

# STRESS AND RESILIENCE AMONG JAMAICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

UP-ROOTED LIVES, DEEP-ROOTED MEMORIES: STRESS AND RESILIENCE  
AMONG JAMAICAN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS  
IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

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McMaster University MASTERS OF ARTS (2016) Hamilton, Ontario (Anthropology)

TITLE: Up-rooted Lives, Deep-rooted Memories: Stress and Resilience among Jamaican  
Agricultural Workers in Southern Ontario AUTHOR: Stephanie Mayell, B.A. (Trent  
University) SUPERVISOR: Professor K. E. Goldfarb NUMBER OF PAGES: *viii*, 98.

**ABSTRACT**

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) is a transnational labour agreement between Canada, Mexico, and various Caribbean countries that brings thousands of Jamaican migrant workers to Canada each year to work on farms. This thesis explores Jamaican SAWP workers' experiences of stress in Ontario, and situates these experiences within a system of power and international inequality. When describing their experiences of stress and suffering in Ontario, many Jamaican workers drew analogies between historic and modern slavery under the SAWP. However, stress discourses also inspired workers to emphasise their resilience, and many workers gave equal attention to explaining their inherent strength as "Jamaicans", which they associate with national independence and the history of slavery. In this way, I suggest stress discourses are sites of flexibility and resilience for Jamaican workers, and this thesis presents the foremost cultural, political, and historical factors that support Jamaican workers' resilience in Ontario. Moreover, the predominant coping strategies workers employ in Ontario will be explored within the context of their restricted agency under the SAWP. This thesis concludes with a discussion of stress as an expression of subjectivity that is characterised by strength, faith, and the history of slavery.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for granting me a Frederick Banting and Charles Best Canada Graduate Master's Award, and McMaster University for granting me a David Oliver Mackey Ontario Graduate Scholarship. Were it not for these funds, my research would not have been possible. These awards provided me the funding necessary to travel to multiple sites across Southern Ontario for nearly 6 months, which in turn facilitated my ability to assist many migrant farm workers access health care, local churches, and other essential social supports.

This thesis would not be possible without the support and encouragement of my amazing supervisory committee. It is with sincere gratitude that I wish to thank my supervisor Kathryn Goldfarb, your guidance, contributions, brilliance, and kindness were my saving graces throughout my graduate studies, fieldwork, and writing process. Thank you to my co-supervisor Kee Yong, your diverse experiences, knowledge of anthropological theory, and consistent support kept me informed and on track throughout the stages of researching and writing. And it is with deep appreciation that I thank my external committee member, Janet McLaughlin, without your ongoing support, input, generosity, and friendship this thesis, and nearly all of my research hitherto, would not have been possible.

Balancing graduate studies and a young family can be tricky at times, and my ability to get to this far has been made possible by my wonderful family. Thank you to my husband Jason for supporting me along my long scholastic journey – and especially for keeping the kids happy and the house tidy for the last two years (give or take) so that I could focus on coursework, fieldwork, and writing my thesis. I would also like to thank my parents, John and Heather, for their ongoing support as I continue down the academic path – I am especially grateful for the endless hours you spent listening as I read one of the many papers I wrote, not to mention the many times you arranged to spend quality time with your granddaughters so that I could get some writing done. And to my beautiful and brilliant daughters Claire and Evelyn, thank you for accommodating my writing noise limits and at-times frazzled demeanour, I am particularly grateful for the wonderful and unexpected ways you both have helped me maintain perspective over the years.

A big thank you to Michelle Tew of the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, your warmth, support, and friendship have been so valuable to me over the past two years, and your tireless dedication to migrant farm worker health in Ontario is an

inspiration. The Agricultural Workers Alliance in Simcoe was instrumental in my research, and I especially thank Fanny, Estella, Isabel, and Joanne for all of your assistance, smiles, and stories. The migrant worker clinic in Simcoe was likewise instrumental, and I would like to thank Mary, Isabel, Lorena, Trish, and Dr. Will for all of the ways you helped the workers I accompanied to the clinic, and for always making me feel like a part of the team. Thank you to the Community Health Centres in Norfolk County, Niagara Region, and Durham Region for your ongoing support of my research. And I would like to acknowledge and thank my friends and colleagues in the Durham Region Migrant Worker Network for your ongoing hard work.

Thank you to Camille, I appreciate and value our time spent together on Friday nights, and I am inspired by your kindness and tireless dedication to migrant farm workers in Canada. I would also like to thank Kandace Bogaert for your friendship, mentorship, and laughter, especially while navigating my first year at Mac – I could not have made it to this point without you. And to Alexandria Barogianis, I am so grateful for our friendship over these past two years, thank you for always being there to talk ideas through over long car rides, and for your support and thoughtful insights. Thank you Heryka Miranda, your messages of friendship, light, and love kept me strong throughout my writing process.

Most of all, I wish to thank the many Jamaican workers who talked to me and told me their stories of stress and strength, I am humbled by and grateful for your honesty and candour.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AWA	The Agricultural Workers Alliance
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CHC	Community Health Centre
CPP	Canada Pension Plan
DRMWN	Durham Region Migrant Worker Network
EI	Employment Insurance
NHECC	Norfolk Health Equity Community Committee
NMWIG	Niagara Migrant Workers Interest Group
OHCOW	Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers
SAWP	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers Union
WSIB	Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

**DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

The following is a declaration that the content of the research in this document has been completed by Stephanie Mayell and recognizes the contributions of Drs. Kathryn Goldfarb, Janet McLaughlin, and Kee Yong in both the research process and the completion of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), a transnational labour agreement between Canada, Mexico, and various Caribbean countries, sees thousands of migrant workers travel to Canada each year from Jamaica to work on Canadian farms. The SAWP was established in 1966 to fill a labour shortage in Canadian agriculture, specifically the labour-intensive horticulture sector in Southern Ontario, and Jamaica was the first country to send workers to Canada under this program. Extremely high levels of unemployment in Jamaica and the cost of their children's education are the two main factors that motivate Jamaican workers' participation in the SAWP today. Although Jamaican workers generally arrive in Canada healthy, the social determinants of health associated with seasonal farm work are known to place SAWP workers at risk for a variety of poor health outcomes, including mental health (Binford 2013; McLaughlin 2009, 2010; Mysyk et al. 2008; Salami et al. 2016). Notably, these structural conditions are maintained by both the Canadian and Jamaican states. Despite the suffering caused by the conditions of the SAWP, I learned that it is important not to view Jamaican workers as victims, as it neglects their agency and is incongruent with how they view themselves.

During my fieldwork I found that Jamaican SAWP workers in Ontario use the terms "stress" and "pressure" interchangeably as idioms of distress, and the language of stress provides workers with an effective framework to explore and articulate their challenges and suffering. Workers' experiences of stress as distress in Ontario are associated with the conditions of their temporary employment in Canada, and I suggest that considering stress as both an idiom of distress and as a discourse allows these

experiences to be contextualized as part of a system of power and international inequality. When describing their experiences of suffering in Ontario, workers drew explicit analogies between historic slavery and the conditions of the SAWP and used the language of slavery to describe the power relations on the farm. Surprisingly, analogies between historic slavery and the SAWP generally inspired workers to invoke and emphasise their strength as “Jamaicans”, which they associate with national independence and the history of slavery, and this both facilitates coping and supports resilience. In this way, I posit that stress discourses are sites of flexibility and resilience for Jamaican workers, and to this end I present the main cultural, political, and historical factors that I found support Jamaican workers’ resilience in Ontario. Moreover, I detail the predominant coping strategies that workers employ, and discuss these within the context of their restricted agency under the SAWP. To conclude, I explore stress as expression of subjectivity that is inseparable from strength, faith, and the history of slavery.

### **Research Objectives**

At the outset of my fieldwork, I sought to investigate the ‘mental health’ experiences, broadly conceptualised, of Jamaican SAWP workers. Within days I realised that the concept of ‘mental health’ was stigmatised among Jamaican workers, who associated it with ‘madness’ and ‘craziness’. Workers did use the language of stress, so I followed this lead and devised new survey and interview questions that aimed to uncover how workers employ ‘stress’ as an explanatory model for distress, and what factors specifically were associated with psychological distress in Ontario. I also wanted to

investigate whether there are other explanatory models or idioms of distress unique to Jamaican workers.

Going into the field, I expected to find that most Jamaican SAWP workers experienced psychological distress to some degree. Although it is certainly true that most workers experience distress while in Ontario, I was most surprised to learn that the workers eschew being viewed as victims; rather, they are proud, strong Jamaican workers who choose to come and work in Canada as the best of a limited number of employment options. When workers spoke with me about their experiences of stress in Ontario, they gave almost equal attention to explicating their resilience as “Jamaicans” and the strength they derive from their spiritual faith.

It was clear to me, and to the workers I spoke to, that the conditions of their employment in Canada are the root cause of their stress and suffering, but workers are powerless over their stress for fear of forced repatriation<sup>1</sup>. Despite the prevalence of suffering and fear workers face in Canada, when workers talked to me about their experiences of stress, they emphasised their strength and resilience. Moreover, many workers suggested that their working in Canada would be greatly improved if farm owners and community members would treat them “like humans” and recognise that they are working to support their families back home. As my fieldwork progressed, I began to

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<sup>1</sup> Under the SAWP, farm owners are empowered to send home workers without cause or reason, as such the threat of arbitrary repatriation is pervasive for all SAWP workers. Fear of repatriation is amplified when workers get sick or injured, as “medical repatriation” is common practice (see Orkin et al. 2014). For Jamaican workers, the liaison often facilitates speedy repatriations. In my experience, repatriated workers in Norfolk County were dropped off at a rural and desolate bus stop in the middle of the night (2-3 a.m.) where they were left alone to wait for the bus to the airport.



ponder how I might represent my experiences of Jamaican workers' strength and resilience in the midst of structured suffering without diminishing the extreme distress caused by the conditions of the SAWP. To this end, I consider stress as both a discourse and an idiom of distress in order to situate workers' experiences of stress in Ontario, as well as their resilience, within the context of the conditions of the SAWP in order to create space for exploring Jamaican SAWP worker subjectivity.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided this research:

- What language do workers employ to describe psychological distress? In other words, what is the dominant idiom of distress?
- How do Jamaican SAWP workers experience stress while they are working and living in Southern Ontario? What do these experiences mean to the workers?
- Given the extreme suffering caused by the structural conditions of the SAWP, how can I reconcile the fact that workers emphasised their strength and resilience in the face of adversity? How can I highlight workers' resilience without downplaying the structural source of their distress?
- What cultural, political, and historical factors support workers' resilience in Ontario? What are the common strategies workers employ to cope with extreme suffering?
- What might the exploration of the association between stress discourses and the processes of seasonal labour migration reveal about Jamaican SAWP worker subjectivity?

## **Concepts**

### **Stress**

Many researchers and disciplines discuss stress as a concrete reality, when in fact it is an explanatory principle (Korovkin and Stephenson 2010:30). In this research, 'stress' is conceptualised as a narrative idiom that is generally used to describe a process that is experienced as psychologically and emotionally unpleasant and negative.

Approaching stress as a process (Korovkin and Stephenson 2010), and theorising stress as a discourse (Foucault 1990) and as an idiom of distress (Nichter 1981, 2010), provides a framework to explore the interplay between stress, distress, and resilience, and allows for exploration of subjectivity among Jamaican SAWP workers. For the purposes of this thesis, stress is conceptualised as both an idiom of distress and a discourse.

### **Idioms of Distress**

Idioms of distress are conceptualised as socially and culturally meaningful ways of experiencing and expressing psychological distress and/or affliction in local worlds. Idioms of distress are not static or structured modes of expression of distress (Kirmayer and Young 1998); rather they "communicate experiential states that lie on a trajectory from the mildly stressful to the depths of suffering that render people or groups incapable of functioning" (Nichter 2010:405). In his exploration of psychosocial distress in South India, Nichter (1981:401) elucidates that idioms of distress are

...underscored by symbolic and affective associations which take on contextual meaning in relation to particular stressors, the availability and social ramifications of engaging alternative expressive modes, and the communicative power of these modes given intervening variables and the responsiveness of concerned others.

Attention to idioms of distress can yield insights into the social, interpersonal, political, and economic sources of distress, as well as the cultural dimensions of the illness experience. In this thesis, 'stress' and 'pressure' are approached as idioms of distress.

### **Discourse**

Discourse as constructed by Foucault entails both the language and practices involved in the construction of a topic. In this way, discourse is "the production of knowledge through language", and both meaning and meaningful practice are constructed through discourse (Hall 2001:72-73). Hall explains that according to Foucault's construction, 'discourse produces the objects of knowledge', and "nothing which is meaningful exists outside discourse" (Hall 2001:73). Discourses are systems of representation that provide a means to talk about and represent knowledge in a particular historical moment (Hall 2001). From a Foucauldian perspective, "the concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from", and because all social practices contain meaning, all practices have a discursive element (Hall 2001:73). Moreover, Foucault asserts that "discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another" (1990:101-102). Importantly, discourses always operate in relation to power relations (McHoul and Grace 1995:39). For the purposes of this research, stress will be framed as a discourse.

## Slavery

The transatlantic slave trade occurred between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. During this time, Europeans imported massive numbers of slaves from Africa and set up sugar plantations across the Caribbean region. The past trauma of slavery has an important influence on the distress of Caribbean people (Smith 2003:7); approximately “40% of the more than nine million enslaved Africans who survived the Middle Passage to the New World were dispersed throughout the Caribbean” (Sutherland 2014:17). In this way, “trauma on a massive scale has been handed down through the generations, is still being handed down, and is hard to express and conceptualise...the way in which this happens can be observed in how individuals relate to themselves and to others” (Smith 2003:7). The concept of ‘collective memory’ was first formulated by Halbwachs (1980), who postulated that memory is dependant upon and shaped by the social framework in which a group is situated in society. To Halbwachs, memory “is always constructed in particular socially inscribed circumstances through mnemonics embedded in particular social practices of individuality and sociality...generations may be said to recollect their pasts within distinct frameworks” (Scott 2008:6). In this thesis, the term slavery is employed to describe the historical process, and is conceptualised as an important ‘collective memory’ for Jamaican SAWP workers that provides the framework for workers’ distress in Ontario, and also fosters resilience and coping through its association with emancipation, music, and faith.

## **Resilience**

The concept of resilience was first discussed in the context of physics, and later advanced in child development studies to denote a positive adaptation in the face of substantial adversity (Luthar 2003). In cultural anthropology, resilience in human beings can be understood as “less a personal characteristic than a trajectory resulting from the interplay of many personal, social, and structural factors” (Obrist and Büchi 2008:252). Finding that the idiom of ‘stress’ “helps to frame African migrants’ reflections, interpretations, and explanations of their often diffuse feelings” (2008:259), Obrist and Büchi were the first to conceptualise stress as an idiom of resilience. Along these lines, Fletcher conceives resilience as a trajectory and as a “potential for resistance and positive outcomes” in a study on stress among immigrant youth in British Columbia (2014:5). In this thesis I also conceptualise resilience as a trajectory, and I investigate the cultural, political, and historical factors that support Jamaican workers’ resilience in Ontario.

## **Coping**

Coping strategies consist of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage stress demands; the most commonly cited definition of *coping* as a strategy was first advanced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in their cognitive phenomenological theory of stress and coping, wherein it was defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (141). In later works, Lazarus further conceptualised coping in two ways: as an enduring and dynamic process that changes in response to the changing demands of a stressor; and as a goal-directed process in which

the individual orients thoughts and behaviours toward the objective of resolving the source of stress and managing emotional reactions to stress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984; Lazarus 1993). Moreover, coping strategies can be subdivided into functional categories: problem-focused coping, directed at altering the situation that is causing distress, and emotion-focused coping, directed at regulating distress (Folkman and Lazarus 1990:316). Because workers' restricted agency gives them little room for 'problem solving' per se, in this thesis coping is understood as individual actions directed at regulating emotions.

