

## ACME

An International Journal for Critical Geographies  
Revue internationale de géographie critique  
Revista internacional de geografía crítica



## NoBodies

# Transnational Im/Mobilities and Dis/Embodiment in the Orchards of Niagara-On-The-Lake, Canada

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Volume 22, numéro 4, 2023

Departures, Arrivals, and Encounters: Feminist Understandings of Borders and Human Im/mobilities

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1106680ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1106680ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Centre for Social Spatial & Economic Justice at the University of British Columbia

ISSN

1492-9732 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lozanski, K. (2023). NoBodies: Transnational Im/Mobilities and Dis/Embodiment in the Orchards of Niagara-On-The-Lake, Canada. *ACME*, 22(4), 1174–1196. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1106680ar>

Résumé de l'article

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# NoBodies: Transnational Im/Mobilities and Dis/Embodiment in the Orchards of Niagara-On-The-Lake, Canada

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## Abstract

The production of fruit, vegetables, and other horticultural crops in Canada relies upon the embodied labour of migrant agricultural workers who plant, prune, and harvest these crops. Using a feminist geopolitical lens, I foreground the bodies of these workers as these bodies are situated at the intersection of everyday lived experiences and systems of capitalist production through, in this case, Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). Drawing on workers' experiences of their bodies in the context of the regulatory provisions of the SAWP, I highlight the contradictory disembodiment of agricultural workers at the same time that their bodies are necessary to provide the physical labour at the heart of fruit and vegetable production. The disembodiment of these workers is possible because of their status as racialized non-citizens: while Canadians can insist upon the recognition of their bodies, migrant agricultural workers cannot. The disjuncture between embodied labour and embodied subjectivities was exacerbated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected on migrant agricultural workers – through their bodies – while in Canada. Given the relative safety afforded to those who held citizenship (and other

permanent) status in Canada, I argue that the active disembodiment of migrant agricultural workers in Canada demonstrates the ways that embodiment is a privilege that is tightly bound to citizenship.

## Keywords

Embodiment, citizenship, migrant agricultural workers, SAWP, Canada, racism

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## Preamble

"From Blossoms"

...

From laden boughs, from hands,  
from sweet fellowship in the bins,  
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent  
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,  
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.  
O, to take what we love inside,  
to carry within us an orchard, to eat  
not only the skin, but the shade,  
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold  
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into  
the round jubilation of peach.

...

(Lee 1986)

## Introduction

In Canada, if the food does not travel long distances from other countries, many of the workers who grow 'local' food do. The labour that supports local fruit and vegetable production in Ontario, Canada, is enabled by the transnational mobility of migrant agricultural workers who cross national borders through two programs: the agricultural stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). The TFWP brings workers from around the world, typically through labour recruiters, to participate in various employment fields and at a range of job statuses in Canada, including the ostensibly low-skilled agricultural stream (see Lu 2020). Through bilaterally administered contracts, the SAWP brings workers from the English-speaking Caribbean – primarily Jamaica – and Mexico. SAWP workers are integral to Canada's fruit, vegetable, and ornamental plant industry, worth \$7.5 billion in 2021 (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2022).

In her analysis of migrants and refugees, geographer Mountz argues that "dis/embodiments reveal the spatialized processes through which state practices materialize

in relation to migrants and refugee claimants in quotidian life" (2004, 328). Building on Mountz, I show that for migrant agricultural workers, the materiality of their embodied labour in the production of fruit and vegetables (alongside other labour-intensive crops) is discordant with the disembodiment that underpins agricultural labour regulations and practices, especially for those with non-citizenship status. In the context of feminist geopolitics, the bodies of workers constitute the material, everyday site upon which transnational systems of food production and racialized capitalism are manifest (Cohen 2017).

Despite the ways in which the migrant workers' work is intensely physical, the conditions set out in the SAWP exacerbate the denials of embodiment that underpin agricultural labour. These racist denials are situated within the "difficult and complex history of black men's efforts to be counted fully human as they struggle to gain the same rights and privileges white men claim for themselves" (Henry Anthony 2014, 6). The material experiences of inequality build upon exclusionary discourses through which the bodies of migrant agricultural workers are socially interpellated. As Grosz observes in her analysis of the intersection between bodies and cities, "the body is, so to speak, organically, biologically 'incomplete'; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering, and long-term 'administration'" (1999, 382). On farms, in orchards, and in greenhouses, the physiological bodies of migrant agricultural workers – individually and collectively – are moulded into labourers through socially articulated hierarchies of racialization, gender, and citizenship status.

The contradiction between workers' provision of physical labour to create food that nourishes Canadian bodies and the denial of the bodies of these workers is resolved, I argue, through the refusal of Canadian employers, Canadian consumers, and the Canadian state to acknowledge the embodied fallibility of Black (and Brown<sup>1</sup>) non-citizens. Those with permanent status in Canada are better situated to reject the rejection of their bodies. Citizenship status, then, is embodied status.

