LABOUR, Capital and Society
TRAVAIL, capital et société

Vol. 50, No. 1&2, 2022

LABOUR, Capital and Society / TRAVAIL, capital et société

The journal is indexed inter alia in *Alternative Press, Development Contents, Dev/Education Exchange, DEVSIS, Geography Abstracts, PAIS, Left Index, Population Index, Sage Human Resources, Social Science Citation Index, Sociological Abstract, UNESCO Bibliography of Social Sciences and the World Agriculture Economic and Rural Social Abstracts, JStor, Ebsco.*

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Cover Photograph: Quang Nguyen vinh, Salt Field Workers, Vietnam.

Articles received in 2021. Published online November 2022.

ISSN: 0706-1706 Legal deposit: National Library of Canada

TRAVAIL, capital et société

une revue sur le Tiers-Monde

LABOUR, Capital and Society

a journal on the Third World

Volume 50
Numéro/Number 1 & 2
2022

ANNOUNCING THE LAUNCH OF THE

Asian Labour Review

The new review's objective is to be an independent platform for analysis, exchange and debate around critical issues confronting workers and labour movements in Asia. It is hosted at Sogang University, South Korea, and explores the development and continuous transformation of capitalism across Asia that challenge labour movements to analyse and intervene to protect the survival and dignity of workers. It raises questions about how we understand, strategise and counter neoliberal, statist and other forms of capitalism so that the labour movement can push back against these assaults by local and transnational capital in collusion with authoritarian and quasi-democratic regimes.

We will explore issues of a changing working class that shapes the orientation of the labour struggle including increased precarity, gig and platform work, and organizing among the growing number of informal workers. We will explore the hidden exploitation, discrimination and barriers to organizing found in the gendered nature of work, the role of reproductive labour and racialised migrant labour regimes. Research will be aimed at revitalising and strengthening independent and grassroots trade unions and exploring emerging forms of worker organization, including organizing that engages with young workers at the forefront in youth-led democratic movements.

We seek contributions on a range of labour issues in Asia, such as labour organising strategies and tactics, strikes and protests, un(der)employment and precarisation, gendered and racialised nature of work, reproductive labour, platform and logistics labour, labour migration, the restructuring of global supply chains, changing labour regimes and industrial relations systems, a labour solution to the ecological crisis, trade union reforms, state repression and more.

The ***Asian Labour Review*** will publish one issue a year. The next deadline is January 31, 2023. We accept submissions of 5,000 words or more, written in an accessible style for an informed, general labour audience. If you would like to pitch an idea or submit an article, please email us: editor@labourreview.org

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LABOUR, Capital and Society
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EDITOR'S NOTE / NOTE de la RÉDACTRICE

Welcome to Volume 50 of the journal, an impressive marker that reflects the work of many authors, contributors, editors and advisors over many years. This issue benefitted from the assistance of 2 co-editors, members of the journal's Editorial Committee – Professor Dolores Chew and Dr. Mélanie Dufour-Poirier.

This issue addresses a major theme in the changing world of work which increasingly combines wage work with non-wage earnings, bringing together proletarian wage work with non-wage forms of livelihood. This is often referred to as the distinction between productive labour and reproductive labour, usually instituted in order to make labour increasingly precarious and poorly paid. The result is blurred lines between proletarian and non-proletarian relationships and has prompted new forms of popular resistance and created new challenges for trade unions and the labour movement as a whole. These forms include, among others, the circular migration of workers between the wage economy and small-scale and subsistence farming within national borders; the growing international movement of temporary migrant workers as well as those who seek permanent migration; and the growing informalization of labour as well as domestic labour. The articles draw attention to the way in which these complex relationships have been under additional pressure and often changed as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Hastie's article explores the struggle of international temporary farm workers on Canadian farms as they attempted to improve their situation during the height of the COVID pandemic. Researching this struggle brings into sharp relief many enduring labour issues across a range of jurisdictions. The intersection between their status as both migrants and workers has left them with a corrosive disadvantage, one that impacts both formal entitlements and practical access to necessary rights, goods and resources, including in the areas of health care, housing, and working conditions, and their ability to seek legal recourse or to remedy the violations of their rights.

Bayane explores the changing dynamic between employer and employee in family domestic work resulting from changes in

the relationship between family and work during COVID as many domestic employers were required to work from home. Domestic work is one of the largest sources of employment in South Africa, a great deal of which is undertaken within extended families. His article explores the blurred lines between family relationships and employer-employee relationships, a poorly researched area.

Singh analyses small-scale farmer resistance in India and their year-long strike against government attempts to reform the small-scale farming sector by introducing neo-liberal laws aimed at opening the agricultural sector to increased market forces. Many of these farmers engage in both farming and wage employment, in a form of domestic circular migration between the urban cash economy and rural agricultural areas. This widespread resistance occurred within the backdrop of the COVID pandemic in which millions of migrant workers were sent home. She analyses the lengthy struggle within its political context and emphasizes the emergence of new alliances between workers in different sectors and featured an important role for women.

Henaway takes up the issue of migrant labour again, looking at both international temporary foreign workers and permanent migrants in Canada. He explores the challenges facing migrant workers who were deemed 'essential' during COVID and the organising strategies of the International Workers Centre in Montreal, Quebec. He reveals the centrality of race and class to making these inequities possible, arguing that they are central to capitalism.

We are fortunate in this edition to have two extensive research notes. The first by Mélanie Dufour-Poirier and Francine D'Ortun and their research on training social delegates of Quebec's Federation of Labour (FTQ). The second is by Onohoe' Omhen Ebhohimhen on Nigerian trade unions in the face of globalisation and labour casualization. We are pleased to return to book reviews with 4 reviews on a range of important topics.

A final note, the journal is undergoing significant changes both among its contributord and in its location. This is my last issue as Editor. After several years of involvement with the journal, I became editor in 2005, inheriting it from its very capable and inspiring founding editor Rosalind Boyd. It has been my pleasure to work with the members of both the Editorial Committee and the Consultative Board as well as the many interesting authors from whom I've learned so much. I also extend my deep thanks to the

many editorial assistants who have contributed to the journal. All were graduate students from the International Development Studies Department, (now renamed Global Development Studies) at Saint Mary's University. Final thanks are also extended to that Department as well to Saint Mary's Graduate Faculty and the accounts department who put up with this strange project in their midst. A very special thanks to Dan Wile, Mehjabeen Alarakhia, Hélène Dansereau, Jenny Harrison and Simone Mutabadzi.

On behalf of the entire journal community as well as myself, I am sorry to announce that we are mourning the loss of Dr. Myron Echenberg, History professor at McGill University, author, long-time valued contributor to our Editorial Committee and a great teacher. He will be deeply missed.

The direction of the journal will be undertaken by the Editorial Committee with the help of Professor Dolores Chew and Mélanie Dufour-Poirier. The journal will be relocated back to Montreal, Québec. Please note the new address:

NEW ADDRESS
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Articles

TRAVAIL, capital et société 50:1&2 (2022)

Désavantage corrosif d'un statut : étude de cas sur la COVID-19 et les travailleurs agricoles migrants au Canada

Bethany Hastie

Résumé

La pandémie de COVID-19 a clairement révélé l'existence de multiples et persistants problèmes relatifs au travail dans bien des territoires. Si le recours à une main-d'œuvre migrante a proliféré dans diverses industries à l'échelle mondiale, la pandémie a révélé l'ampleur particulière du recours aux travailleurs agricoles migrants. Par une approche analytique des politiques, cet article examine le désavantage corrosif produit par l'intersection entre migration et statut de travail pour les ouvriers agricoles migrants. Ce désavantage colore leurs expériences et leur traitement au Canada, que la pandémie a amplifiés. Issue d'une démarche axée sur les capacités, la théorie du désavantage révèle des conditions qui produisent des effets négatifs sur de multiples facettes de la vie des travailleurs et restreignent leur aptitude à faire des choix éclairés quant à leur bien-être. Adoptant la pandémie de COVID-19 comme étude de cas, je soutiens que le statut de travail des ouvriers agricoles migrants et la nature même de la migration créent par leur intersection un désavantage corrosif. Ce qui affecte aussi bien les droits officiels des ouvriers que leur accès pratique aux droits, biens et ressources nécessaires, notamment en ce qui concerne les soins de santé, l'hébergement et les conditions de travail, ainsi que la possibilité d'obtenir justice ou réparation pour les violations de leurs droits.

The Corrosive Disadvantage of Status: A Case Study on COVID-19 and Migrant Agricultural Workers in Canada

Bethany Hastie [1]

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp relief many enduring labour issues across a range of jurisdictions. While migrant labour has proliferated among many industries around the globe, the extent of and reliance on migrant agricultural work, in particular, was laid bare during the pandemic. Adopting a policy analysis approach, this article examines the corrosive disadvantage produced by the intersection of the migration and labour statuses for migrant agricultural workers, which shapes their experiences and treatment in Canada and which was amplified during the pandemic. Flowing from the capabilities approach, the theory of disadvantage uncovers conditions that produce negative impacts in multiple areas of an individual's life and constrains their ability to make valuable choices about their well-being. Drawing on the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study, I argue that the nature and intersection of migration and labour statuses for migrant agricultural workers produce a corrosive disadvantage, one that impacts both formal entitlements and practical access to necessary rights, goods and resources, including in relation to health care, housing, and working conditions, and their ability to seek legal recourse or remedy for rights violations.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the precariousness of work and legal gaps for workers in many industries across the globe. Issues attending seasonal and agricultural migrant labour were rendered particularly visible in light of the vital role migrants play in food production and processing systems and the impact of closed and severely restricted borders in the initial months of the pandemic in 2020 (ILO, 2020b: 1). This article draws on the experience of migrant agricultural workers in Ontario, Canada,

during the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study through which to illustrate the entrenched issues these workers face and which are a direct result of the legal regulation of this form of labour.

Demand for migrant agricultural labour has grown significantly in recent decades (Dauvergne and Marsden, 2014; Ruhs and Martin, 2008), both in countries with established programs, such as Canada (Lenard and Straehle, 2012; Preibisch and Hennebry, 2012), the United States (Calavita, 1992) and across the European Union (ILO 2020b: 1), and through the creation of new programs in New Zealand, Australia (Brickenstein, 2015; Gibson and McKenzie, 2014) and the Republic of Korea (ILO 2020b: 1). Agricultural labour migration programs are often highly regulated by national governments (ILO, 2016; Kuptsch, 2015: 353-354), including with respect to recruitment and travel and conditions of work, wages and living. Many programs operate with similar features that constrain migrant agricultural workers' migration and labour statuses, such as through the adoption of closed work permits and temporary migration permits tied to the seasonal nature of agricultural industries (Hastie, 2019a; ILO, 2020b).

In Canada, as elsewhere, issues regarding the regulation and experience of migrant labour in agriculture were exacerbated by the pandemic, while at the same time highlighting the essential and skilled nature of this work (Falconer, 2020; Larue, 2020; Isaac and Elrick, 2020; Triandafyllidou and Nalbandian, 2020; Neef, 2020; ILO, 2020b). The trajectory of events, outbreaks and regulatory responses to COVID-19 in relation to migrant agricultural labour evidenced a much greater concern for preserving their essential labour to Canada's economy than for protecting the health and welfare of the workers (Triandafyllidou and Nalbandian, 2020: 6-7; Neef, 2020; Weiler et al, 2020; Stevenson and Shingler, 2020), a trend similarly documented in other jurisdictions that rely heavily on migrant agricultural labour (ILO 2020b: 2-3). While Canada was quick to re-open the border to migrant workers in March 2020, the health and well-being of migrant workers was neglected and subject to differential standards from Canadian citizens and permanent residents (Kaushal, Hastie and Eeg, 2020; Lowrie, 2020; Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020; Stevenson and Shingler, 2020; Auditor General of Canada, 2021). In fact, federal health minister Patty Hajdu called the mistreatment of migrant workers during COVID-19 a "national disgrace" and has publicly called for reforms

to Canada's temporary migrant worker programs (Johnson, 2020).

As a "crisis" or "emergency," the COVID-19 pandemic has, in many ways, been framed as unique and exceptional (Kaushal, Hastie and Eeg, 2020). However, as this article demonstrates, much of what the pandemic has revealed in terms of the regulation and treatment of migrant agricultural workers is not unique or exceptional; rather, it has brought into clear focus long-standing issues. Existing research has consistently documented abuse of workers under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program [TFWP] and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program [SAWP] in Canada, including in relation to wage violations, misinformation about rights and entitlements, exposure to safety risks, inadequate living conditions and denial of medical care (Faraday, 2012; Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Hastie, 2017; Preibisch, 2012; Cundal and Seaman, 2012: 206-207; Tungohan, 2018: 246). Unionization, historically seen as a means to improve working conditions, is often formally or practically out of reach for migrant agricultural workers (Vosko, 2014; Vosko, 2016; Vosko, 2018; Smith, 2018; Tapia and Isben, 2018; Hastie, 2019b; Hastie and Farrant, 2021). Rights violations and abuses are similarly documented in respect of migrant agricultural workers in other countries (Hastie, 2019a; ILO 2020b). These issues were, in many ways, amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the visibility of migrant workers during this pandemic also brought these issues into greater public focus.

As I examine in this article, the pandemic has brought into sharp relief the corrosive disadvantage produced by the intersection of *migration* and *labour* statuses for migrant agricultural workers. This concept of corrosive disadvantage (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007) follows from the capabilities approach, a theory of justice that asks not just whether rights, goods and resources are distributed *equally* to members in society, per the model of distributive justice (Rawls, 1999), but whether they are distributed *fairly*, meaning that each individual has the necessary quality and quantity of rights, goods and resources to do and be what they have reason to value (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011). Rather than looking at distribution as the key metric, the capabilities approach looks at what an individual can do and be with the bundle of goods, resources and rights that they possess (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2009). This process of converting rights, resources and goods into "beings" and "doings" (also called "functionings") is at the heart of the capabilities approach (Sen,

1999; Sen, 2009). This, in turn, requires paying attention to the "social, political, legal and other contexts in which an individual must navigate choice, and to how those contexts may constrain or deprive her of some quantity or quality of choice in converting the resources and goods she possesses into valued doings or beings" (Hastie, 2017: 25). The quantity and quality of choice, or opportunity, that flows from the bundle of goods, rights and resources an individual possesses represents the "capabilities," or freedoms, an individual has to achieve desired functionings. Thus, the contexts or conditions that deprive an individual of some quantity or quality of choice or opportunity — capability depravation — may place them in a position of "disadvantage" (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 36-37). In this way, the capabilities approach and concept of disadvantage look more deeply and critically at the notion of "choice" as *viable* options, not only those that ostensibly exist.

The concept of "disadvantage" provides a framework through which to understand those capabilities that are particularly critical for advancing well-being (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 8-9). Taking the capabilities approach as a starting point for their theory, Wolff and de-Shalit focus on understanding and analyzing the conditions necessary not only to achieve functionings but also to *sustain* them. From this perspective, identifying conditions that create "exceptional risk and vulnerability" is integral, as those are conditions of disadvantage (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 9). In other words, one hallmark of disadvantage is being exposed to or forced to take risks that an individual wouldn't otherwise have, due to limited or no reasonable alternatives (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 66-67). The consequence of this is the creation or perpetuation of "insecure functionings" (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 73) and production of "corrosive disadvantage," which is a disadvantage to one functioning that spreads negative effects beyond its own domain and into other areas of functioning (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 121). In other words, corrosive disadvantage identifies those (deprived) capabilities and functionings that produce negative ripple effects in additional areas of an individual's life. As this article examines, the allocation and intersection of migration and labour statuses for migrant agricultural workers produce a corrosive disadvantage, one that impacts their work, health, material living conditions and overall well-being. While this article draws on Canada as a case study, similar regulatory features and problematic practices are

documented in many other jurisdictions (ILO, 2020b).

This article draws on the case study of migrant agricultural workers in Ontario, Canada, during the COVID-19 pandemic through which to illustrate how the regulation of this work produces corrosive disadvantage. This article is based on publicly available secondary sources, including news reports, NGO reports developed through engagement with migrant workers during the pandemic and official government reports. Sources were identified through key word and general searches and updated throughout 2020 and 2021. As Ontario is the province with the largest intake of migrant agricultural workers and the number of available public sources for this jurisdiction much greater, it was ultimately determined to focus on this province as the case study jurisdiction for this article, though the findings and conclusions reached are broadly applicable to the regulation of migrant work across Canada and internationally in jurisdictions with similar regulatory features.

This article proceeds in four parts. Section 1 sets out key aspects concerning the regulation of migrant labour in Canada. Section 2 then provides a brief review of the events and policies enacted in relation to migrant agricultural workers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on this case study, sections 3 and 4 demonstrate how the intersecting nature of migrant agricultural workers' migration and labour statuses produces corrosive disadvantage for their ability to achieve well-being and just conditions during their time in Canada. These sections examine how the impact of workers' migration and labour statuses created issues for migrant agricultural workers in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to both formal entitlements and practical access to necessary rights, goods and resources, including in relation to health care, housing and working conditions, and their ability to seek legal recourse or remedy for rights violations. Ultimately, this article aims to demonstrate how the functioning of status for migrant agricultural workers produces significant negative consequences and results in systemic injustice, not only during the COVID-19 pandemic, but rendered acutely visible by it. This, in turn, assists in laying a foundation from which further conversation and movement towards just conditions for migrant workers in Canada and internationally can take place.

Regulating Migrant Agricultural Work in Canada

Migrant agricultural worker programs in Canada have existed in some form since at least the 1960s (Lenard and Straehle, 2012; Hastie, 2019b). Today, two programs are used to recruit and employ migrant agricultural workers: the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). As immigration programs, the TFWP and SAWP are formally administered by Canada's federal government, although responsibility for enforcement of labour and employment standards, occupational health and safety laws, housing standards and health care rests with individual provinces under Canada's federalist structure. These two programs further sit alongside other immigration programs for both temporary and permanent relocation to Canada, such as for international students, refugee claimants and family members of Canadian citizens and residents, and the International Mobility Program, which provides an expedited vehicle for recruitment of foreign workers with specific eligibility requirements (Marsden, Tucker and Vosko, 2021; Chartrand and Vosko, 2020). Unlike other labour migrants, migrant agricultural workers do not have the ability to use their work experience to permanently immigrate to Canada.

Today, the SAWP brings in more than 40,000 migrant agricultural workers each year (Vosko, Tucker and Casey, 2019: 232), and close to 100,000 migrant workers arrive annually under the TFWP for labour in various industries (Chartrand and Vosko, 2020: 98-99). Migrant workers account for a high percentage of the workforce in agriculture across Canada: 41 per cent in Ontario and 30 per cent in each of BC, Quebec and Nova Scotia (Lu, 2020). Workers in agriculture and other low-wage migrant labour industries in Canada are racialized within the Canadian landscape, which has been linked to patterns of systemic discrimination and exploitation (Smith, 2015; Chartrand and Vosko, 2020; Sharma, 2006; Satzewich, 1991). Among the top countries of citizenship of migrant workers in Canada (including under both the TFWP and SAWP) are the Philippines, Mexico, Jamaica and Guatemala, the latter three of which are SAWP participants (IRCC, 2019).

Under the TFWP, workers may come to Canada for a defined period of time to labour in various jobs, including agriculture. Employers under the TFWP must apply to the federal government for a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) to hire the worker

by demonstrating a labour shortage and lack of available citizen or resident workers (Marsden, Tucker and Vosko, 2021: 78-79). A foreign worker is then recruited and applies for a temporary work permit and an immigration permit (Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Faraday, 2012; Hastie, 2017), each also under the purview of Canada's federal government. Work permits under the TFWP are typically issued for a two-year period and are renewable, though no pathway for permanent immigration exists for lower-skilled jobs, such as in agriculture. Importantly, the immigration and work permits issued to foreign workers under the TFWP are formally separate in Canada, meaning that if a TFWP worker loses their job, they may validly remain in Canada for the duration of their immigration visa period, although they may not take up new employment without first applying and receiving a new, valid work permit (Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Hastie, 2017). Although the TFWP does not require an employer to provide workers with accommodation, this is a common arrangement, especially for agricultural workers, aligning with international trends in this regard (ILO, 2016).

Under the SAWP, migrant agricultural workers are recruited in their home countries for work in Canada each season, up to eight months per year. The SAWP runs on the basis of bilateral agreements between Canada and sending country governments. SAWP workers are assigned to a particular employer and may be "recalled" by their employer to return the next season (Hennebry and Preibisch, 2010; Hastie, 2017; Faraday, 2012; Vosko, Tucker and Casey, 2019: 232; Basok and George, 2020). This "recall" system gives employers in Canada significant power over workers as ongoing employment each season is dependent on the employer's desire or decision to name a worker for return. In addition, workers under SAWP generally live and work on the employer's property/farm, providing an employer with significant physical control over workers' movements (Hennebry, 2012: 10). No option for permanent immigration exists under SAWP.

Under each of the TFWP and SAWP, the migration status of workers is temporary and contingent. While not formally tied to employment status under the TFWP, the nexus between employment status and migration status remains significant in practice. Moreover, work permits are "closed" under these programs, meaning that an individual may only work in the job, at the location and for the employer listed on their work permit (*Immigration and Refugee*

Protection Regulations: s185(b); Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010: 17-18; Hastie, 2017: 31). Changing jobs, locations or employers is a lengthy and arduous process (Nakache, 2013: 78; Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010: 17-18; Hastie, 2017: 31). SAWP workers face even greater constraints as their labour and migration statuses are tied and their ability to change employers not practically available. In addition, because agricultural workers under both the TFWP and SAWP tend to live and work on the employer's property, their labour status impacts their ability to reside in Canada in a practical sense, while also giving their employer significant power and control over their movements and living conditions.

The manner in which migration and work permits are extended under Canada's TFWP and SAWP have been critiqued as creating significant dependence on an employer and a power imbalance in the employment relationship (Hastie, 2017: 32; Marsden, 2012: 217; Marsden, 2011: 51; Hennebry, 2012; Binford, 2009: 507; Satzewich, 1991; Basok, 2002; Sharma, 2012: 36). The temporal, geographic and relational constraints imposed by these permits, coupled with the difficulty of changing employers or jobs, has led some to characterize the permit system as "bonded" in nature and as the "baseline of precariousness" for migrant workers (Marsden, 2011: 50; Faraday, 2012: 61).

In addition to the impact of migration status, the status of agricultural work under provincial labour and employment laws creates further disadvantage for migrant agricultural workers. Differential rights and exclusion from employment and labour laws exist for specific jobs, notably in the agriculture industry, which is occupied primarily by racialized migrant workers (Fudge and MacPhail, 2009: 131; Faraday, 2012; Cundal and Seaman, 2012: 206; Vosko, Tucker and Casey, 2019). This means that migrant agricultural workers are subject to fewer or lower rights and standards at work than migrant and resident workers in other industries or jobs. For example, agricultural workers are often subject to different regulations regarding wages and working hours under provincial employment laws (Faraday, 2012; Hastie, 2017).

In addition, agricultural workers in Ontario and Alberta are also excluded from unionization under provincial labour law (*Labour Relations Act*: s3[b.1]; *Farm Freedom and Safety Act*). In Ontario, workers instead may collectively organize in the workplace under the *Agricultural Employees Protection Act* [*AEPA*], although

this statute was designed expressly to maintain the exclusion of agricultural workers, a largely racialized population, from access to meaningful labour rights (Hastie and Farrant, 2021: 10; Hastie, 2017; Tucker, 2012: 30-56; Barrett, 2012; Walchuk, 2016). Migrant agricultural workers face substantial barriers to unionization in most provinces, even where they are ostensibly entitled to do so, due to the ways in which migration and labour statuses constrain workers' power (Vosko, 2014; Vosko, 2016; Vosko, 2018; Hastie, 2019b). Thus, unionization, historically seen as a vehicle through which to improve working conditions collectively, is practically out of reach for migrant agricultural workers in many settings.

The result for migrant agricultural workers is thus both fewer formal entitlements and rights under law due to their labour status (as agricultural workers) and heightened constraints and difficulty in asserting the legal rights they do possess in practice, due to the nature of their migration status, discussed above. As such, both the migration status (as temporary and contingent) and labour status (as agricultural workers subject to differential standards and exclusions under provincial labour and employment laws) of migrant agricultural workers impact their formal entitlement and practical access to rights, goods and resources necessary to ensure just conditions for their work, health and living situation in Canada. Even where workers have existing legal rights and entitlements, the manner in which migration and labour statuses are allocated "creates a barrier to effective conversion of formal rights into substantive realization of just conditions of work in practice" (Hastie, 2017: 32). As such, these statuses work both independently and in concert to create a situation of heightened vulnerability for migrant agricultural workers. In this way, the migration and labour statuses of migrant agricultural workers can be seen to create disadvantage, constricting the ability of migrant workers to possess and convert capabilities into valuable functionings, or in other words, to have a set of viable options from which to make choices in respect of their own interests and well-being. As the next sections demonstrate, the intersection of these statuses produces corrosive disadvantage for migrant agricultural workers, the consequences of which have been acutely illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 and the Regulation of Migrant Agricultural Work in Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic in Canada unfolded in a manner similar to that of many countries in early March 2020. Following a series of identified cases, border closures were enacted as an early measure in attempt to contain the virus and prevent widespread circulation within the country (Kaushal, Hastie and Eeg, 2020). The earliest border closure measures in Canada made few exceptions for entry. Notably absent from these exceptions were provisions to allow entry for migrant workers. Canada was quick to act in response to labour shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate renewed entry for low-wage migrant workers, especially in agriculture and food processing, given what was being labelled as their "essential" and, in many ways, irreplaceable labour in the food supply chain (Falconer, 2020; Larue, 2020; Isaac and Elrick, 2020; Triandafyllidou and Nalbandian, 2020: 6; Lupton, 2020; Dubinski, 2020a; Haley et al, 2020; Hastie, 2020; Weiler et al, 2020).

Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in relation to migrant agricultural workers must be understood in light of the stratified responsibility under the federalist division of powers under Canada's constitution. While the recruitment and authorization of workers (to travel to Canada and work in Canada) under each of the TFWP and SAWP are within the jurisdiction of the federal government in Canada, responsibility for enforcement of labour and employment laws, including occupational health and safety, rests with each individual province (Marsden, Tucker and Vosko, 2021: 82-83). However, in the absence of information-sharing agreements, provinces may not know the location of migrant workers within their territory. While some provinces have introduced legislation that requires employers of migrant workers in the province to register with relevant authorities, this is not yet consistent across Canada.

Compounding issues regarding the divided jurisdiction of federal and provincial governments, complicated regulatory structures regarding health, housing and employment standards at the provincial level may have operated to further inhibit inspection and enforcement regimes. For some issues, such as those falling within the body of employment standards legislation (i.e., wages, hours of work and related matters), no pro-active inspection or enforcement regimes exist, meaning that workers must file a legal complaint when their rights have been violated in order to remedy the

situation. This is widely documented as especially problematic for migrant agricultural workers in Canada (Hastie, 2017). Regulatory bodies governing health care are typically divided regionally within a province, which may produce inconsistent standards, and enforcement may be similarly hampered by a lack of information about the location of workers and resources for proactive inspection.

The quick reopening of Canada's international borders to migrant agricultural workers was not initially accompanied by specific guidelines to ensure the health and safety of those workers and prevent transmission of COVID-19, and this led to early outbreaks of COVID-19 amongst migrant agricultural workers, who often live and work in tight quarters. As a result, whether and how migrant workers would be required to quarantine on arrival to Canada, for example, was evidently unclear, despite general rules requiring international travelers to quarantine for 14 days on arrival to Canada (Kaushal, Hastie and Eeg, 2020). This was further complicated by the fact that agricultural workers generally live in shared housing accommodations.

Notable outbreaks amongst migrant agricultural workers in Ontario in the weeks that followed the border re-opening highlighted the disparate treatment of these workers in the absence of clear cooperation between federal, provincial and regional authorities and specific rules and support regarding quarantine, living arrangements and occupational health and safety measures. In Ontario, jurisdictional responsibility for health and housing inspections has been delegated to regional health authorities (*Health Protection and Promotion Act*; Ontario Ministry of Health, 2021; Ontario Ministry of Health, 2020), creating the potential for variation in response across the province. Moreover, entitlement to public health care services for migrant workers is restricted (Doyle, 2020).

In June 2020, the Ontario government created assessment and isolation centres for migrant agricultural workers in the Windsor-Essex region (CBC News, 2020b), which intakes a substantial number of migrant agricultural workers in the province. The government also increased its testing efforts amongst migrant agricultural workers following growing case numbers within that population, including creating mobile units to administer tests at farm sites across the province (Jeffords, 2020). Support teams to coordinate and monitor housing conditions and food supplies were also created (Wilhelm, 2020). Finally, in July 2020, Southwestern

Public Health, which is responsible for a region in Ontario that employs a significant number of migrant agricultural workers, issued a health order requiring 22 measures to be implemented at farm sites, including in relation to physical distancing, accommodation standards, screening requirements and access to information (Versolatto, 2020). However, as discussed later, significant concerns and failures regarding these responses were documented.

Provincial efforts were further supported at the federal level. New regulations introduced in late April 2020 required employers of temporary foreign workers to provide separate accommodations for arriving workers during their 14-day isolation or quarantine and to pay them wages during that period "substantially the same as those set out in the offer of employment," with penalties for non-compliance (*Regulations Amending the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (Emergencies Act and Quarantine Act)*: ss 6(2), 7(2), 14). The federal government further provided financial support to employers to cover the costs associated with required self-isolation for migrant workers on arrival to Canada (Shingler, 2020; Larue, 2020). Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) further committed funding and support for enhanced inspections and improvements for housing in response to noted outbreaks (ESDC, 2020). Yet, as discussed below, significant failures were found in this regard as well.

The series of events and policies, and timing of them, that accompanied the border re-opening to migrant agricultural workers evidenced a greater concern for the use of their labour than for safeguarding their health and well-being, lending weight to critiques of Canada's SAWP and TFWP that suggest the programs create second-tier status for migrant agricultural workers. As noted earlier, the concept of disadvantage aims to identify conditions that require particular populations to take on heightened risk or which exacerbate vulnerability (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). The status of migrant agricultural workers can be seen as creating disadvantage by subjecting migrant agricultural workers to differential standards under law and treatment in practice, requiring them, in effect, to take on additional risks and experience particular vulnerabilities that Canadian and resident workers did not face during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the following sections unpack, this creates corrosive disadvantage for migrant agricultural workers in respect of their living and working conditions, as well as their ability to seek legal

recourse or remedy for rights violations.

The Impact of Status on Entitlement and Access to Adequate Living and Working Conditions

Despite the institution of rules regarding quarantine and other health and safety requirements for migrant workers in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple reports surfaced that such rules were not being followed, particularly in the agricultural sector (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020; Bogart, 2020; Auditor General of Canada, 2021). Overcrowded accommodations, a lack of personal protective gear, pressure by employers and use of agencies to move workers between workplaces were all reported as contributing to the spread of COVID-19 amongst migrant workers (Doyle, 2020; Larsen, 2020; UFCW, 2020). Moreover, a lack of enforcement and accountability measures were noted as barriers to employer compliance (Luck, 2020; Bogart, 2020; D'Amore, 2020; Auditor General of Canada, 2021; Triandafyllidou and Nalbandian, 2020: 6).

While issues regarding non-compliance, overcrowding, a lack of sanitary conditions and pressure from employers are not new (Cundal and Seaman, 2012: 208; Hennebry and Preibisch, 2010: 30-31; Perry; Horgan and Liinamaa, 2017: 722; Salami, Meharali and Salami, 2015), they took on heightened significance during COVID-19, given that such conditions create an environment where transmission of the virus could take place with relative ease (Doyle, 2020; ILO, 2020a: 4). This related, particularly, to the inability of workers to maintain proper physical distancing. For example, as federal health minister Patty Hajdu remarked, "All the PPE in the world will not protect you if you are sleeping in a bunkhouse that is housing 12 to 15 people" (Ansari, 2020). Contrary to the risks evidenced by Minister Hadju's statement, migrant agricultural workers may have faced increased density in housing during the COVID-19 pandemic. A report published by a migrant worker advocacy group in Ontario documented that migrant agricultural workers were being housed in increasing numbers following a quarantine period "because social distancing at work is not required for individuals who live together" and this therefore "maximize[s] productivity" (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020: 21). Concerns regarding accommodation and overcrowding were also raised by Canada's Auditor General in a report concerning migrant

agricultural workers and COVID-19 (Auditor General of Canada, 2021: 38).

The Auditor General's report also identified numerous concerns and shortcomings in ESDC's inspections processes undertaken in 2020 and 2021. The report identified problems in 88 per cent of quarantine inspections in 2021 and 73 per cent in 2020 (Auditor General of Canada, 2021: 17) and also commented on under-performance and problems with other inspections, including in relation to isolation and COVID-19 outbreaks and general program compliance. The report concluded that "the department's inspection provides little assurance that employers complied with the requirements to protect temporary foreign workers during quarantine" (Auditor General of Canada, 2021: 17) and during isolation periods required during outbreaks (Auditor General of Canada, 2021: 20-22).

Migrant agricultural workers also reported consistent issues accessing health information and services, both due to the difficulty of visiting off-property locations and delays in obtaining requisite health access documents from the Canadian government (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020: 13). There was a further report that some migrant workers were denied COVID-19 testing when it was requested (D'Amore, 2020). Language barriers for agricultural workers also remained a notable challenge during COVID-19 (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020: 13), which further inhibits workers' ability to access information and services. Moreover, inattentiveness to the schedule and practicalities of agricultural work has been suggested as creating limited access to available services (CBC News, 2020b).

As with other facets of their experience and treatment, issues regarding access to health care were not new during the COVID-19 pandemic, though they were sharply illustrated and took on greater urgency. Research commonly documents multiple challenges for migrant workers accessing health care and medical treatment (Hennebry, McLaughlin and Preibisch, 2016; Hennebry, Preibisch and McLaughlin, 2012; Hennebry and Williams, 2015; McLaughlin, Hennebry and Haines, 2014; Cajax and Cohen, 2019; Cole et al, 2019; Salami, Meharali and Salami, 2015; Haley et al, 2020; Vahabi and Wong, 2017; Vahabi, Wong and Lofters, 2018). Relatedly, migrant workers have been found to experience significant obstacles accessing the procedures required to make a

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board claim in Ontario or other compensatory mechanisms (Basok and George, 2020; Hennebry and Preibisch, 2010: 30-31; McLaughlin, Hennebry and Haines, 2014). These obstacles include language barriers, an insufficient understanding of the process to submit such a claim and, often, a fear of employment-based repercussions, such as not being "named" to return under the SAWP program (Basok and George, 2020: 57; Hennebry and Preibisch, 2010: 26, 30; Hennebry and Williams, 2015). Compounding the existing barriers in accessing health-related information and services, a lack of sick day entitlements and pay, coupled with fears of deportation or termination, further constrains the ability for migrant workers to protect their health and create additional disincentives to seek health care and services (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020: 13-15; Caregivers Action Centre, 2020: 31).

The allocation of migration status as temporary and labour status as contingent and closed, discussed in section 1, produces a corrosive disadvantage for migrant agricultural workers' capabilities in relation to their living and working conditions. The intersection of their migration and labour statuses constrains their ability to choose their living arrangements and subjects them to overcrowded and substandard living conditions that other workers in Canada are generally not subjected to. As discussed in this section, that, in turn, enhances risks to workers' health and safety, which was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, estimates from April to July 2020 found that over 1000 migrant agricultural workers in Ontario had tested positive for COVID-19, a rate of infection that greatly surpassed transmission in the general population of Ontario in the same time period (Vosko and Spring, 2021). Moreover, the requirement for an employer to provide accommodations not only means that workers often live in cramped and unsanitary housing but that they live on an employer's property. This has been found to significantly constrain workers' ability to access services and assistance, due to the extent of control employers have over workers' movements, discussed in section 1, and which was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the contingent and temporary nature of workers' migration and labour statuses creates additional disincentives to seeking health care or medical treatment for an injury or condition, due to fears of deportation, loss of earnings and other repercussions. In other words, migrant agricultural workers

may perceive few viable options to protect their health and well-being because the bundle of rights, goods and resources they possess is diminished due to the regulatory features of the SAWP. In turn, this negatively impacts workers' ability to convert those capabilities into valuable functionings — to "do and be" healthy, secure and well at work.

