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## Articles

## Spatial capital among Mexican agricultural workers in contexts of unfree labour in Canada

### Capital espacial entre los trabajadores agrícolas mexicanos en contextos de trabajo no libre en Canadá

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#### Abstract

The article examines the spatial capital acquired by Mexican agricultural workers in Canada as an asset that can give them power of influence in contexts of unfree labour. It proposes to think about agricultural labour markets as fields, after Bourdieu. A qualitative approach is used, and the text is based on five individual and two collective interviews conducted in 2011 on farms and in public spaces in the peripheral area of the Montreal Region, Quebec. Fragments of the interviews allow us to observe the space as a site of conflict and as a capital that gives workers the capacity for agency which allows them to confront relations of domination and subordination in the “field of migrant agricultural seasonal work in Canada”, and to confront socio-spatial isolation and exclusion. Other forms of capital are also observed, such as linguistic and social, which allow spatial capital to be to generate and increased.

Keywords: agency, field, citizenship, labour migration, unfree labour.

#### Resumen

En el artículo se examina el capital espacial adquirido por los trabajadores agrícolas mexicanos en Canadá como un activo que puede brindarles un poder o una influencia en contextos de trabajo no libre. Se propone pensar el mercado laboral agrícola como un campo bourdiano. Se recurre a un enfoque cualitativo, apoyado en cinco entrevistas individuales y dos colectivas efectuadas en 2011 en granjas y espacios públicos en la zona periférica de la Región de Montreal, Quebec. Fragmentos de las entrevistas permiten observar el espacio como sitio de conflicto y como un tipo de capital que confiere a los trabajadores la capacidad de agencia para enfrentarse a las relaciones de dominación y subordinación del “campo del trabajo temporal agrícola migrante en Canadá”, así como

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al aislamiento y exclusión socioespacial. También se observan otras formas de capital como el lingüístico y el social, los cuales permiten generar y elevar el capital espacial.

Palabras clave: agencia, campo, ciudadanía, migración laboral, trabajo no libre.

## Introduction

This study considers two characteristics of space: the place where competition, conflict and struggle occur and the resource that agents use to exert influence to benefit their interests. Bourdieu's forms of capital are used as the basis for arguing that *spatial capital* is one of several assets that Mexican farmworkers can use to strengthen their agency, to resist power struggles, and to achieve better positions in *seasonal agricultural work for migrants in Canada*.

The structure of Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)<sup>1</sup> for workers from Mexico is characterized by mobility restrictions and socio-spatial isolation in unfree labor contexts. Therefore, spatial capital can help workers to appropriate and use space, which reduces isolation and fosters socio-spatial inclusion in Canadian society.

Canadian society is modern and industrialized. The full exercise of citizens' rights is guaranteed by its *Constitution* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, as well as by international human rights conventions and declarations. Broadly speaking, its programs for low-skilled labor do indeed provide guarantees for the rights of seasonal workers. The SAWP contract is a formal representation of an exercise in civil law, namely, an agreement to freely provide labor.

However, modern societies exhibit a contradiction between the egalitarian forces of social citizenship and the inequality inherent to the capitalist production system. The latter relies on unfree labor practices as it expands and develops. Therefore, although the worker-employer contract is legally executed between free and equal persons, in practice this relationship is not equal because the citizenship status of employers and the temporary resident status of migrant workers make them unequal in their respective endowed powers.

In this sense, the SAWP's structure and operation represent a power device that has socio-spatial consequences for Mexican farmworkers because it hinders the exercise of citizenship rights; it prevents them from accessing education, obtaining permanent residence, and benefiting from labor market mobility; Mexican farmworkers experience difficulties in accessing health services and financial benefits; it isolates them geographically; and it socially excludes them from participating in Canadian communities (Basok et al., 2012; Cohen, 2019; Cohen & Caxaj, 2018; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010; Perry, 2018, 2019). These consequences all produce unfree labor contexts.

To connect spatial capital to other forms of efficient capital, we use Pierre Bourdieu's definition of *field* to understand the migration and agricultural labor exchange between Canada and Mexico. This enables us to identify, for example, the linguistic, legal and social capital that can be exchanged or combined to provide workers with differentiated capacities to act, position themselves, resist and obtain some advantage in the power relationship of this social space.

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<sup>1</sup> The program completed 46 years of operation in 2020. The French name for this program is Programme du Travailleur Agricole Saisonale (PTAS).

To understand how spatial capital benefits Mexican agricultural workers, this study presents select excerpts from five individual interviews and two group interviews conducted in the temporary living quarters of these workers, as well as in some public spaces, in the province of Quebec, Canada. Table 1 presents some basic information about these interviewees. These interviews were part of the fieldwork conducted between March and August 2011.

**Table 1: Basic interviewee information**

Interviewee	Age in 2011	Origin in Mexico (State)	Number of seasons worked as of 2011	Location of the farm (Canadian municipality)	Type of farm
David	43	Mexico	14	Laval	Cabbage, lettuce, onions, pickling cucumbers
Fernando	38	Morelos	13	Saint-Rémi	Cabbage, turnips
Jorge	41	Mexico	11	Saint-Eustache	Flower greenhouse
Rogelio	44	Tabasco	10	Saint-Patrice-de-Sherrington	Carrots, onions
Patricio	46	Querétaro	9	Mirabel	Flower greenhouse
Zenen, Group interview 2	36	Morelos	7	Saint-Rémi	Cabbage, turnips
Group interview 1, Four workers				Mirabel	Flower greenhouse
Group interview 2, Three workers				Saint-Rémi	Cabbage, turnips

