**Precarious Hospitality: Temporary Migrant Workers in Canada’s Tourism and Service Economy.**

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Body Rights: Systems and Social Movements

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**Introduction.**

Rosa wakes up at 5:00 am on the floor mattress in a small apartment where she shares her space with 5 other women. She works for 12 hours every day at a hotel located in the downtown hotel; her job is to scrub toilets, flip mattresses, and wipe down mirrors in rooms. She has been working for almost three years now with this hotel and hasn’t seen her family and kids since then. She works for an employer at that hotel where her Canadian work permit is tied to, and so is her temporary status. Due to this, she is unable to express her feelings about being treated unfairly. Over the period of time, she manages to hide all the expressions, both mentally and physically. In this sector, she knows her body is very useful as long as she is worth working for the employer. There are many other stories unlike hers; she is not an exception. Thus, the situation within Canadian tourism reveals the fundamental framework that controls both the hospitality industry and the tourism sector.   
  
In this paper, I explicitly argue that the Canadian tourism and hospitality industry highly depends on the racialized, gendered migrant workers. Under the means of temporary employment, their body is being commodified, surveilled, and exploited at every means possible. The workers, mainly from the region of the global south, especially women, are brought into Canada under very restrictive immigration programs where they can’t exercise their rights or even basic protection and have economic precarity (Fudge & MacPhail, 2009; Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011). The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) came into existence to minimize the problem within the labor market, but it has come up with a structure that legalizes inequality and sustains racialized division of workers in low-wage, high-demand sectors like tourism (Mirchandani & Bromfield, 2021; Foster, 2014).  
  
 Drawing on Judith Butler’s theory of performative embodiment and body politics, the studies also consider how the migrant worker bodies are being regulated and dehumanized, not looking at them as people who do have rights, but as living, laboring machines (Butler, 1993). The framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) talks about how race, gender, class, and immigration status all combine to contribute to the vulnerabilities of this labor. All these intersecting forces are embedded in the institutional logic of Canada’s migrant labor regime and reflected in hiring practices, legal frameworks, and industry norms (Kolbe, 2023; Perry, 2021).  
  
 After disclosing the theoretical grounding in body rights and intersectionality, I further explore the lived experience of the migrant workers in Canada’s hospitality sector and other areas like legal, economic, and social that sustain their precarity. To look in depth into Canadian practices, I have compared them with other developed countries like Qatar’s World Cup labor force to illustrate how hospitality platforms use algorithmic management to increase employee oversight (Riordan, 2024), and the pain from separation from their families is nothing more than added trauma and vulnerability in their lives (Perry, 2021). Finally arguing on worker resistance, community support, and **policy reform,** which helps to reframe the rules regarding labor in Canadian hospitality.  
  
 At the end, Canada is the reputed country that welcomes people from all over the world but stands in contrast to this very invisible suffering of workers who largely maintain its public image. To give the best of hospitality service to tourists while they neglect the fair treatment of those who serve them is not only a contradiction but also a systemic failure.

**The Body as a Site of Labour and Control**

            The hospitality and tourism sector in Canada Not only is the body treated as a laborer, but also it is being closely watched, managed, and regulated to extract the best way possible. It is one of the high-demand physical jobs, like lifting, scrubbing, or standing for long hours, but they also have to do it with a smile, hiding their expression, and without disruption, requiring them to deliver the service with the best attitude. Immigrant workers in this sector are rendered useful in transaction of their productivity. They’ll only entertain the immigrants as long as they are in full service.   
  
 Judith Butler’s (1993) theory of embodiment has illustrated a powerful view with regard to how we understand exploitation. In Bodies That Matter, Butler talks to us about the bodies that are biological facts, socially constructed, and a politically regulated system. When this application is applied to the hospitality worker, we can confidently say that their bodies are treated just like living instruments where they have been racialized, gendered, and classified as objects with the sole expectation of some state actors and employers. And in Foster, 2014, and Mirchandani & Bromfield, 2021, they give out the important noticeable example about the racialized feminization of caregiving and hospitality labor: they have been employed in some roles like housekeeping or front desk work because their body is presumably passive, compliant, and docile. These are not just accidentally employed; they are expected to consume toxic behavior from their employer, emotional exhaustion, and overwork without raising their voice of concern.   
  