As discussed at the outset of this article, a hallmark of "disadvantage" is being exposed to or forced to take risks that an individual wouldn't otherwise have due to limited or no reasonable alternatives (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 66-67). Migrant agricultural workers in Canada were forced to accept heightened risks of COVID-19 transmission due to the living and working conditions imposed by the legal frameworks governing the migration programs (SAWP and TFWP) and agricultural work under provincial employment laws. Moreover, migrant agricultural workers would likely see few or no reasonable alternatives in light of the widely perceived risks of job loss and deportation associated with voicing a complaint, examined further in the next section. Thus, the nature and intersection of migration and labour statuses for migrant agricultural workers create corrosive disadvantage by constraining not only their migration and work options but also producing negative consequences in respect of their living conditions, health and safety, each of which was acutely illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Impact of Status on Asserting Rights and Obtaining Remedies

Existing literature confirms a strong correlation between the hesitancy of migrant workers to assert their legal rights or seek remedies and the precariousness associated with migrant workers' labour and migration statuses under Canada's TFWP and SAWP (Faraday, 2012; Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Marsden, 2012; Hennebry, 2012; Hennebry and Preibisch, 2010: 25; Hastie, 2017; Tungohan, 2018; Wright, Groutsis and van den Broek, 2017). While migrant workers may know their rights or be aware of rights violations occurring in respect of their working and/or living conditions, they may choose not to complain to their employer or seek legal recourse because doing so is perceived to put their labour or migration status in jeopardy. The hesitancy to voice complaints is particularly problematic given that the available legal mechanisms

for enforcing rights and obtaining remedies are complaints-driven, meaning that if a migrant worker does not complain, they often have no practical access to enforcing their rights (Faraday, 2012; Nakache and Kinoshita, 2010; Fudge and MacPhail, 2009; House of Commons, 2016: 25-26). As such, for many migrant workers, they may face an unreasonable choice between complaining and losing their job and status in Canada or tolerating unlawful working conditions.

Issues concerning migrant workers' ability to assert their rights or voice a complaint were heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic, as were the potential consequences of not doing so given the potentially life-threatening risk posed by COVID-19. In at least one reported case, a migrant worker was fired after speaking with the media about health and safety concerns over SAWP workers' living and working conditions, at a farm that subsequently experienced an outbreak of COVID-19 affecting more than 190 workers and leading to one death (*Luis Gabriel Flores v Scotlynn Sweetpac Growers Inc*, 2020; Dubinski, 2020b). Mr. Flores, a SAWP worker from Mexico, brought his case to the Ontario Labour Relations Board, which found that his dismissal was unlawful and awarded damages (*Luis Gabriel Flores v Scotlynn Sweetpac Growers Inc*, 2020). The conditions Mr. Flores reported experiencing, both to the media and in the legal decision, are widely documented for migrant agricultural workers across Ontario and Canada (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020), yet most will be unable or unwilling to vocalize these concerns to their employer or a third party or seek legal remedy due to the risk of losing their job, as Mr. Flores did.

Pre-existing hesitancy amongst migrant workers to resist unlawful conditions or voice complaints was compounded by enhanced employer surveillance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employer control over workers is a widely documented concern for various migrant worker populations, notably agricultural workers, who tend to live and work on an employer's property (Vahabi and Wong, 2017; Vahabi, Wong and Lofters, 2018). Concerns about exposure to COVID-19 led some employers to impose severe restrictions on workers. For example, an Ontario report documented that a group of migrant agricultural workers were "forced to sign an agreement saying they would not leave the bunkhouse" (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020: 22). Other reported measures included instituted curfews and prohibition against guests on

the property (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020: 22). While some restrictions may have arisen in response to public health orders, others appear to have been instigated by individual employers (Campbell, 2020). These increased restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of migrant agricultural workers by further isolating workers and increasing the level of perceived control and power employers possessed.

Further compounding the above issues, each of which reflect potential violation of employment, housing and other legal rights, is the persistent enforcement gap that exists in respect of Canada's low-wage labour migration problems. A lack of proactive enforcement and inspection is another longstanding challenge and one that has been expressly and closely linked to the maltreatment of migrant workers in Canada (Marsden, Tucker and Vosko, 2021). In the context of COVID-19, ongoing enforcement gaps created acute risks for workers, placing them at heightened risk of both transmission and exposure to COVID-19 and the enduring abuses commonly noted in respect of migrant workers' experiences in Canada, such as in relation to wage theft, employer control, threats and other abuses, which were also reported and, in some cases, exacerbated during the pandemic (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020: 22-23; Caregivers Action Centre, 2020: 16-17).

A lack of proactive monitoring and inspection has been consistently raised as a concern, both before and during COVID-19. For example, no employer violations were documented amongst agricultural employers from March to June 2020, although during this period farm inspections were conducted remotely and with notice (Ansari, 2020). In addition, a report released in July 2020 found that the federal government allowed employers to submit old housing inspection reports in their application process, rather than conducting new inspections (Baum and Grant, 2020). Moreover, the Auditor General's report, discussed in the previous section, noted serious shortcomings with numerous inspection processes. The lack of enforcement — real or perceived — of the limited regulations attending the TFWP and SAWP and in response to COVID-19 has the potential to exacerbate an existing culture of noncompliance by employers, placing workers at increased health risks for the benefit of Canada's economy.

While tragic, it is perhaps unsurprising that COVID-19 outbreaks amongst migrant agricultural workers continued

throughout the 2020 season (Lale, 2020; CBC News, 2020c; Kelly, 2020; Barker, 2020; CBC News, 2020d), given the many issues documented in this and the previous section, the lack of proactive enforcement of standards and the reluctance of workers to instigate complaints processes. For example, by July 2020, more than 600 migrant agricultural workers in Southwestern Ontario had tested positive for COVID-19 and three had died (Doyle, 2020: 820). The total number of reported COVID-19 cases amongst migrant agricultural workers in Ontario rose to 1300 by the end of August 2020 (Pazzano, 2020). COVID-19 outbreaks and cases amongst migrant agricultural workers continued into the 2021 season, with Public Health Ontario documenting at least 3056 cases from April 2020 to June 2021 and five additional deaths between March and June 2021 (Vosko and Springer, 2021).

The allocation of migration status as temporary and contingent and labour status as closed creates corrosive disadvantage over workers' abilities to voice concerns, assert the rights they are entitled to and therefore achieve just conditions of work during their time in Canada. The extent of power and control employers are perceived to have by virtue of the manner in which status is allocated to migrant agricultural workers in Canada creates few or no reasonable alternatives — viable options — for workers but to submit to employer demands. This is, as discussed earlier, a hallmark of "disadvantage." Voicing concerns, asserting rights or seeking remedies are each commonly perceived by workers to place their status and continued participation in the programs in jeopardy. Thus, the regulatory features of the SAWP further constrain the quantity and quality of the goods, rights and resources (capabilities) migrant agricultural workers possess as well as their ability to convert those into valuable functionings (doings and beings) in relation to their work and time in Canada. Thus, their functioning of being a worker is deeply insecure, and the choice to exercise a capability, such as asserting their legal rights in the workplace, is perceived to place other important capabilities — such as the opportunity to continue to work in Canada — at unreasonable risk.

The allocation and intersection of statuses create corrosive disadvantage for migrant agricultural workers by unreasonably constraining their ability to navigate choice with respect to the legal rights they formally possess in a number of areas, including not only work and immigration but also health and living conditions.

As such, migrant agricultural workers in Canada are forced to take on heightened risks and then rendered exceptionally vulnerable due to the limited viable options they have to mitigate those risks, such as through voicing a complaint or seeking legal remedy to enforce the rights and standards they are entitled to. This impacts not only their ability to reside and work in Canada but the conditions of work, health, living arrangements and, thus, overall well-being. As with the previous section, this corrosive disadvantage was not produced by the COVID-19 pandemic, though it was in many ways exacerbated and rendered acutely visible by the pandemic.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic brought into renewed and sharper focus long-standing concerns and issues regarding the regulation of migrant agricultural labour in Canada. While increasing the visibility of this population and public understanding of the essential nature of their work, the pandemic also laid bare the enduring challenges that migrant workers often face and which, in many cases, were exacerbated during this period.

This article discusses how the allocation and intersection of migration and labour statuses produce a corrosive disadvantage for migrant agricultural workers, limiting both their formal entitlement and practical access to the necessary rights, goods and resources to have just conditions of work under Canada's TFWP and SAWP, as well as their ability to voice concerns, assert rights and seek remedy for violations of those rights. The consequences of this were brought into sharp relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in significant outbreaks amongst migrant agricultural workers. Yet, the documented challenges facing migrant workers in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic have also produced many renewed calls for reforms to the regulation of migrant labour, such as increased inspection and enforcement of rules, open work permits and access to permanent residency (Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020; Caregivers Action Centre, 2020). Both the features and challenges associated with the regulation of migrant agricultural in Canada are not unique, and the concerns and conclusions demonstrated in this article, as well as recommendations for reform, could apply broadly to many jurisdictions around the globe that have created similar programs (ILO, 2020b).

Reforms to end the temporary nature of migration status and

closed nature of labour status would work to significantly ameliorate the corrosive disadvantage created under current regulatory regimes. An open work permit and permanent or open-ended immigration permit would enhance migrant agricultural workers' capabilities and functionings by creating greater and more secure space in which workers could exercise choice free from the additional negative consequences they currently face. This would impact not only their ability to assert rights in the workplace, but also in respect of their living conditions and health and safety. The attention given to the plight of migrant agricultural workers in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic may represent a critical turning point and moment for reform to these programs. As this article has suggested, reforms to status are integral if these programs are to produce effective positive change for migrant agricultural workers in Canada and internationally.

Endnotes

1. Assistant Professor, Peter A Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia. I would like to thank Mila Ghorayeb and Sebastian Cooper for their assistance in preparing this article, as well as the anonymous reviewer, and Suzanne Dansereau, Editor of Labour, Capital and Society, for their helpful feedback and assistance in the publication process.
2. For a discussion of these two approaches to justice, see: Brighouse.
3. Constitution Act, 1867.
4. For example, differential regulations exist for both agricultural workers and domestic workers, though these exceptions are formally determined by occupation and not the citizenship status of the worker. See: Employment Standards Act 2000, Parts VII, VIII, IX, X, XI; O Reg 285/01 made under the Employment Standards Act 2000, sections 2(2), 4(3), 8, 9, 24-27, cited in Faraday, 2012: n232; Agricultural Employees Protection Act; Labour Relations Act, s 3(b.1); and BC's Employment Standards Regulation, sections 18, 34.1, 40.1, 40.2.
5. The Constitution Act, 1867 divides responsibility for making and enforcing laws between the federal and provincial governments in various areas (ss 91-92). For example, while the federal government is responsible for immigration, provincial governments are responsible for labour and employment laws for industries falling under their jurisdiction, which includes agriculture.
6. For example, of the three provinces that intake the largest numbers of

migrant agricultural workers – BC, Ontario, and Quebec – only BC has legislation that requires employers to register with the province (Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act).

7. Canada's quarantine orders are contained in a number of orders-in-council: Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to 2019–nCoV Acute Respiratory Disease in Canada Order; Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease in Canada Order; Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease in Canada Order (Persons Not on Government Flight); and Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 in Canada Order (Mandatory Isolation) No 4.

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TRAVAIL, capital et société 50:1&2 (2022)

Composer avec la relation famille-travail durant la pandémie de Covid-19 : domestiques familiales en région rurale au Limpopo, Afrique du Sud

Percyval Bayane

Résumé

Le travail domestique — source d'emploi majeure en Afrique du Sud — tire ses racines de l'ère coloniale et de l'apartheid, durant laquelle les femmes noires travaillaient comme domestiques pour des familles blanches. Dans L'Afrique du Sud contemporaine, par contre, le travail domestique est prévalent dans les familles noires, avec une tendance croissante au travail domestique familial, soit des parents ou amis travaillant comme domestiques pour des proches. Un défi typique du secteur du travail domestique est de composer avec les relations employeuse-employée, qui conditionnent la négociation d'autres conditions de travail. Le cadre de travail des domestiques familiales est alourdi par la pandémie et l'instauration du travail à domicile. Cet article s'appuie sur 15 entrevues semi-structurées menées auprès de femmes noires travaillant comme domestiques familiales. Les résultats suggèrent que le travail domestique familial est centré sur une sollicitude réciproque — les sœurs-domestiques (sister-maids) peuvent assurer un soutien financier à leur famille et les sœurs-patronnes (sister-madams) obtiennent de l'aide pour les travaux ménagers. La Covid-19 a toutefois eu un impact sur le travail domestique et les relations famille-travail, les sœurs-domestiques ayant des difficultés à faire leur travail en présence des sœurs-patronnes et de leurs enfants. Aussi, les sœurs-domestiques éprouvées par le travail en temps de Covid-19 adoptent le silence. La pandémie a toutefois aussi permis aux sœurs-domestiques et aux sœurs-patronnes de se rapprocher, ce qui a renforcé les relations famille-travail pour certaines.

Navigating Family–Work Relationships during Covid-19 Pandemic: Family Domestic Workers in Rural Limpopo, South Africa

Percyval Bayane [1]

Abstract

Domestic work — one of the largest sources of employment in South Africa — is rooted in the colonial and apartheid era, during which black women worked as domestic servants for white families. In contemporary South Africa, however, domestic work is prevalent in black families, and there is a growing trend towards family domestic work: family members or close friends working as domestic workers for kin. Typical challenges in the domestic work sector include the navigation of employer–employee relationships, which shape the negotiation of other working conditions. In family domestic work, the setting is worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and implementation of working from home. This paper draws from 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with black women working as family domestic workers. The findings suggest that family domestic work is centred in reciprocal caring — sister-maids are financially enabled to support families and sister-madams are assisted with domestic duties. Covid-19 has had an impact on family domestic work and family–work relationships, whereby sister-maids had difficulties working in the presence of sister-madams and their children. Hence, silence is adopted by sister-maids challenged by working during Covid-19. However, the pandemic also enabled some sister-maids and sister-madams to grow closer to each other, which strengthened family–work relationships.

Introduction and Background

Domestic work remains the largest source of employment and livelihoods for black women, and there are approximately 67 million domestic workers globally (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2011). The domestic work sector is a remnant of the colonial and apartheid era, whereby black women worked

as domestic servants for white families (Cock, 1989). In her book, Cock (1989) explains that during apartheid, domestic workers worked under exploitative conditions, including as long hours, low wages and verbal abuse, because the sector was not regulated by labour laws. However, the dismantling of apartheid resulted in formalization of the domestic work sector and regulation of domestic workers' conditions of work (Ally, 2009).

In post-apartheid South Africa, domestic work is considered as formal employment. Ally (2009) highlights the changes within the domestic work sector post-apartheid that turned servants into formal workers. The Department of Labour implemented and adopted the Labour Relations Act of 1995 to ensure that domestic workers have access to organizations such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). The CCMA enables domestic workers to report unfair treatment and unfair dismissal by their employers. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) 75 of 1997 protects domestic workers' rights as employees. Meanwhile, Sectoral Determination 7 of 2002 strengthens the BCEA through regulating domestic workers' working conditions, wages, and the contractual employment relationship between domestic workers and their employers (Mbatha, 2003: Ally, 2009). Therefore, domestic workers have access to collective bargaining and unions, such as South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU), which assists with protecting and negotiating fair working conditions such as hours of work and wages (Mbatha, 2003). For instance, domestic workers' wages are regulated through the national minimum wage, implemented to assist employers with determining domestic workers' wages (Department of Labour, 2017).

Nonetheless, scholars such as Tolla (2013) and Maqubela (2016) suggest that non-family domestic workers continue to work under exploitative conditions, such as lack of access to employee benefits and long working hours. Evidently, the domestic work sector retains the same conditions even after regulation and formalization by the Department of Labour (Magwaza, 2008). The employer–employee relationship remains a debacle and perpetuates exploitation in other working conditions. Bonnin and Dawood (2013) argue that the negotiation of employer–employee relationships is problematic in terms of space, because domestic workers perform their duties in employers' private spaces [the home]. As such, it may be difficult

for both employers and domestic workers to navigate the workplace as a space for work and for a home (for the employer). However, navigation of such relationships within family domestic work, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, remains under-studied.

In post-apartheid South Africa, domestic work is prevalent in black families, and there is a growing trend of black women working as domestic workers for their relatives or close friends (Bayane, 2021; Dilata, 2010). This raises intriguing questions of how family domestic workers navigate family–work relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic, with sister-madams[2] working from home. The Covid-19 pandemic penetrated South Africa through the first case reported in March 2020 and a State of National Disaster being declared by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases of South Africa (NICD). On 26 March 2020 the NICD implemented a national lockdown whereby businesses and companies resorted to online operations and working from home (Bayane, 2020).

Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic ultimately changed the way of working in multiple sectors, including domestic work. It is therefore significant to explore the negotiation of family–work relations within family domestic work during the Covid-19 pandemic. The primary research question of the study was: How do black women working as family domestic workers for their relatives navigate family and work relations during the Covid-19 pandemic? To answer the question, the study employed a qualitative research approach and intersectionality as a theoretical framework to contextualize the experiences of being a family domestic worker during the Covid-19 pandemic and having sister-madams working from home.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

Intersectionality is employed as a theoretical framework and lens to understand family domestic work and experiences of family domestic workers working during the Covid-19 pandemic and how family–work relations are affected by the presence of sister-madams and children at home. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality to comprehend and unpack the experiences of women of colour. Intersectionality considers women's experiences as contextual and shaped by multiple identities and factors, such as gender, class, race, geographical location and many more (Collins, 2000; Williams, 2009). Hence, in this paper intersectionality is

employed to understanding family domestic workers' working experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Collins (2000), women's experiences must be unpacked through considering the intersectional oppression influenced by multiple factors and identities. In other words, the experiences of women cannot be contextualized additively, but it is imperative to understand how social identities contribute towards such experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2006). Hence, intersectionality was a suitable framework to contextualize family domestic work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Family domestic workers' experiences of working during the Covid-19 pandemic are shaped by multiple factors, such as the nature of family–work relations prior to the pandemic, the age gap between sister-maids[3] and sister-madams, and sister-maids' relationships with the employers' children. Maqubela (2016) echoes that intersectionality is a suitable theoretical framework as it helps with understanding the root of domestic workers' perceptions and what contributes towards their experiences of being domestic workers.

Methodological Approach, Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed a qualitative research approach to understand the perceptions and experiences of family members working as domestic workers for their relatives. The qualitative approach enabled me to gain a detailed understanding of family domestic workers' experiences and negotiation of employer–employee relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic (Creswell, 2009; Sarantakos, 2005). The site of the study was Nkowankowa, which is located in Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality, in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The site was suitable because I reside in a nearby area and, through observation, noticed the existence of family domestic work, wherein family members are hired as domestic workers by their relatives. Such family domestic workers assist with domestic duties and chores while employers are absent.

Black women hired as family domestic workers in Nkowankowa were participants in the study. All participants resided in rural areas and travelled to work in their relatives' houses in Nkowankowa. A snowball sampling technique was used to gain access to a total of 15 participants — women working as family domestic workers for their relatives. Semi-structured interviews

were conducted with participants, whereby open-ended questions were used to gain in-depth insight into experiences and perceptions of working as family domestic workers during Covid-19.

Accessing and interviewing participants was difficult due to Covid-19 restrictions. Participants were first called to set up an appointment and were promised that Covid-19 rules would be preserved during interviews. Hence, in all interviews, hand sanitizer was used and masks were given to each participant, and this eased their fear of participating in the interviews. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Institution A. Before the interviews, all participants were given information letters and consent forms to sign to confirm their voluntarily participation in the study. Interviews were conducted in Xitsonga, as participants were comfortable with their home language, and each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

Thematic content analysis was used to analyze and present data in themes and subthemes (Alhojailan, 2012). I followed the suggested steps of transcribing and translating, coding and interpretation (Rosenthal, 2016). I began with transcribing interviews verbatim from Xitsonga into English, using recordings and field notes to ensure that participants' raw meanings were captured. Coding was the second step, through reading and rereading transcripts to identify recurring themes and ideas. I then used colours to differentiate themes and subthemes. Interpretation was the final step, where I read and interpreted the themes and subthemes to address the objectives of the paper.

Findings

Domestic workers are hired to help primarily with domestic duties, such as cleaning, ironing, cooking and taking care of children and the elderly, for remuneration. In South Africa, domestic work is rooted in the colonial and apartheid period, when black women worked as domestic servants for white families. However, as mentioned above, domestic work in black families is prevalent in contemporary South Africa, and there is a growing trend of relatives such as sisters and cousins working as domestic workers for their family members (Bayane, 2019; Bayane, 2021). The working conditions of domestic workers have been debated extensively, with studies focusing on both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, Cock (1989) demonstrated that domestic workers'

working conditions were exploitative during apartheid. She suggested that conditions were exploitative because the domestic work sector was not formally regulated.

The domestic work sector was formalized during the transition to post-apartheid South Africa, and the BCEA and Sectoral Determination 7 (SD7) were adopted to regulate employer–employee relations. Furthermore, working conditions such as hours of work and wages are regulated through the national minimum wage and SD7. Tolla (2013), however, illustrates that domestic workers in post-apartheid South Africa continue to work under exploitative conditions such as long hours and are frequently paid below the national minimum wage. Negotiations over working conditions within the domestic work sector, therefore, remain a challenge. This paper addresses the lack of research in family domestic work during Covid-19 and presents findings on the situation of family domestic workers during the pandemic.

Family Domestic Work Is Reciprocal Care: "We care and support each other"

> *The primary reasons for black women to work as domestic workers include lack of employment and lack of the education and skills which would allow access to other employment opportunities to meet their responsibility of providing for children (Dinkelman and Ranchhod, 2012; Gama and Willemse, 2015). Therefore, non-family related domestic workers continue to work within the domestic work sector primarily to provide for their families and children (Tolla, 2013). However, family domestic work is more than work because it entails an act of reciprocal care between family members, who are helping each other to provide for families and also assist with domestic chores in absentia. Nikiwe, a 39-year-old black woman is working as a domestic worker for an elder brother and shared the following about being a family domestic worker:*
>
> *Interviewer: Why did you choose to work as a domestic worker for a relative?*
> *Nikiwe: The real reason for me to work as a domestic*

worker for my brother and his wife is because I have been looking for a job for more than a year and could not find anything. Meanwhile, there is no one working at home and I have to provide for my children. Thereafter, my brother and his wife called me and explained that they need someone to help with domestic chores and proposed that I work for them since I was not employed anywhere. I then agreed to working and helping with household duties, while they pay me to provide for my children.

The story portrays how family domestic work is based on reciprocal care between sister-maids and sister-madams. Nikiwe explains that the primary reason for agreeing to work as a family domestic worker was to be able to support her children, but at the same time to help her brother's family with household duties. Nikiwe's narrative is echoed by other participants, such as Ntombi, a 40-year-old woman hired as a domestic worker by her sister:

Look, I decided to work as a domestic worker for my sister because I do not finish school which is required in most jobs nowadays. I was happy when my sister called me the other day and told me that she would like me to help with household duties and I will be paid. For me, this meant that I would be able to provide and support my family particularly and only help her with house work. So we care and support each other.

Nikiwe's and Ntombi's sentiments are supported by other participants' narratives, which confirmed that working as a domestic worker for relatives enabled them to support and provide for children. Reciprocal caring and helping each other are central in family domestic work, because sister-madams pay their sister-maids to help with household work, while sister-maids appreciate being family domestic workers as it brings food to the table for their families and children.

Being a Family Domestic Worker during the Covid-19 Pandemic: "Difficult to work in the presence of sister-madams and children"

The National State of Disaster in South Africa was declared on 15 March 2022, after a Covid-19 case was reported in early March 2020. This involved implementation of measures and levels of lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19. Business operations were affected with work being performed online from home. Hence, contextualizing family domestic workers' experiences and perceptions of working during the pandemic is imperative and contributes towards understanding the impact of Covid-19 on family–work relations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, sister-madams were also working in the home, which affected sister-maids' way of performing daily tasks. The findings suggest that family domestic workers found working during Covid-19 difficult. Norah, a 41-year-old woman, explains:

> *My work before Covid-19 was good, because I did my chores freely and without interference from anyone. However, the pandemic [Covid-19] came and things changed, and work became a bit difficult because I could no longer pace myself and decide on when to clean, cook or do other chores. My sister began to interfere with my work by telling me when to do what and how it should be done, which made things tense between me and her. Sometimes, we ended going for days without talking properly like before.*

Norah appreciated work prior Covid-19 because she could pace herself by deciding on when and how to perform household duties. However, working in the presence of her sister-madam affected their family–work relationship because the sister-madam interfered with her way of performing work. An example is given on how the sister-madam would tell Norah when to clean and cook, which is opposite to her experiences prior to the pandemic. As a result, Norah and her sister-madam would sometimes not talk to each other due the tension resulting from her sister-madam working from home. Such sentiments are echoed by Noma, a 40-year-old woman working as a domestic worker for her sister:

> *I enjoyed work before the Covid-19 pandemic and*

lockdown, because I worked in an empty house — with children at school and my sister at work. In that way, I worked freely and completed household duties at any time. But things are now difficult with my sister and children being at home. I am always fighting with my sister and the children because they are disturbing me from cleaning and doing other chores properly. For instance, the other day, I fought with my sister as I told children to play outside but as their mother, she told them to stay in the house. This ultimately affected our relationship as I felt undermined.

Norah's and Nomsa's narratives illustrate how the Covid-19 pandemic had a strain on the family–work relationships of sister-maids and sister-madams. Both sister-maids and sister-madams had good relationships with minimal conflicts prior to the pandemic. However, working during the pandemic changed their family–work relations as it featured arguments/conflicts between sister-maids and sister-madams. This is further echoed by Samantha, a 42-year-old woman working as a domestic worker for her brother:

Since the whole family (brother, his wife and children) began to be at home full-time, things took a wrong turn because my sister-in-law forced herself into everything I do in the house. She told me how I need to firstly clean the bathroom before the other rooms and kitchen. This made me uncomfortable and angry because I felt like a little child who does not know her job and what needs to be done. As a result, we always clashed with everything and fought almost every day.

Samantha's story echoes points articulated in Nomsa's and Norah's narratives. What is noticeable is that conflicts within family domestic work were exacerbated by the new setting [sister-madams working from home] brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. This resulted in power debacle; on the one hand, sister-maids felt threatened by their sister-madams giving instructions on how duties should be performed in the home. On the other hand, sister-madams seem to have felt compelled to reclaim their position as the employer, instead of being a relative, towards family domestic workers.

However, other factors such as the age gap between sister-maids and sister-madams, seem to have contributed towards the increased conflicts/arguments. Nyiko, a 41-year-old woman working for her younger sister, shared:

> *My younger sister and I almost fought the other day because she was yelling at me like a child, and I told her to let me do my work as I know, which she did not take well and told other relatives. Thereafter, we only managed to solve the problem through a family meeting with other relatives present.*

Evidently, the Covid-19 pandemic affected sister-maids' and sister-madams' family–work relationships, with sister-maids being forced to change their way of performing work because of the presence and involvement of sister-madams and children. Henceforth, conflicts/arguments between sister-maids and sister-madams are noted during the pandemic, while they were not visible prior to Covid restrictions. Moreover, conflicts within family domestic work were perpetuated by factors such as age because sister-maids working for younger siblings felt disrespected and belittled when told how to perform their jobs.

Domestic workers' common challenges in the workplace include being ill-treated and verbally abused by employers. Although family domestic workers had positive experiences of working closely with their sister-madams during Covid-19, some of them experienced conflicts related to sister-madams' and children's interference with their daily work. Such family domestic workers resorted to silence and patience as a way to deal with workplace predicaments to avoid being dismissed. Silence is the strategy family domestic workers employed in dealing with the difficulty of having their sister-madams and children interfering with their daily work. Joyce, a 43 year old woman hired by her sister, narrates how she keeps quiet whenever her sister-madam (relative) becomes too involved in work:

> *Ever since my sister started working from home, things drastically changed as her and the children disturbed me whenever I was working. For instance, I would sometimes get indirect questions and comments from my sister on*

how I clean, and in such instances, I keep quiet to avoid fights, especially in front of the children.

Joyce illustrates how working during Covid-19 was challenging in terms of the sister-madam and children interfering with her work. She therefore resorted to keeping quiet to avoid conflicts. Thus, silence was adopted as a strategy to maintain peace and preserve family–work relations between her and her sister-madam. Likewise, Nkateko, a 45 year old woman working as a domestic worker for her brother, shares how silence is employed to avoid being dismissed from work:

Covid-19 made things worse for me, as my brother's family [wife and children] were always at home and I could not do my work properly. But even though as I was told how to clean, iron and do other things, I decided to keep quiet because of not wanting to lose my job — which helped me to provide for my family.

Nkateko's and Joyce's narratives demonstrate that family domestic workers survived working during Covid-19 through being silent whenever challenges arose. In her story, Nkateko highlights how the pandemic made things worse through her sister-madam and children giving her tough time. However, she kept quiet to protect her job, which assists in providing for her family.

Covid-19 Pandemic Also Strengthened Family–Work Relationships: "We became very close"

The Covid-19 pandemic also brought positive experiences to family domestic workers, which included sister-maids and sister-madams becoming closer and caring for each other. Some of the factors which contributed towards the positive experiences involved sister-maids working for their younger siblings and having a good relationship with their sister-madams prior the pandemic. Grace, a 37-year-old woman working for a younger brother, shares her positive experience of working during Covid-19:

I was sceptical at first when my younger brother and his wife began working from home, and thought that things would be difficult in terms of being told how to do my

job. However, the opposite occurred as both my younger brother and his wife were very nice towards me, and we used every opportunity to spend more time together and advise each other about family matters and personal problems. I enjoy my work even more now.

Grace's narrative illustrates how working during the Covid-19 pandemic has borne positive fruits for her and her brother and his wife, because they became very close. This is demonstrated by Grace and her brother and sister-in-law spend time talking and advising each other on family and personal matters.

This experience is echoed by Jeaneth, a 38-year-old woman working for her younger sister:

My younger sister and I became very close during the Covid-19 because she was working from home. So we spent time talking about general things such as life, children and even work, whereby she would ask me how I find working for her and if ever there are any challenges. This practice helped us in knowing how to treat each other as employer and employee but most importantly as siblings.

Jeaneth's story supports how being a family domestic worker during the Covid-19 pandemic also resulted in sister-maids and sister-madams caring for and loving each other even more. However, the age difference between sister-maids and sister-madams also contributed towards the positive experience, because Grace and Jeaneth are working for younger siblings, who they can relate to about life and other things, unlike other participants. Moreover, sister-maids explain how they had a close family–work relations with their sister-madams [younger siblings] prior to the pandemic, and this contributed to the positive work experience. Although Covid-19 increased conflicts, sister-maids and sister-madams became very close as family members/siblings than employers–employees, as demonstrated in Jeaneth's story.

Discussion: "Being a Family Domestic Worker during the Covid-19 Pandemic"

In South Africa, domestic work is one of the largest sources

of employment, with approximately one million black women working as domestic workers (Bayane, 2021). Notably, domestic work in post-apartheid South Africa is not restricted to black women working for white families (Cock, 1989), but now includes black women working for family members as domestic workers (Bayane, 2021; Dilata, 2010). This raises questions of how work and family relations are negotiated within family domestic work (Bayane, 2021). Given the high rate of unemployment in South Africa, the lack of skills and education, and the responsibility of providing for families, women primarily resort to working as domestic workers (Phillips, 2011; Zungu, 2009; Bayane, 2019). However, we suggest that reciprocal caring and helping each other are central within family domestic work. Family domestic workers see working for their kin as a way of caring for and supporting each other, as sister-madams are assisted with domestic duties in their absence. Meanwhile, family domestic workers are enabled through wages received to financially support their families and children.

Caring within black families is rooted in the apartheid era, where family members such as aunts and uncles were exposed to the pressure of looking after children while their parents migrated to work in the city (Bozalek, 1999). Mosoetsa (2011) concurs that helping and supporting each other is normal in black families, especially during tough times, such as periods of unemployment. Likewise, family domestic work consists of relatives supporting and helping each other for survival. Thus, although family domestic work is a wage labour, it consists of humane and caring principles, unlike in non-related domestic worker and employer settings.

Since the transition to the post-apartheid era, the employee–employer relations within the domestic work sector became regulated through contractual agreements and in other formal ways (Ally, 2009; Bayane, 2019). However, negotiating formal and informal relations remains a challenge due to the dynamics of space and power (Magwaza, 2008; Tolla, 2013). Bonnin and Dawood (2013) assert that because the domestic worker's workplace is the employer's private home and space, balancing formal and informal relationships in non-related domestic work is challenging. Equally, navigation of family–work relationships in family domestic work, particularly during Covid-19 pandemic, became challenging for some sister-maids due to power and space dynamics. This paper suggests that sister-madams working from home demonstrated

power through being too involved in family domestic workers' daily work. As such, family domestic workers, especially ones who were older than their sister-madams, felt belittled and disrespected by the interference and disturbance of both the sister-madams and children at home: "I felt like a child, and told her to let me do my work as I know." The presence of sister-madams and children at home compromised family–work relationships as conflicts and fights arose between relatives: "We are always fighting."

Nonetheless, family domestic workers navigated the challenges of working during Covid-19 by being silent to in order to avoid risking their jobs and to maintain family–work relations. This paper illustrates how family domestic workers resorted to keeping quiet to preserve peace between themselves and sister-madams (relatives). Tolla (2013) concurs that silence is the prevalent strategy of navigating and surviving working as a domestic worker, even in non-related domestic work settings. Nevertheless, for others, the family–work relationship in family domestic work was positively affected by Covid-19. Family domestic workers commended having sister-madams working from home as it enabled a very close relationship: "[We] spend more time together and advise each other on family matters and personal problems." Such experience, however, was primarily influenced by the age gap between family domestic workers and employers. Our findings illustrate that family domestic workers working for younger employers could relate to one another and even advised each other about personal and family matters. Thus, working during the pandemic resulted in sister-maids and sister-madams becoming closer as family members/siblings, but conflicts were noted in some narratives.

This paper therefore indicates how being a family domestic worker during the Covid-19 pandemic, on the one hand, threatened family–work relations for family domestic workers whose relatives (employers) stripped them of their power to decide when and how household duties were performed. Having sister-madams (employers) working from home led to power and space debacles, as demonstrated through family/work conflicts between sister-maids and sister-madams. On the other hand, the pandemic also enabled family–work relationships because both sister-maids and sister-madams were able to spend time together and support and show care for each other.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper asserts that family domestic work is a waged labour based on reciprocal care and support between relatives as sister-maids help with domestic responsibilities, with sister-madams financially enabling family domestic workers to support their families and children. However, the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the way the sister-maids and sister-madams navigated the family–work relationship. On the one hand, being a family domestic worker during Covid-19 was difficult as employers interfered with work by giving instructions about how to complete daily tasks. As such, during the pandemic, older family domestic workers felt disrespected by employers' and children's involvement in their working routine, resulting in conflicts/arguments. Such family domestic workers resorted to silence to keep the peace as family members and protect their jobs as workers. On the other hand, sister-maids working for younger sister-madams commended working during the pandemic because it strengthened their family–work relationships. Sister-maids were able to engage their sister-madams in personal and familial matters. Thus, the intersectionality of power, space and age gap between sister-maids and sister-madams influenced the experiences of family domestic workers and the way the family–work relationship was navigated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study does not generalize about family domestic work and navigation of family–work relationship during Covid-19, but contributes to research focusing on balancing family–work relations during the pandemic. Future researchers may also conduct a comparison study of how family–work relations during the Covid-19 pandemic is navigated within non-related domestic work setting, as this study was limited to family domestic work, which consists of family members working as domestic workers for their relatives. Moreover, studies can further investigate strategies adopted in non-related domestic work relationship to survive working during Covid-19 pandemic.