Source: 2011 fieldwork in Quebec, Canada

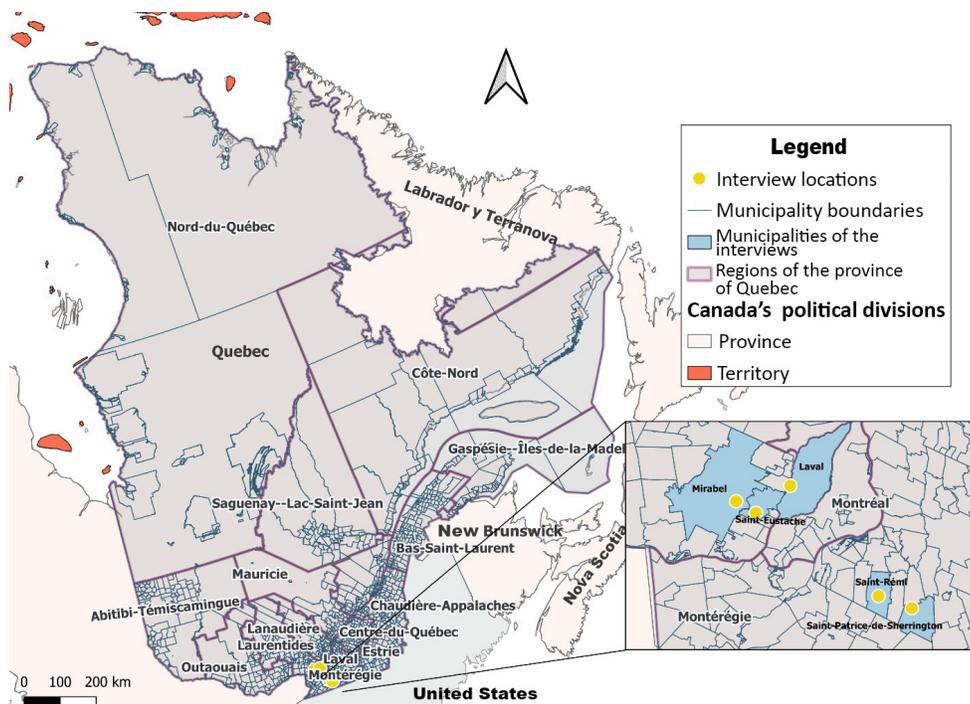
The interviews selected for this article were conducted in the five municipalities indicated in Figure 1. The interview with David, a vegetable farmworker, took place in his temporary living quarters and in a cafe in Laval. Laval is a city north of Montreal surrounded by rural areas.

The interview with Jorge was conducted at his residence and in the flower greenhouse where he worked in Saint-Eustache. Saint-Eustache is also a city with rural areas, located across the Mille Îles River, northwest of Montreal. A third interview was conducted with Patricio in his temporary living quarters and his workplace, a flower greenhouse in Mirabel. Mirabel is another city with large rural areas northwest of Montreal. These three municipalities are part of the Montreal Metropolitan Community, which comprises 82 local municipalities.

The fourth interviewee was Fernando, a worker on a vegetable farm in the city of Saint-Rémi. The interview was conducted at his residence. Group interview 2 included workers from this same farm and included an individual interview with Zenen on

the farm premises. The fifth individual interviewed was Rogelio, a day laborer on a vegetable farm in the municipality of Saint-Patrice-de-Sherrington and was conducted in various local restaurants. These last two municipalities are located to the south of Montreal and do not belong to the Montreal Metropolitan Community. Saint-Patrice borders the United States.

**Figure 1: Map of the province of Quebec showing the municipalities where interviews were conducted**



Source: created by the author with data from <https://mern.gouv.qc.ca/ministere/cartes-information-geographique/>

It should be noted that Ontario is the Canadian province with the highest labor demand and the highest number of Mexican agricultural workers hired. However, a close look at Table 2 shows that labor demand and hiring in other provinces has increased over the last 10 years. For example, Ontario accounted for just over 50% of the SAWP's day laborers in 2010, followed by Quebec and British Columbia, accounting for approximately 20% each. By 2019, the proportion SAWP workers in Ontario decreased to 42.9%, while Quebec ranked second with 24%, almost a quarter of all SAWP workers. Furthermore, Quebec's total numbers doubled in nine years, from 3 085 to 6 333. British Columbia ranked a close third in 2019 with 22.3%, and its total numbers almost doubled between 2010 and 2019.

**Table 2. Mexican workers in the sawp, by province**

Province	2010		2019	
Ontario	8 084	51.1	11 331	42.9
Quebec	3 085	19.5	6 333	24.0
British Columbia	3 061	19.4	6 049	22.9
Alberta	815	5.2	1 177	4.5
Nova Scotia	175	1.1	568	2.2
Manitoba	336	2.1	464	1.8
Prince Edward Island	150	0.9	325	1.2
Saskatchewan	97	0.6	120	0.5
New Brunswick	6	0.0	40	0.2
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	15 809	100.0	26 407	100.0

Source: Ministry of Labor, Training and Skills Development (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social [STPS])

## The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (sawp) and Unfree Labor

The sawp is touted as a model program with benefits for both countries (Henestroza, 2003; Vanegas, 2000a, 2000b; Verduzco, 2000, 2015). It enables Canada to regulate seasonal labor migration and supplement its agro-industrial labor market with foreign labor. The benefits for Mexico are that its workers are guaranteed a certain number of work hours and have safe transportation from Mexico to the workplace. They are also provided with housing and can avoid the insecurity of undocumented work that is widespread in the United States.

It is assumed that people voluntarily commit to working in the sawp. However, this ignores the fact that this choice is made within certain social, economic, legal and cultural structures. An absolutely free choice means that the worker has comparable or better options in Mexico. However, due to the structural inequalities of the capitalist economy, the available job opportunities in the Mexican agricultural labor market are not at all comparable to those in Canada or the United States (Barrón, 1998, 2005).

Given the conditions of the Mexican labor market, the only way for these workers to cover their families' basic needs of food, clothing, health and education or even to save and improve their living conditions is to migrate to one of these northern countries. However, once families begin to receive remittances from relatives working abroad, they become dependent on them (Basok, 2000; Márquez, 2012; Preibisch, 2004a).

Once workers are in Canada, they find that it is impossible to appeal a unilateral breach of contract by employers. This constraint, added to the fear of deportation and expulsion from the program, further aggravates the structural imposition. Thus, there is coercion present in a worker's decisions to continue in or leave the sawp, contributing to an unfree labor system (Silverman & Hari, 2016). This condition also exists for workers of other nationalities who participate in other low-skilled seasonal work programs in Canada, and it may be even more intense for them (Castracani, 2018; Muir, 2015; Preibisch, 2015; Vargas-Foronda, 2010).

