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## The Negotiation of New Family Formation Post-migration among Low-wage Migrant Workers: The Case of Canada

### ABSTRACT

This article examines how post-migration relationships are critical to shaping long-term migration and employment aspirations among migrant workers. The article offers an analysis of low-wage migrant workers' experiences of establishing new families post-migration within Canada's state-managed foreign labour migration regime. While the relational dynamics of migrant labour are well-documented, scholarship in this area tends to focus on the affective dimensions of maintaining transnational ties across time and geographic distance. In response, this article contributes to a growing interest among scholars to better understand a more varied range of emotional complexities associated with cross-border labour migration. Two main findings are presented. First, the article examines how prolonged family separation can result in the formation of new intimacies that can reshape migrant workers' affective connections to sending and receiving countries. Second, the article examines how policies that entrench migrant workers' temporary resident status doubly aggravate workers' experiences of imposed family separation.

### INTRODUCTION

Marcia came to Canada from the Philippines to work as a live-in caregiver and eventually transitioned from temporary to permanent resident status. When she achieved permanent residence (PR) she sponsored her husband, with whom she had been separated for several years, a time during which their relationship suffered. Their reunion was unfortunately not a happy one and resulted in a separation. She later met Mauricio, a Filipino national working as a Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) in a horticultural greenhouse in Southern Ontario. While he was still married in the Philippines, Mauricio had been separated from his original family, which included two adult children, for several years. Both in their early 40s, Marcia and Mauricio had a child together, but they decided not to remain romantically attached. Mauricio, who was open with his wife about his relationship with Marcia, decided to remain married and to simultaneously co-parent his new child with Marcia. In order to make this relationship work, Mauricio decided to try to find his own pathway to PR, which for him involved moving to Alberta in order to access that province's Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), a program that allows employers to nominate eligible TFWs for PR. While he was able to find an employer to nominate him and he

was eventually granted an invitation to become a permanent resident, his application was ultimately rejected by the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) on the grounds that his marriage in the Philippines was no longer legitimate because of his relationship with Marcia, resulting in what the CBSA officer perceived to be a fraudulent application. Mauricio was forced to leave Canada and was separated from his then five-year-old son. He fell into a deep depression.

It is well-established in the extant literature that migrant workers prioritize the maintenance of transnational relationships, particularly with children who have been left behind (Barber, 1997; Basok, 2002; Bernhard, Landolt & Goldring, 2009; Encalada-Grez, 2019, McKay, 2007; Parreñas, 2005). However, the forced separation from original families that often accompanies migrant workers' experiences of temporary foreign labour migration can sometimes weaken these intimate bonds (Cohen, 2000; Pratt, 2012). This article explores how this deterioration may provide an opportunity for workers to develop close attachments in host societies, particularly with fellow workers. By engaging with the narratives of migrant worker couples engaged in Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) who met and decided to start families together after having migrated temporarily from their original countries for employment, the article examines how migrant workers may seek out a degree of emotional and relational emplacement in ways that belie entrenched policies that treat migrant workers as highly mobile individuals who are physically and emotionally disconnected from both place and community. While the migration process may initiate the production of new and transformed intimacies, the disconnect between migrant workers' experiences of family formation post-migration and temporary labour migration policies that discount the importance of migrant relationships effectively renders any corresponding familial aspirations that may result from these new family relationships tremendously difficult to realise.

The article presents two main findings. First, I show how prolonged family separation can result in the formation of new intimacies that can reshape migrant workers' affective connections to both sending and hosting communities. I argue that these relationships demonstrate how for some TFWs state-managed labour migration may be experienced as a fluid process of home-making that involves both an estrangement from original ties and the simultaneous production of new imagined communities. In so doing, the article advances a theoretical approach that supports an 'emotional turn' in migration studies that recognizes the analytical centrality of how migrants' affective connections come to frame their mobility decisions (Aure, 2013; Morosanu, 2013; Ryan, 2011, 2019; Ryan, Erel, & D'Angelo, 2015). Second, I examine how TFWP rules related to obligatory return migration may in effect produce a situation whereby migration programs separate TFW families against their will, families that have been established post-migration *within* Canada, thereby doubly aggravating TFWs' erstwhile experiences of family separation. Post-migration relationship experiences reveal both how migrant work and life aspirations are dynamic and variously negotiated across time and space, and how current state-managed labour migration policy may play a role in how these aspirations may develop and evolve.