Endnotes

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2. Sister-madams refers to family members who hired their relatives as family domestic workers. The term madams is borrowed from Cock's (1989) work and used during the colonial and apartheid eras to refer

to employers of domestic workers, but significantly highlighting the dominance and unequal relationship between white employers and black domestic workers.

3. Sister-maids refers to family members working as domestic workers for their relatives. Maids is traced back to rkCock's (1989) work whereby during colonial and apartheid era, white employers referred black domestic workers as servants.

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Ils ont écrit leur propre histoire: La contestation des fermiers indiens en 2020-2021

Navsharan Singh

Résumé

Pendant 16 mois, d'août 2020 à décembre 2021, des milliers de fermiers et d'ouvriers agricoles indiens ont fait la grève. Cette action était leur réponse aux lois néolibérales radicales votées par le gouvernement, qui allaient appauvrir encore plus les agriculteurs en difficultés depuis des années, comme en fait foi de façon continue le nombre effarant de suicides chez les fermiers. Les nouvelles lois allaient éliminer les mécanismes de protection et ouvrir l'agriculture indienne aux forces de marché mondiales. Éventuellement, face à la détermination et à la mobilisation tenace des agriculteurs, le gouvernement a dû reculer. Cet article d'une chercheure-militante participante offre une description détaillée de cette grève qui a duré plus d'un an, et démontre comment son organisation a rassemblé divers secteurs, et a inclus la participation intégrale des femmes. Il fournit une analyse intersectionnelle ainsi qu'une analyse des considérations politiques évidentes de bout en bout. Il situe la grève dans le contexte général de l'économie politique d'une crise, et d'une résistance, agraires, assurant ainsi à cette grève mémorable sa place dans l'histoire et en tirant une précieuse leçon pour notre époque.

They Were Making Their Own History: The Indian Farmers Protest 2020-21

Navsharan Singh[1]

Abstract

For 16 months from August 2020 to December 2021, thousands of Indian farmers and farm workers went on strike. Their strike was a response to sweeping neoliberal legislation passed by government that would further impoverish farmers who have been struggling for years, as demonstrated by the huge number of on-going farmer suicides. The new laws would remove protections and open up Indian agriculture to global market forces. Eventually, due to the farmers' resolve and their militant organizing the government was forced to back down. This article, by a scholar-activist and participant, provides a detailed description of the strike, that lasted over a year and demonstrates its manner of organising that brought together various sectors, and featured the integral participation of women. It provides an intersectional analysis and analysis of the politics evident right through. It situates the strike within the overall context of the political economy of agrarian crisis and resistance, thereby putting this historic strike on record and providing us with a valuable lesson for our times.

Introduction

"The farmers not only know how to farm, but they also know how to protect their fields," spoke out a farm leader from Punjab at the protest site on the outskirts of Delhi, where thousands of protesting farmers were camping. Led by the farmers' unions, with the Punjab unions at the forefront, a convoy of tractor trolleys and trucks—thousands of them, extending for several miles— had made its way into the capital city of Delhi on November 26, 2020. Eventually they set up camp and remained until December 2021.

The immediate reason for the farmers' action was a slew of neoliberal laws that were passed by the Government of India which would further impoverish them and make them much more vulnerable to market forces. Smallholder farmers have been moving

between their small holdings in the villages to urban areas where they do poorly paid jobs in manufacturing or service provision. This also means they may be involved in urban markets or other informal activity without social protection. Their small holdings in the villages are their security. With such a situation, this is one of the reasons small farmers opposed these new laws and participated in protests. This is significant not only for India but for many so-called developing countries -- small inadequate holdings, poor prices for their products if they are able to market them beyond their subsistence, extremely low wages either from rural or urban employment. This generates worker/farmers who are unable to be solely one or the other. They are vulnerable to every changing economic wind and are seen as a huge hindrance to 'development'. Government and corporate austerity programmes exploit this situation.

On 26 November, 2020, prevented by police barricades from entering India's capital, Delhi, the farmers decided to camp right where they were stopped. Soon they set up mini townships at four different entry points to the capital, naming them after well-known heroes of independence and land reform movements against British rule. They put up signage indicating the villages they came from and built little homes in the trolleys.[2] Within days they opened libraries and reading rooms, several health clinics, installed laundromats, hot water heaters, mini workshops for repair of tractors, phone battery charging stalls, and a large number of community kitchens. Fresh vegetables and tankers of milk came from the farmers of the neighbouring state of Haryana every day. There was plenty of food for everyone at the community kitchens. "We are here to stay, we will leave only when the government repeals these draconian laws," they said.

They had come waving their union flags, equipped with food, stoves, utensils, blankets, and other essentials to last them for months. These were overwhelmingly small and marginal farmers. In India roughly 85 percent of the farm holdings are small and marginal, that is, less than 2 hectares of land, with 70 percent less than 1 hectare and average landholding is only 0.5 hectares per household. (Kumar, *et al* 2020). "We will fight over and over again and generation upon generation, but we will not let our land go", a slogan at the camp site read. The government introduced three farm bills in Parliament in September 2020: the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill,

2020, the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020. Together, these bills proposed to relax restrictions on purchase and sale of farm produce, on government acquiring and maintaining stocks of essential food supplies under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (for public distribution purposes when needed) and outlined a framework on contract farming. The Bills were introduced on September 14, were passed in the Lok Sabha (lower chamber of the national parliament) on September 17, and in Rajya Sabha (upper chamber of the national parliament) on September 20, received the President's assent on September 24 and were announced in the parliamentary *Gazette* on September 27, 2020. In a matter of less than two weeks, completely suspending any democratic process and consultation, the Farm Bills were allowed to effect a fundamental transformation in the existing regulatory framework in agriculture in favour of big business. The farmers feared that the laws would make smallholder farming unsustainable and force small and marginal farmers to give up their land and become casual or contract labourers in the cities. They were determined to fight this out.

The farmers remained steadfast and stayed for 13 months in the camps they had set up. And then, on November 29, 2021, the three laws were repealed and regarding their other pending demands, the government promised the farmers to set up joint committees to help find satisfactory solutions. It was only then that the farm unions decided to adjourn the protest and return to their villages. It was a historic victory for the farmers and a significant defeat of the unfettered neo-liberal agenda which is being pushed in the agriculture sector, fundamentally changing how farming is organised. But this victory came at a heavy human cost. Over 700 women and men died during the year-long, peaceful sit-in at the borders. (Human Cost of Farmers, 2022). Their lives had been shortened by neglect and harsh living conditions, made harsher due to state apathy contributing to farmers' vulnerability and emotional harm. Men and women died of stress, dehydration, by suicide and were run over by speeding vehicles. They were living on the roads, away from close family, and the support systems and reserves were fewer. Prolonged exposure to heavy rains, scorching heat waves and severe cold had a fatal impact on their bodies. The potential markers of neglect on the over 700 bodies remain undocumented,

but they are etched on the minds of the families who laid their loved ones to rest.

There is no expectation that the government will pursue the cases of these deaths with compassion and care, no expectation either that the costs paid by the farmers in this struggle will be officially acknowledged and reparations offered to the families. The state remains indifferent, "we have no knowledge of any deaths", was the official response, even as questions were asked in parliament about the deaths. (Shekhar, 2021). Over 700 dead in a movement which remained peaceful throughout the thirteen-month period is a colossal tragedy. It speaks of the violence peoples' movements are encountering in India presently.

The average age of the women and men who lost their lives is 57 years. Most of them were small and marginal farmers who belonged to the lowest rung in the farming community and have left behind destitute families, many of whom have heavy farm debts to repay. This is the conclusion from a rapid survey by a team of academics from Punjabi University, Patiala. (Gupta, 7 November 2021).

This article is about the protest that lasted for over a year, in the overall context of the political economy of agrarian crisis and resistance. There are many aspects to this movement. The farmers came to seek the roll back of the three farm laws but the backdrop of this protest were deep structural problems plaguing the agrarian sector, including the role ascribed to agriculture in India's economic growth strategy. The three farm laws were overlain on an acute agrarian crisis which had grown into a festering wound on the body politic of rural India. The Covid pandemic experience added to the crisis. Over ten million migrant labourers, according to government's own admission, had to return to their villages between March and June 2020 on foot[3] unable to feed themselves in the cities.[4] Many died of dehydration, exhaustion and hunger while walking back to their rural home. Several pregnant women gave birth to babies on the roadsides while walking back home. The memories of this horror were fresh in farmers' minds. The cities did not offer them sustenance. The farmers protest therefore responded to an existential crisis -- they called it the struggle for their identity, their existence -- playing havoc in the everyday lives of the rural communities collectively and differentially along class, caste and gender axes. There were a million reasons to fight and

as the protest became protracted, multiple agrarian protests became palpable, unfolding simultaneously at the borders. The small, marginal and landless farmers, farm labourers, women, youth and Dalits[5] and their resolve, borne out of daily experience of indignity, neglect and exploitation, laid bare the political economy of agrarian crisis from complex, gendered locations. The heterogeneity of their experiences decentred prioritization of one social section over others and pushed the movement in the direction of a strategy that was forced to synthesize different interests, even those which were previously perceived as conflicting.

Vulnerability and precariousness underscore the lives and livelihoods of farmers and farm workers. Most of the farmers are smallholders and many move between the villages and urban areas to augment their livelihoods. In urban areas they may do poorly paid jobs in manufacturing or service provision or in informal activity. Stability and security were key issues in the strike and why farmers opposed these new laws, went on strike and participated in protests in earlier years. These experiences of the farm sector are not unique to India. Many other countries have farmers with small inadequate plots and poor prices for products if they are able to market them beyond their subsistence. And wages that may be earned are extremely low. Government and austerity programmes just exploit the situation. Farmers, farm workers, members of farming families and farm worker families, all struggling to survive and then when faced with the further decimation and precarity that these farm laws augured made them come out in this historic strike. So you have worker/farmers unable to be solely one or the other.

This article is about the multiple protests and the emerging new alliances of the oppressed. It starts with the background to the existing agrarian crisis, explains how the government pushed through the farm law legislation and explains the challenge the strikers presented to corporate India. It then goes on to elaborate how the farmers' organizing strategies were crucial to the success of the strike and moves on to the victory within the victory, the manner and conditions of women's participation informed by a keen awareness of patriarchy.

Deep agrarian crisis

This farm protest was the longest lasting and most significant peasant mobilization in postcolonial India, and as it

unfolded it revealed the deep agrarian crisis which had lain buried under the myth of the "green revolution" in India. The story of the green revolution of the late 1960s, which involved the development of high-yielding varieties of cereal grains based on hybridized seeds, synthetic fertilizers, and pesticides; expansion of irrigation infrastructure; and modernization of management techniques, is now well known. Punjab became the first place in India to adopt this green revolution package, which doubled, tripled, and quadrupled the yields of wheat and rice in the 1960s and 1970s. A government-backed system of assured prices — the Minimum Support Price (MSP) — incentivized and encouraged farmers to grow only these crops.[6]

The abundant production in Punjab and in the neighbouring state of Haryana helped India attain food self-sufficiency and address hunger and malnutrition through the Public Distribution System of food (PDS) program — a government-run program of food distribution to poor households throughout the country through a network of fair price shops.[7] But by the mid-1970s, the high costs of imported fertilizers, pesticides, and hybrid seeds controlled by large private corporations began to grow on the body politic of Punjab. The gulf between rich and poor farmers grew demonstrably wider, together with an ecological crisis in the form of a declining water table and large tracts of arable land becoming saline. In addition, a large-scale increase in terminal illnesses linked to the massive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides became palpable as small and marginal farmers struggled to maintain their livelihoods.

By the 1980s, the gains of the green revolution had petered out further, and by the early 1990s, Punjab was plunged into a series of serious crises. The small farmers who had thus far managed a precarious balance between high input costs and the price of their produce came under a heavy debt burden as food prices began to fall in the global food market and input prices soared. The tractors, tube wells, seeds, and fertilizers all bought on credit — on the policy advice of the international financial institutions and the agriculture universities —became millstones around farmers' necks and plunged them into deep indebtedness and stagnating incomes.

Confronted with stagnating incomes, mounting debts and the inability to repay their loans, led to a large number of farmers and agricultural labourers committing suicide. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics, between 2000 and 2015,

over 300,000 farmers and labourers committed suicide linked to farm distress in India and over 16,600 farmers and rural labourers took their own lives in Punjab. (Singh and Kingra, 2021). The government stopped publishing the suicide data after this period, but farm leaders at the protest kept repeating that these figures had reached alarming proportions in more recent years. By 2018-19, in India as a whole, households operating and managing farms of less than one hectare reported earning less than their monthly household expenditure and 60 percent of all farm households had substantial debt. This despite the fact that farm households do not sustain themselves on agriculture alone but receive about 40 percent of their income from working on other farms or in non-farm occupations.[8]

The farm Laws: A Covid-19 victory

Agricultural sector reforms have been on the central government agenda for several decades following the reforms initiated during the 1990s when the country undertook a structural adjustment program (SAP) under the IMF and World Bank.[9] The policy experts continued to stress the need to shift people out of agricultural work in order to provide cheap labour to urban manufacturing and to service sectors. The Approach Paper to India's 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) categorically mentioned the need to shift the approximately 10 million agricultural workers into non-agricultural activities in urban manufacturing and services. (Government of India, Planning Commission, 2006; Chand, 2017). But these recommendations were ill conceived and failed to attract a large-scale shift. The manufacturing and services sectors neither created sufficient employment nor a real wage needed to sustain the working class in the cities, requiring that they maintain their dependence on the villages.[10] The farmers understood that if pushed out, they would be reduced to a perennial casual labour force on slave wages in unwelcoming cities. As the employment crisis deepened the farmers further pushed against attempts to shift them out of agriculture work and demanded policy attention to make small farms sustainable with loan waivers, subsidies, higher support prices, and expand support prices to more crops and guarantee of procurement.[11]

However, in 2020, cynically using the Covid-19 pandemic, the government pushed the agriculture reform laws through. They also pushed through other pieces of legislation that they had been

unable to do earlier that negatively impacted labour and social security. The Code on Industrial Relations, 2020 changed the laws relating to trade unions, essentially minimizing the State's regulatory role. The Occupational Safety and Working Conditions Code dilutes the duties of the employer in specifying safety standards and sublets regulatory responsibilities to third parties. The Code on Social Security shifts the onus of financing of social security schemes to a mix of private and public resources, were adopted without allowing much discussion in the Parliament. (Sood, 2020). In parallel, the disturbing suppression of basic rights and freedoms through the use of the preventive detention laws and special legislations was further entrenched during the Covid pandemic. (Aftab, 2021; Alametsä, 2022).

The farmers had long recognized that these three farm laws taken together were a death warrant for the small and marginal farmers and were designed to push them out of farming and thus facilitating the ability of large corporate players to take over control of land and farming. Prior to approval of the three laws, three ordinances[12] were introduced by the government on June 5, 2020, with the same provisions which later became laws. These ordinances were aimed at collectively seeking to facilitate barrier-free trade of farmers' produce outside the markets notified under the various state laws; define a framework for contract farming; and impose stock limits on agricultural produce only if there is a sharp increase in retail prices.

The farmers' unions were quick to convene village-level meetings with farmers to discuss the implications for various sections of the farming community. The government claimed that these laws would free farmers from the clutches of the commission agents, allowing them to sell their crops outside state-regulated areas, or *mandis*[13], in states where they previously were not allowed to do so and allow them to benefit from efficiency along the supply chain. All farmers — big and small — currently have the right to sell their products, mainly wheat and rice, to the government for a guaranteed minimum support price.

The large corporate houses aligned with global agribusiness corporations are already diversifying into procuring, transporting, storing, processing and food distribution. The new farm laws would have pitted the farmers against agribusiness firms which would enter the market with control over market information and the

advantages of scale. The farmers recognized that this would make the *mandi* system defunct and lead to an end to the guaranteed (MSP) -- without which the debt-ridden small holders were unable to continue -- forcing them to sell their land and become wage labourers. They also feared that with government withdrawing support to the farm sector, slowly the subsidies for inputs, extension services, and procurement assurances which provided a semblance of stability to agricultural production would also be withdrawn.

When the three laws were passed in September 2020 without consultating farmers and little discussion in Parliament, the farmers' unions issued a call to fight collectively and created a joint platform. Collectively and in their respective union platforms, they held large numbers of state-wide protest marches, rallies, and meetings to discuss the new laws and mobilized farmers against them. Protests also started in many other states, notably Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Telangana, and hundreds of small and big farm unions all over India also joined the protest. On the initiative of Punjab unions, Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) -- United Front of Farmers -- was formed in November 2020.[14] The SKM gave a call for a protest march to Delhi on November 25-26, 2020.

Putting the corporates on notice

The farmers' movement mounted a challenge to the official policy of facilitating market subjugation of farming communities and their forced eviction from their lands. Even prior to the strike, the farmers had been voicing resistance to policies that would subject them to the market. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA)[15] government headed by Narendra Modi has been aspiring to re-position India in the world economic order. In order to attract foreign investment and showcase the country as a credible alternative for capital in search of new avenues to invest, it has been trying to create vibrant land sale markets. Right after coming to power in 2014, the NDA government tried to dilute the provisions in Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Re-Settlement Act 2013, reducing the powers of farmers and making land acquisition easier for private corporate projects. However, due to stringent opposition from the farmers and the opposition parties, the proposed amendments had to be rolled back. But removing protections for smallholders and enabling

greater liquidity of land remained a state priority.[16]

As the protests began, farmers focussed on the nexus between the Indian state and the corporate giants. The Adani group and the Reliance groups, making an entry into the agriculture sector, became the centre of farmers' opposition.

The Adani group is expanding infrastructure to store, transport, and market agricultural produce, along with multinationals, such as Singapore-based Wilmar.[17] Adani Agri Logistics has built and operated grain silos for the central government's Food Corporation of India (FCI) in an ongoing public–private partnership. The latter activity has accelerated since 2017, with new private railway lines, automated grain-processing plants and other infrastructure built around these outsourced FCI silos in Punjab and Haryana as part of a wider process of capturing logistical chains. (Singh Bal, 2021). The state has facilitated the creation of a private security force by the Adani Group to protect its infrastructure of private railway lines, silos and grain-processing plants. Nearly 900 Adani-controlled silos have been set up all over India to facilitate grain storage and interstate as well as international food trade. (360 One World Many Voices).

Reliance Industries (RIL) is entering the agritech business through a combination of online technology and collaborations in farm equipment innovations as part of its move to expand its "farm-to-fork" model (Das Gupta, 2020).

The protesting farmers were rightly alarmed by the scale of the ambitions of these two big corporate houses.[18] Both Adani and Ambani (of Reliance group)[19] hail from the western Indian state of Gujarat, which is also Modi's home state, and they have ties to him going back to his time as Chief Minister of that state from 2001 until he became Prime Minister of India in 2014. Their links with the power centre are a public secret, and these two groups have become symbols of crony capitalism.[20] During the protest, farmers protested against Ambani and Adani which they saw as representing corporate greed which they were committed to resist. Scores of Reliance gas stations, shopping malls, warehouses and toll plazas (on national highways) were picketed by the protesting farmers. Many toll plazas, some of them set up by Reliance group investors, were made toll free throughout the protest period. The biggest farmer picket line was mounted outside the Adani dry port in Kila Raipur, Punjab. It continued for the entire period of the protest and forced Adani

Logistics Services to shut its inland container depot. (Sharma, 2021). The state-corporate nexus and the unrestrained neo-liberal agenda being pushed in the agriculture sector was perceived as an invasion of their fields, which the farmers determinedly fought against.

When hundreds of thousands of farmers occupied the roads and the toll plazas, the government was forced to negotiate with them. Nine rounds of talks were held with farm leaders between December 2020 and January 22, 2021. The farm leaders described the nine Rounds as extremely condescending where the officials' focus was not on listening but on convincing the farmers of the advantages of the new laws, claiming that the reforms were meant to bring prosperity to farmers, free them from the clutches of the middlemen, and more than double farmer incomes. The farmers rejected these arguments. They remained firm that they will accept only a total rollback, and that they will not engage in clause-by-clause amendments. Punjab farmers had the previous Pepsico contract farming experience to convince them that contract farming benefits were not for the small and marginal farmer which form the majority of farmers. (Jain, 2020). As a result the talks made no headway, and the government stopped all negotiations after the January 26 2021[21] tractor parade by farmers, when the government accused them of insulting the nation on Republic Day. (Gupta 18 September 2021; Sharma 2021).

The farmers also knew that for the overwhelming majority of small and marginal farmers who were the backbone of the farmers resistance, the option of transporting farm produce to lucrative markets was not an option. They did not have the means to do so and they would always be forced to sell their crops near their villages to whomever was ready to buy at whatever price. Farmers cited the Bihar experience where Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) system was abolished for farmers in 2006, to argue that when it came to open market operations, all odds were stacked against marginal and small farmers who were then reduced to migrant agriculture labour in Punjabi farmers' farms. (Himanshu, 2020). Interestingly, the same Punjabi farming community which did not always have great affection for the migrant Bihari farm labour, the *bhaiyyas*, started seeing an affinity with them: "they were the farmers of Bihar who have been reduced to farm labour in this reform process", Punjabi farmers were heard saying.

A secular movement

Even while negotiating with the farmers, the government kept up efforts to polarize and break the protest by dubbing it "politically motivated", "infiltrated by Khalistan separatists" and "led by Naxals".[22] But the attempts to polarise did not succeed. The farmers movement remained united, peaceful and secular. Even though the display of Sikh markers of identity, the *langar* (community kitchen), the salutations, and the invocation of Sikh history of struggles from some platforms continued to inspire the farmers' *morcha,*[23] the identity discovered in the movement remained that of farmers and not particular to Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims. The movement never lost sight of its core fight against the neo-liberal state's pro-corporate farm laws designed to facilitate the entry into agriculture of capital in search of new places to invest, and to hasten the process of dispossession of small farmers from their land. The twin attack on the state and the corporations remained the core element of the movement. Early on the farmers learned that an effective resistance movement can only emerge by overcoming religious, caste, territorial, and other divisions, and building alliances with other dispossessed people. Accordingly, the farmers' charter of demands y included demands of the peasantry, but also linked with the interests of urban and other rural poor. All farm unions demanded the unconditional repeal of the three farm laws and the Electricity Amendment Bill-2020. But unions were also seeking the universal implementation of the Public Distribution System (PDS) throughout the country, connecting their struggle to food security for the poor. They pointed out that once food grain becomes a commodity to be traded only under market conditions, the already crumbling PDS system will collapse, making the urban and rural poor food insecure.

Building alliance

The clear articulation by farmers of shared interests with different sections of the working people, created conditions for building alliances with impoverished urban and rural populations whose employment and food security were also threatened by the new laws. In the last few years, India's right wing regime had disenfranchised the poor and the marginalized, section by section, community by community, forcing them to fight their own battles for justice in silos. The farmers' protest staged over the year, made

it possible to identify links between the farmers' demands and the interests of the rural and urban landless and working poor. On the farmers' platforms there was a realization that the only effective resistance to these assaults on rights is through building solidarity and exerting moral pressure.

The unions' protest stages featured not only speeches by union leaders, but also performances of music, drama, poetry, and folk singing, most of the day and into the evenings, highlighting agrarian crisis, rural indebtedness, apathy of the government officials, conditions of public schools and hospitals, and women's oppression. The stage provided space to farmers ranging from the apple growers of Himachal Pradesh whose fate hung precariously on Adani Agri Fresh's price setting (Gupta, 2 September 2021) to the poor farmer-labourers of Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh state (UP), whose standing crops were ruined by stray cattle let loose on them by the arbitrary policy of UP's Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act, (Nagavarapu, 2019) to the landless Dalits of Punjab whose rights over village commons were usurped by the powerful. All these sections came to the protest stage to talk about their experience of being bled by corporate greed, of livelihoods destroyed, and lives made miserable through communal agendas of the right-wing majoritarian regime. Also participating were anganwadi[24] workers, contractual employees, para teachers, employees of Public Sector Units which are being privatised, MNREGA[25] workers' and so on. These were working class people who were not pressure groups in themselves, not strongly unionised, and had little bargaining power.

Gradually, these platforms turned into a school, a university of people resisting, providing the intellectual tools for understanding the diverse oppressions which the dispossessed endured as Dalits, small and marginal farmers, contractual employees and as women. The unions used these platforms to build consciousness and unity. The political resistance developed from this understanding.

The farmers' unions marked special days at the *morcha* to build solidarity and community support. They celebrated the birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas, a fifteenth-century poet who is revered by Dalits. They marked May Day in solidarity with workers, and birth and death anniversaries of Muslim freedom fighters in defiance of the regime's attempts at increasing religious polarization. The largest Punjab farmers' union BKU (Ekta-Ugrahan)[26] which had

a separate protest stage at the west side of the Tikri border called Bibi Gulab Kaur, named after the legendary Ghadar[27] party woman activist, marked International Human Rights Day on December 10, 2020. The protesting farmers demanded the release of incarcerated intellectuals and human rights activists facing state repression and booked under the draconian preventive detention laws, such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for exposing the communal and pro-corporate agendas of the government through their writings, art and speech. Despite a backlash from sections of the media, farmers' leaders defended this act of solidarity with eloquence and candour.[28]

Several public intellectuals and human rights defenders who are incarcerated in association with the Bhima Koregaon conspiracy case[29] in Mumbai's Taloja prison, reciprocated farmers' solidarity by observing a day long hunger strike in support of the protesting farmers. (News18, Decemer 20). A year later, on December 10, 2021, on their final day at the protest camp site, as the farmers prepared to leave following the repeal of the three farm laws, the Bibi Gulab Kaur stage folded by marking Human Rights Day for the second time. The farmers were joined by the family members of some of the arrested intellectuals and the farm leaders emphasised the unity of farmers, writers, intellectuals and human rights defenders in building a secular struggle for the rights of the oppressed and against the regime's communal fascist onslaught. The farm leaders from Bibi Gulab Kaur stage brought the often elite-dominated agenda of the defence of human rights, embedded in high-flying international organizations, and in elite professions, right among the struggling farmers and workers. They made simple connections between the anti-people 'extraordinary' laws and the use of 'extrajudicial' measures by the state to wield soverign power to oppress, and it resonated with them.

These special days were a way in which the farm unions sought to reach out to larger sections of society, honour women leaders, stand up against violence meted out to Muslims, uphold the fundamental right to dissent. The protest approached the thorny issue of class and caste differences between the landowning *Jats* and the low castes, largely landless, Dalit communities. The relations between landowning and landless are antagonistic as their economic interests often clash. But the protest opened a space to explore the overlapping economic concerns of landless labourers, Dalits and

struggling small and marginal farmers who feared the loss of their land. Acknowledging caste oppression allowed the potential for new alliances as a result of socio-economic differentiation in rural India.

It is observed in some literature, that farm labourers who have a high stake in food price stability and interests at variance with labour reforms that are already assaulting their work conditions and safety, hardly figured in the protest. (Lerche, 2021; Harriss-White 2021). But this is more complex than it appears. As for the physical presence at the *morcha*, foregoing daily labour to be present, was not an option for farm and other contractual labourers. They survive on their daily labour. However, they kept coming to the protest sites and the farm labour unions pushed the agenda of labour. Farm labour unions in Punjab and other places issued statements in solidarity with the protesting farmers and the farmers' unions adopted the salutation *mazdoor-kisan ekta, zindabad* (long live the unity of labour and farmer).

Bringing the focus back to the agrarian crisis and farm labour

The farmers' movement of 2020 was successful in bringing the focus back to the agrarian crisis in the public imagining.[30] Significantly, in the overall environment of heightened political consciousness about the processes of differentiation and dispossession in rural India, the rural labour unions started mobilizing rural labour and the landless in the states on their specific demands. In Punjab, seven rural labour unions came together in mid-2021 to form a united front *Sanjha Majdoor Morcha* (United Labour Front) around the specific demands of rural labour and landless farm workers. In August 2021, this labour front called for a three-day protest sit-in in Patiala, Punjab, to press for their demands. A joint demand charter of the front was presented at a mammoth meeting of the rural poor and landless, which included a very significant presence of women labourers. It demanded the repeal of the three farm laws and the new labour codes which were also passed in the same session of the Parliament in September 2020. The United Labour Front demanded that the debt waiver scheme of the state must include non-institutional and small cooperative societies' loans which the landless and the rural labourers accessed but had been kept outside the ambit of debt waiver schemes. They asked for land for the landless labourers for farming and for building houses.

Further, drawing attention to the fact that the agrarian

crisis is not limited to farmers but the burden is equally borne by the landless, they asked for compensation and jobs for the families of landless farm labourers who committed suicide due to farm distress. The Front also demanded that the MNREGA work be expanded to provide employment for a full year for all members of the family, the MNREGA daily wage be increased and the PDS system strengthened to ensure food and nutritional security of the rural poor. They demanded one third of the panchayat[31] land be given on long term lease to Dalits, following the 1961 Act to ensure security of livelihoods and dignity of the landless.[32] They raised a voice against caste oppression of Dalits, sexual oppression of Dalit women and for enhancing social security for the workers who are unable to work due to old age.

In a unique act of building a new class solidarity among all those who have been pushed to the margins through the processes of socio-economic differentiation, the landless labour unions while demanding redistribution of land to the Dalit landless, also demanded land for the *Jat* farmers who became landless due to the crisis caused by rising costs and falling agriculture incomes. It was clear to see the convergence of interests of all those – irrespective of their caste – who face employment and land squeeze as the state facilitates the land sales market and enables the entry of transnational agribusiness corporations into the fields.

The Labour Front leaders emphatically declared that a broad united movement was the only answer to the unequal division of land, for the economic and social security of rural labour and for ensuring a life of dignity. Resolutions were also passed for the withdrawal of UAPA and other preventive detention laws and release of all the intellectuals arrested under these laws. The Front received the support of several unions of farmers, industrial workers, Pepsico workers and MNREGA workers. The Front is a significant development and an important articulation in the new socio-economic reality of rural India where rural labour is written out of policy and reduced to a welfare category in development discourse.

Industrial workers were also mobilised in support of the farmers' movement as the new laws threatened food security not only of rural but also urban working classes. A joint platform of central trade unions observed a one-day Bharat Bandh (All India shut down) in December 2020 to lend moral support to the farmers' protest. Attempts were also made to mobilise non-unionised urban

contractual industrial workers employed in the small factories in the vicinity of farmers' camps in support of the farm movement. This was met with state repression and the two young Dalit activists who were mobilising contractual workers were arrested, brutally tortured, and slapped with serious charges, including murder. The woman activist also faced custodial sexual violence (Yadav 22 and 25 February 2022).

While the three farm laws which catalysed lakhs of farmers to leave their homes and join the *morcha* at the borders of Delhi, it was the mode of farm protest as well as the broadening of the movement concerns that created fertile space for the emergence of new class alliances of the oppressed in the countryside.

Mainu Rang De Basanti Chunniya[33]: Women's stirring presence at the morcha

Thousands of yellow and green dupattas[34] were the omnipresent symbol of the women's stirring presence at the borders in Delhi where farmers had set up camps. When the convoy of thousands of tractor trolleys entered Delhi on November 26, 2020, women were part of these long convoys. They came waving their union flags and braving police barricades, water cannons and tear gas.

The leadership of the farm movement is predominantly elderly and male, with decades of experience of mobilizing farmers on local demands. There are over 32 farm Unions in Punjab alone and they were all at the protest sites. A few of these Unions have a women's wing which are led by women, but by and large women are not in leadership positions in the farm Unions. However, women quickly acquired very significant positions in the protest movement. They worked quietly behind-the-scenes -- collecting food and funds, talking to the press, managing the stage, and mobilising support for the movement among the families in the villages and townships near the camp sites at Delhi's borders. Women's role was exemplary in the build-up to the farmers' march to Delhi led by the unions in Punjab. Women mobilized support through the use of *Jago* (wake up) -- a folk performance tradition, going around in the villages late at night singing and giving the protest message.

Once the protest camps were set up at the borders, women took over roles and responsibilities which kept on expanding the longer the strike continued. While for many women from Haryana

and Western Uttar Pradesh, it was their first time in a protest, it was not the case with women from Punjab who were present in very large numbers. Far from first-time participants in the protest movement, they have a long history of mobilizing which goes back to at least three decades. Rural women have been part of farmers' protests to demand compensation for farmers' who died by suicide which they did because they were unable to cope with mounting farm debts and for crop failure due to faulty seeds provided through government outlets. They have been at the forefront against forcible land acquisition and in struggles for Dalit rights over village commons. Rural women in Punjab mobilised against rape and violence and the impunity perpetrators enjoyed in the rural social order. Women have been a part of the farmers' unions; and the left unions especially have been influential in bringing women into the public domain.[35]

On 18th January, 2021, Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) dedicated one full day to celebrate women farmers' contribution to the movement. This was the first women farmer's day, many more followed in subsequent months. Women speakers talked about the three farm laws and how they affected women. Farmer women were also joined by many other working-class women on this day. There were teachers, childcare workers, informal employment workers, nurses, anganwadi workers and also women from farm suicide families. It was on these stages that women started talking not only about the farm crisis but also about patriarchy, and discrimination, not in theoretical terms but with questions and examples from their everyday lives – why are families not happy when a daughter is born; why do we prefer sons over daughters; why do we have domestic violence in our families?

In view of women's' strong presence, the International Women's Day was marked at the morchas on 8 March 2021. The song of *basanti*[36] dupattas was in the air. *Colour my chuniya basanti* - a modified version of *mera rang de basanti chola* (colour my clothes yellow) – a well-known Ram Prasad Bismil[37] song associated with Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev as they walked to the gallows[38] – reverberated in the air.[39] The new version was about women coming out of the confines of home to claim that women's place was in the struggles. Women leaders and activists spoke about the exemplary role of women in the ongoing farm struggle and the corporate attack on their livelihood, of their exploitation in the big corporate farms where women labourers were not even paid the statutory minimum

wage, and they challenged the official policy of facilitating market subjugation of farming communities and their forced relocation to cities as perennial casual labour.

Women talked about the forgotten role of women in previous movements – from Tebhaga[40] to Telangana[41] to Anti Betterment Levy struggles[42] of the 1950s and 60s. They said that women always fought with men for the rights of the tillers but after the movements were over, they were asked to go back home to cook *chapatis*. Women were alert to the failure of the leadership of earlier movements to pay attention to what the women were saying to help transform the gender social relations. They reminded the present leadership of the need to recognise that the ongoing farm struggle would only be half as strong, half as vibrant if women had not joined the movement. The historic rally at the Bibi Gulab Kaur protest stage on March 8, 2021, proposed and passed two resolutions. The first resolution demanded the unconditional release of all women political activists incarcerated under preventive detention laws in Indian prisons. The second resolution, at the women's rally, acknowledged and expressed gratitude to women journalists who were exposing the scandals of the state, braving the threats to their lives and risking their careers and state repression.

In July 2021, the SKM held a *Kisan Parliament* in the heart of Delhi as the Indian parliament met for the Monsoon Session for two weeks. Two full days of the farmers' parliament were dedicated to women farmers when women ran the mock proceedings of the House. These two days saw a massive mobilisation of women from different states of India – from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra and Telangana in the South to the western state of Maharashtra and the central and Northern states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, the women farmers held spirited sessions foregrounding women's demands.

It was evident in the farmers' protest that women who were not even recognized as farmers in policy and society, created a space in the movement for articulating a gender perspective. Women's formidable presence was also successful in breaking the convention that politics is a male arena of activity. The layer of masculinity attributed to the farmers' movement dissolved with women's presence as women became visible everywhere.