### **Subjectivity**

Subjectivity was defined by Ortner (2005) as "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear and so forth that animate acting subjects [and] the cultural and social formations that shape organise and provoke these modes of affect, thought, and so on..." (31). Building upon this foundation, Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2007:14) add:

The subject is at once a product and agent of history; the site of experience, memory, storytelling and aesthetic judgment; an agent of knowing as much as of action; and the conflicted site for moral acts and gestures amid impossibly immoral societies and institutions. Modes of subjectivation are indeed determined by the vagaries of the state, family and community hierarchies, memories of colonial interventions and unresolvable traumas, and medicoscientific experiments and markets. Yet subjectivity is not just the outcome of social control or the unconscious; it also provides the ground for subjects to think through their circumstances and to feel through their contradictions, and in so doing, to inwardly endure experiences that would otherwise be outwardly unbearable. Subjectivity is the means of shaping sensibility.

In this thesis, subjectivity is conceptualised as "a means of shaping sensibility", and stress is approached as an expression of subjectivity.

### **Stress and Resilience: Literature Review**

Since the publication of Selye's (1956) seminal work on stress in the 1950's, the idiom of stress has emerged as a popular and normalised way for people to talk about distress and tension, and has quickly become a dominant explanatory framework for distress within scientific and popular discourse across the world (Fletcher 2015; Korovokin and Stephenson 2010; Orbist and Büchi 2008). In general, experiences of stress are assumed to be negative, and analyses of stress are often framed in biology and pathology. In their work on social stress and stress processes, Korovokin and Stephenson (2010) explain that 'stress' is "not a concrete phenomenon but a purely abstract explanatory principle" (21). Moreover, these anthropologists posit that stress is an inherent feature of any society, insofar as it results from "discrepancies between the mythology and reality of any given system of social organisation which constitutes the contradictory forces with which we all live" (Korovokin and Stephenson 2010:18).

By contrast, bio-cultural anthropologists theorise stress as an evolutionary adaptation that undergirds the fight-or-flight mechanism. Stress is adaptive in the short run, but exposure to chronic stress, especially that of psychosocial origin, "can lead to a wide array of negative health outcomes" (Wiley and Allen 2009:354). In this way, bio-cultural anthropologists conceptualise psychosocial stress as the physiological and psychological reaction that an individual has to an environmental challenge or social situation that threatens health, well-being, survival, or reproduction (Wiley and Allen 2009). Bio-cultural approaches to stress emphasise the physiological (hormonal) mechanisms of the stress response, and how these give rise to negative health outcomes.

Specifically, they note the primary stress response involves (1) the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, indexed by the release of epinephrine and norepinephrine, and (2) the suppression of the parasympathetic nervous system via the secretion of cortisol – a steroid hormone that regulates the stress response and supports a variety of organs – in order that energy resources be made more available to the muscles (Wiley and Allen 2009:327). Bio-cultural anthropologists explicate that consistently elevated levels of cortisol suppresses the immune system and is associated with heart disease and diabetes. Importantly, Young's (1980) seminal anthropological analyses of 'stress' highlights that "while the facts about stress *are* scientific, they are also the product of certain historically determined factors – i.e. specific sets of social relations and theoretical knowledge – which account for their ideological character" (133); in other words, the meanings associated with stress derive from social, cultural and historical contexts.

Stress was first conceptualised as a discourse by Young (1980) in order to investigate the ways in which social inequalities are maintained in the discursive construction of biomedical categories. The stress discourse is an inherently social discourse that "claims to situate pathogenesis within everyday experience", and according to Young (1980), the "specificity of the stress discourse is determined by a combination of social relations of production and theoretical knowledge" (144). Following Young's (1980) contention that "the naturalised conceptualization of stress in scientific and popular discourse not only shrouds its social context but perpetuates inequity through the persistence of unexamined (asymmetrical) social relations" (316), Adelson (2008) explored the everyday meanings, language, and interpretations of stress among Cree

women in Northern Canada. Critical of research that de-contextualises stress, Adelson explored Cree women's 'stress discourses' and concludes that these discourses reflect and reinscribe the social, cultural, and historical conditions of inequity among Cree women. Arguing "improved understanding of perspectives may enhance appropriate disease management and develop a more valid conceptualization of stress in research efforts", Schoenberg et al. (2005:171) likewise examined stress discourses in the effort to determine lay perspectives on stress and diabetes, and found stress intersects with diabetes in various arenas, namely: stress as implicated in the origin of diabetes, as a challenge to self-management, as a threat to maintaining glycemic control, and as a precursor to and a consequence of diabetes complications.

Inspired by Antonovsky's (1979) salutogenic approach, which asks why people stay healthy as opposed to why people get ill, anthropologists Obrist and Büchi (2008) conceive resilience as a trajectory that results from the interplay of a variety of personal, social, and structural factors, and not as a personal characteristic. These researchers found that the concept of stress offers both an explanatory framework and a guideline for action among African migrants in Switzerland, and in this way they postulate that stress is an idiom of resilience. Similarly, Fletcher (2014, 2015) conceptualises resilience as a trajectory that is influenced by the interaction of personal, social, cultural, and structural factors in her exploration of the stress experiences of immigrant youth in British Columbia. In this context, Fletcher (2014) theorises stress as idiom of both distress and of resilience to allow "for full consideration of the social and political contexts that make 'stress' a valid system of representation, in a particular temporal context", and to

overcome anthropological concerns over the de-contextualisation of stress (23). Due to the ways immigrant youth work with ideas of stress and identity to address the challenges they face, Fletcher (2015) found that dialogues of stress can become a way to reflect on their resilience, which she notes both facilitates coping and enhances resilience.

### **Migrant Farm Worker Mental Health: Literature Review**

Earlier studies into the mental health of migrant farm workers in the US were inter-disciplinary and often focus on acculturative stress and on identifying specific stressors associated with risk for depression and anxiety. For example, Hovey and Magaña (2002, 2003) found that family dysfunction, absence of effective social support, low self-esteem, high education levels, lack of control over migration, heightened acculturative stress, and elevated anxiety have all been linked to greater symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation among Mexican migrant agricultural workers.

Subsequently, these researchers identified eighteen common stressors that undergird the workers' elevated levels of anxiety and depression, including: separation from family, rigid work demands, poor housing conditions, educational stressors, low income, hard physical labour, lack of transportation, and exploitation (Magaña and Hovey 2003).

Furthermore, many workers reported an inactive coping style in response to several of these stressors, such that they "just put up with it"; such responses likely point to the chronic nature of these stresses, and Magaña and Hovey (2003) posit that "the inability to avoid the ongoing stress may create a sense of hopelessness among the farm workers, and thus a susceptibility to anxiety and depression" (84).

More recently, Hiott et al. (2008) sought to uncover the stressors inherent to migrant farm work that contribute to poor mental health and found that Latino migrant farm workers in the US face five domains of stressors (legality and logistics, social isolation, work conditions, family, and substance abuse by others), and that the types of stressors had differential effects on anxiety and depression symptoms. This study concludes that stressors inherent in farm work are associated with poor mental health outcomes, but they note “some types of stressors may have mental health consequences while others do not, and that discrete types of stressors may act on specific mental health outcomes” (Hiott et al. 2008:37).

Because migrant farm workers are employed in a variety of regions across the US, recent studies have tended to focus on specific regional contexts. One such investigation into the correlates of Latino farm worker mental health in North Carolina by Crain et al. (2012) found that more than half of migrant worker interviewees had poor mental health (indexed by depressive symptoms and anxiety), and they conclude that outreach efforts to minimize the stressors inherent to farm work may be a useful strategy in protecting migrant farm workers' mental health. Similar studies aimed at uncovering the stressors associated with depression among Latino migrant farm workers have been recently conducted in Nebraska (Ramos et al. 2015), Arizona (Carvajal et al. 2014), and Georgia (Rodriguez 2013); all produced comparable findings and indicated the need for developing and employing healthy coping strategies. Unfortunately, this literature does not problematize the broader political economic context that structures farm workers' suffering and distress in the United States. Moreover, recommendations for

programming/interventions to assist workers develop healthy coping strategies are troublesome insofar as they suggest that individuals simply need to learn to cope “better”, which may further imbed workers in relations of inequality.

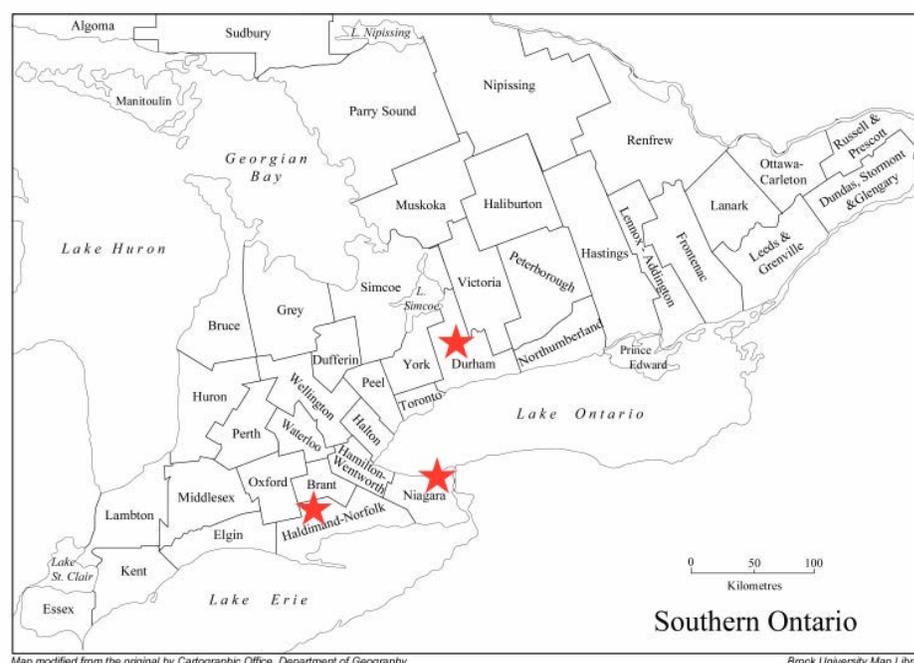
In the Canadian context, anthropological inquiries into the SAWP reveal these workers are structurally vulnerable to a variety of health issues relating to occupational and environmental health, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, as well as chronic and infectious diseases (Binford 2013; Hennebry et al. 2015; McLaughlin 2009; McLaughlin et al. 2014; Mysyk et al. 2008; Salami et al. 2016). Many of these health issues are linked to the social determinants of health (SDoH) faced by migrant farm workers, including employment and working conditions, income/social status, social support and connectedness, environment and housing, access to health care, health literacy, and gender issues (McLaughlin 2009, 2010). Focusing on Mexican SAWP workers, Mysyk et al. (2008) identified *nerves* as the idiom of distress workers use as a metaphor for “the breakdown in self/society relations and the lack of control over their bodies” (383). The mental health of SAWP workers from Mexico and the Caribbean was explored McLaughlin (2009), who found workers encounter many stressors that negatively impact health and emotional wellbeing, and their “bodies, minds and spirits are all connected, and are thus all affected. Their individual pathologies are reflective of the wider social-political pathological relations in which they live out their lives” (393).

### **Research Context and Methodology**

One of my main goals throughout my fieldwork was to assist Jamaican workers in a meaningful way by connecting them with local churches, health care, and social

supports throughout the duration of my fieldwork. Moreover, it was also my intention to produce research that can inform efforts and actions directed toward change at the levels of society and policy. In this way, this research employs a participatory research (PR) approach, insofar as it is “explicitly committed to conducting research that will benefit participants, either through direct intervention or using the results to inform action for change” (Israel et al. 1998:175).

During the 2015 growing season, between June and November, I conducted ethnographic research in three regions of Southern Ontario that host Caribbean SAWP workers: Norfolk County and Niagara Region, the two regions of the province with the greatest concentrations of workers; and Durham Region, which is my home community, and an area that hosts SAWP workers each year, but has few accessible services available to them (see map).



I gathered the majority of my data in the town of Simcoe in Norfolk County. For the five months, between June and October, I travelled to Simcoe every Friday afternoon, as well as every Thursday afternoon during July and August, in concordance with the workers' time off. In Durham Region, I am a member of the local migrant worker support group, and during my fieldwork I helped plan and execute a number of events for local SAWP workers, and I attended Caribbean church services for workers each month. In Niagara Region, I assisted in the delivery of a mental health workshop for migrant workers, and I volunteered at migrant worker events organized by the local migrant worker support group.

I had expected to encounter pervasive suffering among workers when I began my fieldwork, and I certainly did encounter plenty of suffering, yet by the end of the season it was the workers' strength and resilience in the face of adversity that was the dominant theme. Moreover, in my experience, Jamaican workers do not want to be viewed as victims because this neglects their agency and their identity as "offshore workers<sup>2</sup>", and many times workers asked me to take note of their strength as "Jamaicans" (literally, on my notepad). Toward a better understanding of the relationship between adversity, resilience, and health is not well articulated in the literature, Panter-Brick (2014) advocates for resilience-based approaches, that is "models of research and practice predicated on strengths rather than vulnerabilities...emphasise notions of well-being

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<sup>2</sup> Jamaican SAWP workers regularly referred to themselves as "offshore workers", and many found the term "migrant worker" confusing when I employed it. Mindful not to essentialise my interlocutors, for ease of communication I refer to the Jamaican men who participate in the SAWP throughout this thesis interchangeably as "SAWP workers", "farm workers", "Jamaican workers", and "workers".

rather than survival, salutogenesis rather than pathology, and the promotion of human dignity rather than mere alleviation of human misery” (438). Further, resilience-based approaches avoid situating whole communities “within a discourse of victimization, negating agency, capabilities, and strengths” (Panter-Brick 2014:439), and as such this approach is ideal for this research. In this way, this research takes a resilience-based approach because according to my experience it is best suited for the exploration of workers’ stress and resilience in the context of the suffering caused by the conditions of the SAWP and the history of slavery. Importantly, a resilience-based approach advocates for interventions that enhance strength and capability, and to this end Chapter 3 outlines the cultural, political, and historical factors that support workers’ resilience in Ontario.

Over many months I cultivated long-term relationships with several Jamaican workers and spent a lot of time talking to them about their experiences of stress. This ethnographic methodology allowed me to see the process and discursive aspects of stress and subjectivity among workers. Although I wish to highlight the resilience of my interlocutors, I equally wish to provide a balanced perspective of their resilience within the context of the extreme suffering that they often endure on account of the conditions of the SAWP. Toward this end, this thesis conceptualises stress as a process (Korovkin and Stephenson 2010) and theorises stress a discourse (Foucault 1990; Young 1980) in order to investigate the interplay between stress and resilience, and to explore subjectivity among Jamaican SAWP workers.

In Simcoe and Durham Region, in order to recruit participants I conducted outreach around the retail areas frequented by migrant workers. I approached workers and

explained that I was a student doing health research with Caribbean workers about stress and wellness, provided workers with my telephone number, and concluded by giving workers pamphlets that list information about local health services and social supports available to them. These pamphlets are written in accessible plain language. Many of the workers I approached during outreach engaged with me in unstructured interviews on the spot regarding their stresses, concerns, and coping strategies, and many were eager for me to share their stories.

Over the season, I administered twenty-one anonymous surveys to Jamaican workers, and conducted multiple in-depth interviews with three Jamaican workers. I administered the surveys in quiet and private areas, and in recognition of potential literacy issues, I recorded the workers responses on the sheet. While surveying and interviewing workers, I employed an explanatory models approach in an effort to “understand how the social world affects and is affected by illness” (Kleinman et al. 2006:294). Kleinman (1988) defined explanatory models as “the notions that patients, families and practitioners have about a specific illness episode...they are justifications for practical action more than statements of a theoretical and rigorous nature” (121). The survey and interview questions were designed to elicit explanatory models for distress, coping strategies, and recommendations for social support. In this way, the explanatory models approach allowed me to uncover the explanation for as well as the meaning of stress for workers.

### *Surveys*

In recognition of workers' limited time off and competing priorities, the survey was kept brief (14 questions) and used language that is both accessible and culturally

sensitive. Surveys were anonymous, and the first 6 questions sought demographic data, including: age, home parish, marital status, number of children, number of seasons working in Canada, and reason for participation in the SAWP. The following questions were a mix of multiple choice and open-answer, and sought a variety of information: What do you like most about working in Canada? What causes you stress while you are here; how do you describe it? How often do you feel stressed? How often do you feel lonely or sad? What do you do to feel better when you are feeling these ways? How often do you use alcohol or drugs? Have you ever felt so bad (stressed or sad) about working in Canada that you wanted to talk to a doctor about how your feelings? What would make your time working in Canada better? What kind of changes in the community or local services would you want to see for migrant farm workers? I recorded the responses for the workers, and I also took note of the date and the location I administered the survey. I originally intended to administer more surveys, but this proved to be an awkward interaction with workers, and it was clear early on that participant observation was the most effective method for gathering data.

