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Central American Temporary Foreign Workers in Québec Smalltowns: A Portrait of Community Response

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Abstract

Recent years have seen an explosion of the recruitment of Central American Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) by agricultural operations and other businesses in Québec small towns. The mobility of one group (the TFWs) underpins the ability of another group (Québec small-town residents) to *avoid* migration by contributing to the continued viability of economic activity in Québec small towns. In this article, we examine the “fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations, and practices” (Cresswell, 2010, p.18) as evidenced in Central American TFWs’ experiences interacting with local community members as well as the response of local businesses, local social and community services, and local churches to the presence of TFWs in their communities. Drawing on data from focus groups with TFWs (n=31) and interviews with employers (n=17), advocates (n=13) and government actors (n=10), we come to the conclusion that Québec small towns have been

transformed by the cyclical mobility of TFWs but that the possibilities for diminishing the unequal power relationships and allowing for long-term integration and community development are limited so long as both the TFW Program continues to constrain the social, employment and geographic mobility of TFWs and Québec refuses to consider all occupational levels for permanent residency under the Québec Experience Program.

Keywords: temporary foreign workers; community development; mobility; migration; integration; Québec; Guatemala

1.0 Introduction

While Canada has had migrant agricultural and domestic worker programs for decades, there has been a veritable explosion of the employment of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in the past 10 years (Faraday, 2012). The privileging of Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) over more traditional permanent immigration as a source of workforce renewal has introduced fundamental changes in Canadian communities, particularly small-town or rural communities, that are faced with the challenges of international mobility as conceptualized by Cresswell (2006). This conceptualization emphasizes the power dynamics that facilitate or impede the mobility of different people, with class, race and gender playing a key role. But also, the mobility of one group has an impact on the mobility—and the immobility—of others. As suggested by Cresswell (2010), mobility can be understood as a “fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations, and practices” with “broadly traceable histories and geographies” (p.18). Here we examine such entanglement in Québec small towns.

We draw on interviews and focus groups from a larger study exploring the expansion of the hiring of Central American workers from the agricultural to the broader horticultural, food processing and other industries in Québec; here we present Central American TFWs' experiences interacting with local community members as well as the response of local businesses, local social and community services, and local churches to the presence of TFWs in their communities. More than 10 years into the growth of TFW employment in Québec regions, we are able to see both promising practices and areas of concern. Without question, however, TFWs are introducing a wind of change in small-town and rural Québec (Bélanger & Candiz, 2014; Olar, Jacques, Nolet, & LeBreton, 2009).

We ask the question, how do the politics of mobility (Cresswell, 2010) play out in terms of Québec small town adaptation to the presence of TFWs? Examining the transformation of local communities (social interactions, businesses, public services, community services and churches) in the wake of the arrival of TFWs offers insight into the types of policy and practice measures that might make this transition easier for all those involved.

We begin this paper with an overview of the Canadian and Québec context for our study. We then present the methodology of our research project and the analysis undertaken for the purposes of this paper. The findings are presented in four sections: relations with year-round residents; local business response; public social service response; and non-profit response. We conclude with a discussion of how the recent Québec experience compares with models of TFW relationships with local communities in other parts of Canada.

2.0 Literature: Migrant Workers in Small-town Québec

In this article, we examine the ways in which the mobility of Central American TFWs influences the Québec small towns that are their destinations. In these small towns, mobile TFWs interact with an essentially immobile—or “moored” (Cresswell, 2010)—community, people who go about their usual activities in terms of their social lives, businesses, public services and non-profit activities. Previously, these communities were an uncommon destination for international migrants. But in the past 15 years, TFWs have become more and more present, working in such sectors as agriculture, tourism, hospitality, and food transformation. While much has been written about the conditions under which TFWs in Canada labour (Hanley, Shragge, Rivard & Koo, 2012; Fudge & MacPhail, 2009; Worswick, 2010) and the impact of their migration on their lives and the lives of their families (Pratt, 2012), less attention has been paid to their interactions with their destination communities and the ways in which these communities adjust—or not—to their presence (Preibisch, 2007).

There are several bodies of literature emerging that address the changing nature of immigration to Canada and, today, it is increasingly clear that there is a shift away from permanent immigration to temporary migration (Faraday, 2012). In Québec, as in other provinces, academics are documenting the “regionalization” of immigration, how small-town and rural communities are changing in response to growing numbers of foreign-born neighbours, usually permanent residents or government-sponsored refugees (Vatz-Laaroussi, 2012; Vatz-Laaroussi, Bezzi, Manço, & Tadlaoui, 2012). The Québec Ministry of Immigration has for nearly thirty years been encouraging immigrants to settle outside of the Montreal metropolis but without much attention to local demand for particular skill profiles (see Ministère d’Immigration, Diversité et Inclusion, 2015) and with limited success (Boulais, 2010; Simard, 2007). This paper offers a contribution in analyzing the ways in which small-town communities are adapting to an even newer form of mobility, that of TFWs, one of the first to examine this within the Québec context.

In other parts of Canada, there exists already a body of literature that is looking at the impacts of both internal and international mobility, often temporary or cyclical. Specifically in terms of TFWs, there is the recruitment of such workers to economic boomtowns such as Fort McMurray, Alberta (Barnetson & Foster, 2013; Foster & Taylor, 2013). Southern Ontario,

especially around Leamington and the Niagara region, has received the attention of scholars interested in the relationship between huge numbers of seasonal TFW workers – who generally remain isolated on farms – and local residents over the long term (Basok, 2002; Hennebry, 2012; Preibisch, 2007). And finally, other academics have been exploring the way that certain towns have begun to see the retention of temporary foreign workers as permanent residents as a way to stabilize the local population, support local services and revitalize the local economy, as we have seen in Brandon, Manitoba and elsewhere (Carter, Morrish, & Amoyaw, 2008; Horgan & Liinamaa, 2012; Moss, Bucklaschuk, & Annis, 2010).