The article begins with an overview of how migrant relationships have been discussed in the context of Canada's TFWP. This is followed by a review of extant scholarly literature that seeks to understand the myriad ways that migrants' experiences of relationships may shape the international migration experience more broadly. The article proceeds with a discussion of methods before providing a detailed examination of findings. The article concludes with a discussion of conceptual and policy implications.

## CANADA'S TFWP

This article is primarily concerned with examining the experiences of low-wage migrant workers, a population that has been working in Canada under various international labour schema for decades. Most well-known among these are Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, a bi-lateral agreement between Mexico and several Caribbean countries, and Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program, a program which has recently been retired. In order to provide Canadian employers with a cheaper and more employer-dependent labour force across sectors and industries, in 2008 the Conservative government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper expanded the scope of the TFWP (Barber & Lem, 2018). Low-wage TFWs, both men and women, may now come from any country and can be found working in a variety of 'low-skilled' and 'semi-skilled' jobs, including in the fast-food restaurant industry, hospitality and tourism, and secondary agriculture (including vegetable packing as well as pork, beef and fish processing). For an employer to be eligible to hire a TFW they must apply for a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), a federal labour market tool designed to measure whether there are no Canadian workers available to do the work. Low-wage TFWs may not travel to Canada with their families.

Workers who enter Canada through the TFWP are by definition temporary, though during 2011 and 2017, in an effort to make sure that TFWs were promptly returning to their countries of origin, the Harper government instigated the 'cumulative duration rule' (Government of Canada, 2019). This rule required that TFWs leave Canada after four years of arrival and required that they must spend an additional four years outside of the country before re-applying to the program. This rule was abolished by the Liberal government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2017 under the recommendation of a 2016 parliamentary study of the TFWP which concluded that the cumulative duration rule produced barriers to TFWs who were beginning to establish roots in Canada (May, 2016). While this time restriction has been lifted, TFWs are still considered temporary and are expected to return to their home countries when their work permits expire. That said, in Canada, provincial and territorial jurisdictions have the right to develop their own immigration policies, including pathways to nominate individual TFWs to be invited to PR. Between 2005-2009 low-wage migrant workers had a transition rate of 31%, and 80% of these transitioned through a PNP, making these subnational pathways the most effective option for low-wage TFWs who want to become permanent residents of Canada (Lu & Hou, 2017).

## DISCOUNTING RELATIONSHIPS UNDER CANADA'S TFWP

Recent literature from Canada examines how the family context of immigrants is often neglected in policies that promote permanent settlement and inclusion (Bauder, 2019). This neglect is intensified in policies that govern Canada's temporary labour migration regime (Bernhard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2009; Bryan, 2014; Cohen, 2000; Martin, 2019; Pratt, 2012; Preibisch & Encalada-Grez, 2013; Preibisch & Santamaria-Hermoso, 2006). This observation is particularly germane considering how, for much of the past 15 years, Canadian immigration policy has been reoriented toward addressing the needs of employers by increasing its reliance on a temporary and precarious foreign workforce. This may have negative effects on migrant workers' intimate relationships, including in some cases the "breakdown of the traditional family unit" (Root, Shields, & Gates-Gasse, 2019: 59). The disregard of family relationships in this context is most noticeable in the requirement that migrant workers in low wage jobs travel to Canada alone,

without their families. It has been shown that the requirement that workers leave their families behind is an important mechanism of labour control in Canadian workplaces, as it restricts workers' access to a social life outside of work (Basok, 2002; Preibisch, 2010; Schwiter, Strauss, & England, 2018). The ability for employers to control workers' social lives illustrates how access to the TFWP provides Canadian businesses with employment practices that would not be available if they were limited to hiring a domestic labour force (Preibisch, 2010). Writing about migrant farm workers for example, Basok (2002: 123) describes how family separation contributes to a compliant workforce thus: "They have no birthday parties, funerals, or weddings to attend. They do not need to take their children to a game or to a doctor. They come to Canada to work and not to have fun". Intimate transnational relationships are thus shaped by global systems of inequality as well as localized strategies for controlling labour, particularly at the lower ends of the labour market (Parreñas, 2005). Workers must maintain cross-border relationships through cell phone communication and other means of online messaging (Paragas, 2009). Often the primary expression of familial intimacy at migrant workers' disposal is the act of sending regular remittances (Wells, McLaughlin, Lyn, & Diaz Mendiburo, 2014).