### *Research Sites*

I administered the most surveys at two locations in Simcoe, the Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA) support centre (located downtown) and the migrant farm worker health clinic (located uptown), as these were the two sites I most frequently transported workers to and from. Funded by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) Canada, the AWA is an essential resource for all migrant farm workers in Norfolk County. Often the only place workers have to turn for assistance, the AWA

centre helps workers with parental benefits applications, compensation claims, scheduling, pay issues, referral to legal counsel, health and safety training, and various other issues including unfair treatment and unsafe housing and working conditions. Importantly, the AWA centre also provides a comfortable seating area with free Wi-Fi for workers, and there are bicycles available for the workers to borrow.

Initiated in 2014, the migrant worker clinic in Simcoe is operated by the local Community Health Centre (CHC). This clinic program was designed to increase workers' access to primary health care, mitigate practical barriers, and address the health vulnerabilities of workers through the provision of walk-in style clinics that operated at accessible times and locations that were convenient for local workers. The migrant worker clinics also provide workers with confidential health care they can access independent of their employers, offer health promotion materials, and do not require workers present health cards. I administered 3 surveys at the migrant worker HUB space in Simcoe, which is a space provided for workers to relax in Friday nights provided by the Achieve Mental Health Wellness & Recover Centre; I stopped by this space each week, but often could not stay long because workers generally needed my help accessing health care or dealing with issues related to their employers. I also administered 3 surveys in the parking lot at the grocery store in Simcoe.

In Durham Region, there are few existing resources for workers. I spoke with workers at various health fairs across the region, but was unable to survey workers because I had no private space. In this region, I focused on participant observation methods, and kept fieldnotes that detailed my experiences at each event I attended.

*Interviews*

The interviews were semi-structured, as the conversation often expanded from the guiding questions, and generally lasted about an hour in length. I interviewed two workers on multiple occasions, and I interviewed the third worker only once. I interviewed Trevor at the Boston Pizza in Simcoe one Friday evening in August, and we spoke that evening for over 2 hours before I drove him back to the bunkhouse. The other interviews were conducted either in my car, at various health care locations, or over the phone. I assured workers that the interviews were anonymous, thus all names in this thesis are pseudonyms. Throughout the season, I maintained electronic communication via text, phone, and *WhatsApp* with approximately 40 workers across all three regions. I sought explicit permission to use all data, whether acquired in person or over the phone.

*Participant Observation*

I engaged in participant observation at a variety of events in all three regions, including: health fairs, recreation events, and health promotion workshops. Moreover, I frequently drove workers to medical clinics, diagnostic labs, medical specialists, and other social services. I also regularly visited farms, bunkhouses, and crops fields in all three regions. In this way, I witnessed a variety of working and living conditions, which informs my analyses. Over the course of my fieldwork, I spent approximately 300 hours engaged in participant observation.

**Layout of this Thesis**

This thesis is framed in three substantive chapters – the Introduction, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 – followed by a somewhat speculative conclusion that discusses the

implications of exploring stress as discourse and suffering, as well as resilience, as these connect to slavery and subjectivity. In organising this thesis, I was most concerned with highlighting the workers' experiences of stress from their perspective and in their own words, and to this end I have taken a predominantly narrative approach in the following two chapters. In an effort to present a balanced and accurate reflection of my interlocutors' experiences of stress, the thesis is loosely divided between: (1) a focus on workers' experiences of distress in Ontario, and contextualising these experiences within the conditions of the SAWP, and (2) a focus on workers' resilience and coping in the face of structured suffering, and exploring workers' resilience in Ontario in the context of their restricted agency. In this way, chapter 2 presents ethnographic data that illustrates Jamaican workers' experiences of stress as distress, and articulates how workers' distress is structured by the SAWP. To follow, chapter 3 explores the ways workers cope with stress, and presents the factors that support resilience in Ontario. The final chapter in this thesis discusses the relationship between stress discourses, experiences associated with their participation in the SAWP, and the ways Jamaican SAWP workers express their subjectivity.

## CHAPTER 2

### “THE PRESSURES OF LIFE”: STRESS AS DISTRESS AND DISCOURSE

This chapter explores Jamaican workers' experiences of stress as distress. To begin, I detail the biocultural approach to stress, and highlight its similarity with workers' somatization of stress. I proceed to conceptualise stress as an idiom of distress, which workers use interchangeably with 'pressure' to describe their challenges and suffering in Ontario, and I note the relationship between stress and the weather in Southern Ontario during the 2015 agricultural season. Next, I present the five common themes associated with workers' distress in Ontario that emerged from my analysis, and ethnographic data appears throughout to illustrate these themes. In the final section, stress is theorised as discourse as well as an idiom of distress, and the chapter concludes with a discussion that contextualises workers' experiences of stress as a part of a system of power and international inequality, and elucidates that Jamaican SAWP workers perceive their experiences of suffering in Ontario as commensurable to historic slavery.

#### **Stress as Somatic Response to Distress**

The biocultural approach in anthropology conceptualises stress as biological, culturally shaped, and ultimately pathological. Bio-cultural anthropologists posit that chronic activation of the stress response damages heart health in two distinct ways: first, the repeated release of epinephrine under chronic stress causes high blood pressure and places the individual at an increased risk for cardiovascular disease and heart attack; and second, chronic elevation of cortisol causes insulin levels to remain high and cells to become insulin resistant, leading to a build up of visceral fat cells in the abdomen, which

in turn increases risk for heart disease and diabetes (Wiley and Allen 2009). Although immune activity is enhanced as an initial response to a stressor, it is subsequently brought back down to baseline levels via cortisol; chronic stress has serious implications for immune functionality, as “the net effect of cortisol on the immune system is suppressive, and immune activity stays below baseline” (Wiley and Allen 2009: 333).

Commensurable to the bio-cultural perspective, Jamaican workers likewise associate stress with pathology, in particular elevated blood pressure and its impact on heart health. For this reason, many workers regularly visit local pharmacies throughout the season on their night off to check their blood pressure on the machine, and at the migrant worker clinics and health fairs blood pressure checks are one of the most common requests. I asked Trevor about how stress/pressure can affect his body, and he told me:

The stress of work brings up your blood pressure and that can kill you. If you are in the field, you have pressure from the work and pressure from just bending your back, you got the pressure from the boss, and the heat from the sun alone. All this pressure [will] make your blood pressure go up, this can kill you.

Trevor went on to tell me that drinking coconut water is very good for pressure because it replenishes the body and brings the pressure back down. In this way, among Jamaican workers there is a dual meaning of “pressure”, social pressure as well as material or biological pressure within the arteries, and workers extend the meaning even further in describing the “pressure” caused by the heat of the sun.

In my experience, Jamaican workers who experienced prolonged psychological stress embodied a number of symptoms (i.e. fatigue, difficulty sleeping, trembling, anger,

fear, desperation, and lack of concentration) that they understood to be a manifestation of nerves or nervousness. In another conversation, Trevor told me he takes something called Vita-malt, a non-alcoholic malt drink, when he feels nervous and wants to calm his nerves. Although Jamaican workers do use the language of “depression”, this state of being is not medicalized in Jamaica, and therefore workers generally understand this feeling to be situational and/or temporary. Workers told me that the most common remedies for such conditions in Jamaica are plant-based (e.g. soursop tea, moringa, cannabis), and none of these are readily available in Canada.

### **Stress as Idiom of Distress: Stress/pressure in Ontario**

By contrast, an ethnographic approach often conceptualises stress as an idiom of, or explanatory model for, psychological distress. Idioms of distress are culturally meaningful explanatory frameworks, and they are used to describe a range of experiential states along a trajectory from mildly stressful to extreme suffering (Nichter 2010). It was my experience that Jamaican workers use ‘stress’ and ‘pressure’ interchangeably to describe their challenges or afflictions in Ontario. Notably, the sources of stress/pressure in Ontario are intrinsically connected to the structural conditions of the SAWP. Workers draw direct analogies between how they work and live in Canada under the SAWP and how their ancestors existed under slavery, thus an ethnographic approach offers the ability to understand the structural and historical conditions of oppression.

### **Geographical Context: Impact of Weather in Southern Ontario in 2015**

Early in the season it became clear to me that the poor weather conditions in Southern Ontario were a major source of stress for workers. Many workers in Simcoe told

me that “this is a rough year” because there was frost in late May and too much rain in June, and this in turn caused many crops to fail. Many farm owners experienced financial losses, and one survey respondent told me flatly “the boss is stressed about his crops, so we’re stressed too”. Specifically, these weather conditions had a two-pronged negative impact on workers. First, the failed crops meant that the workers spent days lying around crowded bunkhouses not working or getting paid. A worker from Simcoe named Calvin<sup>3</sup> expressed his frustration to me: “I am home sitting down [and] not working, it’s really getting to me. I have not been working for weeks, [only] half day, or sometimes two hours...three, four the most, otherwise it’s sitting down all day. There’s a lot going on with me right now, I think I’m over stressed”. Randall, a worker on a different farm in Simcoe, shared his frustration, “I am here bored as hell, not working, and I don’t think I’m working tomorrow either. Sleep and talk on the phone and watch TV, that’s all that I can do here. It’s not good for me”.

Second, after the early-season crop failures, many workers felt their employer expected them to work twice as hard later in the season to make up for the initial losses. Trevor explained to me that once the later season crops were ready for harvesting, workers were expected to put in twelve hour days, “while the field boss coming by saying *faster, faster*, and the boss wanted us to be picking so early in the morning when it was dark, and we told him we can’t see in the dark, but it didn’t matter...start at 7!”. I also learned that workers were shuffled and transferred between local farms throughout the season to assist with harvest, with minimal notice; mid-way through the season Calvin

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<sup>3</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

explained, “he [the farm owner] has not sent anyone home, there are farms where he can send some of us to work, but there are a lot of guys still sitting down and not working. I don't know why he don't send me. I am sure I am not coming back here next year”.

Calvin's concluding statement reflects his concern that his employer was unhappy with him, and his uncertainty whether this employer will call him back. Of the workers I met in Simcoe early in the season, I am aware of approximately two dozen who were transferred at some point to other farms within Norfolk County, or to other areas of Canada, including Niagara Region, Prince Edward County, and Nova Scotia, and nearly half of the workers I met in Durham Region were transferred throughout the season to various local farms as needed. Most workers took such changes in stride because they were happy for the opportunity to continue working, especially considering the number of their co-workers not working. The geographical location of my research in Southern Ontario informs my findings, specifically the important aspects of weather and geographical specificities.

### **Themes Associated with Distress in Ontario**

Beyond anomalous weather, during my ethnographic analysis I identified five themes associated with workers' experiences of stress associated with the conditions of the SAWP, namely: family, work environments, living conditions, illness and injury, and racism and lack of social connectedness in Ontario. To follow I explore these themes with reference to ethnographic data. To conclude the chapter, I theorise stress as discourse, and discuss workers' experiences of stress/pressure in association with the power relations and structural constraints on their lives.

*Family*

Most workers I surveyed, interviewed, and engaged with told me that the main reason they work in Canada is to earn money that will give their families a better life back home, so it is unsurprising that the stress associated with homesickness, missing family, and transnational parenting were predominant in my findings. When I asked workers what causes them stress while in Ontario, many stated how difficult it is to be away from their family, especially their children; a young man here for the first time emotionally explained, “I miss my family. I worry about the family back home, especially my son, because he is young and I want him to know his father and give him things I never had”. He went on to say that his time working in Canada would be improved “if the boss would realize we are people, that we have families”.

Working in Canada means that Jamaican workers can afford the tuition to put their children through school, as education beyond primary school (grade 6) is not covered by the Jamaican state. Many of the workers I spoke with felt that providing their children with an education was the only way they could help their children secure employment in the future, and prevent them from having to do farm work in Canada. Clifton, father of nine children, explained: “School in Jamaica is expensive, the parents have to buy everything like paper and books and everything. I come here so I can pay for my kids’ tuition, and I make sure that I send the money home on time. My kids work hard at school, they want a future”. One active way I saw Jamaican workers parent from a distance was in sourcing books, electronics, and school supplies to ship home to their children. This proved stressful for some workers who were not able to locate or

understand what their child was looking for. Happily, on a few occasions I helped workers find affordable electronics and locate books for their children, including two texts on computer software programming.

Maintaining a transnational romantic relationship for up to eight months per year is challenging for these workers and their partners, and many workers expressed concerns about their spouses and girlfriends. Most workers call home daily to touch base with their families, but some workers expressed that electronic communication is not enough, and it is expensive. During our conversation while waiting at the migrant worker clinic, Delroy explained: “while we are here we are away from our wives and girlfriends, so the men have to handle big phone bills. And being lonely with no wife, no sex, is very stressful. It would be nice to see my wife, the farmer should allow our spouses to visit”. During phone calls back home, marital conflict can worsen the stress of homesickness. During our sit-down dinner, Trevor explained to me that partners back home are often unaware of the workers’ working and living conditions, and he emphasised the importance of a supportive partner when working in Canada:

Working in Canada, you have to have a strong family back home. If you have a girlfriend or a wife, they have to be supportive of what you are doing. If you are in Canada and you are working and you don't have any support, it makes no sense to come. You have to have support and get support from your family. You have to be able to maintain your family from here, you have to make your family back home feel happy, so they give you the support. If they're not happy, it don't make sense to come here cause if you have a family back home giving you trouble, while you're in Canada dealing with the stress from the boss, it's too much pressure.

Some workers worry about what might happen back home while they are working in Canada, specifically whether their partner will remain loyal to them. Andrew explained this to me while we sat at the AWA: “The real reason why we really come to Canada is to work [so] that we can maintain our family, but how can we maintain our family under certain pressures that we face? You are married, and you are here from eight months, and within that eight months you don’t know what can happen in Jamaica while you’re in Canada working so hard”. During their limited time off each week, sending money home to family and shopping for things to send back in their crates<sup>4</sup> was the dominant activity of most workers.

Distance from family and community support networks are particularly difficult for workers when a loved one passes away back home, and during such circumstances feelings of homesickness are greatly exacerbated and can give rise to extreme sadness and loneliness<sup>5</sup>. This was evident to me during a phone conversations with Calvin, he told me “things are not good, I lost my uncle back home on Wednesday...it’s hard...things are getting worse by the day here. I am dying to get home and see my kids”. When I assisted with the mental health workshop in Niagara-on-the-Lake, some of the Jamaican workers who attended brought musical instruments, and after the workshop concluded a group

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<sup>4</sup> While working in Canada, Jamaican workers often keep a barrel or crate at the bunkhouse, which they fill with items throughout the season, and ship home just prior to their return home. Often family members request items, and in my experience the most common items shipped home were bags of rice, electronics (TVs, DVD player, laptops), school supplies, outdoor power equipment (chainsaws, weed-whackers), tools, small appliances, and children’s bicycles.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the family impacts of migration among SAWP workers see the recent study *Sustaining Precarious Transnational Families: The Significance of Remittances From Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program* (Wells et al. 2015).

began singing 'nine night' songs, traditional funerary songs known all over Jamaica that are sung for the nine nights following the death of a loved one. At this point, the Jamaican workers in the room sang collectively with pensive emotion, while everyone else in the room silently witnessed the sentiment, sadness, and beauty of the moment. When I asked an attendee named Jacob what singing these songs meant to him, he told me "my sister died three years back when I was up here working in Canada. It was hard, I never got to be with my family at that time. Today, I sang and remembered her."