Women brought new issues to the farm movement and from a new location. Agrarian crisis in its plurality is writ large

on the body politic of rural India – landlessness, falling incomes and rising costs of farming, mounting farm debts, ecological crisis manifesting in the degradation of environment, health, and water; lack of employment in farm sector, especially for women, and increasing hold of the corporate giants on the lives of farmers, to name a few. The crisis also erupted in the form of suicides of farmers and agricultural labour who were unable to repay the farm loans. In January 2021, just a month after the farmers' *morcha* began at the borders, women farmers and labourers from the families of farm suicides in Punjab joined the protest at the border. As they came they carried with them the pictures of their dead relatives, some held two. From the Bibi Gulab Kaur stage where they had assembled, when they held the grainy pictures high, it was like a wave of corpses rising. It was evident that while the entire farming families come under crisis with suicides, the suicides affect women profoundly as they are left to pick up the threads which men suddenly drop – carry on the responsibilities of farming, repaying debts, demanding compensation from the state and preventing forcible evictions from their land. These women have been organizing under the farmers' unions but also under *Kisan Mazdoor Khudkushi Peerat Parivar Committee* (KMKPPC) – Committee of Farmers and Labourers Suicide Victim Families which was formed in 2017 and has been actively campaigning for compensation and rehabilitation of families of suicide victims.[43]

Since the green revolution took off in Punjab, rural women have been written out of policy. They have experienced complete neglect and total stagnation in their employment and wages, unable to get employment in farm operations even for jobs which men have vacated as they migrate to the cities. The farm work which men and women do is very different, and there is a strict gender divide in tasks. In green revolution areas mechanised farming has made it hard for agricultural wage labour to find work in all seasons, and for women work is even scarcer. In Punjab for instance, women are almost entirely out of operations associated with the wheat crop, they find rice planting at times for a few days, and it is only in cotton picking, which is not yet mechanized, that they find some paid work. The vegetable and citrus growing belt generates additional days of wage work, but the entire work put together does not exceed 150 days in a year[44], and this includes work under the government's rural employment guarantee scheme, MNREGA.

The nature of the work in rural areas has also changed, especially for women. Overwhelmingly, it is contract work, piece rate, which is given to the man, who engages his wife and children in these operations. Rates are per hectare of rice planted, quintal of cotton picked, hectare of hay baled, and so on. The daily wage rates on vegetable and fruit farms, where women are concentrated, are almost one-third lower than the stipulated minimum wage. When men migrate to nearby cities and towns, both as skilled labourers and as unskilled workers on construction sites and other odd jobs, women stay behind to look after the children and desperately seek opportunities for wage work. If agricultural work is scarce, non-farm work is even more scarce. The women are landless and asset-less, representing the most marginalized section of agricultural wage workers in Punjab.

Landlessness is rampant among Dalits. At the all-India level, 58 percent of rural Dalit households are landless, much higher than households in any other social group. Landlessness is particularly severe among Dalits in Haryana, Punjab and Bihar, where more than 85 percent of Dalit households do not own any land other than homestead land. (Anand, 2016). There is also extreme inequality in ownership of land.[45] In Punjab, currently, only 3.5 percent of Punjab private farmland belongs to Dalits who make up 32 percent of the population. (India, *Agriculture Census 2015-16*). The national average is 8.6 percent of farmland for 16.6 percent of Dalits. For several years, landless Dalits in Punjab have fought to regain control of village common land that has gradually slipped away from them and Dalit women are at the forefront of these land rights movements. Over the last few years, they have been getting unionized and staking claims over the commons with some success and seeking redistribution of excess land.[46] A labour union of the landless, *Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee* (ZPSC) is at the forefront of this movement.[47]

Women came to the *morcha* bringing with them their varied experiences of being landless labourers; having lost husbands, fathers, or sons to deaths by suicides and their fights against sexual violence and the impunity it enjoys. Some of these gendered experiences are as follows. From women labourers who are landless but dependent on land for their livelihoods, it was learnt that if cotton crop fails due to bollworm disease, farmers suffer the loss of a crop but farm workers – mostly women – lose their season's employment.

Landowning farmers receive compensation for a failed crop, but who compensates for lost labour? In Sitapur, in Uttar Pradesh (UP) state, Dalit farmer-labourer women were not only dealing with stray cattle but also excessive bureaucratisation of the MNREGA making them lose days of labour only to fulfil the paper requirement. They mentioned being hit by two kinds of unruly bulls referring to the stray cattle menace as well as the anti-labour UP state bureaucracy. Women from Haryana brought new songs about the plight of women farmers who had no ownership of land and whose fate was worse than a tenant who can be evicted from land any time the families want to teach them a lesson.

With women's rousing participation in the movement, the farm movement's claims on the state expanded. The agrarian crisis as experienced by women is far more intense. Their earlier sustained work and activism validated their experience and their present-day demands. With women's presence, the movement was no longer just about state protection through MSP. They added the demands of gender justice, land to the landless, guaranteed minimum wages for farm jobs, equal wages for farm operations and much more.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Modi in a televised address to the nation on November 19, 2022, said that he was sorry that he was not able to convince a "section of the farmers" that the laws were in their favour. Following this announcement, on November 29, 2021, on the first day of the winter session of the Parliament, the three laws were repealed without any discussion, just as they were passed without any discussion in September 2021.

The farmers' protest movement for the repeal of the pro-corporate farm laws became the largest and longest sustained non-violent movement in recent history. It captured the public imagination and brought crucial issues of democratic social change and the challenges of the anti-farmer development paradigm to the forefront of the country's attention. The movement had continued without pause through the coldest and hottest weather. The achievements of this historic farmers' movement are far greater than the mere repeal of laws. This struggle was fought and won in the context of the rise to dominance of Hindu nationalism, a hypernationalism which is aggressive and exclusionary, that legitimizes hatred and violence including lynching of minorities, that thrives on polarizing people

and criminalizing dissent. Emerging in this context, the farmers' protest became the torchbearer for democratic and justice movements more widely in the country, beyond just farmers. It was a large-scale mass mobilization across classes, in the face of which, the Modi government's communal fascism failed. The mobilization of people across classes and languages, united the farming communities in different parts of the country. The advanced organisational political consciousness and political maturity gained during the protest will work towards building a demand for a more participatory democracy in place of a rigged electoral democracy which the country has been seeing.

In the months that the farmers stayed at the *morcha*, the farm protest transformed into a strong, plural movement, which expanded beyond the goal of protesting the three farm laws. It opened pathways for building new class alliances to collectively challenge the deal between the neo-liberal state and the transnational capital. The farmers asked for reforms in the agriculture sector which included state regulation to end farmers' exploitation by big corporations and multinational companies. The declarations of support for the farm laws by the International Monetary Fund and international banks, along with multinational agribusiness firms, indicated the range of forces backing the laws, and it was not lost on the farmers. They asked for small industry, employment closer to their villages, regulation of the big business with ambitions to control agricultural market and centralise power.

The farmers' charter included producers demands, but it also related to the interests of other urban and rural poor. All farm unions were collectively demanding the unconditional repeal of the three agricultural laws. But they were also seeking implementation of the universal public distribution system and the right to food for everyone. In the manner in which the government sought to defame and criminalise their opposition to the farm laws, farmers unions saw a design in how this government treats popular dissent. Consequently, a prominent demand of the unions was the release of intellectuals, of activists seeking democratic rights including student activists, and the withdrawal of all the restrictions against the right to protest.

These are the most significant issues for this country which the farmers raised and built their actions around. The solidarities that emerged at the borders of Delhi posed a threat to the anti-farmer and

labour pro-corporate authoritarian regime. The farmers movement saw politics in command, opening realms of possibilities for new alliances, of decentring existing axis of social and economic power and halting the dispossession of small and marginal farmers. The thirteen month long *morcha* allowed farmers' unions to overcome the general unease of movements about exploring the mutual constitution of different axes of oppression in relation to the state. The *morcha* offered the space and time for common axis to emerge and the overall environment of solidarity inspired openness to explore without dogma the unfamiliar relations.

It is this realm of possibilities which needs to be explored, pulled together and consolidated. Now is the time to do this, to build up, to contribute to strengthening the emerging possibilities. The hope of a lasting impact of the movement and the ability of the protest to usher in enduring alliances across caste and gender through the politics in command which emerged against the determining power of structures rests on learning lessons and taking these achievements forward. Plunged into dark times, India saw a ray of hope in the Indian farmers' movement. The unity of farmers made the defeat of majoritarian, masculinist, militarised politics, realisable. Today the famers of this country stand tall, resolute both in their solidarity and their resistance. They fought the good fight to the best of their ability and have much success to claim. This is the largest protest in our recent history which was a formidable challenge to the power of the state. Farmers will be remembered in history for standing their ground, for having shown the moral fibre and for seizing the mantle. This movement will be remembered as a moment of pride in the journey of this Republic.

Endnotes

1. Navsharan Singh, independent scholar and activist, navsharan@gmail.com; +919910171808
2. 'Trolley' is what is attached to a tractor to carry goods, crops, people, etc. Trolleys were ubiquitous during the strike. Parked trolleys became makeshift homes. And a publication that emerged during and out of the strike was named Trolley Times.
3. Government of India, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways Lok Sabha unstarred question no. 2044 answered on 22nd September, 2020 http://164.100.24.220/loksabhaquestions/annex/174/AU2044.pdf
4. Government of India imposed a lockdown from the midnight of 24 March 2020, and India went into what has been rated as the most

stringent lockdown of physical movement and economic activity in the world in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A tracker, created by researchers from Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford, the "Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker" based on data from 73 countries, calculated governments' response to Covid-19 into a common 'Stringency Index'. This tracker identified India's response as one of the most stringent in the world.

5. Outside the 4-Caste group structure are people considered lower than the lowest of Castes. They go by the term Dalit meaning "broken but resilient", formerly known as "untouchables" continue to experience profound injustices including socioeconomic inequalities, usurpation of their land, rights, and experience brutal violence at the hands of the "upper" Castes. Dalits under Caste apartheid are forced into segregated schools, villages, places of worship, and subject to violent oppression. Often they are denied access to public amenities including water and roads. This entire system is enforced by violence and maintained by one of the oldest, most persistent cultures of impunity throughout South Asia, most notably in India, where despite the contemporary illegality of the system, it has persisted and thrived for 2,500 years. (equalitylabs.org)
6. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) for any given crop is fixed so that farmers receive a price that covers their costs of cultivation and provides the farmer with a reasonable income. The government procures food grains from the farmers at the MSP and makes these grains available to workers at a reasonable price. The government sells the procured food grains through a Public Distribution System (PDS) to the working class and the peasantry. Excess grain is held in government warehouses as a buffer in case of years of bad harvests and as a counter-cyclical measure to shield the working class from high food inflation.
7. PDS was operated as a universal scheme until 1992. However, following the neo-liberal reforms initiated in 1991, it was turned into a Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) under which households are classified according to their economic status. There are multiple ration cards in operation under the targeted approach in the states and under central schemes. Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) ration card is given to impoverished families identified by the state governments. These cardholders are eligible to receive 35kg of food grains per month per family at the subsidised price of Rs.3 for rice, Rs.2 for wheat and Rs.1 for coarse grains. The families not covered under AAY come under the Priority Household (PHH) who receive 5kg of food grains per person per month. Some state governments are still using Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards giving 10kg to 20kg food grains per family per month at 50% of the economic cost. There is also Above Poverty Line (APL)

classification under which families receive 10kg to 20kg food grains per family per month at 100% of the economic cost. There is also Annapoorna Yojana (AY) for older people who are poor and above 65 years. Cardholders receive 10 kgs of food grains per month under this card. PDS distribution is done through a network of currently 5.27 lakhs Fair Price Shops (FPSs) across the country. For more details, see https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=178067

8. At the all-India level, according to NSS Report No. 587: Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Livestock Holdings of Households in Rural India, 2019, 39.8 % of income is earned from wages followed by cultivation/net receipt from crop production (37.2 percent), farming of animals (15.5%), and income from non-farm business (6.3%). According to the same survey, 50.2 per cent of farm households in India are in debt.
9. India agreed to an IMF-monitored structural adjustment programme in 1991. The 'recommendations' for reforms under the adjustment programme included scraping all subsidies for agriculture and opening agriculture to foreign trade; retreat of government from the sector and dismantling the system of procurement and the universal distribution of food. In 2008, the World Bank in its report India – Taking agriculture to the market, underlined the slow pace of reforms and promoted the complete deregulation of the agricultural marketing system. It called for the continuation of reforms initiated in the 1990s.
10. India's jobless growth story is now well-known. Post opening up in 1991 to boost productivity and augment job opportunities while resolving the balance of payment crisis, liberalization, privatization and globalization resulted in abysmal job growth during the initial years, followed by stagnation and deceleration. The negative trend continues even today. India chose acceleration in capital intensification at the expense of creating employment. The resultant increase in labour productivity did not translate as more share to labour. The workers as a class lost in terms of both additional employment and real wages in organised manufacturing sector. See, for instance, K.P. Kannan and G Raveendra, "Gainers and Losers during 2012–18 From Jobless to Job-loss Growth", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 54, Issue number 44, 2019.
11. Food Corporation of India, a central agency of the Government of India, along with State Agencies purchases food grains such as wheat and rice from farmers under a Minimum Support Price.
12. Ordinances are laws that are enforced by the president of India when the Indian parliament is not in session.
13. Mandis, in simple terms, are market yards of APMC (Agriculture Produce Market Committee), which are run and regulated by state governments. Mandis are old and ubiquitous institutions of economic

life in many parts of India. They act as a meeting point between farmers and consumers. As per suggestions by the National Commission of Agriculture (NCA), there should be at least one mandi within 80 square kilometers, so that every farmer within that area can access the mandi within one hour to sell their product. (The Nation-Wide 9 December 2020).

14. SKM represents forty unions and networks, the largest being the All India Kisan Sangarsh Coordination Committee (All India Farmers' Struggle Coordination Committee), a pan-Indian umbrella organization comprising close to four hundred farmers' unions and organizations. There are a few large unions in Punjab which are not part of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) but support the demand of repeal of the new farm laws, and had a big presence at the Delhi borders.
15. NDA (National Democratic Alliance) is the ruling alliance of political parties led by the Bharatiya Janata Party.
16. Government's policy advisory arm, Niti Aayog also focused on creating better land records, digitisation and integration of all records relating to titles and encumbrances, formalising cadastral maps of all plots of land, defining a structured timeline for timely resolution of property disputes and making public land disputes data etc. with a purpose to develop vibrant land sales market and encourage land sales. See for instance, "Raising Agricultural Productivity and Making Farming Remunerative for farmers", December 2015. https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2019-08/Raising%20Agricultural%20Productivity%20and%20Making%20Farming%20Remunerative%20for%20Farmers.pdf
17. See, for instance, "About Adani-Wilmar", https://www.adaniwilmar.com/about-us.
18. Reliance Industries Limited, a Fortune 500 company has seen a meteoric rise and it is the largest private sector corporation in India today https://www.ril.com/ar2020-21/pdf/RIL-Integrated-Annual-Report-2020-21.pdf. Adani is one of the richest people in India. His group has interests in oil and gas, power generation, logistics, ports and coal trading. Adani's meteoric rise is reflected in his net worth, which has increased by approximately 340% since May 2014 to about $34 billion as of January 2021, according to the Bloomberg Billionaire Index. This puts him second only to India's richest individual and chairman of Reliance Industries, Mukesh Ambani, who has similarly seen his wealth spike. As it happens, the sharp increase in billionaire wealth, while predating the current government, has accelerated during the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who came to power in May 2014.
19. So, Reliance and Ambani appear interchangeably here.

20. Unfair and unethical business practices of Reliance, such as, auction rigging, and government patronage it receives are documented in the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) reports. On Reliance entry in the telecom industry, which is known for high barrier to entry, Reliance Jio managed to capture the telecom market in a period of 3 years, while multiple incumbents were forced to exit or merge to keep themselves afloat. The Report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India Report No. 35 (2017) noted that Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd. (RJIL) got an undue benefit of about Rs. 33.67 billion after the Indian government allowed it to offer voice services over wireless broadband spectrum it had won in 2010. As reported in the newspapers, the CAG had sent a draft report to the DoT which said that the fact that a small Internet Service Provider could win the pan-India broadband spectrum which was 5000 times its net worth was a glaring sign of auction rigging, which the DoT overlooked. Similarly, when the Indian government approved the privatisation of six airports in 2018, it relaxed the rules to widen the pool of competition, allowing companies without any experience in the sector to bid. Gautam Adani, with no history of running airports, scooped up all six. See for instance, Patnaik 2022, Findlay and Lockett 2020, Adani Watch
21. 26 January is Republic Day in India.
22. Khalistan movement is a movement to create a separate, sovereign homeland—Khalistan -- for Sikhs. 'Naxals' refers to a political movement going back to the 1960s, inspired by Maoism, that continues in India, largely underground. Many of the people involved are from sections of the population marginalized by caste, class, and Indigeneity. In the current political climate, urban intellectuals and human rights defenders are often labelled "urban Naxals" and routinely detained and imprisoned for long periods under draconian laws. One of the most famous being the octogenarian Jesuit priest Fr. Stan Swamy who died in prison in 2021. There is more on this on p.12 below.
23. morcha – a gathering of like-minded people protesting for a cause.
24. Andagwadis are government-run rural childcare centres. Anganwadi workers are an all women cadre of over 1.4 million workers contracted by the government to run the childcare centres and various other health and welfare schemes of the government. They are the frontline welfare workers who are paid a very small honorarium and no benefits. They have been seeking better pay and working conditions for the last many years.
25. MNREGA - The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, adopted in 2005, was designed to reduce insecurity in income and food in rural areas, guaranteeing at least hundred days of wage employment at the state minimum wage to all workers who seek work. https://rural.nic.in/sites/default/files/nrega/Library/Books/1_

MGNREGA_Act.pdf

26. BKU – Bharati Kisan Union [Indian farmers' union]. BKU (Ekta-Ugrahan had the largest support base of farmers in Punjab.)
27. The Ghadar Party was a revolutionary movement in colonial India and the diaspora, dedicated to ending British colonialism. It was informed by secular, democratic, socialist principles.
28. Video, "Farmers Agitation Demands Release of Human Rights Defenders" Karwan e Mohabbat, 2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFHGOqE2qAE
29. For more on this see https://thewire.in/rights/bhima-koregaon-violence-four-different-theories-but-no-justice-in-sight
30. The farmers union have been trying to draw attention to the farm crisis for the last many years through major mobilizations in the states such as in Maharashtra in 2018 (Dhawale, 2018); a march of Tamil Nadu farmers to Delhi twice with skulls and chains (Alavi, 2017); and a long march of all India farmers to Delhi in November 2018 (People's Archive of Rural India, 2018). The farmers protest in 2020 successfully built on the ground prepared by the previous protests and on a wider scale.
31. A panchayat is a village council and panchayat land is land that comes under the jurisdiction of the village council.
32. According to the Punjab Village Commons Land (Regulation) Act of 1961, panchayats lease village common land annually to the highest bidder on the condition that a third is reserved for the scheduled castes and auctioned separately. Yet, for years now, Jat-Sikh landowners have been subverting the process by bidding for the reserved lands in the name of dalits or through proxy candidates.
33. Colour my head scarf yellow.
34. Dupatta – long scarves
35. Rural women's mobilisation is deeply connected with many aspects of Punjab's left legacy and a very vibrant progressive rural cultural movement in the state which can be traced back to the late 1960s. There is rich music, poetry and also theatre in rural areas. There are scores of rural theatre troupes in Punjab, and we saw them regularly at the borders performing where the farmers were protesting. Many of these rural theatre troupes are part of an umbrella organisation - Punjab Lok Sabhyachar Manch, a people's cultural platform committed to building a just society through progressive cultural movement. These troupes do political theatre. Women are both part of the audience and the lead performers. Another very interesting tradition in Punjab is the all-night cultural programmes in the villages, a tradition which began during the years of militancy in the 1980s when Punjab remained under night curfew - from 9 pm to 5 am – for years. A progressive left cultural tradition emerged in rural Punjab in this period. People would collect at a central point in the village before 9 pm and watch cultural

programmes all night under the open sky. This tradition continued in the villages even after militancy ebbed. Women were mobilised for these cultural programmes as a conscious strategy and women see themselves as part of the movements.

36. Basanti – a shade of yellow or saffron that symbolizes the mustard fields and has symbolic meaning of spirit and sacrifice in Sikhism.
37. Ram Prasad Bismil (1897-1927) was a writer, poet and revolutionary with the Hindustan Republican Association, who was hanged by the British to his anti-colonial revolutionary activities.
38. Three young anti-colonial political activists belonging to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. They were inspired by the Ghadar movement. They were condemned and executed by the British colonial state. They continue to inspire struggles for equality and justice.
39. The modified song written by poet Sarbjot Singh can be heard here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL2bHbjcvek
40. For a quick reference about the movement, please see Roy, 2018.
41. For a brief summary see Mangat, 2020.
42. For a brief introduction see Peoples Democracy, 2020.
43. KMKPPC was founded by Kiranjit Kaur, a young university student whose father had committed suicide. She went from village to village, collecting data on women whose husbands, sons, fathers or fathers-in-law committed suicide. The Committee terms farmer suicides as institutional murders and seeks state accountability for every suicide.
44. These estimates are based on the author's field surveys in many parts of Punjab for an ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) project 2019 (unpublished).
45. The Gini coefficient at the all-India level is as high as 0.76. In states like Punjab, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, the land distribution is even more skewed and the Gini is higher than 0.80. (Anand, 2016).
46. According to estimates, excess land (calculated by applying a uniform land ceiling of eight hectares (around 20 acres) on operational holdings), is available for redistribution all over Indian states. In Punjab, 217,265 hectares is excess land. Punjab also has 68,839 hectares shamlat land (land owned by the village panchayat) in around 8,000 of the state's 13,000 villages, according to the Rural Development and Panchayat Department. The one-third of this is reserved for Dalits which comes to around 22,946 hectares. According to a response to an RTI (right to information) query by Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (Land Acquisition Struggle Committee; see f.n. below for details about this organization) in January 2018, over half of Punjab's shamlat land (land owned by the village council) is concentrated in the six districts of Punjab. Some 9307 hectare shamlat land is under the control of land grabbers; of the remaining 60 thousand hectares, most is auctioned by

panchayats every year, and any villager can bid for cultivation. The average rent is Rs 20,000 per acre in the reserved category (Dalits), and around Rs 28,000 in the general category. In comparison, lease rates to private persons (farmers) are Rs 60,000 per acre annually in Malwa region, and Rs 25,000-45,000 in other regions.

47. A labour union of the landless, Zameen Prapti Sangharsh Committee (ZPSC), was formed in 2014 for the rights and access of Dalit landless cultivators to reserved common lands in Punjab. At present, there are many villages where the union has been successful in obtaining Dalit's share in land through annual auctions by the state government. The ZPSC is now demanding that instead of annual auctions, the reserved land is leased to landless Dalits on a long term basis.

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S'attaquer à la pandémie permanente qu'est la précarité : leçons tirées de l'organisation des travailleurs et travailleuses migrants et immigrés racisés à Montréal pendant la pandémie de COVID-19

Mostafa Henaway

Résumé

Cet article démontre l'importance pour les travailleurs et travailleuses migrants et immigrés de s'organiser en fonction de leurs réalités. Pour ce faire, l'auteur s'appuie sur l'expérience du Centre des travailleurs et travailleuses immigrants (CTI) de Montréal. Beaucoup de ces travailleurs ont un st*atut d'immigration précaire, qui les rend vulnérables à une exploitation capitaliste poussée. On présume que leur besoin de rester au Canada et de gagner de l'argent les empêchera de parler des inégalités en milieu de travail et dans les pratiques patronales. Quand la COVID-19 a frappé, ce sont ces travailleurs, chargés des tâches reconnues « essentielles » par les gouvernements, qui ont permis à la société de fonctionner. Des promesses de régulariser leur statut d'immigration ont été faites. Mais deux ans après, ces promesses ne se sont pas réalisées et le statut des travailleurs demeure précaire. Toutefois, l'expérience acquise par la CTI dans sa lutte contre l'imposition de mesures néolibérales lui a permis de tenir bon face aux conditions de travail dictées par la pandémie. Les efforts pour régulariser le statut des travailleurs migrants s'intensifient. Il y a actuellement une mobilisation à l'échelle du Canada pour presser le gouvernement de tenir ses engagements, confortée par la reconnaissance croissante de l'importance de ces travailleurs pour le pays. L'article dépeint la réalité de nombreux travailleurs qui vivent et besognent à la confluence de la racialisation et du statut précaire de migrant, et révèle combien ces conditions sont essentielles au maintien du système capitaliste.*

Challenging the permanent pandemic of precarity: Lessons from racialized migrant and immigrant workers organizing in Montreal during the COVID-19 pandemic

Mostafa Henaway[1]

Abtract

This article demonstrates the importance for migrant and immigrant workers to organize in ways that represent their realities. It draws on the experience of Montreal's Immigrant Workers' Centre (IWC) to do this. Many of these workers have a precarious immigration status, making them vulnerable to acute capitalist exploitation. The presumption is that since workers' need to remain in Canada and earn their living, they would remain silent about workplace inequalities and labour practices. When COVID-19 hit, it was these workers, doing what governments recognized as 'essential' work that kept societies functioning. Promises were made about regularization of their immigration status. However, it has been two years since the imposition of pandemic restrictions and these promises have rung hollow, leaving them with a precarious immigration status. Yet the organising experience gained by the IWC in the struggle against the imposition of neoliberal measures, prior to the pandemic, held the IWC in good stead as it faced pandemic working conditions. The struggle to regularize migrant workers' status is mounting and at this moment there is a Canada-wide mobilization to hold the government to its promise, bolstered by the growing recognition of the importance of these workers to the country. This article demonstrates the realities faced by many workers who live and work at the intersection of racialization and an insecure migrant status and reveals that it is key to propping up the capitalist system.

Introduction

On March 31st, 2020, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, tweeted, "This virus is the great equalizer" (Cuomo. 2020). However, in March 2020, in the first months of the pandemic, when the world was being slowly shut down under lockdowns and stay-at-home

orders, nothing felt further from the truth. In New York City, one of the global epicentres of the pandemic, a picture was emerging of the sheer scale of the disproportionate impact and devastation the pandemic was having on Back and Latino communities. Black and Latinos were dying at a rate double that of white New Yorkers. (Barranco et al., 2020). In one dramatic example, a pastor said his church lost 44 members to COVID-19 (Shoichet, et al, 2020). His congregation was made up of essential workers; the vast majority undocumented migrants from Central America. Frankie Miranda, president of the Hispanic Federation said, "We are dying at a higher rate because we have no other choice. These are the delivery food people, the people that are the day workers, the farm workers, these people that are working in restaurants. They are essential services, and now they are not enjoying the protections that may be in other industries people can have" (Jimenez, 2020). Similar patterns emerged across advanced capitalist countries. Those deemed essential and unable to remain at home were largely racialized immigrant and migrant workers.

Moreover, the loss of working hours and income overlapped with endemic food and housing insecurity. According to Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, director of the Equity Research and Innovation Center at Yale School of Medicine, "We know that these racial-ethnic disparities in COVID-19 are the result of pre-pandemic realities." (Godoy & Wood, 2020). Such analysis was echoed in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* by scholars who analyzed how workplace settings determined COVID-19 disparities along racial and ethnic lines (McLure et al. 2020).

In Canada, numbers released by Statistics Canada showed immigrants were at a higher risk of death because they predominantly work in essential industries such as care work, agriculture, food processing, and logistics. According to them, immigrants comprise 20% of the total population but account for 30% of all COVID-19-related deaths. Further, as of June 2021, immigrants made up 44 to 51% of COVID-19 deaths in Vancouver and Toronto. Prior to March 2020, these workers were in the shadows of society. (Ng, 2021). The disproportionate impacts along racial-ethnic lines concerning who got the right to remain at home and who was deemed essential, went beyond pre-pandemic disparities. Governments scrambled to make exemptions to the travel bans imposed during the spring of 2020, in response to pressing labour needs in the wake of the pandemic.

Migrant Workers were brought in the thousands to Canada, the UK, and the US to ensure food supplies for these countries. While these workers were rendered invisible, paradoxically, this army of labour was now deemed essential. Sociologist Zophia Edwards notes this contradictory dynamic in the production of the essential worker as an identity. "These Black and Latinx workers, as well as other nonwhite racialized workers, have now been deemed essential, so they still have to report to work despite stay-at-home orders. While viewed as essential, they are also treated as expendable." (Edwards, 2020). The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing structural vulnerabilities experienced by these now 'essential' yet 'disposable' workers (Stevano et al., 2021).

This article will both reaffirm and extend an understanding of the pandemic "[as] a manifestation of the existing systemic fragilities of capitalism" (Stevano, et al, 2021: 181) by examining the disproportionate impact of the pandemic upon racialized immigrant and migrant workers in Montreal. It draws upon the organizing efforts of the Immigrant Workers Centre (IWC) in Montreal.[2] The IWC, already one of the central frontline grassroots workers' organizations in Montreal, from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, began organizing workers for better COVID-19 protections, to improve working conditions and to access services for undocumented workers. The article will demonstrate how racialized immigrants and migrant labour precarity remain central to capitalist economies, yet are treated as expendable, attested to by the context of COVID-19 which renders them at greater risk of becoming ill or facing death from this illness. The pandemic illuminated how public health is intertwined with the logic of racial capitalism, thus obscuring the structural causes of the transmission of the virus (McClure et al., 2020). Further, the article draws upon the novel experiences and lessons of the IWC during the pandemic. It explores the agency and struggles of migrant and immigrant workers in the city of Montreal and in the province of Quebec, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the article will demonstrate how collective action taken by 'essential workers' was not solely the result of spontaneous individual or collective action. Looking at the IWC as an exemplar, it will be shown that this is a result of worker organizations/strategic orientation, organizing immigrant and migrant workers over the past two decades in a context of neoliberalizing labour markets, propped up by low-wage, disposable and racialized labour.

The article will explore the contours of the victories made by the IWC in Montreal during the previous two years of the pandemic. It will also examine how the IWC has been able to broaden its base and strategic thinking to complement discussions of how workers in the midst of the challenges of the COVID-19 situation are organizing. Furthermore it will provide important lessons and knowledge about the struggles of migrant and immigrant workers.

The article draws on ethnographic work coming out of my experience as a community organizer at the IWC since 2007. I draw upon organizing campaigns and the experiences of our members who were essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The timeline of the article spans the start of the pandemic in March 2020, right up until the completion of writing this. The article focuses on the struggles for basic health and safety, for personal protective equipment (PPE), to access benefits, to counter challenges posed by punitive measures faced by non-status migrants during the curfews. All this happened in the context of broader struggles for regularization of resident status, access to services, and decent work. The ethnographic work is supplemented by reports, government documentation, and media sources to contextualize the ethnographic study.

The first part of the article situates migrant and racialized immigrant workers within the broader context of capital's constant requirement for cheap and disposable labour. This is key to understanding their 'essential role' in the reproduction of many societies. The second section gives a brief overview of the IWC, its history, and organizing priorities. The third section focuses on the context of Montreal as the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. The next section explores the struggles of immigrant workers deemed essential for COVID-19 protection and decent work within warehouses and meat processing plants, after which it looks at the struggles of migrants and immigrants for permanent immigration status as essential workers. The article will conclude by drawing on these experiences to contribute experience-based knowledge to the growing and urgent discussions of how migrant and immigrant workers' struggles can be best advanced. A constant will be the centrality of these workers to the renewal of the labour force at a time of intersecting crises.

Intersections of Migration, Race, and Capitalism

The unequal effects of the pandemic upon racialized workers and migrants are not the result of a moment but do give pause to reflect on how capitalism benefits and reproduces itself best by having access to workers who are rendered more exploitable, in this instance, racialized workers. "The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief the deep structural problems affecting nonwhite racialized workers in the core and periphery" (Edwards, 2021). Migrant labour thus needs to be viewed within a framework that can analyze the continued need for racialized migrant labour within advanced capitalist states. It makes critical the requirement to connect the relationship between capitalism and racism (Schling, 2017). Robin Kelley contends that capitalism as a system of accumulation does not rationalize race, yet is reliant upon the profitability of exploiting racialized workers (Kelley, 2002). In this vein, Freshour and Williams examine how racial capitalism was a mode of manufacturing vulnerability through monoculture agribusiness, premised on low-wage, non-unionized, and devalued labour as a result of capital accumulation along racial lines (Freshour and Williams, 2020). Essential for capital accumulation is a global racialized division of labour (Roediger, 1993). As migration scholar Aziz Choudhry reminds us, "The imperialist exploitation and undermining of many societies in the Global South under earlier eras of colonialism, and historical institutional arrangements concerning labour, are key to understanding labour and migration in today's era of global capitalism." (Choudry 2016). Racialization of migrants is key to understanding race as a central mechanism to prop up capitalism.

Migration patterns are embedded within the structural transformations of the dynamics of flows of capital, the spatial dimensions and concentrations of capital accumulation (Hanieh, 2019). The most significant transformation in the period of globalization has been the scale of transnational migration (Herod, 2003), which has created a global reserve army of labour that has been vital to the transformation of labour markets and intensification of precarious work (Buckley et al., 2017). As Adam Hanieh remarks, "Through the very dispossession that generates movements of people across (and within) borders, migration comes to powerfully shape processes of class formation in specific national contexts." (Hanieh 2019, 55). This makes migration central to the transformations of

the global economy (Ferguson and McNally, 2015; Hanieh, 2019).

We need to understand border regimes in the contemporary context. Migration flows are inherently racialized by the ways in which borders and immigration regimes act not to repel migration but as filters to control migration which produces subjective identities, thus differentiating the value of workers. Whether distinguishing 'illegal' and 'legal' migrants, 'temporary' or 'permanent' residents, and 'citizen' and 'non-citizen' (Walia, 2013), this categorization and stratification of migrants are essential to producing the requisite 'precarious worker'. "Immigration controls work with and against migratory processes to produce workers with particular types of relations to employers and labour markets." (Anderson, 2010: 306). The increased policing of borders and restrictive measures on migration are not to stop migration. Instead, manufactured precarity among migrants, is a strategy to manage and discipline labour for capitalist exploitation; the more vulnerable, the more exploitable. (Anderson 2010; Choudry and Hlatshwayo 2016).

At this moment in history, migrant workers have become central to capital because the costs of reproduction are offloaded onto them and their home countries; they are no longer the responsibility of the state in which they work, or of their employers. As Ferguson and McNally argue, "Migrant workers' transnational households and networks, and the state policies supporting these, also institutionalize dramatically lower costs of social reproduction." (Ferguson and McNally). For undocumented migrants, the costs of their reproduction are non-existent as they are entirely separated from the citizenship population (Buckley et al., 2017). Arat-Koc describes this as part of the neoliberalization of immigration. Drawing on the patriarchal gender division of labour, reproductive and care work is commodified and outsourced to migrant women who enter the global North's labour market (Strauss and Fudge, 2014). In her study of domestic migrant workers in Canada, Arat-Koc points to how the burden of self-sufficiency is foisted onto the workers themselves (Arat-Koc1999). The increased commodification of social reproduction in North America and the European Union (EU), and its externalization from more traditional spaces, have happened with the reliance on a reserve army of migrant labour from the global South.