Investigation of the relationship between temporary foreign workers and local residents in rural areas and small towns is in its early stages in Québec, with a recent important article by Bélanger and Candiz exploring the social construction of TFWs in the eyes of the local population. Their findings (that local people consider TFWs to be essential to the local economy, to be reliable workers and yet to be relatively invisible within local communities - Bélanger & Candiz, 2014) are echoed by our own. But here we aim to contribute to the broader literature on *relationships between* TFWs and local communities, exploring the ways in which the politics of mobility (Cresswell, 2010) are transforming Québec rural areas and small towns.

In Québec, low-skill temporary foreign workers are more heavily employed in small towns and rural areas than in the larger cities where there is a ready supply of refugee claimant, permanent resident and citizen labour.¹ However, much of the TFW work is seasonal, meaning that the towns in our study, generally within a 200-kilometer radius of Montreal, experience a yearly surge of TFW residents who in some cases outnumber year-round Canadian residents. These TFWs are of different ethnic and racial backgrounds than the Québec small-town residents and often they do not speak any French at all. The result is a gaping communication divide.

The hiring of TFWs for agricultural work in Canada is not new (Brem, 2006) and in Québec, there is an even longer history of intraprovince migration to perform agricultural work, from Gaspésie to the Montérégie, for example. But in the past twenty years, agricultural and related industry employers describe serious frustrations in trying to hire locally for seasonal work (Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, 2010, 2010; Mimeault & Simard, 1999); local workers are reported by employers to be unreliable, unlikely to remain for a full season, and their work is considered to be less productive than that of TFWs (Fondation des entreprises en recrutement de main-d'œuvre agricole étrangère, 2013; Author 3 et al, 2010). These labour market challenges can be explained to some degree by the ageing of the Québec population and younger workers' disinterest in a job that is seasonal, low paid, repetitive, dangerous and physically very demanding (Abella, 2006; FERME, 2011; Gravel, Villanueva, Bernstein, Hanley, Crespo Villareal &

¹ This trend may be changing, however, as we hear increasing reports of low-skill workers being employed in urban Quebec service industries.

Ostiguy, 2014; Varvaressos, 2009). Nevertheless, these seasonal jobs are at the core of Québec's rural regional economies and are a source of both direct and indirect revenues (Olar et al., 2009).

Faced with these challenges, Québec's agricultural and related employers have turned overwhelmingly to hiring temporary foreign workers, principally from Guatemala and Mexico with a small but growing number from other Central American countries (FERME, 2011). In 2013, FERME recruited nearly 10,000 workers for Québec workplaces, 50% of them from Guatemala (in the low-skill agricultural TFW stream) and 48% from Mexico (on the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program – SAWP) (FERME, 2013). Despite the appeal of TFW programs for Québec employers, however, there is no shortage of academic studies from across the country documenting the potentials for exploitation under the program (Binford, 2009; Fudge & MacPhail, 2009; Goldring, 2010; Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011). And despite the potential pitfalls of the program, Québec small-town employers, following in the footsteps of small-town employers across Canada, have begun to turn towards the low-skill stream of the TFWP, rather than the SAWP, to fill jobs that are off the farm.

In this paper, we use Cresswell's framework of the politics of mobility to explore the interaction between Central American (predominantly Guatemalan) TFWs in supposedly low-skill occupations and the small-town and rural communities in which they work in Québec. Our field research offers a compelling example of the tensions between different forms of mobility and of how "movement, representation, and practice... are implicated in the production and reproduction of power relations" (Cresswell, 2010, p.26). Québec small-town communities struggle with the effects of the out-migration of their young people for work in the cities, leading to difficulties recruiting labour for low-skill jobs and the maintenance of local services, both public and private. In an effort to *avoid* the need for further out-migration from the local community (i.e. having to close or move their businesses due to lack of local workers), business owners have turned to the TFWP as a way to recruit mobile international workers. So, finally, local community members (trying to remain "moored" and avoid a need for their own mobility) meet in the specific locale of Québec small towns with internationally mobile Central American workers. Ironically, once TFWs arrive in Québec, the TFWP assures that they in fact have very limited local mobility, both geographically and in the labour market. All of these dynamics create mobility entanglements (Cresswell, 2010) in terms of social interactions, the private sector, the public sector and the non-profit sector, the subject of this paper. Our case study allows us to observe this very specific "constellation of mobilities" (Cresswell, 2010), a manifestation of interrelated forms of mobility that intersect among particular people, in a particular context, at a particular time.

3.0 Methods

The research project on which this article is based explored the interplay between the motivations of employers in using the low-skill category of the TFWP (excluding the SAWP) and the experiences of the Central American workers coming to Québec as a result. In this article, we draw on our interview and focus group data collected between 2009 and 2012. First, we conducted individual interviews with 17 employers who hired Central American TFWs in non-agricultural industries such as ornamental horticultural, food transformation and cleaning industries ² and 23 key informants (13 NGO representatives, 7 government representatives, 3 government worker protection commissions) whose mandates touch the presence of TFWs in these sectors. These semi-structured interviews were conducted mostly in French, and in three cases in Spanish (e.g., consular representatives, one recruiter). Interviews with employers and key informants focused on their perspectives on the relative costs and benefits of hiring Central American TFWs in comparison with local workers, relationships within the workplace, adjustments to their activities in response to the hiring of TFWs, and the challenges and potential improvements to the TFWP.

We then conducted four focus groups with Central American temporary foreign workers in the low-skill stream (four focus groups with a total of 31 participants) who worked in the same industries and the same 200-km radius to Montreal as the employers. The focus groups, generally lasting about 2 hours each, were conducted in Spanish by Spanish-speaking members of the research team (two of whom are themselves Latino). They were held in off-site worker housing (2) and in church facilities (2). The focus groups discussed workers' motivations for participating in the TFWP, their experiences within the workplace (work conditions, relationships), their living conditions outside the workplace and integration in the local community and well as the challenges and potential improvements to the TFWP.