Previous research has documented how attempts to control migrant workers' social lives in Canada are not limited to immigration policies that prohibit travel with families of origin, but also include efforts to limit friendship formation post migration. McLaughlin (2010), for example, argues that the 'ideal' migrant worker is one who is a self-sufficient individual who limits their relationships to both locals and fellow workers. She found that employers try to circumvent intimate relationships by enforcing various workplace rules, such as dormitory curfews. Exacerbating workers' constrained social lives, Perry (2018) found that employer-provided housing can generate negative co-worker dynamics, thus aggravating workers' social isolation. In her work with migrant fast-food counter attendants in Alberta, Polanco (2016) similarly found that employer-supported pathways to permanent residency encourage workers to compete with each other for limited nomination spots, thereby engendering compliance in the workplace. On the other hand, other researchers have found that the forging of friendships among workers can provide an important mechanism for coping with social exclusion (Mayell, 2016). Encalada-Grez (2019) for example, argues that expressions of sexuality can provide a means for engaging in everyday forms of resistance against the control of social lives among women migrant farm workers in Canada. In her work with migrant farm workers in Southern Ontario, Reid-Musson (2018) found that workers find ways to assemble in their free time as a way of disrupting the overbearing rhythms of agricultural production. Other researchers have found that worker relationships with local Canadians can also provide opportunities to reduce social isolation (Hanley, Gravel, Bernstein, Villanueva, & Crespo Villareal, 2015; Preibisch, 2003).

Canadian immigration policies that geographically sever workers' family lives and employer practices that seek to limit workers' social lives in Canada are crucial elements shaping TFWs' experiences of international circulatory labour migration. What this literature makes clear is that, for migrant workers in Canada, the relational terrain, which includes maintaining transnational family connections as well as establishing relationships with fellow workers and local Canadians, is fraught with struggle. There is a growing chorus of scholarship however that seeks to understand the importance that intimate relationships, both pre and post migration, play in shaping the international migration experience. In what follows I review how the inevitable

tensions between intimacy and migration have been examined in recent migration literature more broadly.

## NEGOTIATING RELATIONSHIPS IN INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International migration is an inherently relational process (Holdsworth, 2013). Current research sheds light on how the migration process may affect migrants' various emotional bonds over time and space (Morosanu, 2013; Ryan, 2015). Most extant literature that considers the role that intimate relationships play in migrant workers' lives conceptually prioritizes migrant workers' struggles to maintain relationships with families of origin transnationally (Bernhard et al., 2009; Parreñas, 2005; Preibisch & Encalada-Grez, 2013; Wells et al., 2014). This literature underscores how migrants should not be thought of as "isolated actors", as most migrant decision-making "is nested in networks of significant others" (Ryan, 2019: 187). However, while the decision to migrate may be relational, the act of cross-border migration dissociates individual migrants from the emotional bonds of original family and friendship networks, and thus involves a reconfiguration of existing relationships (Skrbis, 2008). The temporary labour migration experience may consequently be thought of as both relational and fraught with complex emotions. On the one hand, lengthy separations can be hard on original families. Transnational spousal relationships in particular can be difficult to maintain (Constable, 2003). In the words of Cohen (2000: 84), "Spouses may have affairs or find other partners. Spouses grow apart from each other, grow hostile, jealous, depressed, or simply indifferent". These challenges can play a significant role in undermining migrant worker health and well-being (Hiott, Grzywacz, Davis, Quandt, & Arcury, 2008). On the other hand, in contrast to assumptions that family breakdown is always necessarily bad, international labour migration may offer individual migrants, and women migrants in particular, the opportunity to escape oppressive family, social and economic dynamics at home (Nolin, 2017; Phizaclea, 1998). While it is well-established that transnational affective dynamics are central to the experience of international labour migration, current scholarship recognizes a need to extend the discussion to examine the significance of a broader array of migrant relationships.