Migration, Race and Capitalism Create Disposable Yet Essential Labour

COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated a global crisis of productive and reproductive work across the globe. The pandemic also exposed what occupations were essential to our social reproduction. Though if we follow Kim Moody's argument that pre-dates the pandemic, such occupations have been increasingly marketized,[3] even as they have become vital to capitalist economies in the global North (Moody, 2017). *The American Journal of Medicine* has argued it has been migrant and immigrant workers that have borne the brunt of the pandemic (Reid, Ronda-Perez and Schenker, 2020) and these workers were produced as the ideal 'essential worker' during the pandemic (Reid, Ronda-Perez and Schenker, 2020). More traditional sectors such as care work, agriculture, food transformation, and the maintenance of fixed capital (i.e. work in cleaning, security), as well as the new titans of global capitalism such as Amazon or Uber and the on-demand gig economy, have all become reliant upon racialized migrant and immigrant workers. This racialized division of labour can be seen in the stark inequalities witnessed during the pandemic. Amazon serves as a prime example. During the early days of the pandemic, Jeff Bezos became the first person in human history to have personal wealth amounting to 200 billion USD. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of Amazon's racialized workforce, from its warehouses ('fulfillment centres') to delivery drivers who were deemed 'essential', worked without proper COVID-19 protections. The implication being their health didn't matter; they were disposable, even as they played a key role in the functioning of many cities (Alimohamed-Wilson and Reese, 2020).

Another key sector of the economy, premised upon a racialized division of labour, is agribusiness, particularly meat processing and packing. In the United States, meat packing plants and industries were deemed essential services (Samaneigo and Mantz 2020). Honing and Genoway's study of companies such as Brazilian-owned multinational JBS, the world's largest meat processor, illuminate the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic and workers being deemed 'essential', gave the employer greater control over the intensification of work, while workers incurred ever greater risks during the pandemic. (Honing and Genoways, 2020). Through their study of JBS, Samaniego and Mantz articulate how essential industries are propped up by racial inequalities (2020). In

the sector of care work we see how neoliberal policies have made this the most fundamental sector of the economy that has become marketized. Increased austerity has favoured privatization and measures to contain costs of labour, to rationalize to meet budget cuts, but to continue to remain profitable by exploiting the precarity of the workers. A key mechanism in containing costs is the heavy reliance on racialized immigrant and migrant care workers in hospitals, private nursing homes and for elder care. The pandemic had shed light on the ways in which these workers are key to the reproduction of society in what Tithi Bhattacharya calls life-making work (i.e., care work, agriculture), much of what was deemed essential. (Jaffe, 2020).

As Sarah Farris and Mark Bergfeld argue, the devaluing of social reproductive work ensures that profits remain higher. Social reproductive professions are devalued through the use of disposable labour, often racialized, gendered and with precarious status. Employers can force lower wages, non-unionization, and flexibility to reduce costs and increase productivity (Bergfeld and Farris, 2021). Much before the pandemic, racialized workers from countries in the periphery were being recruited to North American and European countries to fill gaps within their health care systems. And, in the wake of the pandemic, this actually produced higher profits. (Edwards, 2021).

While these workers were celebrated during the first critical months of the pandemic, they remain disposable, a condition that is not primordial, but has been carefully constructed in the service of greater profit-making. Despite this, migrant workers have displayed agency through new forms of collective organizing, unionization, and mobilization (Choudry and Hlatshwayo, 2015). During the pandemic as well, workers organized. In fact, in areas there was a great upsurge in organizing. This cannot be explained solely by the conditions produced by the pandemic. There is a necessity to connect spontaneous actions with long-term political objectives. There had been organizers in North America and Europe, whether with new unions in the UK, workers centres in the US and Canada. Their strategic orientation and leadership with a long-term vision to organize precarious immigrant and migrant workers prior to the pandemic is central to any long term labour renewal (Ness, 2005; Fine 2006; Choudry and Hlatshwayo, 2016).

The Immigrant Workers Centre

The Immigrant Workers Centre (IWC) in Montreal was founded in 2000 by community and labour activists to defend, promote and expand the labour and immigration rights of precarious immigrant workers. It was also a counterpoint to the blitz model of union organizing that often failed to bridge ethnic divides within workplaces (Choudry, Hanley, Jordan, Shragge, Stiegman 2009). In the beginning, the IWC worked mostly with Filipinos employed in textile industries or as live-in caregivers. The IWC fits easily into a growing phenomenon of non-traditional labour organizations seeking to address the impact of economic restructuring on workers. In the absence of any collective representation, the IWC became a space where workers could discuss their workplace issues and find collective solutions. The IWC was at the intersection of community and labour organizing. By 2006, the work had expanded to include a broad range, from individual casework and campaigns to improve the conditions faced by immigrant and migrant workers, to labour rights education, training, and workshops.

The IWC also tries to insist on another major issue which is organizing workers based on their needs and demands, not solely on what is inscribed in the law. This is because workers (particularly those with precarious work or precarious immigration status) experience forms of injustice that are considered legal within existing institutional frameworks. This is particularly compounded for workers in precarious working situations who lack immigration status. This means taking on pressure campaigns, direct intervention, appeals, and various other mechanisms to ensure that workers' rights are upheld.

The strategic focus of the IWC began to shift with the deepening of economic restructuring and growth of temporary labour migration in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. This led the IWC to address new forms of precarious work that were emerging. The first was a consequence of the expanded use of temporary placement agencies within low-profit sectors such as agribusiness, cleaning, and warehousing. The second was the Canadian government's expansion of the temporary foreign worker program, and the third was the growing phenomenon of the working poor. As a result of the above, the strategic orientation of the IWC was to not focus solely on workplace struggles, but to engage in campaigns on the broader issues of precarious labour. Consequently,

the IWC embarked on building worker-led associations which could build broad-based campaigns to challenge the key pillars of precarity in Quebec (Calugay, Henaway, and Shragge, 2011). This meant the formation of the Temporary Agency Workers Association (TAWA), the Temporary Foreign Workers Association (TFWA) and the building of a coalition against precarious work, which included migrant domestic workers, temporary foreign workers, temporary agency workers and undocumented workers from Mexico who formed an organization called Mexicans United for Regularization (MUR). The Coalition Against Precarious Work, created in 2012 has campaigned for a living wage, the right to permanent full-time work, permanent immigration status, and the right to open work permits for temporary foreign workers.

Temporary migrant worker programs have become a central element of the process of creating a temporary, flexible workforce. In Canada, for example, the number of temporary foreign workers under Canada's temporary foreign worker program outpaced permanent migration. Migrant workers are absorbed into flexible, lean labour regimes characteristic of neoliberalism. Meanwhile unionized, secure jobs have been been transformed with flexible, atypical work arrangements characterized by insecurity, low wages, and increased risks to health and safety (Fudge and Vosko, 2003). In Quebec, nearly 90,000 temporary foreign workers and roughly 19,000 in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program come mainly from Central America. They face constant abuse, low pay and inability to access their rights because they are on closed work permits.

In 2013 when the IWC supported the formation of the Temporary Agency Workers Association (TAWA-ATTAP)[4], it was led by 30 immigrant workers who worked for temporary employment agencies (temp agencies) in Montreal. TAWA-ATTAP organizes social events, general assemblies, rights workshops, and does consistent outreach in workplaces and neighbourhoods with high numbers of temp agency workers. Importantly, TAWA-ATTAP is worker-led, ensuring that political priorities and outreach (for example, around issues of workplace health and safety or access to permanent work) are always dictated by the members themselves. Canada has also witnessed a growth of asylum seekers who have applied for refugee status but remain in limbo with temporary status. Many of them seek work through temp agencies, agencies,

that 'racialize'[5] these workers exploiting their lack of 'Canadian experience' (Vosko, 2000) and they end up in warehousing, food processing, and other occupations deemed low-wage, dangerous, and precarious (Hanley et al., 2018).

TAWA-ATTAP's outreach and membership focus was around two specific groups of workers. The first, warehouse workers deemed permanent-temporary workers (perma-temps) in Montreal, in particular working in warehouses and recruited by temp agencies for major corporations such as Dollarama, Stokes, Reebok, and David's Tea. These workers were predominantly new refugee claimants, waiting for their claims to be heard. The second group was predominantly women, recruited by 'fly by night' agencies that operated outside the confines of the law that hired undocumented workers for sectors such as food processing and cleaning (Salamanca, 2016). Over the years, TAWA-ATTAP has struggled to organize workers who are among the most difficult to organize within the neoliberal labour market context. Informed by this work, the IWC began to adopt a similar strategy with Temporary Foreign Workers.

The focus of the IWC is not simply to have a worker-led organization to deal with barriers and challenges immigrants face on an individual or collective basis. It is to also link these challenges to broader systemic issues such as neoliberal economic restructuring and its intersection with immigration policies. This showed the critical importance of broader political policy in addressing members' needs. The result of the neoliberal transformation of Canada's immigration regime has meant nearly 1.2 million people live with temporary or no legal status (Migrant Rights Network, 2022). The hyper-exploited have been the growing proportion of undocumented workers. The number of undocumented migrants is now estimated at 500,000. These workers, as a result of their lack of status, have become the most exploitable, without protection, and thus a focal point for organizing within the IWC, especially for undocumented women agency workers. Such creative organizing strategies were necessary to deal with the difficulties of incorporating such workers into collective structures or existing unions. (Choudry and Henaway, 2014).

In February 2017, TAWA launched the Stability and Dignity campaign. It presented demands to the minister of Labour in February 2017 (Salamanca Cardona, 2018). The members of TAWA-ATTAP, mainly undocumented warehouse workers from

Francophone Africa, the majority women, had converging but also diverse sets of issues they faced in regard to their integration and participation in the Labour market. The approach was for broad political demands for improved health and safety, to have temporary placement agencies registered with the ministry of labour, and equal work for equal pay for temporary workers. In 2018 workers saw a key victory with changes to the labour law which included some of the demands of the IWC and TAWA-ATTAP, such as equal pay for equal work, paid sick days, and all temporary placement agencies having to be registered passed (El-Khouri and Benoit, 2018).

Certain things changed as a result of the pandemic. Demands by immigrant and migrant workers prior to the pandemic only got validated during the pandemic. During the pandemic, sector-specific and workplace issues faced by immigrant and migrant workers which had been priorities of the IWC were to become the epicentre of the struggles. While during the pandemic, there was an upsurge of spontaneous forms of worker organizing, the struggles discussed below show the continuity and necessity for long-term organizing that can play a key organizing role during moments of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Montreal, Epicentre of the Pandemic

While the world's attention became focused on cities in China, or in Lombardy, Italy, and New York City as global epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic, Montreal joined them as it came to face a crisis of the same magnitude. The province of Quebec in which Montreal is located, was one of the first provinces in Canada to put a full lockdown into place on March 24th, 2020, shutting all non-essential businesses and restricting travel out of cities. By this time, though, the spread of COVID-19 had taken its toll. Montreal became the seventh deadliest place in the world (Berube, 2020). The vast majority of deaths took place in the province's long-term care homes, which accounted for 82% of the deaths. By May 2020, there had been 2,003 dead in Montreal, 74% of those who died were over 80, 97% of them were over 60 (Lindeman, 2020). As the prime minister of the province, François Legault admitted, a cause of this was that Quebec's senior care had become drastically underfunded (Canadian Press, May 15, 2020). Under the previous government in Quebec, which had been in power 2014 to 2018, the Health Minister Gaétan Barette had implemented reforms to "optimize"

resources, making community and preventative care subordinate to the needs of regional hospital networks, especially long-term care homes, CHSLDs [Centres d'hébergement de soins de longue durée]. (Leier, 2021). The CHSLDs experienced cuts in funding and lost management autonomy (Siedman, 2015). These austerity measures are what is seen in 'two-tier'[6] labour market segmentation, as critics of these measures in the healthcare network pointed out. The use of temporary placement agencies to provide a ready pool of cheap labour within the healthcare system was exposed. Especially among lower-skilled workers such as orderlies often known in Quebec by their French nomenclature, *préposé aux bénéficiaires*, cleaners, and security guards within the healthcare system undermined the management and standards within Quebec's public health system. A deteriorating healthcare network that was unable to respond adequately to the pandemic, coupled with where places community transmission was most acute, showed how public health corresponds to socio-economic conditions (Burton-Jeangros et al., 2020; Whitacre et al., 2021). While elders were the most severely affected, another picture emerged in Montreal, similar to other major cosmopolitan cities. Within the city of Montreal, it was neighbourhoods with high concentrations of essential workers which became a fault line in the COVID-19 crisis.

Particular neighbourhoods and areas of the city emerged as epicentres in epidemiological maps. One such neighbourhood was Montreal North, one of the poorest and most racialized areas of the city of Montreal. It was estimated that 23% of residents of Montreal North contracted COVID-19. The vast majority of these residents were essential workers or 'guardian angels'[7] working in long-term care networks through temporary placement agencies. As Will Prosper, a community organizer with Hoodstock, a community organization that was in direct contact and provided PPE to the community, states; "It's these people who are still taking care of us, when not too long ago they were the people whom we wanted to kick out," (Lindeman, 2020). Montreal-Nord was not the only neighbourhood at this global epicentre. Here again what was laid bare were pre-existing structural issues in consonance with the dynamics of neoliberal migration. As has been stated above, this precarious work is the result of decades of economic restructuring and the politics of neoliberalism. They have transformed the nature of work to create a cheap and disposable workforce.

Challenging the work conditions inside Montreal's warehouses

On March 23rd, in Quebec, Premier François Legault declared, "What I want to tell Quebecers who are not working in an essential service, please stay at home. The more we limit (human) contact, the faster we will limit the virus and the faster we will be able to return to our normal lives. So it's time to be united more than ever." (Authier, 2020). Those businesses that were deemed essential included grocers, companies manufacturing PPE, pharmacies, agriculture- or food related sectors.

In Montréal, by the middle of June 2020, there were 35 different workplace outbreaks of COVID-19, many of which occurred in places with a primarily immigrant workforce. (Luft, 2020). Québec public health statistics show that 20% of all virus transmissions were workplace-related (Santé Quebec). This fact remains the key preoccupation of workers and their communities: how to ensure that workplaces remain safe when employers feel that they can act with complete impunity, even if their workforce is at risk.[8]

Despite the economic and public health crisis, retail e-commerce sales reached a record $3.9 billion in May 2020 in Canada (E. Ng, 2021). Other firms that could leverage their logistics and online sales also attained record profits. Loblaw's reported $240 million in profits in the first quarter ending March 29th, 2021. Dollarama reported sales of $844.8 million and $86.1 million in earnings from April to June. Yet many of the thousands of immigrant workers who continue to carry out essential jobs were left behind. For major corporations and retailers, logistics operations are central to the circulation and distribution of food and essential goods. This meant that warehouses and distribution centres remained fully operational during the pandemic. For the IWC, the pandemic made more urgent the pre-existing issues faced by precarious immigrant workers. Employers who, prior to this had little regard for the health and safety of their workers, when the pandemic began, ignored their pleas and prioritized profits over their employees' lives.

In Montreal, one particular retail corporation that serves as a prime example of this dynamic is Dollarama. On March 24th, 2020, Dollarama was deemed an essential business and saw its sales increase by 20% in 2020 (Canadian Press, March 2020). Dollarama is a Montreal-based multi-national corporation and a low-end retailer which has been the focus of the work of the IWC since 2010.

It operates nearly 1,200 outlets in Canada. As a major corporation, its presence is felt across Canada and Central America. The Rossy family which owns Dollarama,, has accumulated a net worth of 2.52 billion dollars, making them the sixth richest family in Montreal and 50th in Canada (Canadian Business, 2015). Dollarama's wealth is built upon a familiar formula -- rapid movement of goods from the global South at the lowest possible cost. This has meant, in particular, the need to contain the costs of labour. This strategy, particularly with regard to logistics operations, is similar to other major firms.

Dollarama, like many other low-end retailers, was reliant upon a largely temporary low-wage and racialized workforce (Gonos and Martino, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010). It employs over 1,500 workers within their five warehouses and distribution centre in Montreal. It uses five temporary placement agencies to get workers for all its warehouse work. Irrespective of how long workers have worked for Dollarama, be it one month or ten years, they are employed as temporary workers (Salamanca, 2018). Much of the workforce in Dollarama's distribution centre is composed of new refugee claimants in Montreal. Since the election of Donald Trump, there has been a renewed crisis for refugees in the US. As a result, more than 60,000 people entered Canada through Roxham Road along the Quebec and New York state border. (Guardian, (Tremayne-Pengelli, 2022). These refugee claimants coming from Nigeria, Haiti, Guinea, India, and Palestine seek their first jobs (as a result of the lack of 'Canadian' experience) through temporary placement agencies. These agencies are looking for a docile and disposable workforce for logistics and warehousing, sectors, as noted above, that seek to maximize profits. Workers whose status is precarious are ideal. According to the Immigrant Workers Centre's report on warehouse work, of the workers surveyed, 38% were from Africa, and 31% were from Haiti (Immigrant Workers Centre, 2019). South of the border, in the US, Amazon warehouses and distribution centres in Minneapolis largely employ new immigrants from East Africa. In Chicago's warehouse industry, the workforce comprises Black and Latino workers. A flexible, low-wage labour force perfectly fits with just-in-time delivery to match just-in-time production on a global scale (Moody, 2017; Alimohamed-Wilson, 2021).

In the early days of the pandemic, workers from the Dollarama warehouse had begun to approach the IWC. They

wanted to make the demand to stay home. Dollarama which was not providing health and safety equipment prior to the pandemic was now not enforcing or enacting measures to keep workers safe during the pandemic. For example, during the first weeks of the pandemic, PPE such as masks or gloves was not mandatory, as COVID-19 had not yet been identified as an aerosol spreader, and this continued even when this became widely known. The reason for this was that these PPE products which were in short supply were being given to frontline health workers. However, the workers at the Dollarama warehouse felt that with the denial of any basic PPE for them, their lives were continuously being put at risk in the name of profit.

The IWC thus focused on doing direct work with workers and workplaces to ensure workers were provided with adequate health and safety equipment. It began distributing sanitizers and masks at workplaces prone to outbreaks, such as large warehouses and distribution centres. Furthermore, the IWC began to focus immediately on guaranteeing the rights of 'essential workers' to remain at home with adequate financial support and access to new government financial aid programs such as the Recovery benefit.

During the first days and weeks of the pandemic in March and April of 2020, organizers distributed 'know your rights' pamphlets pertaining to COVID-19, masks, gloves, and sanitizers, along with juice boxes, to the 1,500 workers weekly during their shift change. Workers became more aware, appreciated these efforts and began lodging complaints with the Labour Standards Commission. During the first week of April, a small group of workers gathered to organize for better protection. These workers, mainly Haitian refugee claimants living in neighbourhoods such as Saint-Michel and Montreal Nord, some of the areas hardest hit by the pandemic in Montreal, making them epicentres both Montreal and globally. While pundits declared the high rates of community transmission were due to multi-generational housing, a common denominator was that many of the people living in these neighbourhoods were working at Dollarama.

As Dollarama refused to place workers' health and safety over its profits, the IWC, along with workers, went public with a press conference on April 5th, 2020. One Dollarama worked from Haiti testified, "Workers at Dollarama's Montreal distribution centre aren't being supplied with gloves, masks or soap." (Tomesco, 2020). The press conference was successful. Workers got some basic PPE.

It was the first victory for these marginalized workers. Yet there was retaliation by Dollarama against its long-term agency workforce. According to the testimony of one of the worker activists about the conditions and consequences of Dollarama; "There was nothing resembling physical distancing on the job. He said he raised concerns with a supervisor and — the following day — he was out of a job. "I had worked there three years; I'm not a thief, I'm not a dog, I just wanted to be safe," said Maxime, who did not want his real name published. "I just wanted my coworkers to be safe." (Curtis, 2020).

The more publicized the conditions of these essential workers became, more allies became involved. In May 2020, Dollarama announced it would cut the COVID-19 premium given to workers despite record profits and immense risk workers took. In June 2020, nearly 60 workers along with the Conseil Syndicats Nationaux (CSN) Metropolitain Montreal, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) Regional Council, migrant justice groups like Solidarity Across Borders (SAB)[9] and new formations of essential workers, came together in one of the first in-person demonstrations during the pandemic alongside. This demonstration made a demand to maintain workers' COVID-19 premiums, for permanent jobs and to inform the public about the role of essential workers who were performing very dangerous jobs during the pandemic, yet who were excluded from the 'guardian angel' program (Government of Canada, 2021).

The campaign after June 2020 gained momentum. Through 2020 to 2021, each time it was made public that COVID-19 premiums were to be cut, workers organized rallies in front of Dollarama's main distribution centre. Dollarama would reinstate the $2 premium each time and then promised to keep their COVID-19 premium indefinite as long as the company was deemed essential. This victory was significant in that it took place during a context when the vast majority of employers had cut such premiums.

Cultural workers in Montreal penned an open letter calling for direct solidarity with Dollarama's warehouse workers. It read, "As artists in Montreal, we have a responsibility to amplify the message of Dollarama employees. This solidarity is also a civic obligation for us because it is a Canadian company whose head office is in Montreal, and it is an integral part of the social fabric of our city." (IWC-CTI, 2020). Former workers became spokespeople, as workers inside still felt unable to speak in public. By June 2021,

with the support of the British Columbia Government Employees Union (BCGEU), who took the role of an activist shareholder in Dollarama, wokers tabled a motion in the annual investor meeting to ask for a human rights report. The investors rejected the motion, but again Dollarama had to give concessions. The first of which was its admission that agencies were operating inside Dollarama. The second was a promise for a permanent pay increase to $15 an hour. These victories with Dollarama provided lessons.

These workers, though under the duress of the pandemic, came together because they realized that their employer was more concerned with profits than their health. The workers chose life over death. For the IWC, this was the result of nearly a decade of outreach, workers' assemblies, and campaigns. And the pandemic brought about conditions in which workers themselves the confidence to go public themselves.

Organizing immigrant working class communities at the epicentre of the pandemic

Another epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic within Montreal was Parc-Extension, a working-class, immigrant neighbourhood, with the highest percentage of working poor in Montreal. According to a study by the Institut national de la recherche Scientifique (INRS), 30.7% of the population of this neighbourhood are workers who live below the poverty line. Many of these residents are employed in essential services (Leloup et al., 2016). Residents are predominantly new immigrants and migrants from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, but also from a range of other countries. Parc-Extension can be viewed as a microcosm of global capitalism. The neighbourhood has become home to a growing number refugee claimants from India, whose numbers have increased 283% since 2018. These immigrant workers are deemed disposable yet essential, as day labour or temporary agency workers. Since 2015, the IWC has focused a series of activities and organizing efforts on Parc-Extension. The approach was to build worker organizations in the community to reach people more effectively and create the conditions for workplace organizing and broader campaigns within their community. The focus had been on the 'Fight for $15'[10] campaign to address systemic poverty faced by working poor residents in Parc-Extension. This struggle has also been inextricably tied to housing and immigration justice issues.

The majority of IWC members in Parc-Extension, work in major corporations such as Dollarama, Mega Blocks, and Amazon but also are concentrated in a number of meat processing plants and greenhouses. During the first wave of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, many residents in Parc-Extension worked in a meat processing factory known to have major outbreaks. One major case was at a plant called Concord Premium Meats (Curtis, 2020). In the summer of 2020, 24 workers on the evening shift were affected. During that summer, the IWC focused on outreach, particularly at Concord Meats, which hired workers through 'fly by night' agencies, bringing immigrant workers from Parc-Extension on buses to the factories. Concord Meat employs over 500 workers through several different temporary agencies that all bus in the workers from Parc-Extension. During the first wave, the transport provided by the employer did not meet public health standards for COVID-19. The workers at Concord Meats were stuffed into school buses without physical distancing. "That scares me because these people get on the (work) buses, and they're packed," said city councillor Mary Deros. (Carpenter, 2020). By the Fall of 2020, Parc-Extension had the highest rates of infection in the city. (CBC, October 2020).

The outreach team of the IWC distributed pamphlets and organized workshops on COVID-19, rights in the workplace and how workers can access worker compensation and other benefits. Concord Meat had a track record of complete disregard for its workers' health and safety. Another plant which became the source of a major outbreak was Les Aliments Cargill at its meat processing plant in Chambly just outside Montreal. At least 64 workers contracted COVID-19 during this outbreak. Many of the workers were refugees working through temporary placement agencies. The transmission belt from workplace to community was clear as Montreal Nord, a largely immigrant working-class neighbourhood, was the epicentre of the pandemic. Much of the focus on community transmission focused on poverty, poor housing, and education. Yet it was the negligence of large employers who were deemed essential during the pandemic.

The result of the struggle inside Parc-Extension for the IWC led to the formation of the South Asian Worker's Committee in the summer of 2021. The IWC brought together worker leaders and focused on their development, fundraised to hire a community member as a full-time organizer, and began organizing along

strategic linguistic lines such as Punjabi and Hindi. The IWC fought several cases from Concord Meats regarding health and safety and unjust dismissal, and also, from the course of 2020 until 2021, brought in over 100 workers from the community to workshops on immigration and the formation of such a committee. This work was not solely due to a reaction in the moment; it was the result of organizers being grounded in a long-term strategic manner. The strategy paid off as they were able to respond to the crisis facing the community and mobilize in this political moment. The struggles and organizing inside Dollarama and in Parc-Extension had been shedding light on the structural issues of precarious work. However the catalyst was the pandemic and the response by governments who publicly declared the essential need for workers in certain sectors, while simultaneously not addressing the lack of permanent status that many of these workers faced. This lack of status became a key point for mobilization during the pandemic.

From Guardian Angels to 'We are All Essential'

In April 2020, during the first lockdown, Premier Legault of Quebec posted a video thanking healthcare workers for their contribution, calling them "guardian angels who watch over us and who combat the invisible enemy that is COVID-19" (@ francoislegault, 2020). 'Guardian angel' became a popular term in Quebec to describe essential workers, in particular those within the health sector. This was seized on by migrant justice organizations, who had identified that many so-called 'angel' essential workers' were migrants and refugee claimants without permanent status in the country or access to the same supports that sustained permanent residents. In May 2020, a 40-year-old refugee claimant from Haiti, Marcelin Francois, died from COVID-19. During the week, he had worked in a textile factory and on the weekends, he had worked at a CHSLD, sent there by a temporary placement agency (Lindeman, 2020). He lived without permanent status and was among many of those who played a key role in the healthcare system. However the Premier's words remained rhetoric. There were no concrete steps implemented to truly recognize the contribution of refugees.

Legault's 'thank you for your service' appeared especially empty when his party members rejected a motion by an independent member of Quebec's National Assembly, Catherine Fournier, to recognize the contribution of refugee claimants working in health

care and public long-term care homes by pressing Ottawa to regularise their immigration status. Fournier's motion was a response to mobilizations, especially in Montréal's Haitian diaspora. As noted above, Haitians make up a significant number of the asylum seekers with still pending claims. The majority of them had crossed into Canada at Roxham Road. These protests brought attention to the number of 'essential' workers who had long-pending asylum claims and were threatened with deportation while working and dying in jobs as healthcare workers, often with no access to public services. Essential worker narratives, deployed by migrant rights groups and circulating in the press, combined with a brewing consciousness of how 'sheltering in place', a possibility for many white, middle-class Québecers was not an option for them.

Around this time, the idea of a regularisation program that would grant permanent residency to asylum seekers in healthcare began to be floated in the press, and in June 2020, Radio-Canada obtained a draft paper for the first version of a special immigration program for health sector workers in the pandemic. The program, penned by then Federal[11] Immigration Minister Marco Mendocino, was quite broad in its conception of health care and had relatively accessible eligibility requirements. Most of those who could have qualified for the program resided in Quebec.

Despite the crisis, the position of Premier Legault was, in fact, to maintain his anti-immigrant position. He asserted: "We can't open the door and say, 'If you come here illegally, if you find a job, we'll accept you as an immigrant'. That's not how it works." (Macpherson, 2020). With the immigration restrictionist mandate of his party, Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ), Legault couldn't politically afford to support a generous program that would exceed their promised limits. But when the migrant justice movement gained support from the media, a media who were writing for a Québecois public. And now, thanks to what was unfolding during the pandemic, this public was primed to think about the necessity of social reproductive infrastructure and work, *especially* in the healthcare system. The Premier could not be seen to to maintain an entirely hard line. As a result, he partially demurred, at first proposing a case-by-case selection of asylum seekers.

In August 2020, the federal government announced Guardian Angel program. Quebec-based applicants had to apply for a Certificate of Selection (CSQ), typically a rubber-stamp

procedure for refugees , however eligibility criteria had become highly restrictive across all of Canada. The program opened on 14th December 2020. From then till February 6th, 2021, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) received 978 applications which covered 2525 persons (as dependents were included). Of those only 239 principal applicants got approved in principle and decisions were pending on the remaining ones. (Government of Canada, 2021).

The reality was that essential workers with precarious status were left out of the new 'guardian angel' program and they were also excluded from accessing the basic tools to combat the pandemic, such as COVID-19 PCR[12] tests, government financial support, and later vaccines. This generated an apartheid system which excluded non-status migrants and raised questions such as what would happen to undocumented[13] migrants and those without status who contracted COVID-19. Also, non-status workers without access to PCR tests would be left out of the collective effort to save lives and protect the most vulnerable. For others, despite the grave risk COVID-19 posed, without access to the benefits available to other workers, in particular the Canada Recovery Benefit,[14] they were left with only two choices: starve or risk contracting COVID-19 by taking on essential work, especially in the burgeoning sector of cleaning for public hospitals or long-term care homes.

One of the first actions taken by the Women's Committee of TAWA-ATTAP, in order to gain access to healthcare and to PCR tests for non-status migrants, was to present their demands and realities to the public. The provincial government had informally approved that everyone would have access, however the reality was that healthcare workers had to continue to ask for PCR tests. During this time, too, they did not get access to state support. This led to substantial grassroots efforts by the IWC and SAB to raise a solidarity fund for undocumented workers. It also meant building networks with government agencies and other state bodies to ensure access to these supports. Since a lot of these exclusions emanated from not having status, the Women's Committee of TAWA-ATTAP began to use the realities of the pandemic to highlight the plight of undocumented workers. Alongside immediate demands, the pressure began to build towards a call for full regularization of all migrants. This was in response to the critiques put forth by migrants and allies of the 'guardian angel' program. Many essential workers

-- warehouse workers, cleaners, delivery drivers, care workers, and agricultural workers, most of whom had precarious migration and resident status, felt they were deliberately being excluded from the conversation about essential workers being deserving of status. In addition, we have already noted the co-relation between agency workers and those with precarious status and the alarming number of increasing deaths among such workers and their communities. The actions of the Women's Committee was born of the challenge of pure survival that many of them faced. Then in the spring and summer there were began to be growing calls for full status for all from sectors outside of the IWC and SAB.

The reaction to the limitations put on the 'guardian angel' program by Premier Legault began to grow louder. Paul Clarke, executive director of Action Réfugiés Montréal said, "While it's always good news when asylum seekers are granted status, this measure does not go far enough." Again he went on to remind everyone that, "There were asylum seekers who were working in warehouses all through the pandemic making sure that there was food at your local Loblaws or Provigo". Migrants who were essential workers in long-term care homes were also excluded. One mediatized case was of a refugee claimant from Cote d'Ivoire, Mamadou Konaté who worked in a number of Montreal CHSLDs. He was facing deportation, despite working throughout the pandemic, risking his life. He caught the coronavirus at the end of April, at the height of the first wave. When he recovered, he went right back to work at the front lines. His situation exemplifies the new fault lines in the politics around COVID-19. As articulated by Frantz André, a member of the IWC board and spokesperson for the Action Committee for People Without Status, noting the shift in tone. "When they came, they were considered the zeros of this world…[n]ow they are heroes." (Julie Young, et al, 2020).

The lack of status and absence of any program to regularize migrants came to the fore in the summer of 2020. Various groups -- SAB, alongside the IWC, TAWA-ATTAP, Pinay, Le Québec c'est nous aussi, Guineans for Status For All, as well as blocs organized by Artists For Longterm Care – got together, to demand permanent immigration status for all, not just a select group of 'guardian angels', based on the affirmation that all migrants are essential. A demonstration was planned. The statement put out by the organizing committee "…stressed the urgency of an immediate, inclusive

and comprehensive regularization program, as a response to the coronavirus pandemic and redress for centuries of discriminatory and racist government policy." (SAB, 2020). Nearly 1,000 essential workers and their allies came out to demand a comprehensive regularization program. The march exposed the hollowness of the narrative of the federal government. "While we welcome the regularization of any migrant without status, we roundly reject the Liberal party's rhetoric for what it is: the same divide and rule tactics that the colonial state has always used to quell resistance, a strategic attempt to maintain its hold on political power." (SAB, 2020). The march marked the beginning of a renewed movement for status. Migrants mobilized under the banner of essential workers to demand status. The IWC supported groups of warehouse workers and delivery drivers. In the summer, a group of international students and refugee claimants from India also began to organize for status. Their group United Refugee Council got a petition signed by nearly 6,000 people from the community. The federal government attempted to silence dissent by blaming the province of Quebec for not having an expanded program. During that summer and fall, there were actions by a diverse network of self-organized migrant workers.

The question of status, particularly for undocumented workers, became acute during the second wave of Covid in the winter of 2021 when the Quebec government instituted not only a lockdown but a curfew which the police would enforce. This curfew had dramatic effects on undocumented migrants who were facing deportation orders. According to the law, undocumented migrants who face deportation have a warrant issued for their detention prior to removal from Canada by the Canadian Border Services Agency. The police can enforce this order.

> *A police car pulls alongside the van as it exits the highway. Inside, the silence is tense. "Odette" clenches her fist and prays. Then, as the police pull ahead and move in another direction, she and her coworkers start breathing again. It is after curfew. Although she has a letter from her employer verifying that she is working nights, if the police ask to see it, they may realize that there is an arrest warrant in her name. The warrant was issued after she failed to show up for deportation about a year ago (Foster, 2021).*

Despite having letters, those without status do not have valid identification papers which would become evident if the police stopped them and ran a check. This created immense stress. As a precaution, workers would arrive at work before the curfew began; some would stay at another worker's house that might be closer to their workplace, all to minimize commuting and the risk of being stopped by the police. Community groups deplored the curfew because it disproportionately penalized marginalized populations. They pointed out how adopting effective health measures would make such draconian policies unnecessary. The IWC began to work with law students to prepare a guide for workers to deal with the curfew and what to do if police stopped them. The curfew also began to bring again to the centre of the public's attention, a key demand of the IWC and migrant organizations: enacting a real 'sanctuary city.[15] Under the former Montreal mayor Denis Coderre, Montreal declared itself a sanctuary city at a time when there was also a wave of similar motions adopted in the US by city governments in reaction to Donald Trump's anti-immigrant politics. The motion was adopted in Montreal, but was largely symbolic as it did not put in place any attempts to curb the powers of the police to execute deportation warrants.

During the pandemic, the emptiness and unwillingness of the city to move further to protect undocumented migrants from potential deportations was called out by the borough mayor of Parc-Extension, Villeray and Saint Michel, Giuliana Fumagalli. She had been a board member of the IWC and a migrant justice activist. On 23rd February, 2021, she submitted a motion to Montreal's city council to support full regularization of status. (Local 514, 2021). Fumagalli maintained the adoption of the motion represented a significant step toward protecting the city's citizens. "We have a responsibility to represent the interests of marginalized populations who suffer disproportionate and discriminatory effects from certain measures put in place in the context of the health crisis" (2021). While it was mostly symbolic, it did amplify the movement's voice and put forward resources from the city towards organizations such as the IWC through one of the city departments, Bureau d'intégration des nouveaux arrivants à Montreéal (BINAM). This was a victory for those who had been rendered invisible prior to the pandemic.

Issues related to essential workers during the pandemic would continue to open new avenues for organizing immigrant

and migrant workers. The coalition that had become active during the pandemic organized a major mobilization to demand access to government services for immigrants regardless of status and the right to work in Quebec. The demonstration was organized under the banner of "Immigration Precarity Maks Labour Precarity! We Are All Essential!" The mobilization was successful as the leadership of migrants put forward the experiences of workers and their communities. South Asian migrants facing deportation spoke, as did welders from Morocco under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, domestic workers, warehouse workers and allies from various organized labour such as the Confédérations des Syndicaux (CSN), and Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec (FTQ). The large union centrals had also mobilized to support the workers.