### ***A Feminist Geopolitical Intervention***

This analysis of the manifestations of the power of transnational capitalism and complicit states within the everyday, embodied experiences of migrant agricultural workers represents a feminist geopolitical intervention into the important body of literature that has focused on the experiences of migrant agricultural workers in Canada. As Massaro and Williams (2013, 567) argue:

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<sup>1</sup> Brown workers – including those men and women from Mexico who participate in the SAWP – are also denied full human-ness. Specifically, the Jamaican workers whose experience informs my research are bound to Black enslavement in the name of capitalist expansion (Mbembe 2017). Their embodiment also exists in direct relation to the recent police killings of many Black Americans in the United States and the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet and D'Andre Campbell in Canada, a context in which Black citizens are at greater likelihood at being shot and killed by police (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2020)

feminist geopolitics [...] traces nascent forms of power, oppression, and resistances at and between multiple scales (e.g. body, home, and nation-state), enabling an understanding of the operation of various forms of power through situated, embodied, and politically transformative theories and research methodologies.

Responding to the disconnect between feminist geography and political geography, Hyndman calls for analyses that “illustrate that global processes, whether economic, political, or socio-cultural, are experience in localized, everyday, embodied ways” (2001, 212). Such analyses, she argues, must operate at scales beyond (both bigger and smaller than) that of the nation-state or global economy; challenge the public/private binary at a global scale; and install mobility as a key element of analysis. In her critique of the masculinist, ostensibly Archimedean perspective of critical geography, Sharp (2000) also calls for the re-centring of people’s lived experiences within such analyses of power. Pain and Smith (2008) use a biological metaphor to conceptualize their account of fear and risk: the double helix of DNA, they argue, represents the equal and parallel strands of structure and agency bound together through affect, events, and encounters but which remain vulnerable to rupture and discontinuity.

In this paper, I render visible the everyday lives and experiences of Jamaican migrant agricultural workers in Canada, with specific attention to the scale of their bodies. This foregrounding of bodies as sites that manifest material inequality is consistent with Heynen’s call “to better demonstrate how the physical torment of human bodies existing amidst extreme material inequality under capitalism are shaped through the discursive power relations that define social bodies in particular ways” (2008, 33). Building upon the extant literature that relates to migrant agricultural workers in Canada (see Basok 2003, 2002; Binford 2013, 2009; Hennebry 2014, 2012; Hjalmarson 2022; McLaughlin 2010; Preibisch 2010, 2004; and Reid-Musson 2017, 2014), I situate the racialized bodies of these Jamaican men within the “permanently temporary” (Hennebry 2012) spaces of Canadian agriculture. These workers experience the structure of the SAWP bilateral agreement, global food insecurity, and transnational capitalism through their sweat, their bruises, and their devastating injuries.

### ***The Setting***

My research is centred in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL), an aesthetic touristic destination where the rural landscape is dominated by orchards of tender fruit trees including cherries, plums, and peaches and, increasingly, vineyards and wineries. Both fruit and wine provide a local product for tourism consumption, alongside the touristic experiences of wine tastings, vineyard tours, and cycling tours amongst the manicured fields. NOTL, with just over 17 500 residents (Statistics Canada 2016), draws millions of tourists annually (Singh 2020). Much of the gastronomic tourism in the region is based on close – even direct – relationships between producers and consumers (Lozanski and Baumgartner 2022) in which a more proximate relationship to a farmer leads to “the common

understanding that the local food production process is more wholesome and morally gratifying than the industrial commodity system" (Gray 2013, 22). Within this frame, tourists may claim a superior and innocent form of pleasure (Mahrouse 2011) while the foundations of their tourism reiterate transnational capitalist exploitation.

The vineyards and the orchards are labour intensive in their cultivation. Yet, agricultural labour is exempted from many employment standards through the *Ontario Labour Relations Act* (Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development 2019; similar exemptions for agricultural labour exist in all other Canadian provinces). Agricultural workers repeat the same motion for hours – days – at a time as they tie grape vines onto wires, prune branches, thin fruit clusters, or harvest ripe fruit. This work is done out of doors with full exposure to the physical elements – sun, wind, heat and humidity, rain and cold. While tourists participate in cycling tours along rural roads alongside vineyards and orchards or partake in wine tastings at the region's many wineries, the migrant agricultural workers who cultivate these spaces experience NOTL's picturesque idyll as the physical strains and pains of long, difficult days of labour.

## Methods

In my analysis, I seek to bring the experiences of the several Jamaican agricultural workers I have come to know through eight years of field research into conversation with the formal and informal discourses that organize the SAWP. In NOTL, I am connected to a core group of six workers who are employed at three different farms. As a white woman who lives more than 200km away from the community, I began this project with no meaningful connections to NOTL as a region or the Caribbean SAWP workers who were working there. From preliminary introductions via a community organizer, my connections with these Jamaican workers – migrant agricultural workers are disproportionately men (see also Hjalmarson 2022) – have continued and expanded to include many of their co-workers and friends on other farmers. Although I am directly connected to a small group of workers, "it is impossible to separate participants from non-participants in any meaningful way... [given] impromptu, unstructured and unbounded group interactions" (Butz, 2008, 246).