 Additionally, Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), which is one of the most renounced programs among migrant workers, has found itself in some kind of limitation where they cannot work for any other employer except one (Fudge & MacPhail, 2009). This does give a tremendous amount of control to one single employer, where they control every aspect of their lives; it creates a dependency on one person. And this dependency keeps the workers bodies in check at all times, i.e., in motion, in service, and in silence. The fear of deportation ensures their compliance with hard work, even when the work is unsafe, exploitative, or abusive (Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011). And also, as Puar (2017) says in her book "The Right to Maim," in today's capitalism the bodies in service are in between states. They are not fully discarded, nor are they really cared for. These immigrant workers are one of the best examples to portray. They work in the presence of people and serve them with a smile, but when they want to execute their rights at work and express their feelings, they've been largely ignored. As mentioned before, they are valued on the occasion of their hard work and as long as they meet the expectations of employers. By any chance or otherwise, if they are hurt, tired, or get pregnant, employers are quick to respond to find their replacement.

            Coming across the digital era, the control over the movement of bodies has been stronger than ever before. In hospitality, in restaurants, in delivery services, and even in cleaning jobs, everything is managed by this online app where they can schedule software programs to check your work progress and their body movements (Riordan, 2024). The new era of the digital economy in the hospitality sector keeps a detailed check on their act, feeling, and productivity process. You're obliged to sound good, happy, and polite and behave in a certain way in everyday life. If the system shows a discrepancy in workers behavior, like not performing well enough, then they might even be on the verge of losing their job without any further explanation.  
  
 There is another problem that has caught attention and affects the migrant workers: their bodies are feeling lonely and stressed. Preibisch and Hennebry (2011) show the living conditions of workers in a small, tiny space with loads of people on a sharing basis, not much space to move, and also being separated from their families, causing their mental and physical state to be in crisis. This reminds us of Butler's idea where the bodies are connected with social constructs and are affected by government policies. They are not just alone; they are part of a larger system where they have been controlled, tied to one employer, and basic rights are ignored. Also, Crenshaw (1991), in "Intersectionality," pointed out women of color face multiple types of unfairnesses that converge into racist and sexist as well as class-related and immigration-related discrimination. For instance, a Filipino hotel cleaner, a Jamaican person cleaning rooms, and a Bangladeshi cook are just considered workers. But they are far beyond those who have faced events like colonization, unfair global trade, and family responsibilities. Combining these experiences, they're seen and treated differently in Canada's labor market.

 To deny this worker a basic protection from the job they do, unlike others, basically portrays that the governing organization makes this kind of physical suffering quite normal. For instance, the physical ache like their hands get rough and cracked, and they feel sickness due to stress. All kinds of body rights are ignored so that capitalism can run smoothly and efficiently. However, as Butler talks about, the people's bodies aren't just passive. Working and leading worker organizing and monetary support to family members maintains a physical resistance against exploitative labor practices. Often see this support evolve quite slowly, but indeed a brave action towards supporting migrants is taking legal action, trying to form unions, creating support groups, and sharing their stories publicly. This definitely conveys the deep message to all of us that the boss is not invisible, and the well-being of migrant workers is as important as local workers.

**Racial stratum and Labour Segmentation in Canadian Hospitality**

The way it's organized in the Canadian hospitality and tourism sector isn't by efficiency or merit. Rather depends on race, gender, and whether someone is a migrant. Jobs are divided as per race and status in the country instead of focusing on who is skillful. That's where migrant workers kick in, especially women of color from poorer countries, in the hardest, least seen, and low-paying jobs. All intended; as Foster (2014) argues, Canada treated their migrant workers as just temporary helpers, accepted when most needed and discarded if not needed, nowhere to be seen as fully belonging. Till today it is quite noticeable when you visit or stay at some places like housekeeping and/or in the kitchen that is where the largest number of migrants are concentrated but not valued as others.

