

# “Oaxacans Like to Work Bent Over”: The Naturalization of Social Suffering among Berry Farm Workers

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## THE SKAGIT VALLEY

The Skagit River flows west from the mountains of the North Cascades National Park in northwestern Washington State to the Pacific Ocean’s Puget Sound, pouring through some of the most spectacular vistas in North America. The river is located roughly halfway between Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia, about an hour and a half drive from each. Most of Skagit County’s agriculture can be found in the flat flood plain of the river. This land is protected from the tides of the Puget Sound by a grass-covered dike some five-feet tall gently curving along the edge of the water.

The valley includes several towns lining Interstate-5, with charming turn-of-the-century town centres surrounded by expanding strip malls, apartment buildings, and housing developments. Much of the land now covered by strip malls was flower or berry fields a mere five to ten years ago. In the valley, one hears heartrending stories related to the state of family farming in the United States – the Johnson dairy farm closing after several generations because they could not compete with large agribusiness; the Thompson berry farm shutting down after nearly a century due to increasing competition from abroad; and Mister Christenson’s shame at selling his apple orchard to the developers of a new mega-store, ending the Christenson apple growing legacy that had endured since their

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arrival from Scandinavia. A common bumper sticker in the valley rails against this phenomenon: "Save Skagit Farmland, Pavement is Forever". Several family farms, relatively small in comparison with much of US agribusiness, cultivate the remaining agricultural land.

## HIDDENNESS OF MIGRANT BODIES

There are no migrants here; why are you looking here? I haven't heard of any. If you want migrants, you'll have to go to the other side of the mountains, Eastern Washington. There are lots who pick apples around Yakima, I think. But there aren't any over here.

A regional public health officer in Washington State advised me thus in the fall of 2002 as I explored the possibilities of dissertation fieldwork with undocumented indigenous Mexicans in Skagit County.

As I came to discover over the next two years, the Skagit Valley is an important site in multiple transnational circuits (see Rouse, 2002) of Mexican farm labourers, including indigenous Mixteco and Triqui people from the Mexican state of Oaxaca. A few thousand arrive here for the tulip-cutting and berry-picking seasons in the spring and live several months in shacks made of cardboard, plastic sheets, and broken-down cars or in company-owned labour camps, often in close proximity to the multi-level houses of local elites with panoramic views of the valley. The migrant labour camps look like chains of rusted tin-roofed tool sheds lined up within a few feet of each other and have been mistaken for small chicken coops in long rows. The plywood walls are semi-covered by peeling brown-pink paint. There is no insulation and the wind often blows through holes and cracks in the walls. Each unit has two small windows, some of which are broken and many of which are covered by old cardboard boxes. The ground around the camps quickly becomes either deep mud or light dust depending on the weather. During the day, the metal roofs conduct the sun's heat, regularly surpassing 100 degrees inside. At night, the air is damp and cold, often below freezing. The bathrooms and showers are shared in separate plywood buildings with cold, concrete floors.

During the first and last phases of my fieldwork, I lived in a one-room, 10 foot by 12 foot unit that the farm calls a *cabina* [cabin] in the middle of the largest labour camp on Tanaka Farm. It would more appropriately be categorized as a "shack". Normally, a minimum of one family would share this size shack. In the fall, as the night temperatures dropped, my breath condensed and froze to the underside of the roof as I slept, and then melted and rained inside as the sun rose. My shack had one old mattress with several rust stains, a tiny sink with

separate hot and cold hoses that ran orange water for the first few seconds, an old refrigerator, and a camping-style gas stove. Shacks like these, where thousands of families live in Skagit County, are most often hidden away from public view, in compounds behind the farm's tree stands or buildings.

How can thousands of the very people who make the valley's famous agriculture possible be overlooked? Here, as in many places where diasporic labourers struggle somewhere along the continuum of employment and enslavement, the hiddenness of migrant bodies is one factor enabling their continued exploitation. The conditions described in the Skagit Valley are mild in comparison with the hidden enslavement described by Wells (1996). Perhaps the erasure of these workers is best understood as a "public secret" (Quesada, 2005), in which Anglo residents simultaneously know of but do not see Mexican migrant labourers. The public gaze (especially of the elite public who shop at high-end grocery stores and live in exclusive neighbourhoods) is trained away from and spatially distanced from migrant farm workers (see Sangaramoorthy, 2004, Chavez, 1992). In the rare instances that this gaze focuses on Mexican migrants, anti-"illegal" immigrant and racist rhetoric and actions often result (see Rothenberg, 1998, Quesada, 1999).

This paper will begin by uncovering the hidden structure of farm labour, describing how agricultural work in the United States is segregated along an ethnicity-citizenship-labour hierarchy. I will then show ethnographically that this pecking order produces correlated suffering and illness, particularly among the undocumented, indigenous Mexican berry pickers. Yet, it should become clear that this injurious hierarchy is neither willed nor planned by the farm executives and managers; rather, it is a structural form of violence. Of note, these structures of inequality are only very rarely problematized by any group of people on the farm, even the most oppressed. In the ethnographic data, we find that this structure becomes naturalized via perceived bodily differences, including ethnic conceptions of pride in these differences. Finally, we will consider means for "pragmatic solidarity" (Farmer, 1999) and change.

## FIELDWORK ON THE MOVE

In order to answer the questions described above and to address the larger social, political and health issues related to United States-Mexico migration, I performed fieldwork utilizing the classic anthropological research method, participant-observation (see Figure 1, from Holmes, 2006). I began my fieldwork in a one-room shack in a migrant camp on the largest farm in the valley, the Tanaka Farm, during the summer and fall of 2003. I spent my days alternately picking berries with the rest of the adults from the camp, interviewing other farm employees and area residents, and observing interactions at the local migrant clinic.

In order to understand the transnational experience of migrant labour, I migrated for the next year with Triqui indigenous people from the Mexican state of Oaxaca whom I had come to know on the farm. I spent the winter living with nineteen of them in a three-bedroom slum apartment, pruning vineyards, and observing health professionals in the Central Valley of California. During the spring, I lived in the mountains of Oaxaca with the family of one of the men I knew from Tanaka Farm, planting and harvesting corn and beans, observing the government health centre, and interviewing family members of migrant workers in the United States. Later, I accompanied a group of young Triqui men through the night as they hiked through the desert into Arizona and were caught by the Border Patrol. I then migrated north again from California, through Oregon where we picked up false social security cards, and once again to the farm in Washington State in the summer of 2004. Since then, I have returned to visit my Triqui companions in Washington, California, and Oaxaca on several shorter trips.