### *Work Environments*

The unfortunate realities of work environments under the SAWP have been identified as a major source of suffering among workers in Canada (see Hennebry 2010; McLaughlin 2009; McLaughlin et al. 2014; Preibisch and Hennebry 2011; Preibisch and Otero 2014). Typically working six days or more each week, SAWP workers put in long hours of hard physical labour, with minimal job control, and stress/pressure in work environments was associated with abusive employers, rigid work demands, fear of forced repatriation, powerlessness, lack of personal workplace protections, and conflict with co-workers and supervisors (Hennebry et al. 2012, 2015; McLaughlin 2009; McLaughlin et al. 2014; Mysyk et al. 2008; Narushima et al. 2015). Many of the young, first-year workers I met in Simcoe were surprised by and unprepared for the harsh work conditions, and many expressed literal disbelief at the beginning of the season. When I asked a young worker in his early twenties from Montego Bay, who first came to Canada in 2015, how he was finding farm work in Canada, he told me "it's not good, the farm owner is no good, he's not polite and he treats workers like slavery. We are supposed to work all day,

with no breaks. It's not right, we Jamaicans are not used to this". Moreover, multiple workers told me about issues they were having with their employers issuing inaccurate and/or untimely paycheques, and many workers do not understand the government or SAWP deductions.

As noted, the weather conditions were unfavourable to certain crops, yet other crops thrived in Norfolk County, namely strawberries and raspberries. For workers on berry farms, like Trevor, this meant particularly strenuous and long days crouched over and picking. Mid-way through the season, I asked Trevor to describe his workday to me:

You get up at 5 am, and you work right through the day. You only get fifteen minutes break in the morning, half hour for lunchtime, and fifteen minutes break in the evening. Within that time you have to always be bending your back and working, right through the day. So, it's very hard for you to be comfortable in the environment, because we in Jamaica think that everything is gold in Canada, you come here and you say 'oh, everybody loves Canada because Canada is so quiet and Canada is so nice'. But, yet, still it's like we're still in slavery, cause you come here and the boss gonna tell you that you can't get up for two seconds, just to stand up and look around. You can't do that...you know? Then you know what they do? The supervisors are black, and they use them to put on the pressure on the we [Jamaican workers]. We have sometimes guys feel pain right through, and they have a pain in their backs for months and can't do anything about it because they don't want to go to the boss' wife and tell her that 'I feeling a pain', she's like take you the hospital, and when you come home to the bunkhouse, tomorrow morning she sends for that guy to come and do work in the field.

Later in the year Trevor suffered a back injury, and although I brought him to the migrant worker clinic in Simcoe and for massage therapy at a wellness event, having no option for time off he continued working, thus prolonging the injury. For weeks I saw Trevor walking slowly to nurse his back as he went about his Friday night errands in Simcoe.

Farming is a dangerous industry, and farm environments pose special problems for injury control and regulation because of the various occupational hazards intrinsic to the work (McLaughlin et al. 2014; McLaughlin and Hennebry 2014). Most of the workers I met were aware of the importance of personal protective equipment (PPE), and the fact that farmers did not provide them adequate protection was a source of stress for many workers. It was common for workers to who handle pesticides to suffer skin rashes and eye irritation, in fact it was the norm to see workers in Simcoe walking around with blood-shot and reddened eyes. Many workers, especially those I spoke to at the clinic in Simcoe, told me they worry about the association between pesticides and cancer, and they perceived the fact that farm owners do not provide adequate PPE as evidence that they are viewed as “disposable workers”. This finding is in concordance with a recent study exploring Canadian farm owner’s perceptions of migrant farm worker health and safety, which found in the case of migrant farm workers in Canada, “workplace safety and health is made a low priority [by employers] for the sake of profit” (Narushima and Sanchez 2014:12). To overcome the shortage of PPE, some workers sought out cheap gloves, protective glasses, and other gear at local stores, which they purchased with their own money; however, many could not afford to purchase such things, and it was common for workers to use handkerchiefs and bandanas as masks when handling pesticides. At one of the BBQs for workers in Simcoe, we had a limited number of safety glasses we handed out as game prizes. After the BBQ, I started receiving many text messages inquiring if I had more safety glasses, and many guys explained how much they need them but cannot afford to buy a quality pair.



Because SAWP workers can be repatriated by their employers at anytime for any reason, most workers “suffer through” rigid work demand and abusive employers and supervisors. If things get particularly bad on the farm, the conditions of the program are such that the only recourse for Jamaican workers to address workplace issues is to contact the Jamaican liaison, whose job it is to represent workers while they are in Canada. Unfortunately, it was my experience that although the liaison generally listened to workers, changes in the work demands never resulted from the liaison’s involvement; this was also a source of stress for workers, who felt vulnerable to exploitation, powerless, and “sold out by our own people”. Jamaican liaisons are employees of the Jamaican Ministry of Labour, and they come to live and work in Canada throughout the agricultural season. Each liaison is assigned a region over which they are tasked with maintaining contact with employers and SAWP workers and make sure things are running smoothly. Officially, the liaison is meant to protect the rights of the workers, but in my experience the liaisons are most interested in appeasing farm owners, facilitating quick repatriation of ‘unwanted’ workers, and making sure the program doesn’t get bad press. Notably, Jamaican liaisons are of a higher social class than SAWP workers and often look down upon workers, and this power dynamic is an ongoing source of stress/pressure for many workers in all regions.

Farm owners must involve the liaison when workers are repatriated, and most workers feel that the liaisons are most interested in protecting the program and in keeping the farmers happy. Garfield, a worker who was repatriated mid-season, had many dealings with the liaison after the boss sent him home mid-way through his contract.

Garfield explained to the liaison that he had merely approached the boss to ask why workers were being paid for ten hours in cash each pay period, rather than on their paycheques, and he requested that all of his work hours be paid to him on his cheque. This was important to Garfield, a worker in his forties who was only two seasons into the program, who wanted to be sure that his pay stubs were accurately reflecting all of his hours worked, and he was concerned that he was being exploited in some way. The liaison confirmed that his employers' practices violated the conditions of the program, because he was not deducting taxes, but he also told Garfield that there was nothing that can be done. I asked Garfield about whether the liaison makes things more or less stressful for workers, and he explained:

The liaisons don't care about their own kind, and they don't protect anybody but the bosses. I think it should be white people caring over blacks, because the white people in Canada have power to really force things [to get better]. The liaison should protect my rights, but instead I have to come to you. The liaison makes it no good, it makes things much worse for me because he says he can't help, I have to go back home. My wife is upset, she doesn't understand. The liaison said he knows this is an injustice, but he can't do anything. I hope I can come back next year, but not to this farm. Will you call the liaison for me, and talk to him?

In the days following his repatriation, I helped Garfield get his errands completed in Simcoe before going home. During our conversations he told me that he is a farmer back home in the parish of St. Elizabeth, and in recent years his crops have been failing, requiring him to take out some loans, which is why he came to Canada for work. He explained that as a man in his forties who grew up without a father, he never wanted to work in Canada and leave his two children, but he feels it is the only way to make enough

money to pay back the loans and save his farm back home. Garfield was also concerned that his wife was angry, and that his children would be disappointed in him. While we drove to the local dollar store to get pencils and notebooks for his kids, Garfield's wife called, seeking further information and explanation about how the farmer could have let him go. The phone call distressed Garfield, and afterward he revealed that he felt deeply ashamed for returning home to his family mid-way through his contract, and that he desperately wants to come back next year.

Inter-group competition and conflict with co-workers is a source of stress for many workers (Preibisch and Binford 2007; McLaughlin 2009). I learned in my research that Jamaican workers have the perception that employers and governments favour workers from Mexico. Specifically, Jamaican workers expressed that while working in Canada, the Mexican workers are better protected by their government than Jamaican workers are by the Jamaican government. This perception of unequal treatment is supported by the fact that Mexican workers have a supplementary health insurance package in Canada that saves them the out of pocket costs for prescriptions, while Jamaicans do not and must rely on the liaison service to reimburse them after they return home. In conversation with me, Jamaican workers regularly diminished Mexican workers, describing them as less skilled, lazy, and less physically strong. Many of the community workers and volunteers I have come to know tell me that this ongoing competition is reflective of employers' efforts to actively encourage rivalry between Caribbean and Mexican workers so as to keep their workforce preoccupied and divided.

*Living Conditions*

*“You don't think that Jamaican people have homes? Do you think we live in shacks? We have quality houses back home, so when I look at the bunkhouse, and how offshore workers live here, I wonder how is it Canada is a First World country when things are so backward?”*

-Patrick, St. Andrews Parish

The conditions in which SAWP workers live in Ontario give rise to stress/pressure associated with social isolation, substandard housing, inadequate amenities, lack of privacy, and conflict with housemates (McLaughlin 2009; Preibisch and Hennebry 2011; Smith 2015). Many of the bunkhouses are located on farm property, and as such are geographically and socially isolated. What's more, larger farms often have many bunkhouses to house the workers, and thus workers are housed in groups at multiple locations. In some expansive areas, workers do not ride bicycles, and without transportation they spend their hours off in the bunkhouse. This isolation was a source of stress for many workers, as a young survey respondent told me: “...Simcoe is too isolated, more than stressful for a Kingston guy who is used to things, there is nothing here”. During one of our weekly meetings, I asked Trevor if he feels socially isolated at the bunkhouse, and he told me “In Jamaica, we're not used to living in a cage like we're an animal or something, we are used to freedom”.

Housing conditions in Ontario were a source of stress for workers, specifically substandard amenities and accommodations (see Otero and Preibisch 2010; Hennebry et al. 2010; Smith 2015). Stories about poor living conditions and inadequate housing were common, and I visited more than a dozen bunkhouses in Norfolk County, three in Niagara, and six in Durham Region. Although there was variation, most bunkhouses I

saw were poorly constructed, poorly maintained, overcrowded, and lacking adequate amenities. For example, I kept in contact with approximately a dozen Jamaican workers at a particular mixed vegetable farm in Norfolk County, and as the season progressed I came to learn that the workers slept in the loft area of a converted barn with no insulation, no heating, and no toilets inside the building; the toilets are outside and down a path, and the workers expressed indignation at being asked to walk through the dark at night to use the washroom. Moreover, at this farm the workers were made to shower in one open room with nine showerheads and no shower curtains or dividers for privacy; this was unacceptable to the workers. Their outrage was magnified by Jamaican masculinities and the cultural rejection and legal prohibition of homosexuality in Jamaica, but also because these conditions are unacceptable in comparison to Canadian standards.

Poorly conditioned or inadequate number of appliances was a cause of conflict between housemates at a number of farms. Workers typically shared a limited number of cooking and washing appliances, and had limited time off in which to get these chores accomplished, resulting in stress and competition. Trevor told me about the conditions at his bunkhouse:

There's like one machine has to serve twelve guys, one washing machine. Even the bathroom system, you have a heating system that whenever you turn on the machine the water in the bathroom get hot until there's steam coming out from the water. If you flush a bathroom, the water gets burning up. We bring it up to the boss and tell him, guys are getting burned, but there's nothing they do about it. Every year we come back and it's the same. And right now the heating in the house is not working, and we cannot adjust the heat because the farm owner installed it [the thermostat] and took the remote and the key to his office. That alone brings stress on you.

The generally insufficient number of stoves in the bunkhouses meant that workers had to wait and take turns to prepare their meals, and many told me they do not eat until late in the evening or sometimes not at all if they worked a particularly long day. It was my experience that Jamaican workers did not tend to share cooking duties with their housemates and instead preferred to take turns using the stove, which in turn created competition and tension between the workers. When I suggested to workers that it might be easier to share cooking responsibilities, I was often told that workers don't know their housemates well enough to share cooking, and many suspect that the others would eat more than their share or put less effort into preparing the meal. As the season progressed, a few workers I knew from larger farms would pair up to do their cooking, but only once "trust" and friendship was established. Food is expensive in Ontario, and food insecurity<sup>6</sup> was a major problem among Jamaican workers; I often heard of workers living on rice, crackers, fruit flavoured drinks, and nutritional drinks (such as Ensure) while in Canada.

Close living quarters and lack of privacy caused stress and tension among workers. Conflict among housemates occurred for various reasons, and depending on the demographics of housing this rivalry between groups could be a great source of stress. While sitting with Delroy at the AWA, I asked him how he feels about the living conditions on the farm where he works:

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<sup>6</sup> Food insecurity "indicates deprivation in terms of a basic human need: access to nutritious food in sufficient quantities to maintain good health", and a recent report indicates that 1.7 million Canadian households (4 million individuals) experienced food insecurity in 2012 (Tarasuk et al. 2014). Migrant farm workers across Canada generally lack access to nutritious food (see Cole 2012; Hennebray 2014; McLaughlin 2009, 2010).

It is stressful on the farm because you have like one hundred and ten guys live on the main farm, how can you survive? Or, how can you be happy? No privacy. You're used to having your wife at home, or your girlfriend at home, you can sit down and talk and feel comfortable, with kids running up and down, you feel nice about it. But when you're living in a bunkhouse with a hundred and twenty guys, all of those guys come from different parishes, and they are not the same. So, you must feel stressed, and then by [the time] you lie down to sleep, it's morning again and you have to get up and work.

One farm that employed nearly one hundred Caribbean workers experienced frequent conflicts between Jamaican workers and their co-workers and supervisors from Barbados. Such conflicts went on throughout the season. Often the situation was exacerbated by excessive alcohol consumption; in fact, excessive alcohol consumption by Barbadian workers became a regular problem at this farm, which I witnessed on a few occasions. At another farm in the same area, conflicts between senior Jamaican workers and young men from Kingston were recurring, as Clifton told me: "those guys [Kingston youth] come here for the wrong reason, they come for *bling*<sup>7</sup> and girlfriends, they don't have a good plan. They aren't used to hard work, so they complain and cause fights. Last year the Kingston guys stole items from the bunkhouse and now the boss knows you can't trust those guys". I was fascinated to learn about these inter-Caribbean and inter-Jamaican dynamics, especially how they prevented solidarity between workers and how employers

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<sup>7</sup> By *bling*, Clifton was referring to ostentatious and flashy jewelry, particularly gold chains, rings, and watches, that some of the younger workers, especially those from urban areas, purchase and proudly wear. It was common for me to see workers in their twenties walking around Simcoe on Friday nights proudly sporting gold chains. Bling can also refer to flashy clothes and shoes.

exploited these tensions on the farms in ways that ignited competition and prevented workers from collectively organising.

*Racism and Lack of Social Connectedness*

*“We know you have racists here in Canada, and that people don't like black people. When we go into downtown, it's obvious. The cashiers at the grocery store won't even look up at you, but if it is a white person they say hello, and they smile. I've seen it many times.”*

– survey respondent

Racism, exclusion from the community, and a general lack of social connectedness and support are sources of stress/pressure for Jamaican workers (McLaughlin 2009; Preibisch 2004; Preibisch and Binford 2007; Sharma 2000; Smith 2013). During one of my many trips to the migrant worker clinic in Simcoe with Clayton, a worker who sustained a serious injury while working on a tobacco farm, he told me: “sometimes I feel mad at white people, because they have been violating my rights, and they don't care that I am injured because they say ‘he's just a black guy, he can go home and die’”. The abusive behaviour of farm owners and Canadian field managers was often explained to me using the language of “slave masters”, and workers frequently remarked to me that slavery is alive and well in Canada. Most workers expressed that their poor treatment in Canada is directly connected to their blackness.

The rural communities that host Jamaican workers are generally not welcoming or inclusive of them (Hennebry et al. 2015). In Simcoe, workers told me that it is unsafe for them to walk around secluded areas of the downtown alone because the local men, concerned that Jamaican workers will “steal their women”, have been known to attack solitary workers. As far as I saw, Jamaican workers heeded this warning and stayed away

from side streets and alleys. When I asked workers about this threat, they often remarked that Jamaican workers 'know' that Canadian women are attracted to them on account of them being "strong black men", so they understand why local white men are nervous of them. I rarely saw groups of local men anywhere near the areas where workers congregated on Friday nights, but I did witness car loads of local women driving around the bar areas looking to pick up Caribbean workers. In this way, it seems as though the local women actively pursued workers, yet it was the workers who are blamed and made to feel unsafe.

Many workers I met in all regions lamented the rude treatment they receive in the community, particularly from the retailers and cashiers they interact with. On more occasions than I can count, at a variety of locations in all regions, I witnessed locals glaring at workers, and cashiers being extremely rude and condescending during retail transactions. Notably, I concluded all of my surveys by asking workers what changes in the community or local services would improve their time working in Canada, and one of the most common requests by Jamaican workers was to address the racism and lack of friendliness in the community.