This labor segmentation operates through systemic stratification. Mirchandani and Bromfield (2021) show how racial bias is embedded within Ontario’s employment enforcement mechanisms, often disguised behind a “color-blind” policy lens. In practice, this means that while all workers are nominally treated the same, regulatory agencies fail to address how race and immigration status compound vulnerability. This oversight results in what they term “regulatory stratification,” where the most precarious workers are left out of protections altogether. The segmentation of jobs and enforcement of low mobility for migrant workers reinforces their racialized positioning as “always temporary,” a theme further explored by Alberti and Danaj (2017) in their analysis of agency work in British hospitality. Even when migrants possess high qualifications, their placement in low-wage, low-mobility roles is persistent and normalized, particularly in service roles deemed “fit” for non-white, immigrant workers.

The experience of a temporary worker can't be measured only from the lens of economics. Crenshaw’s (1991) intersectionality reminds us it’s a mixture of all like race, gender, whether they are immigrants, and/or any social class combined that generates the unfair behavior towards them; the sole reason to understand the entirety is not just it. For instance, in the Canadian hospitality industry, the Filipino race is quite noticeable in cleaning and as a room attendant. They are not hired because of their skillfulness; they've been hired due to their gender and race, assuming they are quite clean and obedient (Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011). Though the hiring process is not completely done on the basis of that idea, it leads to an unwelcoming workload for too little payment. Even with too little wages, they don't complain and handle their work stress-free. They are there for work with a smile expected, not to express their feelings, what they feel, or how they are getting treated.

This process creates economic and psychological as well as social impacts that accumulate over time. Perry (2021) talks about the state of migrant workers; though they work hard and invest time, they still find themselves alone and not able to build families or own homes, nor do they truly feel like they belong in the community. It has become harder to get a permanent residency nowadays, even after investing years of work towards it, which makes migrant workers in a state of uncertainty. Not just employer behavior contributes, but it also comes from larger laws and the economy, where they treat those workers as replaceable at any time. As Kammer-Kerwick et al. (2023) say, when these migrant workers are being mistreated, they expect the system to help them; however, they often don't get their cultural backgrounds or the different challenges they've been facing when trying to convey their real-life problems or seek justice.

Not by any means saying that they don't fight for their rights; Foster (2014) talks about the support system like unions, legal aid groups, and organizations for migrant workers, which they are constantly trying to change this unfair system. Change will take time and is happening slowly. But this constant effort to bring a change in the community of migrant workers where everyone is treated fairly and equally with respect. Canada is a diverse country and is proud of its diversity and inclusivity, though it comes with challenges in the job market, where they manage to keep people excluded. It is not random that you are noticed, get promoted, and get protected in hotels & in restaurants. The industry will continue using concealed forms of exploitation through service language as long as it fails to address and eliminate the racial organizing principles that guide its workforce.

**Comparative International Models on a Global Context**

Unlike Canada, there are countries around the world that take advantage of this migrant worker. In comparison to others like the United Kingdom and Qatar, we come across how government rules, unfair systems, and global business practices all come together to bring fear among migrant workers. Not only can we see the unfair practices in Canada, but also ways that Canada could improve their policy.

In the UK, hotels and restaurants are dependent on migrant workers who have been hired through third-party agencies, usually from Eastern European countries. Alberti and Danaj (2017) explain that if companies hire workers through agencies, in this case they are not directly liable for the migrant workers, and finding a way not to abide by the UK's worker protection laws makes the migrant workers confused about who they actually report to, paid little, with no union protection, and with unstable work agreements, which is close to the situation occurring in Canada as well in the hospitality settings where the workers can only work for one employer and can't explore options if they are mistreated or fired (Fudge & MacPhail, 2009). If carefully monitored, both counter countries hire people whenever they want, exploit them, and discard them, keeping them in a constant temporary and lower-status position.