In contrast, Canadian citizens do not experience these situations in their own country because they have a variety of work options. Furthermore, they do not depend on a single income (remittances) and do not fear deportation and abuse by an employer, foreman or shop steward. If they do experience such abuse, they can recur to an institutional system that defends them. In other words, they can fully exercise their rights as citizens with access to free labor, which includes the defense of their rights.

Unfree labor and different forms of slavery have been present in various modes of production for centuries. Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, John Bright, and other thinkers argued that these types of labor were incompatible with capitalism because they were inefficient, did not allow for task specialization, and were expensive (Brass, 2011). It follows that modern, capitalist societies should abolish them in favor of free labor (De Vito & Lichtenstein, 2016; De Vito & Sundevall, 2017). This led to the creation of international instruments that formally declared the abolition of those labor practices for being incompatible with human rights.

Nevertheless, unfree labor relationships continued to be widespread in third world countries. They were thought to be "an anomaly in the capitalist mode of production" (Basok, 2002, p. 14), residuals of a bygone era, or the result of an immature form of capitalism (Lebaron, 2015; Sharma, 1995). These interpretations ignored the fact that those unfree labor relationships continued to be compatible with and inherent to the expansion of capitalism in developed countries and around the world (Brass, 2011; De Vito & Sundevall, 2017; Strauss, 2014).

Thus, a dichotomy arises around work in modern and capitalist societies. At one extreme are slavery and unfree labor, both operating as mechanisms of control. At the other extreme is non-slave labor, which has the appearance of freedom and is therefore considered to be desirable (Engerman, 2000).

When a society transitioned from a feudal to a capitalist system, serfs gained the ability to sell their labor. However, even though a worker is in full control of his own labor, he is forced to sell it (Marx, 1973). Workers then find themselves in a contradictory situation produced by the very structure of capitalism. They are free to sell their labor but are forced to sell it in order to survive because they do not own the means of production (Strauss, 2012, 2014).

In this article, free labor is understood as "the ability to sell one's labour, to enter into a contract with a purchaser of labour, and to receive an agreed wage" (Strauss, 2012, p. 139). Unfree labor is when individuals cannot leave an employment relationship to look for another job. In other words, they do not have mobility between labor markets (Satzewich, 1991) nor the ability to leave the labor market temporarily or permanently. Different degrees and types of coercion, such as threats, captivity, violence or even death, are practiced in unfree labor (McGrath, 2005).

The different types of unfree labor include slavery, convict labor, forced contract labor, indentured servitude, unpaid domestic work, child labor, human trafficking,

and more. Forced labor usually begins with coercion, but some labor relationships that are freely established and have legal recognition later become coercive due to the structure and execution of the contract. This weakens the worker's ability to terminate the contract and seek other employment (Strauss, 2012), like the situation seen in the SAWP. Regardless, those working in unfree labor situations must work hard, more to avoid punishment than for economic rewards (Brass, 2011).

The labor practices described above have been observed by scholars, social activists, trade unions and non-governmental organizations (Strauss, 2014). They have also been prohibited in modern democratic states through various international legal mechanisms (Basok, 2002; De Vito & Sundevall, 2017). Examples of these mechanisms include the "Slavery Convention" (Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos [OACDH] 1926), the "Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery" (ONU, 1956), and the "Abolition of Forced Labor Convention" (OIT, 1957).

Regarding the SAWP, Tanya Basok examined the advantages for Canadian farmers to use the SAWP's labor force, which is expensive due to transportation and lodging expenses. The reason is that it functions as a source of unfree labor. More specifically, it can be considered a captive workforce because a worker cannot quit his job to find another one and because workers are available for any production period (Basok, 2002; Perry, 2018, 2019). It is also considered to be captive because "The employer dictates and regulates where and how workers live" (Encalada, 2005, p. 17). Seasonal migrant housing is usually located near or within the farm that employs them. Furthermore, a worker cannot choose or change employers if he or she finds the job unsuitable<sup>2</sup>. These operational characteristics of the SAWP have socio-spatial consequences on the integration and exclusion of migrants in Canadian society. While the SAWP has underlying legal agreements that provide certain "guarantees" to workers, in practice the "boundaries between autonomy and slavery and free and unfree labor are blurry" (Silverman & Hari, 2016, p. 96).

The SAWP has some similarities with an old Mexican agricultural production relationship supported by unfree labor: the Mexican hacienda or plantation. The SAWP and the hacienda both operate on private property, supply their products to the marketplace, employ external labor, and exhibit certain unfree labor practices. The main difference between the two is that haciendas relied on indentured servitude called "peonaje", where workers accumulated debt at the hacienda's company store ("tienda de raya"), obligating them to work for the hacienda owner until the debt was paid off (Montoya, 2005).

SAWP is a government-administered program in which migrants are paid lower wages (but higher than wages in Mexico) than those paid to local workers. Due to their legal status as seasonal workers, they are sometimes exploited by employers (Strauss & McGrath, 2017) and are always vulnerable to the unilateral termination of contracts by employers, leading to deportation and expulsion from the program.

Although the labor relationship found in the SAWP is not forced labor or slavery in the strict sense (Strauss & McGrath, 2017), it can be argued that the program combines free labor (to sell labor, establish a contract, and receive a wage) and unfree labor practices (workers in captivity without full legal status, precarious working conditions, labor coercion, no labor mobility, and reduced socio-spatial mobility).

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<sup>2</sup> A worker can only transfer to another employer if a work assignment has been completed before the end date stipulated in the contract or if an employer fails to assign the agreed number of hours to a worker.