**FIGURE 1: SUMMARY OF FIELD WORK**

<b>TIME PERIOD</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>
<p><b>6 Months</b> Jun - Sep 2003 Jun - Jul 2004</p>	<p>Skagit Valley, Washington</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reside in migrant camp and observe living conditions.</li> <li>• Pick berries and observe labor conditions.</li> <li>• Interview laborers and family members</li> <li>• Interview and observe farm management and owners</li> <li>• Interview local residents</li> <li>• Collect media representations of migrants</li> <li>• Accompany and observe sick and injured workers in the clinic</li> <li>• Interview clinic medical and nursing staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers?</li> <li>• What are the market forces impinging on farm management and owners?</li> <li>• What are the various representations of farm workers in the area?</li> <li>• How are the different ethnic and immigrant groups organized?</li> <li>• What are the health problems suffered by each group?</li> <li>• How are different groups treated and understood in the clinic and in society?</li> </ul>
<p><b>4 Months</b> Oct - Jan 2003</p>	<p>Central Valley, California</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the above and how it differs in the context of large agribusiness in rural California</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the above and how it differs in the context of large agribusiness in rural California</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 1: SUMMARY OF FIELD WORK CONT.**

<b>TIME PERIOD</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>
<b>4 Months</b> Feb- Mar 2004 May- Aug 2004	Triqui Zone, Oaxaca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reside in a natal village of migrant farm workers, observing everyday life</li> <li>• Interview laborers and family members about the meanings of migration and labor in the U.S.</li> <li>• Interview and observe clinic medical and nursing staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do people in Oaxaca experience the migration of family members?</li> <li>• What are the social and cultural forces affecting the health of Triqui people in Oaxaca?</li> <li>• How are the Triqui people treated and understood in the clinic?</li> </ul>
<b>1 Month</b> Apr 2004	Southern Arizona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe a group of Triqui people as they cross the U.S. - Mexican border</li> <li>• Interview Mexican people before, during and after a border crossing</li> <li>• Interview and observe vigilante members, Border Patrol Officers, area residents, and local activists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the social and physical forces at the border that affect the health of Mexican migrant workers?</li> <li>• How are Mexican migrants treated and understood by area vigilante members, Border Patrol officers, area residents, and local activists?</li> </ul>

## THE TANAKA FARM

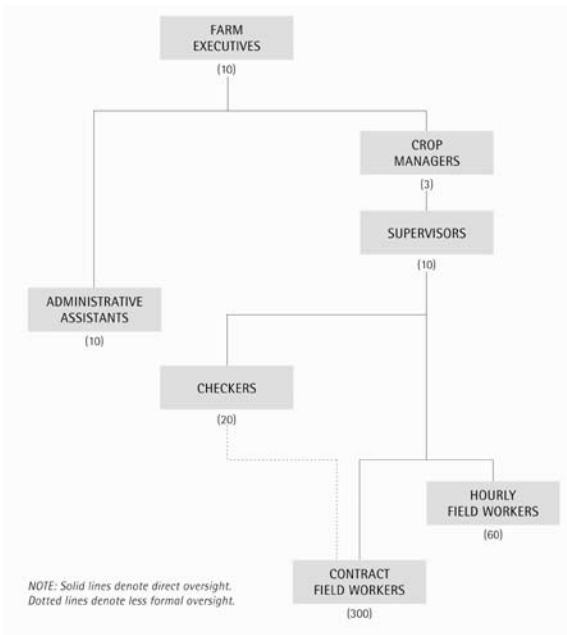
The Tanaka Farm consists of several thousand acres and employs some 500 people in the peak of the picking season, late May through early November. During the winter and early spring, employment shrivels to some 50 workers. The farm is owned and run by a third-generation Japanese-American family who lost half of their land during the internment of Japanese-Americans in the 1940s. Today, the farm is known primarily for its strawberries, many from a variety bred by the father of the current farm owners. It also produces raspberries, apples, and both organic and so-called “traditionally grown” blueberries. The business is vertically integrated, consisting of everything from a plant nursery to fruit and berry production and even a processing plant. This follows an increasing trend described by Thomas (1985) as “hav[ing] the industry covered from seed to supermarket”. However, most of the fruit from the Tanaka Farm is sold under the label of larger companies.

The Tanaka Farm advertises itself as “a family business spanning four generations with over 85 years experience in the small fruit industry”. The farm’s business goal is to produce high quality fruit and sell it for profit. This farm specializes in berries with high taste content sold for use in dairy products (ice creams, yogurts,

etc.) that use few to no artificial flavors or colors. Their “Northwest variety” strawberry is red throughout, with an incredible amount of juice and a shelf-life of mere minutes, distinct from the fresh-market “California variety” strawberry sold in grocery stores that are white in the middle with less flavorful juice and a much longer shelf-life. Employees on the farm grow, harvest, process, and sell berries, supporting the explicit goals of the company.

On another level, the structure of farm work entails an exacting and complex segregation, a “de facto apartheid” (Bourgois, 1995). After my first few weeks living in a labour camp and picking berries, I began to notice the organization of labour into a complicated hierarchy. The structure of labour is determined by the asymmetries in society at large – specifically those organized around race, citizenship, and class – and reinforces those larger inequalities. Thomas (1985) describes a similar organization of agricultural labour in California that takes advantage of citizenship and gender inequalities in the region. The complex of labour on the Tanaka Farm includes several hundred workers occupying many distinct positions from owner to receptionist, field manager to tractor driver, weight checker to berry picker (see Figure 2, from Holmes, 2006). Responsibilities, anxieties, and privileges differ from the top to the bottom of this labour organization.<sup>1</sup>

FIGURE 2: LABOR HIERARCHY ON THE TANAKA FARM



## SEGREGATION ON THE FARM: FROM EXECUTIVE TO PICKER

The third generation of Tanaka brothers makes up most of the top executives of the farm. The others are Anglo professionals recruited from other companies. The executives work at desks in private offices and live in their own houses, some with panoramic views. They work incredibly long hours, usually starting before the sun comes up. They regularly take time off during the day to work out at the local gym or meet friends to eat. They worry about farm survival in a bleak landscape of farm closures amidst increasing corporate agribusiness, expanding urban boundaries, and economic globalization. The farm president, John Tanaka, explained his anxieties to me in his office in one of the farm's portable buildings:

The challenge for us at a management level is that we have to maintain our fair share of the market.... Well, the difference is that in South Carolina, they have federal minimum wage, which is US\$5.75 an hour. In Washington, I'm paying a picker US\$7.16, the state minimum wage, competing in the same market. That's a huge difference, huge difference. ... I would say the largest challenge for survival—I don't like to use the word 'survival,' but I'll use it—is probably offshore competition. For example, China. They can take a strawberry and bring it to San Francisco and deliver it to a restaurant cheaper than we can. And a lot cheaper to bring it to Japan. We pay \$7.16 an hour. In most countries that we're talking about here, whether it be China or Chile or wherever, they don't pay that a day!

One of John's brothers, another farm executive, explains to me that they use a "portfolio of crops" to be able to survive these pressures and leave something for future generations. John clarifies:

"...and it's different than other businesses, where you grow a business and then sell out, or you reach a certain profit level that you're comfortable with. In our business, we grow it for the next generation, which means that when I retire, you know, I can't pull dollars out of the company because it would leave the next generation with a big gap. And so we know that, and that's what we focus on".

The crop managers have private offices in the small "field house" several miles into the fields from the main farm office, though they spend significant time driving and walking while overseeing the fields. They work similar hours to the top executives and have somewhat less choice about when they take breaks. They are all Anglo-Americans and live in comfortable houses in one of the nearby towns.

The administrative assistants who work at desks in the field house common spaces and the teenagers who stand outside checking weights live in their relatively simple family houses near the farm. They are almost entirely white, with a few Latino-American citizens. The administrative assistants complete repetitive tasks for their bosses and handle questions from the labour crews and outside business partners. The teenage checkers weigh the berries brought in by pickers, enforce farm quality control rules such as number of leaves per flat, and spend much of their time gossiping and laughing. Both groups worry primarily about the moods and reactions of their supervisors. One of the administrative assistants, Sally, a white woman of approximately forty years of age who has lived all her life in Skagit Valley explained to me that her superiors regularly reprimand her for being too nice to the workers. She has been told to be “more curt” and “quick”, “less friendly”. In addition, they often advise her on how to do her work and give her projects without the common courtesies of “please” or “thank you”. She feels disrespected by the people “above her” (as she states) and treated like a “peon”.