The qualitative data collected from all the interviews was transcribed verbatim, translated from Spanish to French when relevant, and then thematically coded (beginning with the interview themes but remaining open to emerging themes). We used NVIVO software to analyse both vertically and horizontally to look for points of convergence and divergence among the respondents. All citations in this article have been translated from French or Spanish to English by the authors. All data was collected in compliance with ethics certification from the Université du Québec à Montréal and McGill University.

4.0 Findings: Community Reactions to TFW Mobility

Our interviews with employers and key informants as well as our focus groups with temporary foreign workers revealed much about the ways in which Québec small towns and rural areas are being transformed by the

² Among the employers interviewed, there were 8 small businesses (8-50 employees), 6 medium enterprises (51-200 employees) and 3 large enterprises (201+ employees).

entanglements of mobility created by the presence of TFWs. In this section we begin with the nature of the personal relationships that develop between TFWs and local year-round residents. We then look to the ways that local businesses, social services and churches have adapted to the presence of TFWs in their communities. In Québec, as in the rest of Canada, there are no official settlement services offered to TFWs. As we were reminded by a representative of one of the provincial worker protection commissions, “*Their integration is not as elaborate as that of permanent immigrants.*” In large part, the successful “settlement” of TFWs, even on a temporary basis, depends on community members around them. For this reason, we present these findings towards a discussion of how different social actors might adjust their behaviour in order to improve the integration of TFWs into the social fabric of Québec small towns.

4.1 Relations with Local Year-Round Residents

Our interviews were rich with examples of the relations that are developing between Central American TFW workers and year-round, mostly ethnic Québécois, community members. Here we will begin with an exploration of the general connections between workers and year-round community members before focusing on two ends of the continuum: tensions and racialization versus the development of genuine friendships.

4.1.1 Interactions within the Community

In general, employers expressed an awareness of the fact that their choice to hire temporary foreign workers, especially in larger groups, was going to have an impact on the community both socially and economically. For some of the communities where TFWs were hired, they would be the only non-Québécois in town, with some community members never having personally met another Latino before their arrival. In most communities, however, immigrants and refugees had been arriving in small numbers over at least the past decade, so it would be the scale of the influx of TFWs rather than simply their presence that would have relevance.

In the best-case scenarios, employers actively engaged with their neighbours in order to pave the way for good relations. Here one employer shares his experience of how, over the years, his neighbours have reacted to the workers employed in his business:

Of course when the Guatemalans first arrived, we expected people to have a bit of difficulty accepting it; they watch TV, they have preconceived ideas about all kinds of things. So we said to ourselves that we have to set the tone, we have to dictate the image we want to have adopted. So we put a lot of value on it, made it super interesting. We told people that it was going to be fun, that we were going to learn Spanish, that the guys were nice, they’re coming to help us. They’re not stealing our jobs; they’re saving them!

The interviews with both workers and employers revealed a variety of experiences, however, depending on the village. This employer feels the community has come to see the arrival of TFWs in a very positive light:

Very positive. We were talking about prejudices, but at a certain point, when you're part of the story, you understand that these preconceived ideas are wrong. Everyone's a winner.

But workers were often less sure of their connection to the community:

Worker 1: No one makes contact with anyone else.

Worker 4: There's also the question of language. There aren't a lot of Latin Americans around here.

For many workers, the hours of work were so long that they were tired and wanted to rest at home in their free time and, when they were housed on farms or worksites far outside of town, the distance from their homes to the village made casual interaction difficult. Since most of the workers do not speak French and few of the local residents speak Spanish, language was obviously a barrier to interactions. Even when there were native Spanish speakers present in the town, it did not necessarily translate into easy connections: "Here, [in our small town], the immigrants are mostly Colombian, but I don't see them getting together [with the TFWs]." There were also cultural differences that made the Québécois and the Central American TFWs feel distant from each other.

Despite these obstacles, however, some local community members and some workers were making an effort to overcome them. Most workers reported being free to visit local villages on their time off (often with employer-provided transportation)—"we were never told we weren't allowed to have contact with anybody"—and many were interested in learning French in order to be able to better communicate. In one case, the employer had arranged for workplace-based French courses but, given the limited free time available to workers, they often felt compelled to take care of other personal errands or simply to rest rather than fully participate in the courses. Nevertheless, we heard many examples of workers venturing forth with their limited French to try to make connections with year-round residents, as shared by this worker:

You have to be active, forget the daily routine of work. Even if our French is not 100%, we have to get out there. There is nothing better in life than to lose your fear. People who live in fear will never go out. We jump in, even with our awkward French, and get moving.

In many of the communities where TFWs work, local municipalities have initiated social activities that bring together year-round residents and migrant workers, as we hear from this employer:

At the end of August, there's the "Fêtes gourmands" [food-lovers' festival] in Lanaudière. And all the regional products, the micro-breweries come together here during the St-Jean-Baptiste holiday [*in late June*]. This year, there are two nights for migrant workers. We'll buy the tickets, go with them. There will be food from their countries and music and we're going to do some integration.

St-Remy's "Fiesta des Cultures"³, organized by the local municipality with a variety of private sector partners such as the Caisse populaire (credit union) and agro-business (but generally not the medium or small-scale employers), is a well-known example considered by many key informants as a model to emulate. Organizing soccer games between local residents and TFWs—games in which the TFWs systematically and soundly defeat their opponents—is also common. In addition to these accounts, we heard many examples of workers and year-round residents having simple, friendly interactions in the streets and businesses of their small towns and villages.

While in general the relations between TFWs and year-round residents appear distant yet peaceful, tensions do exist and, sometimes, racialized images of the workers interfere with positive relations.

