Encerrados: Wyoming Migrant Worker Resistance to Embodied Legacies of Violence

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Abstract

Encerrados: Wyoming Migrant Worker Resistance to Embodied Legacies of Violence is a compilation of migrant worker life stories that resist and challenge ongoing colonial structures of labor, care, and power. Drawing on anthropological literature that engages with the body, different forms of violence, frameworks of (in)visibility, capitalism and the fetishization of commodities, and the inflammation of the land, society, and bodies, this thesis interweaves migrant worker stories with histories of violence to bring forth the dangerous contradictions that structures of domination depend on. Combining extensive participant-observation, interviews, and the implementation of a social impact project focused on migrant worker healing, this thesis sheds light to the legacies of violence that manifest as poor health in the lives of Wyoming migrant workers, creating feelings of entrapment. These feelings are exacerbated by the violence of the U.S. immigration system that produces uncertainty and confines them to the geographic space. The body becomes the entity in which the ongoing forms of violence against migrant workers are made visible and the visibility of migrants in the broader community constructs hostile anti-immigrant environments. These attitudes, ideologies, and perceptions infiltrate into the institutions of care, further creating barriers for migrant patients seeking services. Despite their existence in harmful environments constructed by legacies of violence, Wyoming migrant workers are resilient and resist ongoing colonial harms. I argue that practices of remembering, and artmaking contribute to lessen these feelings of entrapment and provide migrant workers with the agency to reconstruct exploitative environments, in effect establishing feelings of libertad and tranquility.
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## Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................ 2  
Acknowledgements....................................................................................................................... 3
Introduction................................................................................................................................... 7
Part I: Colonialism.......................................................................................................................... 60
   1. Colonial History, Violence, and Inflamed Bodies................................................................. 60
   2. “Unskilled Workers”............................................................................................................ 88
Part II: Forced Migration................................................................................................................ 100
   3. Embodied Punitive Immigration Policies............................................................................ 100
   4. The Violence of Operation Gatekeeper: Illustrative Migration Stories......................... 121
Part III. Migrant Worker Health Systems and Strategies of Resistance................................. 132
   5. Good Intentions, Bad Management: How Rural Migrant Clinics Struggle................. 132
   6. Towards Healing and Restoring Community: Storytelling and Art........................... 161
Conclusion.................................................................................................................................... 176
Bibliography................................................................................................................................ 177
List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Chart of farm hierarchies................................................................. 20
Figure 1.2: Grass field at the base of Heart Mountain................................. 36
Figure 1.3: Researcher with Cecilia and Mayra weeding fields..................... 53
Figure 2.1: Cecilia and Evelyn emptying their weed sacs.............................. 89
Figure 2.2: Cecilia and Mayra kneeling, planting hemp............................... 93
Figure 2.3: Close up of hemp plants................................................................. 94
Figure 3.1: Landscape of Obed’s family farm in Chuhuichupa, Chihuahua, MX. 115
Figure 3.2: A corn field in Chuhuichupa, Chihuahua, MX after harvest season 117
Figure 3.3: Obed in his farm in Chuhuichupa, Chihuahua, MX..................... 119
Figure 4.1: Elisa’s painting, *El tecolote vigilante*.......................................... 126
Figure 4.2: Angela’s painting, *Cruzando la frontera*...................................... 129
Figure 5.1: Map of the distribution of migrant health centers in Wyoming....... 135
Figure 6.1: Researcher with cohort of migrant community healing program participants 163
Figure 6.2: Jose explaining his painting about life in Mexico vs Wyoming....... 164
Figure 6.3: Reina’s painting, *Los cambios en la vida*.................................... 165
Figure 6.4: Mariana’s painting, *El bajio*.......................................................... 167
Figure 6.5: Cecilia’s painting, *El mejor tiempo de mi vida que nunca volverá*.... 168
Figure 6.6: Mariana’s painting, *La mariposa*................................................... 170
Figure 6.7 and Figure 6.8: Gloria’s paintings, *Mi casa* and *La partida*........ 172
Figure 6.9 and Figure 6.10: Gloria’s paintings, *Nuestra madre* and *Lo que se deja* 173
Figure 6.11 and Figure 6.12: Gloria’s paintings, *La creación* and *Invierno solitario* 174
Figure 6.13: Gloria’s painting, *Un día de julio*................................................ 175
Introduction