This analysis is based upon four semi-structured interviews I conducted with formal consent. Another four interviews were completed by a former worker who received permanent residency and worked as a research assistant. My first two interviews were conducted with workers who are strong advocates on their farms and are seemingly unafraid of their employers. Despite their confidence, both men assured me that they would be repatriated the next day, should their employer find out what they were doing (see Hjalmarson 2022). Both interviews were terminated midway by the participants.

These formal interviews sit alongside fieldnotes and fragmented interviews that occur on the steps of bunkhouses. My method is informed by Geertz's (1998) "deep hanging out," which Walmsley describes as a project in which "the research agenda was set by *being-with* [a participant], by the dynamic that emerged between us, albeit it within the framework of an

existing body of knowledge” (2016, 283-4). The men I know speak both Patois, of which I do not have a working knowledge, and English to various levels. My primary connections are with workers who have stronger English skills, who frequently facilitate conversations with workers who speak primarily Patois.

During these conversations, I openly write short prompts in a notebook, which I subsequently draft into detailed fieldnotes. For a specific project related to COVID-19 in the fall of 2020, I recorded workers responding to questions about how the pandemic affected their decision to come and their time in Canada (see Lozanski et al. in press); six workers agreed to participate. Given that my data are predominantly fieldnotes, the lack of voices of the agricultural workers is a noted deficit but one that reflects the structured precarity that the workers navigate daily (Hjalmarson 2022).

This bricolage of data juxtaposes the research practices that are effective in this research setting and normative research practices including printed and signed consent forms; interview schedules (or at least themes) approved by REBs; quantifiable numbers of participants and interviews. This project is informed by critical race theory (CRT) and research methods that are consistent with the tenets of CRT, including knowledge that is generated by people of colour – in this case, the SAWP workers – on their own terms. This project is oriented less towards “a specific set of conventions that determine ‘rigor’ and ‘structure’ [than towards] a process that is thorough and reflective in its understanding of the expressed concerns of communities experiencing and resisting White supremacy” (Stovall 2018, 80). While other researchers have collected data using interviews (Basok and George 2021; Wells et al., 2014; Binford 2013; Preibisch 2010), my project is situated within an ethnographic approach that prioritizes long-term relationships (Chapman and DeCuir-Gundy 2018).

These long-term relationships have been key to meaningful research. My social location as an educated, white, Canadian woman with a professional career has minimal overlap with that of migrant agricultural workers. Our very distinct intersectional identities are apparent in virtually all of our interactions. This reflection on our disconnected social locations is not offered as a straightforward disclaimer of positionality but rather as a structural and material truth that informs my research activities – relationship building, collecting, and analyzing data, and sharing the stories and experiences of MAWs.

Afforded the privileges of my class and citizenship statuses, I have traveled to Jamaica twice (Nov. 2017 and Dec. 2019) to connect with workers and meet them in their communities. My mobility to Jamaica required only the purchase of a plane ticket, in contrast to the medical and police checks required for SAWP participants prior to paying for (and hopefully receiving) their tied work visas (Gogia 2006). Outside of these visas, SAWP workers are unlikely to be approved for travel to Canada. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I travelled to NOTL approximately one weekend per month while SAWP workers are in Canada (typically March to November) to spend time meeting with them either after work or on days off. During COVID-19, my visits have been significantly constrained. In NOTL, I sometimes provide transportation to Niagara Falls, the bank, the grocery store, or for other errands.

Most often my visits involve sitting on the steps of the bunkhouses, speaking informally with anyone who is interested in talking with me.

Consent is ongoing: the workers know that I am writing a book (and essays) so Canadians will understand what it is like for the people who grow their food. Wherever possible, I have given workers the opportunity to review (either read themselves or read the piece to them), amend, or veto any public work that includes references to specific incidents or events that might identify individual workers or their workplaces. When reviewing such work, I explain to the workers – already keenly aware of their precarity – the risks of being identified and possibilities for mitigating those risks, including removing the material that could identify them, changing details about their stories or using multiple pseudonyms. Beyond the approval from my institutional Research Ethics Review Committee, I understand my research ethics as “an ongoing dialogue with vulnerable communities and individuals who are participants in [my] research” (Roger and Mignone 2018, 47).