4.1.2 Tensions & Racialization

Today, most year-round residents of small-town and rural Québec probably see the hiring of TFWs from Central America by local businesses as inevitable. Not long ago, however, there was a worry among some employers that their clients might not be too receptive to the idea that the company recruited Latin American employees. One employer described problems with racism in the past when his clients were distrustful of one of his employees who was black. But, today, most of this type of problem seems to have dissipated. Nevertheless, there remains an 'othering' of TFWs, linking them to potential health or sanitary problems, as we hear from these two employers:

(1) Last year, with H¹N¹, there were a bunch of ignoramuses who thought that all Mexicans had H¹N¹.

(2) When they arrive, we bring them here, we wash their clothes to make sure they haven't brought along any insects. It's a requirement of the residence [where they have their accommodations] out of fear that the foreign workers will bring along who-knows-what.

Interestingly, racialized stereotypes of Central Americans held by employers and local community members sometimes led to their favour as employees. Several employers mentioned seeing cultural similarities between Central Americans and Québécois, often in relation to their Catholic traditions. They

³ <http://www.fiestadescultures.com/>

are therefore considered by employers to adapt well to the local context: “The Mexicans and Guatemalans adapt better to this work and to the Québec temperament in general [than other groups of workers].” And in some cases, Central Americans are compared positively to other ethnic groups who are currently facing a backlash in Québec. One recruiter, for example, described moving away from hiring North African TFWs based on very negative stereotypes⁴:

It’s cultural. Even if they speak French, we’re making a monumental error in our society. We want people to speak French but culture is more than just language. It’s the Canadiens hockey team, it’s how we live here. Going to get people from North Africa will cause problems if you look at what’s going on in other parts of the world.

Negative stereotypes about Central Americans, however, revolved around the perception of their being uneducated and overwhelmed by their migration experience. More pernicious forms of racism, however, are to be found in the view of them as “macho”, heavy drinkers and a danger to local young women. This employer describes his efforts to limit any dangers he imagines his workers might pose to the local community:

It’s too bad, but I can’t accept that my Guatamalans go out at night and invade the village and my neighbours... You don’t know where they’re going to go. They’re human, they get bored. Lots of testosterone. Lots and lots and lots. I know I shouldn’t say this, but there are surprises when we let them go out. You know, it could be that the daughter of one of my neighbours is pretty, she wants to learn Spanish and likes to chat... One day it could end up that... When you open the door, they come barging through!

However, such perceptions do not seem to be the norm.

4.1.3 Friendships

In workplaces where TFWs work directly with Québécois, especially in relatively small workplaces, it is often friendships between these two groups that are the first examples of TFWs having social interactions outside the workplace, as we hear in these two examples:

It’s going well. Some of our employees invite them on the weekend to their pool, to have a few hotdogs. They’re pretty open to that.

The Québécois employees invite the Guatamalans to their homes, with their families, give them gifts at the end of the year.

⁴ North African immigrants have been facing employment discrimination for a number of years already, despite their high levels of French and post-secondary education (Eid, Azzaria, & Quéirat, 2012; Lenoir-Achdjian, Arcand, Helly, Drainville, & Laaroussi, 2009).

We heard several examples of Québécois co-workers visiting Guatemala to see their TFW co-workers' villages, meet their families and understand more about their homes:

One of the Québécois workers in our group speaks Spanish. Two years ago, he decided to take his vacation in Guatemala. He came for 8 days. Two of us went along with him and we visited many places. We told him that just like we tried to speak French over there, he had to speak Spanish here. So he practiced his Spanish with our friends, our family... Two workers ended up coming to visit and they were really delighted with our country.

One employer described feeling a real connection to his employees and developing an interest in their agricultural practices in Guatemala, planning to visit to participate in the coffee harvest on his employees' farms.

Such connections were not limited to social interactions between TFWs and their colleagues outside of the workplace. Some local community members developed friendships as well: "*They have friends. I met one woman who told me she and her husband were having a couple of TFWs over for supper on Friday.*" There also seemed to be an interest, especially among young people, to meet the TFWs, learn about their countries and engage in language exchanges. Finally, there were examples of TFWs developing long-term romantic relationships and sometimes marrying Québécois, eventually settling in the community permanently as immigrants. In some cases, concerns were raised about the power imbalance present in relationships that developed in the workplace (ex. TFW with the adult child of the boss) but, especially in cases where workers were hired by small enterprises and lived in town, romantic relationships were a happy spin-off for small numbers of TFWs and local residents.

Overall, in our study, we saw fewer examples of workers being explicitly prohibited from going out and meeting people outside the workplace than has been reported in other studies (Choudry et al, 2009; Perry, 2012). However, it was clear that the long, tiring work hours, the geographical isolation of certain farms, the difficulties in securing transportation and the fundamental language barrier made it difficult to form relations with year-round residents. Also, it seemed that it was much easier for those living in town, as opposed to on a farm, to make non-work-related connections.

Apart from these interpersonal relationships, the presence of TFWs is creating a shift in the operations of local businesses, social services and non-profit organizations, as we see in the following sections.

4.2 Business Response

The presence of large numbers of TFWs in Québec small towns and villages, even seasonally, has been widely recognized by local business people as a challenge but, especially, an opportunity. With limited transportation options

and limited free time, TFWs buy locally. As we see here, pre-existing local businesses have altered their offer of goods and services as a result of the presence of TFWs and other new businesses have sprung up to meet TFWs' unique demands.

4.2.1 Adaptation of Local Businesses

In terms of pre-existing local businesses, the most common adaptation has been to hire Spanish-speaking employees, whether in the Caisse populaire (the ubiquitous Québec credit union where most small-town and rural TFWs seem to do their banking), the grocery store, local restaurants, WalMart and – of course! – the Tim Hortons. Grocery and department stores order products that are sought by Central American TFWs in order to attract their patronage. Businesses plan for the large influx of workers on paydays (often Thursday nights) and Sundays, days when towns can be transformed with the presence of hundreds of workers. Generally, the presence of the workers in the towns is appreciated:

Our upstairs neighbour shares a lot with us. The corner store knows us. Even the bank knows us. The grocery store, too. We stand out because of our language, our colour and our size.