The other workers live in one of three labour camps. The first holds 50 people and is located 100 feet from the road. Each shack has heating, insulation, and wooden roofs under the tin metal sheets. The supervisors live here and spend their days walking outside observing and directing the pickers. Some treat their workers with respect while others are blatantly racist. Both groups are bilingual to some degree in Spanish and English, almost entirely Latino-American citizens, along with one US resident Mixteco from Oaxaca. Barbara is a bilingual Latina in her early 20s from Texas who has been working at the farm during the harvest for 11 years. She attends a community college in Texas every spring and hopes to become a history teacher. She explains to me that her job is to make sure certain rows of berries are picked quickly without leaving any good berries behind. She is upset when other crew bosses call Oaxacan people “*pinche Oaxaco* (damn Oaxacan, using a derogatory term)”, “*Indio estúpido* (stupid Indian)”, “*burro* (donkey)”, “*perro* (dog)”, or “*gente cochina* (dirty people)”. Her family learned English in Texas as well as in the farm-sponsored English classes that take place after work. She told me that these classes are open to all employees except pickers. The Triqui pickers I know shared this understanding. When reading an early version of this paper, however, John Tanaka informed me that there is no such farm regulation. Nonetheless, the unofficial, assumed policy effectively excludes pickers from the English classes.

The second camp, located a few hundred feet from the road and holding roughly 100 people, is made up of shacks with wooden roofs under tin metal sheets. None has heating or insulation. The apple and raspberry pickers as well as some of the strawberry pickers live here. The apple pickers climb ladders to reach the apple



trees and are paid per pound, making the most money of all pickers. The raspberry pickers work long hours sitting on large harvester machines and are paid by the hour. These groups are made up almost entirely of undocumented mestizo Mexicans from central and northern Mexico, along with a few undocumented Mixtecos and Triquis from Oaxaca in southern Mexico.

The third camp, located several miles from the farm headquarters down a back road, holds 250 people. The shacks here have tin roofs without wood, no heating and no insulation. Here live the majority of the farm's labourers, the berry pickers who work bent over outside in the fields. They are made up almost entirely of undocumented Triqui indigenous Mexicans as well as several undocumented Mixtecos and two undocumented Chiapanecans. Several times during my stay on the farm, the undocumented pickers were afraid to leave the camp for routine trips to buy groceries or play basketball due to rumors of Border Patrol sweeps. One 28 year old Triqui woman named Marcelina describes her struggles as a migrant berry picker:

It is very difficult for a person here. I came to make money, like I thought, 'here on the other side [of the border] there is money—and good money,' but no. We're not able to make enough to survive. And then sometimes they [the checkers] steal pounds. Sometimes rotten berries make it into the bucket. 'Eat that one!' they say, throwing it into your face. They don't work well. This is not good. You don't make enough even to eat. I have two children and it is very ugly here, very ugly to work in the field. That's how it is. Sometimes you want to speak up, but no. You can't speak to them.

There in Oaxaca, we don't have work; there are no jobs there. Only the men work sometimes. . . . That's why I wanted to come here, to make money, but no—no—no, you don't make anything here. You don't have anything to survive. I wanted to work, to move ahead [*salir adelante*] with my children. I have been here four years without seeing my son [in Oaxaca]. In California, there is no work—just pruning and you don't make any money—because of the same thing, that we don't know Spanish, and that is because we don't have enough money to study. Parents have to suffer in order to send their children to school, to buy food and school uniforms. I have lots of sisters back there, studying, though I did not get to study. There are many children who do not go to school because they lack money. I had to leave Oaxaca so I wouldn't suffer from hunger and I hoped I would make enough to send back to support my sisters in school. I had to give up school myself.

Marcelina makes clear the anxieties of survival in the midst of working seasonally and sending financial remittances to support family in Mexico. Ironically, in order for most of the family to stay in their hometown in Oaxaca, one member or more must migrate far away and send money back. This is true of virtually every

family I met in their hometown. She speaks of the difficulty of leaving one's home and family to work in the United States and suggests that perceptions held in Oaxaca of opportunities in the United States, do not match the experiences of migrant workers once here. Her words also acknowledge significant power differences between the pickers and other farm employees.

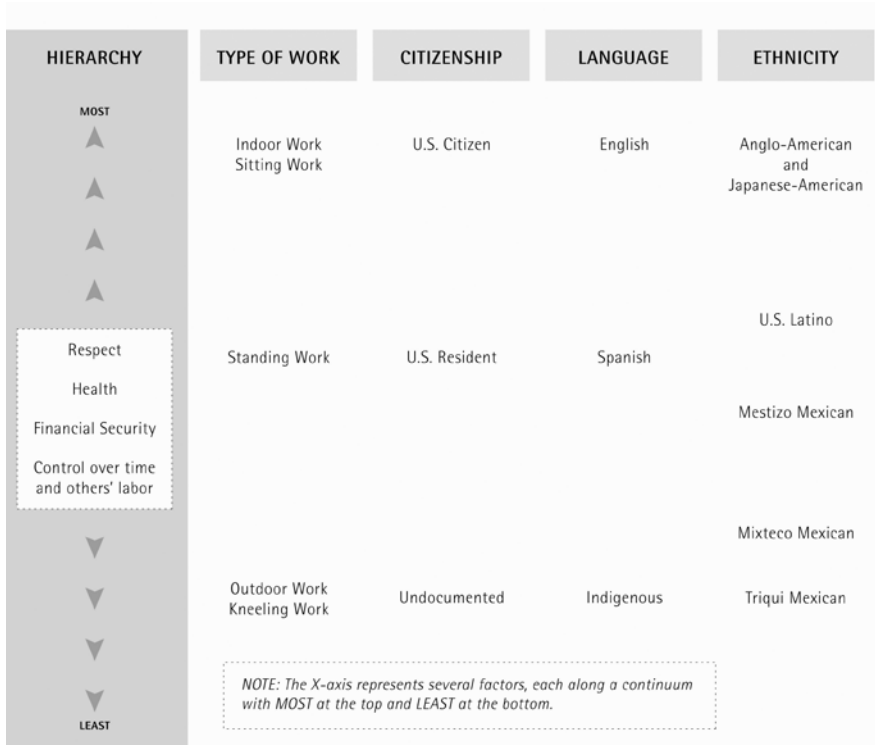
## ETHNICITY AND CITIZENSHIP HIERARCHIES AT WORK

The ethnicity-citizenship labour hierarchy seen here – White and Asian-American US citizen, Latino US citizen or resident, undocumented mestizo Mexican, undocumented Indigenous Mexican – is common in much of North American farming (see Lopez and Runsten, 2004, Edinger, 1996, Zabin et. al., 1993, Nangengast et. al., 1992). The relative status of Triqui people below Mixtecos can be understood via a pecking order of perceived indigeneity. An Anglo farm employee told me the Triqui are more “simple”, while mestizo area residents informed me that Triqui people are “*los indígenas más puros* (the most pure indigenous people)” and that “*les ve tan—tan sencillos, siempre están amables* (it can be seen that they are so—so simple, they are always kind)”. Several area residents explained to me that Triqui people are “traditional” and “simple” and do not understand modern things like bank accounts and pay checks. In this hierarchy, ethnicity functions as a camouflage for a symbolic continuum from indigenous, simple other to civilized, modern self. The Anglo- and Japanese-Americans inhabit the pole of civilization. The Triqui are constructed as the opposite—backward, simple. As seen above, the more civilized one is perceived to be, the better one's working and living conditions.