Qatar is another example, which is much more severe. Before the 2022 World Cup, the people had seen how the hospitality and construction workers got treated. The system in Qatar is used as Kafala (sponsorship), where all the workers are tied up with one owner who has all the power to keep their status legal, whether they want to change or leave the country. Babar and Vora (2022) argue that Qatar being an authoritarian country is part of the system called "racial capitalism," where the people are ranked and valued according to race, nationality, and how rich or poor they are. So the people from the global south are being watched closely, paid low wages, and working in harsh conditions. while all being denied the right to form unions or quit abusive jobs

In Canada, the government might not be following Qatar's Kafala. However, the Canadian system does work in a similar way to the kafala system, with visas tied to one and only one employer, which makes the migrant worker's life harder to change the job they want to, and they often find it very difficult to find a way to get permanent residency in the country. As Fudge and MacPhail (2009) explain, Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) makes migrants vulnerable, especially those who are not that skillful in their job. Similarly, Qataris, they treat people as they please, but when it comes to their rights, they've been disregarded accordingly.

In countries like the UK, Qatar, and Canada, in the hotel and restaurant industry, colored women are often pushed away to the least visible, lowest-paying, and most unsafe jobs. Babar and Vora (2022) show that in Qatar, worker protection laws were not covered for the employee working for homes and hotels, who was left to face exploitation. Mirchandani and Bromfield (2021) show that the women migrant workforce in Canada from places like the Philippines, Latin America, and the Caribbean get treated unfairly just because of their race, gender, and immigration status, as mentioned earlier, all combined, leading to the unfavorable condition with no way to raise their concerns or complaints to get the necessary attention.

Judith Butler's (1993) ideas help us to understand this problem around the world with regard to the bodies, so workers bodies are valuable only when they perform the task they are allotted. These can be visible through tracking their physical information (Qatar) or computer programs for monitoring (UK), or those who want to remain permanently in Canada tied to the employer are being closely watched and controlled; it seems less like a fully human being.

There is, of course, a hope in Canadian jurisdiction, where they can make things better for these migrant workers. Unlike Qatar or the UK, there are unions and advocates who vouch for and support migrant workers (Foster, 2014), though it is slow. Kolbe (2023) points out that problems still exist because of racism and unfair systems, which make migrant workers become a part of our society. Canada portrays itself as a multicultural country; however, on the ground, the reality seems too far. Riordan (2024) criticizes Canadian tech companies for maintaining unfair work practices through language that promotes diversity.

Overall, the comparison between two countries, the UK and Qatar, will see a similar pattern that cannot be ignored: migrant workers in the hospitality sector are the backbone yet are disposable. The systematic system developed over the period of time like Kafala in Qatar, agency labor in the UK, and the TFWP in Canada, resulting in racialized control, precarity, and invisibility. If Canada wants to lead with an example on the global stage, then it should lead in equity and justice by reframing labor and immigration law, for instance, on employer-tied permits and genuine pathways to permanent residency.

**Migrant Life Beyond the Workplace**

Migrant workers are not just bodies; they are like us who have jobs. Some are parents, families, partners, spouses, and individuals with real feelings. However, the rules for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) make this feeling unreal and make us think about who they really are. The loneliness that workers feel when they aren't at work is not by default; it's a systematic, desired error to get as much as possible from the migrant workers while making sure you're not socially accepted in the social structure.

Migrant families in Perry (2021) explains when workers are invited to work in Canada, they often, without realizing it, break families apart. The best example is women migrant workers who come to Canada and work for a number of years, leaving their kids and partners in their home countries. Workers are always in a dilemma of whether they'll ever settle in Canada with their families or not. These work regulations dismiss emotional attachments at the workplace by prioritizing production output above employee happiness. The experience of being separated from their families causes migrant workers to experience deep loneliness together with feelings of guilt and extreme anxiety. There is a huge emotional price to pay when they aren't with their loved ones, which the policymaker often forgets while drafting rules.  
  
 Separation from the families isn't easy on bodies; it hurts physically and mentally. Preibisch and Hennebry (2011) found that in Canada's hospitality & restaurant industry and care homes, people go through tremendous amounts of depression, fatigue, and stress more likely when the employer provides them with staff housing or in more isolated, rural areas. Migrant workers have to deal with difficult experiences and burnout on their own due to the pain and no support from friends or family. Also, when depressed, access to mental health is far beyond reach where someone can understand one's home culture. There is always a label being put on migrant workers as having strong personalities, but on the ground, they are really in fear of expressing their feelings of being deported due to no jobs or sponsors or facing punishment if they complain.