In this analysis of the embodiment (or lack thereof) of transnational capitalism for migrant agricultural workers, the structural strand of the feminist geopolitical double helix (Pain and Smith, 2008) manifests in the bureaucratic regulations that organize workers’ everyday lives. Formal sources that inform my argument include the exemptions afforded to the agricultural sector in Ontario’s *Employment Standards Act* (2020), the *Contract for the Employment in Canada...* (2018), and housing guidelines operationalized in NOTL in the *Temporary Foreign Worker Housing Inspection Report* (Niagara Region Public Health 2020), a document that outlines requirements for the approval of workers’ living conditions in employer-provided accommodations. I have included a few vignettes of my own dissonant and contrasting experiences in NOTL as a white woman to emphasize the incongruity between the racialized experiences of the workers and those travelling to NOTL as tourists.

### **Agriculture as Embodied Labour**

The peach in my hand is warm. I rub its fuzz with my thumb, appreciating its reds and oranges and golds. I squeeze gently to feel the fruit give slightly, then bite into the sweet flesh and let the sticky juices run down my hand and chin.

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Thinning peaches... you stand on a platform that is operated by the engine of a car, so basically it’s the chassis of a car with plyboard on top so it keeps on moving and never stops.... It’s not fun because usually it is hot, so you are getting the heat from under the platform, from the engine, usually there’s no cover, no shade so you’re getting heat from the sun ... where most of the problem is with the fuzz because you’re sweating and the fuzz is mixed with the heat, oh that ain’t fun. Damage your skin. Everything that’s bad you can think about.... It gets on your skin and very crazy, it’s very itchy.... [I] cannot claustrophobic myself too much [with extra protective clothing] because if I do that it also bring hives on my skin because it’s too hot and then with the dust



and the sweat, the dust and the sweat is basically torture, so I can really have too much on, too much clothes. If you have too much clothing on it gets so much trapped into and then you have more problem. (Matchet, NOTL)

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Harvest occurs during peak summer heat; workers wearing a harvest bag climb up and down ladders as they reach for the peaches. Two men per tree – I only know of women harvesting for a day or two because of a shortage of help – fill their bag with 50 lb of peaches and then gently place their bag's contents in the nearby bins. Bones, who's been coming to NOTL for 13 years, describes the worst part of harvest as having to reposition and climb the ladder in a new location after picking a not-quite-full bag (25 to 40 lb). Sometimes, he says, he'll empty a half-full bag so he doesn't have to carry it up the ladder but only if the boss isn't nearby. Smoky Don tells me it's dangerous to sleep on the ladder but some people do it because they're so tired after working 14-hour days in stifling heat. Instead, he naps on the ground against a tree because he can sleep and listen for the boss' truck.

Workers participating in the SAWP provide their Canadian employers with their physical labour. The crops they work in NOTL require planting, pruning, tying, thinning, and harvesting, almost all of which is done by hand. In both fields and greenhouses, workers are exposed to chemicals and despite the formal regulation of protective protocols, these protocols may be circumvented by employers or workers (McLaughlin, Hennebry and Haines 2014). Some SAWP workers in NOTL work in greenhouses where the temperatures are stifling and humidity near 90% in summer months. Migrant agricultural workers in the fields and orchards also work in extreme heat, as well as in near freezing temperatures. Many work long days with only a lunch break resulting in hunger and exhaustion. Should the employer determine that there is more work to be done, already long days are extended for hours at a moment's notice without access to food or water: "eat a peach," was one employer's advice to hungry workers when he extended their already 12-hour long day, a day that reached 34°C with high humidity.

Workers' bodies are denied not only in relation to "intense heat" (McLaughlin 2010, 84)<sup>2</sup> but also to rain and storms. The peaches set the timeline for harvest: if the fruit remains on the trees too long, it will overripen and the crop will not be saleable. If it rains, workers

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<sup>2</sup> It is significant to note that in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Canadian politicians sought to restrict the access of Caribbean Black people – British subjects – to Canada through the justification that "natives of the West Indies [...] are not assimilable and, generally speaking, the climatic conditions of Canada are not favourable to them" (cited in Hjalmarson 2022, 87; also see Mongia 1999, 534 on the exclusion of Indian citizens). While workers from tropical countries were historically excluded because they would 'suffer' due of the Canadian climate, workers from tropical countries are now understood as ideally adapted to the same climate. This discursive elasticity is evidence of the malleability of embodied potentialities (Grosz 1999), which are coordinated, in this case, through the needs of the Canadian state and its citizens.

don their waterproof rain gear and work in the heat to bring in the produce, working for up to fourteen hours daily. They harvest in all conditions, including – sometimes, on some farms – using metal ladders during thunderstorms: “if there’s like lightning or thunder we don’t usually pick for safety reasons, but if the crop is ready and it’s raining you gotta, you just gotta go” (Matchet, NOTL; my emphasis). In 2021, a Guatemalan agricultural worker was struck by lightning and killed while harvesting cauliflower near Montreal (CBC 2021); two workers died similarly in 2012 (Ravensbergen 2012; Taylor 2012).