While existing academic studies on the SAWP have highlighted the effects of structures that coerce workers, more research is needed on the farmworkers' strategies for negotiation, struggle, and resistance. Some studies (Basok, 2000; Cohen, 2019; Cohen & Caxaj, 2018; Silverman & Hari, 2016) have recognized that while SAWP workers are unable to unionize or strike, they do exhibit some forms of resistance in their daily lives. Because they do have the ability to make some choices, they are not completely controlled by others. However, resistance efforts are difficult to sustain, as some migrants prefer not to do this for fear of being suspended.

The fact that workers do not publicly demonstrate against employer abuses, SAWP restrictions, racialization of labor, or discrimination in Canadian society does not mean that they lack a consciousness of political action. As such, it is important to determine how workers use different forms of capital to resist in other ways.

The study by James Scott (2011) on the forms of resistance exhibited by subordinated groups is an important reference because his study found that dominant groups can never exercise total control over subordinates. The anthropologist's research shows that every time a domination structure is imposed, it leads to strategies and actions of resistance by individuals and groups. However, these do not need to be overt, direct, public or explosive, as "... they will most likely covertly create and protect a social space in which a measure of dissent can be expressed" (Scott, 2011, p. 19). Scott calls this "infra-politics", which are the discreet and indirect practices of resistance such as the ones used by Mexican farmworkers in the SAWP.

One form of resistance supported by networks of social capital in combination with cultural capital to achieve community integration is found in the work of Adam Perry (2018, 2019), conducted in Leamington, Ontario. Perry holds workshops to teach farmworkers theatrical techniques (*Theatre of the Oppressed*) to express their work experiences in unfree labor and social exclusion contexts. In other words, he uses art to create spaces of resistance.

Another example of resistance supported by social capital is the community-based work of anthropologist Amy Cohen and Susana Caxaj (Cohen, 2019; Cohen & Caxaj, 2018). Since 2013, their "Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture" (RAMA) collective has supported and assisted seasonal agricultural migrants.

These two examples demonstrate that the goal is to help produce and augment the spatial capital of agricultural workers (although this is not how researchers think of it) so that migrants can occupy different spaces and insert themselves into Canadian society.

## Citizenship and Unfree Labor

Citizenship and the seasonal work status (no citizenship) of agricultural migrants in Canada is a structural factor that legitimizes the domination/subordination relationship. Because these migrants are not citizens, they are vulnerable to labor exploitation and social exclusion (Baines & Sharma, 2002; Sharma, 2000), resulting in unfree labor.

At this point, it is useful to consider the work of Thomas Humphrey Marshall, which has been criticized for several reasons, primarily his progressive ideas on the emergence of rights and his failure to consider gender, ethnicity and nationality (Silva,

2014; Baines & Sharma, 2002). However, it is a useful analytical model and starting point for describing certain sociohistorical characteristics.

Marshall examined the period from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His model encompasses three components: civil, political and social rights. The civil rights component is characteristic of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and pertains to the protection of individual liberties such as freedom of thought and expression, to enter into contracts, to work where one sees fit, and to defend these rights in a court of law. “[Civil rights] confer legal standing to fight for what one wishes to possess” (Marshall, 1997, p. 315). Access to civil rights was uneven despite their formal recognition, and many people were left unprotected by civil rights laws.

The political rights component emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and provided the right to vote and to receive votes; that is, to participate in the political sphere of a nation-state. However, as capitalism and its inherent inequalities continued to evolve, the application of certain elements of this component encountered obstacles because “the political rights bestowed by citizenship, unlike civil rights, constituted a potential threat to the capitalist system” (Marshall, 1997, p. 320). This explains the delay in recognizing that women and ethnic minorities are entitled to all the rights of citizenship.

The social rights component is characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and pertains to economic and social welfare. Social rights steer towards achieving equality before the law by mitigating the effects of the inequality inherent to capitalism. These rights enable individuals “to live the life of a civilized human being according to society’s current standards” (Marshall, 1997, p. 303).

Social rights are a subset of human rights, which include the right to work, as recognized in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, which says “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment” (ONU, 1948). The “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” also establishes the right to freely choose work under just and favorable conditions and the right to unionize and strike (ONU, 1966). According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (OACDH, 2005), realizing this right is essential to achieving human dignity.

Thus, citizenship must confer all three components for an individual to enjoy all the corresponding rights and responsibilities and to become part of a community. It represents a major step towards equality and counterbalances the class inequalities of capitalism (Marshall, 1997). As such, citizenship and capitalism exist in perpetual tension.

Now, when the concepts of citizenship and partial legal status are introduced in a study of labor markets, a form of labor stratification can be observed. In the top stratum are citizens, who theoretically enjoy the full exercise of the three components of citizenship. Permanent residents are in the next stratum, followed by other categories of high-skilled and low-skilled migrant workers. In the bottom stratum are undocumented workers, who in the context of citizenship “do not have the basic right to have rights” (Goldring & Landolt, 2015, p. 66). While this stratification system may allow upward mobility, the SAWP is evidence that a change in legal status in Canada does not necessarily result in an improvement in the precarious lives of its enrollees.

The immigration status of Mexican workers does not permit them to exercise citizenship rights and is the main reason for their instability. This same status limits the social and spatial inclusion in Canada of this workforce, yet “[t]hese non-citizens are part of Canadian society and are unlikely to be identified by neighbors or friends

as being unfree or less deserving of rights” (Baines & Sharma, 2002, p. 77). Other limiting factors are language unfamiliarity, nationality and gender discrimination, and racialization processes (Baines & Sharma 2002; Preibisch & Binford, 2008; Sharma, 2000, 2001; Silverman & Hari, 2016). However, the SAWP is not an Althusserian type of state apparatus that completely dominates these workers’ lives, as these workers can avail themselves of certain types of capital, including spatial capital, that confer the power to resist these limitations.

## Factors that Structure Agricultural Work

In general, agricultural work requires a workforce that can withstand wear and tear to the body and that is available to tend the crops during their different stages of growth. Seasonal or seasonal agricultural production is effectively defined “by the seasonal cycles of the plants and the durations of these cycles, which can be a few weeks to almost a full year” (Montoya, 2005, p. 23).