While ethnicity establishes one's occupation on the farm in large part, citizenship further shapes one's position. Thus, the very few indigenous Mexican labourers with US residency held higher positions (e.g. field supervisors or raspberry pickers) than their undocumented relatives working as strawberry pickers. Undocumented workers can save and send home to Mexico less money than their ethnic counterparts who are US residents due partially to the earnings in their relative positions on the farm as well as to the US\$1,000 to US\$2,000 they pay a *coyote* (border guide) every time they cross the US border. Furthermore, those considered “illegal” inhabit a different phenomenal space in relationship to the government, one permeated by rumours, fear of being “*agarrado* (caught by the Border Patrol)”, and a lack of power to counteract mistreatment and abuse. They return home to visit their relatives in Mexico less frequently due to the extreme hardships involved with returning to the United States to work. In addition, though federal and state taxes are taken out of their weekly pay checks, undocumented workers are not eligible to benefit from social security, welfare, or other social programmes. Finally, Thomas (1985) explains that the undocu-

mented workers are the most vulnerable on many levels and that their inclusion in agriculture leads to increased labour supply stability, increased productivity for producers, as well as decreased worker control. The figure below shows the correlations among respect, labour, suffering, ethnicity, and citizenship (Figure 3, from Holmes, 2006).

**FIGURE 3: CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM OF HIERARCHIES ON THE FARM**



### THE PLACE OF THE ANTHROPOLOGIST

In many ways – given my ethnicity, citizenship, and class – I did not take the appropriate position in the labour hierarchy. For the purposes of my research, I placed myself in the housing and occupations of the Triqui undocumented immigrants. However, because of my social and cultural capital, the farm executives treated me as someone out of place, giving me special permission to keep my job and my shack even though I was never able to pick the minimum. At times, they even treated me as a superior, asking my advice about labour relations and

housing on the farm. Crop managers, field bosses, and checkers treated me as a sort-of jester, as respected entertainment. They laughed and joked with me, using rhetorical questions like, “Are you still glad you chose to pick?” As they walked through the fields, they regularly stopped and talked with me, picking into my buckets to help me keep up, something they did not do regularly for other pickers.

On the other hand, the other pickers viewed me with suspicion, particularly initially. After watching a Jet Li movie in the camp shack of a Triqui family, the father and husband, Samuel, told me that several Triqui people believed I was a spy for the police, the border patrol, or the US government. Others thought I might be a drug smuggler looking for a good cover. Later, when I lived in the hometown of the Triqui pickers in Oaxaca, several people, including town officials, threatened to put me in jail or kidnap me because I must be a spy or simply because “*no deben estar gabachos aquí* (white Americans should not be here)”.

Given that the adults in the camps were suspicious of me, especially initially, I spent a fair amount of time my first months playing with the children. After asking many sets of children where they were from and which languages they spoke, I realized that every single child who came to play with me was Triqui. None of the Mixteco or mestizo children ever came to my shack. Apparently, the children recognized that I was positioned in a Triqui location in the farm hierarchy and responded to me accordingly.

Near the end of my fieldwork, Samuel complained about the problems that lack of resources created in his hometown and said they needed a strong mayor. I asked if he would be mayor someday.

No. You need to have some education and some money and some ideas. You will be President of San Martin, Set! And you can do a lot of good! We need a water pump and paved roads. You should set up a pharmacy, build a house and marry a Triqui woman [chuckling].

Later, Samuel told me, “It is good that you are experiencing for yourself how the poor suffer (*experimentas como sufren los pobres*)”. He said, “Right now you and I are the same; we are poor. But, later you will be rich and live in a luxury house (*casa de lujo*)”. Feeling uncomfortable, I explained that I do not plan to have a luxury house, but rather a small, simple house. Samuel clarified, looking me in the eye, “But you will have a bathroom on the inside, right”?

## THE HIERARCHY OF SUFFERING – SUFFERING THE HIERARCHY

Just as ethnicity and citizenship correlate with the labour and housing pecking order, this entire complex maps onto a hierarchy of suffering. The further down the ladder one is positioned, the more degrading the treatment by supervisors, the

more physically taxing the work, the more exposure to weather and pesticides, the stronger the fear of the government, and the less control one has over one's own time. The multiply determined "abjectivity" (Willen, this volume) of the Triqui migrant berry pickers fits what Philippe Bourgois calls "conjugated oppression" (1988). In Bourgois' analysis of a Central American banana plantation, the conjugation of ethnicity and class results in an experience of oppression distinct from the experience of economic exploitation or racist insult on their own. In the Skagit Valley, class, ethnicity, and citizenship form a triply conjugated oppression conspiring to deny undocumented Triqui berry pickers respect and deprive them of their physical and mental health.

The Triqui people inhabit the bottom rung of the pecking order, labouring in the most stressful, humiliating, and physically strenuous jobs picking berries. They live in the coldest, wettest shacks in the most hidden labour camp. Strawberry pickers must bring in a minimum weight of 50 pounds of de-leafed berries every hour; otherwise they are fired and evicted from camp. In order to meet this requirement, they take few or no breaks from 5 a.m. until the afternoon when the field is completed. Many do not eat or drink anything before work so that they will not have to take time to use the bathroom. They work as hard and fast as they can, picking and running with their buckets of berries to the white teenage weight-checkers. During my fieldwork, I picked once or twice a week and experienced gastritis and headaches, as well as knee, back, and hip pain for days afterward.

Triqui strawberry pickers work seven days a week, rain or shine, without a day off until the last strawberry is processed. Occupying the bottom of the ethnicity-citizenship-labour hierarchy, undocumented Triqui strawberry pickers bear an unequal share of health problems – from idiopathic back and knee pains to slipped vertebral disks, from diabetes type II to premature births and developmental malformations. Several studies document the increased health problems of Latin American migrant workers (e.g. National Agricultural Workers Survey, Walter et. al., 2002). After the first week of picking, one young female picker said that her body could no longer feel anything ("*ya no siente nada*"), though her knees still hurt sometimes. Another female picker standing nearby said that her knees, back and hips are always ("*siempre*") hurting. Later that afternoon, one of the young men I saw playing basketball the week before the harvest started told me that he and his friends can no longer run since their bodies hurt so much ("*Ya no corremos; no aguantamos*"). In fact, even the vistas I considered sublime and beautiful had come to symbolize toil and pain to the pickers. On multiple occasions, my Triqui companions responded with confusion to my exclamations about the area's beauty and explained that the fields were ugly ("*feos*") and pure work ("*puro trabajo*").

During my fieldwork, several Triqui people experienced notable health problems. Abelino, a Triqui father of four, who lived near me in the labour camp, experienced acute pain in his knee when he turned picking strawberries one day. After continuing work in vain hopes that the pain would go away, he told his field boss about the incident. The boss said simply, “OK”, and quickly drove away without any follow-up. Unsure what to do, Abelino kept picking in great pain. Two days later, work was cancelled abruptly and Abelino and I went to an urgent care clinic. Abelino and I ended up seeing four doctors and a physical therapist, usually without a translator. In the intervening months, he limped around camp, taking care of his kids while his wife picked in the fields.

The urgent care doctor we saw first explained that Abelino should not work, but rest and let his knee recover. The occupational health doctor we saw the following week said Abelino could work but no bending, walking, or prolonged standing. Abelino went to the farm office to ask for lighter work of this sort. The bilingual receptionist told him in a frustrated tone, “*No, porque no* (no, because no)”, and did not let him talk with anyone else. After a few weeks, the occupational health doctor passed Abelino off to a reluctant physiatrist<sup>2</sup> who told Abelino and me that he must work hard picking strawberries in order to make his knee better. Without asking Abelino how he picks, she asked me to translate that he had been picking incorrectly and hurt his knee because he did not know how to bend over correctly. Once Abelino had recovered, this doctor explained to me that Abelino no longer felt pain, not because he got better, but because the picking season was over and he could no longer apply for worker’s compensation. After the picking season ended, Abelino and his family moved closer to relatives in Oregon and he worked making holiday wreathes. Two years later, Abelino still tells me that he has occasional knee pain and that “the doctors don’t know anything (*no saben nada*)”.

