Parental Controls: The Gendered Experiences of Latin American Mothers and Fathers in Canada's Agricultural Guestworker Programs

by

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Abstract

PARENTAL CONTROLS: THE GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF LATIN AMERICAN MOTHERS AND FATHERS IN CANADA’S AGRICULTURAL GUESTWORKER PROGRAMS

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This thesis explores the experiences of transnational agricultural migrant workers in Canada’s guestworker programs. Examined through a gendered lens, it focuses on migrant’s experiences as parents to children whom they must leave behind in their communities of origin when they migrate. Drawing on interview and ethnographic data, this thesis argues that transnational parents, especially mothers, face a unique set of challenges and barriers as participants in these programs. It explores how the injustices that migrants suffer impact parents’ ability to focus on their primary motivation to migrate—their children—thereby limiting their ability to fulfill their roles as parents and hindering their parent-child relationships.

Keywords: gender, migration, transnational parenting
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Esta tesis está dedicada a Oscar, mi inspiración y Antonio, mi motivación.

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Introduction

As growing social and economic inequalities between the richest and poorest countries leave few livelihood options for people within their own communities of origin, many are being forced to look for work abroad as transnational labour migrants. These migrants are typically in the prime of their productive and reproductive lives, yet because they are poor, immigration stipulations prohibit them from bringing their dependents – the elderly, the young and the weak – with them to their receiving communities. Under these circumstances the transnational family is emerging at an increasing rate out of high out-migration areas. As heads-of-households, and usually, primary breadwinners, migrants face not only the unique challenges of living and labouring outside their countries of origin, but also those challenges involved in managing their homes and familial relationships from across borders.

Guiding Questions

My interest in transnational labour migration sparked in December 2001, when I met my now husband, Oscar. When we met, I was an AmeriCorps volunteer working with an immigrant advocacy
agency in Washington, D.C. Oscar was living and working in the same community as a Mexico-US labour migrant. As Oscar’s partner, I quickly became familiar with the issues that transnational labour migrants face. We subsequently moved to Mexico where we lived for more than seven years. In Mexico, I witnessed and often experienced first-hand the socio-economic conditions that motivate people to migrate; these issues became especially clear once I had a child of my own. Despite my intimate familiarity with Mexico-US emigration, and with the motivations which push Mexicans to migrate, I knew very little about Canada’s managed migration programs when I arrived here and began thinking about my research. After learning more about transnational agricultural labourers in Canada, a number of new questions about how migrant parents manage their transnational livelihoods came into focus:

1. What are the experiences of parents who migrate from Latin America to Canada as temporary migrant farmworkers?
   a. How are these experiences gendered?
   b. What strategies do migrant parents use to fulfill their reproductive roles transnationally?

2. How are traditional Latin American parenting ideologies and gender roles challenged through migration?
a. How are traditional gender roles and expectations maintained or re-structured to meet the physical and emotional needs of transnational families?

b. How are gender roles maintained or re-structured differently in mother-away versus father-away families?

Using these questions as a guide, I analyze migrant parents’ experiences as agricultural migrant workers through a gendered lens. Specifically, I demonstrate how the intense and exhausting labour market demands that migrants face as participants in Canadian managed migration programs limit migrants’ ability to focus on their primary motivation to migrate—their children. This research is important because it contributes to research relating to global concerns about the social and familial impacts of transnational migration on migrants and their families. Furthermore, it sheds light on the injustices that exist within Canada’s agricultural migration programs with a special focus on how these injustices are gendered.
Methodological Theory

I use feminist standpoint theory in the design of my research methods and for examining my research questions. Feminist standpoint theory, which is often used in justice-seeking movements and research surrounding socially oppressed groups, is an “epistemology, methodology and political strategy” (Harding 2004: 2-3). A standpoint, as Mary E. Swigonski describes it, is a “position in society, involving a level of awareness about an individual’s social location, from which certain features of reality come into prominence and from which others are obscured” (1994: 390). Feminist standpoint theorists believe that social frameworks are often “androcentric, economically advantaged, racist, Eurocentric and heterosexist” and “ensure systematic ignorance and error about not only the lives of the oppressed, but also about the lives of their oppressors and thus about how nature and social relations in general work” (Harding 2004: 5). It has been argued that certain features of the structural framework of Canada’s managed migration programs fit this description (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010; McLaughlin 2010).

In contrast with non-feminist social science theory, a feminist standpoint framework is based around the idea that “experience shapes epistemology” and that people who share similar types of experiences often share similar standpoints
(Hirschmann 2004: 319). Furthermore, it theorizes that oppressed human beings experience a different lived reality than powerful members of society in large part due to their marginalization (Swigonski 2004). Finally, feminist standpoint frameworks “refus(e) loyalty to the Western “native’s” view of life and thought”… and “assert that not just opinions but also a culture’s best beliefs—what it calls knowledge—are socially situated” (Swigonski 2004, as cited in Harding 1991). Using this framework as my guide, my research recognizes the social, political, and economic oppression transnational migrants have often been subjected to and aims to create space where their voices and experiences can be heard and validated.

Feminist standpoint methodological theory aims not only to place value on the experiences of the oppressed with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of their reality, but also to work towards what Chela Sandoval calls an “oppositional consciousness” through which members of the oppressed group are moved to struggle together against a dominant system and repression (Harding 2004:2; Sandoval 2004). In other words, feminist standpoint methodology impels oppressed groups to “...resist their oppression by drawing on the epistemological power their particular shared experiences afford...” (Hirshmann 2004:319). Likewise, my research aims to be activist in
nature. By documenting and sharing migrants’ stories, not only with those in academia but with policy makers, social workers and most importantly, migrant workers themselves, I hope to contribute to the social movement fighting against human rights abuses and towards justice for transnational migrant workers in Canada and around the world.

The Roots of My Research

My research formed part of an ongoing research study called *Homemaking across Borders: Theorizing “choice” and voluntary social exclusion in the transnational livelihoods of women from Mexico*, directed in part by my academic advisor, Dr. Kerry Preibisch. This project is an “empirical study of women engaging in temporary labour migration and low wage jobs in Canada’s agri-food industry” (Good Gingrich, Luann and Kerry Preibisch 2009). While the primary focus of this study is on migrant women’s experiences, men are also included in the study with the goal of allowing for a gendered analysis of the broader themes (Good Gingrich and Preibisch: 15, emphasis mine).

Within this larger study, my research focused specifically on temporary migrant farmworkers’ experiences as transnational parents. I chose this topic based on my interests and
epistemological positioning as a researcher. First, as a Spanish-speaking Latin Americanist with extensive experience living in Mexico as a transnational migrant and married to a former transnational migrant (Mexico—United States), I felt that I was well suited for research with Mexican and Guatemalan SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot participants. Second, as a mother to a young child, I am drawn to the stories and experiences of other parents, especially mothers. Finally, because of the masculinized nature of agricultural work, (as compared to caregiving labour which has been stereotypically described as “women’s work”) and, because of the way in which parenting ideologies are so deeply intertwined with socially constructed gender norms, a study of transnational parenthood among agricultural workers promised to be a fascinating and important contribution to the current literature on migratory studies (Brickner and Straehle 2010; Spitzer et. al 2006; Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010).

Gaining Access to the Sample Population

As this project had already been granted approval by the Research Ethics Board, a formal request was made and my name was added to the certificate. My first three field research trips were conducted under the supervision of experienced researchers,
namely, Evelyn Encalada Grez, a PhD student of Dr. Preibisch, and later, with Dr. Preibisch herself. On these trips, I was not only able to observe their fieldwork expertise, but was also introduced to their previously established research contacts. Subsequent research trips were taken on my own or with another student researcher. In total, I conducted 15, one, two, or three day field trips during which I conducted ethnographic research and a total of 26 in-depth interviews. My research was conducted primarily in the Niagara Region of Ontario and in the city of Medicine Hat, Alberta; however, I also conducted research in other regions of these two provinces. These locations were chosen because of previously established project parameters and research goals. However, I was permitted a great deal of flexibility and control over the manner in which I solicited participants.

In the beginning, I relied heavily on snowball sampling to gain access to participants; the snowball was initiated by the small number of key contacts that had been previously established by Dr. Preibisch and the research team and grew from there. I found this to be the easiest and most efficient method of participant solicitation. However, once I gained confidence in my research abilities and a better understanding of the communities that I was working in, I made a few “cold calls” at
migrant worker residences and social events, such as soccer games or dances, in hopes of diversifying the data pool. In these instances, I would simply approach a potential participant, introduce myself and explain the research that I was conducting. Then I would ask if they would be willing to share some of their experiences with me. While the majority of participants were solicited by the snowball sampling, I did recruit a good number of interviewees using the alternative method.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to interviewing all participants, I explained the project objectives and read the informed consent aloud. Each participant also received a written copy of the informed consent statement as well as my contact information and that of the project supervisors. Because of the vulnerability of the population and the fear that many workers have of retaliation against those that speak about their experiences in Canada’s managed migration programs, written consent was not required of participants. Instead, explicit verbal consent was attained and digitally recorded before beginning the interviews. All the information collected remained confidential and was only shared with other members of the research team. Participant names were replaced
with pseudonyms to assure anonymity. As well, all migrant-employer identifying information such as business name or location has been omitted from the final report.

Under the project guidelines, all participants received a $40 cash or gift card compensation for their time. The research team for the Homemaking study decided collectively to provide participants with a cash gift of $40 following the interview to compensate them for their time. Migrant farm workers are paid close to the minimum wage and often work long hours. As I explain in the thesis, these long work schedules often leave them little free time; the research team wanted to acknowledge their generosity in taking the time to share their experiences with us. The monetary compensation was not mentioned during the recruitment stage to avoid using it as an incentive or to commodify the relationship between participant and researcher, something that may have impeded the building of rapport. In most cases the participant did not know about the compensation prior to the interview taking place. Incidentally, when I passed workers the envelope describing its contents as a “small gift from the University to thank you for your time” most participants initially refused to take it, telling me that they were more than happy to participate in the study and that they were happy that someone was interested in hearing their stories.
Methods

My research methods are qualitative in that they are nonnumerical and use approaches that are “subjective, interpretative, process orientated and holistic” in nature (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004: 3). Qualitative research is recommended for researchers who “seek to understand the meaning or worldview of a particular subject or want to listen to the subjective experiences of others and somehow make sense of them...” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004: 4). Moreover, my research incorporates an interpretive or hermeneutic tradition in that it places value on “interpreting meaningful [social] interactions” between groups of people or individuals (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004: 5). Specifically, my research utilizes as the two primary research methods: 1) ethnographic research in the form of participant observation and convivencia\(^1\) and 2) in-depth interviews.

Participant Observation/ Convivencia

A large part of my work during my research trips was ethnographic, a research method which Douglas W. Maynard describes as “participant observation [that] captures facets of

\(^1\) Literally “co-existence” or “co-habitation,” convivencia is a commonly used Spanish word that describes the act of two or more people spending time together in an amicable manner.
members’ life world” and which “can be helpful in providing access to inner experience and its relation to behaviour and conduct” (2006: 55, 83). I spent many weekend afternoons helping prepare and consume food with the Mexican and Guatemalan migrant women, going grocery or dollar-store shopping with them, and sitting in their living quarters watching old Spanish-language movies together. I attended social events, such as dances run by Latin American community members at local bars and restaurants, and soccer games at schools at which formal leagues, organized by the migrants themselves, competed. I attended a migrant woman’s birthday party and a community Easter celebration to which I even brought my husband and three year-old son. Because of personal time constraints as a student and mother, and also because of the long hours and six or seven work-day per week schedules that migrant employers demand, most of my visits were on Saturday evenings and/or Sundays. Therefore, I typically observed migrant workers in their “down” time – cooking and cleaning, resting and relaxing, and communicating by telephone with family members at home in Mexico or Guatemala. Following all interactions I wrote detailed field notes documenting what I had observed. The time that I spent conviviendo with the migrants was invaluable and not only gave me the opportunity to observe the ways in which migrants parent their children transnationally but also helped increase my
understanding of the daily lives and challenges that transnational migrants face in Canada.