Given that there are more willing participants than there are spots in the SAWP, workers compete not just against workers from other regions and other programs (such as the agricultural stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program) but also against each other:

[The boss] come they said “guys?” “Yes boss.” “This morning, I need [from] there to finish, there to finish, there to finish, there to finish, there to finish” [pointing in five different directions]. Five places they tell you when you can’t finish more than one. So we know – so stupid – we start to race each other, race each other, race each other like we’re going down the track, like we’re running Olympics. (Smoky Don, Saint Mary Parish)

This race against each other responds to the workers’ individual precarity. Over the years I have been conducting research, several workers have simply not been named by their employers, with no indication on departure and no explanation by their employer, their liaison, or the Ministry of Labour:

You have to spend money to do police record and you have to get photographs and do the work permit. Spending up those money and you don’t get a request. It’s unfair because sometimes some of the boss say, “see you next year guys” and they don’t call you. (Duke, Saint Andrew Parish)

In 2021, after paying for his criminal record check, photos, and work visa, and passing his medical examination, Smoky Don – who identified and resisted his employer’s demands to work at untenable rates – was not named by his employer and did not return to Canada.

The expectation that migrant agricultural workers can perform intensive labour with repetitive movements for long days, without days off is steeped in racialized stereotypes that map onto the bodies of agricultural workers. In Canada, McLaughlin found that

many employers commented on migrants’ ‘inherent’ qualities, such as the Caribbean men’s ‘hearty make-up’ and ‘tolerance of intense heat,’ making them ideal field workers, or Mexican women’s delicate and obedient ‘nature,’ which make them superior workers for specific tasks such as packing soft fruit or picking flowers. (2010, 84)

In Holmes’ ethnography of undocumented Indigenous Mexicans working as seasonal strawberry pickers in Washington state, the capacity for bending and kneeling of these Triqui

workers informs the employers' indifference to the workers' discomfort and debilitation (Holmes, 2013). The crew manager for apple pickers explained to Holmes that the Indigenous Mexican workers are not suitable for picking apples (even though the fastest apple picker was Triqui). Through spatialized racism, the manager suggested "Oaxacans are perfect for picking berries [on their knees] 'because they're lower to the ground'" (2013, 171), demonstrating again the ways in which the potentialities of racialized bodies are physically coordinated (Grosz 1999) in space in the interests of capital.

Perceptions of bodily difference along ethnoracial lines serve as the lenses through which symbolic violence is enacted such that each category of body is understood to *deserve* its relative social position. Because of what are considered their 'natural characteristics,' indigenous Oaxacan bodies are understood to belong picking berries as opposed to other jobs. (Holmes 2013, 171; original emphasis)

Similarly, farmers have different assumptions for Caribbean workers than for Mexican. One farm manager at a winery told me that Caribbean workers were better suited to work in orchards because they are taller, while Mexican workers are better at the dextrous work required of vineyards. The winery next to his employs Jamaican men to work – effectively – in the vineyards. Such stereotypes are pervasive. Preibisch and Binford (2007, np) found that

Employers' use of racial stereotypes 'naturally' associated different groups of workers with particular crops... evidencing how the racialization — or the gendering, for that matter — of the production process operates as a discursive process to produce the labourers demanded by agricultural producers in the high-income countries of the North.

These stereotypes buttress a biological, essentialist explanation for migrant workers' willingness and capacity to do the difficult agricultural work refused by those with permanent status in Canada, work that is manifest as a series of involuntary mobilities and immobilities: knock peaches out of clusters as the thinner moves along, climb up and down the ladders during harvest – don't stop to rest. Stay in the field until the employer says it's time to go, don't leave the bunkhouse property unless approved by the employer – don't move without permission.

These stereotypes create competition for jobs not just between migrant workers and Canadian workers but between migrant workers from different sending regions (Binford 2009). The capacity to push workers to push their bodies, to be reduced to their arms through de facto international competition for places in the SAWP is intentionally built into the logic of the program. Instead of creating additional spaces for Caribbean workers when the program expanded in 1974, the Department of Manpower and Immigration opted to include Mexican workers in order to manage the negotiating strength of liaison officers from the Caribbean, who were seen as exercising too much power in their negotiations (Satzewich 2008, 273-4). This decision to increase not just the number of workers but the regions

competing to send SAWP workers cemented the structural precarity at the core of the program.

### Citizenship as Embodied Entitlement

'Race' is manifest through migrant farm labour (Cohen 2017). Slocum suggests, "Race becomes material through the body. Groupings of bodies do things and are 'done to', becoming racialized in the process" (2008, 854). It is precisely the stereotypically essentialized capacities of some bodies – Black bodies – to exert themselves that makes migrant workers from the Caribbean ideal for, and (presumably white) Canadians unsuitable for, labour in agricultural settings. These racialized stereotypes do not operate equally upon the bodies of Canadian and migrant workers. Indeed, MAWs with Brown and Black bodies have their bodies eclipsed as organically complete entities. The investment of the Canadian state, Canadian employers, and Canadian consumers in migrant agricultural labour and its productive outcomes requires the reimagining of workers' bodies. Component parts – arms, for instance – come to replace whole, embodied selves and subjectivities.