Less examined in the literature, and of key concern to this article, is the question of how migrant workers may negotiate relationships post-migration in host countries. However, there is mounting interest in developing more nuanced understandings of how the diversity of migrant relationships may shape the migration experience and affect migrant decision-making (Ryan, 2015, 2019; Ryan & Sales, 2013). While moving across borders may contribute to the weakening of existing connections, it may also influence the development of new emotional ties, leading to the growth of 'families of choice' (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001), intimate adaptations that can help to alleviate the everyday strains of international labour migration. The experience of friendship is a crucially important aspect of people's lives (Cronin, 2014) and may provide an important means for migrant workers to develop a network from which they might access vital social supports (Povrzanović Frykman & Mozetič, 2019; Ryan et al., 2015). While some current research is uncovering how social integration in the destination country is not incompatible with continued and intimate transnational ties in the country of origin (Bunnell, Yea, Peake, Skelton, & Smith, 2012; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), the focus on transnationalism as an analytical framing device may obfuscate the importance of migrants' immediate everyday relationships in a given host country (Boccagni, 2012; Morosanu, 2013).

The analytical prioritizing of transnational relationships is not surprising however, as, while physical remoteness may complicate everyday intimacies, migrants may take original relationships for granted, while new relationships in a host country may be difficult to forge as they can require more active and sustained emotional labour (Ryan, 2015). Nevertheless, migrants may aspire to familial intimacies in the host society in response to policies that undermine family life through forced geographical distance (Valentine, 2008). The physical and emotional gap that physical distance can provoke between migrants and their transnational networks may provide an opening to cultivate shared experiences that reinforce the affective dimensions of migrants' everyday lives in host societies (Morosanu, 2013).

Maintaining and attending to local friendships post-migration may also contribute to shaping migrants' affective connections to place. Conradson and McKay (2007) and McKay (2006) for example demonstrate how the experience of international migration is accompanied by emotional states that produce what they refer to as 'translocal subjectivities', feelings of attachment to both 'here' and 'there' that are continuously negotiated in migrants' everyday lives. In keeping with this vein of analysis, in her research with international students in Australia, Robertson (2018: 550) found that everyday friendship relations are influential factors in how these subjectivities are constituted, and are thus "crucial to the transformation and multiple emplacements of the self that occur through transnational mobility".

Canadian immigration policies and employer practices may ostensibly discount the importance that intimate relationships and friendship networks play in migrant workers' lives. Nevertheless, a growing literature in the area of international migration is beginning to recognize the importance of intimate relational networks in the lives of migrants. While the broad theme of social networks is not new to the area of international migration (Kendel & Massey, 2002), current literature is probing further into the affective dimensions of these relationships, signaling a possible emotional turn in migration studies (Aure, 2013; Mai & King, 2009). An area of empirical analysis that is under-represented in this burgeoning literature is the experience of new family formation post-migration in the context of circulatory international labour migration. The remainder of this article I will examine these dynamics as they play out in the context of Canada's TFWP.

## METHODS

The data that form the basis of this article are drawn from a broader research project whose goal was to understand if, how and why TFWs in low-wage jobs were engaging in secondary internal migration on arrival to Canada. I conducted the bulk of the field-work for this project during 2016, while the cumulative duration rule was in effect, with some additional field-work activities taking place in 2017 and 2018. Of equal importance during this period was the increased interest among several Canadian provinces in the use of PNPs. The coexistence of these policies produced a push-pull dynamic whereby migrant workers who were at risk of unwanted repatriation actively sought out elusive opportunities to transition to PR, which for many meant moving between subnational jurisdictions.

For this project I undertook a narrative inquiry (Czarniawska, 2004). In the interview stage this meant asking participants to tell their stories of navigating Canada's immigration system on their own terms, thus prioritizing TFWs' own interpretations of how they exercised agency despite the well-documented structural constraints. In the subsequent data analysis stage,

this meant placing individuals' first-hand narratives of exercising geographical and labour-market mobility within a broader social and scholarly context.

In total I interviewed 32 TFWs from a range of countries working in low-wage jobs from a variety of occupations, including agricultural workers, meat and fish processing workers, fast-food counter attendants, gas station attendants, and hotel cleaners. The sampling strategy focused on recruiting workers in low-wage jobs who had had experience with inter-provincial migration at some point during their time spent in Canada. Recruitment began by reaching out to current and former members of Montreal's Immigrant Workers Centre (the community partner) as well as to my own TFW networks from previous research conducted in Ontario. Interested participants were asked to contact me directly by phone or through WhatsApp, a popular social media platform among migrant workers. Given the project focus on inter-provincial migration, I inevitably recruited workers who were living in various parts of the country at the time the research was conducted. Field-work was therefore conducted across Canada. All told, I interviewed workers in 8 provinces and 1 territory. I spent a total of four months travelling between Ontario, Quebec and Alberta to interview workers in person. When in-person interviews were not possible, I interviewed workers via Skype. I have provided pseudonyms for all participants.