**In-Depth Interviews**

From January to September 2011 I conducted 27 semi-structured in-depth interviews with migrant men and women from Mexico and Guatemala. The age range of my participants was 26-56 years and the breakdown according to gender and nation of origin is as follows: three Guatemalan females, four Guatemalan males, 14 Mexican females, four Mexican males and two Canadian males (one agricultural co-worker of the migrants and one community activist). All but two of my participants are transnational parents. In total, I conducted 25 interviews in Spanish and two in English. The length of the interviews ranged from approximately 45 minutes to one and one-half hours. Interviews took place in various locations including local coffee shops, restaurants and migrant worker residences. Participants were always encouraged to choose the interview location; I only suggested they pick a private location where they would feel comfortable speaking. The interviews were semi-structured in nature; although I used a previously established interview guide provided to me by the project, participants were encouraged to discuss ideas or topics that were important and meaningful to
them that related to transnational parenting and their migration to Canada.

After initial introductions, the interviews generally focused on three areas. Swigonski argues that Feminist Standpoint research must “begin from concrete [life] experiences [grounded in cultural diversity] rather than abstract concepts” which helps to “decrease the partiality and distortions [imposed by an oppressive patriarchal power structures] in the picture of nature and social life” (1994: 390-391). My interview questions are generally broken into three sections and adhere to these suggestions by focusing on the life experiences of participants which place value on their communities and cultures of origin and unique perspectives and ideas.

Specifically, I began the interviews with questions about the migrants’ lived experiences in their communities of origin prior to migrating to Canada, with a special emphasis on their experiences as parents. In this section, questions included: “What was your life like prior to migrating to Canada?” and “Tell me about your childhood and youth” and “How did your children and other family members react when you suggested the possibility of you migrating to Canada?” In the second section, the focus was on participants’ experiences as transnational migrant workers; specifically, as transnational parents in
Canada. In this section, I asked questions such as “How do you feel about the [transnational] caregiving arrangements you have in place for your children?” and “How do you fulfill your parenting responsibilities transnationally?” and “In your community, what are the qualities of a good mother/father?” The third and final section of the interview explored the way in which migrant workers imagine their future and the future of their families. I would end the interviews with questions like: “How do you imagine yourself and your family in five years from now?”

**Analysis**

All interviews were digitally recorded and saved on my computer in password protected files. Interviews were transcribed in their original Spanish by me or the project’s professional transcriptionist. My analysis was conducted in Spanish in order to retain the intended meaning of participants’ language and I only translated into English the sections that were to be used in the thesis. I began using NVivo9, a computer program for qualitative analysis, to help organize my data. However, due to time constraints, I continued with a phenomenological analysis of my data. Phenomenological analysis is a method that is ideal for describing the common lived experiences of a group of people
by analyzing interview data (Creswell 2007, Hycner 1999). To conduct this analysis, I began by reading through all of the transcripts and organizing the raw data into codes, or conceptual categories, which described the experiences of participants in the study. I approached this step of the analysis being “open to the meanings and phenomenon that emerged” and by aiming to “listen to (and read) the interviews for a sense of the whole” (Hycner 1999:144-145). Later, I combined the categories, determined and contextualized themes that emerged from these categories, and summarized to explain in broader terms “what the participants experienced and how they experienced it” (Creswell 2007, Hycner 1999).

**Organization and Overview of Thesis**

The thesis is structured as follows: In the next chapter, I provide an overview of South-North transnational labour migration in the Americas, focusing on the differences between undocumented migration to the United States and managed migration to Canada by means of the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot Programs. I continue by exploring the phenomenon of transnational parenting, focusing on the relationship between traditional gender roles and parenting ideologies and the strategies that migrants use to parent across borders. In
chapter two, I present agricultural migrant workers’ descriptions of their experiences as transnational parents, highlighting the major themes that emerged from this research: children as the motivation to migrate; the challenges of making and managing care arrangements; the emotions, sense of sacrifice and estrangement that come with the transnational parent-child relationship; and the ways in which migrants experience transnational motherhood and fatherhood. In chapter three, I analyse these experiences through a gendered lens, showing how the injustices that migrants face as participants in the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot hinder their ability to focus on their primary motivation for migration: their children. In doing so, I demonstrate that mothers, much more so than fathers, experience feelings of self-doubt, guilt and inadequacy, as well as painful estrangement from their children, which in turn diminishes the benefits of their migration.
Chapter 1: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Transnational Migration in the Americas: An Overview

In many regions of Mexico, transnational labour migration has become a way of life (Cohen 2004; Dreby 2010). This is increasingly true in other parts of Latin America as well (Carletto et al. 2010; Bastia 2009). Much of the academic literature written on transnational migration of workers in the Americas has focused on undocumented Mexican workers in the United States (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Dreby 2007; Lahaie et al. 2009; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). It is estimated that more than two million Mexicans migrated to El Norte (literally, “North” of the US/Mexico border) between 2000 and 2005, and an estimated 11.2 million “unauthorized” immigrants were living in the United States in March of 2010 (Dreby 2010; Otero and Pechlaner 2010; Pew Hispanic Center 2011). The sheer number of human beings that are impacted by undocumented migration certainly makes it an important area of study. However, managed labour migration programs, such as Canada’s programs for agricultural workers, are uniquely important and deserve attention for various reasons. One reason is that undocumented migration is so prevalent in large part because of failed attempts at managed migration programs in these places (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011; Martin 2010). As Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz explains, “Undocumented or illegal
migration has become salient as a result of the fortification of national borders that restricts the movement of workers but not to jobs, goods or money— in effect, when policies simultaneously stimulate and “illegallize” international migrant labour” (2011: 26).

While undocumented migration exists in Canada, it does to a much lesser degree than in the United States, principally because it is not “associated with a clandestine border crossing” but instead, occurs because migrants who have entered the country with official documentation either overstay their allotted time in the country or otherwise disrespect the limits of their visa (Magalhaes et. al 2010: 132). The total number of undocumented migrants residing within Canada is not known, but most experts estimate that somewhere between 20,000 and half a million migrants from all over the world live in this precarious situation (Magalhaes et. al 2010). Undocumented migration in Canada is a remarkably under-researched area, especially in comparison to the wealth of literature available documenting the plight of undocumented migrants in the United States. Since there is such limited information about undocumented migration in Canada, we must draw from US-based research, which tells us that from a migrant’s perspective, there are some critical differences between documented migration by means of a managed
migration program and undocumented migration. Undocumented migrant workers in the United States face the infamously dangerous and often very costly trek across the border between Mexico and the United States. However, once they are in the country and past a certain border patrol inspected area, undocumented migrants enjoy a relatively high degree of flexibility and control over the decisions they make and the lives they live compared to managed migrants. Undocumented migrants may return to their communities of origin when necessary and return to *El Norte*\(^2\) on their own schedule, provided they remain undetected and have the financial resources to do so (McLaughlin 2010: 90; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). They also have some control over the type and schedule of employment they hold and their opportunities for promotion and/or professional growth. An ethnographer of an undocumented Mexican migrant workers in the United States noted that undocumented migrants even set up informal, yet extremely effective, social and economic networks that help support other migrants’ voyages *al Norte* and to help each other adapt to a new life in a new country (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). She found migrants’ willingness to work and “attitude” to be a key factor in their ability to earn higher wages and better employment opportunities. While some undocumented

\(^2\)Literally “the North” (of Mexico), this word is used to describe the United States.
migrants earned minimum wage or occasionally less than minimum wage, many undocumented workers in the United States earn double or even triple the minimum wage simply by demonstrating good work performance and a positive “work ethic” in their place of employment (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011: 97-98 cited in Kochhar 2005).

On the other hand, those that come to Canada as agricultural workers in managed migration programs enter the country under less precarious conditions, using legal documentation and travelling via commercial airlines, but upon arrival suffer enormous restrictions on their personal and labour mobility (McLaughlin 2010; Hennebry and Preibisch 2010). Another part of migrants’ experience in these programs, as Hennebry and Preibisch (2010) point out, is that workers are limited to a single designated employer. Accordingly, employers hold tremendous power over their employees. Workers are often frightened to complain about poor or unsafe working conditions because of the risk that they might be fired and returned to their country of origin. Indeed, their fears are well-founded as workers in Canada’s managed migration programs can be fired and repatriated by employers for a multitude of reasons (from which Canadian workers are protected) including illness, injury and pregnancy (Hennebry and Preibisch 2010: 10; Basok 2002; Preibisch and Hennebry 2011; Pysklywec et. al 2011; McLaughlin
Another part of transnational migrant workers’ experience in Canada is earning the same hourly wage year after year, regardless of their work performance, skill-set or seniority in the program (Hennebry and Preibisch 2010). Unlike undocumented workers in the US, migrant workers in this country cannot expect a pay raise or improved working conditions simply by demonstrating a positive attitude and/or good work performance, since they are paid according to established wage rates. Nonetheless, because of the programs’ “naming policy” by which employers can select (or refuse) former employees, most workers do feel pressured to conform to the stereotypical image of an “ideal” employee: self-disciplined, loyal to their employer, completely flexible, and willing to place their job security before their personal health and safety (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006: 111; McLaughlin 2010). One researcher documented the pressure migrant workers feel to perform:

“We have to work much harder because others around us set the pace very high because they want to show off to the boss. We’re not machines, but some try to work like machines— the want to impress the boss and keep up the reputation that one Mexican worker is worth the productivity of three to four Canadians— not just three, but four!” (Interview April 2007 cited in McLaughlin 2010: 84)

All of these factors contribute to migrants’ experiences as temporary farmworkers in Canada.
Another major difference between undocumented migration and managed migration is that undocumented workers in the United States may eventually establish themselves in a new community and send for the family to migrate north to join him or her (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Key to my study is the fact that migrant workers in Canada are prohibited, either officially, or due to financial limitations which make them ineligible by immigration standards, from bringing dependents with them when they migrate (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011; McLaughlin 2010). Furthermore, they are offered no path to permanent residency by which they could eventually emigrate as a family unit (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011; McLaughlin 2010). So great is the desire for these workers to be “permanently temporary” that government recruiters in sending countries actually favour workers with dependents that they will be forced to leave behind precisely because there will be less of a chance that worker will form social commitments here or try to settle in Canada at the end of his or her contract (McLaughlin 2010: 91; Hennebry and Preibisch 2010: 10-11).

Permanent settlement, then, is not a viable option for most workers, even those who have spent ten to 20 seasons working on Canadian farms and have made a considerable contribution to the country’s economy.
Canada’s Managed Migration Programs

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 182,276 “foreign workers” entered Canada in 2010 (CIC 2011). I prefer the term temporary migrant workers to refer to these migrants for the same reason that I have used “undocumented immigrants” in place of the commonly used “illegal immigrant” or “illegal alien” in my discussion of migrants in the United States. Terms such as “foreign” and “illegal” “gloss the historical and political construction of immigration categories and diminish the humanity of transmigrant workers” (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011: x). Furthermore, as Nandita Sharma explains in Home Economics: Nationalism and the Making of Migrant Workers in Canada, terminology such as “foreign worker” (and illegal alien) create a group of people that “live within nationalized societies” but “are represented as existing outside the boundaries of both the nation and the state” so that they are able to be “denied the legal entitlements and protections of being classified as citizen or permanent residents” and are therefore, “legitimate objects of the national state’s coercive powers” (2006: 53).

Temporary migrant workers come to Canada from all over the world to labour in various areas of employment. The Live-In Caregivers Program (LCP) is probably the most well-known and well-documented of these programs, bringing thousands of migrant
workers, mainly from the Philippines, to work in Canadian homes as nannies for children and caregivers for the elderly (Stasiulis and Bakan, 2003, Brickner and Straehle 2010). The Pilot Program for Occupations Requiring Lower Levels of Training, National Occupations Code C&D (hereafter referred to as the NOC C&D Pilot), brings temporary migrant workers from all over the world to help alleviate labour shortages in areas such as meat butchering, food processing and even the preparation and serving of food and beverages in fast food restaurants. This program, which will be described in further detail in below, also facilitates the migration of agricultural workers, many from Guatemala and other regions of Latin America, to Canadian farms (Preibisch and Hennebry 2011: 183; Brickner and Straehle 2010).