But not always:

We chat with the other employees at work, with the Québécois foremen. We see them around and we chat. But not with the people from around here, in the stores. We go in, we buy and we leave. We aren't friends with people in the village, the Québécois.

There are reports of local residents avoiding the central village on the days when there is a high presence of TFWs. And the workers do not always feel welcome in the local businesses, as we hear from this key informant:

They felt there was racism but often it was not really racism. It's more that people are awkward. For example, in a Caisse populaire, lots of Mexicans will be there on a Friday night and the bank teller will say, "Ok, Mexicans, make a separate line. I'll look after you afterwards." It's because she doesn't have time. She has to get out special forms. She wants to take care of the easy cases before getting to the more complicated ones. For the people who hear her, they perceive it as racism.

Nevertheless, certain employers, especially in towns where the hiring of TFWs is relatively new, took pains to reach out to local businesses to pave the way for their employees and demonstrate that the TFWs could be good for local businesses:

We went to talk to the local merchants. We need TFWs. Yes, it's different but if they had questions or doubts, they could call us. We

went to talk to the bank. Everyone bought little Spanish phrasebooks so that they could communicate. It's been a nice adventure. You have to get involved in the community. We had to buy 32 bikes so we asked, through a letter, for the merchants to sponsor a bike. We received money for 28 bikes. I told them it was important for the workers to be able to get around...

In regional centres where TFWs congregate for shopping and social activities, the demand for Spanish-speaking employees has drawn Latino permanent residents from Montreal (who also speak French) to settle in these smaller towns, as we observed on our visits to conduct interviews and through conversations with Latino service workers in these small towns. They report being pleased with the availability of jobs and the much lower housing prices outside of Montreal.

4.2.2 *New Businesses Tailored to TFWs*

Apart from preexisting local businesses adapting themselves to this new clientele, there is also an influx of new businesses catering specifically to TFWs. In some cases, these businesses are fairly informal, often with the business owners travelling in from Montreal – the taco stand that only sets up in town on payday, for example – but they are much appreciated by workers.

Other businesses are seen with suspicion by our key informants. Several interview participants raised a concern about the appearance of cheque-cashing businesses that allow workers to send money home immediately via well-known channels such as Western Union, rather than using the *Caisses populaires* that are more familiar to employers and key informants. While we did not hear of any complaints from workers about cheque-cashers, the concerns expressed by this key informant—that the cheque-cashers charged unnecessarily high fees and were taking advantage of workers' distrust of banks—was shared by others:

The workers think the banks charge fees and they worry that their money won't be there anymore a month after they deposit it. So what happens is that individuals from Montreal come into town, set up an office and exchange the endorsed cheques of the workers for cash. Next, the workers go to Western Union and pay even more fees. But in their heads, it's better than depositing it in the bank and doing a transfer...

And as we hear from this employer, their initial suspicions are often allayed once they understand a little more about the situation. He points out the key role of social networks in TFWs' use of local commercial services.

There's also a Mexican who's been working in Québec for a long time... a guru for the foreign workers. When they need to transfer money or they have a specific question, they call that guy. At first,

they talk about Don Somebody and I sent one of my guys to check him out. I found it a little bizarre. I was afraid he was asking my guys for money. But, in the end, everything was fine and this guy is just a good resource. I remember that they were looking for a specific kind of bread and this guy managed to have it brought into their region.

4.3 Public Social Services

As with for local businesses, it was very new for local public social services to encounter groups of foreign-born service users. Add to this that the demand for services tailored to this clientele can be highly seasonal, and local social service authorities are faced with an important challenge. In our interviews and focus groups, the two main categories of public services of concern to participants were the municipality (housing and transportation) and the health system. For both of these public services, having Spanish-speaking staff is one issue, but we see below that there are adjustments required in terms of the basic way such services are conceived.

4.3.1 Municipal Services

Small-town Québec municipalities found themselves faced with new needs with the influx of TFWs to their communities, needs that are distinctly different from those implied even with the arrival of immigrant permanent residents.

First, there is the question of housing inspection. The low-skill TFW program requires that employers provide housing for TFW employees. This housing has been documented (and it was raised in our interviews and focus groups) to often be overcrowded, in poor repair and with substandard or inadequate appliances (Choudry et al, 2009). What has emerged is that there seems to be some ambiguity about which authority is responsible for the quality of TFW housing. Québec's Workplace Health and Safety Commission will do inspections at the request of workers and FERME (the main recruitment agency, whose members are employers) inspects its members' housing (FERME, 2013), but most municipalities also have a housing inspector who is responsible for housing conditions for the general population. It seems that, in some municipalities, the town has been proactive in assuring decent accommodation while in other municipalities, this is not the case:

Interviewer: Did someone from the municipality come to look at the house?

Worker: We don't know. We never saw them.

It must be said that, in most towns, the TFWs would be the only people living in their employer's accommodations and potentially in "work-camp" conditions. Moreover, the fact that the inspector will likely have problems communicating with the Spanish-speaking "tenants" increases the difficulties related to assessment and recourse. Nevertheless, housing remains one of the most critical aspects of TFWs quality of life while in Canada. It would seem

that the mechanisms of employer self-regulation of housing conditions, implemented by FERME, has not been able to successfully guarantee the housing rights of TFWs although there does seem to have been improvements in recent years.

The second major municipal issue was public transportation. The offer of public transportation varies greatly from one rural or small-town municipality to another, depending on such things as population density, geography and local economy. TFWs, however, often report a lack of affordable, independent transportation as a major barrier to their autonomy. Having to rely on the employer for transportation or paying for an expensive taxi ride are discouraging. While some employers provide their workers with a car or van to get around during their time off, this still requires travelling as a group. We heard from several participants what a difference it made if the place of employment was close to a public bus line – even if infrequent – and we heard of certain municipalities that invested in special bus routes around to farms and other more isolated workplaces to allow workers to come into town in the evenings and on the weekends. This type of investment can be beneficial to local businesses, increase contact between TFWs and local residents, and offer TFWs more autonomy in their movement.