The fallibility of migrant agricultural workers' bodies is erased as these bodies are reduced to their instrumental function: labour. This metonymic shift has consequences beyond the physical tasks required of, for instance, producing peaches:

Labor shapes not only what bodies *do* but what bodies are assumed to be *for*. And then, in acquiring the arm of the laborer, it is as if this body was created to provide arms for the social body; it is as if that is what this body was for. This *for* can be what is *before*.... What you are assumed to be for can then become what you are good for, even all that you are good for. The laborer in doing more with an arm, has an arm that can do more, such that the laborer is more reducible to the arm... (Ahmed 2014, 108; original emphasis)

At the same time that they are reduced to their body parts – arms perhaps – migrant agricultural workers' bodies are denied. The arm that Ahmed (2014) points to as a tool of labour is relieved of its integration into a complex body. Arms do not require bathroom breaks, arms do not grieve dislocation from their families, arms do not catch COVID-19. The reduction of workers not only to the labour they can provide, but to labour as the essence of their existence, coordinates migrant workers' micro and macro im/mobilities, im/mobilities that are both informed by, and reiterate, tropes related to gender, racialization, and citizenship status.

The capacity of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to insist upon the recognition of their bodies – their whole bodies – is enabled by transnational systems of precarious labour. Migrant workers take on the physical agricultural labour that Canadians do not want to do. Indeed, Canadians are afforded the choice of whether they *want* to do this labour, a choice that has been central to the development of the program since its inception (see *Hansard*, 1973 July 20; cited in Sharma 2006, 100). The suitability of Black and Brown bodies for arduous labour is simultaneously read as the unsuitability of white bodies (Said

1979, Fanon 1986 [1952]). Racialized bodies are sought for agricultural labour and, once embedded in such settings, they are naturalized as belonging there, although never permanently. Within systems of transnational labour, racialized non-citizens are understood to have the capacity to perform physically demanding work in extraordinarily demanding settings. This narrative is one that erases the biological vulnerability of workers' bodies to heat, exhaustion, injury, and pain and the sociohistorical context that has led workers to 'choose' to leave their families and communities behind for eight months of arduous labour. Given their ability to access such 'willing' labour, the Canadian state and employers have no incentive to improve working conditions.

As noted above, the physical working conditions associated with agricultural labour are amplified by legislative exemptions from minimum employment standards (see Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development 2019). Despite the long hours, they must work daily and weekly, seasonal farm employees and harvesters are not entitled to limits on the number of hours they work, daily rest periods, or minimum breaks between shifts. These exemptions from labour standards further disembodify workers by disallowing rest. It is not surprising that Canadians refuse this working environment. Canadians (and their families) can access less physically demanding forms of low-paid employment, publicly funded healthcare and publicly funded education, and other social supports. These benefits of permanent status within Canada enable those who hold this status to insist that their bodies be recognized as organic rather than mechanical. This rejection operates both individualist choice and nationalized choice. As a nation, Canadians choose not to do the physical labour of agriculture. 'Others' – from, for example, Jamaica – choose to do the physical labour of (our) agriculture. In this way, Canadians are afforded reasonable conditions vis-à-vis the safety and comfort of their bodies, while Jamaicans are denied the same.

In her analysis of formal political spaces, Puwar argues that "the ideal representatives of humanity are those who are not marked by their body" (2004, 58). To be "not marked" means to move through a given sphere without attention or friction. Structural privilege enables one to take the biological functioning of one's body for granted. As an example, it is only in the past few years that some employers have made portable toilets available to workers who are in the field for upwards of 12 hours per day. (Toilets have only been provided in some fields and may still be several minutes away by vehicle). While those in the spaces of power and status interrogated by Puwar (2004) may not be defined by their bodies, this is because the spaces in which they operate have been designed to accommodate their bodies. Disproportionately white male politicians and senior bureaucrats "are not marked by their body" (2004, 58) because the figurative and literal architecture of their working environs has been organized around their hegemonic bodies.

The bureaucratic and physical architectures of agriculture in Canada are similarly organized around certain bodies: racialized bodies with precarious status. As McLaughlin points out, through the architecture of the SAWP, "Canada successfully separates the laborer from the human [i.e. the arm from the body per Ahmed], seeking only to extract a specific

service and not to develop a well-rounded citizen with various skills to contribute to the country” (2010, 91). The precarious status of migrant workers – there is no path to permanent status via the SAWP – exacerbates the already-challenging conditions of agricultural labour, amplifying the demands from the body and denying that same body. Indeed, workers whose bodies breakdown are subject to medical repatriation (Orkin et al. 2014).