The majority of my sample included migrant workers from Guatemala and the Philippines. Each of these populations had very different experiences of secondary internal migration within Canada. The Guatemalan workers interviewed all worked on farms and did not speak either English or French. For the most part these participants did not express an overt desire to stay in Canada permanently, but rather wanted to return to their original communities once they had raised enough money to return home. This is consistent with the literature on the experiences of Latin American migrant farm workers in Canada (Basok, 2002). When these workers engaged in secondary internal migration within Canada, it was most often in an effort to escape an abusive employer and to seek a safe haven among fellow Guatemalans, primarily in urban areas such as Montreal (Perry, 2019). By contrast, Filipino participants all had fluency in English and worked in various industries. Many of these workers had experiences of working as an international migrant worker for several years before coming to Canada (for example as factory workers in Taiwan, construction workers in South Korea, service workers in the UAE, and as seafarers in Singapore). All of the Filipino workers interviewed had not lived in the Philippines for many years and considered Canada a viable option for transitioning to PR. For these workers, accessing different PNPs through engaging in inter-provincial migration was perceived to be a potential strategy for achieving this goal (Tungohan, 2018). With the exception of one participant originally from Mexico, all of the participants highlighted in this article come from the Philippines.

## FINDINGS

With regards to participants' connections to families of origin, throughout the data, participants discussed how maintaining transnational relationships was a crucial aspect of their lives and one that inevitably shaped their experience of cross-border labour migration. In particular, there was notable similarity in how participants considered their responsibilities to children and aging parents in their countries of origin when making employment and migration-related decisions. Unsurprisingly, and in-line with previous research on the transnationalization of family life among migrant workers (Parreñas, 2005; Preibisch & Encalada-Grez, 2013; Wells et al., 2014),

participants discussed the importance of maintaining consistent online conversations, sending regular remittances, and making long-term plans for permanent reunification.

However, participants' experiences of establishing proximal relationships post-migration, particularly with fellow workers, emerged as an important theme across the data collected. These relationships were varied, and in general provided workers with the opportunity to develop a sense of community post-migration. If one were to place these relationships along an intimacy spectrum, they would span the entire gamut. On the one end, workers discussed sharing Facebook profiles with fellow migrants they met during the pre-arrival orientation workshop in the country of origin. While these workers may have ended up in different parts of Canada, they kept in touch remotely and shared insights about their employment and migration experiences with each other as a means of providing mutual support. Further along the intimacy spectrum, participants established friendship networks with fellow migrant workers from their workplaces and the Canadian towns and cities where they lived. Friends would often get together in their free time to socialize, thus weakening the potential adverse effects of social exclusion. On the furthest end along the closeness continuum, participants reported forging intimate relationships with fellow workers, including experiences of coupling, of experimenting with creative ways of staying together permanently, and even of deciding to have children together. While the experience of coupling was not universal across the sample, more than a third of participants (12 total) reported having had this experience. With notable exceptions (Encalada-Grez, 2019; Preibisch & Encalada-Grez, 2013), these stories of affective connections and new family formation are largely absent from the extant literature on state-managed international labour migration. However, migrant workers' experiences of post-migration relationships tell us something about how migrants' proximal social networks may inform their sense of identity, attachments to place and to transnational relationships, and their employment and migration-related decision-making processes. Post-migration relationship experiences reveal both how migrant work and life aspirations are dynamic and variously negotiated across time and space, and how current state-managed labour migration policy may play a role in how these aspirations may develop and evolve.

This section focuses on participants' experiences of forging intimate bonds with fellow workers in order to better understand how these shape workers' aspirations in ways that challenge current Canadian immigration policies and in so doing reveal implicit assumptions about families and intimacies that undergird Canada's labour migration policies. The data reveal an unintended consequence of temporary labour migration schema. Namely, requiring workers to travel as individuals apart from their original families in tandem with policies that restrict workers' access to permanent resident status transforms the dynamics of workers' relationships to family and community in some unexpected ways. First, I consider how migrant workers' experiences of coupling contribute to the production of an imagined home in Canada, thus complicating workers' estrangement from geographically distant families. Second, I examine how Canada's policy of forced return migration may in effect separate families that have been established post-migration *within* Canada, thereby aggravating migrant workers' broader experiences of family separation. In addition to Marcia and Mauricio from the introduction, I focus on the experiences of three couples: Thalia and Ivan; Jessica and Ricki; as well as Louise and Pocholo. Of the participants that experienced important changes in intimate relationships pre and post migration, I chose these couples because in each case this was *the* predominant theme guiding their story of labour migration. These participants had different backgrounds in relation to legality, experiences of previous migration and pre-migration relationships which may have

affected their relational bonds and encounters with policy. However, in putting these narratives side-by-side, my intention is to tease out how participants' experiences of post-migration intimacy variously shaped their mobility decisions and interactions with Canadian immigration policies.