Crescencio, another Triqui man living near my shack, asked me one afternoon if I had any headache medicine. He explained that every time a supervisor calls him names on the job, makes fun of him or reprimands him unfairly he gets an excruciating pain in the centre of his head. He told me that the headaches made him more prone to anger with his wife and children. He explained that he wanted to get rid of the problem so that he would not become violent with his family. Crescencio had seen doctors about it in Mexico and the United States as well as a Triqui healer, to no avail. He had tried numerous medicines and other remedies, without relief. The only intervention that made his headache go away was drinking 20 to 24 beers. He had to use this remedy a few times in an average week. I suggested he go into the local migrant clinic to see if they could try a new medicine for his problem. A week later, he told me that he had seen one

of the doctors in the clinic, but that he “didn’t do anything”. When I spoke with the doctor, he presumed that Crescencio had already engaged in intimate partner violence and explained,

“Well, yes, he thinks that he is the victim and thinks that the alcohol or the headache makes him beat his wife...but really he is the perpetrator and everyone else is the victim. And until he owns his problem, he can’t really change... I know a lot about domestic violence, and what we’ve seen is that nothing really works, none of these migraine medicines or anything, but to put people in jail because then they see a show of force. That’s the only thing that works because then they have to own the problem as theirs and they start to change. It’s a classic case of domestic abuse. He came to see me once and I told him to come back two weeks later after not drinking. But he didn’t come back two weeks later. Instead, he came back a month later and saw - not one of our best doctors but an OK doctor - one of our locums. Apparently, he told the doc something about when people at work tell him what to do, it makes him mad and that’s what gives him a headache. ... We referred him to therapy. Do you know if he’s going to therapy?”

Crescencio’s case suggests that much of the self-destructive suffering of Triqui migrants is socially-structured (see Eber, 1995). Once symbolically de-contextualized, this destructive suffering – specifically alcoholism and intimate partner violence – reinforces common stereotypes of Mexican migrants. Prejudice completes the negative feedback loop, helping naturalize and reinforce the proximal social inequalities. In general, structural inequalities – such as living and working conditions organized around ethnicity and citizenship – determine the hierarchy of suffering on the farm. Due to their location at the bottom of the pecking order, the undocumented Triqui migrant workers endure more than their share of injury and sickness. Yet, by and large, the clinicians in the field of migrant health do not see this social context. These physician-patient relationships will be considered further below.

## GRAY ZONES FROM FARM TO CLINIC

During my fieldwork, many of my friends and family blamed the farm management for the living conditions of berry pickers. They assumed that it was the growers’ fault that the pickers live in such poor conditions and that the growers could easily rectify the situation. This supposition is supported indirectly by many writings on farm work, most of which describe the details of pickers’ lives but leave out the perspectives of the growers.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the experiences of farm management are overlooked in these studies inadvertently encourages readers’ presumptions that growers might be wealthy, selfish, unethical, and mean.

Yet, as the ethnographic data above indicates, this segregation is not conscious or willed on the part of the farm owners or managers. Much the opposite; larger structural forces, as well as the anxieties they produce, drive these inequalities. The corporatization of US agriculture and the growth of international free markets squeeze growers such that they cannot imagine increasing the pay of the pickers or improving the labour camps without bankrupting the farm. In this case, structural violence is provoked by market rule and then channelled through international and domestic racism, classism, sexism, and anti-“illegal” immigrant sentiments. By structural violence, I mean the structural processes – primarily exploitative economic relations – that injure bodies (Farmer, 1999, Bourgois, 2001).<sup>4</sup> Engels (1975) explains that the effects of unequal social structures can be “as violent as if [the exploited] had been stabbed or shot”.

The structural nature of the labour hierarchy comes into further relief in light of the values of the growers. The Tanaka Farm executives are ethical, caring people who are involved in local churches and community organizations and work toward a vision of a good society that includes family farming. They want to treat their workers well and leave a legacy for their children and grandchildren. After a picker strike (described further below) during which explicit racist treatment of the pickers in the fields was brought to light, the executives were visibly upset and surprised. They promptly instructed the crop managers to pass on the message to treat all workers with respect. Perhaps instead of blaming the management, it is more appropriate to understand them as human beings trying to lead ethical, comfortable lives, committed to the family farm in the midst of an unequal, harsh system.

At the same time, there are hints of “bad faith” on the farm, characteristic of certain supervisors more than others. The phrase, “bad faith”, comes from Jean Paul Sartre (1956) to describe the ways in which individuals knowingly deceive themselves in order to avoid acknowledging realities disturbing to them. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) builds on this concept to indicate ways in which communities collectively engage in self-deception in the face of disturbing poverty and suffering. This collective bad faith is evident in the Skagit Valley in, among other places, the segregation effected by farm practices like the unofficial exclusion of pickers from English classes. It is further enabled by the layers of bureaucracy and linguistic barriers separating the management from the more explicit mistreatment of the berry pickers.

The farm can also be seen as a sort of “gray zone”, akin to that described by Primo Levi (1988) in the lagers of the Holocaust (see also Bourgois, 2004). The gray zone described by Levi involved such severe conditions that any prisoner seeking her own survival was inherently complicit with a system of violence against



others. While I do not mean to say that the system of US agriculture is in any way as horrific as the Holocaust, Levi himself encourages us to use his analysis to understand everyday situations such as “a big industrial factory” (1988: 40). In the fight for survival within the multi-layered gray zone of contemporary US agriculture, even ethical executives and growers are forced by an increasingly harsh market to participate in a system of labour that perpetuates suffering. This gray zone is also evident in the actions of workers seeking to impress their superiors in order to move up the ranks. Checkers might, for example, cheat pickers out of pounds during the weighing process due to pressure from above.

The area migrant clinic is another gray zone in which the attribution of responsibility for misunderstanding, mistreatment, and suffering is unclear. Physicians and nurses in these clinics work under difficult conditions without access to state of the art technology and are often frustrated by a system with irregular funding, virtually no insurance coverage, and poor continuity of care and medical records. One physician in the Skagit migrant clinic told me, “Most [migrants] don’t have any insurance so that’s even harder ‘cause you start them on a medication and you know they are just going to be off it again wherever they go next”. These clinicians make somewhat less money because they choose to work in this situation. Many of them work here because they are dedicated to caring for underserved populations and most have learned Spanish in order to communicate better with their migrant patients. As a result, Anglo area residents tend to see them as noble and selfless. However, the Triqui people remarked several times that the clinicians “don’t know anything” (*no saben nada*). Knowing first-hand how much studying goes into medical education, this statement surprised me.

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Michel Foucault describes what he calls the “clinical gaze” (1994). Foucault explains that there was a change in clinical medicine around the advent of cadaveric dissection. Whereas physicians used to focus on the words of the patient, the symptoms as expressed by the patient, after the advent of cadaveric dissection, they began to focus on the isolated, diseased organs, treating the patient more and more as an object, a body. As would be expected with this paradigm, the physiatrist and the migrant health doctor described earlier saw the Triqui bodies in their offices, yet were unable to engage the human and social context leading to their suffering. These clinicians, like other medical professionals, were not trained to see the social determinants of health problems. Despite their good intentions, it was not surprising that they would fall into the trap of utilizing a narrow lens that functions to de-contextualize sickness, transporting it from the realm of inequality and power to the realm of the individual, biological body. Medicine, here, functions effectively as an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson, 1990). One consequence is that many of the most proximal determinants of suffering are left unacknowledged, unaddressed, and untreated.