Managed migration programs that bring agricultural workers from Latin America and the Caribbean to work on Canadian farms include the SAWP (Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program), which has existed for more than four decades; and since 2002, the NOC C&D Pilot. It is estimated that approximately 27,000 Mexican and Caribbean workers migrate to work in Canada through SAWP annually and a total of more than 135,000 migrants have participated in the program since 1966 (Hennebry and Preibisch 2010). These workers come to Canada for up to eight months per
year and their migration is frequently circular in nature; many return year after year for five, ten or even 20 years (McLaughlin 2010: 80). The SAWP requires that workers be employed in “primary agriculture” and positions are afforded only to citizens of a few countries (Mexico, for one) that have entered into bilateral agreements with the Canadian government (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011).

By means of the NOC C&D Pilot, more than 10,000 agricultural workers migrate to Canada annually (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011: 8). Through this program, employers can hire workers from anywhere in the world provided that there are no Canadian citizens or permanent residents available to fill the vacant positions (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011:8). Migrants in this program are eligible for employment contracts that last for up to 24 months and are permitted to work in more diverse areas of agricultural production, for example, in the harvesting of apiary products or raising and processing of food products in the “animal sector” (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011; HRSDC 2011). However, after accumulating four years of employment in Canada, they must return home for four years before being eligible to re-enter Canada as a temporary migrant.
Not so inspirational: Humans rights criticisms of the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot

Canada’s temporary migration programs have become known internationally for offering a “best practice model for managed migration” (Hennebry and Preibisch 2010: 1). Despite their critical acclaim, some scholars and activists disapprove of the programs’ labels as “inspirational models of migration,” arguing that while some internationally recognized “best practices” have been incorporated into these programs, a troubling number of key features of these programs are in need of improvements that would help protect the human rights of participants (Hennebry and Preibisch 2010: 1-2; Brickner and Straehle 2010).

A key criticism of the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot is the highly gendered and racialized nature of the participant selection process (Preibisch and Binford 2007; Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010; McLaughlin 2010). In terms of gender, women have only been eligible for participation in the SAWP since 1989, and even now, it is estimated that women comprise a mere two or three percent of the total workforce (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 297-298; McLaughlin 2010: 85). While a number of factors account for women’s scant participation, employers’ gendered preferences have been identified as the principal factor shaping international labour migration to Canada (Preibisch 2007). Both
male and female workers in these programs are often categorized by their employers on the basis of the stereotypical association between gender and labour capabilities. For example, men have been described as being “naturally suited” for farm work because of the perception that men are stronger, more durable and have more endurance (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 290; Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006: 116-117). Stereotypes as these within a heavily masculinized environment contribute to migratory experiences that are highly gendered, as I explain below. On the other hand, Canadian agricultural employers have expressed their belief that women are “ideal” for other areas of production because they are “naturally” more compliant, attentive to detail and nimble than their male co-workers (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 301-305). Stereotypes like these and the pressures that both men and women feel to “please” employers (in hopes of guaranteeing an invitation to return to Canada in subsequent seasons) create a fierce sense of competition between workers (McLaughlin 2010).

This competition is stress-inducing and contributes to the infighting that occurs between co-workers/roommates, or compañeros (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 301-305; Sheese 2011). Another part of the experience of being a temporary agricultural migrant in Canada is that workers live in housing
accommodations provided by their employer, often on the premises of the farming or food production operation. The quality of these accommodations is very poorly regulated and while some employers provide relatively clean, safe and comfortable living arrangements, others force workers to live in dilapidated and extremely overcrowded spaces (Hennebry and Preibisch 2010). Living conditions such as these exacerbate the already challenging position that the majority of migrant workers find themselves in once they are in Canada: not only have they left their families and homelands behind, but they are forced to live and work with a small group of strangers 24 hours a day for months at a time. The pressures of poor housing have been found to affect women in different ways than men as a result of the ways in which competition is fostered within these temporary migration programs (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010). Sheese (2011) found that female migrant farmworkers describe their relationships with co-workers and roommates as antagonistic, competitive and even traumatizing. In her study, women reported that of all the challenges migrants face, their emotional well-being was most threatened by living with their co-workers (Sheese 2011: 92, emphasis mine). Migrants explain that they are able to cope with this distress by “keep(ing) their children and objectives at the forefront of their minds” (Sheese 2011: 133). However, I will argue that since these problems are all-
consuming of migrants’ time and energy, the infighting and tensions that women experience in Canada create a distraction which effectively lessens their ability to focus on their responsibilities as transnational parents.

Another criticism of the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot is that health care, particularly that aimed at women’s gender specific needs including birth control and/or abortion services, is often extremely difficult for migrant workers to access while in Canada. Lack of privacy, long and unpredictable working hours, breaches of confidentiality by medical professionals, and unreliable access to translation services complicate the situation further (Sheese 2011: 182). Accordingly, another “problematic” trait of migrant women according to employers is that they can become pregnant (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010). Researchers have found that women participating in the SAWP or NOC C&D Pilot who become pregnant during their contract may be punished and/or ridiculed and sent home, or worse, may stay and finish their contracts without receiving proper prenatal care (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 305).

Migrants in both the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot often experience isolation and restrictions on their mobility (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006; McLaughlin 2010). Workers’ living arrangements are usually in close proximity to
those of the employers, allowing management to monitor migrant’s movement. “Farm rules,” such as curfews and regulations regarding who may visit the property and when, further limit migrant’s mobility (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006: 111). As Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría explain, in “Canadian agrarian patriarchal culture” a woman’s sexuality and ability to reproduce is widely considered a liability and because of this, women frequently face barriers and stigmatization that men do not. (2006: 116; Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011). For example, participants in Preibisch and Encalada Grez’s study have reported that home state officials require women to sign a document in which they agree to refrain from “engaging in intimate relationships with foreign men or Mexican migrants [and] accept(ing) money from men whatsoever” while in Canada (2011:26). There is no such humiliating and dehumanizing waiver of personal rights for male participants (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011: 26).

A final criticism of the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot and one that is highly relevant to my research is that these programs separate families. Agricultural workers may not bring their families with them during the duration of their contract nor are they offered a path to Canadian permanent residency (McLaughlin 2010; Hennebry and Preibisch 2010). Regardless of their
Contribution to the economy, society and culture, these migrants are not permitted to settle permanently with their families in Canada. This makes their existence both in here in Canada, and in their country of origin, seemingly “temporary” (McLaughlin 2010).

Officially, family status is not among the criteria for selection to participate in the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot. Unofficially, mothers and fathers have priority over workers who do not have children. In fact, migrants report that it is widely perceived that one must be a single mother or married father to be eligible for participation. They explain that recruitment propaganda in their communities of origin is clearly geared to single women and married men with dependents and tell stories of applicants who did not fall within these categories that were not accepted into the program (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 298). Because of this, nearly all workers leave children behind in their country of origin when they migrate. In fact, a key element of the so-called success of the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot is precisely that the majority of workers have dependents in their countries of origin which assures that they will return when their contracts have finished (McLaughlin 2010; Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010). Yet, because transnational migrant farmworkers are not permitted to bring their families
with them to Canada, the daily tasks of reproduction—cooking, cleaning, caring for children when they are sick or injured and other parental and/or spousal obligations—are not pulling them away from their work as is the case for their Canadian co-workers. Hence, migrant workers are considered “ideal” candidates for employment specifically because they are forced to leave their families behind (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 304). Arat-Koc concurs, explaining that migrant workers are seen as “ideal” workers “because their responsibilities of social reproduction [are] not just privatized in the home but can be totally hidden, with the economic, social and psychic costs transferred to a different location and state” (2006:88).

**Transnational Parenting**

Socially constructed ideas and expectations about parenting and social reproduction are challenged for migrant workers who must leave children behind in the countries of origin if they are to migrate. In their explanation of a conceptual framework through which we can examine immigrant transnationalism, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) have described “transmigrants” as “immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political—that span borders.”
Moreover, they explain, transnational lives include a “multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies” (1994:7). Barbara Schmitter Hiesler adds that the “linkages” that transmigrants maintain with both sending and receiving countries “give rise to a new social formation, the transnational community, and a new identity, the transnational identity” (2008: 95). Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila remind us that we should “[examine] transnational motherhood, not as physical circuits of migration, but as the circuits of affection, caring and financial support that transcends borders” (1997: 550). By expanding upon and synthesizing these ideas, I would define transnational parents as mothers and fathers who maintain familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political, and emotional relationships with their children at home while simultaneously maintaining these relationships in the place where they have migrated. In doing this, they create new, complex, and gender-challenging identities.

The challenges of transnational parent-child relationships have been widely documented, but for the most part, outside of the Canadian context and outside of the context of migrants in managed programs for agricultural workers (see Parreñas 2005; Dreby 2007; Pajnik and Bajt 2010). Moreover, while some academic literature has looked at transnational fathering (Parreñas 2005,
Dreby 2010), most of the current research on transnational parenting has focused on transnational mothering, or “distant motherhood” (Lutz 2010: 1653; Cienfuegos Illanes 2010; D’Ottavio 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Shifting migration patterns paired with gendered societal expectations of what it means to be a mother have been an attractive and much needed area of study. As Pessar and Mahler explain, “One hundred years ago, the prevailing pattern of international migration was the lone, rugged male who left his family behind in the homeland as he ventured across the seas to seek his fortune, hoping to return to them after achieving success” (2003: 822). Now the numbers have shifted and women worldwide migrate at the same rate or at a rate that potentially outnumbers that of the migration of men (2003: 814). This changing pattern of female migration is what Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild call the “worldwide gender revolution” (2009: 442). Nicola Piper refers to these changing patterns in migration flows as the “feminization of migration” (2008: 1287). Helma Lutz argues that “gender is not just one ‘aspect’ in the study of people on the move like economy, politics or religion, but a central organising principle in migration flows and in the organisation of migrants’ lives” (2010: 1651). Increasing numbers of voluntary migration of Latin American women can be attributed to “pressures in the social or family environment,
political crisis and economic crisis” as well as “cultural factors emerging from the daily life of migrant women that act as push factors for leaving” (Cortés 2005, cited in Cienfuego Illanes 2010: 205). These cultural factors may include “domestic violence, sexual abuse, sexism and other practices that set limits to their personal development” (Cortés 2005, cited in Cienfuego Illanes 2010: 205). Indeed, there is a body of research that indicates that transnational labour migration has an emancipatory effect on those women who have never before been able to escape their restrictive, patriarchal communities of origin (see for example, Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010). However, the increase demand in female labourers is clearly most prevalent in areas such as domestic and care work, entertainment and prostitution (Lutz 2010). In Canada, for example, the bulk of caregiving migrants³ are female while men still make up the overwhelming majority in the highly masculinized agricultural sector (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010).

Migration of women and transnational motherhood challenges Latin American gender roles and societal expectations of mothers in a way that certainly deserves attention. However, it would be incongruent to ignore the experiences of transnational

³These migrants are participants in the Live-In Caregiver Program which brings thousands of migrant workers, mainly from the Philippines, to work in Canadian homes as nannies and caregivers for the elderly (Stasiulis and Bakan, 2003, Brickner and Straehle 2010).
fathers and their children in a study of transnational parenting. My research explores both transnational mothering and fathering in agreement with Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s argument that: “Gender is not simply a variable to be measured but a set of social relations that organize immigration patterns. The task, then… is to begin with an examination of how gender relations [which are exercised in relational and dynamic ways] facilitate or constrain both women’s and men’s immigration and settlement” (1994: 3). My research also concurs with Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaria’s suggestion that there is a “need for feminist scholarship to go beyond women-only focuses and situate gender and its intersectionality with other relations of power as constitutive elements of im(migration), even in masculinized migration flows” (2006: 107). Therefore, my research incorporates the perspectives of both mothers and fathers to help facilitate a more comprehensive gender analysis.