### Negotiating relationships between here and there

Migrant workers' accounts of establishing intimate, long-term, and emotionally committed relationships with fellow workers reveals participants' engagement with a fluid process of home-making that involves both a distanced engagement with transnational family ties and the simultaneous production of new imagined communities in Canada (Ahmed, 2000; Bonifacio, 2013). The three vignettes offered here demonstrate how the shared experience of labour migration can contribute to mutual feelings of affection that can serve to fill the emotional gap that compulsory family separation often generates (Morosanu, 2013). Participant accounts furthermore show how affective engagements are dynamic and evolve across space and time, and how these are important elements contributing to transformations in migrant workers' connections to place and to both short and long-term mobility aspirations (Robertson, 2018).

#### Thalia and Ivan

Thalia came to work in a cucumber packing facility in Southern Ontario in 2009. In 2010 she met Ivan, a former seasonal agricultural worker from Mexico who had overstayed his visa. Thalia was single when she came to Canada. She worked in electronics and textile factories in Taiwan for 12 years before signing her Canadian contract. A Filipino national, she had not visited the Philippines in many years, though she was still supporting her aging mother with regular remittances. Ivan was married and had one child when he started coming to Canada in 2003. After several consecutive seasons of working in Canada, the regular family separations had taken their toll on his marriage. Because of the breakdown of his marriage, one year he decided not to return to Mexico and instead continued working under the table in Canada. He continued to support his son with regular remittances. In 2010 he met Thalia at work. They eventually moved in together and had a son of their own. Because of the cumulative duration rule, Thalia was scheduled to leave Canada in 2015. They decided to move to Alberta where they heard they could be nominated for permanent residency through Alberta's Immigrant Nominee Program.

#### Jessica and Ricki

Jessica came to Canada from the Philippines in 2008 to work in a tomato greenhouse operation in Southern Ontario. She worked there for 7 years (with short sojourns to the Philippines) before she met Ricki, the new greenhouse forklift driver and also a Filipino national. Both in their 40s when they met, Jessica left behind four children when she came to Canada and Ricki left behind three. Both Jessica and Ricki were estranged from their spouses in the Philippines, but nevertheless were supporting their children with regular remittances. Because of the cumulative duration rule, they were both scheduled to return to their original families in the Philippines in 2015. In the months leading up to the scheduled departure, Jessica realized she was pregnant. In order to stay together, they felt leaving Canada was not an option. On a whim, they decided to move to Northern British Columbia where they heard they could be nominated for permanent

residency through the BC Provincial Nominee Program Northeast Pilot Project. They dreamed about sponsoring their children in the Philippines to eventually join them in Canada.

#### Louise and Pocholo

Louise and Pocholo, both Filipino nationals, met while they were working in a McDonald's restaurant in the United Arab Emirates in 2010. Both single and in their mid 20s when they met, they decided they wanted to start a family together, but that they did not want to do so in the UAE. After having heard from fellow workers that Canada had initiated programs whereby temporary foreign workers could transition to PR, Louise and Pocholo decided to find work there. In 2011 they each signed a contract to work as fast-food counter attendants in separate Subway Sandwich outlets in Edmonton, Alberta, where a year later Louise gave birth to their first child. They were not successful with their nomination plans, and Louise switched to a student visa to keep the family together, as her spouse (Pocholo) could then switch to an open work permit. However, as Pocholo was scheduled to return to the Philippines in 2015 as per the cumulative duration rule, his application for an open work permit was denied. Louise was pregnant with their second child at the time of our interview.