4.3.2 The Public Health System

Apart from housing and transportation, another important difficulty for TFWs that has been reported in the literature (and confirmed in our study) is access to healthcare. As has been noted elsewhere (Hennebry, 2010; Sikka, Lippel, & Hanley, 2011), there are numerous barriers to health related to TFWs' immigration and employment status. Nevertheless, here we address the health care system itself, focusing particularly on access to the CLSCs (community health centres) and hospitals present in rural areas and small-town Québec.

Overall, our participants reported that they were able to access medical care—including doctors, dentists, hospital care—when necessary: “The village doctor is very open. The TFWs don't have a family doctor here, so he's willing to treat them.”

But there could be significant barriers. Language was, predictably, an issue, as reported by this key informant: “Language is another element to consider. They don't have access to all the health information because we can't communicate with them at all.”

But we heard many examples of Latino health professionals working in rural and small-town health services. When these professionals are identified, word often travels fast and they are sought out by TFWs needing care. TFWs resort to using other social networks to access healthcare, as well: “The wife of one of their *Québécois* colleagues is a nurse so, before going to the doctor, everyone goes through her. They have a little network here, so it goes well.”

Some workers who do speak a little French felt confident to be able to visit a doctor on their own.

Apart from the language issue, there is the issue of the willingness and the capacity of the healthcare system to take into account the particular dynamics of the TFW experience. TFWs are often accompanied to the hospital by the employer or the employer's representative to act as interpreter. What can result is that miscommunication—whether intentional or not on the part of the employer—can make all the difference for a workers' compensation claim and sometimes results in a lack of information being passed on to the worker. In other cases, we heard of medical professionals sharing confidential information about TFW patients with employers without consent. There can be a sense that the employer is a “guardian” of the TFW worker.

The difficulties encountered in the Québec health care system, as well as the salary lost for time off, causes some workers to avoid it altogether, as we hear from this key informant:

He had to get in touch with a doctor in Guatemala so that he could send him some medication. A lot of workers bring their own medication because they don't have confidence in our health system. It's inaccessible and creates conflicts for them at work.

4.4 Non-Profit Response

We included a number of non-profit actors in our key informant sample, collaborated with union and church representatives to recruit TFW focus group participants and heard from TFWs themselves about their contacts with non-profit actors. Ranging from organizations dedicated to working with agricultural TFWs (unions, particularly the United Food and Commercial Workers - UFCW), to organizations representing the interests of agricultural employers, to local churches and community groups adjusting to the presence of Central American TFWs, non-profit actors were very present in the rural areas and small towns of our study. Here we will focus on the local actors (churches and community organizations), leaving a discussion of unions and employer associations to other publications.

4.3.1 The Catholic Church and Pastoral Workers

The Catholic Church in Québec has taken an official stance in support of TFW agricultural workers, having published an important and critical document describing the difficulties created by the TFWP and pledging spiritual and social support for TFWs who seek it (Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec, 2008). With so many of the Central American workers being Catholic themselves – or practicing Protestant Christians – many have sought out the local church to attend mass, receive sacraments and seek advice and support. Several of the informants with whom we spoke saw the presence of TFWs in their community as having revitalized their local church:

The Church is very present. The one in my town sends messages every two weeks or so and I forward the information to employers

who then give the information to the workers. There are religious activities... [Mass is celebrated in Spanish] in my town. The messages are also always sent in Spanish.

In places where there is not a large enough number of TFWs, the Church organizes monthly masses in Spanish which are quite popular and which serve as a general social occasion:

They organize masses once a month in nearby villages. The workers almost all go, most of them go. I have a gang who likes to go for supper in a restaurant on Sunday evenings. They're pretty well integrated, I think. They know where things are.

Churches invite TFWs to their general activities but we are told that specific activities tailored to TFWs are more popular. Activities take place in Spanish and, although most church representatives seemed pleased to welcome the TFWs as new members of their community, not all parishioners were as enthusiastic, something that was felt by the workers. Examples of such activities include parties, community dinners, workshops on social and labour rights, as well as French classes. Churches are also seen as safe places to meet and socialize, with TFWs able to reserve rooms for their own uses, which can include more controversial organizing to defend their labour rights—or even participate in research projects!

Most of the dioceses we visited have hired a Spanish-speaking pastoral worker whose mandate is to reach out to and support TFWs. In the Montérégie region, several dioceses have come together to create the *Somos Hermanos* (We are Brothers) program to build links between the farmworkers and local communities. These pastoral workers are well known among TFWs and employers usually see them as a positive contact for their employees. The role of the pastoral worker can be especially helpful in reaching out to workers when the workers have difficulty leaving their place of employment during their free time, as we hear here:

Here, the thing in common is the Catholic religion. We have a lot of contact with the pastoral workers... That's important, because the TFWs don't always have access to the church. Sometimes people will tell them they can't go or they block the pastoral workers from having contact with the TFWs. But they do have their annual mass at St. Joseph's Oratory and some of them even helped to build a church in Laval. Access to religion is a heavy issue; we're talking about their religious expression. Sometimes, people give us the excuse that it's because they don't understand the mass in French but that's not the point. We're talking about social contact, about the moral impact.

In cases where the TFWs report difficult work conditions, the pastoral worker is sometimes able to intervene to mediate with the employer, lending some

moral weight to the workers' complaints. This was much appreciated. It seems that the pastoral workers have a fine line to negotiate, however. Here, an employer describes how the Church was a welcome actor with employers unless pastoral workers became too publicly identified with advocacy or union work:

The local Monsignor, before being bishop here, he worked in Mexico and he speaks Spanish... He often went to see the workers, he developed a link with them and he could see that the workers needed some help. He was lucky to find a Latino pastoral worker who spoke really good Spanish. He gave him the mandate to look after the TFWs here. But it started out badly. That guy [the pastoral worker] worked more closely with the UFCW than with the UPA [Agricultural Producers Union] so he didn't last long on the farms. Afterwards, he came to talk with us and we worked out a method of working together... Their objective is really to offer support to the workers, spiritual and religious accompaniment.