Traditional Latin American Gender Roles and Parenting Ideologies

Traditionally, Latin American ideologies about family (and specifically, about motherhood and fatherhood) clearly distinguish between male and female roles and statuses (Cienfuegos Illanes 2010; Garcia and de Oliveira 2005; Sanders
These ideologies are highly patriarchal: men are defined as being the “breadwinners,” carrying the obligation to provide for and protect their wives and children (Garcia and de Oliveira 2005). Furthermore, “hegemonic masculinity” as Matthew Guttman notes, has traditionally also been ideologized and expressed, for example, in displays of “homophobia, machismo, and misogyny” (2003: 3). Women, on the other hand, are described as being responsible for the caring work of the household—domestic duties such as child care, cooking and cleaning— and as “crucial to the family unit” (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1317). In some communities, especially in rural areas, a woman’s mobility is restricted to the “domestic sphere” except for short trips to church, to the store, or to visit female relatives; women may be punished if they cross these socially constructed boundaries (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1317; Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaria 2006, Fletcher 1999: 76). In regards to parenting, the widely-believed gendered stereotype that woman are biologically predetermined to mother children and are therefore, “naturally” best-suited for the task of caring for them, permeates family life (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997).

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila theorize that some of these ideologies come from “cultural institutions of industrialization and urbanization, as well as from preindustrial rural peasant
arrangements that allow for women to work while tending to their children” (1997: 4). Catholicism has also heavily influenced Latin American culture (and cultures throughout the world) and has played a key role in spreading gendered ideologies about parenting and family structure (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; D’Ottavio 2008). For example, the Cult of St. Mary in Poland “gives power to woman as protector and reproducer of the nation but, at the same time, it demotes the woman’s role to that of a powerless mother devoted to self-sacrifice and martyrdom for the sake of the nation’s children” (D’Ottavio 2008: 161).

Correspondingly, traditional gender roles in Mexican society reflect male machismo and female marianismo:

Machismo calls for men to be sexually assertive, independent, emotionally restrained, to wield absolute authority over their wives and children and to serve as family breadwinners. The ideological corollary for women... Marianism (or marianismo), is modeled on the Catholic Virgin Madonna, and prescribes dependence, subordination, responsibility for all domestic chores, and selfless devotion to family and children. (Stevens, 1973; Mummert 1990; Soto 1986 cited in Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994)

Thus, the ideological image of motherhood is also expressed in a sacrificial sense: a “good” mother is expected to sacrifice herself for her children (Cienfuegos Illanes 2010: 208). Furthermore, a woman’s femininity is intricately linked to ideas about “good” and “bad” mothering (D’Ottavio 2008: 161).
relevance of this phenomenon in modern-day Latin American society is exemplified in Mexican culture by the idolization of “models of maternal femininity” (and sacrifice) such as the Virgen de Guadalupe and “negative femininity” (and self-centeredness) such as La Llorona and La Malinche (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997: 551; Sanders 2009). Certainly, Latin American culture is very diverse and it is likely that gender ideologies vary greatly between and even within countries. However, in my data analysis, I look for evidence of the impact of the ideologies described above on migrants’ experiences as transnational parents because their prevalence has been documented so extensively.

**Gendered Challenges for Transnational Parents**

How then do these gendered expectations of men and women influence the thousands of Latin American parents participating in managed migration programs in Canada? While not all modern migrant families subscribe to stereotypical gender ideologies, they undoubtedly play a role in the modern-day experiences of transnational parents and their children (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006; Salazar Parreñas 2005; Lutz 2010). Ideally, traditional understandings of what it means to be a parent would be restructured, adapted or re-arranged to accommodate “spatial
and temporal separations” from their children through migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997: 548). Frequently, however, attempts to adapt or re-structure traditional gender roles to adapt to a parent’s migration causes familial and societal conflict (Dreby 2010; D’Ottavio 2008; Salazar Parreñas 2005). In Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and their Children (2010) Joanna Dreby suggests that in Mexican transnational families, traditional gender roles are actually reinforced when parents are physically separated from their children as emotional support, albeit long-distance, is expected from mothers and not fathers (2010). She explains that transnational mothers and fathers typically parent from abroad in a similar manner: through regular contact by phone and by sending gifts or cash remittances. Modern technology such as texting and software applications that allow users to make voice and video calls over the Internet may help facilitate communication; however these technologies do not exist without their own challenges. A recent study of Latino transnational families found that limited access to computers and internet in migrant’s country of origin limits the usefulness of such devices, often making them more frustrating than helpful (Schapiro et. al 2009). The difference between the expectations and experiences of migrant mothers and fathers, Dreby claims, is that mothers carry a culturally accepted “moral burden” of parenting which
expects women to be nurturing, physically present, and attentive to the daily needs of their children which fathers do not carry (2010: 91). Javiera Cienfuegos Illanes came to a similar conclusion about the physical presence of a mother when she stated: “As builder of the family origin, prestige and identity, the [Latin American] mother cannot but be physically and emotionally close to her children and husband” (2010: 208).

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila further explore this idea:

> When men come north and leave their families in Mexico...they are fulfilling familial obligations defined as breadwinning for the family. When women do so, they are embarking not only on an immigration journey but on a more radical gender-transformative odyssey. They are initiating separations of space and time from their communities of origin, homes, children and—sometimes—husbands. In doing so, they must cope with stigma, guilt and criticism from others. (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997: 552).

My thesis addresses these theorized differences by documenting migrants’ experiences as transnational parents and analysing migrants’ perceptions of the reactions that their children, family and communities had to their migration.

Because of traditional Mexican ideologies of parenting, Dreby (2010) found that a woman’s separation from her child is usually much more complicated and traumatic than is a father’s separation from a child. Moreover, she claims that a Mexican woman’s very honour is compromised when she migrates as it is
seen as failure to adhere to gendered expectations of her responsibilities as a mother (2010). Undoubtedly, contemporary gender roles are rooted in Latin America’s historically gendered moral division of honour:

...the father, when there was one, was in charge of providing his family with honour in terms of position and family past, while it was the mother who was in charge of providing virtue to the family through her irreproachable conduct in her role of looking after the family home. The honour that the mother provides is definitively the moral honour of the family. In this manner, the figure of the mother not only remits to an origin, but is also the depository of the identity and prestige of the family. (Cienfuegos Illanes 2010: 208)

While men are seen as fulfilling their obligations as fathers when they migrate, women are seen as abandoning them (Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). In accordance with Dreby’s work, researchers who interviewed Mexican migrant mothers working on farms in rural Canada found that while “women’s international labour migration is primarily motivated by maternal love, their “migration is vilified” and seen as abandonment and “questionable mothering” in their sending communities “while men’s (migration) is socially accepted” (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 300).

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas’ (2005) work on transnational families in the Philippines corroborates these findings,
indicating that transnational migration in Filipino families seems to enforce traditional and frequently burdensome gender boundaries. She notes that women are often faced with disapproval of their migration by members of their family, teachers or school administrators and/or other community members and that women’s migration is often blamed for their children’s poor academic performance, behaviour and/or mental health issues. When gender boundaries are enforced and pronounced, a migrant mother’s already heavy workload is intensified, thereby lessening her ability to meet all of the children’s needs adequately. Consequently, migrant mothers and their children are susceptible to increasing the levels of stress and anxiety that can exacerbate the negative feelings about their separation (Salazar Parreñas 2005).

Most transnational mothers in the SAWP or NOC C&D Pilot are single, separated or divorced which is owing to a number of factors, principally, biased participant recruitment practices in both sending and receiving countries and pervasive gender ideologies which expect married or childless women to stay home and be “good wives or daughters” (Kanaiaupuni 2000 cited in Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010: 298). However, there are some married women, who, due to extenuating circumstances—such as a mentally, physically or otherwise disabled husband— are accepted
into the program, as a sort of act of “charity” by home state officials (McLaughlin 2010; Sheese 2011). In Mothering in Migration: Transnational Strategies of Polish Women in Italy, Gemana O’ttavio found that in cases where a mother migrates and the father stays behind, many men “coped poorly” with their newly acquired, gendered responsibilities and became susceptible to depression and/or addictions, such as alcoholism (2008: 163). Polish fathers who stayed behind to care for their children while the migrant mother was away lacked the motivation to care for the children and take an active role in their physical and emotional development (2008). O’ttavio notes that these fathers seemed “unable to positively modify their behaviour towards children and acquire attributes towards children considered female, such as willingness to listen, compassion and understanding” (2008: 163). In my research, I look for evidence of this phenomenon in married mothers’ responses. Similarly, Parreñas describes the structural rearranging of Filipino families in a mother’s absence as a phenomenon which, ideally, could allow for traditional “ideologies of women’s domesticity” to be reconsidered (2005: 92). Unfortunately, the unwillingness of fathers to adopt “feminine” responsibilities and attitudes, paired with female kin and eldest daughters who dutifully take over the work of the absent mother, lead to transnational families that maintain the gendered expectations of household
responsibility. She calls this the gender paradox (2005: 92). This paradox, as Parreñas explains, prohibits Filipino families from reconstructing ideologies about mothering and fathering and often leaves children of migrant mothers feeling abandoned and unimportant. These feelings frequently lead to tense and conflicted relationships with both of their parents (2005). Lutz corroborates these findings, stating that fathers who stay behind face “crisis’ of masculinity” frequently symptomized as “augmented male alcoholism, violence, and child misuse” (2010: 1653). Other researchers have noted that mothers frequently express feelings of guilt for having left their children and report anxiety about children’s education, freedom of movement, and the transmission of their native language and culture to the children they leave behind, while fathers usually did not share these concerns (D’Ottavio 2008, Dreby 2010). Furthermore, mothers, more so than fathers, worry more about the negative implications of their migration on the children they leave behind (Dreby 2010). Their concerns may be well founded, as multiple studies have found that children of migrant workers suffer emotional distress, difficulty in school, socially, and with authority, a preoccupation with migration, and fewer educational aspirations than children whose parents do not migrate (Dreby 2007, 2010; C. Lahaie et al 2009; Kandel and Kao 2001). While the primary focus of this thesis is not on the
social and emotional impact of a parents’ migration on their children’s lives, my thesis does consider parents’ perceptions about how their children have been impacted by their migration and how this affects migrants’ perception of themselves as parents.

**Sharing Reproductive Labour**

Migrants must negotiate caregiving arrangements for their children if they are to migrate and participate in the SAWP or NOC C&D Pilot. When a father migrates and the child’s mother is present and able, she is typically the person to assume this responsibility (Dreby 2010; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). However, in cases where the mother migrates, the decision process is not so straightforward. Frequently, women choose the children’s grandmother, or other female kin, a madrina o comadre (God-mother or “co-mother”) to care for her children (Levitt 2001; Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). If, for whatever reason, a family member is not an option, she might ask a neighbour, friend or even a paid caregiver to care for them while she is away. Sometimes, eldest daughters are left in charge of their younger brothers and sisters (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997: 559; Salazar Parreñas 2005). Interestingly, these “other mother” arrangements are quite accepted in Latin
American culture in what Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila describe as a “more collective, shared approach to mothering in contrast to a more individualistic Anglo-American approach” (1997: 559). Clearly, this approach to mothering is still highly gendered, as the burden of caregiving remains with girls and women. My research will examine migrants’ perceptions about collective mothering and consider the ways in which these ideals influence the decision-making process for and management of caregiving arrangements for children of transnational migrants.

In her depiction of Filipina transnational migrant mothers, Parreñas calls the three-tier transfer of caring work from rich women in the global North to poor women in the global South and the transfer of the care of the poor woman’s children to other poor women in their kinship networks the “international division of caring work” (2005: 23). Canada’s Live-in Caregiver Program exemplifies this phenomenon. While my research does not focus on migrant caregivers, there are parallels that can be drawn between the care chains created by caregiving labour migration and the division of reproductive responsibilities between agricultural migrant workers and stay-at-home caregivers in their communities of origin. Interestingly, these women are considered an even more vulnerable population than migrant mothers themselves (Bastia 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila
1997). Grandparents, especially grandmothers, are often the key factor in their adult children’s decision to migrate as most parents will not travel unless they are able to find acceptable child care and most Latin American mothers feel that maternal grandmother is best-suited for this role (Bastia 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). However, because of this expectation that mothering duties will be shared, a grandmother’s role as caregiver often feels not like a choice but more as an obligation to migrant children (Bastia 2009: 397; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Indeed, while an adult child’s migration often helps increase the grandmother’s material and financial security, she is often very overwhelmed by the heavy responsibility of caring for children at a later stage in her life (Bastia 2009). Mexican and Guatemalan stay-at-home caregivers also face financial vulnerability because they are dependent on the migrant parent’s remittances which may be irregular and unreliable (Bastia 2009).