The website [www.neverlosehope.ca](http://www.neverlosehope.ca) shares the stories of several MAWs who were injured or killed while in Canada working on the SAWP. Two workers are identified as having been sent home mid-season because of medical issues: Eric Louie Thomas was sent home because of kidney damage after spraying without protection and Kemar Coley was sent home after his finger was severed. Several other workers who were injured while working – including Raymond Barnes, Jaleel Stewart, and Joseph Bryant – continue to suffer without access to compensation and to treatment in their home countries. While these workers experienced acute injuries, many others develop chronic injuries while employed in Canada. Workers must pass a medical exam as part of the selection process but there is no similar requirement upon returning home to determine whether workers have become injured or ill, perhaps as a direct result of their participation in the SAWP.

The removal of workers who are no longer able to carry out the labour of agriculture reinscribes the narrative that people from the Caribbean, in this instance, are better suited to physical work as only those bodies that *appear* to sustain these physical demands remain in the fields. Often, workers with broken bodies manage or conceal their pain and fatigue in the name of transnational remittances to support their families and communities. The SAWP is one of the few ways available for many workers to achieve financial security. The context of economic and social insecurity within which workers ‘choose’ to participate in the SAWP reiterates historical and contemporary forms of colonialism as the extraction of resources (labour, in this case) from the global south for the benefit of the global north.

### **COVID-19: Embodied Citizens, Disembodied Workers**

The hypermobility of the COVID-19 virus had implications for domestic and transnational mobilities worldwide. In Canada, as in many other countries, the border was closed to all non-citizens shortly after the World Health Organization’s announced a global pandemic. This border closure was intended to restrict the number of people entering the country, each of whom could potentially spread COVID-19 through communities in Canada. However, shortly after this closure, it became clear that the Canadian horticultural industry, which relies on migrant workers to make up approximately 43% of its workforce (Canadian Produce Marketing Association 2022), would collapse without the arrival of these workers. Thus, within days of the border closure, the federal government granted an exemption to enable migrant agricultural workers to travel into Canada.

As it opened the borders to migrant agricultural workers (and other non-Canadians), government leaders repeatedly situated the health and safety of Canadians as their top

priority (see, for example, Prime Minister of Canada 2020). At the same time that their labour was recognized as critical to food security for Canadians and the economic security of the agriculture industry, migrant workers' bodies were also understood as a threat to Canadian public health:

Temporary foreign workers are important for sectors with critical labour needs—notably agriculture. Our government is taking strong measures to protect the health and safety of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic. These exemptions will provide the short-term workforce support necessary to maintain our high-standard levels of trade, commerce, and food security. (Qualtrough, cited in Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020)

While Qualtrough (then-Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion) highlights the importance of migrant labour to the agricultural sector, she sandwiches an explicit reference to “the health and safety of Canadians” within her rationale for permitting migrant agricultural workers to enter the country. This emphasis on “the health and safety of Canadians” eclipses the fact that migrant workers were arriving from home countries with significantly lower rates of COVID-19 (Lozanski et al., in print). Within Canada, these workers were far more vulnerable to COVID-19 than many Canadians because of their living and working conditions (Weiler et al. 2020; Haley et al. 2020; Hennebry et al. 2020), vulnerability exacerbated by their precarity as easily replaceable employees within the SAWP.

When they did arrive, some workers arrived at farms without basic amenities, including food (Haley et al. 2020, 27). Justicia for Migrant Workers documented the poor quality of food received by workers who were quarantining in hotels. Workers in NOTL reported receiving insufficient food and/or employers buying expensive food on workers' behalf. Many, though not all, workers were required to reimburse their employers despite the employer having received \$1500 per worker to cover costs associated with the quarantine (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2020). The failure of workers to receive access to food to sustain themselves and cleaning supplies to mitigate a global pandemic reflects the denial of their bodies. While these bodies were critical enough to provide transnational labour amidst a border closure, many of these same bodies were denied the basic necessities of safe and dignified living.

Not only did workers suffer through poor quality food and confined living, migrant agricultural workers were the second-most COVID-infected demographic in Ontario due to their living conditions (and working spaces, for those in greenhouses). The federal government was aware of the significant deficit in the living conditions of many migrant agricultural workers prior to COVID-19. The requisite calculation for minimum overall space per worker is 7.4m<sup>2</sup> (80 square feet) (Niagara Region Public Health 2020, 2). It is the rare exception for workers to have a private bedroom; most workers sleep in close quarters to one another. Given these space constraints, there was – and remains – no reasonable

capacity for workers to engage in physical distancing from one another, a key component of COVID-19 prevention strategies.

Videos posted publicly revealed warehouse-style housing in which bunkbeds separated from each other by 18 inches (as required by Niagara Region Public Health 2020) had large pieces of cardboard as an ostensible protective measure (J4MW 2020). A Niagara media report on the process of housing inspection for migrant agricultural workers includes images in which tarps feature as barriers between spaces (Snobelen 2021). Workers at a farm in NOTL reported the use of plywood between closely spaced bunks, which eliminated any air circulation or cooling in the sleeping area while also compromising workers' capacity to evacuate the premises in an emergency. These living conditions are consistent with those observed by community organizers and researchers working to support migrant workers. These living conditions represent a continued denial of bodies of migrant agricultural workers.