The success of such mobilizations in workplaces, communities, and among migrants represented a shift in consciousness as the willingness of workers to take action grew. By reframing it "We are all essential", undocumented migrants and those with precarious status found a slogan that they identified with, they were able to unite and put forward compelling discourse related to their central role during the pandemic. This did lead to success as migrants used their identity as workers who were essential. It gave them the confidence to mobilize and speak out. At the same time, during the pandemic, migrants' power within their workplace was limited. This was a major challenge to gaining a full regularization program.

Despite the challenges that remain, the IWC began to not just mobilize essential workers but to focus on strengthening and deepening its organizational capacity and leadership. The IWC did this by bringing together warehouse workers, undocumented workers, and workers from the arabophone speaking community who worked in factories and the South Asian community working in warehouses. The IWC worked to develop their leadership through education and building a broad-based workers' council which directs the actions of the IWC. The members who became active were not just a result of the major campaigns waged by the IWC, but of an increased number of workers who filed complaints and challenged their employers during the pandemic. The work of the IWC during the COVID-19 pandemic was a key turning point in the scale and reach of the IWC. However but the pandemic alone

cannot be credited for these advances. The earlier organizing of the IWC has been key.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the fragility of global capitalism and its reliance upon a global racialized division of labour within and across countries. The pandemic devastated racialized workers and communities disproportionately. COVID-19 exposed how our societies were reliant on a racialized immigrant and migrant workforce. Stay-at-home orders exposed structural racism and its intersections with class. The pandemic exposed the structural inequalities faced by immigrant and migrant workers, including how these workers' expendability was a hard-wired necessity for the reproduction of capitalist societies. Those who remained home and safe relied upon migrant workers to grow their food, clean hospitals and care homes, package and deliver the goods to households, keep stores open, and care for those who were sick. These workers deemed 'essential' had been invisibilized prior to the pandemic. Decades of economic restructuring under the guise of maintaining global competitiveness meant the proliferation of precarious work to keep labour costs low, ensure productivity, and bolster the existence of non-unionized workplaces across entire sectors of the economy, in the service of profit margins. The transformation of work occurred in tandem with the reliance upon racialized immigrant and migrant workers. This is because the ideal worker was a precarious worker, whose precarity was created by immigration regimes that did not deter the growth of migration from the global South to the North but controlled and disciplined them to serve the needs of capital.

The case study of the organizing of immigrant and migrant workers involved with the IWC during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the seeming paradox of the 'essential' worker who is also the 'disposable' worker. The study also shows how despite migrant and immigrant workers facing conditions of low-pay, dangerous work, and precarious immigration status, organizing of workers, supported by organizations such as the IWC posed challenges to employers and made public unjust labour laws and immigration policies. Essential workers in warehouses for corporations such as Dollarama, usually perma-temps with precarious status and refugee claimants in meat processing plants or cleaners without status or living in fear of deportation, suffering the devaluing of

their labour and their rights as workers, surmounted precarity and invisibilization through organized mobilization and articulation. In the early moments of the pandemic with all the politics involves, despite fear and the lethal character of the pandemic, and the fact we were collectively facing something unseen for generations what emerged was the possibility of a more socially just and equitable world.

In an era of labour defensiveness, of the weakening power of trade unions in advanced capitalist countries, the struggles of these 'essential workers' for basic health and safety protection, living wages, and ultimately, full status have posed a significant challenge to global capital. The direct impact of two decades of grassroots labour organizing by the IWC began to bear fruit as it built the leadership capacity, relationships, and skills needed to support workers' struggles during the pandemic with concrete victories -- at Dollarama, workers gaining masks, better protection, and a living wage. The struggles of undocumented women who work through temporary agencies to place in the public discourse that there can be no real protection of the rights of essential workers without full status for all undocumented workers were major successes. Beyond these campaigns, the IWC was able to forge new alliances with communities in Parc-Extension, build new worker-led committees along a geo-spatial and community basis. This work demonstrate how broad-based workers' councils are key to expanding these victories and ensuring the sustainability of the organizing work, especially as the sympathy for essential workers and collective memory of the pandemic fades from public discourse.

As in the case of Montreal and other cities, the momentum built has charted a new path for labour renewal led by the most marginalized sectors of the working class. This work has shown that there is not a decline in labour militancy but that it is taking place in new sectors, and sections of the working class. The challenge for such renewal, though, is the ability to build organizations that cannot just bring together immigrant and migrant workers, but ultimately translate that identity of 'essential' workers into building the collective worker confidence. Experience has demonstrated how this transformation fostered the taking of collective action along economic lines and how this action enabled the workers to realize their true power as essential workers. The consequences of such mobilization and action would not just disrupt marginalized

sectors of the economy, but could have a major societal impact. This inherent power that the workers have and are realizing can chart a path to challenge the very structures which have produced the racialized inequality and exploitation that has enabled a global public health crisis which has not been seen for a century.

Endnotes

1. Mostafa Henaway mhenaway@gmail.com is a Ph.D candidate at Montreal's Concordia University, Department of Geography, Planning and Environment
2. IWC started in Montreal in the province of Quebec in Canada. Over the years the work of the IWC has expanded to other parts of the province.
3. Marketized – areas under public or governmental sectors that get privatized and become part of the for-profit sector.
4. The name in French is Association des travailleurs et travailleuses d'agence de placement (ATTAP). It may be referred to from time to time as TAWA-ATTAP. In this article it will be referred to from here on as TAWA-ATTAP.
5. Lack of Canadian experience results in 'racializing' which is unconnected to skin colour but works in the same way that racism does. I.e. it constructs a rationale to justify exploitation.
6. Two-tier or dual labour markets are those in which governments reduce protections for temporary workers who become increasingly attractive as labour when compared to permanent workers who have permanent immigration status and worker protections.
7. 'guardian angels' was a label that was used by politicians during the early days of the pandemic for essential workers, particularly those in healthcare and care in general. While an accurate descriptor it also had elements of paternalism that soon became clear once vaccines were introduced and there was less fear and uncertainty about the pandemic. Then the status quo re-emerged.
8. Since this article was written, the government of Quebec has removed the 5-day isolation requirement for anyone testing positive for COVID. This will impact the spread/contagion conditions described above and has been strongly criticized. For example, see epidemiologist, Dr. Donald Vinh in René Bruemmer, "Some doctors denounce Quebec's 'common sense' COVID recommendations", Montreal Gazette, 4 November 2022 https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/quebec-ends-five-day-covid-isolation-period-counsels-common-sense
9. Solidarity Across Borders is a Quebec-based network of refugees, and migrants.
10. 'Fight for $15' is a campaign to wage minimum wage in Quebec to $15 an hour.
11. Canada has a federal system of government with Provincial and Federal

government ministries. But while a federal system, the province of Quebec has special status and jurisdiction over areas like Immigration. E.g. in order to settle in Quebec, an application for immigration must first succed in obtaining a Quebec Selection Certificate (CSQ). Only after this can the Federal immigration process be followed and completed.

12. PCR – polymerase chain reaction tests are accepted as being more accurate than the rapid test, in detecting COVID-19 infection. However access to these tests is not as easy and depending on the context and situation, individuals wishing/needed to get a PCR test have to pay out of pocket and the fees can be high, at times over $100. Since the PCR test is more accurate, often a report from this type of test is required by institutions
13. Undocumented – "An undocumented migrant is an individual who has no authorization to reside and/or work in Canada. The majority become undocumented by falling out of status when they cannot meet eligibility criteria for existing immigration programs after lawfully entering Canada, and have overstayed their authorized period of stay. Only a small portion of undocumented migrants are thoughts to have unlawfully entered, or were trafficked or smuggled into Canada." (Government of Canada 2022).
14. "The Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) provided financial support to employed and self-employed Canadians who were directly affected by COVID-19. and were not entitled to Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. Depending on when you applied, applicants received either $1,000 ($900 after taxes withheld) or $600 ($540 after taxes withheld) for a 2-week period, between September 27, 2020 and October 23, 2021. The last day to apply was December 22, 2021." (Government of Canada, n.d. https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/recovery-benefit.html, accessed 14 November 2022).
15. Sanctuary cities can be defined as "policies and practices [that] generally serve the purpose of accommodating illegalized migrants and refugees in urban communities" (Mancina, 2013). Sanctuary cities gained widespread attention after an important milestone for sanctuary cities in the USA. (Mancina, 2013). In 1985, San Francisco passed the largely symbolic "City of Refuge" resolution, followed in 1989 by the "City of Refuge" ordinance. The latter specifically prohibited using city funds and resources to assist in federal immigration enforcement, cooperating with investigations by or surveillance requests from a foreign government. Today, dozens of cities in the USA have passed sanctuary legislation to protect illegalized migrants who are de-facto residents of these cities. Concrete policies include Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), which typically prohibit municipal police forces and city service agencies from interacting with immigration officers.

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LABOUR, Capital and Society 50:1&2 (2022)

Research Note

Self-training and experimentation among workplace peer helpers during Covid-19: exploring the use of the ©Trans-faire training tool among FTQ social delegates.

Mélanie Dufour Poirier & Francine D'Ortun[1]

Abstract

This research note explores the trial of a training tool, called © Trans-faire. The objective behind the creation of this training tool is to enhance the capacity of social delegates of the FTQ (Quebec Federation of Labour) to act as peer helpers, a program begun by the FTQ in 1983 in response to growing workplace psychological problems which have been made significantly worse by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This research is part of our 10 year long longitudinal study of the FTQ's approach to developing mutual aid between workers. This latest data collection was undertaken during the pandemic and aimed to identify the training needs of social delegates. It examined the way they saw their role, the strategies required to carry out their mission, and their motivation for self-learning. To do so, we held two discussion groups and conducted thirteen semi-directed interviews. We were able to identify their motives, strategies and self-study objectives. Given the new urgency brought on by Covid, the social delegates were able to develop rapid responses to topical problems and new situations.

We found their self-study motives to be related to issues of identity and workplace operations. The knowledge they developed through experience and action are an invaluable source of learning, innovation and points of debate between actors within a workplace community which Trans-faire seeks to expand.

Note de recherche

Covid-19 : mobile d'autoformations et d'expérimentation du ©Trans-faire par le Réseau des délégués sociaux de la FTQ

Mélanie Dufour Poirier & Francine D'Ortun[1]

Résumé

Cette note de recherche met en lumière l'expérimentation d'un dispositif de formation entre pairs aidants au sein du Réseau des délégués sociaux (DS) de la Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ): le © Trans-faire. En pleine pandémie, nous avons recueilli les besoins de formation des DS et examiné la vision de leur rôle, les stratégies pour mener à bien leur mission et leur motivation à apprendre par eux-mêmes, par la tenue de deux groupes de discussion et de 13 entretiens semi-dirigés. Nous avons dégagé les motifs, les stratégies et les objets d'autoformations réalisées par les DS. Dans l'urgence, ces derniers ont trouvé des réponses rapides à des problèmes ponctuels et inédits. Les motifs derrière les autoformations se sont révélés d'ordres identitaire et opératoire professionnel. Ces savoirs expérientiels et d'action constituent des sources inestimables d'apprentissages, d'innovations et de délibérations entre les acteurs d'une communauté de travail que le Trans-faire cherche à essaimer.

Introduction

Cette note de recherche met en lumière l'expérimentation récente d'un dispositif de formation entre pairs aidants au sein d'un réseau d'entraide syndicale : le ©Trans-faire. Ce dispositif vise le partage des apprentissages faits par ces pairs aidants en vue de poursuivre leur mission d'aider leurs collègues dans leur milieu de travail respectif. Ces travaux s'inscrivent dans une programmation longitudinale de recherche que nous menons depuis plus de 10 ans auprès du Réseau des délégués sociaux (DS) de la Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ) : nous y étudions les actions et les innovations déployées par les DS sur le terrain pour contrer les atteintes d'ordre psychologique au travail et humaniser les milieux

de travail[3]. Plus précisément, en pleine pandémie de Covid-19 (C-19), nous avons sollicité des DS, choisis selon un échantillon raisonné (Fortin, 2010), pour participer à 2 groupes de discussion (n=50) et à des entretiens semi-dirigés (n=13) menés entre le 19 juin et le 2 juillet 2020. Outre les défis ayant compliqué leur contexte d'intervention, notre collecte de données nous a permis de dégager les motifs, les stratégies et les objets d'autoformations réalisées par les DS dans ce contexte historique et inédit. Et de déboucher sur la création de ce nouveau dispositif de formation entre les pairs, bousculant au passage l'appareil structurel du Réseau à cette même enseigne.

De manière plus globale, les atteintes d'ordre psychologique au travail tirent, de notre avis et celui de plusieurs auteurs (De Kersabiec, 2016; Chaignot Delage et Dejours, 2017 ; OIT, 2019 ; 2016), leurs sources de dysfonctionnements et de déséquilibres profonds provenant du travail lui-même, de ses modes d'organisation et des politiques organisationnelles l'encadrant. La souffrance liée à ces atteintes constitue l'épiphénomène d'une crise sociale mondiale que la pandémie de C-19 n'a fait qu'accentuer : sa résolution réclame la mise en place d'actions concertées de la part de l'ensemble des acteurs du travail, au Nord comme au Sud, dont les organisations syndicales au premier chef. Il en va de leur pertinence et de leur légitimité d'agir de manière proactive à ce titre et de se faire des vecteurs de transmission des idéaux de solidarité, d'affiliation sociale, de démocratie industrielle et de justice sociale dans les milieux de travail, partout où ils déploient leurs actions.

La création d'un réseau d'entraide

Pour les non-initiés, la FTQ, la plus grande organisation syndicale au Québec, créait en 1983, en collaboration avec l'organisation philanthropique Centraide, le Réseau des DS. Celui-ci se voulait destiné à accompagner les travailleurs syndiqués aux prises avec des problèmes de santé mentale au travail. Sa venue s'explique par le déficit de proximité syndicale dans les milieux de travail au chapitre de la santé mentale et la récession économique qui sévissait alors à l'échelle mondiale. L'ampleur de la crise avait incité la FTQ à former des militants syndicaux capables de fournir une aide technique aux syndiqués touchés par le chômage et d'accompagner les travailleurs en difficultés, dont ceux aux prises avec des problèmes de consommation abusive d'alcool et de drogues.

Leur rôle se formalisera davantage avec le temps, notamment en ce qui a trait à la relation d'aide et à l'écoute de personnes en détresse. Pour nous, les DS sont des pairs-aidants, tel que le définit Bonnami (2019) : ce concept s'appuie sur une base idéologique, celle de la reconnaissance des savoirs expérientiels, de l'expertise du vécu détenue par les personnes concernées en leur capacité à partager leurs expériences entre pairs. Les DS accompagnent leurs collègues en détresse, sur la base d'un rapport d'égal à égal, quels que soient leur métier, leur âge, leur sexe ou leur expérience. L'approche qu'ils préconisent est l'écoute active et l'entraide entre les pairs, libre et confidentielle, accessible en tout temps. Sans trop de brièveté, les DS se définissent comme des agents de soutien et de rétablissement, à l'écoute de leurs collègues et cherchent à cultiver des rapports de proximité et de confiance avec ceux-ci. L'entraide proposée se veut non professionnelle: loin de s'y substituer, elle vise à fournir une écoute active par un pair travailleur et des références utiles vers des ressources hors du travail, ainsi qu'à prévenir des situations de crise dans les milieux de travail et, a-t-on récemment noté, à agir comme médiateur en situation de malentendu ou de conflit.

Le contexte de la collecte menée à l'été 2020

Ces considérations étant posées, notre présomption à l'été 2020 était à l'effet que la pandémie de C-19 et les mesures sanitaires l'accompagnant, dont la distanciation sociale, avait bousculé l'aide de proximité prodiguée par les DS dans les milieux de travail alors que la souffrance était exacerbée, et avait généré des besoins particuliers pour les DS, dans le cas nous intéressant plus précisément ici, au chapitre de la formation. En effet, des données inédites mises à notre disposition par la FTQ attestaient d'une recrudescence exponentielle depuis le début de la pandémie des interventions en santé mentale des DS auprès de leurs pairs en difficulté. Les motifs récurrents d'intervention, relevés alors par la FTQ, étaient : alcoolisme; anxiété; stress, dont celui de contracter le virus; violences entre les pairs; nombre démultiplié d'arrêts de travail. Un sondage réalisé à l'interne par la FTQ indiquait également que sur 651 interventions menées par ces pairs aidants entre mars et juin 2020, 80% d'entre elles concernaient des enjeux de santé mentale (stress, anxiété, crises de panique) – plus encore, en lien avec le travail et la pandémie. D'un côté donc, la crise sanitaire avait non seulement provoqué l'exacerbation des problématiques déjà

connues des DS, mais également leur sophistication, que l'on pense notamment aux défis se rapportant à la porosité des temps de travail et à la conciliation travail-vie de famille (ou vie hors travail), sous l'impulsion généralisée du télétravail. Le tout sur fond de réduction notable des ressources d'aide psychologique accessibles pour des travailleurs en difficultés, à l'instar des maisons de thérapie, des banques alimentaires, des maisons pour femmes et enfants violentés, etc. De plus, de nouvelles problématiques avaient également émergé suivant la perte d'appartenance au groupe, l'éloignement des travailleurs face au syndicat, l'effritement de la présence syndicale sur le terrain, l'exacerbation du sentiment de solitude, pour ne nommer que celles-ci. De l'autre, ladite crise avait aussi provoqué une mutation profonde du rôle et des conditions d'exercice des DS qui se réalisent, dès la fondation du Réseau, dans la proximité avec autrui.

Le but de la collecte menée à l'été 2020

Ce faisant, il devenait urgent pour nous de documenter la capacité des DS à agir auprès de leurs pairs dans une famille de situations, mais surtout à innover au contact des bouleversements liés à la pandémie et à s'adapter par l'expérimentation (active et passive, c'est-à-dire non conscientisée) de ceux-ci. En collaboration avec le Réseau, nous avons donc convenu de recueillir les besoins de formation des DS dans ce contexte de hautes turbulences et d'examiner finement la vision de leur rôle, les stratégies pour mener à bien leur mission d'entraide syndicale malgré la C-19 et leur motivation à apprendre par eux-mêmes les objets sur lesquels portent ces apprentissages, soit : ces autoformations réalisées par les DS eux-mêmes pour contribuer à renforcer leur propre capacité d'agir. Nous avons ainsi dégagé des données d'entretien et analysé ces autoformations selon les deux objectifs suivants : 1) apprécier le potentiel de ces autoapprentissages et reconnaître la circularité et le multilatéralisme des influences susceptibles d'enrichir à terme l'offre de formations du Réseau en misant sur la co-construction de nouveaux savoirs entre pairs; et 2) stimuler l'*intelligence collective*[4] des DS ancrée dans l'espace et dans le temps, dans le vif de l'action de terrain. Il faut comprendre que jusqu'en mars 2020, soit avant la pandémie, pour s'acquitter de leur rôle, les DS bénéficiaient de formations en salle et d'accompagnement sur mesure au besoin. L'offre « en présence » du Réseau des DS comprenait une formation

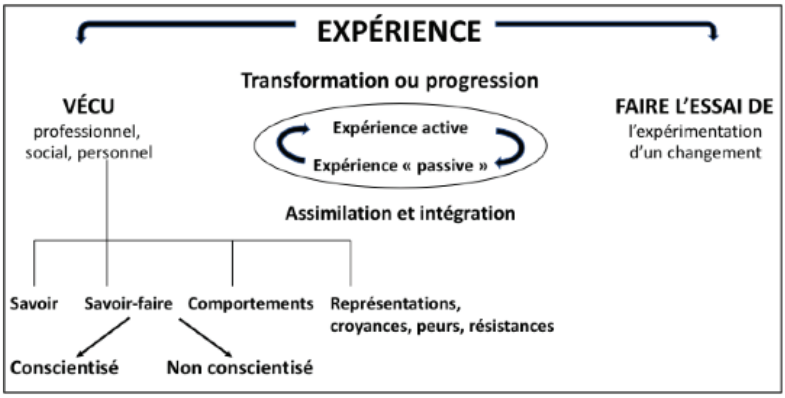
initiale se déployant sur trois jours à l'intention de l'ensemble des DS. Celle-ci visait et vise toujours à développer leurs habiletés d'écoute active, à connaître les ressources vers qui diriger les collègues qui les interpellent, et à faire de la prévention. Des ateliers étaient aussi disponibles pour parfaire leur formation (p. ex. : violence en milieu de travail; action sociale et politique; travail syndical en prévention; outils pour la résolution de conflits interpersonnels; harcèlement psychologique). Des journées thématiques se tenaient sur des thèmes variables, règle générale, plusieurs fois par année, le tout se clôturant par une conférence annuelle. Au moment d'écrire ces lignes et au moment de notre contact avec le terrain à l'été 2020, le Réseau des DS offrait toujours de la formation initiale et continue, mais à distance, par Zoom, en raison des mesures sanitaires. Le paradigme préconisé en matière de formation (lire ici, la formule de l'hétéroformation ou formation reçue par autrui) demeurait cependant la voie privilégiée à l'intérieur du Réseau des DS.

Cadre théorique

Au plan théorique, notre raisonnement (et les analyses en découlant) tirent leurs assises : 1- du modèle conceptuel de Karolewicz (2010) sur la transformation de la pratique professionnelle découlant de l'expérience ; et 2- du mode d'apprentissage qu'est l'autoformation (D'Ortun, 2012). Dans l'apprentissage par l'expérience, un travailleur est dans l'action : il réfléchit sur le résultat de son action (avec le risque de difficultés à prendre du recul), comprend le principe général (avec le risque de ne pas être capable de formaliser ses savoirs) et généralise son action (avec le risque de s'enfermer dans la routine) (p. 43). C'est l'expérience (active et passive) des transformations suscitées par la pandémie de C-19, telles que perçues et vécues par les DS, dans leurs interventions et leurs apprentissages qu'il nous apparaissait urgent de sonder dans la présente démarche de recherche. Le modèle de l'apprentissage par l'expérience de Karolewizc (2010) (en témoigne la figure 1 ci-contre) présente la particularité d'éprouver les expériences passées et passives des individus (constituées de savoirs, savoir-faire, savoir-être, comportements, croyances, peurs et résistances accumulées et intégrées au fil des années) et les expériences actives (ex : savoirs actualisés) pour comprendre le vécu expérientiel des individus, soit leur capacité à faire l'essai et l'expérimentation de changements susceptibles d'enrichir leur vécu (personnel, social et professionnel)

et de s'adapter à leur environnement.

Figure 1



Source : F. D'Ortun, d'après Schéma 1 : La double notion de l'expérience, p. 27, dans Karolewicz, 2010, *L'expérience, un potentiel pour apprendre*, Paris : L'Harmattan.

De son côté, l'autoformation constitue un mode de formation où le travailleur prend l'initiative et choisit, de manière autonome, les buts et les méthodes d'apprentissage et acquiert des connaissances en utilisant ses propres ressources et celles de son milieu (D'Ortun, 2012). Quelles que soient les contingences du moment, l'autoformation amène un contrôle accru de la personne sur son apprentissage et sur un nombre varié d'étapes et de composantes de son apprentissage (Tremblay et Éneau, 2006). L'autoformation se caractérise donc par la prise de pouvoir du sujet social sur un ou plusieurs aspects de sa formation (Éneau, 2011), en plus de prendre racine dans des espaces sociaux divers en marge de l'école – dont au travail (Carré et Charbonnier, 2003). Ces deux modèles présentaient des synergies naturelles avec les réflexions animant nos avancées et notre collaboration avec les acteurs du Réseau.

Résultats : motifs, objets et stratégies d'autoformation

En théorie et à un niveau plus officiel, c'est-à-dire, à l'intérieur de la FTQ, l'approche et les rôles des DS demeuraient inchangés – nonobstant la crise pandémique de C-19 (l'écoute active, l'entraide entre les pairs, l'exercice de fonctions de sentinelles dans leur milieu de travail, la guidance ou le référencement vers des ressources appropriées, la mise en place de suivis). Cependant,

dans la pratique et à un niveau plus officieux cette fois, nos données révélaient que la pandémie avait réellement compromis la capacité des DS à agir auprès des travailleurs (certains essaimés en télétravail, ou déjà en détresse avant la C-19 et voyant leurs difficultés s'accroître au quotidien) et à intervenir en raison de la distanciation sociale, de la rareté des ressources et de la souffrance psychologique (perte de sens, incertitude, solitude) recensée chez certains. Avec la mise sur pause de l'offre de formations syndicales offerte par le Réseau, un certain nombre de DS ont pris l'initiative de combler de manière autonome leurs besoins d'apprentissage afin de poursuivre leur rôle de pairs aidants, malgré la complexité et les incertitudes de l'environnement socio sanitaire. Dans l'urgence, les DS n'ont eu d'autres choix que de trouver des réponses rapides à des problèmes, souvent tout aussi ponctuels qu'inédits, et d'apprendre à maîtriser des outils de communication qui leur étaient jusqu'alors inconnus, afin de créer (ou de maintenir) une proximité de rapport ou une bienveillance à distance, d'accueillir, d'écouter, de réconforter, d'informer, d'aiguillonner vers des services d'aide à distance, soit : **à déployer une action syndicale de proximité et un activisme militant**, centré sur la personne, sur le terrain de la revendication locale.

Dans l'ensemble, les DS se sont retrouvés isolés et privés de ressources, tout en étant motivés à trouver des solutions face à ces écueils. La plupart d'entre eux ont fait preuve d'autonomie, de résilience et de débrouillardise, en veillant à combler par eux-mêmes des besoins de formation (par l'autoformation) qui ne se révélaient pas comblés par l'offre habituelle du Réseau **: prévoir de tels besoins aurait été et serait encore à ce jour par ailleurs impossible à concrétiser au vu de la multitude des situations se présentant dans le quotidien des DS**. Stimulés par l'expérience de la C-19, des DS ont vite reconnu que l'autoformation comportait l'avantage de permettre d'acquérir rapidement des connaissances pour s'adapter à un environnement instable et changeant, en vue de poursuivre leur rôle de pairs aidants et d'agir au mieux de leurs connaissances et de leurs compétences sur le terrain. Malgré les inconvénients à apprendre par soi-même, dont notamment la qualité incertaine des apprentissages réalisés, le temps personnel à investir parfois et la non-reconnaissance de ce qui est appris en marge, cette modalité comportait des avantages, de notre avis, pour le moins assez fondamentaux **: le délégué social se v**oulait de la sorte « acteur » de

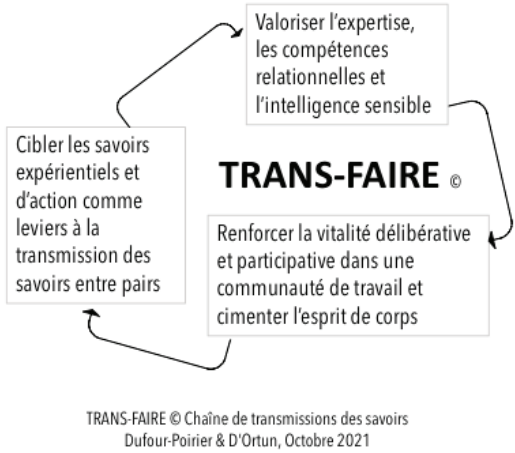
son apprentissage; sa motivation se révélant d'autant plus forte que l'action **était** reliée au contexte (pandémie, confinement, essor de la violence domestique, conciliation télétravail/enfants à la maison à éduquer), à une difficulté (poursuivre la mission d'aider malgré la distance), et à un besoin (mettre à jour et nourrir l'offre de ressources adaptées et disponibles, créer un intranet pour faciliter la circulation d'informations).

Certains motifs derrière les autoformations se sont révélés d'ordres tantôt identitaire, tantôt opératoire professionnel. Sous les motifs d'ordre identitaire, on retrouve: me sentir compétent et utile (auto efficacité); améliorer ma confiance en moi; mieux me connaître. Sous les motifs d'ordre opératoire professionnel, nous recensons : manier Zoom; être à jour en matière d'informations sur la C-19 et les mesures sanitaires; prévenir les risques psychosociaux au travail, intervenir davantage en amont des causes derrière la montée en force de la souffrance au travail; connaître le rôle et les responsabilités des autres délégués (soit le délégué syndical et le délégué en santé et sécurité) et mieux exploiter les synergies entre ces derniers pour potentialiser mon rôle de DS; approfondir mes connaissances en matière de santé mentale et optimiser ma capacité à intervenir, rapidement de surcroît, au regard des demandes d'aide (dépression, violence conjugale, toxicomanie, etc.); mettre à jour ma liste de références et de ressources disponibles depuis le confinement et en décloisonner les frontières en cas de besoin (p. ex. : sites CNESST, Organisation mondiale de la santé, Suicide action Montréal]); etc. Les DS ont été capables de déployer une grande diversité d'initiatives axées sur le maintien de savoirs, savoir-faire et savoir-être existants et le développement de connaissances et de *modus operandi* nouveaux. Globalement, toutes ces démarches provenaient du souci premier des DS de maintenir à peu près intacte leur capacité à intervenir, aussi rapidement que possible, mais surtout autrement, auprès de leurs pairs syndiqués sur une diversité importante de thèmes (p. ex. : violence domestique; conciliation difficile des rôles et débordement du travail dans la sphère domestique; sentiment de solitude et perte d'appartenance au milieu de travail; troubles mentaux; rechutes et abus de substances; perte de revenus, surendettement et précarité alimentaire), le tout, rappelons-le, dans un contexte de réduction de la disponibilité des services et des centres d'entraide communautaires. Pour finir, ces autoformations ont également eu pour propos d'étayer les réflexions

de plusieurs DS quant à l'importance de pallier les atteintes d'ordre psychologique au travail en collectivant leurs causes en amont, surlignant dès lors l'urgence pour eux d'agir comme de véritables agents de changement et de prévention (primaire idéalement), en collaboration avec l'ensemble des acteurs de leur communauté de travail d'attache. Fait d'autant plus intéressant, ces derniers constats se voulaient particulièrement prégnants chez les jeunes et les femmes, forçant la venue d'une relève syndicale au visage et aux repères transformés certes, mais surtout enclins à forcer le renouveau syndical à plusieurs enseignes.

Un dispositif d'apprentissage entre pairs : le ©Trans-faire

Au vu de la richesse de ces témoignages, un protocole de partage entre pairs, éprouvé et validé sur le terrain en novembre 2021 naissait de ces suites : le ©Trans-faire (voir figure 2 ci-contre). L'expression associe le préfixe « trans », qui exprime l'idée de changement et de traversée et « faire ». Le ©Trans-faire permet à des DS ayant choisi volontairement d'exposer leurs expériences, de documenter et de présenter ce qu'ils ont appris par eux-mêmes à leurs collègues, le contexte qui les ont motivés à apprendre cela, comment ils s'y sont pris pour apprendre cela, les obstacles rencontrés, les solutions mises de l'avant. (Dufour-Poirier et D'Ortun, 2022). En adéquation avec nos objectifs de recherche et les inspirations théoriques admises précédemment, ce protocole favorise la création d'une intelligence collective par le partage d'expertises et la reconnaissance accrue des apprentissages réalisés par soi-même et par les autres pairs-aidants; valorise la prise de pouvoir par les DS sur leur formation (autodiagnostic des besoins, autonomie); stimule des liens de confiance entre ces pairs-aidants; encourage les partages portant sur des problèmes réels vécus et résolus par les DS sur le terrain.



Modèle conceptuel du ©Trans-faire

Perspectives de développement associées au ©Trans-faire

Au-delà du renforcement souhaité des capacités d'agir des DS dans les milieux de travail et du changement de paradigme, voire d'expérimentation institutionnelle que le ©Trans-faire provoque dans l'appareil structurel de formation du Réseau des DS, trois grands principes en guident les activités : 1) Reconnaître et valoriser l'expertise, les compétences relationnelles et l'intelligence sensible des DS; 2) Cibler les savoirs expérientiels et d'action des DS comme leviers à une chaîne de transmission des savoirs entre pairs; 3) Renforcer la vitalité délibérative et participative dans une communauté de travail et y cimenter l'esprit de corps, de façon directe ou moins conscientisée. La valorisation et le partage d'un savoir transversal sur la vie, l'expérience, l'expertise et le vécu au travail, et des enjeux les caractérisant, constituent les fondements des modalités d'intervention des DS auprès de leurs pairs. Les initiatives conçues en mode ©Trans-faire visent ainsi la création d'une chaîne d'entraide et de transferts des compétences et de connaissances empiriques indispensables à l'activité humaine dans tout milieu de travail. Ce protocole permettra de cultiver le *savoir-manifester la proximité*, adéquatement et au moment opportun. La valorisation et le partage de ce savoir transversal sur la vie, l'expérience, l'expertise et le vécu au travail, et des enjeux les caractérisant, constituent les fondements des modalités d'intervention des DS auprès de leurs

pairs et de ce protocole. En effet, l'esprit socioconstructiviste et la visée de socialisation au travail (Francq et Maroy, 1996) animant les initiatives conçues en mode ©Trans-faire, selon le principe de donner au suivant, visent la création d'une grande chaîne d'entraide et de transfert des compétences et connaissances empiriques indispensables à l'activité humaine. Les savoirs expérientiels et d'action accumulés par les DS constituent des sources inestimables d'apprentissages, d'innovations et de délibérations entre l'ensemble des acteurs d'une communauté de travail.

La prochaine Conférence annuelle, qui se tiendra les 27-28 avril 2022, illustre l'impact de notre protocole du ©Trans-faire à l'intérieur du Réseau des DS : cet événement ancrera dans le réel la validation et l'acceptation de cette initiative d'expérimentation institutionnelle auprès de ces acteurs du terrain. En effet, la Conférence sera constituée de huit ateliers. Chacun de ceux-ci comportera une brève présentation théorique, suivie du partage de deux cas d'expérimentation institutionnelle (lire ici, apprentissages nouveaux et/ou pilotage d'initiatives plus diversifiées) déployés par des DS dans leur milieu de travail respectif. Ces ateliers, animés par des DS, porteront sur des thèmes non enseignés par le service de formation *formelle*, soit par la filière plus classique des *hétéroformations* (ou apprentissages par le biais d'autrui). Ces apprentissages *informels* entre pairs DS font écho à l'expérimentation de notre protocole. Notre intention en amont visait (et vise toujours) à favoriser l'apprentissage entre pairs et à participer à la création d'une communauté dynamique d'apprentissage entre les pairs-aidants de manière à mettre à profit l'intelligence collective de ce groupe de militants syndicaux au chapitre de la prévention des atteintes d'ordre psychologique au travail. Et de faire de cette thématique un instrument fécond de mobilisation et d'attraction de la relève syndicale.

Pour conclure, les DS remettent à l'avant-scène (le plus souvent, à leur insu) l'importance des actions syndicales et du syndicalisme de proximité dans les milieux de travail (écouter les membres, prendre en compte leurs besoins, en somme, dans le jargon, sortir des bureaux syndicaux et *faire du plancher*, …), commandant en cela un retour aux sources, soit à l'ontologie même du mouvement syndical, à sa mission fondamentale et à sa raison d'être. En plus de réitérer la plasticité étonnante du mouvement syndical et sa capacité d'adaptation face à l'adversité, les DS

confirment aussi la nécessité criante d'actualité de collectiver non seulement le traitement des atteintes d'ordre psychologique au travail, mais également les réponses censées pallier leurs causes en amont (Chaignot Delage, Dufour-Poirier, Le Capitaine et D'Ortun, 2019). Et faire de l'acteur syndical, une fois pour toutes, au Nord comme au Sud, un protagoniste avant-gardiste dans le domaine, capable de miser sur la pleine charge transformationnelle du moment d'expérimentation proposé par la pandémie de C-19. Voire au-delà.