Joanna Dreby calls Mexican caregivers of children of transnational migrants “middlewomen” because of the integral role that they play in maintaining the relationship between the children and their mother (2010: 145). She explains that often children have such an intimate relationship with “middlewomen” that they call them “mami” or “mama” as they do their biological
mother. In some cases children call their biological mother by their first name, as they would a sister or cousin and only the caregiver is awarded the title of mother (Dreby 2010, Bastia 2010). Migrant mothers express having mixed feelings about the intimate relationship that their children have with their caregiver. While biological mothers may be happy that their children are being well cared for, they also feel scared, sad, angry or offended when their children do not recognize them as mother (Dreby 2010, D’Ottavio 2008). My thesis looks for evidence of the existence of these types of challenging relational issues between SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot mothers and the children they leave behind.

Conclusion

The 2009 Human Development Report reminds us that in migration, “movement is not a pure expression of choice” (2009: 8). Indeed, in Latin America, more and more parents are being left without feasible options for maintaining their families in their countries of origin; in fact, the options are so few that for many, that migration is not really a choice but the only viable option for their families’ survival (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011; HDR 2009; McLaughlin 2010). However, the migratory “opportunities” that are available to agricultural workers in
the global North, specifically in Canada, effectively prohibit them from bringing their families with them when they migrate, thereby separating parents from their children for months, years and even decades at a time (Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010). As transnational parents, Latin American mothers and fathers must simultaneously maintain their own lives and livelihoods in Canada as well as their children’s lives at home. This task does not come without its challenges.

In this study, I explore the experiences of Latin American mothers and fathers as transnational parents in Canada’s SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot Programs, both as participants in the labour market force and as co-workers and as cohabitants with other transnational migrant workers. Clearly, previous research has shown that these experiences are often difficult, painful and even dehumanizing; however, relatively little has been published about how these experiences affect participants’ relationships with their families at home and specifically, with their children. This research looks at how these relationships, which are often influenced by traditional Latin American parenting ideologies and gender expectations, are challenged, re-structured or maintained when a parent becomes a transnational labour migrant. To do this, I consider various aspects of the parent-child relationship; explore the strategies that
transnational parents use to parent their children from across borders; and examine migrants’ perception about how they fulfill their roles as transnational mothers and fathers.
Chapter 2: Results

This chapter begins by exploring the motivations that push parents to migrate transnationally in search of work. It continues with discussion of the some factors involved in a parent’s decision to migrate, focusing specifically on the management of caregiving arrangements for their children. The central focus of this chapter is on the experiences of agricultural migrant workers as transnational parents, with a particular emphasis on how these experiences are gendered. As the results will show, transnational parenting, which, by its very definition challenges traditional Latin American parenting ideologies and gender expectations, poses a unique set of challenges, barriers and limitations to the parent-child relationships of SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot migrants and the children they leave behind.

Motivation to Migrate

Principal to practically every informant’s stated motivation to migrate was the desire to salir adelante, literally, “to get ahead.” In other words, migrants hope to improve their family’s financial stability by coming to work in Canada. Specifically, parents planned to use their earnings in Canada for two
purposes; first, to build their own home or to improve their current housing situation, and second, to secure the financial resources necessary to pay for their children’s education. Education is such a key motivator because most migrants have very little or no formal education themselves and aim to give their children the opportunities that they didn’t have. Tomás, a 35 year-old Guatemalan father of two, very clearly sees the connection between his lack of education and his need to migrate transnationally: “I don’t have a profession, and for this reason I am here. If I had a profession then there would be no reason for me to be here.” However, my data indicates that single mothers, even those who have completed a relatively high level of formal education, are often forced to look for work outside of their communities and countries of origin. Indeed, single parent status, and more specifically, the absence of spousal financial support, is perceived as one of few socially acceptable reasons for a mother to leave her children to migrate. Shakira Isabel, an indigenous mother of two boys, feels that she is forced to migrate precisely because she is a single mother who does not have the support of her children’s father:

I think that if I had a husband, and if he gave me money for food, I would not come here to Canada. I would stay home and care for my children and tend the fields and plant crops so that my children could eat. But I don’t have a husband so I
have to look (for work), I have to maintain the household and the little money that I earn (in Mexico) isn’t enough.

For women like Shakira Isabel, migration was less of a choice than what felt like the only hope for their families to have chance to salir adelante. Single mothers also highlighted that lone parenting is not easy whether at home or transnationally. A number of single mothers indicated that they migrate with the hope that they might be able to compensate for the suffering and humiliation that their children have experienced growing up in a single-parent household, something that is highly stigmatized in Latin American culture. Maria, a single mother who completed a relatively high level of education in Mexico, blames her own bad choices in previous intimate relationships for her son’s poor academic progress and hopes that she can make up for her mistakes with her efforts in Canada.

Let me tell you that sadly, I do not think that I am a good mother. I do not think I am a good mother now, nor do I think that I was a good mother before I came (to Canada). I feel guilty because my son isn’t doing well in school, and I know that it is my fault. [...] But I think that the time is now and so, from so far away, I am trying to fix everything.

Therefore, while both transnational fathers and transnational mothers are economically motivated, the circumstances under which men and women decide to migrate are distinct. Mexican and
Guatemalan men migrate because they face persistent poverty or sometimes, because of an acute economic crisis, such as a medical emergency in the family. On the other hand, when Mexican and Guatemalan women migrate transnationally, they are typically facing the challenges of an extraordinary social crisis—having a disabled, alcoholic or drug-addicted partner/breadwinner, being widowed at a young age, or suffering though a tumultuous and/or violent intimate relationship—in addition to the pervasive poverty and/or financial crisis that men experience. Furthermore, a mother’s decision to migrate encompasses certain risks and challenges and a series of important choices/decisions that she must make for herself and her children that a father’s migration does not.

**Decision making; Making and Managing care arrangements**

One of the key factors to mothers’ ability to migrate is having found suitable care arrangements for their children. For fathers, this topic was generally a non-issue as their children were being cared for by their own mothers in the same living arrangements that had been in place prior to the father’s migration. On the other hand, a number of mothers reported difficulties in finding a suitable caregiver. The challenges involved are reflected in the interview with Adriana, in which
she recounts looking for someone to care for her children the first time she migrated:

They gave me the opportunity to come here but I thought, okay, I am going to earn money but it is also very painful to think about leaving my children. Who am I going to leave them with?

Melissa: And how did you choose someone to care for your children?

Adriana: My children have always stayed with my sister. I had to talk to my brother-in-law first, along with her. It would have been harder to leave them with non-family members because no one wants to take on that sort of responsibility. Many women’s stories indicated that they felt that, in the eyes of the caregiver, being tasked with the responsibility of their children was perceived as a burden. Shakira Isabel recounted how her children told her they felt so unwelcome in their own grandmother’s home, that they preferred to return to their family home and fend for themselves:

When they were small I left them at my mother’s house. But when they got older they said that they didn’t want to stay with my mother anymore because their uncles got mad at them. They thought it would be better if they stayed at their own house. (They told me) “We know how to cook now; we are going to see how it goes with just the two of us at home.”

For other women, choosing a caregiver seemed easy or even natural. These women had typically chosen to leave their children with their own mothers or by themselves, with the eldest daughter in charge. For example, Anabel has always left
her two daughters alone when she migrates; the eldest was 16
years old when her mother first migrated:

When I came here, my eldest daughter cared for her sisters
because they were still living in the house where we had
lived with their father.

Melissa: And has this worked out?
Anabel: Yes, it’s as if I were there.

Similar to findings by other scholars (Bastia 2009; Hondagneu-
Sotelo and Avila 1997), migrant women’s own mothers were the
most commonly reported choice of caregiver for their children.
When I asked Azucena why she thinks maternal grandmothers are
best suited for this responsibility, she replied: “Because she
is my mother and there isn’t anyone I trust more than my
mother.”

One interesting point that these mothers made about the
ease with which they found caregiving arrangements for their
children is that many had left their children with this person
for extended periods before they came to Canada. Since the
majority of the female migrants in the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot
are single mothers, many had relied heavily on their mothers or
other female caregivers to support them in raising their
children prior to their transnational migration. Maria
explained:
The thing is that my son practically grew up with my mother because when I separated from my husband we went to live with her. Even when we moved into our own place, he would go to my mother’s house on Friday afternoons and wouldn’t come back until Sunday. He even calls her “Mom.”

This finding corroborates Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila’s (1997) previous research on Latin American “other mother” arrangements which claims that there is a common understanding or expectation between Latin American women about the “collective responsibility” of mothering within immediate and even extended families (1997:559).

Even when a caregiver was easy to secure, the caregiver—migrant relationship is not always easy to manage. As “normal” as it felt for Maria to leave her son with her mother, she questions the quality of care her son is receiving at her parent’s house:

My mom works and in the afternoon I would call her and ask “Where is my son?” (And she would reply) “Oh, I don’t know, I haven’t seen him.” And every time I would call my mom’s house he was never there. [...] So I sent him money so that he could buy a cellular phone so that I could communicate directly with him from here. Because I could never reach him and I would worry and wonder where he was. (My parents) don’t even know where he is.

On the other hand, sometimes the quality of care is so good that children, especially young children, grow very attached to their caregivers. This can be very painful for mothers as
babies and toddlers may not even remember them when they return home. This happened to Azucena after her first season in Canada:

It feels awful because they forget about you. Especially for the little ones, well, it is easy for them to forget because my mom is practically the mom there. They call her mom and they don’t even know me. In fact, my son even pushes me away and says, “You, no!”

Managing the challenges of caregiving arrangements is clearly one of the gendered experiences of transnational migration. However, these challenges persist far beyond the initial decision to migrate and increase exponentially once parents get to Canada.

Transnational Parenting

From the moment they arrive in Canada, SAWP and NOC C&D migrants are bombarded with a myriad of new experiences - a new climate, a foreign language, a new job, new living arrangements with strangers, new methods of transportation and communication, a new currency; the list goes on and on. There is no grand welcome to Canada nor is there time for cultural and social acclimation. Yolanda remembered arriving in Canada for the first time: “When I arrived I cried every day because everything was different and so overwhelming (y todo se te viene encima).
And you have no idea what is going on, or what you are doing here. [...] I felt trapped and wondered how I was going to make it here.” As Janet McLaughlin (2010) has argued, Canadian employers treat migrant agricultural workers not as human beings who have social and emotional needs but as a workforce of “robots” that are expected to hit the ground running despite circumstances that would make anyone feel anxious and overwhelmed. Moreover, migrants’ responsibilities as mothers and fathers and to their communities of origin don’t disappear when they cross international borders. It is under these extremely difficult and all-consuming circumstances that migrants must find the time and energy to parent transnationally.

Resource exchanges are an integral part of what it means to be a transnational parent. Both migrant mothers and fathers reported remitting anywhere between 60 to 80 percent of their earnings in Canada to their communities of origin. Men almost always send their remittances to their wives, while women usually remit to their child’s caregiver or another family member. In all of the interviews, the receiver of a mother’s remittances was another female. Migrants claim that the principal uses of these funds are to feed, clothe, house and educate their children. An interesting trend in my research was
that men did not report being involved in the details about their households’ daily financial decisions. On the other hand, women reported being much more intimately involved in directing how their remittances are spent. For example, mothers reported that they frequently specify how much the receiver is to allocate for children’s bus fares, food, and other school expenses, how much should be saved, and what foods or special purchases should be made for children.