Imagine spending your life waking up at 4:00 am, bundling up in your discolored collar shirt and washed blue jeans, blasting the heater in your car to alleviate the morning chill, and your car headlights flashing onto the petrified eyes of four carefree deer as you cautiously swerve to avoid them on your hour commute to the fields. Imagine the satisfaction of working the soil, paying close attention to how the leaves of the bean crop change, grow, and intertwine with one another, as if they are holding hands, signaling that their life cycle is coming to an end, their produce ready to be cultivated. Imagine using your hands to pick the first pinto bean pod, opening the pod, and seeing three beautifully shaped brown beans mirroring the color of your skin, imagine gathering these beans to ensure that your family, as well as families across the land, are fed.

Imagine the beautiful shades of blue outlining the mountains that encircle you, the smell of dirt on your clothes and on your hair, the quietness of the early morning, the smell of the crop and the weeds when they are uprooted out of the soil (the same way your co-workers were uprooted from their land), the empty “clunk” sound of the shovel hitting the dry soil, the disappointing sound of breaking a stem while trying to uproot the weed and having to bend over for a second time, but most of all, imagine the conversations of resistance, the stories that are carried through the wind, and the laughs that make your 12 hour workday seem like 20 minutes of labor.

Now, imagine the sound of your broken English as you try to communicate with the grower, the never-ending aches that send a rushing sensation of pain through your body with every crooked step you take down the dirt row, imagine thinking that you could be separated from your family at any moment, imagine having to hold in your urine for hours because there is
no private space for you to use the restroom, and imagine the sun beating on your back, leaving an endless stream of sweat running down your cheek. For some of us, these experiences do not remain in our imaginations, rather they constitute our realities of existence as migrant laborers in a globalized world dependent on violence, exploitation, and human suffering. In efforts to illuminate and make visible the voices, stories, and embodied experiences of an invisible community, this thesis documents migrant farm laborers’ life histories, illness narratives, moments of joy, and instances of community gatherings and empowerment through art production. Their stories uncover the histories of power and systems of inequality that infiltrate into the daily lives of Mexican migrant workers in Wyoming, dictate the work sector they are able to participate in, and structure the resources they can access.

When I was only a year old my family and I settled on the isolated plains of Wyoming having left our home in Chuhuichupa, Chihuahua, Mexico. We still live on the Wyoming plains, and my father has remained in the same place of farm employment for the past 19 years. I have seen my father’s body (treated as disposable by his employer) deteriorate, made weak by the physical demands of his irrigator job. During the moments he would be at home, he would spend his time resting, complaining about his aches and pains, complaining about the disrespect from his employer, and telling stories of his life in Chihuahua. Since his job is very time demanding, and my mother does not drive, it was always a challenge to find transportation to medical facilities, resulting in my own experiences with medical instability. I did not have an established doctor or dentist as a young migrant and oftentimes missed essential check-up appointments.

Through my personal experiences serving as my parents’ translator in medical appointments, with their employers, and during legal processes, I have developed a desire to serve as a resource and advocate for my migrant community at home. Working as a weeder
alongside migrant women (including my mother, my grandmother, my aunt, and family friends),
I have gained insights into the gendered challenges existing within migrant worker communities.
I have embodied the migrant laborer experience and found value in the conversations that
manifest in these spaces of physical and mental suffering.

The geographic and sociocultural landscape, coupled with long workdays in the sun,
restricts Wyoming migrant workers to participate in the same daily routines, creating feelings of
being *encerrados*\(^1\). A lack of legal status exacerbates these feelings, leaving workers like Jose
feeling forced to work in the fields, with no other option for survival. Migrant workers associate
their lives before migration with freedom and now find themselves confined to a geographic
space far from their homes and culture. The community’s location in the Northwestern region of
the state, over 1,000 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, and the extremely rural environments
that are fostered, further complicate the possibility to participate in cultural events, have access
to cultural food, and feel connected to one another. Furthermore, migrants that settle in
Wyoming experience the harsh winter season that further restricts their movement and alienates
them from cultural goods. Dangerous road conditions and temperatures reaching below zero
force migrants to remain in their homes. Many migrant workers that I spoke to expressed
heightened feelings of loneliness, *deseesperación*,\(^2\) and sadness during the winter months. Many
agricultural workers lose employment during the winter and will be called to return to the fields
in early spring. Therefore, workers often struggle to find employment elsewhere, but oftentimes
are funneled into other sectors of work like the service industry.