As English-speakers, Jamaican workers are generally left to navigate Canadian society and source things like social support and health care unassisted; however, significant differences in socio-cultural norms and behaviours makes such endeavours difficult and stressful. For example, stress for Jamaican workers in Norfolk County can be triggered by something as simple as needing a haircut, because although the region hosted nearly 4,500 workers in 2014, there are few local barbershops that cater to the needs of

black clientele. One Friday evening, Randall came to visit the HUB with his friend, and he seemed very distressed. When I asked what was bothering him, he asked me if there was anyone who could plait (cornrow) his hair. I told him that unfortunately none of us could, but that I would ask the other guys where they go for such things. Exasperated, Randall hung his head in his hands and said: "I don't like this place, there's nothing in this town. Why don't they give us guys what we need? I miss things back home". Randall worked on a farm where the living and working conditions were the worst I personally ever witnessed, and there was also a great deal of competition among the workers in his bunkhouse. As a result, Randall had a tough time coping, but he regularly expressed his appreciation for having me to talk to.

Lack of accessible social and educational services for workers in the rural Ontario towns that host them means workers have few mechanisms by which they can connect and integrate into these communities. In the absence of accessible social support services, many of the workers I encountered during outreach would ask me questions about their rights in Canada. The most frequent question I was asked concerned Employment Insurance (EI); namely, why workers pay into it, and whether they receive any benefits doing so. Most workers expressed they had no one else to ask, and that the liaison did not tell them anything. When I asked workers where they might have gone for answers had they not met me, they typically could not respond. Another question I was frequently asked regarded the potential abolishment of the Jamaican Ministry of Labour's mandatory savings program, which required all workers to automatically remit 16 percent of their income through mandatory deductions; the program was abolished in July, and yet many

of the workers I met in August were still unaware of the change. I soon realized the liaison was not passing this information along to workers, which in turn prompted me to prepare copies of an information sheet ready to distribute to workers in Simcoe and Durham Region that explained the changes. I want to note that in Simcoe, the Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA) support centre does provide workers with as much support and information as they can, and they do an exceptional job given the number of workers in Norfolk County, the resources available, and the parameters of the SAWP.

Stress associated with the differences between Jamaican and Canadian societies is particularly salient in the case of Jamaican SAWP workers. Jamaican workers frequently expressed how difficult it is to adjust to the individualism that defines Canadian societies because it is so different than back home. While we chatted in the parking lot, Trevor explained: "It's different here. In Jamaica, if people don't notice you in the community for a day or two, someone is gonna come looking for you to make sure you are ok. Everybody watches out for each other". The lack of friendship with Canadians is a tremendous source of stress and sadness for workers, and they regularly expressed sincere gratitude to me for my friendship and support.

### *Injury and Illness*

*"I left Jamaica as a worker, but I came home as a patient. Injured workers are those guys who suffer a lot. Now I can't feed my children, and nobody cares. What kind of a system is this? This is a slavery system that breaks bodies."*

– Clayton, injured on the farm

Many SAWP workers are injured on the job each year, but in the absence of accurate statistics the exact number is impossible to gauge. Jamaican workers returning

home injured face numerous stressors, and in accordance with similar studies, I found that injured workers were the most prone to depressed moods (McLaughlin 2007, 2009; McLaughlin et al. 2014; Orkin et al. 2014). During our interview, Trevor reinforced my experience:

Some injured guys go crazy, because most of those guys go back and they don't have much things to live off. When they leave this job because they injured, they don't have another job, and ain't nobody gonna employ somebody that's injured. They gonna stay home, not doing anything, and that's stress. That would make you go crazy. You know, your mind can only take certain things. After a while it's like...you know, there are some people we call 'clean clothes mad people', they're clean but when you sit down and they talk to them, it's like you wonder, whoa, that person is gone. Sometimes you see them on the bus talking to themselves, and then they get up and do something crazy, and then you ask them [and] they tell you they used to work in Canada or America doing this job.

Clayton, who was injured on the job, suffered injuries that are the result of faulty farm equipment. It is significant to note that the day before the accident Clayton brought the problem of the faulty hydraulic lift to the attention of his supervisor. Subsequently, the farm owner had some migrant workers inspect and 'repair' the equipment, and he assured Clayton that the hydraulic on the truck was fixed; Clayton had his doubts, but was powerless to challenge the boss. The next day, while loading a bin full of wet tobacco leaves into the kiln, the hydraulic lift gave way and fell on Clayton, crushing him between the metal bin and the truck. He was taken to the hospital unconscious, where the farm owner relayed the details of the accident to the doctor before he regained conscious. When Clayton awoke, confused and with an intravenous in his arm, he was greeted by the emergency room doctor who assured him that he "would be ok", and then he was sent

back to the farm with the farmer. Clayton could not believe he was being discharged given the severity of the accident, and in the days following the accident he went back to the hospital for tests. Three days after the accident, Clayton called me distressed, explaining:

I'm in a bad luck mood. I'm not wanting to think too much about the accident, but I'm shaken up because there was like blood springing up in my mouth in the morning, and it's traumatizing to have blood in my urine. I've never taken a lick so hard in my life that I have peed blood clots. That accident mashed up my body, how can the doctor say I am going to be ok? I know this is a lifelong injury, I can feel it.

In subsequent weeks, I assisted Clayton in getting to the migrant worker clinic each week, and helped to arrange for him to see medical specialists in other areas of the province for more comprehensive testing. As the weeks progressed with little physical improvement, Clayton was unable to do modified work duties. The persistence of his injury infuriated the farm owner's wife, who accused him of "pretending" and repeatedly told him "you're not injured, you're ok, you just need to move that arm". This verbal harassment was compounded when the same individual used her phone to video record Clayton as he moved around the farm; this harassment had a serious impact on Clayton who, having arrived from a previous farm only weeks before the accident, was unaccustomed to this level of mistreatment. When I spoke to Clayton four weeks after the accident, he told me:

I'm here now, depressed and distressed...one side of my body is not working right since I got the lick. I worked tirelessly around the clock, why can't the farmer take responsibility? I don't understand. The boss keeps telling me that I'm not injured... what am I, a piece

of wood? A two thousand pound bin crushed my body, iron on iron, how am I ok? I am rejection over here.

As the weeks unfolded, Clayton's emotional wellbeing deteriorated as he struggled with physical pain, a hostile living environment, and difficulties in attaining workers compensation because the first ruling by the Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB<sup>8</sup>) granted him a mere three days' pay to recover. The physicians at the migrant worker clinic remarked on Clayton's mental health, and suggested that he receive psychological counselling to help him manage the trauma and depression that resulted from the injury, but because Clayton had no transportation to get him around, and he was unfamiliar with the area, this was not possible.

Five months after returning home, Clayton is still unable to fully use his left side and suffers from headaches, back and shoulder pain, memory loss, insomnia, and in his words "I'm depressed, like really, really stressed". Despite these persistent injuries, he also returned home without workers compensation on account of the WSIB ruling (that his injuries entitled him to 3 days). Even though a claim had been filed, and Clayton had assistance throughout the WSIB process, his case supports McLaughlin's (2007) finding that workers' temporary and precarious employment status in Canada poses various limitations for those who do wish to follow through with claims or appeals. For Clayton, one of the most frustrating issues was that the Jamaican liaison was his official

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<sup>8</sup> The Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) is the governing body that provides disability benefits in event of injury on the job, oversees workplace safety education and training, and monitors health care after injury to facilitate an "early and safe" return to work. A recent article noted that WSIB is widely criticized by Canadians for cutting compensation benefits to injured workers against the advice of medical professionals (<http://www.cbc.ca/ontariotoday/2016/02/17/is-the-wsib-ignoring-medical-advice/>)

representative, and the WSIB case manager communicated with the liaison and not Clayton. When Clayton had inquiries as to the status of his claim, the liaison diminished his concerns and kept telling Clayton to “co-operate”. In an attempt to find out the truth of the matter, I called the liaison to inquire about the status of Clayton’s claim, but was given platitudes and empty promises that the matter would be looked after and false assurances that the liaison had Clayton’s best interests at heart.

The ongoing physical pain, with the added burden of financial stress and the inability to provide for his four young children, has made Clayton’s mental health even more precarious since he returned home to Jamaica. During a phone conversation in February 2016, he told me:

Since I’ve been home with no money, I have to borrow it from family. My girlfriend is stressed out, nothing is ok, she is worried about everything because my kids go to bed without enough food. When my kids ask *Daddy, why did you come home?* I tell them that farmer is a wicked person. I’m stressed out, can’t sleep because I’m worrying about my kids while the WSIB people are sitting back in chairs saying “ok, that’s just another black guy, he can go away and die”. If I die, it will be WSIB’s fault.

Clayton is accessing health care in Kingston, Jamaica through the health care channels that are approved by the Jamaican Ministry of Labour. Recently, the doctor in Jamaica referred Clayton to a psychiatrist in order to help him deal with the stress and memory loss. I maintain weekly contact with Clayton, not only out of concern, but also because I continue to work with him in collaboration with community workers and legal advocates toward securing a new WSIB ruling or initiating an appeal. Notably, most workers do not have this kind of support.

Illness is another cause of stress for workers, as they worry that employers will send them home if they become sick in a practice called “medical repatriation” (Orkin et al. 2014). In Norfolk County, an area greatly underserved in terms of health care, many workers expressed fears that farm owners are in allegiance with local health care professionals at the local hospital and walk-in clinic. Workers explained that they are nervous to access health care at these locations because they are afraid that their employer will be notified. Simcoe has a small population base, with very few existing medical services, so workers’ lack of confidentiality is certainly founded. In my experience, the health care professionals in this area are the spouses and family members of the local farm owners, and workers’ fears are definitely warranted. For all workers, the fear of repatriation is ever-present in Canada; one survey respondent astutely described this as “mental slavery”, because the fear makes the workers do whatever the farmers demand. The migrant worker clinic in Simcoe has begun to address these barriers to migrant worker health care in Norfolk, and many workers throughout the season contacted me to take them to the clinic specifically so they could access confidential health care.

## **Discussion**

Exploring stress as an idiom of distress elucidates the social, political, economic, and interpersonal sources of distress, but it does not situate these sources within the broader structural context from which they emerge. Simultaneously approaching stress as discourse offers the possibility to contextualise the sources of distress, and to uncover the power relations and structures that maintain them. This discussion will approach workers’

experiences of stress as distress and as a discourse in order to demonstrate these experiences are part of a system of power and international inequality.

Essentially, Foucault constructs discourse as the production of knowledge through language, in that he conceptualises discourse as “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic” (Hall 1997:72). In the case of Jamaican workers, stress language is commonly used, which I believe can be partly attributed to Jamaica’s British-style education and health systems, as well as the spread of Western media. In my experience, the Jamaican workers talk about their experiences of stress with full awareness that (1) these experiences are structured by the conditions of the SAWP, and (2) they are essentially powerless to do anything about these conditions. Once I gained the trust of my interlocutors, and thus overcame my ‘white girl’ identity, the theme of slavery became recurrent in most conversations. This was specifically evident in association with the workers’ powerlessness, and the contemporary conditions and realities of working under the SAWP were regularly analogised with the conditions of historic slavery.

Moreover, Foucault emphasises that discourses always function in relation to power structures (McHoul and Grace 1993:39). In talking to the workers about their experiences of stress, in many ways I too was reproducing power relations along racial lines, insofar as I was a white Canadian researcher. When I was conducting surveys at the beginning of my fieldwork, workers often asked me to “write that down” when describing extreme suffering. I got the impression that workers saw my white-ness as power, and that by recording their specific challenges I might affect some positive change over the

source of their stress. In the beginning of the season I mostly administered surveys, as I had not yet formed relationships with workers, and during this time none of the workers I surveyed used the word 'slavery' when describing their stress in Ontario. After approximately a month of fieldwork, when I had established the trust of enough workers, suddenly conversations about stress transformed into analogies of historic and modern slavery under the SAWP, and many workers expressed disbelief that Canada 'allows' slavery. Reflecting my perceived power as a white Canadian, Clayton implored me to "talk to the new Prime Minister of Canada, explain the problems with the system, that guys are suffering...I think he will listen to you".

In their analyses of social stress, Korovkin and Stephenson (2010) posit that stress is a systemic feature of any form of social organization, and they highlight that stress stems from dissonance that results from contradictions between systems of organization and the perceptions of the individuals within these systems; this is particularly true in the case of Jamaican workers in Ontario. Paradoxically, although workers exercise agency in choosing to participate in the program, and are grateful for the elevated socio-economic status it affords them in Jamaica, upon arriving in Canada their agency is severely restricted by the condition of the SAWP. The nationalist pride that serves as the foundation of their identities as 'Jamaicans', which is bolstered by political independence, is undermined in Ontario by the Jamaican liaison service and compounded by the racism they experience in Ontario communities. Moreover, workers connect the behaviour of the liaison with a practice of being "sold out by our own people" during historic slavery.

Stress and pressure that is associated with family and transnational parenting was prevalent, and many workers lamented their prolonged absence away from family. One survey respondent suggested that his time in Ontario would be improved if spouses/girlfriends were able to visit workers mid-season; interestingly, he pointed out that prison inmates often receive conjugal visits from their spouses, and in this way he suggested that his value in Canada as a migrant workers is less than a 'criminal'. Another worker told me that he wished that workers would be allowed to return home when a loved one passes away and return after mourning. Another issue was the cost of regularly calling home, which most workers reported was a dominant coping strategy. Workers situate all of these challenges within the control of the farm owners, and many workers appealed for some form of education for farm owners to let them know that Jamaicans are 'humans' and 'have families'.

According to the conditions of the program, employers must provide living accommodations for workers, and although there are some regulations around health and safety, living quarters in Ontario are not inspected or monitored. Employer provided bunkhouses not only pose specific health and safety risks related to over-crowding, poor sanitation, and proximity to pesticides (Preibisch and Hennebry 2011), they also contribute to the immobilization of SAWP workers (Smith 2015). Because workers have been coming to Southern Ontario for fifty years now, many of the bunkhouses I visited were run down and lacking basic amenities, and they are often over-crowded with workers.

Agriculture is among the most hazardous industries, insofar as “farms have production tasks spread across a wide geographic area under changing or dangerous weather, light, and other environmental conditions. Risk is increased if machinery is poorly designed, inadequately maintained, or improperly operated” (McCurdy and Carroll 2000:475). Workers recognize these dangers, but the conditions of the program are such that workers are regularly asked to work in unsafe conditions, operate poorly maintained machinery, and work without proper personal protective equipment, and because their employer can repatriate them for any reason, workers have limited ability to refuse unsafe work (McLaughlin et al. 2014). Workers are aware that they are unprotected, at risk, and powerless, which clearly causes stress. This scenario played out to its worst possible end with Clayton, who is now facing a life-long injury because he was expected to operate heavy machinery that he knew wasn't functioning properly.

Workers live and work in rural communities, and the cultural differences and pervasive racism causes distress. In an examination into the relationship between the act of migration and mental distress, Bhugra (2004) found that individuals coming from socio-centric (collective) societies who migrate to ego-centric (individualistic) societies are at risk for greater alienation and stress, which he posits results from incongruent ontologies: individualistic societies emphasise “I” consciousness: autonomy, emotional independence, individual initiative, the right to privacy, pleasure seeking, financial security and the need for specific friendship and universalism”, whereas collective societies “stress ‘we’ consciousness: collective identity, emotional inter-dependence, group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations, the need for stable and predetermined

friendships, group decisions and particularism” (2004:69). In my experience, I witnessed this I/we contrast among Jamaican workers, and many workers referred to themselves in conversation using first-person ‘we’. Some workers told me that their employers forbade them from going into town or engaging with locals, while others said they were not able to have visitors of any kind at the farm/bunkhouse (see also Preibisch 2007, 2010; Smith 2015). Such restrictions over their movements were typically interpreted through the lens of slavery, prompting ‘slave owner’ or ‘slave master’ labels for such employers. At the macro-level, many Jamaicans view the program itself as racist, citing their working and living conditions in Canada as a perpetuation of slavery; workers’ lack of visibility, labour rights, and social support in Canada reinforces this perspective (Smith 2014, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

As constructed by Foucault, “the concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from” (Hall 2001:73). Considering stress as a discourse and as an idiom of distress, it became clear to me that the meaning workers’ attribute to their experiences of stress is slavery, past and present. In this way, the subjectivity of Jamaican workers is connected in specific ways to history, and insofar as workers use stress language to frame their challenges and powerlessness, stress can also be seen as an expression of subjectivity. To be sure, the coercive violence of racism and sex/gender are the founding conditions of human subjectivity, especially in the North American context, both historically and in the historical present. In the following chapter, I explore the ways stress language allows workers to frame challenges as well as highlight

their strengths, such that stress discourses can be understood as sites of flexibility and resilience, before discussing stress in the context of subjectivity.