Another important part of parenting from afar is communication with children and caregivers at home, usually by telephone and, in rare cases, via internet. The telephone becomes the emotional “lifeline” between a migrant parent and child. Most of the migrants I met had at least shared access to a land line and some of them had purchased cellular phones in Canada. For other migrants, especially those that are geographically isolated at their place of employment and/or whose mobility is restricted by their employer, opportunities to call home are few and far between. This was exemplified in Tomas’ case, where the phone line in his residence was strictly regulated and monitored by the patrona, or in situations where there is no phone available to migrants at all. Anabel told me the story of a rural Canadian farm where she once worked that had no phone or any way to connect to the outside world:
On Sundays we would ask the boss for permission to go to church, to mass. But instead of going to mass I would (go to a pay phone and) call home. I would tell my daughters, “Be waiting by the phone girls, between 7 and 7:30 at night. Be waiting by the phone because if I can’t reach you in that moment I won’t be able to talk to you all week.”

Even when a land or cellular telephone is available to a migrant, phone calls home can be costly and frustrating. All of my interviewees reported using international calling cards to phone home which notoriously provide spotty connections and limited and inconsistent amounts of talk time. During these rare and precious moments, parents not only enjoy light-hearted conversation, but also give advice and even discipline their children. Shakira Isabel described a typical phone call to her two boys:

I tell them that they should try not to leave the house, to take care of each other, to go to school and do their homework, and not to get into fights at school, that they should behave. And I tell them not to waste their money.

When Adriana calls home, she asks her university-aged son, who was two years old when she first migrated, to help her maintain the family home where they only live a few months out of the year:

I ask him how he is, how school is going, or how everyone at home is and he tells me all of the details. Or, for example, there are things that I ask him to do for me. Like right now our house— the house where we live— is empty because he
lives with his aunt. But he goes to our house every afternoon after school. We have a dog, and he gives it food and water. And I ask him if the telephone bill or electric bill came in – he has to pay attention to these things so that he can go make the payments.

Realistically, parenting from afar is limited to resource exchanges and verbal communication, and these limitations can be complicated and frustrating. However, what migrants overwhelming reported as the most challenging part of transnational parenting were those aspects that cannot be counted: the painful emotions, sacrifice and estrangement that are part of the transnational parenting experience.

**Emotions and Sacrifice**

Undoubtedly, transnational migrant parents experience a wide range of emotions during their tenure in the program. Sadness, loneliness and a general sense of worry or anxiety about the well-being of their children are some of the emotions that both mothers and fathers consistently described. Anabel talked about the emotions she experiences while separated from her children and grandchildren: “Being away from our families we feel sadness, we feel melancholy, at times we are okay, at other times we are sad because we are not with our families.” A
A first-time migrant recounted the advice she was given by an experienced migrant while she waited to board the airplane to Canada:

Good luck, friend, on your first trip to Canada. I hope and pray that you do well. [...] You are going to feel very sad and very lonely. I know because I have gone through a lot there and I have suffered a lot. I hope that you don’t go through all the things that I went through.

Sacrifice is a key idea or theme that commonly accompanied migrants' explanations of their experiences as transnational parents. The sacrifices that migrant workers make as SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot participants are profound as their health, safety, emotional well-being and even their basic human rights are often at risk. For example, as labourers on Canadian farms, migrants frequently experience fast-paced, intense and high-pressure working environments. Under the supervision of employers (patrónes) or foremen or women (capataz or capataza) they report being pushed to physical and emotional exhaustion, labouring hour after hour for 12 or 14 hours a day, six or even seven days per week. Yet because of their vulnerability and precarious tenure in the programs, which I will describe in further detail below, they usually do not complain. Speaking about his experiences with the capataz at the farm where he works, Tomás, a Guatemalan father of two, explained:
They pressure us a lot and they have no patience for those of us who just arrived to work. [...] We work 13 or 14 hours a day under pressure. We work a lot and they want the work done quickly. And they don’t care if you are a woman or a man, what they say is: “You came here to work. You wanted work, that is why you came (to Canada) so just get your butt in gear!” And frankly, there are co-workers that are afraid that the capataz will do something to them if they talk to the bosses about the way they are being treated.

Similarly, Maria reported feeling pressured to work quickly and without stopping because of the way that the supervisors criticise and even verbally abuse those who fall behind to take bathroom or water breaks: “They glare at me (when I go to the bathroom) and I feel like they are saying, “Look! Everyone else is way ahead and you are far behind. Hurry up, you slowpoke!”

The uncertainly and precarious tenure that SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot participants experience on the program is especially profound precisely because the majority of migrants are parents with dependent children. The principal area of uncertainly revolves around the fact that tenure in both the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot programs is very unpredictable because it is in large part based on the subjective “carta” or letter of evaluation which employers create for each worker at the end of each season at the behest of the Mexican Ministry of Labour. If a migrant worker receives a poor evaluation or is not invited by the employer to return to the farm that he or she laboured on the previous season, authorities in Mexico may revoke the migrant’s
opportunities for future migration to Canada. The threat of a poor evaluation and/or repatriation is a very powerful tool of labour control used by home state officials, employers, and supervisors alike. Shakira Isabel, an indigenous Mexican mother of two boys, explained how home state officials use this tool to encourage workers to “behave:” “They tell us we have to behave at work. (They threaten us) that if we receive a bad report they will cancel our departure and there won’t be any more employment (opportunities in Canada).”

Anabel, a single mother from the Mexican state of Tlaxcala, recounted the story of how her “bad behaviour”—returning to her residence past an employer-imposed “curfew” because of her inability to communicate with the English speaking taxi driver—provoked her subsequent transfer and ultimately, a lost opportunity to migrate the following season: “Because we supposedly behaved badly we didn’t receive a “carta” and didn’t get asked to return the second year.”

Another area of uncertainty for migrants is that the length of employment as stated in their contracts is not always honoured by the employer. Migrants are frequently transferred from farm to farm during their time in Canada, either as “legal” transfers under program guidelines, whereby an employer formally arranges to take on another’s migrant employee, or “informal”
transfers, whereby an employer “loans” his/her migrant workforce to another employer.\textsuperscript{4} Since employment conditions vary so drastically from farm to farm, transfers can be a serious source of anxiety for migrants as they have no idea what kind of environment they are being sent into. Dulce remembers being transferred from a farm in British Columbia to one in Saskatchewan and learning that the pay schedule at the new farm was much different than those at the farms she had previously worked at:

It was a terrible experience for me. [...] On other farms they paid us once a week or once every two weeks but on this farm, they only paid us once a month. We went hungry. We went hungry and so did our families. I can’t complain because I have always tried to save a little money, even when I have worked very little, I have tried to think about tomorrow and not about today. But there were young co-workers and some who were in Canada for the first time, and they were in a very difficult situation.

Uncertainty for SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot workers is also rooted in the fact that while the rules and regulations which employees must follow are strictly enforced, there is minimal regulation of employers’ commitment to the contract conditions and the safety and well-being of their employees. For example, the majority of employers provide a loan to migrant workers upon

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\textsuperscript{4}Informal transfers are not permitted under the SAWP and place migrants in situations of extreme risk. Working for someone other than the designated employer is a violation of the work permit and can result in the migrant’s deportation. Moreover, migrants in these arrangements are not covered by Worker’s Compensation.
\end{flushright}
arrival in Canada so that they have funds for food and other living expenses before they receive their first pay check. This cash advance, typically in the amount of one to two hundred dollars, is deducted from the migrant’s subsequent earnings. While this is not an official requirement for employers (farmsontario.ca) it is an extremely important service as most migrants arrive in Canada with little or no money, having spent it on pre-migration expenses such as document processing and transfers from their community of origin to the airport, and most importantly, to assure that their families will be taken care of financially in the interim between departure and their first remittance from Canada. Unfortunately, some employers do not acknowledge this need and leave new arrivals with little or no money to fend for themselves during their first few weeks in Canada. This happened to Tomás who, at the time of his interview, had been in Canada for 12 days and had yet to receive a pay check:

(The boss) brought us to do grocery shopping when we first arrived. She was supposed to give us $100 for our groceries but she only gave us $45. (And she told us) “With this money you need to buy two weeks’ worth of food.” And honestly, today the food ran out. [...] So, I had to go and ask my co-workers if they would lend me $25. And I was scared (to ask them), you know? (But they told me) “Of course, brother, no problem. All of us need help when we first get here.”
The number of work hours is another major source of preoccupation for transnational migrants on Canadian farms. Migrants indicated that this is often a case of feast or famine; during periods of peak production, it is not uncommon for migrants to be asked to work 12 or more hours per day, six or seven days a week. When the production wanes, there may only be a few hours of work per day or work a few days per week. When migrants are not given opportunities to earn the wages that they are promised in their contracts (a minimum of 40 hours per week), their well-being and the well-being of their families at home are at placed at risk. Anabel’s first contract lasted only two months and in her words, those two months were “no muy bien trabajados” or “not well-worked.” When she returned home to Mexico she was financially worse off than she was before she migrated. Anabel and her daughters were forced to move in with her mother so that they would be able to survive until she was able to migrate again, more than a year later. Shakira Isabel’s story is similar:

The first week we started at one in the afternoon and we only worked two or three hours and then they would send us home again. There wasn’t any work and I only worked 52 days before they sent me home to Mexico. I didn’t earn much money. I only made enough to pay for my flights and then I was sent home.
Not surprisingly, these transnational parents expressed the despair they felt in having left their children, desperately holding on to the promise of improved economic stability, only to return to home in the same or worse financial situation as when they left.

My research also corroborates previous research on temporary labour migration to Canada that documents the dehumanizing treatment of migrant agricultural workers. (McLaughlin 2010; Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006; Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2011). Sadly, the participants in my study recounted heart-breaking stories of abuse. Indeed, in their descriptions of their places of employment, migrants expressed feeling like indentured servants or even slaves instead of free workers. Adriana, a single mother from the Mexican state of Puebla, described the paternalistic behaviour of her patrón:

The first year my boss was really demanding. [...] He wouldn’t let us go out, he had us restricted. The only thing he would tell us was “You are going to work, and after work you will eat, shower and sleep so that the next day you are ready (to work again).”

My research also heard cases of employers confiscating the personal documents of migrants. Tomás told me that the patrona had taken away her employee’s passports and visas— their only
sources of identification—upon arrival in Canada. In this passage he explains how she explained her line of reasoning:

Yea, she took away our visas and passports. And I said to her, “Ma’am (what would happen) if we want to go out somewhere and the police stop us and we can’t prove that our personal documents are valid here? [...] (And she answered) “No, you shouldn’t be going out; you have no reason to be going anywhere.” [...] (And I don’t think) this is fair because if they are looking for slaves, then they should have said that up front and I am sure that no one would have come.

The patrona later told Tomás that he would have to work to pay off his debts to her before she allowed him to return to Guatemala. Then, she cut his work hours to a few per day, once or twice a week, as a punishment for “making her life difficult.”

My data confirms that female migrants face unique challenges as SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot participants; for example, the highly gendered nature of the participant selection process and intense restrictions on their mobility by employers (Preibisch and Hermoso Santamaría 2006; Preibisch and Binford 2007; Preibisch and Encalada Grez 2010, 2011). Anabel explained how Mexican program officials make female workers feel as if their sexuality and maternity is a liability:

I see that now they are allowing us to go (to the dance) but before they didn’t. And the official from my state tells us, “Take care my mujercitas please be careful. When you go
there I don’t want you getting pregnant or working while you are pregnant...

In addition to the challenges that migrant workers face owing to the uncertain character of their employment abroad, the intense nature of their work and the dehumanizing treatment by employers, they must also navigate the difficult territory of co-habitating with their co-workers within this stress-provoking environment. While poor working conditions and dehumanizing treatment by employers is well documented in existing literature on migrant workers in Canada, very little is known about the relationships between migrants, apart from one recently-published exception (see Sheese, 2010). Surprisingly, interpersonal conflict between migrant workers emerged as a major theme of respondent’s experiences in Canada.