Also, the major contributors to the ongoing issue are race, gender, and whether someone is an immigrant. As Mirchandani and Bromfield (2021) point out, migrant women workers are more likely to face harassment at work and be denied any access to appeal. Yet they don't consider any programs that are meant to help workers. Immigrants struggle to seek help because they lack language proficiency and do not trust official institutions & support services, which fail to communicate effectively with their cultural background. Butler's (1993) certain idea that things are only valuable if they fit bodies and their problems. Migrant workers contribution towards the country's economy is quite noticeable, but they go unrecognized because their contribution does not align with the common narrative about productivity.  
  
            Kolbe (2023) stresses that the health of a migrant worker, both emotionally and mentally, is compromised and isn't just by accident; it's built into the Immigrant Labor Law. Laborers who come from abroad as temporary workers are just seen as a replaceable commodity, unlike others with real social lives. These rules had applied and led for such a long time that now they're considered normal to the migrants and their families. Separated from loved ones, feeling disconnected from their culture, and constantly worrying about their future is the long-term harm. It might not be exactly a physical harm at work, but it's emotionally damaging.

Even after the difficulties they face elsewhere, they continue to work. Migrant workers do come forward and form small communities, where they meet, greet, and exchange emotional connections and find ways to get their rights back. Perry (2021) talks about women uniting against overwhelming systems through shared WhatsApp groups, church meetings, and community centers to gain strength from each other. Resistance might not seem to be on a large scale, but it's a continuous process to fight for what's worth it, fair treatment, and for humanity, which has been considered as less in a society.

The Canadian hospitality industry needs to play fair and be more ethical. The policy shouldn't just be concentrated on minimum wage and work agreements but also go far and beyond its normal thinking, like the feelings and social lives of migrant workers; it means they do have lives, the right to be with their families, and full healthcare and support mentally, physically, and culturally. They need a change from being completely dependent on employers, who control their lives and freedom. They should receive proper human treatment instead of being treated as merchandise.

**Resistance, Hope, and Policy Solutions**

Migrant workers have been treated unfairly for a long time now; however, they are fighting back through public speaking, getting organized, and demanding a systematic change for fairness. Though while making the policy, the voices always seem to be ignored. "Canada Destroyed Me," from this year (2025), clearly states how the migrant workers talk about their hurtful experiences like extra hours, not getting paid enough, and unfavorable living conditions. A woman who spent her life working full-time felt she received no respect upon retirement. The systematic problem within the system becomes apparent through this ongoing pattern of events while demonstrating migrant workers' strength and ability to persevere. Stories are being shared in public and in groups; people are standing up for their support, and the fight for a change is ongoing.

Advocacy groups, organizations, and unions are coming together, listening to the voice. Foster (2014) talks about movement that took place among the migrant workers to integrate them where they weren't before. It's a slow and challenging process, but it's happening for real. According to Kolbe (2023), when decisions have to be made with regard to migrant workers, they are still on the edge. The voices are heard only when serious crises take place.

A big change is a constant demand made by a migrant worker from Canada to discard a closed work permit. Where the employer has the capabilities to keep their employee in check if they want to continue their stay in the country, they also can't report mistreatment; if they do, then they might be sent back where they come from. Fudge and MacPhail (2009) argue that exactly this kind of situation comes up in lives and absolutely makes them vulnerable; that needs to stop as early as possible. The support systems, together with laws, must comprehend the real experiences of workers they aim to assist.

We need to bring in the public accountability. On a large scale, we need to hold the employer accountable for not paying properly, mismanagement, work safety culture, and housing and treat them with the utmost respect. As Riordan (2024) points out, everyone talks about "diversity" but ends up doing harmful things. Essential tools like transparency and independence are must-have things to oversee the process.