Despite this tension, pastoral workers are widely recognized as playing an important role in TFWs' experiences in Québec:

When there are problems, they call me and I call a pastoral worker and he goes. It's spiritual and religious but, at the same time, it goes further than that. There are problems of isolation, problems of alcoholism. The pastoral agent has good judgement. He can get them to talk and can take it far enough that they can let their problems out.

And, in most cases, pastoral workers still do not hesitate to provide information and support in defending the labour or immigration rights of workers who approach them with such problems.

4.3.2 Community Organizations

This study raised local community organizations as emerging actors in the dynamics between Central American workers and the rural and small-town populations of Québec. We had few examples, but it is important to raise this point. The community sector outside of Québec's larger cities has been going through a process of adaptation to the presence of larger number of immigrants, but also of TFWs. In recent years, there have been a number of training campaigns aimed at providing information to rural and small-town community workers about different topics related to TFWs: the structures of the different immigration programs which may be leading people to their communities; the specific health, labour and social entitlements accorded to people with different immigration statuses; and the social and employment dynamics that are particular to TFWs and others with precarious immigration status. In this study, two specific examples were brought to our attention: labour rights organizations and youth organizations.

Since their main reason for being in Canada is to work, it is often in search of labour rights organizations that TFWs will reach out to community groups in the local area. Although we have heard of cases of local organizations refusing service to TFWs because they fall outside their mandate or because they are uncomfortable with their lack of knowledge about the TFW situation, this seems to be changing. As we heard from one key informant: “Often the workers will go through community groups to make their complaints. They’re more comfortable in turning to them.”

While they can be difficult to find, most regions of Québec will have some form of community group that deals with labour rights, Employment Insurance or other work-related benefits. Some of them are members of Québec’s Front de défense des non-syndiqués, a province-wide coalition of community groups and union organizations dedicated to improving workers’ rights. It seems that rural and small-town member groups of this organisation are offering increasing service to TFWs.

The other example that was raised was youth centres. Again, many small towns and villages will have a youth centre that may have space and time for TFWs to become involved. The objective is mainly social, a way for TFWs to meet local people and give local youth a chance to get to know someone from another country. French-Spanish language exchange is popular. This employer shared an example from one town that was raised by a number of participants:

The people in one town, where there were about 150 or 180 workers and also an active pastoral worker, decided to open the youth centre to the TFWs. It gave them access to computers, there was a television, they could rent movies in Spanish, they offered French workshops. They even did an exchange program with the youth where they went and played music together. So, it was the municipality that offered the space for free and the pastoral agent that managed to get \$2000-\$3000 in funding each summer, from the United Way and other sources, to organize activities.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This study had a number of limitations, principally related to the difficulties related to recruitment of participants. The politics surrounding the TFWP makes it so that we are likely to have recruited employers who generally comply with the TFWP’s provisions and see themselves as good employers. We are more likely to have recruited the workers with the most freedom and capacity to interact with people outside the workplace. And our key informants would often have been representing their organizational mandates. Nevertheless, we were able to recruit a diverse range of participants, interview data are in line with our observations within the communities and there was a concordance between the different categories

of participants in terms of the range of both positive and negative relationships. And while all studies on TFWs struggle with the recruitment bias of workers (Choudry et al, 2009; Perry, 2015), ours is one of only a few studies that has been able to recruit employers.

5.1 Nuanced Responses to Mobile Workers in Québec Small Towns

The findings of our study suggest that the community response to the entanglements of mobility that arise from the presence of growing numbers of Central American temporary foreign workers in Québec rural areas and small towns is nuanced. In this article, we looked at four categories of local response to TFW mobility: interactions between year-round local residents and TFWs; business response; public social service response; and non-profit response. In each of these four categories, we were able to document cases of both positive and negative responses.

In terms of interpersonal relations, many employers seemed to make an effort to reduce the friction of mobility by encouraging TFWs' social integration into their local communities and we heard of many examples of Québécois colleagues or neighbours inviting TFWs into their homes or to participate in family activities. This seemed to happen most often in smaller, mixed (Québécois/TFW) workplaces and especially when the workers lived in town and not on the farm itself. On the other hand, many TFWs described feeling excluded from local communities, unconnected and unable to forge new relationships, due in part to language challenges but also due to geographic isolation and also racism. We had several examples of employers and key informants offering views on TFW behavior that were based on racist preconceived notions. This seemed more likely when workers came in large groups for seasonal operations, often creating a major demographic shift in towns over the growing season.

In terms of business response, it is clear that many entrepreneurs in our study have recognized the opportunity present in TFW mobility in the form of TFWs' buying power in small towns. Continued agricultural production, today dependent on TFWs, is a cornerstone of economic autonomy for Québec small towns (Olar et al, 2009); local businesses have capitalized on the presence of TFWs by adapting their existing businesses (e.g., hiring Spanish-speaking staff, offering Latino food products) or by relocating their businesses from Montreal either on a temporary basis (e.g., only on payday, only during the high season) or permanently. TFWs appreciate access to such commercial services. However, many more businesses remain little adapted to serving TFWs, with banks and credit unions seeming to be a clear example. Employers often arrange for all their TFW employees to bank at the same institution, creating little competition among financial institutions to innovate in order to attract business. Over the years, helpful practices are emerging but problems continue to arise. And clearly TFWs do not feel welcome in every establishment in town.

Public social services in small towns seem to be the area that has been the most resistant to change in response to the presence of TFWs. It is unclear how widespread is the recognition of the needs—and legitimate demands—of TFWs across the public social service sector, but turnover is comparatively low among its employees. Even if rural and small-town health and social service authorities prioritize the hiring of Spanish-speaking professionals, it may take longer than in the private sector to see a real change. There were several interesting initiatives in terms of public transportation, but in the health sector good service for TFWs seems to rely overly heavily on social networks and the luck of the presence of Spanish-speaking professionals. Access to healthcare remains a difficult issue for TFWs in rural and small towns, as it is across the province.