Key to the theme of co-habitation is that the while the quality of the living accommodations that Canadian employers provide certainly varies, my ethnographic research revealed that the majority of migrants live in substandard conditions. The housing accommodations that I visited included old, musty-smelling, poorly insulated houses; run-down motels where up to four people lived in a standard sized room; decades-old, rodent-infested mobile homes, or make-shift apartments built inside or alongside greenhouses or warehouses. Nonetheless, migrants repeatedly told me they felt “lucky” to be living in such
spaces, as many of them had experienced worse conditions in past seasons. Adriana, for example, described the living arrangements she was provided during her first season in Canada:

The first year I lived in a trailer and we had mattresses on the floor, there were no beds there. (The trailer) had two bedrooms, two people slept in one bedroom, and two more people slept in the second bedroom. But there were eight of us, so the other four women had to sleep all together in the living room. All we had in between us was a sheet that we hung as a curtain.

Another SAWP migrant, Anabel, recounted her story of living in make-shift accommodations on a tobacco farm:

On the tobacco farm we slept in the garage. [...] There (the employer) improvised and made us a room where we slept. We slept on a piece of plywood, like a table, with a mattress on top. (To use the washroom) we had to go to all the way to the tobacco factory, walking blindly through the woods in the dark of night.

Not surprisingly, these conditions exacerbate the challenges of living in close quarters with a group of complete strangers for weeks and months at a time. My research also suggests that these problems are much more prevalent between women than between men; in fact, most of the male participants indicated that there is actually a high level of solidarity between male co-workers and that while the living conditions are not ideal, they are not unbearable. While the quality of the accommodations provided for men and women is similar, what is
distinct about women’s experiences is the intense interpersonal conflict with other women that makes life in Canada almost intolerable. Sara, a married woman from the Mexican state of Campeche, described her emotional reaction to the conflict she experienced in her first few months in Canada:

I have cried a lot here, I never thought I could cry so much. In the two months that they have been bothering me I have cried a lot. I think that not even when I was a girl, when I suffered so much with my mother—because I went hungry and everything when I was small—I have never cried as much as I have cried here. [...] (The employer) has been very nice to me. It is just my co-workers that have treated me badly.

Competition between workers is another major source of conflict that respondents indicated has profound implications for migrants’ experiences in Canada. This competition is fostered by employers’ demanding sets of labour expectations and a sense of rivalry over meeting and exceeding these expectations in an attempt to impress and gain the favour of the boss. Those who are favoured by the employer are more likely to receive an invitation to return to Canada the following season. Those who are not may face repatriation and possibly the loss of their livelihood.

Also key to this sense of competition is a migrant’s English proficiency, or lack thereof. Migrants complain that workers favoured by employers frequently take advantage of their
positions of relative power, specifically, those who speak English using their skills selectively and in a way that puts non-English speakers at a disadvantage. Maria, a Mexican woman, gave an example of how the language barrier between workers and supervisors can create conflict in the workplace:

I have a problem with my co-worker. The thing is that she speaks English very well and the patrón uses her (to translate). [...] One day the supervisor got mad and said a lot of things to me. When she left, I asked my co-worker “What did she say?” and she didn’t answer me. So I got upset because supposedly she is supposed to translate for us and I said, “I am asking you what she said.” And she answered “You don’t want to know, compañera.”

Those who can speak English also hold the power and the ability to “defend” themselves against English-speaking co-workers who would bad-mouth them to the employer. Don Güero, a Mexican father, explained why he believes English proficiency is so crucial for workers on the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot: “When you learn English, you have fewer problems. If you speak English you can defend yourself, defend your personality, so that no one can humiliate you.”

This phenomenon of competitive work environments also manifests itself in the real or imagined threat of being bad-mouthed or reported to the employer by a co-worker. Shakira Isabel, an indigenous Mexican woman who is only partially fluent in Spanish and speaks only a few words of English
explained how a co-worker taunted her relentlessly in front of
the other workers, accusing her of making complaints to the
employer about others; in essence, suggesting that she was an
unworthy snitch. Shakira Isabel recounted:

*(My co-worker said to me)* Isn’t that right, compañera? There’s the boss in case you have a problem. And I told her, “How could I be saying anything to him if I don’t even speak English? All I know how to say is morning and thank you and I don’t understand anything else.” I am in a difficult situation.

Another key dimension of transnational migrants’ experience
in Canada is the formation of intimate relationships. As
migrants spend up to eight months under the SAWP to even four
years under the NOC C&D Pilot, it is not surprising that they
develop intimate relationships during their employment periods
abroad. The context in which this occurs for Latin American
temporary migrants from Mexico and Central America to Canada is
markedly different than their migration to the United States,
which has experienced a “latinization” over the past 20 years
with increasing rural settlement of Latin Americans (Martin
2001). In Canada, the Spanish-speaking population is located
primarily within cities (Carranza 2008) and while migrants can
and do form relationships with non-Spanish speakers, sharing the
same language undoubtedly facilitates “falling in love.” As a
result of this and other factors, SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot workers
usually form relationships with other SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot workers. Since this workforce is largely male, women would seem to have an advantage of sorts in that they have their “choice” of men. While this partially true, women indicated that they are sometimes pursued aggressively by multiple men at the same time and that this is not always welcome attention. Anabel told me that many women enter into an intimate relationship in part to deter unwanted attention from other men: “Having a partner here helps me because the others leave me alone, they stop bothering me. This is why women sometimes agree to enter into a relationship.”

Infidelity is another challenge to forming intimate relationships in the program as the majority of relationships being formed are between single women and married men. Migrants justify this infidelity by resigning themselves to the commonly held belief that leading a transnational life really means living two separate lives, one at home in Mexico or Guatemala and another one in Canada. However, this justification is not shared by all migrants I spoke to. A number of participants told me that new migrants feel pressured to enter into interpersonal relationships that are not socially acceptable in their communities of origin. Sara, a first time migrant with a disabled husband and three children at home explained how
uncomfortable she feels about her female co-workers rationalizing their relationships with openly married men: “They are always telling me that Canada is one thing and Mexico is another thing. (But) to me, Canada and Mexico are the same, here or there, for me it is the same; I am the same.”

Furthermore, intimate relationships are often difficult to maintain making painful break-ups not uncommon. Women described their heartbreak when their partners were sent home or to another farm, saddened by the possibility that couples may never work for the same employer in the future, or pained by the knowledge that men returned to their wives at the end of each season. Indeed, while intimate relationships help protect women from unwanted advances from men and allow them to be courted and to choose an “ideal” partner, sometimes for the first time in their lives, there are other aspects of these relationships that reinforce burdensome gender expectations. For example, Anabel believes that women are to blame if their hearts are broken because they knowingly formed emotional attachments to married men:

We get depressed, we feel sad, we feel lonely and we cry. (And being in a relationship) helps us, even though we know that they have a wife. I am one of those people who says, I respect his decision, I respect that he has to go home to his family. If I fall in love with you it is my own fault because I know that you have someone else at home.
Anabel told me later in the interview that she was heartbroken and had been “crying a lot” over a boyfriend that had recently been sent home to Guatemala to his wife and children. Perhaps her tough, no-nonsense exterior is her way of coping with the pain of these seemingly impossible relationships.

Though the trials migrants face in Canada are overwhelming at times, they are comforted by the fact that their “sacrifice” in Canada will assure a brighter future their children. Tomás explained: “It is really painful to be far away from my family, especially since my children are small. (But) these are the sacrifices that I must make for my children.” Other parents told me that they sacrifice so that their children will never have to migrate. Dulce recalled how she gently reminded her daughter of the sacrifices she has made for her when she complains that her mother is not physically present in her life:

I tell her, today, you have expensive shoes when so many children your age don’t have the shoes that you do. On Mondays, you would come to me and say, “I want my bus money for the week.” And I would say “here is your money.” When I was in Canada, I couldn’t afford to buy new trousers for myself; I would go to the second-hand shops so that you could wear new clothes. But you know what? This doesn’t bother me, in fact, I am really happy because I gave everything I had and I gave it to the person I love the most.

While both men and women shared similar emotions of grief and sadness being separated from their children, it was clear that
transnational motherhood and fatherhood are distinct experiences. Among women, principal among my findings was the prevalence of self-doubt and questioning regarding their decisions to migrate, a topic that often generated intense emotion during the interviews. To illustrate, Azucena expressed being conflicted as to whether her decision to come to Canada was really in the best interest of her children: “It’s really hard because for the children, it just isn’t the same (without me there.) They need their mother. I feel like I am failing them. I don’t know if I have done the right thing by coming here.” Maria echoed this sentiment, sobbing as she questioned how much Canadian dollars are really worth:

I’m telling you that I don’t know if the fifty or eighty thousand pesos that I will earn here are really worth eight months of lost time with my child. If you look at it that way the money really isn’t anything, don’t you think? If you said to me “I am going to take your child away from you for eight months and in exchange I will give you eighty thousand pesos” I would say, “No! I will give YOU the money; give me another eight months with my son.”

Transnational motherhood

In many ways, participation in the SAWP and NOC C&D does empower women economically, and the financial benefits of long term, consistent migration are unquestionable, notwithstanding the occasional reduction of hours, reduction of pay and premature
repatriation. In Canada, Anabel was able to become financially independent for the first time:

The program has helped us quite a lot. Because now I know that I can get ahead. In Mexico, people always humiliated me and told me that I wasn’t good for anything. Now I know that I can get ahead without anyone else’s help.

This excerpt also reflects the positive impacts that transnational migration can have on a woman’s self-esteem and self-image. Many of the women demonstrated pride at what their migration has achieved. Dulce, for example, is proud that because of her sacrifice, her daughter may never have to migrate:

It is hard to think that my daughter could be repeating my history. But there is a difference (between me and her) because when her father left us, we didn’t have anywhere to live. Today, my daughter has a place to live and she has my support. And she will never have to leave her children the way that I left them.

Transnational migration allows women to take on a role that is, according to traditional Latin American gender ideologies, assigned principally to men. Working in Canada provides a means by which women can simultaneously become both the breadwinning father, and the selfless, sacrificing mother idealized in their culture. Dulce reflected: “I have been a mother and a father and I have always tried to give them the best of me without
“asking anything in return.” Shakira Isabel echoed this sentiment:

Melissa: How do you fulfill your responsibilities as a mother from Canada?
Shakira Isabel: I call them and I am sending them money. Now I am a father and a mother.

However, these benefits do not come easily or without their social and emotional costs. An ever-deepening estrangement between a mother and her children takes its toll on women’s lives and hearts. Mothers especially report the distance, or “gap”, as Parreñas (2005) described it, that forms between parents and their children from months and years of physical separation and absence from each other’s daily lives. Women, especially those who had been migrating for many years, were best able to express what this means to them:

I have made money, I’ve been able to do things there like maintain the family, give them studies, live better, have a nicer home, and give my children the things that I couldn’t give them before. But it is also very difficult and hard because a distance develops between a mother and her children. This is the hardest thing.

Possibly one of the most profoundly honest and painful statements about estrangement came from Dulce, as she reflected about the impact that ten years of separation has had on her relationship with her now adult daughter:
My daughter found another bad man and now she is pregnant. I sent her money yesterday. I have talked to her a lot. But what can I offer her if I don’t really know her?

As this excerpt suggests, while transnational parents may achieve the economic stability of their household, their relationships with their children suffer. In fact, a number of women described a sense of regret for what has become of their relationship with their children. Dulce expressed her sorrow over having “abandoned” her children:

I have told my children that they are never going to abandon their children the way that I abandoned them. A female migrant’s situation is very difficult. Sometimes I smiled but as they say, like a clown, my smile hid my sadness.

Clearly, Dulce did not abandon her children; however as other researchers have found (see Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) women are held to much higher standards than men when they migrate. Even when they send similar financial resources and communicate as frequently as or more frequently than men, women are seen as abandoning their responsibilities when they migrate while men are seen as fulfilling them.