In Canada, this productive sector has one of the highest local labor turnover rates due to the risks inherent to this type of work, the strenuous activity involved, the use of machinery, and exposure to pesticides and other chemicals (Gibb, 2006). Canadian agriculture has historically relied on unfree labor sources such as orphans, youth in reform schools, prisoners of war, and indigenous peoples (Preibisch, 2007). This reliance on unfree labor continues with the SAWP captive workforce.

To supplement the small local workforce and maintain the global competitiveness of its agribusiness sector, the Canadian government has designed seasonal work programs that purport to respect the rights of low-skilled foreign workers. However, these foreign workers find it difficult to exercise these rights due to the legal and operational design of the work programs.

## The Field of Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Labor

The analysis of social phenomena such as migration related to seasonal work programs often emphasize only one side of the society-individual relationship. Some approaches emphasize the overwhelming tyranny of social structures, while other approaches emphasize the spontaneity of individual action. The result is two seemingly opposed approaches. One is objectivist and focused on structure, and the other is subjectivist, focused on individual action (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995).

The concept of structure refers to the different levels of social life that constrain the actions of the actors (Giddens, 2006). Examples of structure include systems of social stratification, the capitalist mode of production, the international agricultural market, and seasonal work programs. Functionally, all of these interrelate to imbue social life with stability and continuity. In contrast, individual action is used to highlight the voluntarism and rational action of individuals. It assumes that their actions in society are driven by personal interests and motivations and that they control the conditions of their own lives (Ritzer, 2002).

This false society-individual dichotomy leads to an incomplete understanding of social and spatial phenomena. However, there are some theoretical perspectives, such as Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, that can bridge these conflicting approaches. Bourdieu's theory is used in this study to understand the scope of action that agricultural workers have in structural contexts of unfree labor. Five basic and interconnected concepts are used for this purpose: social space, field, agency, capital and habitus.

For Bourdieu, *social space* is a historical construction of relationships; "...it is a multidimensional space of positions" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 20) that arises from an unequal distribution of certain assets called capital and that is the object of contention by various social agents (individuals, collectives, groups, institutions). This contention leads to "a hierarchical position for each agent that is defined by their place in the distribution of a particular kind of capital" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 28). Therefore, possessing these types of capital, as well as global capital, is what establishes superior/inferior and dominant/subordinate social positions (Giménez, 2005).

Social space is also a field because it is where the efforts to control capital take place, thereby reorganizing the positional structure of the agents (Bourdieu, 1997). Thus, social space could be viewed as consisting multiple fields that are part of the global social space.

A *field* is the socially structured space of its occupants' historical relationships. It is the specific arena of conflict in which agents relate to each other. The agents are clustered or dispersed according to their positions and dispositions (habitus) and strive to control or monopolize assets or capital while simultaneously trying to eliminate competitors (Bourdieu, 2002).

Going beyond its simple definition, fields are significant in that they can be used as a tool to identify the overall properties of the global social space and all its fields. For example, fields reveal that these spaces are systems of forces, competition and contention in which the participants (agents) oppose each other or band together, thereby structuring relationships of domination and subordination. It also enables the identification of the "specific properties of a particular field" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 119); that is, it provides an understanding of the various participants (individuals, groups, institutions) and the characteristics of the competition and contention for the control of assets.

One advantage of using field theory is that it enables us to identify the structures that are imposed on individuals. It is also important to recognize that because participants find it worthwhile to play this "game" and benefit from it, Bourdieu found the need to include "a theory of social agents" in the study of the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995, p. 25).

When the actors in the field are individuals, they are not completely rational, voluntary or free from any type of conditioning. On the contrary, they are agents, which means that they are socially constituted through a set of dispositions and schemas (habitus) that allow them to act in the field and influence it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995).

*Agency* is understood as the participants' power or capacity to act and influence the field and to strive and compete for forms of capital. We must stress that agency is not the free action of individuals but, rather, is enabled by the field's structure, by owning types of capital and by the habitus.

Agents inhabit different positions (dominant, subordinate or other) associated with various dispositions and schemas that encompass cultural practices, consumption practices, political opinions, modes of acting in the world, etc., which are what Bourdieu calls *habitus*. The concept of *habitus* enables us to understand that an individual's actions do not happen spontaneously, but rather, their "actions are framed within historically and socially constituted categories of perception and appreciation" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995, p. 71). Agents can always make decisions but always within the framework of internalized possibilities. The *habitus* represents rules that have not been intentionally created but that have accumulated in the agent's mind and body and, therefore, constitute the dispositions and schemas that tell the agent how to play in the different fields.

Thus, there are multiple fields, such as power, intellect, politics, fashion, sports, art, university experience, etc., but all of them are analytically constructed by the researcher. Similarly, labor migration can be conceived as a field that can be divided into subfields.

This article conceives of the SAWP agricultural labor program as the *field of seasonal agricultural migrant labor in Canada*. This is appropriate primarily because the SAWP grew out of Canada's historical relationships with agricultural production based on unfree labor. Second, most Mexican workers in the SAWP have worked in some capacity in agriculture. Third, farmers have historically faced structural disadvantages such as fluctuations in product prices, low wages, a lack of technology to work the land, or shrinking labor markets. Fourth, it is a relational space with two main groups of opposing agents. These groups are the Canadian farmers (employers) and the agricultural workers who, as a social reproduction strategy, temporarily leave their homes in Mexico to work in Canada.

The employers occupy the dominant position because they own enough of the various types of capital to do so. However, this does not mean that they definitively and absolutely control the field. The agricultural workers are in a subordinate position to the employers. However, they are not completely subjugated by the field's structures of power and domination. They are agents with the ability to contend for assets and the capacity to use these assets to exert influence or produce a favorable effect in contexts of unfree labor. They can also decide to resist, negotiate or accept the power relationship. For example, when Jorge<sup>3</sup>, a worker in a Saint-Eustasche flower greenhouse, experienced his employer's attempt to exert control, he urged colleagues from other farms not to accept this type of abuse.