### CHAPTER 3

#### “A DIFFERENT MENTALITY”: RESILIENCE AND COPING IN ONTARIO

Early in my fieldwork I learned the importance of not viewing Jamaican workers as victims. Jamaican men choose and want to participate in SAWP, as it is the best of an extremely limited number of employment opportunities (Basok 2007; Binford 2013; McLaughlin 2009). In this way, workers are proud of the work they do in Canada as working ‘offshore’ affords them increased socioeconomic status back home and allows them to pay for their children’s education, which is at once a point of pride and expression of parental love. Moreover, SAWP workers are often able to build homes in Jamaica with the money they earn abroad, which would otherwise be impossible. As the season progressed, I was surprised by the strength and resilience that I was witnessing among Jamaican workers, even when we were talking about egregiously stressful situations and events, and this observation prompted me to investigate how workers maintain resilience in Ontario. Furthermore, it was clear that the practice of talking to me about their experiences of stress/pressure in Ontario ‘reminded’ workers of their strength, which they often attributed to their history of slavery and emancipation, as well as their national independence.

In this chapter, I approach stress/pressure discourses as sites of resilience and flexibility, and present the factors that emerged from my ethnographic analysis as supporting workers’ resilience in Ontario. Next, I detail the predominant coping strategies that workers reported, and situate these within the limitations of workers’ agency in Ontario. To follow, I consider the two dominant social resources that facilitate coping and

foster resilience in Ontario – churches and local support networks. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the centrality of the memory of historic slavery as an underlying source of strength and resilience for workers while they are in Ontario.

### **Stress and Resilience**

In some cultural approaches to medical anthropology, resilience is conceptualized not as a personal characteristic, but rather a trajectory that is influenced by the interplay of various personal, social, and structural factors (Fletcher 2014; Obrist and Büchi 2008). In their study on African immigrants' experiences of stress in Switzerland, Obrist and Büchi (2008) were the first to conceptualise stress as an idiom of resilience, insofar as it assisted their interlocutors in framing their reflections, understandings, and explanations of often diffuse emotions and thoughts. Fletcher too conceives resilience as a trajectory that offers a potential for resistance and positive outcomes among immigrant youth as a group (2014). In this thesis, I likewise approach resilience as a trajectory that is shaped by the interaction of cultural, political, and historical factors (and not an individual characteristic). Moreover, I argue that stress/pressure discourses are sites of flexibility that allow Jamaican workers to not only frame their distress, but also to cultivate resilience. To follow, I detail the factors that emerged from my ethnographic analysis as supporting Jamaican workers' resilience in Ontario, namely spiritual faith, Jamaican identity, and historical slavery.

### **Cultural, Political, and Historical Factors that Support Resilience in Ontario**

*“Psalm 41 and verse 11, by this I know that you favour me, oh Lord, for you never allowed my enemies to triumph over me. Hallelujah...you make me stronger.”*

- ‘You Make Me Stronger’, by Kevin Downswell (Jamaican gospel artist)

Upon investigating the factors that support Jamaican workers’ resilience and strength in Ontario, despite their structural exploitation and the constraints on their agency, I identified three main factors interwoven throughout my interlocutors’ stress discourses that strengthened workers’ resilience in Ontario: faith and spirituality, Jamaican national identity, and (unexpectedly) historic slavery.

During my fieldwork, Jamaican workers most frequently sought to deal with stress by emphasising the positive religious significance and/or deeper spiritual meaning of the experiences of stress. Many workers described themselves as “a good Christian” or a “God-fearing man” early in our initial conversations. This phenomenon may be partly explained by my work with churches in various regions that are engaged with the migrant farm worker populations as well as my choice to stay out of bars and clubs. There are three broad forms of religion that are practiced in Jamaica: European denominations, including Anglicans, Moravians, Baptists, Methodists, United Church, Quakers, and the Salvation Army; American evangelical and Pentecostal churches, such as the Adventists and various branches of the Church of God; and religions indigenous to Jamaica, including *Kromanti/ Maroon, Myalism, Native Baptists, Revival, Jah Rastafari* (Wedenoja and Anderson 2014:130). Most workers I spoke to were Christians, including Anglicans, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Baptists, but it was my experience that whilst in

Ontario Jamaican workers were often happy to worship in any Christian church that welcomed them.

James, a worker I first met in Norfolk County early in the season, was amazing in his ability to frame his adversity in faith and gratitude. James kept in touch with me throughout the season as he moved around to multiple farms across Southern Ontario, and he was always cheerful and reflective. In fact, James' positive outlook and unshakeable faith were impressively consistent, and often our conversations became quite philosophical. Even when telling me about exploitative and dangerous working conditions on some of the farms he worked at over the season, James was calm and reflective:

Let me say give God thanks, because I could've gone home Friday. Out of nine guys...cause the boss cannot find no job, he sent eight back to Jamaica, and my place where I worked last year, the crop burned off, so now I'm at a different farm. This boss is no good to his workers, I'm not working back with this man next season. Just showing him my ladder have a problem, it don't work right, him say that him carrying me home [to the bunkhouse], and him give me the day at his place [with no pay], and say I must go to work tomorrow. This guy put pressure on us for simple things. I'm getting ten hours a day from here, so I give God thanks, from the heart, mind, and soul. My back is aching, from the bending...from that day talking to you, I can see that you are real, so I can tell you that I love my God. Him great to me in ways I can prove, that there is a true living God around us all. I feel him, I next to see that man. Keep strong by our Lord, stay safe mind always.

Approximately three weeks after having this conversation with James, he was transferred to an apple orchard in another region of the province, where he reported much improved working conditions. Many times my conversations with James left me feeling positive and inspired, even though we often discussed very stressful situations. Interestingly, although many of the workers I spoke to did attend church in Canada, James did not;

rather, he maintained a personal dedication that allowed him to reframe negative experiences in a positive and spiritual light throughout the season.

The Jamaican political identity as a source of strength and resilience was one of my most dominant observations, and the strength it provided workers in times of adversity was amazing. Many of my conversations with workers about their experiences of stress incorporated declarations of their pride as 'Jamaicans', and workers provided me a plethora of evidence to support their statements, including; their history of emancipation and political independence, the international popularity of Bob Marley and reggae music, and famous Jamaican track and field stars. When I asked Calvin how the workers deal with the difficult conditions they endure in Ontario, he explained: "We Jamaicans, we have a different mentality, that's why we don't go crazy. You don't see a lot of mad people [Jamaicans] walking up and down Simcoe! It's music, just music. And sometimes we just think on other stuff, try and think of anything back home". Often workers drew strength from reflecting on life back home, most often expressing nostalgia for the weather, the ocean, their families, and their faith communities.

Given the widespread poverty and unemployment in Jamaica, as well as the country's international debts, McLaughlin (2009) reveals political affiliation is of tremendous importance to Jamaicans because their "lives are governed by access to political patronage, making political rivalries not just symbolic, but also deeply important" (121). In my experience, most Jamaican workers were extremely knowledgeable in Jamaican politics, historical and contemporary, and wanted to discuss their political opinions and affiliations with me. I learned that there are two main federal

parties in Jamaica, the Peoples National Part (PNP) and the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), and that each parish (or province) of Jamaica is represented by one of these two parties; these elected representatives then come together under the federal parliamentary government. Trevor supports the PNP:

...ok, with the PNP you have a lot of good and a lot of bad, they could do more, but to me, the PNP build the most roads and they build the most housing. Education wise, they make it a lot easier, cheaper. Jamaica Labour Party...it's very hard, because they're so confrontational, they always have problems with one another, they don't know the vision for the country...

Clayton explained to me why he supported the PNP, but thinks its time for change:

You see, everybody's struggling in Jamaica, it's not like in Canada, in Jamaica there's no jobs...and the government is not advanced, it's like a third world country. Everybody is tense, and mostly young people want change, and older people remember the past, and the guys [politicians] who made promises, but then they get elected and nothing changes. We, Jamaicans, we need change, we need things to be better.

During one of our many trips to the wound care clinic, Clifton and I discussed the stakes of Jamaican politics for SAWP workers. Clifton, who is a lot older than both Trevor and Clayton, is a JLP supporter, and one of his points of criticism against the PNP was their proposition to limit participation in the SAWP to 10 years, in order to "give younger guys a chance". Clifton was grateful this rule never went through, as he explained "I have nine children, and they all go to school, not just for a short time but until they're eighteen! How could I afford that and work in Canada only ten years?! [*Laughs.*] That's why the labour party is best, they look after offshore workers". I can't quite discern the demographics for how political support shakes down among workers, but almost all of the

workers I spoke to proudly and seriously explained to me their political perspectives, and I had the impression such conversation made them feel connected to home.

Another phenomenon I frequently observed was that of workers caring for their disadvantaged co-workers during times of need, such as illness, injury, conflict, or repatriation. It was common that I received calls from workers asking me to help their co-workers, and often requesting me to arrange transportation to see a doctor (resulting in my nickname in Simcoe, 'the doctor lady'). Often these calls came from workers who act in leadership roles on the farms, and gain the respect of their co-workers through example and friendship. During my conversation with Trevor about how workers cope with stress in the field, his leadership role emerged:

...even if one of our fellow workers was down today, we call to make sure he is ok. We have to take care of each person, despite we can't do much, we gotta do what we have to do...we all are Jamaicans, we have to show love. That's why I asked the boss about allowing us to listen to music in the fields, because the supervisors don't let us sing, they don't like how it look[s]. So I asked the boss, and explained to him that in Jamaica, this is what keeps us going. He listened to me, and then he said "ok, I'm gonna allow you guys to listen to music"

Trevor's success in convincing the farm owner to allow workers to listen to music in the field (on either speakers or earphones!) positively impacted the experiences of many workers on this large fruit and berry farm. When one of the workers on this same farm had a serious bleeding nose that lasted for days, which resulted from accidentally inhaling pesticides, Trevor and other guys arranged to get his groceries on Friday night so he could stay back at the bunkhouse. Although competition and conflicts between co-workers and housemates were common, I knew of many workers who actively helped those in need and demonstrated consistent care for their Jamaican co-workers.

Once I established trust with my interlocutors (nearly a month into fieldwork), the history of slavery was a theme that ran through most of my conversation with workers about their experiences of stress in Ontario. During an interview late in the season, I asked Trevor how Jamaican workers stay strong and cope with abusive supervisors and long hours out in the field. He told me:

...a lot of Jamaicans know how to hold things, because our fore-parents were the slaves, they know how to hold things. We will sing to get the pressure off of our head, we will listen to music to get the pressure off our head, because...just imagine you are some of these white people, and you tell them "do this!" (*he snaps his fingers*). *Laughs*. But we know how to hold it together...

A survey respondent who was previously a teacher in the parish of Clarendon told me "Jamaicans are strong because of our history, and we know [our] history...our ancestors were slaves, and now we know how to be strong". What I found particularly fascinating was that although workers framed their stress experiences in terms of analogies to historic slavery, at the same time they drew upon this same history as their greatest source of strength. I came to understand that workers' spiritual faith and Jamaican identity were deeply connected to the history of slavery, and that these factors combine to support workers' resilience in Ontario.

### **Coping in Ontario**

Coping strategies consist of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage stress demands, and are generally directed in one of two ways: solving problems or regulating emotions (Folkman and Lazarus 1990). In my experience, the majority of workers' stress experiences emerge from their structural powerlessness under the SAWP and their restricted agency in Canada, and the coping strategies they employed reflect this

precarity: workers coping focused predominantly on regulating emotions, as they were not empowered to “solve” their problems. When I asked about coping strategies, and the things workers did to cope with stress/pressure in Ontario, nearly all reported that calling home, listening to music, and watching TV were their primary strategies for coping and relaxing in Canada; all of which were aimed at regulating emotions. Workers generally demonstrated cognitive flexibility in the face of adversity (such as the poor weather and implications for their earnings, or injury), which also helped with coping.

Calling home was generally an effective coping strategy because it reminded workers of the reasons they are working in Canada, and it also gave them a chance to hear about what's happening back home. Touching base with family members and friends in Jamaica was a tangible reconnection with family and home, as Delroy explained to me while we waited at the pharmacy:

I come here to work, to send my kids to school and have a better life. The bosses don't care about that, it's hard. I call home every night, and I talk to my wife...I use my video so I can see my loved ones and talk to my children. I also call my sister, and my brother...and you can call them every day, and hear what's going on [at home].

Although some workers found it difficult to call home at times because they missed their families, or due to conflict, the dominant way workers told me they deal with the “pressures of life” in Ontario was to call their family members back home.

Music was something that Jamaican workers explained as being in their blood, it is both how their ancestors survived slavery, and how they prefer to worship and give thanks. In my experience, listening to music was an essential coping strategy for most workers. Workers reported a wide range of musical interests, but the main genres were

gospel, reggae, and R&B. The workers on Trevor's farm were really into a popular Jamaican gospel artist named Kevin Downswell, and I often played this album while I drove workers around from place to place. In speaking with Clarence, a young man from Kingston, he told me that he copes with stress in the field with music... and after work by watching movies and TV: "because, what else can we do here? There is nothing in Simcoe for us".

Domino games between co-workers was a common way workers distracted themselves from everyday stress, and most of the workers I talked to played games of some kind. Workers in certain areas of the province organised cricket games and tournaments, while workers in other areas played basketball and soccer. Playing games was a way for workers to have fun and get away from the daily grind of farm work, as one survey respondent from St. Elizabeth parish told me: "playing dominos, and soccer sometimes, are good for the health of your mind and soul...you need time to have fun with friends, to be yourself". Some workers who had access to bicycles told me that they liked the freedom a bicycle offered in rural Ontario, and going for a ride allowed time for reflection and offered an escape from stresses associated with the bunkhouse.

It was my experience that many of the more experienced workers who have been working under the program for years arrive in Canada each season with particular goals and plans for what they will do with their earnings. These workers keep this goal in their mind, and draw upon it for motivation. Workers also demonstrated flexibility with these goals, as is the case with Clifton, who told me:

Every year I come to Canada, I have a plan back home about what I want to build in my house. In Jamaica we build slowly, over time. I

add room here, and another thing next year, you understand? Last year I started to build a bathroom, a second one in the house, and I wanted to finish it this year...but I don't think so, too much time off. You have to have a plan, that's important, and stick to that plan. You are here to achieve goals...not to buy bling and drink, you have to save your money.

In Clifton's case, when his earnings were less than he expected, he made the cognitive choice to let go of his goal of finishing his bathroom, and focussed on sending enough money home each week to cover tuition for his six school-aged children and other household expenses. Letting go of larger goals due to lost wages was common among the workers I spoke with during my fieldwork because so many had lost time due to weather and crop failure.

For Clayton, who suffered a serious injury on the farm, his entire lived reality was turned upside down by the accident, and yet he always incorporated some positive spin on each stress/pressure he encountered. In his four previous seasons of working in Canada, Clayton had experienced what he considered fair treatment by his employer at a mixed vegetable farm. This year, for the first time, Clayton was sent to work on a tobacco farm mid-season, and this was where the accident occurred. One week after the accident, while we drove to the migrant worker clinic, he explained:

This accident has made me realise that I am a good person, I have good in me. I'm scared of the farm now, because when things happen like this, you start to figure out where you stand. If a worker gets injured, the farm owner is just gonna get a new one. I'm gonna change my life, I want to turn my life around. I'm looking at other options when I go back to Jamaica, that are not too strenuous... get a skill like welding or electrical. Offshore workers are taken for granted because they have no choice. I can do something better, something with my mind.