Doing policy change isn't enough; we need to see the change in how people think. Migrant workers are not just outsiders or fulfilling the labor gaps. Migrant worker rights must be mentioned. These workers are part of Canadian society, and what they have to say holds a place while drafting the policy. As Judith Butler (1993) reminds us, our bodies function beyond basic production since they establish personal understanding and provide emotional power alongside helping us recognize ourselves. Migrant workers are complete human beings, not commodities. Hope lies in the stories being told out loud in public, the groups who work for them, and the willingness of the lawmaker to do some real change in society, like listening to their hurtful experiences, their strength, and their demand for equal fairness, right here in Canada.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this research, I have come to understand that the exploitation of temporary migrant workers is not merely a flaw in Canada's hospitality industry, but it’s a carefully designed feature of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the broader neoliberal labor market. These workers are not brought in as future citizens but as a living mechanism where they are expected to perform exhausting labor and quietly disappear when no longer needed. Their immigration status is tied to their employers, their housing is often substandard, and their ability to speak out is limited by fear. As Judith Butler (1993) would argue, their bodies “matter” only to the extent that they serve capital and not as beings with rights, dignity, or permanence.

I do not write this conclusion simply to summarize the harms. I write it as a call for change and as someone who now sees this system more clearly. When I was on a temporary work permit in Canada, I worked for survival, so I wasn't able to think about these deeper structures we are all in. As a Canadian, now I can take a step back and think about the system from its roots up and have a responsibility to speak up and hope to have a better future. We need to rethink the hospitality industry to redefine its parameters not only for tourists but also for those who make tourism possible. A system needs to be built that is rooted not in exploitation but filled with rules, care, and respect for migrant workers and should not be in control of any single person. The below pointers are necessary to address policymakers and government officials.  
  
Canada must recognize that the current structure of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program is fundamentally irreconcilable with human rights & with social structure. While the program is presented as a flexible labor solution, it often produces institutional precarity and systemic inequality (Fudge & MacPhail, 2009; Preibisch & Hennebry, 2011). This must change.  
  
 We need clear and accessible pathways to permanent residencies for all migrant workers. If someone is good enough to serve in our hotels, restaurants, and resorts, they are good enough to stay. Permanency offers dignity, stability, and the ability to build a life: to form families, access healthcare without fear, and speak up against injustice (Perry, 2021; Mirchandani & Bromfield, 2021).

1.     Canada must sever the link between immigration status and employer. As long as workers are dependent on a single employer for their legal status, they remain vulnerable to coercion and abuse. An open work permit system would give migrant workers greater mobility and help break the cycle of silence and fear (Kolbe, 2023).

2.     Labor standards must be enforced proactively. We need unannounced workplace inspections and real consequences for employers who violate rights and implement not just financial penalties but also public accountability measures like naming and shaming abusive companies (Foster, 2014).

3.     To the hospitality and tourism industry, it is a moment for reflection to improve the lives of migrant workers. For instance, they must no longer be seen as replaceable labor. Employers must adopt ethical hiring practices, culturally appropriate training, and inclusive human resources policies. Professional groups, associations, and unions must do more to organize and empower migrant workers and ensure their voices are part of decision-making. No one should be considered “too temporary” to deserve respect.

            To civil society and the public: we are not innocent bystanders. The comfort from our hospitality and tourism industry, like our hotel beds, our takeout orders, and our clean linens, is usually made possible by the hardship of others. If we value fairness, we must also value the lives and rights of those who support our daily lives. Migrant voices must be heard by the general public, while advocacy groups need support and institutions and policymakers need to change their approaches. Migrant workers deserve the same hospitality that we expect as consumers.  
  
            As a student, this research has changed me. Began with curiosity but now became a moral obligation. It’s not enough to critique from a distance; we must be willing to engage, to question our own privileges, and to work for justice. Studying Judith Butler’s (1993) work helped me see how the body itself is shaped by social forces. Migrant workers’ bodies are controlled and tracked every move, where they sleep, and how they are touched, not just by personal choice, but by law, economy, and expectation.

            These bodies are not abstract metaphors. They are real, tired, and often unseen. That invisibility is a form of violence that is not accidental, but it is institutionalized. It is structured into policy, normalized in society, and justified through silence. That is why this paper and this conversation must continue.

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