These examples of family formation post-migration show how participants are seeking a measure of emplacement and relationality amongst each other in a labour market and policy context where they are ostensibly treated as isolated and intrinsically mobile individuals. In reality, migrant intimacies are variously ruptured and recreated in ways that complicate their enforced temporariness and their inability to remain in Canada permanently. Certainly, these ruptures and opportunities were experienced differently across the sample presented here. For the purposes of easeful labour integration, labour migration policy treats migrant workers as socially dis-embedded individuals. For some workers, this produces an affection vacuum from which new relationships may develop; relationships that may contradict the social norms of the traditional family structure that underlie Canadian immigration policy. In particular, for several participants (Ivan, Jessica, Ricki, Michelle and Mauricio), an extended separation from spousal intimacy resulted in the breakdown of their original marriages. While for these workers original transnational relationships endured, across time and distance marital relationships became more transactional and less intimate, and were based primarily on financial remittances and the care of children. This shared experience of family separation and labour migration formed the basis of developing intimacies with fellow workers in Canada. For example, Jessica and Ricki as well as Michelle and Mauricio, each in their 40s when they first met their respective partner, developed strong bonds out of these commonalities. However, not all post-migration intimacies evolved from the ashes of broken transnational marriages. For example, for Thalia, Louise and Pocholo, each in their 20s and single at the time of migration, the experience of labour migration provided an opportunity to meet a prospective life partner with whom they would not likely have connected under other circumstances. For these participants, the process of labour migration provided an occasion to fashion intimate relationships less geographically-hindered by the circumstances of birth. These narratives reveal how Canadian labour migration policies are based on mistaken and simplistic notions of migrant relationships, notions that contradict the various patterns that actual migrant relationships may follow.

#### Separation squared

In each of the vignettes, increased intimacy among workers shaped their aspirations to remain in Canada permanently. This aspirational transformation is related to participants' newfound connection to place that their new family relationships have produced. This is demonstrated in the following quotes:

I don't have anything anymore in the Philippines. I have a broken family already and if I can't stay I don't have anything to show for my 8 years here in Canada. I don't have any reason to go back. I have my baby here and I am used to living in Canada. (Jessica)

We are fighting for our status here because we have a daughter here. If we go back home, I don't have a job and she don't have a job, so how can we support our daughter there? (Pacholo)

While participants nurtured aspirations to build their lives in Canada, the fear of compulsory separation from their new families was a constant source of anxiety. For her part, Thalia was concerned about her and Ivan being repatriated to different countries:

Interviewer: How often do you think about the future?

Thalia: (laughs).

Interviewer: A lot?

Thalia: Yes. I'm just worried about my situation here. Especially with Ivan.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Thalia: (laughs) I don't want to cry! You know, that my partner, that... I don't want to cry! That he doesn't have papers here. For example, if he is deported to Mexico, it's too hard for me.

Interviewer: It's a lot of responsibility for you.

Thalia: Yeah, it is a lot. If I don't have a baby it's ok, but I have a baby.

For their part, at the time of the interview Louise and Pacholo were planning what to do in the event that Pacholo was repatriated to the Philippines while Louise was pregnant:

Maybe if the officer has a good heart, they give us a chance here. But, if they refuse, I have no choice but to go back to Philippines by myself together with my older daughter. And the baby will stay with Louise who will continue her studies in Canada. That is the only chance we got now.

Participants' anxieties around family separation as a result of TFWP compulsory repatriation rules were not unfounded. Eventually, each of these families experienced an unwanted separation as a result of these rules.

After arriving in Alberta, Ivan was ultimately deported to Mexico, while Thalia stayed behind with their son in order to attempt a status transition through the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program with the support of her employer at a large meat processing plant. She was ultimately successful and was eventually able to sponsor Ivan to return to Canada after a separation of two years. They are currently living together as a family in Alberta.

After an unsuccessful attempt to find work that could lead to a status transition, Ricki was repatriated to the Philippines in 2015. This twofold experience of family separation was particularly challenging for Ricki, who fell into a state of depression as he felt he was a stranger amongst his original family, a response to repatriation that is well documented in the migrant worker literature (Cohen, 2000). Jessica discussed how Ricki's obligatory split from her and their son meant that mandatory family separation has come to shape Ricki's experiences of family life in complex ways. She said:

He lost weight since going to the Philippines. I think because he can't talk to our baby. It's hard because he always took care of the baby since birth. And he always told me that he never took care of his kids back home because he was abroad.