I worked closely with Clayton in the months following his injury, and helped him arrange and attend various medical appointments. Given his previous experiences working in Canada, the poor treatment he received by the farm owners after the accident confused him and exacerbated his psychological distress. His repeated failed attempts to get meaningful support and productive assistance from the Jamaican liaison was both infuriating and stressful. As the weeks progressed, Clayton's initial hopefulness for a better future was replaced with daily concerns stemming from his immobility, chronic pain, lack of income, harassment on the farm, and inability to support his family back home, all of which has resulted in ongoing suffering and "depression" (his words). Clayton is now immediately focused on achieving "justice" from WSIB, getting physically better, and since returning to Jamaica, he has begun leaning more on his faith and church community for help and support.

Given my role in the community, and my engagement with and support of workers, it is unsurprising that workers would often attach positive and significant meaning to our interactions. For example, workers would often seek me out in Simcoe on a Friday night, with the hopes of visiting with me at either the grocery store parking lot, the AWA support centre, the HUB, or the migrant worker clinic. Many of these workers brought me fresh produce, and they generally wanted to chat and catch up with me on the week's happenings. Sometimes workers would ask me questions about their rights, but many times we chatted about their week at the farm and what crops they are working on. I came to realise that these exchanges and weekly check-ins were very important for many workers, and they often told me how much they appreciated my friendship and concern

for them. In this way, for many workers in Simcoe and Durham Region, I came to see myself as both a friend and a coping resource.

### *Alcohol and Substance Abuse*

I found that alcohol consumption varies among the Jamaican workers I spoke to, and both tobacco and cannabis were used infrequently among my interlocutors. During every survey and interview, I asked workers about their alcohol and substance consumption, and most of the workers I talked to told me they either “don’t drink” or “drink occasionally”. Notably, I decided not to engage any workers in any bar, restaurant, or club, and thus I did not speak to workers who may partake in regular drinking. From my experiences visiting bunkhouses and talking to workers, beer seems to be the drink of choice, as evidenced by the stacks of empties piled high at many bunkhouses. As noted in the previous chapter, co-workers’ excessive alcohol consumption was a source of stress for many workers I talked to, as Clifton explained “sometimes the other guys, they get so drunk in the bunkhouse... they don’t stop drinking, they drink more and more, and then start conflicts. Some nights I can’t even sleep from it”.

One Saturday evening in Durham Region, I drove to the bunkhouse to pick up a carload of workers and take them to the Caribbean church service. The workers were in good spirits, especially Freddie who was quietly signing and humming during the ride. When we arrived at the church, Freddie was animated, and he began singing with the piano player. At first, I thought Freddie was feeling particularly happy to be attending church, and when I remarked on this to Clifton, he looked perplexed, then laughed. When I approached Freddie, to talk about his obvious love of gospel music, it then became clear

that he had been drinking; somehow, I did not smell this in the car, but during our brief conversation at the piano it was apparent. After the service, Freddie insisted that we stop to buy cigarettes, even though the others wanted to get back to the bunkhouse, and the tension that ensued gave me insight into Clifton's concerns.

During an interview with Trevor, I asked him about alcohol consumption, and he told me that most workers drink beer to relax, but not to get drunk, and that guys often make a tonic by mixing a beer with something to dilute it. He told me that if I wanted to get an idea, I should go to the Beer Store in Simcoe on a Friday night and watch for myself, which I never had the chance to do. Trevor also told me he drinks beer occasionally, and when he is under a lot of stress he likes to go to a club to dance and have couple of drinks with friends: "when I feel my nerves are bad, I try to go to a club, or go to somewhere, and try to dance it off. And tomorrow morning you are going to feel a lot better because you enjoyed yourself, so your nerves will be calm, but if all you thinking about is the work, you'll go mad"<sup>9</sup>.

### **Social Resources that Support Resilience and Coping in Ontario**

During my fieldwork, I observed that local churches and social support networks (comprised of various community organisations and volunteers) provide the most helpful and consistent forms of social support to workers in Southern Ontario. It was my general

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<sup>9</sup> Causal attributions of mental illness in Jamaica have been recently explored by Arthur and Whitley (2015), who found the five most commonly endorsed causal attributions of mental illness in Jamaica are: drug-related causes (including *ganja*); biological causes, including familial transmission and "blood"; psychological causes, including "stress and thinking too much"; social causes, such as job loss and relationship problems; and, religious or spiritual causes, such as *Obeah*. In this way, according to Jamaican explanatory models for mental illness, participation in the SAWP is associated with both psychological and social factors that predispose Jamaican workers to mental illness.

observations that workers who attend church services or accessed social support (e.g. health fairs, support centres) were better able to cope with stress. To follow, I will explore these two forms of support in the context of my fieldwork.

### *Churches*

Many rural churches in Ontario offer services for migrant farm workers, in either Spanish or English (according to local worker demographics), which typically include a social time with refreshments afterward. I found this to be true in all three regions of the province that I conducted research, but is perhaps most salient in Simcoe where there are a number of churches offering Caribbean worship services for migrant farm workers.

In Simcoe, one particularly notable church has been working with Caribbean SAWP workers for over a decade, and every year this church helps workers organize, develop, plan, rehearse, and execute an end-of-season musical celebration called “Caribbean Night”, which is recorded and subsequently made available on DVD in order for workers to show their families. Many of the workers I spoke with in Simcoe were involved with this church, and many told me they spend their time off throughout the season rehearsing music for the performance. One of the pastors from this church sat in the parking lot of the grocery store every Friday night (which he has done for over a decade), offering time and assistance to any worker in need, and I generally made a point of stopping by to chat. During one conversation he told me that he regularly visits workers on the farms to invite them to check out the service and to counsel them when needed. Trevor explained the significance of such visits:

When the pastor comes to have a prayer meeting with us at the bunkhouse, and to talk us, that help us a lot. ‘Cause sometimes a

little prayer is good for us. Even though a lot of us are not Christians, we are god-believing people, so, you know, it helps us. In the evening, we can call home and say 'we want you to pray for me when you go to church', and the pastor from that church can give a prayer or something cause we are under a lot of stress in Canada. It will help the situation, because when you come here to work, it's hard if you don't have any support from anybody.

The pastors from this church also visit workers and churches in Jamaica during the holiday season, and maintain a spiritual bridge during the growing season by bringing pastors from Jamaica to Canada in the summer. These visits are paid for by church donations and collections throughout the year.

In Durham Region, the 2015 season was the first time that a local church offered services for and by Caribbean migrant workers. While conducting outreach early in the season with members of the volunteer migrant worker network, I approached local Caribbean workers at the grocery store to invite them to an upcoming health fair for workers at a local church. During the health fair, it was apparent that most of the workers were Christians, and many that I spoke with told me that they had nowhere in Canada to worship. After the health fair was over, I drove a carload of workers back to their bunkhouse, and during the ride we talked about church and the importance of worship. All four of these workers told me that they attend church regularly in Jamaica, and would love to in Canada as well, but, as one worker explained, "back home you can walk in to any church and everyone is welcome. Here, it seems you have to be invited. When you walk in, people just stare at you". The next day I relayed this story to the Anglican Reverend, prompting a warm invitation to the workers to attend Sunday service, and an offer to arrange transportation there and back. Although a few workers attended the next couple of Sunday mornings, there were two issues that arose: workers did not always

have Sunday mornings off work, and Caribbean worship looks much different than Anglican services in Ontario. The Reverend was astute to these issues, and engaged with the workers to see what kind of service and at what times was best suited to their needs. The “Caribbean Worship” services began mid-way through the season, and workers were involved in writing music, singing songs, playing instruments, giving sermons, and scripture reading. The workers involved in these efforts expressed appreciation for having a place to worship, and many maintain contact with the Reverend and myself from Jamaica to relay blessings and well wishes.

#### *Community-based Organizations and Support Networks*

Across Southern Ontario, there are a number of migrant worker support networks and community organizations that seek to provide migrant farm workers with support and assistance, and the availability of these services varies across the province. The two areas of Southern Ontario with the greatest concentration of SAWP workers, Norfolk County and Niagara Region, have the most social services and supports available to workers: local Community Health Centres (CHCs) operate migrant worker medical clinics in both regions, in Norfolk since 2014 and Niagara since 2010; there are established community support networks that facilitate ongoing supports and organize annual special events for workers, namely the Niagara Migrant Workers Interest Group (NMWIG) and the Norfolk Health Equity Community Committee (NHECC); and, both regions have an Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA) support centre where workers can go to receive assistance with a number of issues, including compensation claims, pay issues, referral to legal counsel, pension claims (CPP), unfair treatment, unsafe housing, and working conditions. By

contrast, Durham Region has the Durham Region Migrant Worker Network (DRMWN), a coalition of volunteers and community-based organizations that works to provide ongoing supports to workers through outreach efforts, special events, and semi-annual health fairs.

In an effort to overcome the barriers SAWP workers encounter in accessing health care in Ontario (Hennebry et al. 2015), the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) work with local migrant farm worker support networks as a part of their Migrant Farm Worker Program. Importantly, this program offers migrant farm worker clinics, occupational health and safety workshops, workplace consultations, occupational health and safety information and resource toolbox for the migrant worker clinics, and community partnerships with other migrant workers support networks across Southern Ontario. Migrant farm worker health fairs are an important event for workers in Ontario, as they give workers from across the region a chance to come together in a social and informative environment. These health fairs usually provide workers with a variety of resources, including: home-cooked meals prepared by groups of volunteers; information booths set up by community organizations that provide information on health and safety and offer complimentary items (e.g. bottles of sunscreen, toiletries, hats, safety glasses); medical clinic staffed by a physician, nurse, and translator; and, raffle prizes (e.g. bicycles, televisions that they can ship back home). The 2015 health fair in Simcoe saw more than 350 workers attend, and although I had intended to interview workers at the event, the numbers meant I was needed in the kitchen to prepare and serve food. I attended three health fairs in Durham Region during my fieldwork, and the workers

enthusiastically received these events. A local Caribbean caterer provided the food for a July health fair, and the Caribbean workers were thrilled, as many hadn't enjoyed their favourite foods in months. In Niagara Region, I was not able to attend any health fairs, rather in this area I attended and assisted with the welcome event, and later in the season I worked with the migrant workers clinic in Niagara to deliver a (very well received) mental health workshop.

I collected most of my data in Norfolk County on Friday nights, and I would generally make my way to the AWA at some point each week with a worker in need of advice or assistance. I quickly came to realize how important the AWA was to Jamaican workers, who called it "the baby office"; it received this nickname because it is the place where workers go to fill out their employment insurance (EI) applications for parental benefits, which is available to them if their spouse/ partner is expecting a baby during the year they migrated to Canada. The assistance with parental forms means a lot to workers who rely on this income to help bridge the gap between contracts in Canada. Another significant support the AWA offers is free Wi-Fi, because this allows workers to connect to family for free using *WhatsApp*; most Friday nights, the centre waiting room was overflowing with workers on their cell phones talking with or videoconferencing family back home. As Delroy explained:

It's expensive in Canada to call [home], it takes up some money. That's why it's good to have [free] Wi-Fi, like at the baby office [the AWA], so we can use WhatsApp. It's harder here than in Jamaica, twice as hard, but when you're here [in Canada] you know you can pay for the family.

On another, particularly busy, Friday night at the AWA centre, Randall told me:

It's like, Canada has certain nice people...like you, and the nice ladies at the baby office, this is a good place for offshore workers, and the doctor clinic too. We can see you people care, and Jamaicans, we respect people who respect us. If you show us love, we'll show you love until the end...it's important for us to have this place [the AWA], to sit and relax.

I spent many valued hours speaking with workers at the AWA centre, and it was my experience that the social support, space, and friendly conversation they offered provided workers an essential and effective buffer against the negative effects of stress in Ontario. Not only does the AWA provide practical support services to a large number of workers in Southern Ontario by assisting them with parental benefits, they also offer an essential space in the community where workers feel welcome, safe, and respected. Many of the same workers come to the centre each week, and in this way it also serves as a social space for friends from back home to connect and talk. One survey respondent spoke with me about his loneliness, stress, and isolation, and how talking with people at the AWA helps him feel better:

...sometimes just talking to a person is the help he wants. When you schedule him out, and don't talk to him, he can go crazy and start thinking "nobody love me" or "nobody wants to be around me". But if there are people around him, then his mind can always balance. It's good to know that people care about you, and want to talk...without that, I think working here [in Canada] can lead to mental sickness.

This sentiment reflects my general observation that stress discourses provide Jamaican workers relief from distress. Moreover, this also suggests that the social rejection and racism workers encounter in Canada were perceived by workers as the sorts of conditions that lead to mental illness. In Jamaica, the concept of "mental health" is associated with "mental sickness", which workers explained to me using terms like "madness", "going

crazy”, and “clean clothes mad people”. The Bellevue Mental Hospital in Kingston is notorious in Jamaica as the place that houses the mad people, that “keeps them in”, according to Trevor. In this way, mental sickness was a potential outcome for workers who felt isolated and alone, but relief could be found in simply talking with someone who cared.

### **Discussion**

At the outset of my fieldwork, I expected to learn that most Jamaican workers were suffering from pervasive psychological distress in Ontario, and I quickly realized I was wrong. Although workers certainly do experience stress and suffering on account of the SAWP's policies, when talking with me most workers gave equal or more attention to their innate strength and abilities as Jamaicans to manage the stress/pressure. The meanings associated with stress terminology are derived from social, cultural, and historical contexts – that is, discourse (Young 1980:133). According to Foucault, “there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy” (Hall 1990:101-102). For Jamaican workers, the discourse of stress and the discourse of slavery are inter-connected in Ontario, and this combination allows workers to not only frame their distress, but also their strengths as the descendants of emancipated African slaves. Discourses always speak to power relations, and in my experience workers emphasized their identity as ‘Jamaicans’ as a source of strength, and they associated their identity as ‘black men’ with exploitation.

Religion and spiritual faith were a main source of strength and resilience for workers in Ontario. In my experience, nearly all Jamaican workers I spoke to about

stress/pressure expressed a religious faith, most commonly manifest by workers thanking me with a “Bless you” or “I’m giving God thanks for you”. In talking to me about their experiences of stress/pressure in Ontario, many workers framed their adversity in religious faith, and often sought to highlight positive factors to be grateful for. Culture and religion are inextricably connected, according to Geertz (1973), and in Jamaica, religion is a central facet of daily life. Generally, cultures that are collectivist, such as those found in Jamaica, emphasise the inextricable and close relationship between mental health and spiritual health than do cultures that emphasise individualism (Dein et al. 2012); this was certainly my experience with the workers I spoke with. Religious diversity was evident to me, and was noted by Trevor earlier, but in my experience the commensurable factors among workers were a focus on uncovering the personal significance or esoteric meaning of a challenging situation, and practicing gratitude.

Famously, Halbwachs (1980) formulated the concept of ‘collective memory’ to denote the inherently and inescapably social nature of memory. To Halbwachs, memory “is always constructed in particular socially inscribed circumstances through mnemonics embedded in particular social practices of individuality and sociality...generations may be said to recollect their pasts within distinct frameworks” (Scott 2008:6). Although the concept of collective memory has been criticised in anthropology for its tendency to flatten and homogenise the collection of individuals in a group, I think in the context of Jamaican workers it is salient. Workers often declared their strength as ‘Jamaicans’, which they attribute to the history of slavery, emancipation, and political independence. During stress discourses, workers typically began by detailing experiences of

stress/pressure as stress, which they often framed in the language of historic slavery, but equally they drew upon this history of enslavement, and subsequent emancipation, as their dominant source of strength and resilience. Moreover, music is an essential part of the contemporary Jamaican identity, and workers root this in the history of slavery; I heard many times that their African ancestors survived slavery because they were strong and they had music.

Exploring the mental health experiences of African immigrants living in Switzerland, Obrist and Büchi note that the illness metaphor 'stress' not only provides an explanatory model for negative experiences and a useful frame to interpret diffuse emotions, it also offers a guideline for action and coping (208:258); I likewise found that stress discourses nearly always included the formulation of a plan, even if the plan is simply to 'watch TV'. Moreover, talking to me about their experiences of stress/pressure provided an important space for workers to not only detail their suffering, but also to facilitated coping by highlighting their strength and resilience as Jamaicans.