Beyond this biological gaze, physicians in North America today are also taught to see behavioural factors in health – such as lifestyle, diet, habits, and addictions. Behavioural health education has been added as part of a laudable move to broaden medical education within the paradigm of biopsychosocial health first described by George Engel in 1977. However, without being trained to consider the social determinants (e.g. global political economic structures and local prejudices that shape the suffering of their patients), health professionals are equipped to see only biological and behavioural determinants of sickness.

Limited to these two lenses, physicians can see suffering as caused by either biology (e.g. pathophysiological, genetic, anatomic problems) or the patient's behaviour (e.g. "lifestyle risk factors"). Thus, well-meaning clinicians often inadvertently add insult to injury. As seen above, they often blame the suffering on the patient without appreciating the local hierarchies and international policies that place their patients in injurious working conditions in the first place – such as the diagnosis that assumed a knee injury resulted from an incorrect bend while picking or that supposed a headache victim had trouble with authority. Ironically, the progressive move to include behavioural health in medical education without the correlate inclusion of social context may be exactly what leads clinicians to blame, even criminalize, the victims of social suffering (see also Terrio, 2004). Even those health professionals acutely aware of the social determinants of health may resort to biological and behavioural explanations as a defence mechanism against what they experience as a hopeless situation.

Yet, the reality of migrant health is even more complicated and dangerous. The gaze at work in the migrant clinic makes it extremely difficult for even the most idealistic of clinicians to heal effectively. Not only are these physicians unable to recommend appropriate interventions to the social determinants they cannot see, they often prescribe ineffective treatments with unintended harmful results. The recommendations given to Abelino and Crescencio – to return directly to work and to seek therapy and perhaps become more accepting of supervisors' (cruel) treatment – shore up the unequal social formations causing sickness in the first place. Akin to the tranquilizers given to treat the starvation of shantytown dwellers in northeast Brazil as described by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992), these treatments unintentionally depoliticize suffering, thereby buttressing the very structures of oppression. Thus, the violence enacted by social hierarchies extends from the farm to the migrant clinic and back again, despite the impressive values and intentions of those in both institutions. The farm and the clinic make up gray zones in which difficult economic survival and narrow perceptual lenses coerce ethical farm executives and idealistic clinicians into complicity with structural violence.

The relationship between undocumented Mexicans and the migrant clinic is further convoluted by the clinic's own affiliation with the US government via funding and regulations. This affiliation foments intermittent rumours and fear among Triqui workers that the Border Patrol will raid the clinic.

## SILENCE AND RESISTANCE

Throughout my fieldwork, I was surprised by how little my Triqui companions explicitly questioned the many social inequalities they experienced. There were only a handful of times over the course of fifteen months when someone verbally questioned their social position. As might be expected, most of the undocumented migrants with whom I worked avoided confronting their employers due to their fear of being turned in to the Border Patrol. More surprising, however, was the fact that my Triqui companions rarely questioned the social structure in private. Of course, there are many common ways in which pickers work the system from within its constraints using subtle "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1986), such as eating berries as they work and allowing some green berries and leaves into each bucket.

Most of the overt interrogation of social inequality occurred late in the harvest season when the berries had become sparse and small. At this time, the farm management announced an immediate decrease in rate of pay per unit of berries. That same day, three people were fired for bringing in less than the required minimum daily weight in berries. Dozens of workers began high-pitched whistling in protest until the vast majority walked off the field in a spontaneous strike.

The pickers, with help from a local non-profit organization, put together a document with 24 complaints that they demanded be addressed by the farm. Through a series of negotiations over the course of a week, the pickers were able to raise awareness of their primary concerns, including low rate of pay, biased job promotion for relatives of supervisors, and racist name-calling on the job. They demanded that the farm executives sign the document of complaints as a formal contract to fix the problems. In the meetings, the farm executives were genuinely moved to learn of the hardships of their workers, expressing surprise, sadness, and resolve. They instructed their managers and supervisors to treat the workers with respect and to promote people more fairly based on employment tenure. They also raised the rate of pay by a few cents a pound (only to lower it again at the beginning of the next harvest season). John Tanaka signed the document of complaints and it was filed as a "memo" instead of a contract. During the following summer harvest, it was difficult for me to discern any lasting changes.

During a discussion among several Triqui pickers regarding the outcomes of the strike, I asked why they were not continuing to organize alongside a larger union. One older man explained that they do not trust labour organizers, who are US Latinos and come in from the cities. He explained that he had heard that these organizers do not represent Triqui pickers, but just want their money. The others agreed. One of the other men suggested that they might have another spontaneous strike in a future year if conditions became intolerable again. Thomas (1985) explains that labour solidarity is especially difficult in agriculture due to the distinct, and sometimes contrary, interests of groups with different citizenship statuses.

### NATURALIZATION AND INTERNALIZATION

How have these inequalities become routinely unquestioned and unchallenged, even by those most oppressed? Pierre Bourdieu's conception of symbolic violence proves useful here.<sup>5</sup> Symbolic violence is the naturalization, including internalization, of social asymmetries. He explains that we perceive the social world through lenses ("schemata of perception") issued forth from that very social world; thus we recognize (or "misrecognize") the social order as natural. The inequalities comprising the social world are thus made invisible, taken-for-granted, and normal for all involved (Bourdieu 1997, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).<sup>6</sup> When I asked a local mestiza Mexican social worker why Triqui people have only berry picking jobs, she explained that, "*A los Oaxaqueños les gusta trabajar agachado* (Oaxacans like to work bent over)", whereas, she told me, mestizo Mexicans, whom she called simply *Mexicanos*, get too many pains if they work in the fields.

Later, I asked the farm's apple crop manager why I had not seen any Triqui people harvesting apples, the field job with the highest pay. He explained:

"The O'xacans are too short to reach the apples, they're too slow. ... Well, they have to use ladders a lot more than some of the other guys. The other guys just use the ladders to pick the very top of the tree, where the O'xacans are having to, you know, halfway. ... And, besides, they don't like ladders, anyway".

He continued that Triquis are perfect for picking berries because "they're lower to the ground". I followed with a question about the health effects of pesticides. He explained:

"Well, I mean, the laws are so tight that there's no way anybody should be able to get sick from pesticides. ... I mean, there are the few people out there that are a lot more sensitive, and they show it once in a while. It's not that we did anything wrong, or a neighbour did anything wrong, it's—they're just a lot more sensitive and you're always going to find those people".

The social worker and apple manager's responses represent common perceptions of bodily difference along ethnic lines. These perceptions serve as the lenses through which symbolic violence is enacted such that each category of body is understood to *deserve* its relative social position. Because of their natural characteristics, indigenous Oaxacan bodies *belong* picking berries as opposed to other jobs. On the other hand, mestizo Mexicans have bodies that do not fit in the picker category and belong in other positions. Furthermore, individual bodily differences serve to transpose any blame for the harmful effects of pesticides from the actions of the farm management to the bodily sensitivities of specific pickers. At the same time that symbolic violence is enacted from without in these ways, Bourdieu's symbolic violence inheres a nuanced sense of internalization and complicity of the dominated. One does not perceive only others, but also oneself, as belonging in particular social locations.