Endnotes

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TRAVAIL, capital et société 50:1&2 (2022)

Note de recherche

SYNDICATS ET MONDIALISATION: L'IMPACT DU NÉOLIBERALISME SUR LES OUVRIERS NIGÉRIENS

Onoho'Omhen Ebhohimhen

Résumé

Avant l'explosion de la mondialisation, les études conventionnelles sur le rôle des syndicats présentaient l'économisme comme la principale force motrice étayant la lutte ouvrière pour un salaire décent et de bonnes conditions de travail, dans un univers de travail forgé par un modèle de reproduction sociale. La construction du rôle des syndicats a été exemplifiée et dominée par un modèle syndical nord-américain. Ce concept théorique antérieur suffisait peut-être à ces discussions, mais nous soutenons que l'introduction du modèle économique néolibéral a bouleversé le monde du travail au Nigéria, favorisant notamment l'essor de la précarisation. Il a suscité le besoin de nouvelles formes de lutte, qui exigent de nouveaux rôles syndicaux et des outils plus appropriés pour réagir aux manifestations de la vision néolibérale des travailleurs dans un monde maintenant dominé par la mondialisation. Sans négliger leur rôle habituel de lutte pour obtenir des salaires décents et de bonnes conditions de travail, nous suggérons que les syndicats devraient aussi utiliser toutes les plateformes possibles pour mener de vigoureuses campagnes mondiales pour de justes causes. Les revendications collectives des syndicats pour une justice sociale durable doivent reformuler et réorienter les politiques publiques vers un plein développement des forces productives dans le nouveau monde du travail. C'est le plan d'action le plus viable pour garantir un environnement approprié aux travailleurs.

Research Note

TRADE UNIONS AND GLOBALISATION: IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON NIGERIAN WORKERS

Onoho'Omhen Ebhohimhen [1]

Abstract

Conventional scholarship on the role of trade unions emphasised economism as the main impetus underpinning the struggle of workers for decent pay and good working conditions in a world of work shaped by a model of social reproduction prior to the expansion of globalisation. The construction of the role of trade unions was exemplified and dominated by a North American trade union model. While the older theoretical construct might have been sufficient in the relevant discourses, however, we argue that the introduction of the neoliberal economic experiment has changed the world of work in Nigeria, including the rise of casualisation, and has created the need for new forms of struggle requiring new trade union roles using more appropriate tools to respond to the manifestation of neoliberal ideas about workers in a world now dominated by globalisation. We suggest that the trade unions should not shirk their customary role of struggling for decent pay and good working conditions but they must also employ all platforms to vigorously campaign for good global causes. The collective advocacy of trade unions for sustainable social justice must reframe and redirect public policies towards the full development of the productive forces in the new world of work. This is the most viable course to guarantee a suitable environment for workers.

Introduction

In the contemporary categorisation of the working-class movement, the trade unions are singularly rendered against the backdrop of their purpose that tends to enjoy the binary treatment. On the one hand, trade unions are construed as social movements with overarching concerns spanning group identities, similar to non-profit organisations in the same sphere of play and non-governmental

organisations as if all serve as the stepping stones to political action. This context amplifies the neutralised and non-activist grouping of workers and conflates non-activist social organisation practitioners as politicians with active union organisers. But it seems within this charitable spectrum of characterisation that Da La Botz represented trade unions as social movements. On the other hand, in many cases, trade unions are constructed around the political agenda, with all the implications involved in leading strong electoral and legislative campaigns, including strivings to benefit from non-violent political protests, and signing petitions to lobby the political authorities. Fairbrother (2008) tends to subscribe to this latter clarification of the emerging extensive roles of trade unions.

Nevertheless, it is significant that these binary positions emphasise considerations, attributes and methods of work of trade unions. Thus, the positions constitute the backdrop that made it plausible to interrogate the historical argument that the trade unions were established to defend the economic interests of workers. In other words, the profound historical narrative of economism as the defining essence of trade unions may have changed dramatically in the new world of work. In any case, the economist considerations were chiefly associated with particularly the North American model of trade unions and not of universal application.

Scholars naturally emphasise this backdrop of work as a means of material and spiritual satisfaction and that it can only be meaningful for equitable social reproduction if approached from an international perspective. Hendrickx, Marx, Rayp and Wouters (2016) succinctly argued that the establishment of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) itself in 1919 was aimed to develop "international policies and norms on a broad range of labour-related issues. [Thus] the basic idea was to prevent the further deterioration in labour standards in a world recovering from war, based on the principle of social justice as a prerequisite for "universal and lasting peace," whereby "the failure of any nation to adopt a humane condition of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve conditions in their own countries" (Hendrickx, Marx, Rayp, & Wouters, 2016, p. 342; ILO, 1919)

The relevant argument we may deduce from all this indicates that work serves more than one purpose, meeting material needs. At any rate, the ILO Declaration properly envisaged that the world of work as the most appropriate platform for the self-actualisation of

the producers of wealth to create the items of consumption for the continued reproduction of humanity.

The changing world of work

The contemporary literature on the world of work still excitedly, describes it within global structural relations. This tendency accords with the preceding efforts to call the attention of workers to the international cord binding them. Since businesses had never ceased to maintain cross-border tentacles, the working class are inexorably exploited on a global scale. In sum, the new forms of work only replicate the past waves of mass production. The difference is connected to the more intensive, brutal methods exercised by the latter-day employers of labour. And so, this future of work, currently characterised as the fourth industrial revolution, involving the platform economy, robotisation, artificial intelligence and so on, have similar underpinnings. Even though the impact of technological progress could be beneficial to humanity, the advancement in the technology of wealth creation is not equal or neutral, uniformly spread or inclusive or mutually advantageous.

Nevertheless, there is no running away from the changing world that has globalization as its key feature. This is embodied in the "international trade liberalisation, international production or service provision, and new technologies, [which] are the driving factors of change, leading to the increasing economic interdependence of regions and countries" (Hendrickx, Marx, Rayp, and Wouters, 2016, p. 340). The snag, however, may be that interdependence does not wholesomely promote mutuality and humane interactions. This could explain that there are nation-state jurisdictional challenges to the pollyannish celebration of the fourth industrial revolution. One interesting example that has been highlighted repeatedly is the possibility of social dumping or regulatory competition to lower labour protection. Levi et al., (2012) discussed this context of social dumping in the broader framework of economies being increasingly global while social and political institutions are essentially local and national. Since the nation-state recipients of globalization are particularly weak in the Global South, they correspondingly may not imbue the capacity to regulate the globalization processes.

Stone offered further clarification of these arguments and explained in detail that

regulatory competition leads non-labour groups to oppose labour regulation on the ground that business flight hurts them. Thus, regulatory competition can trigger a downward spiral in which nations compete with each other for lower labour standards while labour, having lost its historic allies at the domestic level, is thus rendered powerless to resist. Globalization could be an impetus toward international labour solidarity and cooperation, but without meaningful international labour standards, it can pit labour organisations in one country against those in another (Stone, 2007, p. 572).

Furthermore, it is also true that "...traditional sovereign-state-based labour laws and labour systems are confronted with increasingly powerful, transnational non-state actors, which mean that legal intervention at the supra-state level is becoming increasingly relevant. Consequently, national and international systems of labour regulation have become "interlocked"... [and] lost the comfort of traditional geographical boundaries..." (Hendrickx, Marx, Rayp, and Wouters, 2016, p. 340)

This is why it is wrong to cursorily analyse globalization and even blame regulation to guide against lower labour standards. Rather, in discussing the new world of work, it is important to note that just as the fourth industrial revolution features prominently so also are the concerns about the solidarity of workers and the development of the ability to hold their own against the global bosses. This point is important as innovation and continuous improvement in the means of production define the progress of every epoch. But in local experiences, and this was evinced during the 40th anniversary of the Nigeria Labour Congress, the story of innovation and technological improvement is not class-neutral.

What is now known as the platform economy is an example albeit, recent in history that gained prominence in the early 2000s side by side with the growth of the Internet and modern communication technology. Together with the Internet, general improvement in the tools of labour define the parameters in the measurement of the future of the world of work. On the one hand, for workers, the fourth industrial revolution, innovation and globalization should provide opportunities for the production and delivery of a range of services through online marketplaces. On the other, while the platform economy provides

important income and employment opportunities for a growing number of workers, however, concerns remain about the conditions of work (Samuel-Olonjuwon, 2018, pp. 91-92). Indeed, regulating this form of work poses many challenges to the decent work agenda.

The point should be clear, therefore, that the fourth industrial revolution would exert an impact on the workers for good or ill. And the nature and character of that impact may not be too different from the experience since the 1980s in the Global South with the reign of the neoliberal economic experiment. To be specific, it has been recognised in a study of South African trade unions that "the impact of economic liberalism on unions [is implicated in] the inability of the unions to mount an organisational defence against the attacks on workers – and precarious workers in particular," (Hlatshwayo, 2018, p. 379). Moreover, neoliberal ideas have historically influenced some negative attitudes toward trade unions "as means of justifying the concentration of capital, the subordination of the state to the market and an anti-socialist system of social control" (Cushion, 2020, p.13).

A South African trade unionist, Steve Faulkner, made this point about the class character of recent economic policies designed in the West liberal circle but uncritically transnationalised in the Global South. He spoke at the fortieth anniversary of the NLC in 2018 rather forcefully in his contribution to the debate and noted that

> *There is a class character to the fourth industrial revolution; it is not a neutral process that has no class content. Who is driving the digital revolution? Are they not the same forces accumulating the most obscene amount of wealth for themselves while the vast majority of the world's population becomes poorer and poorer? So you cannot say; you cannot fall into the trap of believing that the fourth digital revolution is without class content. It is being driven by those forces who want to continue to accumulate wealth while poor people and the working class who produce it become poorer and poorer. Our job is not just to sit back and wait for this fourth revolution to offer us opportunities to sit down at the table in Geneva with the bosses and with the governments. Comrades, if we wait, we will not only miss the bus, we will miss the road that the buses will be travelling on" (Faulkner, 2018: 26-27)*

The new public management system and trade unions

Theoretically, the public management and governance system introduced in Nigeria in the mid-1980s stemmed from the adoption of the neoliberal globalization framework, prescribed by the international financial institutions (IFIs). The new management and governance system entails processes, in a formal and organized form, laws, norms, power or language of governing and leadership of the society (Bevir, 2013). The normative of the new public management canons are based on some fundamental assumptions, which could flow both within particularistic territorial jurisdictions and within the global governance narratives.

In the first place, the universalising tendency of the policy and system has socio-political perspectives relating to contemporary forms of governing, governance and governability (Kooiman, 2003). By this is evinced a process of the seamless interface between the varied societal and political actors, taking the interdependence in modern societies for granted and the interactions inherent in them as imbued with an all-inclusive universality. Although the Universalist outlook could be justified in the internationalist orientation of trade unionism, the overarching insight provided by globalising neoliberalism into modern governance has slanted perception. The emphasis seems more rooted in formal conceptualism in capturing the different elements, norms and structures of governance. The formalism of the logic confers contested universalism on hierarchies and even imposed meta-orders on the various configurations of modern governance. Larbi (1999) indeed, entrenched the new governance model into the layer of public management practices. Some of these emphasise cost savings in contracting and outsourcing infrastructural maintenance with all the potentials, risks and limitations.

On the other, the neoliberal ideas informing the new public management and governance system also, enjoin the engagement of international management consultants as advisors on public policy reforms. Hence, the new public management model features terms and platforms like public-private partnerships. For instance, in Nigeria, terms like SERVICOM were deployed in the ethical application of the management of public affairs. At any rate, the thrust of the development policies was either defined or superintended by international management consultants like Accenture or other international policy entrepreneurs.

Ordinarily, the new public management and governance system would have much to recommend for its adoption in societies to tackle corruption, the constraints or excesses of the free market and efficient organisation of policies of the government. However, around the specific interests constellations of trade unions, the specificity of adaptation demand that the overriding purpose of public management coalesces with endowing governance with the strength to pitch for the good life for all working people whether at the peripheral structures or relating to the citizenry in the metropolitan centres of the globalising world.

Given that, a basic challenge flows from the drivers of new public governance and management models, which happen to be chiefly, the pressures from the international financial institutions. In the context of Nigeria, the economic experiment of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) was found to have strongly impacted the associated new governance system, (Adekanye, 1999). As a result, the normative categories of downsizings, user fees, hiving-off of public sector agencies into autonomous executive bodies and the privatisation of state economic assets have come to define the new public management and governance system. This conforms to the findings of Larbi (1999) that suggest the new public management systems have become the new normal in developing countries.

The top-down methods of policy-making wholly promoted by the new public management model seem to derive provenance from the proverbial *magister dixit;* in fact, it could not have found better contemporary resonance. In other words, the leaders at the global centres of economic power claim to know best what is good for the rest of the world. This is despite that the world structures are imbued with analogous democratic testimony of the people. The metropolitan centres, nevertheless, seem to hold that they exclusively possess superior knowledge of what is good or bad, and how the rest of the world may conduct themselves. This confirms the assumption that "metagovernance – the establishment of norms at any level to shape governance process as a whole or as a part of the input and output of the governing system – has become an inseparable feature" (Kooiman, 2003, p. 171) of the new public governance model.

In brief, while it is beyond dispute that the new public management as applicable in theory has grand ambitions, this paper raises some practical questions on several grounds. These include the accrual of sufficient benefits to the trade unions to recommend

the model as utilitarian in the search for autonomous economic increase. Similarly, the application of the theory has yielded less than a positive impact on the development of productive forces. Besides, the new public management has not enhanced the prospects of decent work. The rampant casualisation of labour and unfair labour practices are thus concerning in Nigeria. And so, the new public management system needs to be restructured to strengthen rather than make trade unions so fragile that they cannot defend even the economic interests of workers.

Trade unions in Nigeria

Scholars tend to agree on the historicity and causative factors in the formation of trade unions in Nigeria. Beginning with the establishment of the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU) in 1912, trade unions have featured prominently in social and political engagements in Nigeria. In 1931, both the Railways Workers Union and the Nigerian Union of Teachers separately aggregated along specialised lines and were registered as distinct unions from the NCSU. Importantly, each of the trade unions considered the welfare of its members as the primary objective (Egboh, 1968; Ananaba, 1969). This unilinear economism characterisation of the trade unions appeared perfunctory and a decoy as witnessed by the deviation from the norm when the Railway Workers formulated slogans for Nigeria's political independence in its 1945 cost of living allowance (COLA) strike.

The post-war era of vibrant ideas of freedom and justice also led to labour explosion as trade unions subsequently, proliferated. At a point, there were more than one thousand unions grouped under "four labour centres, viz., Nigeria Trade Union Congress [NTUC], Labour Unity Front [LUF], United Labour Congress [ULC] and Nigeria Workers Council [NWC]. The emergence of the NLC ended decades of rivalry and rancour involving the four centres and unions affiliated with them. The [various] unions, numbering over 1,000 were also restructured into 42 industrial unions" (See NLC website).

Egboh (1970) alluded to the resonance of the Cold War rivalry between the Eastern and Western blocs as also accounting for the increase of trade unions. This would be reasonably evinced by the affiliation of the labour centres with ideologically-inclined international counterparts. The principle and policy of workers solidarity and proletariat internationalism served as the defining

touchstones in the relations with foreign labour centres of the Eastern bloc. Of course, the ideological situational circumstances may not be isolated as Leong (1992) found similar features in the experience in Southeast Asia.

It should be interesting though, whether the new labour centres in post-1978 Nigeria were correspondingly designed, as they were in Malaysia, to combat the influence of communism in the unions. This represents a plausible point for comparative debate. However, the examination of the ideological character of the Nigerian trade unions had been amply discussed in Ananaba (1969) and so, outside of the remit of this article. It suffices to state that with the ostensible end of the cold war, it is equally worth curiosity if ideological debates and contestations had indeed receded or ended entirely. In this context, it would be reasonable to infer that in such circumstances, other influences, chiefly neoliberal paradigms and the pursuit of personalised agenda in the mould of a labour aristocracy may be filling the ideological void in Nigerian trade unions.

Another contested area in the literature on labour trends in Nigeria relates to the unequal representation of females in trade union leadership. A study by ILO suggested that Nigeria represents one of the three countries with Brazil and Ghana where only "there were 30 per cent women's quotas" (ILO, 2012, p.52) representation. According to Shettima (1989, p.81), the characteristic relegation of the role of Nigerian women in socioeconomic development and in public affairs generally; this work in the background likewise percolated into the trade unions. Shettima implied there was scholarly neglect in the failure to interrogate the class and gender bias against women labourers as a possible limitation in its resolution. Other concrete causal factors have been suggested as well for the gender disparity in labour activism and leadership exemplification in Nigeria, ranging from a "lack of political will to male resistance" (p.54). All this has intriguing and worrisome implications for the emerging world of work.

There has lately emerged a creative turn of special seat quotas for education and training as well as the establishment of women commissions and committees which offer a perspective commitment to tackling the social pathology of gender bias. The measured qualitative leap may have become co-constitutive among the possible forms of remediation of the gender disparity. Perhaps, a possibility exists and may be developing imperceptibly with the recent election of a female union activist as president of an industrial

union affiliated with the NLC. Also, that two ex-officio positions in the leadership echelon of NLC-affiliated trade unions are reserved for female candidates to fill could evince hope. All this is in addition to the chairperson of the NLC women commission as statutory national vice president and her deputy and two ex-official members elected into the 14-person national administrative council. While it would seem that elected female leadership in the NLC national structure is minuscule, nonetheless, the conspicuous privileging of the principle of reserved seats for females could indicate conscious efforts at impactful remediation. Currently, females constitute almost thirty per cent of the nationally elected leadership, a practice that is replicated at the subnational layers. Undoubtedly, the indications of incremental progress need far-reaching engagement to scale up the course.

NLC and contemporary labour struggle

Currently at the forefront of the overarching struggle of workers is the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). It was formally constituted as the only national federation of trade unions in the country in 1978. At its foundation, the NLC as a labour centre spanned both public sector and private employers unions. Organised under the rubric of the industrial unions concept, the NLC has some forty-eight affiliate industrial unions dispersed in all sectors of the country's socioeconomy. Although the state of play and membership density of the labour centres constitute a subject of interest due to the peculiar internal trade union politics, a healthy estimate of six million members has been applied for NLC and spread across affiliate unions.

Some Industrial Unions in Nigeria

Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics
Academic Staff Union of Research Institutions
Academic Staff Union of Universities
Amalgamated Union of Food Stuff, Cattle Dealers of Nigeria
Amalgamated Union of Public Corporation, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees.
Association of Nigeria Aviation Professionals
Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union
Iron and Steel Senior Staff Association of Nigeria
Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria
Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria
Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria
Metal Products Senior Staff Association of Nigeria

National Association of Academic Technologists
National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers
National Association of Barbers and Cosmetology Employers of Nigeria
National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives.
National Union of Air Transport Employees
National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institution Employees.
National Union of Chemical, Footwear, Rubber, Leather and Non-Metallic Employees.
National Union of Civil Engineering, Construction, Furniture and Wood Workers
National Union of Electricity
National Union of Food, Beverage and Tobacco Employees
National Union of Hotels and Personal Services Workers
National Union of Lottery Agents and Employees
National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas
National Union of Posts and Telecommunication Employees
National Union of Printing, Publishing and Paper Products Workers
National Union of Road Transport Workers
National Union of Shop and Distributive Employees
National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria
Nigeria Civil Service Union
Nigeria Union of Agric. And Allied Employees
Nigeria Union of Journalists
Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees
Nigeria Union of Mine Workers.
Nigeria Union of Pensioners
Nigeria Union of Public Service Reportorial, Secretarial, Data Processors and Allied Workers
Nigeria Union of Railway Workers
Nigeria Union of Teachers
Nigeria Welders and Filters Association
Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions
Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria
Private Telecommunications and Communications Senior Staff Association of Nigeria
Radio, Television and Theatre Workers
Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Polytechnics
Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities
Senior Staff Union in Colleges of Education, Nigeria
Steel and Engineering Workers Union of Nigeria

Source: "List of Industrial Unions Affiliated to Nigeria Labour Congress." Available at https://www.nlcng.org/.

The NLC is also structured around regional conceptual principles and these are known as State Councils. With a corresponding representation in the seven hundred and seventy bottom-level administrative districts, this octopod spread enables NLC to work creatively with other social forces to advance the cause of the Nigerian workers and sometimes to even make effective forays into the social sphere as an active moderator and shaper of public debate concerning the general welfare of Nigerian citizens.

The NLC public sector unions, organised along professional lines embrace academics and secondary and elementary level teachers, research and health specialists, aviation and municipal workers and so on. The public sector affiliate unions become particularly critical in mass protests and industrial strike actions as their withdrawal of services could paralyse the bureaucratic remit of the state. Similarly, the private sector affiliates ranging from workers in electricity, manufacturing, chemical to petroleum segments, artisanal operators in trades and personal care and so on do often lead to the cessation of public power supply, shutdown of airports and grievous loss of industrial production when involved in strike actions.

The sectoral principles of union organisation have lately been extended to efforts to formalise the non-formal sectors bringing hitherto unproletarianised workers and small and medium scale enterprise operators under the umbrella of organised labour. The consociating moves occasioned the integration of foodstuff dealers, private telecommunication, private security personnel and so on which has resulted in the strictly enforced obedience to the demands of the struggle in the informal sectoral representations. All this has implications for the capability to compel the representative-holders of the authorities of the Nigerian state to come to the negotiating table for the resolution of pertinent labour-government disputes.

It is quite significant that the consensus-building method of engagement with other parties blunted the intrigues of the Nigerian authorities to dissipate the impact of trade unions with the creation of another federation known as the Trade Union Congress on "8 August 2005. Previously, TUC Nigeria had gone through various transformations beginning in 1980 as Federation of Senior Staff Associations of Nigeria, Senior Staff Consultative Association of Nigeria and finally TUC" (See TUC website). Thus, the ostensibly deft move by the Nigerian government to weaken the unity of

workers had been taken in stride that the Nigerian workers struggle in tandem through the two federations in confronting the domestic iterations of neoliberal challenges in the world of work.

As Houeland (2018; 2021) reported, the neoliberal framing of the "IMF-backed structural adjustment programmes have included the removal of fuel subsidies" (Houeland, 2021, p.498). The counter-development framing of the petroleum subsidy argument, for instance, has often been robustly contested by the trade unions to threaten regime stability. Thus the

> *successful popular resistance against subsidy removals is widely recognised but insufficiently understood due to inadequate consideration of the particularities of labour. The subsidy contestations are considered a barometer of Nigerian politics, and the 2012 subsidy protests – often referred to as Occupy Nigeria – was one of the largest popular mobilisations in Nigerian history (Houeland, 2018, p.14).*

Another global example replicated in the practice of trade unionism in Nigeria centres on the agitation for a national minimum wage to ensure decent living for workers. While the 2011 minimum wage experience in Nigeria was tortuous but the joint action of the two federations in 2018-19 resulted in the detailed and comprehensive negotiations of a new minimum wage. The cooperative engagement dovetailed into the swift transmission of the Minimum Wage Bill to the national legislature within a few days of scheduled trade union action to protest the delay in the enactment of the new wage law. For its part, the national legislature expeditiously moved to consider the Wage Bill on the date it was transmitted. Ultimately, the president of Nigeria signed the new minimum wage bill into law in April 2019 within a week of its passage by the national legislature.

While some subnational structures are yet to fully implement the relativity and consequential adjustment of earnings entailed in the new minimum wage, some quasi-private sector organisations simply flout the obligations to pay a living wage to their workers. The treacherous concourse of the employment situation in Nigeria partly accounts for the flagrant repudiation of a duly enacted law on wages.

Labour casualisation in Nigeria

A critical propensity in the discourse of the new public management system resonates in the casualisation of labour. However, the incidence of labour casualisation is not uniform. According to the *Careersmart* blog, in the UK, higher education has reportedly become one of the most casualised sectors, second only to hospitality. Thus, universities and colleges are twice more likely to use zero-hours contracts than other workplaces. Professionals in the further education sectors are also increasingly being employed on fixed-term and hourly-paid contracts. In Nigeria however, casualisation is more noticeable in the private sector organisations ranging from banking services to the beverage sector, telecommunication companies and transportation services.

Adewumi (2020) reported the specific incidence of employment casualisation in Nigeria which tended to threaten the trade union survival strategies in the beverage sector in Lagos, Nigeria. Another survey of a total of 12 trade union officials implicated casualisation in the diminishing trade union relevance in light of increasing informalisation. Thus, the normative collective bargaining strategies of the union become ineffectual in addressing employment casualisation. This is despite the lack of provisions in Nigerian labour legislation for casual employment. It further validates Animashaun (2007) that casual employment in Nigeria is outside the precincts of labour contracts. Casualisation, therefore, exerts a hampering impact on trade unions strategic efforts for decent work for all.

The Nigerian trade unions have been in the trenches both with the various state and private sector employers of labour on casualisation. Through various methods of collective trade union actions and vigorous struggle ranging from appeals to picketing collective bargaining agreements were entered into with the telecom giant, MTN and an emerging industrial monopoly, the Dangote group. Cooperative engagements with the coverall employers' association, the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), also accrued concrete actions to protect workers against the ravaging consequences. For example, the NLC and NECA executed a pact between the parties for the protection of employment in the wake of COVID-19. The Memorandum of Understanding signed on 20th June 2020, obligated both parties to, among others

jointly work together to prevent further loss of jobs in the private sector by engaging companies in a bid to getting them to adopt more humane options, provided that, such engagement would be in tandem with social dialogue principles, respect for rights of each party and in conformity with labour standard practices (ILO, 2020, para. 5).

The industrial relationship with public employers of labour has equally stressed dialogue rather than combat. Thus, public protests by the trade union centres have been aimed at waking the state institutions from lethargic conduct and drawing attention to critical issues pending resolutions.

New forms of trade union struggle

Recently, other forms have emerged, especially along the struggle concept. This goes to define the parameters of conscious actions instead of the sterility of the debate about other forms of trade unions conduct and the different methods to be adopted at the workplace. The struggle concept may not totally supplant the hitherto characteristic habits or easily result in the defeat of other more radical forms of trade unionism. However, the adoption of the limited forms of trade unionism may be in the offing, taking account of the emerging literature and ongoing debates between workers, their leadership and academics about forms of trade unionism. The most recent tendency of combining social and political activism clearly foregrounds some of the intriguing results of the increasing globalization of economies.

The effect of the changing role entails that trade unions are necessarily called upon to be involved in broader global issues or are persuaded to pay greater attention to the dialectical relationship between the conditions of work and the environment that drives and sustains the human-work interactions in the globalizing political economy. After all, a rich part of the history of the working class that "only a few weeks before the Allies landed in Normandy, the International Labour Conference met in Philadelphia in April and May 1944 to redefine the aims and purposes for the ILO. The gathering, largely inspired by the founding ILO Constitution, contained the profound statement that "lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice." Accordingly, the tripartite delegates

from 41 member States which adopted a visionary declaration did not only underpin the survival of the ILO in the post-war era but also defined the social parameters of what is known today as globalization and interdependence" (Ed., 2019, p. 10). This cumulative history of proactive engagement has been passed down as the Declaration of Philadelphia which fundamentally seeks to secure the basic human and economic rights of workers.

The current changes in the world of work are far-reaching in their connection with the different trajectories contemporaneously taken to characterize the future of work. This is more so that globalization comes with its own new public management system. Of course, like many of the top-down policies promoted by the dominant players in the international system, the new public governance was imposed upon the peripheries. The powerful centres of policy diktat neatly correspond to the past colonial metropoles as the current dominant powers are chiefly located in Euro-America. Since globalization was the product of invading neoliberal economic experiments, anyway, it necessarily imbues altered parameters to define the new world of work.

When the addendum to the ILO Constitution (the Declaration of Philadelphia) alluded to the primary purpose of work, it seemed that it was appropriately responsive to the inherent challenges of the old world. Therefore, the organisation was clear that through the process of work "all human beings... [are enabled to exercise] the right to pursue both their material wellbeing and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity" (ILO, 1944, art. II(a)).

Globalization and trade unions

It is beyond dispute that globalization defines the future world of work. But it is difficult to precisely conceptualise globalization. The definitional problem stems from the fact that "it is a shifting and dynamic phenomenon" (Hendrickx, Marx, Rayp, and Wouters, 2016, p. 341). However, it is significant that the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization made definitive efforts to characterise the key features of globalization. They consist of "the liberalisation of international trade, the expansion of foreign direct investment (FDI), and the emergence of massive cross-border financial flows" (World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, 2004, p. 24).

The report further envisaged the possible results of globalization to involve "increased competition in global markets... [that] has come about through the combined effect of two underlying factors: policy decisions to reduce national barriers to international economic transactions and the impact of new technology, especially in the sphere of information and communication" (p. 24).

If we take the discourse in the context of the history of the international labour movement, it goes without saying that the understanding of the prospect of technological innovation and its impact on the future of work featured prominently in the International Labour Conference (ILC) of 2008. Indeed, the ILC anticipated the extreme need for clarity hence, the adoption of a Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. Therefore, the Declaration was not only necessary to respond to and promote the idea of decent work but also, to be specific, it stresses the "need for a strong social dimension to globalization in achieving improved and fair outcomes for all" (ILO, 2008, p. 1). On closer examination, it appears obvious that the international workers through the ILO may have been prescient to have laid down some of the building blocks to deal with the challenges we now see in the trail of globalization.

In all, it is a good report that "in time the right of workers to organise gained ground the Treaty of Versailles and the original ILO Constitution in 1919 recognised "the principle of freedom of association. The ILO was not immediately successful in adopting standards to give substance to this right. This changed with the adoption of key Conventions Nos 87 and 98 covering freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining in 1948 and 1949" (Ed., 2019, p. 11).

And so, this represented great progress since the right to organise was central to the struggle of the British miners for many years, antedating the formation of the ILO. It follows that globalisation may be skewed against the workers. With corresponding international solidarity, the time cannot be more urgent to defend the right to organise by the trade unions.

Globalisation and the public service trade unions

There are increasing challenges for trade unions connected with public service delivery. It is not a function of the alleged innate incompetence of public service workers. Rather, both the conditions of work and the tools and environment of labour have

been circumscribed by the policy regimes imposed on the Global South countries. Scholars have identified the problem of multi-issue investment in the social sectors and that resources for the not-for-profit obligations of the public sectors have been grossly inadequate. In addition, the nominal forms of democracy are not matched by accountability and as a result, the widespread intractable corruption. In other words, the "public services are poor if the state functions poorly, as well as if there is a lot of corruption and abuse of public facilities. Countries with authoritarian anti-democratic regimes that do not permit accountability to have a record of overstaffing and poor management of public funds. Reforms should not be aimed at deregulation and destruction, but rather seek to improve public service provision" (Keller and Hoferl, 2007, p. 176).

The massive reduction of investment in social sectors, like education, health and recreational services has gone to reduce the public services to a degree of inefficient responsiveness. For example, "the health budgets in sub-Saharan Africa and many Latin American countries were cut by 50 per cent in the 1980s. Even countries with efficient public health services, such as Jamaica and Sri Lanka, changed direction and moved towards privatisation. The mortality rate rose sharply everywhere. Not even 'Black Monday' on 19 October 1987, which had been triggered by 184 banks going into liquidation in the USA and which nearly caused a stock market crash of 1930s proportions, was enough to stop the onslaught of international capital flows in the form of stock market indices that had become completely detached from economic reality. On the contrary, the game went on: state pension systems and health services were now in the sights of profit-hungry investors" (PSI, 2007, p. 50).

As reported even in the developed Global North, the crisis of lack of skills has fundamentally affected public sector service delivery (Carter and Kline, June 2017). But the crisis is more pronounced in the Global South in the shortage of engineers to ensure a clean drinking water supply, and the shortage of doctors, nurses and other medical specialists for efficient outcomes in the health care system. Even in the bureaucratic segments of the public service where inadequate training, and lack of regular recruitment to fill vacancies, including the prebendalization of candidate selection, have equally resulted in poor civil service outcomes.

Global campaigns and trade unions

On the balance, we can make preliminary deductions that the poor labour laws and labour practices are necessarily a part of the form of globalization imposed by the metropolitan and developed economies, acting through the international financial institutions on most of the underdeveloped and balance of payment challenged countries of the Global South. Furthermore, the search for low production costs by the industries of the Global North seeks to maintain poor wages and thus perpetuate the de-industrialisation of the Global South. Inevitably, the economic activities confined to non-industrial production explains the underpinnings of their low-cost economies. Lately, the application of the new norms of globalisation has led to new employment roles as exemplified by the casualisation of work. Moreover, many of the businesses in the financial services and info-telecom sectors in Nigeria have developed anti-union employment terms, often requiring staff to sign non-unionisation pacts.

Some of these issues have also engaged the attention of trade unions. It is proper that the international campaigns in that regard, especially against the privatization of public services flow in tandem with climate change and tax justice, uneven labour migration and decreasing health services provisions should constitute issues of global concern. The trade unions should not shy away from the deserved engagement.

In Nigeria, some specific examples suggest that organised labour had confronted the neoliberal paradigm of poor wages and vigorously protested against the unexplained delay of the review of the minimum wage legislation both in 2011 and 2019.

Thus, the trade union campaigns can be rendered concrete from the broad multi-issue focus. In addition, collaborative engagements have been carried out with international NGOs like ActionAid, Oxfam and so on concerning tax justice in which Congress leadership featured prominently in street campaigns and hands-on training of rank and file leadership structures of Congress to take the tax justice system to the lowest of the grassroots bases.

Similarly, employing the new kind of global campaigns and the involvement of CSO in union campaigns have resulted in major policy shifts by the Government of Nigeria on the neoliberal framing of the question of subsidy of petroleum product prices and increase of electricity tariffs. The policy campaigns organised together with

international NGOs like Oxfam and ActionAid resulted in changes to public policy on social protection and the need to work towards matching wages against inflationary trends in the economy. All of these campaigns shaped by globalising canons help Nigerian workers directly in articulating a new agenda towards efforts in the improvement of wages and working conditions. The collective advocacy of trade unions and civil society allies for sustainable social justice has thus reframed and redirected public policies towards the full development of the productive forces not only in the new world of work but also, in social engagement with global causes relating to anti-poverty and transparency.

The policy campaigns organised together with international NGOs like Oxfam and ActionAid resulted in changes to government policy on social protection and the need to work towards matching wages against inflationary trends in the economy. All of these help Nigerian workers directly in articulating a new agenda towards efforts in the improvement of wages and working conditions. Ongoing work with Oxfam emphasises the defence of civic space embracing active media engagement with the democratic project and extending the reach of organised workers in shaping public policy. A valuable lesson has been learned including the unity between the forces of social progress across national borders to respond to the challenges of increasingly globalising multinational enterprises. This is especially important as the transnationalisation of the ideas incubated in the Bretton Woods institutions tends to "necessarily affect policy outcomes everywhere" (Ebhohimhen and Akenzua, 2018, p.3), which continues to exert negative impacts on domestic policy formulation in Nigeria as well.

Conclusion

We have argued that the current changes in the world of work have had far-reaching implications, especially in their connection with the different trajectories of struggle to characterize the role of trade unions and the future of work. A stark example relates to globalization with its own new public management system. It follows that trade union campaigns represent the veritable responses of international workers to the emerging challenges of globalisation. It follows that the response would necessarily entail forging solidarity across national borders and structural divisions. It goes without saying, therefore, that the utility value of global solidarity would

positively alter the responses of the workers in the confrontation with their bosses and the altered domestic policy space.

In Nigeria's experience, on-the-ground organizing and well-timed strikes have yielded positive outcomes in the enactment of new minimum wages between 2011 and 2019. Also, Nigerian trade unions have modified the form of struggle around wages alone as all platforms were *mutatis mutandis* employed to vigorously campaign for good global causes ranging from the subsidy of petroleum product prices to an increase in electricity tariffs. The strategic partnerships with non-state actors like international and local CSOs have demonstrably gone beyond the customary wage issues and instead, represent a long and viable way in the struggle against illicit financial flows, various forms of corruption of public service ethos, labour casualisation in the emergent framework of neoliberal economic experiments. All this inhabits the real possibility of continuously obtaining gains for the struggle of the Nigerian workers. Indeed, the global reach and influence in inter-union organizing would aid public policy formulation affecting workers, social protection and decent work. Consequently, the trade unions should not shirk their customary role of struggling for decent pay and good working conditions. Therefore, all platforms should be employed to vigorously campaign for good global causes. The collective advocacy of trade unions for sustainable social justice has to reframe and redirect public policies towards the full development of the productive forces in the new world of work. This is the most viable course to guarantee a suitable environment for workers.