Finally, there is a growing non-profit response to the presence of TFWs in Québec small towns. The most widespread response is from the Catholic Church's pastoral workers who have made TFWs a priority in their day-to-day work. Pastoral workers' explicit mandate to link the local community to TFWs through sharing of spiritual and social activities is significant in its very human orientation. Pastoral workers are generally seen by both workers and employers as "safe" intermediaries, although they are clearly committed to taking action if they witness injustice. And the types of non-profits showing an interest in serving TFWs are expanding: youth centres; labour rights organizations and immigrant settlement organizations. There exists next to no funding for non-profits to work with TFWs, so the work is very small-scale and highly dependent on volunteers. And, despite the positive examples we were able to document, there remain church congregations and community groups that give the cold shoulder to TFWs.

5.2 A Smaller-Scale, Dispersed Presence of Central American TFWs

The TFW experience is developing a little differently in Québec from what we have seen in other Canadian rural areas and small towns, creating a specific "constellation of mobility" (Cresswell, 2010, p.18) in a specific place between specific groups of actors. What we witness in Québec is a smaller-scale introduction of TFWs in dispersed locales. Unlike in Alberta's Fort McMurray (Barnetson & Foster, 2013; Foster & Taylor, 2013), TFWs coming to Québec are not generally working in boomtowns. They are revitalizing the economies of rural areas and small towns with a long history and in a period of questioning about what it will take to survive the pressures of Canada's changing economy and steady march towards urbanization. Unlike in Southern Ontario's Leamington area (Barnes, 2013; Preibisch, 2007) not all the small towns we visited had an overwhelmingly seasonal migration and any large numbers of TFWs is relatively new. The closest parallel in Québec would be the St-Remy area just south of Montreal with most TFWs only working between May and October. But in most other regions the numbers coming are much smaller than what is seen in Southern Ontario and there is quite a variety in the type of work in which they are engaged, the times of year they are present and where they live. Finally,

unlike in Brandon, Manitoba (Bucklaschuk, Moss, & Annis, 2009; Carter et al., 2008; Moss et al., 2010), we did not come across any locales where a forward-looking municipality cooperated with a company with a long-term staffing vision to forge an explicit effort to permanently integrate temporary foreign workers. While Québec continues to refuse permanent residency to “low skill” TFWs, such a strategy would be possible with the higher skilled workers being recruited by businesses in Québec small towns. And while Québec has long been promoting the “regionalization” of immigration (Boulais, 2010; Vatz-Laaroussi, 2005, 2012), this vision is far from including Central American low-skill TFWs as part of the plan.

5.3 The Ambiguity of TFW Mobility: Opportunities for Transformation

The form of mobility we see among TFWs in Québec is ambiguous. In many Québec towns, internationally mobile workers have become a *permanent* part of the landscape, yet the individuals involved are only present *temporarily* and sometimes *cyclically*. In the case of Central American TFWs, they are limited to only four years of work in Canada before being excluded for four years and then again being eligible for a new work permit. This poses a difficulty in terms of building relationships, whether interpersonal, economic, with the state or with the non-profit sector. We see that Québec rural areas and small towns are in a period of transition. They increasingly rely on TFWs for the survival of their local economies yet the recognition of the social and public/non-profit service adjustments necessary is not yet widespread.

Québec small towns may have much to learn from municipalities in other parts of the country, Manitoba in particular, that have sought to transform the temporary or cyclical mobility of TFWs into a dynamic of settlement and integration. In the long term, Québec needs to open its Québec Experience Program to all occupational levels of the TFWP if small towns are to fully benefit, socially and economically, from the TFW presence in local businesses. In the short term, local actors can make adjustments to their traditional activities to both serve TFWs and take advantage of their presence for the good of the whole community. Local economic development corporations can support local businesses in undertaking market studies and business plans that take into account the needs and interests of TFWs. Municipal governments can invest in public transportation that will facilitate TFW movement within their territories, increasing their access to local businesses and opportunities for social interactions. Ensuring that municipal facilities, such as libraries and recreation facilities, are able to offer basic services in Spanish can also increase the viability of such services for the overall community. The healthcare sector must increase its capacity to provide services in other languages and must increase its understanding of the power dynamics around health between workers and employers. Such changes would quite simply bring health services in line with existing policies around confidentiality and patients’ rights. And, finally, the non-profit sector in small towns is well on its way in recognizing the extent to which the inclusion of TFWs in their activities can revitalize fragile organizations.

In many ways, of course, these changes would provide for a somewhat superficial integration of TFWs since their mobility does mean that they are by definition not settling. As long as the current program continues to encourage international mobility while severely restricting local socio-economic and geographic mobility—enshrining the political power dynamics between migrants and local communities through work permits and housing tied to a single employer, no avenue for permanent residency, difficult recourse for the violation of any labour rights and no guarantee of call back—all the positive adjustments made by individuals, businesses, public social services and non-profit initiatives occur against the backdrop of this massive imbalance of power and employer-dependency that are the trademarks of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program. A deeper shift in relations would come with the possibility of TFWs becoming permanent residents or, minimally, being able to be accompanied by their families while working temporarily in Québec. Neither of these two scenarios are currently possible for low-skill TFWs working in Québec.

Areas for future investigation could include research involving local businesspeople, community workers and public servants, since this study reports on employer, worker and regional-level key informants' observations and interactions with these actors. There is an opportunity to push further the exploration of the ways in which the temporary, cyclical mobility of TFWs is influencing the communities that struggle to remain "moored" within the challenge of the global economy. Searching for a "constellation of mobility" (Cresswell, 2010) that serves the interests and respects the rights of all actors involved—an inherently political undertaking—seems essential.

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