A recent study on the mental health of Mexican migrant farm workers in the Midwestern US found that many workers reported an "inactive coping style" in response to several stressors, such as: "I just put up with it", "there's nothing we can do", etc. Given the pervasive nature of the stressors, the researchers argue "migrant farm workers may have difficulty identifying *immediate* mechanisms for coping...[therefore], chronic migrant farm worker stress may lead to a learned helplessness among some of the farm workers, and thus a susceptibility to anxiety and depression" (Magaña and Hovey 2003:84). Specifically, inactive coping was particularly common in response to rigid

work demands, hard physical labour, poor housing conditions, exploitation, and unpredictable work (Magaña and Hovey 2003). Although I found that Jamaican workers adopted strategies that fall under this category of “inactive coping”, for Jamaican workers in Ontario, there really is *nothing* they can do about any given situation without risking repatriation, and thus I disagree that such strategies indicate “learned helplessness”. Bringing workplace abuses and complaints about living conditions to the liaison is pointless, because, to quote Randall, “the liaison is here for the farmers and to protect the program, there is no one to stand up for the workers”. Although Binford (2013) notes that Jamaican SAWP workers receive higher “level of attention” from the Jamaican liaison than their Mexican counterparts do from the Mexican government, in my experience the liaisons did little more than facilitate quick repatriations. In this way, I conceptualise such strategies as active coping that is directed toward regulating emotions<sup>10</sup>.

For migrant workers who do not have access to social support in Canada, and for those without developed coping strategies, the stress of working in Canada may lead to alcohol consumption and/or substance abuse. In the United States, one of the first studies to document the scope of alcohol consumption among Latino migrant farm workers in North Carolina found that alcohol consumption varies, but over one-third (39%) of their participants may be alcohol dependent (Grzywacz et al 2007:620). These findings suggest that farm workers are at an increased risk for alcohol dependence, and given the dangerous nature of farm work, this places them at further risk for occupational injury or

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<sup>10</sup> I considered Scott's (1985) *Weapons of the Weak* and other Marxist theories of “exploding” in order to transcend the system (Malabou 2008), but such an approach is not well-suited for this research as “exploding” is explicitly not a good strategy in this context.

death. More recently, Arcury et al. (2016) conducted a study that aimed to describe alcohol consumption behaviour among Latino farm workers in North Carolina, and found that this population regularly consumes large amounts of alcohol, and thus are at an increased risk for alcohol dependence. By contrast, McLaughlin reported a broad spectrum of drinking activities among SAWP workers in Canada, but “they engage in these activities much less frequently than popular stereotypes suggest...it is normally either to relax on social occasions or as a coping mechanism against the strains and mental anxiety associated with being in Canada” (McLaughlin 2009:391). I observed nearly identical drinking behaviours among Jamaican workers.

Romantic relationships and positive community connections in Canada were found by McLaughlin to be the other dominant sources of social support for workers. Notably, a limitation of my research was that I did not interview any worker who had a romantic relationship in Canada; however, many workers told me they are lonely and desire to find a “nice Canadian lady”. By contrast, when I asked Trevor about “Canadian girlfriends”, he told me “some guys have girlfriends, and even that is a stress because they [girlfriends] take them to their home, and you have to do what they want to do ...you come here for one thing and one thing only, and if a guy says no, they say ‘alright, you’re gonna walk from here to go back home’, so most of the guys try to please them”. Similar to McLaughlin (2009), I found that Jamaican workers who had connections in the community enjoyed greater mental health, and this was especially true of workers who had family members living in Canada. Certain areas of Ontario, particularly the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), have large Jamaican Diasporas. This was the case with Clifton,

whose cousin Lawrence lives in the GTA and was able to host Clifton and help transport him to medical specialist appointments after his contract on the farm had finished.

### **Conclusion**

To the workers I spoke to, being a Jamaican offshore worker means to be mentally and physically strong, and this strength derives from the history of slavery, emancipation, and political independence. By giving workers an opportunity to express their challenges as well as their strengths, I suggest stress/pressure discourses are sites of flexibility and resilience where Jamaican workers re-frame their suffering in Ontario and focus their attention on their innate strength as Jamaicans. Understanding resilience as a trajectory, I reveal that spiritual faith, the Jamaican identity, and the history of slavery are the factors that cultivate and maintain resilience among Jamaican workers as a group. Moreover, theorising stress as discourse and an idiom (of distress), I found that both strength and suffering were deeply rooted in memories of historic slavery.

### **CONCLUSION: Subjectivity and the Legacies of Un-Elective Hardship**

The conditions under which Jamaican SAWP workers live and work in Ontario – namely, exploitative work environments, employer-provided housing, and employers' power to repatriate workers without cause – give rise to stress/pressure that ranges from mild to extreme suffering. A recent article entitled *Migrant worker program called 'worse than slavery' after injured participants sent home without treatment*<sup>11</sup> appeared in the Canadian mainstream media while I was writing this thesis. The article tells the story of Sheldon McKenzie, a 39 year-old Jamaican SAWP worker who worked in Canada for twelve years to support his wife and two daughters in Jamaica. In 2015, McKenzie fell while working at a greenhouse in Southern Ontario and suffered a serious head injury that put him in a coma. McKenzie has family living in Winnipeg, and when they arrived at the hospital in Ontario he was on life support and had already underwent surgery to remove a portion of his brain. McKenzie's cousin, Marcia Barrett, explained that her family was pressured by the Jamaican liaison officer to have McKenzie sent home to Jamaica immediately because the accident rendered him "unable to work" and as such "he lost his work visa and no longer qualified for health-care coverage". Barrett hired lawyers and succeeded in attaining a temporary stay, but unfortunately McKenzie died of his injuries before a decision was reached on his humanitarian visa application. The practice of sending injured workers home is known as "medical repatriation" (see Orkin et al. 2014), and Barrett astutely sums up this practice as "worse than slavery – they dispose of them".

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/jamaican-farm-worker-sent-home-in-a-casket-1.3577643>

What does it mean for Jamaican workers, and their families, to compare the SAWP to slavery?

In my experience, Jamaican workers are proud of their status and agency as “offshore workers”, as this identity is valued and respected in Jamaica because the income they earn allows workers to support their families back home. In Jamaica, the men who work on Canadian farms are viewed as worldly and travelled, and their families enjoy greater access to education and health care. While in Canada, Jamaican workers are proud of farm work, and they often remarked how their labour contributes directly to each Canadian household (because everyone eats!). Despite this pride and their elective participation in the program, when workers get to Ontario their agency is restricted and they are powerless over the conditions that cause them suffering on the farm, and this is exacerbated by the racism workers encounter in Ontario. This suffering makes it difficult for workers to maintain feelings of pride as a father and husband while in Canada, and instead workers often feel like “black guys” who are not welcome in small town Ontario.

There are a range of work environments and living conditions across Ontario, and accordingly workers' experiences of stress ranged from mild to extreme suffering. Workers who experienced minimal stress/pressure – usually indexed by above-average housing, better work environments, and fair employers –referenced slavery only in association with factors that contribute to their resilience in Ontario, namely music and religion. Workers explained that music was how their ancestors survived the harsh conditions under which they laboured, namely through expressing strength and spiritual faith through song. In this way, workers who experienced mild stress/pressure saw

themselves as agentive beings; this was the case with a group of Jamaican workers in Durham Region that I worked with closely. At this farm, most of the stress/pressure was caused by rivalries between the Jamaican and *Bajan*<sup>12</sup> workers, and this conflict was structured by the fact that the foreman was from Barbados and his son and nephew work at the farm and live in the same bunkhouse as the Jamaican workers. Demonstrating his pride as a Jamaican, Clifton once told me that the reason the Bajans treat Jamaican workers poorly is because they are jealous of them: “they [the Bajans] want to be Jamaicans, why else do they come to Jamaica at the holiday?”

Although I was aware of a few farms where workers felt like “offshore workers”, more often than not Jamaican workers experienced abusive work environments, exploitative scheduling, and inadequate housing, and because they live under the constant threat of repatriation, they are unable to do much about these factors. When workers talked to me about experiences of stress/pressure as distress and suffering, they framed these experiences in the language of slavery. It was common for workers to refer to abusive employers as “slave masters” or “slave handlers”, and the program in general as a slavery system. Interestingly, the combination of stress and slavery discourses allowed workers not only to frame their suffering, but also to invoke their strength as the descendants of slaves, which workers cite as proof they are able to survive un-elective hardships. In this way, the language of stress/pressure allowed workers to articulate their suffering and adversity, but framing these experiences with the language of slavery imbued them with meaning. Moreover, the distinction between forced participation in

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<sup>12</sup> Jamaican workers refer to workers from the Barbados as “Bajans” or “Barbados guys”.

slavery and elective participation in the SAWP suggests may be key to the ways Jamaican workers understand themselves as agentive beings.

Anthropology has been exploring the relationship between stress and subjectivity for some time, from Geertz's discussion of subjectivity among the Balinese to the multiple ethnographies on nerves (Davis 1989; Geertz 1972; Migliore 1993; Lock and Wakewich-Dunk 1990; Low 1994). More recently, Biehl, Good, and Kleinman (2007) compiled an edited volume comprised of essays that "probe the extent to which market logics, institutional norms, and rational-technical interventions actually define the relationship between body and subjectivity" (9). Following Biehl, Good, and Kleinman (2007), in this thesis subjectivity is conceptualised as providing "the ground for subjects to think through their circumstances and to feel through their contradictions" and is thus "a means of shaping sensibility" (14). Among Jamaican workers, stress/pressure can be understood as an expression of subjectivity that allows them to "think through" their circumstances in Ontario and "feel through" the contradictions that emerge, specifically the commensurability of life under the SAWP and the conditions of historic slavery.

Bearing in mind the "modes of subjectification are determined by the vagaries of the state... memories of colonial interventions and unresolvable traumas" (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007:14), this research demonstrates that in relation to stress Jamaican SAWP worker subjectivity is shaped by both the Canadian and Jamaican states. The Canadian state set forth the conditions for workers employment and housing, the Jamaican liaison is meant to be an ally and advocate for the workers; instead, the liaisons are notorious for pleasing farm owners and repatriating workers. Many workers voiced

their discontent with the liaison for “selling out our people”, and workers were angry that their wages (6%) were garnished to pay for the liaison services. In cases where workers were experiencing extreme suffering, the liaison often told workers that nothing could be done, which renders workers unsupported. When workers required social support and needed assistance navigating the Canadian “system” they often asked me to call on their behalf because I speak “Canadian”. The conditions of the SAWP are agreed upon and maintained by the Canadian and Jamaican governments, and these conditions severely restrict workers’ agency and neglect their rights as workers and humans. It was my experience that these structural conditions are particularly painful for Jamaican workers because they are analogous to the conditions associated with slavery. In this way, workers experiences of stress are shaped by “unresolvable traumas” that are exacerbated by the conditions under which SAWP workers labour and live in Ontario.

Arguing for a “robust anthropology of subjectivity”, Ortner (2005) explores subjectivity in relation to changing forms of power and highlights “the subtle forms of power that saturate everyday life, through experiences of time, space, and work” (46). For Jamaican migrant workers who elect to participate in an international system of power and inequity that severely restricts their agency, this is particularly salient. Workers have no control or sway over where they are employed in Canada; rather, farm owners name the workers they want to hire/re-hire each year, which is a tremendous source of stress for workers. This is especially the case when a worker has previously worked (and lived) under abusive, exploitative, or unsafe conditions – in such a circumstance, workers often did not reveal their suffering to friends and family back home in order to preserve both

their increased social status in Jamaica and the image of Canada as the land of golden opportunity, and as such they internalise their concerns over returning to Canada. On some farms, workers' movements are monitored and restricted during their time off, and while working they are often subjected to repeated demands by their supervisors to work "faster, faster". Workers are constantly subject to forms of power that restrict their movement and agency in Canada, and this was clearly associated with their experiences of stress.

Workers framed their experiences of distress and suffering in Canada in the language of stress and the memory of slavery such that the more stressful the situation, the more "like slavery" it was perceived and experienced by workers. In this way, stress and slavery follow in tandem along a stress trajectory from mild to extreme suffering, and this suffering is rooted in, and inseparable from, the historical trauma of slavery. When workers used the language of slavery to talk about their experiences of stress/pressure, they often identified as "black guys" when describing their exploitation and abuse. Moreover, when workers described the racism that they encountered in rural Ontario and at the level of the Canadian government and its agencies, workers likewise described themselves as "black guys"; in this way, being a "black guy" was akin to being a "black body" that is in Canada to perform labour, and not a human being. By contrast, workers who experienced mildly stressful experiences usually identified as "Jamaicans", "Jamaican workers", or "offshore workers". In this way, these two identities – "Jamaican worker" and "black guy" – can be considered to run along the same stress trajectory from mild to extreme suffering.

In sum, during my fieldwork I found that Jamaican SAWP workers in Ontario use the terms “stress” and “pressure” interchangeably as idioms of distress, and the language of stress provides workers with an effective framework to explore and articulate their challenges and suffering in Ontario. Workers’ experiences of stress as distress in Ontario run along a trajectory from mild to extreme suffering according predominantly to the similarity between their work environments and living conditions and their memory of slavery. Workers’ experiences of stress are caused by the structural conditions of their temporary employment in Canada under the SAWP; considering stress as both an idiom of distress and as a discourse contextualises these experiences as part of a system of power and international inequality.

Following my interlocutors’ lead to focus on resilience, I first explored workers’ experiences of stress (and pressure) as an idiom of distress and approached stress as a discourse to contextualise these experiences. Talking with me about their experiences of stress often inspired workers to invoke and emphasise their strength as “Jamaicans”, which they associate with national independence and emancipation from slavery, and in this way stress discourses are sites of resilience and flexibility. To follow, I explored stress discourses as sites of resilience and flexibility that are linked to political independence and historical slavery, and detailed the factors that support resilience in Ontario. For Jamaican SAWP workers in Ontario, stress/pressure can be understood as an expression of subjectivity that is characterised by spiritual faith, strength, and the history of slavery.

Importantly, resilience-based approaches advocate for interventions that enhance strength and capability. Based on my experiences with Jamaican SAWP workers, the most direct way to foster resilience is by connecting workers to local church services. The rural churches across Southern Ontario that offer services for Jamaican (and other) migrant farm workers serve as exemplars for what is possible. Workers spend most of their year working and living in Canada, and generally they have minimal time off, so it is important that interventions are mindful of the needs and schedules of local workers. For example, in Durham Region the workers could not attend the Sunday morning service at the Anglican Church, despite having the desire. Eager to overcome this barrier, the church Reverend organised a service for Caribbean workers on Saturday nights when the workers were available. Such efforts are greatly appreciated by workers, and go a long way toward bolstering resilience and mitigating the suffering they experience in Ontario.

Another important strategy to enhance workers' resilience would be to address the racism and social exclusion they experience in Ontario, although these efforts would need to be locally organised, and the best strategy to this end is unclear. The efforts of local support networks (such as NMWIG, NHECC, and DRMWN), especially health fairs and welcome events, aim to welcome and include workers in local communities, and in this way these efforts facilitate coping and cultivate resilience. One of the most significant take-aways I had from each stress discourse with workers was the positive impact that friendships with people in Canada has upon workers. In my experience, friendship was an incredible source of strength and coping for Jamaican workers, and the employees and volunteers at the AWA and migrant worker health clinics stand out in this regard as

consistently offering workers friendly smiles and an ear to listen. It was common throughout the season for workers to visit these sites to say hello, and they often brought gifts of produce to express their thanks. Another way the AWA stands out as a resilience-strengthening resource is by offering workers access to free Wi-Fi and a comfortable place to sit and connect with family or watch movies; workers sincerely appreciate having this space, and the development of such spaces in other communities would be ideal.

This research focused on exploring Jamaican SAWP workers' experiences of stress in Ontario, and over the course of my fieldwork I found that the structural conditions of the SAWP are the source of stress for workers. At the outset of my fieldwork I anticipated encountering an epidemic of suffering and sadness among Jamaican SAWP workers, but this was not what I found. Surprisingly, talking to me about stress prompted Jamaican workers to emphasise their strength as "Jamaicans" and to explicate their ability to overcome un-elective hardships. In this way, stress among Jamaican SAWP workers can be understood as an expression of subjectivity that is characterised by strength, spiritual faith, and the history of slavery. Moreover, in my experience, workers identified the explicit racism and social isolation they experience in Ontario as conditions that can lead to "mental sickness", and they expressed the need for friends and allies in Canada.

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