Endnotes

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BOOK REVIEWS

Dochuk, Darren, **Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America,** *New York: Basic Books, 2019, 688 pp.*

In the age of climate change, as many lobby for the demise of oil, Darren Dochuk offers a comprehensive account of its discovery and rise within modern culture, particularly within the United States. Dochuk is an historian who grew up in Alberta, Canada, in an economy fueled not only by oil but also, in his experience at least, by evangelical Christianity. *Anointed with Oil* focuses particularly on the relationship of brands of Christianity we have come to associate with parts of the United States and the power of petroleum in the construction of contemporary American democracy. The book casts a wide net in doing so, ranging timewise from the American Civil War to the present, and geographically from North America to the Middle East and beyond.

Dochuk argues that divisions originating in the early discoveries, production and regulation of oil and the involvement of certain strains of American Christianity are largely responsible for the current political and cultural divisions in American society as well as the current politics of oil. Oil and Christianity made the United States of America as we have it today, he contends.

Dochuk's history of oil is a story of the key players divided along the lines of how they wished the oil industry to play out and who worked accordingly. Those led primarily by the Rockefellers, who were early in their call for social and economic standardization and regulation, were pitted against the so-called "independents," who contested government interference and regulation. Christianity (mostly Protestant Christianity, although some Catholics were directly involved) also broke along the same lines. Those often referred to as mainline Protestant groups, such as some Baptists and Presbyterians, supported the Rockefeller camp, whereas those Christian groups who were mostly associated with the populist and often overwhelmingly right-wing churches aligned with the independents. While both sides of this conflict saw oil as a divine

gift, precisely to America in its self-perceived role as exemplar to the world, the manner in which the United States would play this role was strongly contested. For the standardizers, oil would be a divine instrument for the building of God's kingdom on earth. It would be achieved through a Protestant work ethic of order, constraint, disciplined laws, education, cooperation and diplomacy, in short, liberalism, the social gospel and a "civil religion of crude." The "independents" believed and practiced a "wildcat Christianity," which focused on religion as a personal relationship with the divine, individual inspiration, personal freedom, apocalyptic and a heavenly (rather than earthly) kingdom. Dochuk traces, rather convincingly, the interplay between the religious ideas and convictions of this division of Christianity and the corresponding divisions in creating an economy and politics based largely on oil.

How did this work on the ground? In terms of the historical development of the oil industry, it seems clear that at the higher levels of federal governance of the oil industry and its extension internationally, the Rockefellers and company and the oil corporations spawned by their efforts were the most successful. The capitalist desires for wealth and power as well as the social construction of orderly life found religious backing among mainline Christians, for whom the social gospel, disciplined lifestyle and missionary zeal served the organization of an industry that would revolutionize and enhance the quality of life for many. Oil became the Light of the World, thus referring to the biblical metaphor for Christ and his followers. For the independents, the wildcat Christians, who generally opposed regulation, such as rules-of-capture (who owns the natural resource and under what conditions), the oil industry was characterized more radically than it was for their opponents by boom-or-bust cycles. Rather than move them to seek some control in the face of nature's chaotic power, however, they attributed chance and their luck to divine jurisdiction; God, not Rockefeller, was in charge! Christian churches on both sides of the divide benefitted from oil revenues as their congregants filled the coffers with new money and founded seminaries, schools and colleges to increase their adherents. Christian preachers, missionaries and scholars with their rhetorical skills of persuasion and/or education in languages and cultures, often accompanied oilmen on their crusades for markets around the world.

This early division over oil also influenced how each side

dealt with labour issues. In both cases the fight for justice in the form of better wages and working conditions was often fraught with violence and small, incremental gains for workers. In Chapter 5, "American Plans," Dochuk gives an account of the rise of unionism and the struggle to bring credibility and even glamour to this new and transforming industry. Oil would transform not only the economy but also the culture of a nation. Meanwhile, the frenzy around capturing it and the resistance by ill-treated workers, especially the racialized, were considered by many Americans to be a "reign of terror." Violence and destruction, even murder, characterized the attempts of workers to improve their working conditions. Religious ideas added to the fervour of both employers and employees. Employers rationalized their efforts with paternalistic notions of kindness to the poor or the eradication of communist atheist notions attributed to union advocates. Workers often branded themselves as followers of Jesus, whom they interpreted to be a socialist of his time.

While both the standardizers (Rockefeller and associates) and independents often resorted to forms of welfare capitalism, the Rockefellers' oil corporations eventually tended towards forms of partnership between labour and capital, such as establishing advisory boards consisting of employers and employees. For the independents, labour relations was more of a mixed bag, consistent with their notions of individual freedom and lack of standards across oil patches. As is characteristic of the work as a whole, this chapter is peppered with stories of major players, the Rockefellers and the Pews, as well as less known and obscure characters. One such was 13-year-old Charley Spikes, who, following his conversion at age 13, became known as Mister Preacher as he toiled among oil workers in the field and attuned the Gospel message to his co-workers. The case of the rape and killing of Anna Brown of the Osage Nation is just one illustration of the particular violence of racism against native peoples, some of whom had become rich from the oil industry. The role of William Lyon Mackenzie, later to become Canada's prime minister, in educating John D. Rockefeller on the importance of unions and the protection of workers will catch the interest of Canadians.

Dochuk focuses on the United States and the integration of oil into the deepest elements of its culture, the revolutionary nature of its foundation, the myth of its being a Light to the World and its self-perceived mission to spread democracy around the world, all

finding foundation in the kinds of Christianity it made its own. As oil is fluid, however, so is the spread of its effects, economically, politically and culturally. Dochuk has also been diligent in assembling data on American involvement in the Canadian oil fields, in African countries (cf. pp. 464-467 on boycotts in Nigeria) and more extensively in the Middle East. In all of these instances, religious players were involved. In the Middle East, for example, the so-called "independents" attempted early accord with Israel (1950s), whereas Rockefeller and majors succeeded, but not easily, in the Arab states. In both of these cases, Dochuk points out, the major players brought religious convictions to bear on their ambitions. Many independents saw the establishment of Israel and Zionism, in particular, as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and the furthering of the apocalyptic approach of the End Times. For most liberal Christians, the ecumenical notion of cooperation with other religions, such as Islam, and hence the negotiations with the Arab states, melded nicely with their economic and political ambitions. Chapter 7, "Holy Grounds," captures the heady, but also painstaking, efforts of American oilers attempting to establish influence and even control over oil production in the Middle East. From the beginning, the nature of the political landscape and the United States' attempts to keep both Israel and the Arab states within their sphere of influence are highly reliant on the murky nature of oil politics and on religious players. William Eddy, a professor and son of missionaries, who had learned Arabic first by chanting with "holy men" on street corners in Cairo in the 1920s, was one such player. His goal was to build international cooperation based on "religious brotherhood." He became an effective cultural broker for the extension of American oil interests in the Middle East (pp. 293ff).

The political power shifts within the United States are signalled at the beginning of Chapter 10 as Alberta's premier, Preston Manning, officially opened the Canadian Oil Fields, a project resulting from a collaboration with those Dochuk calls "the new evangelicals." These included J. Edgar Pew and internationally known evangelist Billy Graham. They were fresh off the Republican National Convention of 1964, which saw the ascendency of Barry Goldwater over Nelson Rockefeller as leader of the Republican Party, a political turning point for the so-called evangelical Christians. This association of many evangelical Christian groups with the most conservative wing of the Republican Party would only

grow stronger in the following years up to the present.

Anointed with Oil concludes with "The End of the American Century" (Chapter 12) and an epilogue on God and oil in the new millennium. In his usual style of intensive data, large landscape and biographical narratives, Dochuk takes the reader through the oil crisis of the 1970s, the Middle East's growing control of oil, and the increasing awareness of an environmental crisis. In all of these categories Dochuk maintains a focus on the complex interlocking of the economic, political, cultural (especially religious, Islam as well as Christianity) and social dimensions of oil.

Those who are specialists in various fields, such as economics, labour relations, political science and religious studies, might object to the wide-ranging nature of the treatment of these areas. Religion scholars, for example, may find the characterization of the religion of the "independents" or "new evangelicals" to be somewhat reductionist. Yet the thesis is certainly viable and the amount of data Dochuk has assembled here is truly impressive. He offers a compelling historical background to the present divisions and challenges to democracy that we see emerging in the United States today. Also, there is much ground throughout the text for both students and more advanced researchers to pursue further. The narrative ends on page 560. The last 128 pages feature summaries of major characters and corporations, an exhaustive list of acronyms, a bibliography and most importantly over 50 pages of notes, some of which give extensive additional background information and explanation of the text. There is also a very detailed and helpful index.

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Ferreras, Isabelle, Julie Batillana et Dominique Méda (sous la direction de), **Le manifeste travail *: Démocratiser, démarchandiser, dépolluer.*** *Paris, Éditions du SEUIL, 2020, 208 pp.*

Ce livre, produit sous la direction d'Isabelle Ferreras, professeure à l'Université de Louvain, de Julie Batillana, professeure

à la Harvard Business School et de Dominique Méda, professeure à l'Université Paris-Dauphine, est le résultat d'une collaboration entre douze femmes universitaires à travers le monde. Il découle de l'engouement international dont a bénéficié la tribune du *Manifeste Travail* dans le journal *Le Monde* au printemps 2020, alors cosigné par huit autrices et appuyé par plus de 3000 universitaires portant sur la place et le rôle du travail pendant et après la pandémie. L'ouvrage est situé dans le contexte actuel caractérisé par des crises qui sont à la fois sociales, politiques, économiques, sanitaires et écologiques. En effet, la pandémie de la covid-19 a mis en évidence la fragilité de notre système économique et notre incapacité à protéger adéquatement les plus vulnérables. Cette crise sanitaire a aussi mis en exergue la centralité du marché du travail et de l'entreprise dans la détermination de l'humain au travail, tous deux guidés par des logiques extractives. À cela s'ajoute la crise socio-économique découlant du capitalisme néolibéral qui, par l'appropriation grandissante du pouvoir et des richesses par une minorité, creuse les inégalités sociales. Pour couronner le tout, la crise environnementale menace la survie de l'espèce sur Terre et met en évidence les injustices structurelles menant à la prise de décisions. À partir de cette toile de fond, Battilana situe le livre en tant qu'outil de réflexion permettant de créer des ponts entre le monde de la recherche et la pratique afin de contribuer à la refonte inévitable du système social et économique actuel.

En partant du principe que les humains ne sont pas des ressources et que l'on doit reconnaître la valeur réelle de la contribution des travailleurs, Ferreras nous présente trois piliers de changement : la démocratisation de l'entreprise, la démarchandisation du travail et la dépollution de la planète. Cette présentation met la table aux neuf chapitres suivants rédigés par des auteures différentes qui proposent des moyens d'articulation d'au moins un des trois piliers. Une contribution non négligeable de ces chapitres est l'intégration des enjeux du Sud global et de ses ressortissants, qui permet de souligner les conceptualisations inadéquates concernant les solutions à adopter et la modification des notions juridiques coloniales. À cet effet, les chapitres de Blackett, Lafuente, Maximo et Chandhoke se montrent particulièrement intéressants.

Le premier pilier, la démocratisation de l'entreprise, vise une meilleure répartition du pouvoir entre les groupes auxquels leur position confère actuellement ledit pouvoir et ceux qui en

sont historiquement privés. On vise ici d'inclure les employés dans la prise de décision stratégique de l'entreprise et d'assurer la représentation de leurs intérêts dans les instances décisionnelles, dans le but d'assurer un réel partage du pouvoir par la justice démocratique. Landemore soutient que la démocratisation du travail entrainerait la diminution des inégalités de salaires et de l'injustice distributive. En effet, il est difficile de justifier de larges écarts de rémunération entre les différents groupes de travailleurs dans l'organisation lorsqu'ils ont tous un rôle décisionnel, par exemple en ayant des sièges sur le conseil d'administration. Herzog reprend ensuite ce levier sous l'angle très intéressant de la lutte à l'injustice épistémique, qu'elle définit comme le fait de ne pas être « *considéré comme un interlocuteur valable, à ne pas être en capacité de trouver les mots adéquats pour communiquer le contenu souhaité, du fait des hiérarchies sociales basées sur le genre, l'attribution de différences aux origines ethniques ou à la couleur de peau, ou le statut socio-économique* » (p.78). Ce concept permet au lecteur de nourrir sa réflexion sur une réelle démocratie sociale et organisationnelle. Herzog propose d'assurer aux membres de ces groupes souffrant de l'injustice épistémique une place et un pouvoir d'influence dans les instances décisionnelles afin de faciliter la dénonciation et la rectification des injustices. Dans le même ordre d'idées, Kaya-Sabanci attire notre regard sur l'impact disproportionné des crises actuelles sur les femmes et soutient que l'égalité de genre dans les organisations est un facteur préalable à l'activation des trois leviers. À cet effet, elle soutient l'adoption de quotas de femmes dans les instances décisionnelles afin de créer une réelle démocratisation du travail tenant compte de la réalité des femmes. Ce chapitre est toutefois peu approfondi et laisse le lecteur sur sa faim.

Le deuxième levier de changement, la démarchandisation du travail, vise à protéger les individus des lois du marché et assurer le droit au travail, notamment par le biais d'un plancher de sécurité sociale et de l'accès garanti à l'emploi. On retrouve notamment Tcherneva qui propose l'adoption de programmes de formation permettant d'arrimer les besoins en emploi avec ceux des secteurs publics, privés et associatifs. De plus, la garantie d'emploi résulterait en un nouveau contrat social où les travailleurs bénéficieraient d'un pouvoir de négociation accru qui obligerait les employeurs à offrir de bonnes conditions et à respecter le droit du travail. Nous considérons qu'il aurait ici été intéressant de voir un

parallèle avec la situation du marché du travail et de l'emploi durant les périodes de la crise sanitaire, où plusieurs États ont assuré un revenu minimal aux individus touchés par la crise, afin d'illustrer comment le marché a réellement été affecté par l'instauration d'un revenu garanti à grande échelle.

Chandhoke reprend ensuite les deux premiers leviers et la notion d'emploi garanti dans le contexte de l'Inde, où moins de 10 % des travailleurs œuvrent dans l'économie formelle. Elle propose de dépasser la distinction erronée entre le travail formel et informel afin d'adopter la notion de création en se basant sur le principe que le travail produit une valeur ajoutée et qu'il serait donc raisonnable d'intégrer les travailleurs participant à la création de ladite valeur dans la prise de décision. Toujours sous la lentille du Sud global, Maximo dénonce la neutralité fictive du droit colonial et l'inadéquation des théories du travail aux contextes des pays du Sud. Plus précisément, elle dénonce la fausse construction juridique universaliste du corps au travail, fondée sur l'homme blanc et européen visant l'emploi formel comme ultime symbole de liberté. Cette conception imposerait en conséquence une fausse construction juridique universaliste de la liberté qui ne peut rendre compte de la multiplicité des travailleurs et qui n'est pas représentative de la coexistence historique de la servitude, de l'esclavage et du travail libre, formel ou informel dans les pays du Sud global. Il serait donc nécessaire d'outrepasser la reproduction de la colonialité juridique afin d'offrir une meilleure protection fondée sur les réalités du Sud.

Le troisième levier est la dépollution visant à opérer une reconversion écologique dans la production et les pratiques des entreprises, qui viserait les processus de production et les pratiques usuelles des entreprises. Méda démontre comment la démarchandisation de l'emploi permettrait, par le biais de filets sociaux, de sécuriser les trajectoires professionnelles des travailleurs qui seraient négativement affectés par la transition écologique en offrant, notamment, des formations, un revenu et un accompagnement vers les secteurs émergents. En orientant les efforts de dépollution ainsi, il serait possible d'accélérer la reconversion écologique, car elle rencontrerait une plus faible résistance de la part des travailleurs ne craignant plus la perte de leur gagne-pain dans le processus.

Les trois leviers se nourrissent donc mutuellement, en assurant la cristallisation l'un de l'autre par leur mise en place commune. Toutefois, alors que la déclaration de l'interdépendance des

leviers est bien articulée par les auteures entre la démarchandisation et la démocratisation, la dépollution, quant à elle, nous semble plutôt s'ajouter seulement une fois que les deux autres couches sont opérationnelles et non pas de façon simultanée. Ce dernier levier est d'ailleurs malheureusement abordé plus brièvement et de façon superficielle, à l'exception du chapitre de conclusion de Méda.

Le *Manifeste Travail* est une lecture très intéressante, digeste et riche de pistes de réflexion pour tout lecteur qui s'intéresse à la construction d'une société plus égalitaire. Il est important de souligner que ce livre est un des rares travaux de collaboration internationale entièrement composé de femmes universitaires. Nous notons aussi la pertinence de la riche section des notes de bas de page, qui se montre très instructive pour approfondir et contextualiser certains concepts. Par ailleurs, l'utilisation de l'écriture épicène tout au long du livre est rafraîchissante. Il aurait toutefois été intéressant de retrouver plus de démonstrations d'applications des différentes idées apportées afin d'ancrer l'ouvrage dans la pratique plutôt que de maintenir un fort niveau d'abstraction dans l'articulation des piliers proposés.

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Global Struggles and Social Change, From Prehistory to World Revolution, *Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020, 224 pages*

Face aux turpitudes, d'abord créées par l'érosion de l'État Providence en raison du projet néolibéral avec, dans son sillage, le changement climatique qu'il génère, de nombreux mouvements planétaires de protestation citoyennes s'élèvent ici et là pour une plus grande justice climatique, économique et sociale. Mais, loin de simplement s'intéresser au caractère contemporain de la mobilisation et de l'action collective, les auteurs se penchent plutôt de manière exhaustive sur les ressorts qui sous-tendent la formation de ces mouvements dans un continuum historique, depuis la préhistoire jusqu'à ce XXIe siècle.

Les mouvements sociaux en tant que locomotives de changement dans le monde prémoderne du XXIe siècle sont, de leur point de vue, à la fois le fruit de la succession de cycles économiques et de leur conjonction avec divers phénomènes au fur et à mesure de la complexification de l'expansion capitalistique (conquêtes, luttes de pouvoir, etc.) et des échanges entre les humains au sein des sociétés et des institutions qu'ils érigent.

Un découpage thématique offre une lecture graduelle des mouvements sociaux de la préhistoire à aujourd'hui. Les chapitres 1 à 3 procèdent à l'examen de l'action collective au sein des sociétés prémodernes jusqu'au mouvement climatique actuel. Ainsi la parentalité, l'autorité, l'égalité, la religion, et l'écriture (entre autres) ont été au croisement d'enjeux de contrôle et de pouvoir, et ont servi la formalisation et la légitimation de l'ordre social et moral ainsi que la structuration des classes et des États dans les mondes grec et romain classiques, tout comme le confucianisme et l'hindouisme en Asie, suscitant des vagues cycliques de rébellion et de révolution. Ou encore les rituels, danses et chants, vus comme des actions collectives de résistance en réponse au processus de domination coloniale et au colonialisme de peuplement chez les Amérindiens.

Le lien est ensuite établi entre la mondialisation et les mouvements sociaux de ce siècle et du siècle dernier, marqués par le glissement de l'État Providence au néolibéralisme contemporain. Puis l'accent est mis sur les convulsions économiques et sociales (récession économique, délocalisation de la production, crise de la dette, désengagement des États, ajustement structurel, privatisation du secteur public, austérité, flexibilisation du travail, érosion des droits sociaux et du contrat social, accroissement des inégalités sociales, etc.) qui en sont issues, pour les populations tant du Nord que du Sud. Ces menaces ont un rôle mobilisateur et catalyseur, et sont le moteur de l'opposition, de l'action et de la résistance collective aux politiques néolibérales ainsi qu'aux réformes du libre marché au niveau local, national et international, marquant le caractère global de l'action collective et des protestations anti-néolibérales.

Une des causes de cette course effrénée du capitalisme notamment industriel est le contrôle de l'exploitation et l'accumulation (hélas à outrance) des ressources, la surproduction entrainant désormais une urgence climatique, notamment par l'augmentation des émissions de carbone qui menace le climat et la planète. Cette autre menace majeure est l'un des puissants leviers

transnationaux de mobilisation et d'action collective de notre siècle pour la défense et la protection de l'environnement et du climat.

Les deux chapitres suivants analysent ce que pourrait être la dynamique future des mouvements transnationaux et l'éventualité d'un tournant plus radical de la nouvelle gauche, fruit des révolutions. À cet effet une étude des idées politiques et du potentiel des mouvements socioprogressifs est menée pour comprendre quels pourraient être les ressorts, stratégies et limites des coalitions transnationales, et quels concepts portent cette revendication de justice globale qui semble se dessiner partout, et notamment dans le Sud, par opposition au projet de mondialisation néolibérale conçu par et pour le Nord.

Les crises du capitalisme mondial qui ont produit la Première Guerre mondiale et le mouvement ouvrier radical ont également produit le fascisme du vingtième siècle en tant que réaction contre le libéralisme centriste et la gauche internationale. En effet miroir, une analyse de la montée du fascisme du vingtième siècle jusqu'aux populismes néofascistes et autoritaires qui ont émergé au cours des dernières décennies est conduite en s'intéressant aux fondements du populisme de droite et du néofascisme contemporain, et aux évolutions politiques depuis le XIXe siècle.

Pour conclure, le tout dernier chapitre, après un rappel succinct des grands mouvements ; offre une perspective sur le potentiel de coalition, de transformation et d'évolution de la société mondiale qu'offre l'alliance intersectorielle et transnationale de ces mouvements progressistes de lutte, notamment après cette pandémie de Covid-19.

Selon une approche critique qu'ils qualifient « d'institutionnaliste-structurelle » : les auteurs s'intéressent donc à la dynamique et au caractère mondial des institutions et des structures — ou des structures institutionnelles, selon l'angle d'approche — qui sont générées par cette mobilisation et cette action collective visant à impulser des transformations sociales, politiques ou économiques. À cet effet, ils s'appuient sur de nombreux exemples, allant de la *Ghost Dance* aux différents mouvements en Amérique latine, en Afrique, en Asie, ou encore en Europe ou aux États-Unis ; lesquels ont émaillé graduellement et émaillent encore l'histoire de l'humanité. Cette démarche a le mérite de mettre en lumière des mouvements de lutte — habituellement oubliés par l'historiographie occidentale — étayés par un travail de recherche assez conséquent

d'analogies historiques, de comparaisons et d'explications des effets de causalité, des processus et des structures de ces différents mouvements de résistance, tant dans le Nord que dans le Sud.

Et même s'il existe des variations aux niveaux local et infranational, fondamentalement, une même mécanique (présence de partis de gauche, universités, niveau d'activisme élevé, expériences de l'action collective passée, savoir-faire en matière de mobilisation, expérience stratégique de la coordination de la résistance, etc.) sous-tend, selon les auteurs, la réponse mondiale d'opposition et de résistance au néolibéralisme au Sud comme au Nord. Similarité considérée comme un continuum de la lutte face aux menaces sociales, économiques et écologiques.

Ce volume est rédigé de manière très claire, et illustré par des exemples éclectiques et très probants, mettant en relief des cas d'espèce issus d'aires géographiques différentes, de manière pertinente et intelligible pour le lecteur, en dépit de la variété d'informations et de sujets abordés. Les auteurs décortiquent ainsi la mécanique des vagues d'évolutions sociétales et des révolutions qu'elles génèrent : partant de ces prémisses, ils proposent un cadre analytique et des références qui permettent de situer les mouvements sociaux dans leur époque, mais aussi d'en comprendre les ressorts comme un continuum en réaction ou en action face à un capitalisme perçu peu ou prou comme un véritable phénix au fil des siècles. Au fil de l'ouvrage, l'on comprend que rien ne s'invente, mais que tout se réinvente en tirant parti des avancées techniques et/ou technologiques que connaît la société.

Avec cette publication les auteurs proposent un travail de réflexion colossal et bien documenté sur les mouvements sociaux du Nord et du Sud, et c'est appréciable notamment pour ceux qui souhaitent comprendre les ressorts et les dynamiques qui fondent et aiguisent la conscience et la résistance citoyennes.

Cependant, face à cette ambitieuse et imposante production offrant un éclairage conséquent sur les enjeux sociaux, politiques et économiques, on ne peut que regretter qu'il y ait fort peu de parts d'analyse accordées au mouvement mondial et à l'action collective des communautés dites « noires » en tant que parties prenantes dans ce mouvement global pour l'émancipation humaine. D'abord contre l'esclavage, puis contre le colonialisme, le néocolonialisme et le capitalisme néolibéral (traite triangulaire esclavagiste et compagnie de commerce transatlantique en droiture à l'origine de l'accumulation

du capital participant à la révolution industrielle occidentale ; firmes transnationales et programmes d'ajustements structurels du FMI ou de la Banque mondiale, institutionnalisation de fallacieuses « aides » au développement…) ; d'autant que ces réactions/inclusions éclatantes persistent depuis la révolution guadeloupéenne de 1802, suivie de celle d'Haïti en 1804 (furtivement évoquée), en passant par le mouvement des droits civiques étatsuniens vers le mouvement Black Lives Matter (plusieurs fois mentionné par les auteurs) d'aujourd'hui, pour l'égalité au Nord, au Sud, en Amérique latine ou dans la Caraïbe. Selon nous, il s'agit de mouvements sociaux de lutte et de résistance qui sont nourris et se meuvent en actions et en réactions tout autant que les autres révolutions et mouvements sociaux de notre planète, contre un capitalisme féroce. Ce dernier a de surcroit érigé, puis entériné le racisme comme principe, une inféodation de fait du peuple noir ; inféodation désormais institutionnalisée et décomplexée dans le système mondial actuel. Il aurait été intéressant d'analyser cette dynamique de résistance là aussi pour en comprendre les ressorts et l'inscrire dans la globalité du continuum affirmé.

Les travaux de Jean-Pierre Sainton, Web Dubois, Frantz Fanon, Cheik Anta Diop, Patrick Manning, Robin D.G Kelley et Cédric Robinson (notamment *Black Marxism*)…, entre autres ; auraient été sans doute bien éclairants pour justement participer, d'une part, à cet effort renouvelé de construction d'une base éthique et philosophique pour une civilisation mondiale progressiste, humaniste, intégrée, et d'autre part, à cette « perspective d'alliance intersectionnelle théorisée en termes d'humanisme, de race, de classe, de genre, d'orientation sexuelle et de gestion de l'environnement », appelée ainsi par les auteurs.

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Parreñas, Rhacel, Salazar. 2022**. Unfree: Migrant Domestic Work in Arab States.** Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 221 pages.

In this masterful protagonist-driven ethnography, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas delineates the process taken by poverty-stricken Filipina women seeking livelihoods as domestic workers through emigration from rural areas in the Philippines to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Throughout her work, the author seamlessly weaves her vast content analysis, interview and participant observation findings into a narrative that sheds light on the relations between the governments, humanitarian activists, employers and workers implicated in this particular international domestic labour-market flow. The quick access and implicit trust granted to Parreñas by a hard-to-reach sample of 85 migrant Filipina domestic workers was eased by her being their *kabayan* (compatriot in Tagalog). However, the job of conducting interviews with a sample of 35 employers who may have suspected the author of being on side with their Filipina workers, was pre-emptively delegated to her European-origin colleague.

What Parreñas discovers is that although migrant domestic workers are objectively unfree in having little choice for survival except by leaving their homes for precarious domestic work elsewhere, her interviewees perceive themselves to be free if they are fortunate enough to be placed in the home of a "good" employer.

In the first chapter, Parreñas describes the *kafala* or guardianship system in effect in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where employers are required to assume full legal responsibility for their sponsored foreign workers. Employers are made liable if their workers: abscond without alerting the authorities, work with other non-sponsoring employers, or commit any crimes, including having unmarried sexual relations. Parreñas argues that this *kafala* system structurally infantilizes domestic workers by setting up conditions where employers are wont to curtail their employees' freedom for fear that laws may be transgressed when their employees are not under their direct supervision. Hence, employers, contrary to international recommendations, often withhold their workers' passports and refuse to give them one day off per week for fear of losing control over their "wards".

The second chapter examines the Philippine government's crucial role in facilitating the south-to-south flow of migrant

workers from the country's impoverished rural areas to the UAE, with the more educated urban labourers engaging in a south-to-north migration instead. Empirical evidence for this section is collected through 106 hours of participant observation of training sessions offered to migrants destined for the UAE. The message given to migrants is three-fold, yet contradictory. They are advised to tolerate any abusive behaviour meted out by their future employers. At the same time, they are encouraged to fight for a monthly wage of $417 USD set forth in a standardized contract (this, in order to both send remittances back home and save money to set up small businesses upon repatriation). Despite labour standards and country-to-country memoranda being signed beforehand, in reality, these agreements are, at best, only aspirational. In the context of the *kafala* system, employers can and often do choose to ignore these contracts, not only to protect themselves from potential prosecution for any illicit activities engaged in by their wards, but also opportunistically, to economize on paying the full wages set by an unenforceable labour contract.

The third and fourth chapters highlight the experiences of Filipina domestic workers themselves. In Chapter 3, Parreñas introduces her conceptualization of how employees are treated, using the criterion of food consumption which the workers themselves avow to be the most important factor in their living conditions. In their employers' homes, the author argues that domestic workers are prone to be dehumanized, infantilized and unrecognized by either not being offered sufficient caloric intake or not being granted a food allowance to purchase the Filipino fare they prefer.

In Chapter 4, the author discusses extreme cases of abuse where those domestic workers who are no longer able to tolerate their employers' physical and sexual abuse, abscond before the contract's end. If they report their escape in due time, migrant labourors are afforded the safety net of being sheltered at the Philippine embassy/consulate and then being repatriated. Nonetheless, in order to ensure a continued source of income, some workers decide to stay on in the UAE as illegals under the extreme duress of earning even lower wages than before, and the constant threat of being captured and criminalized.

In the fifth chapter, Parreñas takes stock of the precarity of domestic workers' lives, attesting that most of her interviewees fall into a pattern of serial migration. If employers do not renew

their one- or two-year contracts, migrant workers are obliged to leave the UAE and re-enter once they have a new contract in hand. Although most may want to remain home in the Philippines upon their repatriation, the wages they earned in the UAE do not provide a cushion thick enough to either operate the viable small businesses they were initially encouraged to do, or to rebuild their properties after frequent climate disasters. Due to the continued unsustainability of making a living in their rural homes and the necessity of bankrolling their children's education or their family's healthcare, domestic workers find themselves with little choice but to enter once again into the vicious south- to- south migration cycle.

Parreñas' social constructionist approach leads her to critique the victimization verbiage adopted by migrant advocates (moral entrepreneurs) who concentrate their campaigns on extremely abusive cases. She is uncomfortable with the glib use of terms like human trafficking and slavery to describe what she sees as an employment relationship, one that is, admittedly, disadvantageous for the migrant worker. Due to the weight of her interview data where the domestic workers themselves portray the majority of their employers as acceptably "good" even under the *kafala* system, the author argues for a switch in the discourse. Given that employers everywhere, north or south, will try to cut corners to squeeze more work out of their migrant employees, the author cautions against selectively levelling harsh orientalist aspersions against the Arab world writ large. The attitudes of the employers her team interviewed in the UAE were not found to be terribly different from others accounts of employers elsewhere in the world.

The testimonies of the workers showcased in *Unfree* are narrated in a smooth and digestible manner and could conceivably stand on their own even without further conceptualization. In ethnographic studies, it is common practice to apply analytical concepts not before but while and after the data is collected in order for a "best fit" that is organic to the data to be identified. Parreñas attempts to theorize her portrait of domestic work in the UAE at a micro-sociological level with a discussion linking worker freedom to employer morality. In so doing, the contradiction she tackles is the following: Her findings show that domestic workers enjoy an exceedingly limited amount of freedom (e.g. lack of unsupervised time off under *kafala,* lack of control of food consumption). Yet despite all the constraints rendering migrant domestic workers

unfree, most interviewees, against all apparent odds, "freely" choose either to stay with their employers or, after their contracts have expired, continue to return to the UAE to toil as domestic workers under the sponsorship of different employers.

In her contemplation of the relation between employer morality and worker freedom, the author encounters a variety of moral stances (moral, amoral or immoral) taken by employers in the treatment of their domestic employees. From the point of view of the domestic worker, the more moral (or "good") employers are, the more freedom they will experience. (Parreñas, for the purposes of analysis, seems to substitute her interviewees' interpretation of "good" employer with "moral" employer. In her interviewees' words, a "good" employer allows them the freedom: to choose their own food, to take unsupervised time off and to renew their contract or be released to work for another sponsor, whereas a "bad" employer does not.) The problem with the morality argument is the following: How, in light of the findings, can employer morality be pre-established even before they take some sort of action toward their domestic workers? How indeed can "good" employers be pre-determined to be animated by good morals? Without the benefit of further research on the employers' prior ethical behaviour, the morality argument risks being tautological and frankly, not very useful to understanding migrant workers' unfreedom.

Although the social constructivist approach used in this book helps describe the positions of non-governmental and governmental moral entrepreneurs (bureaucrats and advocates) and of employer and worker claims-makers, the analytical angle of employer morality / worker freedom that the author has chosen, does not sufficiently accommodate the depth and breadth of the data generated. For greater explanatory value, we are left to search for other, more useful conceptualizations. To reiterate, finding a theoretical best-fit, post-data-collection is normal practice in inductive qualitative research.

In her quest to explain the active agency of precarious workers attempting to exit a web of poverty in the rural south, Parreñas might be nudged to seek inspiration from any one of the analytical literatures on social reproduction, migration, precarity or international labour rights that more closely fit her findings on the interplay between agency and unfreedom. In Parreñas' own previous ethnographies based on interviews with domestic workers, she entertains more robust conceptual discussions on precarity (2021)

and on reproductive labour (2000). The fact that the theoretical discussions in this book train on the more esoteric and less thorny issues of freedom and morality, might be, as she herself has hinted, due to her need to avoid broaching notions of system change in order to maintain access to her sources.

To find a more holistic fit for the impressive data generated by Parreñas' team, these few suggestions of recent works may help further our understanding on ways in which migrant domestic workers are rendered unfree whilst still perceiving themselves as having some agency. Hein de Haas's review of mainstream migration perspectives suggests that instead of simply viewing migrant laborers as being pulled and pushed by external market forces (hence, unfree), their agency should also be taken into account as they actively weigh their aspirations for better opportunities abroad against their capability to survive poverty at home. Faisal Hamadah's (2022) region-specific critique can help us to gain perspective on how employers engendered in the *kafala* system might take the moral stance that they are in fact defending their allegiance to their state by curtailing the freedoms of their non-citizen domestic workers. Valeria Pulignano and Glenn Morgan (2022) underline the gravity of the unfreedoms endured by female migrant domestic workers in the precarity of their work and in the forced abandonment of their own social reproductive role in their countries of origin. Moving forward, Anne Boucher's (2022) empirical study of hundreds of court cases of abuse against migrant workers can help alert labour organizations and workers of dangerous workplace practices that render them unfree. Judy Fudge (2019) suggests that advocates of the rights of international migrant workers could be most effective by being familiar with international trends, yet at the same time, putting pressure on their own governments and civil society organizations to carry out reforms locally.

In order to find a better fit for the monumental empirical findings showcased in *Unfree*, instead of fruitlessly turning to the literature linking employer morality to worker freedoms, a handful of other possible bodies of work are suggested above to reset the analytical direction of this book's findings. Conceptualizing the changing forms of precarity, social reproduction and working conditions globally, as well as documenting those changes in specific communities, as Parreñas has done tirelessly for decades on behalf of Filipina domestic workers, may be the best way that academia

can contribute to elucidating and improving the plight of migrant labourers.

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