After almost two decades in the program, during which time she has single-handedly built a home, started a small business and educated her children, Adriana is still unsure whether she has fulfilled her responsibilities as a mother: “I give him one
thing but not the other. I can’t do everything. If I am with him, he will not be able to study. If I come here, I give him money for his expenses, but I am not with him.” Adriana’s feelings were echoed by many women; even when mothers are doing everything in their power to provide a better life for their children, societal expectations of the ideal mother causes them feel like their efforts are never enough. Furthermore, transnational mothers expressed a profound sense of loss over missed intimate moments with their children. They also described their anxiety about the future. Mothers wonder what their relationship will be like with their children when they “retire” from the program and are at home full-time. In an emotional moment during her interview, Dulce described the plight of many migrant women:

When I have talked with my children, I have always told them that I admire all of the women that come here because you leave part of your life in Mexico—your children, your life, your roots—to come to a country that is so far away. And today I am happy because as a woman, I feel accomplished. But as a mother, I have failed. How I would have liked to be with my children, to get up every morning to make them a coffee and send them off to school, or to wait for them at night, tuck them in and tell them I love them. I have lost all of these things and it hurts me so much. I feel empty because I don’t know my children and they do not know me. I have spent 8 months of the year for ten years here! Yes, I can go to my home and sit down and say, “I worked hard and all of this is mine.” But my heart is empty because I have not felt my children’s touch or heard them say, “Mom, I love you.” And they are right, because maybe when they needed me most I was not there with them. And now, I am here and maybe I will keep working until I am old because at this point I
can’t ask anything of my children when I wasn’t even around to give them a hug.

Dulce cried throughout this part of the interview, mourning the loss that she has already suffered and the one that she fears is yet to come.

**Transnational fatherhood**

Undoubtedly, migrant fathers experience sadness and loneliness during lengthy separations from their wives, children and communities of origin. In some ways, transnational migration challenges traditional gender roles simply because in Canada men are sometimes forced to complete “women’s” tasks, sometimes for the first time in their lives:

Here you have to make breakfast, lunch and dinner, you have to do everything. You know, I am doing both things; I am being both woman and man. I make my food and leave early for work. In Guatemala my wife makes me food and I just go to work. When I arrive in the afternoon the food is ready. Thank God, that is what it is like there. My wife is with my children, she washes my clothing and everything.

However, as transnational migrants, Mexican and Guatemalan men are satisfactorily fulfilling their roles as fathers. Ernesto told me how his family feels about his migration to Canada:

“Pure work (here in Canada), I maintain everything (financially)
there. They are happy.” Unlike women, men rarely expressed doubt about their decision to migrate or concern over how their physical absence has impacted their children’s lives. In fact, men described a sense of pride in having fulfilled and even exceeded their (financial) expectations as fathers. Don Güero summed it up best when I asked him how he fulfills his paternal responsibilities:

Melissa: What do you do to fulfill your responsibilities as a father from Canada?

Don Güero: Work, work, work and send money to my wife. This is logical, this is what a man and Mexican gentleman should do.

Unquestionably, the majority of SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot participants migrate to Canada for their children. Both mothers and fathers dream of providing for their children the opportunities and financial resources that they didn’t have in their own childhoods. With their “children and objectives at the forefront of their minds” (Sheese 2011: 133) they bravely come to Canada motivated by the hope that the money they send home will make up for the financial and social struggles that their family face at home and allow them to be a “better parent.” However, they arrive in Canada to face an enormous, all-consuming set of physical, social and emotional challenges. Between long, exhausting work schedules, poor living conditions that exacerbate already challenging interpersonal relationships
and a host of restrictions on personal mobility, parents must try to find the time and energy to communicate with their children and parent from afar. Certainly, the money is important and it clearly makes a profound impact on the financial stability of the migrant’s family. But to what extent does the money make up for the emotional pain, sacrifice and estrangement that become part of the parent-child relationship? My research found that the answer to that question depends on the gender of the migrant.

According to Latin American parenting ideologies, fathers are expected to be the breadwinners of the family, therefore, when they remit their Canadian earnings to their children, they are fulfilling their duties as fathers. If they do not have the time or energy to worry about and be part of the intimate details of their children’s daily lives, they are forgiven and not emotionally burdened, confident that they have done all that is expected of them as fathers.

Transnational mothers also send their earnings home to their children in Mexico and Guatemala. However, transnational mothering is not just about providing financial stability— it is also about planning and managing caregiving arrangements, disciplining and advising their children from afar and overseeing daily reproductive responsibilities over the phone.
Transnational mothering is about women being emotionally distraught, constantly doubting themselves and the decisions they have made for their families; and, because of society’s burdensome expectations of mothers, wondering if their children are really better off if they are not with them.
Chapter 3: Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout Mexico, Guatemala and other parts of Latin America, transnational labour migration has become a key source of livelihood for those whose options are otherwise limited (Dreby 2010; Cohen 2004; Carletto et al. 2010; Bastia 2009). Although undocumented migration to the United States accounts for the bulk of these South-North migrants, an increasing number of them are choosing Canada’s managed migration programs (such as the SAWP and the NOC C&D Pilot) over US-destined migration hoping to avoid the dangerous US-Mexico border crossing and the precarious situation of working and living without government-issued documentation. While Canada’s managed migration programs offer a sense of security by means of an official visa and contracted employment including transportation, housing and other benefits, migrants’ situation in Canada is far from ideal.

I set out to understand more about the experiences of transnational agricultural migrant workers in Canada’s managed migration programs, specifically about their experiences as mothers and fathers to children they have to leave behind in their communities of origin when they migrate. I aimed to explore these experiences through a gendered lens while considering how traditional Latin American parenting ideologies
and expectations might impact their experiences as transnational parents. Using feminist standpoint theory, I approached this work with the intention of creating a safe space where transnational migrants’ voices and experiences would be heard, validated, and ideally, shared to raise consciousness about the injustice and oppression that temporary migrant workers and their families face. My results clearly demonstrate that the majority of migrants are primarily motivated by the desire to ensure their children’s overall well-being and to secure the finances necessary to provide them with educational opportunities in their communities of origin. For migrant parents, transnational migration entails a complex set of emotional decisions and challenges before, during, and even after their migratory period. My research shows that these decisions and challenges are highly gendered, as mothers, much more than fathers, agonize over choosing a caregiver and having to leave their children for extended periods. Furthermore, the parent-child-caregiver relationship is much more complex in mother-away families than in father-away families. While my data corroborates previous research about the highly gendered nature of this key aspect of transnational parenting (see Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) my research is unique in that it is part of the first study to document this phenomenon within the Canadian context.
Furthermore, my data is certainly not the first to document the structural, institutional and interpersonal injustices that migrants face as participants in the SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot. However, my thesis is original and an important contribution to the existing literature because it explores how these previously documented injustices impact parents’ ability to focus on their primary motivation to migrate: their children.

My findings demonstrate that the labour market circumstances and challenging interpersonal relationships that migrants experience when in Canada draw their focus away from their responsibilities as parents and redirect them to the virtually all-consuming task of managing their transnational lives. Traditional Latin American gender ideologies of mothering are burdensome. As transnational mothers, women take on the role of mother and father, breadwinner and nurturer, simultaneously. The complex and all-consuming pressures that they face as participants in the Canadian labour market and as co-workers to other transnational migrants, paired with prolonged periods of physical separation of mothers from their children, create feelings of guilt, inadequacy, self-doubt and self-questioning about whether their migration is really what is best for their children. My research suggests that transnational
Fathers are not held to the same standards and therefore the emotional burden is significantly less extreme.

Feminist standpoint theory impacted the conclusions that I drew primarily because my research focused on the everyday experiences as transnational migrant workers and their concerns, departing from the “conceptual frameworks of the dominant social institutions” and bringing to light a much darker reality than that espoused by policy makers (Harding 68). Furthermore, as a researcher, I was not impartial, completely neutral or emotionally separated from the data but rather an active participant in the research process with my own preconceived notions about immigration policy, gender roles and parenting ideologies that surely impacted the conclusions that I drew. Because my work was based on feminist standpoint theory, my own social location was an important part of the research. While I endeavoured to constantly practice self-reflexivity and be conscious of the imbalance of power that existed between the participants and myself, I was, in part, able to draw the conclusions I did precisely because I was engaged in the research as a woman and mother who has her own unique standpoint with respect to this topic.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

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My research is limited by several factors. First, the number of Mexican SAWP participants notably exceeds the number of Mexican and Guatemalan NOC C&D Pilot participants. Furthermore, in the interest of time, it was necessary to use a snowball sampling to gain access to participants. However, this method limits participant diversity because those migrants that I was able to contact were already well enough connected within the community that I, a relatively inexperienced researcher new to the Canadian migrant community, was able to find them. Guatemalan NOC C&D Pilot participants are notably less visible within the migrant community, owing to a number of factors, one being that the NOC C&D Pilot is a relatively young program in comparison to the almost half-century old SAWP. Some SAWP migrants have been participating in the program for ten, 15 or even 20 years and are very well connected both within the migrant and activist community are therefore relatively easy to “find.” This is very different than NOC C&D Pilot participants who, at most, have been migrating to Canada for a few years and are significantly less connected to the Canadian community in which they live. Another barrier to accessing Guatemalan NOC C&D Pilot participants was the fear and concern they expressed about being interviewed for this project, presumably because they did not trust that their responses would remain anonymous. This is not surprising, even understandable, considering Guatemala’s violent
and socially divisive political history and resulting climate of fear and mistrust in which so many of the participants have lived during most of their lives (Green 1999). Had I interviewed more Guatemalan respondents, I might have encountered worse working and living conditions because of their relative newness as temporary agricultural migrant workers in Canada and their fear of defending themselves against abusive labour practices owing to their violent social and political history. Furthermore, since many of Guatemalan participants in this study are from indigenous communities in which gendered parenting ideologies are likely distinct from non-indigenous regions of Mexico and Guatemala, a better balanced participant ratio would probably have produced more nuanced and possibly different results.

A further limitation of my research is that transnational parenting in its very definition implies a parent-child relationship that spans across two nations. My research, however, was sited within Canada only. Moreover, it considers only the parent’s side of the parent-child relationship story. Ideally, a comprehensive study of transnational parent-child relationships would be multi-sited in both sending and receiving communities. It would include multiple perspectives,
incorporating interviews with stay-at-home children and their caregivers into the data pool.

**Implications for Research on Transnational Families**

Despite these limitations, the results of this study hold important implications for the body of literature that exists on transnational parenting within the broader field of migratory studies. First, it is part of one of the first studies to focus on the ways in which SAWP and NOC C&D Pilot migrants experience transnational parenting. Clearly, my research has only scratched the surface of this enormously important social issue. Furthermore, during the course of my research, several important themes related to transnational family dynamics emerged which merit further investigation, two of which are described below.

My research supports Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila’s (2007) claim about the prevalence and importance of collective mothering ideologies in Latin American families. While other scholars have documented how grandmothers largely bear the caregiving burden for the children of migrants, what is apparently absent from the literature is an in-depth evaluation of the ways in which these ideologies are adapted (or not) in modern migrant families. Still unclear is to what extent long-
term sharing of reproductive responsibilities is socially acceptable and how grandmother-mother-child relationships function under these circumstances. These types of questions will better help us understand the intricacies of transnational family life and the social impact that transnational labour migration has on family members on both sides of the border.

Another interesting finding in this research was the evidence of multi-generational migratory patterns. While many transnational migrant parents very specifically stated that they migrate so that their children will never have to, I encountered a number of cases of children of long-term migrants that have become migrants themselves. This raises questions about the changing family structure in Mexico and Guatemala and the socialization of children of transnational migrants. and It also casts doubt on the legitimacy of the claim that “temporary” migration programs which, again and again, have proven not to be so temporary after all, are a “win-win” solution for both participants in both sending and receiving communities.

When low income parents in Latin America decide to migrate to Canada as agricultural labourers, they clearly have the absolute best interest of their children in the forefront of their minds. Indeed, many are willing to sacrifice almost anything, even their own dignity, to provide a better life for
their children. Sadly, long term separation from their children is part of this sacrifice and leaves parents, especially mothers, doubtful that their children’s lives can ever really be better without them in it despite financial gains. As members of the global village, we must recognize that dividing families has harmful, long term effects and work towards migration policies that avoid this at all costs.
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