As predicted by scholars and advocates, migrant agricultural workers – like other vulnerable communities – experienced significant and disproportionate impacts of COVID-19. On July 2, 2020, the Province of Ontario shut down Nature Farm in Essex County where 191 workers had tested positive for COVID-19. This shutdown followed on the heels of outbreaks at Greenhill Produce (103 workers; Pedro 2020), Scotlynn Farms (199 workers; Mojtehedzadeh 2020), and Pioneer Flower Farms (60 workers; LaFleche 2020), along with smaller outbreaks at other farms (e.g. Ontario Plant Propagation; De Bono & Bieman 2020). Three migrant workers from Mexico – Juan López Chapparo, Rogelio Muñoz Santos, and Bonifacio Eugenio Romero – died from COVID-19, which they contracted through their farm workplaces, during the 2020 SAWP season. In mid-June 2021, advocacy group Justicia for Migrant Workers reported the death of the 13<sup>th</sup> agricultural worker that year. Caxaj et al. (2022) reviewed files from the Office of the Chief Coroner to understand the factors contributing to the deaths of nine migrant agricultural workers between January 2020 and June 2021. There is no official reporting of the number of worker deaths in Ontario because the SAWP is administered through Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services (FARMS) and not the Department of Employment and Social Development Canada. As such, data related to SAWP – including medical repatriations and worker deaths – is not accessible through Access to Information requests.

The deaths of workers Chapparo, Santos and Romero, along with the numerous outbreaks were highly visible in the public sphere during 2020. Yet despite the systemic vulnerabilities that these outbreaks and deaths made obvious to Canadians broadly, the primary response from Ontario Premier Doug Ford was to call for migrant worker COVID-19 testing, including the possibility of mandatory testing (Maru 2020). This call for testing concealed yet again the living and working conditions that deny the bodies of migrant agricultural workers, sometimes to the point of death.



## Conclusion

At the same time that migrant agricultural workers are welcomed to Canada because of the labour their bodies can provide, their bodies' needs are rendered invisible and irrelevant through the institutional regulations that set out their working and living conditions.

Dunn has suggested that an embodied approach to migration research reveals several important contributions: that mobility is encumbered and unevenly available; that mobility can be imposed, and this imposition is asymmetrical; that mobilities can generate costs and not just benefits; and that bodies are both mobile and emplaced (2010, 5). Expanding on Dunn, I suggest that an embodied approach to mobilities reveals the ways in which some subjects are afforded their bodies, while others are denied their bodies. This hierarchy of bodily recognition maps onto racialization, gender, class, and citizenship status, among other axes of inclusion and exclusion. In my analysis, I have mapped the experiences of Black Jamaican men with precarious status in Canada with specific attention to their embodied experiences and the discursive erasure of their bodies to further our understanding of how the processes of globalized capitalism are manifest in the materiality of everyday lives (Heynen 2008; Hyndman 2001). I have sought to centre workers' lived experience of the power of their employers, the Canadian state, and transnational accumulation (Sharp 2000).

It is through bodies that we move through space, but the spaces we move to and through may or may not recognize our bodies. The bodies of migrant workers from Jamaica (and other Caribbean countries, along with Mexico) are not recognized in the fields or the bunkhouses they occupy as they provide physical labour for Canadian food production. Canadian agriculture relies upon the extraction of agile and dextrous labour from bodies while denying the fallibility of those same bodies. This denial operates through racism and distinct but related practices of exclusionary citizenship. Together these impulses situate the universal somatic norm of Canadian embodiment as that of a white man (Puwar 2004), presumably one who is also able-bodied, cis-gendered, heterosexual, and middle- or upper-class. Such a body is entitled to voluntary forms of mobility and immobility. By contrast, the 'choice' of migrant agricultural workers to cross international borders and work for eight months of the year in Canada repeatedly – many workers have been coming for decades – must be situated within a broader social and economic context that reiterates the systems of production and consumption that developed under imperialism.

Access to voluntary im/mobilities afforded by citizenship would enable migrant agricultural workers to recover their bodies. This recovery of migrant workers' bodies requires that farmers and provincial legislators acknowledge the toll of physical labour on imperfect bodies. It requires that the Canadian government make a commitment – in the form of citizenship – to workers whose bodies produce the food that nourishes many Canadians. It requires that Canadian consumers accept food that is small, misshapen, bruised, scratched, or otherwise ugly (Mull 2019). It requires that the food we consume for

bodily sustenance has at its core a commitment to the bodily sustenance of those who produce it.

## Acknowledgements

With much gratitude to the men and women who have trusted me to share their experiences.

## Funding Details

This research was supported by an Insight Development Grant (430-2014-00240) awarded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and research grants obtained from King's University College at Western University.

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