"We're pretty much sold like property, my friend. You can't say no here, no matter if there's rain, thunder or lightning... The people here treat us like animals, like work animals... I went to another farm near here to say hello to my friends. But since their boss was walking around, not one of them dared speak a word. I asked, 'Who's the boss?,' and one guy nodded in the direction of the boss. So, I said, 'Bonjour, monsieur,' but he didn't even look at me. No way. Tell him to go to hell. There are about 5,000 farms to work on around here... These people don't deserve anything" (Jorge, 2011, individual interview. Saint-Eustasche, Quebec).

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<sup>3</sup> The names of the workers have been changed to protect their identities.

Capital is an asset, a power that enables whoever holds it to exert influence within a field. Bourdieu usually refers to four main types of capital: cultural, economic, symbolic and social (Bourdieu, 1997, 2008, 2011). However, he does not rule out the possibility of identifying other types if they are useful or valid, that is, if they function in a particular field, which is what he calls efficient capital (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995). Thus, for the *field of seasonal agricultural migrant labor*, linguistic, legal, social and spatial capital can all be efficient. Linguistic capital is a form of cultural capital and can be observed in the knowledge and use of French and English by agricultural migrants. Legal capital refers to legal status (of seasonal workers and citizens), knowledge of rights and when they can be enforced. Social capital can be observed in the networks that day laborers have established in Canada, such as contacts with union, civil and religious organizations, friendships, and support by civil society. Spatial capital will be discussed later.

The levels or amounts of capital may be zero or extremely low for first-time SAWP workers but increase in subsequent seasons even if they change farms, areas or provinces.

One type of capital can be exchanged for another if this has been outlined by both agents. For example, if a worker knows how to operate tractors or forklifts, he could negotiate for this type of higher-paying job before entering the SAWP. In this example, cultural capital was exchanged for economic capital.

Because power and domination are key concepts in this field, we need to explore them slightly more to be able to link them to capital. Michel Foucault wrote that power is present in all social life and seen in institutions and subjects. "It moves back and forth; it does not stay still in individuals" (Foucault, 1979, p. 144). Power is a set of historical practices that make up individuals and institutions. Foucault usually calls them *technologies* or *devices*. Thus, the SAWP is a power device produced by the historical relationships of capitalism in Canadian agriculture.

For Max Weber, power is the probability of imposing one's will in a social relationship even when facing resistance (Weber, 1964). As for the concept of domination, Weber understands it as "the probability of getting a group of people to obey a command" (Weber, 1964, p. 43). The interesting thing about Weber's definition is that power and domination are probabilities, meaning that there is a possibility that imposing one's will or commanding obedience may not occur. Thus, to summarize the definitions provided by Foucault and Weber, the technologies or devices of power have the probabilities of being imposed and obeyed and of not being imposed or obeyed, based on the agency of the participants in the field.

In the *field of seasonal agricultural labor*, the farm owners are dominant agents who exercise power and domination. However, because this is a probability, they may encounter resistance or disobedience by farm workers, depending on the type and amount of efficient capital available to exercise power, their historical position in the field, and the strategies undertaken.

## Spatialization and Spatial Capital

Physical and social space are often approached as incompatible dimensions. The former is a container filled by social relationships, while the latter is an abstraction with no material substance that assumes the shape of the container. Like the structure-agency relationship previously discussed, the physical-social relationship is another false dichotomy. The social and the physical maintain a concurrent relationship, and their distinction is analytical.

In this article, spatialization refers to the social practices and relationships that are observed or inscribed in geographic space. The social relationships that structure the *field of seasonal agricultural migrant labor* have observable consequences in space, i.e., they are spatialized. Agricultural workers compete for control of the field's efficient capital in order to maintain or improve their positions in social and geographic spaces, i.e., their socio-spatial positions.

This is exemplified by where the Canadian residences of workers and farmers are situated. These locations are not accidental. The distribution of these residences corresponds to the social and economic hierarchies, i.e., a spatialization of the relationships of domination and subordination. Although farmers and migrants often live in the same rural space, their material conditions are completely different. Workers live in a place designated by the employer, usually in adapted warehouses or prefabricated mobile homes that lack privacy and are overcrowded. They are frequently hidden at the back of the farm or behind the farmer's house, enabling the employer to monitor and control worker and visitor entry and exit and making them invisible to neighbors. In addition, migrants face spatial mobility restrictions because access to motor vehicles is limited.

The employers do not live in makeshift spaces but, rather, in proper houses legally registered in public real estate records and with property titles that confer home ownership rights. They are spacious, suitable residences, with private spaces for everyone in the family, with no overcrowding, and with all the available furnishings and services. In addition, they have vehicles that enable them to freely move about. The employers' homes are usually located near the road for ease of access.

Space has two salient features. First, it is where the struggle and conflict between dominant and subordinate agents takes place because hierarchization and social conflict have been spatialized. Second, this space has become an influence and an asset (Lévy & Lussault, 2003), a form of capital to be controlled: it "is also a weapon... to impose the dominant view of spatial organization on the social population as a whole" (Fogle, 2009, p. 207).

This second feature is why this article regards space as a resource, a power, a type of capital, or more simply, *spatial capital*. This spatial capital is an efficient form within the field of *seasonal agricultural migrant labor in Canada*. Spatial capital is an approach that has emerged relatively recently; therefore, it is treated here as a rough idea rather than a refined concept. It is based on Bourdieu's definition of capital and has been further developed in the fields of geography (Lévy, 1994, 2002; Lévy & Lussault, 2003; Rérat, 2018; Rérat & Lees, 2011) and sociology (Apaolaza & Blanco, 2015; Centner, 2003, 2006, 2008; Kaufmann et al., 2004).

Furthermore, because spatial capital is exchangeable, its accumulation by agricultural workers could lead to a favorable increase in social, linguistic or economic capital. The

inverse could also occur in that social or cultural assets could be exchanged for or added to spatial capital. The following interview excerpt reveals how social capital (people known to the worker) added to spatial capital (the ability to travel to different farms and places) increased the linguistic capital of a worker, enabling him to earn a higher salary (economic capital). The interviewee is David, a vegetable farmworker in the municipality of Laval.