During my second day picking, a tractor with long metal poles spraying something in the air drove through the field while we picked. I asked a supervisor what it was. "Do you really want to know? You sure you want the truth?" I answered, "Yes". "Dangerous insecticides", he said, shaking his head slightly. I later noted danger signs posted on several large canisters surrounding one of the hand washing and outhouse stations at the entrance to the field. Strawberry pickers worked everyday without gloves as the visible pesticide residues dissolved in the mixture of strawberry juice and morning dew that stained their naked hands dark maroon day after day. If they ate anything, they ate in the fields, while picking, without washing their hands to save time and make the minimum. Additionally, our only pesticide education came from a short cassette tape in monotone Spanish played inaudibly in one corner of a huge warehouse full of more than 100 workers and their children during one of the picker "orientations" at the beginning of the season.

The same week as the spraying described above, I received a video I had ordered from the United Farm Workers about the health-related dangers of pesticides. Several Triqui pickers watched it with me. Afterward, one told me matter-of-factly, "Pesticides affect only white Americans (*gabachos*) because your bodies are delicate and weak". Another confirmed, "Triquis are strong and hold out (*aguantamos*)". Here, Triqui people internalize their social position through a form of ethnic pride in perceived bodily differences. This pride helps them endure difficult working conditions, but also ironically aids in the naturalization and reproduction of the structures of their exploitation. Heyman (2001), drawing on Herrera-Sobek (1993), points out that Mexican migrants are "brave and persistent in delivering cheap labour to employers" in the midst of significant hardships at the border and beyond. Triqui pride at being strong and tough, often expressed in relation to many situations from pesticide exposure to border crossings, supports such double-edged bravery and persistence.

In addition, perceptions of bodies are entangled in the imputation of humanity itself. The interpretations of class and body position offered by Strauss and, later, Scheper-Hughes prove especially helpful (1966; 1992). The dual meaning of the word, “position”, as both a post of employment and a stance of the body hints at one phenomenon. Occupations performed seated behind a desk are symbolically linked to the mind, such that they are most prestigious in societies that subjugate body to mind. Jobs executed standing or walking are seen as more physical, less intellectual, and less esteemed. At the same time, these standing bodies are understood to be human. This basic respect is seen in the phrases “upstanding citizen”, “upright character”, and “standing up for oneself”. The jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy that require bodies to kneel in the dirt or bend over in the bushes are the least respected. These body positions are understood implicitly to be appropriate only for morally questionable characters (see also Brandes, 1980) or subhumans. Like animals, these workers are seen “on all fours”.

This general analysis applies well to the Skagit where those with the most power hold desk jobs, mid-level supervisors stand and walk, and the pickers – bent over all day – are derided as *perros* and *burros*. Mateo was the only indigenous Oaxacan on the farm who had been promoted to a supervisor position. He is a twenty nine year old Mixteco US resident from a relatively well-off family who has been able to study English at a local community college after work. He hopes to continue studying English and being promoted on the farm until he can “work with his mind instead of his body”. He explained the superiority of intellectual jobs over bodily occupations, “The body will not always work (*no siempre va a dar*), and I think it will tire (*cansar*). Your mind might tire after years, but not like the body, not to the point of giving you a sickness (*no tanto com para darte una enfermedad*)”.

Over the course of my fieldwork on the farm, pickers were treated as subhumans on several memorable occasions. During one of the common Pacific Northwest rainstorms, several Triqui women waited outside the farm office to ask a question about their pay checks. They huddled together under the overhang of the roof in the mud, one of them holding a baby in her arms. When one of the farm managers arrived, she said in English, “What are you doing in my flowers? Shoo! Shoo! Git! Git!” [waving her hands as if to scare away an unwanted pack of dogs]. In essence, the migrant body is made to betray itself. Specifically, due to perceptions of ethnic difference and body position in labour, the migrant body is seen as belonging in its position in the very agricultural labour hierarchy that then leads to its injury and deterioration. These mechanisms of rendering inequality invisible are activated via internalization into ethnic conceptions of pride. The structural violence inherent to segregated labour on the farm is so effectively erased precisely because its disappearance takes place at the level of the body, and is thus understood to be *natural*.

## CONCLUSION

Attention to what is hidden in US agriculture reveals the segregation of labouring bodies by perceived ethnicity and legality into a hierarchy that, in turn, produces correlated suffering. Such inequalities are effectively naturalized through the symbolic violence enacted by discrepant hiddenness of bodies, perceived bodily differences, ethnic concepts of pride, and imputed humanity based on body position. In addition, migrant health professionals do not see the ethnicity-citizenship-labour hierarchy nor its determination of sickness through their clinical gaze. Instead, they routinely and inadvertently blame patients for their suffering, recommending ineffective and even unhealthy interventions. Meanwhile, the structural nature of these inequalities is illuminated by the fact that idealistic and ethical farm managers and clinicians operate within a gray zone that neutralizes and even reverses their efforts at moral action. In sum, structural and symbolic violence conspire to shore up formations of discrimination, segregation, suffering, and blame.

If social scientists are to work toward positive social change, we must join with others in a broad effort to denaturalize social inequalities, uncovering linkages between symbolic violence and suffering. In this way, we can contribute to the revolution of the social and symbolic conditions producing the very lenses through which symbolic violence is performed. Only thus will these schemata of perception as well as the social inequalities they shore up be perceived as something that can be transformed. Yet, an academic critique of the social order can take us only so far and may lose touch with the lived reality it purports to analyze.

“Pragmatic solidarity” is a phrase used by Paul Farmer (1999) to encourage us to join the struggles of oppressed people instead of working solely as disconnected “experts”. The academic project of denaturalizing social inequities must be accompanied by efforts at all levels of a micro- to macro-continuum: from including pickers in farm English classes to including the social determinants of health in medical education (Holmes, 2006); from buying the products of farms that treat workers fairly (e.g. [http://www.ufw.org/\\_page.php?menu=organizing&inc=orga\\_label.html](http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=organizing&inc=orga_label.html)) to the lobbying of governments to change unrealistic and violent immigration policies, from programmes working for cross-cultural understanding (e.g. *The Bellingham Herald* 2005, <http://www.borderlinks.org>) to activist work for a more equitable international market such that people would not be forced to leave their homes to migrate in the first place. The US government and US society gain much from migrant labourers and give little back beyond criminalization, stress, suffering, and death (see Burawoy, 1976, Rothenberg, 1998, *Arizona Daily Star*, 2005). This dishonest relationship must change.

Mexican migration to the United States continues to be in the political spotlight at the time of this writing (Migration News, 2007), with the newly elected Democratic US congress preparing to debate potential changes to and enactment of immigration bills passed in 2006. President George W. Bush is calling for comprehensive immigration reform, including a poorly defined temporary

worker programme. Ironically, the US policy of increasingly “closing” the border means that my undocumented companions are more and more likely to settle in the United States instead of continuing on their yearly migration circuit with Oaxaca as home base. The plan to add 700 miles of border fencing should be questioned about its likely practical effects instead of being constructed to afford strategic political cache for its supporters.

While policy change is critically necessary, any proposal that does not address the primary political and economic determinants of migration will fail. Amelioration of the social suffering inherent to undocumented labour migration requires careful consideration and confrontation of historical, political, economic, and symbolic factors producing and reproducing this phenomenon. The further deregulation of international and domestic trade – such as the recent United States-Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (Ramazzini, 2005) – should be questioned critically for its potential effects on the ability of marginalized people to survive financially in their home communities. Proposals for the labelling of products according to the labour conditions under which they were made, such as those from the Domestic Fair Trade Working Group (2005) should be considered seriously.