For her part, Jessica wanted to stay in Canada and was working with a lawyer to remain at the time her baby was born. At the time of our interview, she had hired a lawyer and was going through the process of applying for permanent resident status through humanitarian and compassionate grounds. She was trying to make ends meet by working as a cashier in a convenience store in a small town in Northern British Columbia. She achieved permanent resident status in 2019 and is currently trying to sponsor Ricki to join her and their son in Canada.

In the weeks directly after our interview, Louise gave birth to her second child and Pocholo was repatriated to the Philippines. He traveled with both of his daughters while Louise decided to stay in Canada in order to attempt a transition to permanent resident status. Unable to afford the tuition at the community college where she was enrolled in Edmonton, she eventually managed to switch back from a student visa to a temporary foreign worker visa. She moved to Saskatchewan, where she had heard the employer nomination process through that province's Provincial Nominee Program was less onerous than in Alberta. After three years of working in a rural McDonald's restaurant, Louise transitioned to permanent resident status. She is currently in the process of sponsoring Pocholo, who is still in the Philippines with their children, whom she has not seen in three years.

Broadly, the intimate relationships that developed amongst these participants shaped their experiences of international labour migration in ways that were both dramatic and unplanned. Participants' stories of post-migration intimacies inevitably take place in the fraught context of maintaining geographically distant relationships with families in their home countries. For those participants who were married with children at the time of migration, relationships with their spouses had transformed over time and geographical distance. These once intimate relationships evolved into something more akin to the contemporary notion of co-parenting, with the sending of regular remittances being the primary means of expressing affection, an experience which conforms to the current literature (McKay, 2007; Wells et al., 2014). At first glance, those participants who were single without children at the time of migration may seem to fit more neatly into what is perceived as the migrant worker 'ideal': unattached and self-sufficient (McLaughlin, 2010). However, traveling internationally on their own produced occasions for

intimacy that would not have been present otherwise. Overall, in both cases, the opportunity to forge close connections with proximal companions with shared experiences of transnational labour migration offered a means of closing an emotional gap produced by the experience of transnational employment-related geographical mobility.

In turn, these relationships not only further distorted participants' already aggravated connections to transnational ties, but also revealed how migrant workers may engage with a fluid process of home-making whereby affective connections to place are transformed. New intimate relationships, particularly those that involved children, shaped participants' status aspirations, invariably contributing to workers' desires to remain in Canada permanently as a way of keeping their new families together. Mandatory return migration rules, particularly the cumulative duration rule, produced an unfortunate situation whereby participants experienced a second family separation. The promise of intimate connections post-migration thereby reduced workers' experiences of social exclusion while also producing unanticipated anxieties related to uncertainties in the realm of belonging, citizenship status, and the chance for long-term family stability and unity.

## CONCLUSION

While immigration policies in Canada, such as the requirement that low-wage temporary foreign workers not travel with their families, may seek to individualize migrant workers in an effort to facilitate the control of labour, the lived realities of cross-border labour migration do not reveal a story of unique individual pathways, but rather illustrate the complexities of intimate transnational mobilities. By examining the 'new family' narratives of three low-wage migrant worker couples engaged in Canada's TFWP, the article prioritizes the analytical centrality of post-migration relationships to understanding the experience of state-managed temporary labour migration. Specifically, a focus on relationship and family formation post-migration contributes to contemporary scholarship that seeks to uncover how the relational and affective dimensions of migration are not limited to migrants' well-documented struggles to preserve established transnational ties. On the contrary, the findings elaborated upon in this article highlight how the labour migration experience can be an intensely relational process that incorporates both continued transnational connections and the active emotional labour associated with developing new proximal intimacies in a given host society. Relationships both 'here' and 'there' consequently play a major role in shaping migrant workers' long-term migration and employment aspirations and the decisions that ultimately accompany these. While maintaining geographically distant intimacies may remain a priority for low-wage migrant workers, these intimacies inevitably transform over time and geographical distance. When this transformation results in the development of proximal intimacies post-migration, these new relationships can contribute to migrant workers' affective attachments to the host society in ways that belie policies of imposed temporariness that accompany state-managed temporary foreign labour migration regimes. The participants discussed in this article demonstrate a fluid connection to 'home-making' that can incorporate workers' simultaneous engagement with established communities (primarily through sending regular remittances) and the production of new familial connections in Canada. This process of trans-local subject formation evolves from the physical and emotional gaps produced through migrant labour policies that discount relationships and restrict workers' access to permanent residency, and could thereby be considered a foreseeable consequence of increased reliance on circulatory guest worker programs globally.

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