[Interviewer: How did you learn French?] Well, I got interested in learning French when I worked in Saint-Rémi. I met a lady who sold cigarettes that I liked to talk to. She would always say “Come sell cigarettes with me”. She was Quebecois and spoke Spanish, so she’d go to the farms to sell her cigarettes. I’d ask her questions about French about signs that I would see, like “What does that say?”, and she’d say, “It says such and such” ... So, little by little I learned. Then, I met another lady named María, from Sonora. She taught us a little bit, just the basics like *bonjour*, *bonsoir*, *bonne nuit*, ways to greet people and how to order food in a restaurant. When I came to work with this boss, I already knew things like the colors, names of vegetables, numbers. The boss thought I spoke very well, but sometimes he’d say things, and I had no idea. I feel that knowing a little French has given me some advantages. There are other places where knowing French is required because they send you to different places, to do different jobs, and it’s essential. It’s important for me in that they pay me a little more because of what I know, because of what I’ve learned (David, 2011, individual interview. Laval, Quebec).

As discussed above, the characteristics and schemas of the habitus guide the actions of the agents. Thus, what employers and migrant workers do with space and within the space does not happen spontaneously but, rather, stems from their socialization and exposure to historical structuring and historically structured socio-spatial order. The habitus provides information on how to perform in the space, on what can be done, and on ways of accessing, mobilizing, appropriating, and taking advantage of the space’s elements. Thus, it becomes an asset that can be used to achieve better positions, to use as spatial capital, in other words.

An example of this can be seen revealed in group interview 1 (2011), conducted in a greenhouse in the municipality of Mirabel, located in the northeastern section of the Montreal Metropolitan Community. Workers will sometimes go to the nearest town when they are off work or have some free time. Even though they don’t have cars or bicycles, they walk to bars, restaurants, and stores. Sometimes, they just meet friends or go for a walk. However, they avoid walking on the roads because it’s dangerous. Instead, they cut through fields until they get to the outskirts of town. Additionally, the workers live on the farms, and the farmers’ homes are usually located where they can watch who is coming and going.

The workers face several obstacles when they want to leave the farm and appropriate or use a space; that is, to use their spatial capital. The first obstacle is finding a place where the employer cannot see them. In this case, it is a small irrigation ditch on one side of the property. The next obstacle is crossing the ditch, which the workers do by placing a pallet across it as a bridge. The last obstacle is to cut a path through the crops

and not get lost. The workers know that they are trespassing on private property, and the landowners have forbidden this action. However, they ignore this and continue to cross through these properties. This is a resistance strategy that involves the use and appropriation of the space itself and its elements to flout the monitoring and control of the employers. When new workers come to the farm or other nearby farms, they are told about these paths to the town. Thus, space is a site of conflict and struggle but also an asset, a power, a specific type of capital that is used to resist the domination experienced and to occupy better positions in Canadian society.

Despite the restrictions they experience, these workers find a way to get away from the farm and do other things (Preibisch, 2004a, 2004b). Walking along paths and roads, using farm trucks and cars, and riding bicycles are all displays of the spatial capital that enables these workers to thwart spatial restrictions and gain some freedom of movement that, in turn, becomes a progressive accumulation of spatial capital and greater knowledge of space. An example of the above is seen in Zenen, a participant in group interview 2. He works on a vegetable farm in Saint-Rémi but has also been able to travel to other provinces thanks to his social capital.

Around here... most of the time, I go to the bar as a break from work. I shoot pool, listen to music, and if there is dancing, I'll dance with the women there if I get a chance. In all the times I've gone there, I've never been turned down for a dance.

When I went to Ontario, I had a chance to go see Niagara Falls. So, I went because I didn't want to miss it. Since we worked on Sundays at that place, I just talked to the foreman and asked, "Is there any problem with me taking Sunday off to go to Niagara?" The foreman said I could go. Some of the women who worked there invited me along. They said, "Do you want to go to Niagara with us?" I asked, "How much would it cost?" "It'll cost you \$10, which includes breakfast, lunch and coffee", they said. Well, that was fine. A Guatemalan guy took us, about 15 people in all. We passed a Tim Horton's [coffee shop] along the way and he bought us a box of donuts and coffee. We had breakfast once we got there, around nine or ten in the morning. There are some outdoor grills in the little parks around there, so we grilled the meats that he had already prepared and warmed up some tortillas (Zenen, 2011, collective interview 2. Saint-Rémi. Quebec).

Once a week, the employer rents a bus to take the workers to a supermarket for grocery shopping. If there are not many workers, one of the trusted employees will take them in the back of the farm's pickup truck. These trusted employees have earned the privilege of using company vehicles to drive to nearby towns or farms. For example, one of the interviewees, Jorge, used a van that his employers lent him to drive with his coworkers between their living quarters and the greenhouse because their living quarters were far from the farm, in the Saint-Eustache urban area. He was also able to use the vehicle to drive around the area with his coworkers whenever he wanted.

As previously noted, walking is another means by which workers appropriate space and augment their spatial capital. Bicycles are also a key means of transportation that enable workers to leave the farm to visit nearby towns or other farms. Having a bicycle reduces dependency on the employer. Different civil society actors have donated bicycles to workers, which is another example of social capital becoming spatial capital

that can appropriate and use space to achieve social inclusion in Canada. The following excerpt is from our interview with Jorge, who had been transferred to another farm during the same season. Here, we can observe that he enjoyed a certain amount of freedom in his ability to leave the farm after work, when he needed to.

[Interviewer: How do you do your shopping?] I ride my bicycle, or I hitch a ride with one of them [coworkers who have a pickup truck to use]. I can go on my bike because there's a store here in Saint-Benoît.

[Interviewer: How long does it take to ride to Saint-Benoît?] About 10 minutes to go and 15 minutes to come back because it's a little harder uphill. I go back and forth all the time because I like to ride my bike (Jorge, 2011, individual interview, Saint-Eustasche, Quebec).