The Triqui people I know have told me multiple times that they want to keep their homes in Oaxaca and work in the United States one season a year. Because global political and economic change is slow to achieve, they most often focus on the benefits to legalizing a system of migrant labour. My Triqui companions support a fair temporary worker system that does not increase the power differential between employers and employees, as many fear the George W. Bush administration’s plan would do. The poorly-outlined Bush proposal appears to link permission to be in the United States with one employment contract, thus giving that employer the indirect de facto power to deport migrants by firing them (Migration News, 2005). The inability to change employers is dangerous to the health and well-being of workers and is reminiscent of one of the primary characteristics of the recent convictions on charges of slavery in South Florida (Bowe, 2003). A fair programme would allow employee mobility when labour contracts are unfair, unfulfilled, or simply undesirable.

Late in my fieldwork, Samuel summarized the unequal international relationship over a homemade tamale dinner in his family’s labour camp shack, “We dedicate everything to the fields, we are field workers. We are workers; ever since we were born we are planting. ... Poor people from Oaxaca come here, and I don’t know... we come here to give away our strength and everything and they don’t do anything for us. ... Because of our will this government survives”. More recently, in the summer of 2007, many of the Triqui people I know are impressed with the major labor camp renovations being undertaken by the Tanaka Farm.



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## NOTES

- 1 I utilize vertical metaphors here because employees on the Tanaka Farm use such spatial metaphors to describe the labour hierarchy, as will be seen below.
- 2 Physician specializing in the field of physical and rehabilitation medicine.
- 3 Rothenberg's *With These Hands* is a notable exception, including a thick ethnographic description of growers in addition to pickers (1998).
- 4 Wacquant (2004) points out the analytical pitfalls of overly generalized, nonspecific use of the term "structural violence". Instead of doing away with the phrase completely, I focus this term on the effects of economic structures on bodies and leave the effects of other asymmetries to other analytical concepts.
- 5 The concept of symbolic violence is especially helpful here, given its emphasis on naturalization at the level of perceptions and its recognition that perceptual lenses are determined by social structures. Other concepts in the study of the reproduction of social asymmetries, most notably ideology, suggest normalization at a more cognitive level and inhere a more unidirectional genesis from one social class.
- 6 Please note the difference between "structural violence" – the ways in which social inequalities, primarily exploitative economic relations, injure bodies – and "symbolic violence" – the naturalization of social inequalities through a misrecognition of the social order, and its inequalities, as normal or natural. Thus, symbolic violence often works to hide, and therefore allow the continuance of, structural violence and its harmful consequences. The potentially confusing juxtaposition of these terms serves to remind us of the "violence continuum" (2003), in which different types of violence interrelate and produce one other.

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« LES MEXICAINS D'OAXACA AIMENT TRAVAILLER COURBÉS » :  
LA SOUFFRANCE SOCIALE TRANSFORMÉE EN UNE CONDITION  
NATURELLE CHEZ LES TRAVAILLEURS D'UNE EXPLOITATION  
FRUITICOLE SPÉCIALISÉE DANS LES BAIES

Cet article met à profit plus de 15 mois de travail à plein temps sur le terrain, passé en tant que participant et observateur avec des ouvriers agricoles migrants triquis de l'État mexicain d'Oaxaca à analyser la souffrance sociale et la violence symbolique dans une exploitation fruiticole de l'État de Washington. Dans les grandes lignes, cet article étudie les hiérarchies en termes d'appartenance ethnique, de nationalité et de souffrances dans l'industrie agricole américaine ainsi que les processus par lesquels ces inégalités sont transformées en une condition normale et naturelle. L'article débute par une description ethnographique de la structure de la main-d'œuvre dans l'exploitation, notamment de la ségrégation qui y est manifestement opérée sur la base de l'appartenance ethnique et nationale. L'auteur soutient que ces hiérarchies sont source de souffrance et de maladie. L'ethnographie met en lumière le fait que cette hiérarchie de la souffrance n'est ni volontaire, ni planifiée par les dirigeants de l'exploitation, eux-mêmes préoccupés par la survie de l'exploitation familiale. Cette souffrance est plutôt l'expression d'une forme structurelle de violence. En l'occurrence, la violence structurelle est induite par la loi du marché international, puis véhiculée par le racisme, la discrimination sociale, le sexisme et l'animosité envers les immigrants « illégaux ». En outre, les médecins et le personnel soignant de la clinique locale qui reçoit les migrants ne sont généralement pas réceptifs aux déterminants sociaux de la souffrance. L'ironie de la chose, c'est que le modèle biopsychosocial contemporain de la maladie a subi un tel déséquilibre que les professionnels de la santé des migrants recourent à des conceptions de la santé behavioristes pour rendre les patients responsables de leurs propres souffrances. Les hiérarchies décrites ci-dessus ne sont que très rarement considérées comme un problème par les groupes humains présents au sein de l'exploitation, même par ceux qui sont le plus opprimés. L'article, qui s'inspire de la théorie de la violence symbolique de Pierre Bourdieu, soutient que la perception des différences corporelles – qui se fonde notamment sur les concepts ethniques de la fierté et la signification symbolique de la position corporelle lors de l'accomplissement de tâches physiques – fait que ces structures finissent par être perçues comme étant naturelles. Le fait que cette asymétrie sociale soit considérée comme acquise contribue à sa justification et à sa perpétuation. L'article se termine par une discussion sur les implications de cette recherche dans les domaines académique, politique et clinique.

“A LOS HABITANTES DE OAXACA  
LES GUSTA TRABAJAR AGACHADOS”:  
LA NATURALIZACIÓN DEL SUFRIMIENTO SOCIAL  
ENTRE LOS TRABAJADORES DE UNA FINCA DEDICADA AL CULTIVO  
DE FRUTOS DEL BOSQUE

Este artículo utiliza el trabajo de campo de más de 15 meses de observación a tiempo completo de trabajadores migrantes triquis indocumentados, del estado mexicano de Oaxaca, para analizar el sufrimiento social y la violencia simbólica en una explotación de frutos del bosque del estado de Washington. En términos generales, el artículo explora las jerarquías étnicas, de nacionalidad y de sufrimiento en el sector agrícola estadounidense, así como los procesos por los que estas desigualdades se normalizan y naturalizan. El artículo comienza con una descripción etnográfica de la estructura laboral de la granja, incluida la evidente segregación por razones étnicas y de nacionalidad. Estas jerarquías, se argumenta, producen sufrimiento y enfermedades. La etnografía arroja luz sobre el hecho de que esta jerarquía del sufrimiento no es voluntaria ni ha sido planificada por los ejecutivos de la granja que, por su parte, están preocupados por la supervivencia de la granja familiar. El sufrimiento obedece más a bien a una forma estructural de violencia. En este caso, la violencia estructural viene impuesta por las reglas del mercado internacional y se canaliza a través del racismo, el clasismo, el sexismo y los sentimientos de rechazo hacia los inmigrantes “ilegales”. Además, los médicos y enfermeras de los ambulatorios que atienden a los migrantes no suelen entender los determinantes sociales del sufrimiento. Irónicamente, el modelo biosicosocial contemporáneo de la enfermedad está tan desequilibrado que los profesionales de la salud que atienden a los migrantes utilizan concepciones de salud comportamental para culpabilizar a los pacientes por su propio sufrimiento. Las jerarquías descritas anteriormente raramente son consideradas un problema por ningún grupo de personas en la granja, ni siquiera por los más oprimidos. A partir de la teoría de Pierre Bourdieu de la violencia simbólica, el artículo argumenta que estas estructuras acaban por naturalizarse dadas las diferencias corporales perceptibles, entre las que se incluyen los conceptos étnicos del orgullo y los significados simbólicos de las posiciones corporales cuando se realiza un trabajo físico. Que esta asimetría social se dé por hecha contribuye a su justificación y reproducción. El artículo acaba con un debate sobre las implicaciones de esta investigación en los ámbitos académicos, políticos y clínicos.