The accumulation of social capital occurs when workers establish and strengthen ties with Canadian citizens, with permanent residents and even with colleagues from other farms, further contributing to the development of spatial capital. Some establish friendships with locals who work on the same farm, which has led to invitations to bars, restaurants, shows, sporting events and landmarks in other cities. The following excerpt from an interview with Fernando, a vegetable farmworker in Saint-Rémi, south of the Montreal Metropolitan Community, is an example of this.

I have a friend in Montreal... he's a good guy... that I used to hang out with. He still invites me to see shows downtown and at the Olympic stadium [in Montreal]. I'd stay with him in his apartment (Fernando, 2011, individual interview, Saint-Rémi, Quebec).

Another excerpt from an interview with Rogelio, an onion farmworker in Saint-Patrice-de-Sherrington, south of the Montreal Metropolitan Community, illustrates the workers' need to maintain connections with friends on neighboring farms. But there clearly is a fear of doing something wrong that could negatively affect him or other workers.

[Interviewer: Have you visited any workers on other farms?] Yes, there's a farm next door. I really like to visit them. The only thing is... I'm always afraid that maybe their boss is going to reprimand them because of me or retaliate against me and tell my boss. I'm always a bit wary (Rogelio, 2011, individual interview, Saint-Patrice-de-Sherrington, Quebec).

For workers who have been enrolled in the SAWP for several years or who have long contracts (six to eight months), increasing spatial capital helps them cope with being in Canada, a long way from home in Mexico. David again demonstrated his identification with and knowledge of the Canadian geographic space, after several years of working there. Patricio, on the other hand, works in a flower greenhouse in Mirabel and expressed some ambivalence about his life between Canada and Mexico.

[David] After 12 seasons, I see it as very normal... I even tell my wife that I think I know how to get around Canada better than Toluca, since I hardly ever go there. I travel more here in Canada [than in Mexico]. I don't like to drive in Toluca because I feel like I don't know the entrances and exits. It's more

difficult there; it's easier here [in Canada]. I feel very safe and sure of myself. I feel good and confident about going out here, going from one place to another. It's become very familiar to me. I don't get worried about where I am or if it's gotten dark. I enjoy my time here (David, 2011, individual interview. Laval, Quebec).

[Patricio] I'm in Canada more [than in Mexico]. Someone said to me, "Maybe you now think like a Quebecois. Don't you see that you have more of a life here than in Mexico?" It's not that I prefer to be here... But some people come for only three or four months - what kind of life is that? They spend more time in Guatemala, Honduras or Mexico. But me, I'm here for eight months and 20 days and have been coming for the last seven years. Where have I mostly lived? Well, here. I spend more time in Canada than in Mexico (Patricio, 2011, individual interview. Mirabel, Quebec).

Thus, information about the appropriation and use of space becomes key to helping new workers from the same or other farms. David, when interviewed, had a farm truck that he was authorized to use as needed.

I tell them [coworkers] where they can send [money to Mexico]. For example, people here always used to send money by Western Union. But I tell them, "Don't use them, it's better that I take you to Doña Betsy". Or I would take them to Montreal, to the Jean-Talon Market, that's better. I know Saint-Eustache, and I'd take them places since they didn't know how to get around. Now that I work with them, I drive them when they get paid. It's better, and they're happy (David, 2011, individual interview. Laval, Quebec).

These interviews highlight the value of space as a resource, a form of capital that gives seasonal agricultural workers in Canada the agency to face the power disparities that they encounter in their work, where employers have enough capital to maintain a dominant position over these workers. Other forms of capital, such as linguistic and social capital, represented by the support of acquaintances, friends, civic organizations, unions or community members, are essential for generating and augmenting this asset.

## Conclusions

This article raises some questions. Will the sawp continue to function as unfree labor? Will farmworkers remain in subordinate positions? Do migrants have enough agency to change the detrimental conditions of seasonal agricultural work? What else is needed to change or minimize the power asymmetries of this field?

Answering these questions is not an easy task; however, this article has tried to show that structures of domination generate spaces in which there is a probability that subordinate workers will react to this domination with resistance, negotiation or acceptance. To do so, they need certain assets, efficient forms of capital to have power and thereby exert influence in accordance with their interests.

SAWP workers have resorted to discrete and indirect ways of resisting unfree labor contexts, what Scott (2011) calls infra-politics. It appears that this political struggle can be empowered to have a more lasting and profound effect on the field if workers accumulate and combine different capital such as linguistic, social, legal, economic and spatial capital. Support networks, a type of social capital, are fundamental in this struggle, but spatial capital is what anchors the struggle and resistance in space.

From an institutional perspective, the SAWP provides benefits for both countries, especially for Mexican workers. However, this study has demonstrated how the program conditions and rules place these workers at a disadvantage by constraining their socio-spatial relationships in Canada.

The governments of modern, industrialized societies protect the full exercise of civil, political and social rights, which is why Canadian citizens can freely seek and choose the work they want. If they face any work-related abuse, they have institutions to defend them. This is not the case for agricultural workers because their status as seasonal migrant workers does not allow them to exercise the rights of citizenship, placing them in precarious positions.

A SAWP contract is intended to be an agreement between people who are free and equal before the law. However, in practice, it is an unequal relationship; therefore, the SAWP acts as an instrument of power that combines free labor (the ability to sell labor, enter into a contract and receive an agreed wage) with unfree labor practices (precarious legal status and working conditions, coercion, no labor mobility, and limited socio-spatial mobility).

The analysis of space here reveals that it has two simultaneous characteristics. First, it is a place of struggle and conflict in the worker-employer power relationship. Second, it is a form of capital for workers, a tool they can use to influence spatial organization and achieve more beneficial positions in contexts of unfree labor.

Last, while not addressed in this article, the issue of gender may be an opportunity for future work. Although the SAWP mostly employs men, women are also hired to work on Canadian farms. Female day laborers experience an even deeper subordination because they are affected by all the structural aspects of the program and must also face the socio-spatial relationships dominated by certain hegemonic forms of masculinity. This raises the following question. How relevant is spatial capital for women striving for inclusion in a society where they do not have all the rights of citizens and must also contend with the gender practices of a largely male, asymmetrical labor market?

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