Their feelings of entrapment are exacerbated by compounding forces of structural
violence. Wyoming migrant workers are deemed “public charges” as they navigate hostile anti-

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\(^1\) Entrapped or enclosed.
\(^2\) Despair.
immigrant environments, have their work devalued and deemed “unskilled,” live in continuous uncertainty about their futures, and face barriers even when receiving care from clinics designed to support them. Despite the histories of power and inequality that manifest in the lives of Wyoming migrant workers as poor health, their life histories illuminate the contradictions colonialism, capitalism, and punitive immigration policies rely on. Their resiliency and agency to settle in Wyoming, expanding their familial and community ties, resist the forms of power that continuously work to make them invisible. Through practices of remembering and connecting to transnational land, Wyoming migrant workers experience moments of *libertad*\(^3\) in exploitative environments and find *tranquilidad*\(^4\) in their lives.

**Migration in Northwestern Wyoming**

Composing 6% of the approximately 12,000 inhabitants of Big Horn County, the Latinx migrant community is very small (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). In contrast to the mobility of the migrants Seth Holmes (2013) and Jason De Leon (2015) center in their ethnographies, migrants settle in Wyoming, expanding their families and community ties. The migrants whose stories compose this thesis have been in Wyoming for more than ten years. Holmes follows the migration of Triqui migrant workers as they leave their home in San Miguel, Oaxaca and move across different states laboring in different agricultural fields. Unlike studies focused on seasonal nomadic migrant workers, the settled nature of migration in Wyoming provides new avenues for conceptualizing migration, settlement, and the conditions that motivate migrants to stay confined within a rural region, despite it being the source of exploitation. The settled nature of migrants in Wyoming and the often-paradoxical comfortability migrants experience in an extremely rural

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\(^3\) Freedom.

\(^4\) Tranquility.
environment demonstrates how personal ties are made to a transnational land, creating feelings of *tranquilidad*\(^5\) and moments of happiness.

According to the US Census Bureau\(^6\) (2020), the population of Wyoming is 576,851. With the lowest population of all states in the U.S., Wyoming consists of mountains, plains, and basins that provide its communities with beautiful scenery and the opportunity to find tranquil peace in its environment. The largest cities in the state, Cheyenne, and Casper, have a population less than 60,000 and small towns like Greybull, Emblem, Burlington, and Basin, house between 300-2,000 people each. In the extremely rural spaces that migrant workers navigate, the small population often grants them feelings of belonging. Families that migrate from Mexico settle in these towns and work alongside local white communities. When children enter the public education system, their families become increasingly tied to the community. These ties are strengthened through community engagement during sporting events, academic competitions, and school performances. The low population of rural environments facilitate feelings of belonging to the local community and migrant workers would regularly contrast life in Wyoming to a presumed violence imagined in cities. Migrant workers in Wyoming associate urban spaces with increased violence, a fast-paced life, and a lack of control over the wellbeing of family members.

Take for example the words Cristina\(^7\) utilizes when she speaks of Wyoming. Cristina works as a housekeeper for older residents throughout Big Horn and Park County. She and her co-worker, Mariana, are from Chihuahua, Mexico. They both have previous experience working as weeders during the summer seasons, and their previous employer set them up to clean houses.

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\(^5\) Tranquility.  
\(^6\) [https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WY](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WY)  
\(^7\) All names for Wyoming migrant workers have been changed and are pseudonyms to protect the research participants.
When I asked Cristina why her family had moved to Wyoming, she said it was a decision her husband had made on his own. With an annoyed tone, Cristina said that her husband makes all the decisions. He decided they would leave Mexico, and now he was deciding to relocate their family from Little Rock, Arkansas (population of around 200,000) to Burlington, WY (population of approximately 250).

When I asked Cristina if she had previously been to Wyoming, or knew where it was, Cristina said “No yo ni siquiera lo había escuchado mentar. Nada, yo no tenía la menor idea cuando me dijo que Wyoming. Dije Santo Dios donde es eso.”

8 Cristina had no previous knowledge about Wyoming as a state, its extremely rural environments, or what life there would entail. Since moving to Wyoming in 1993, Cristina has developed a deep appreciation for the life she and her family have created in Wyoming. Compared to life in a larger city in Arkansas, Cristina feels more secure in Wyoming. She has greater visibility, and therefore control over the whereabouts of her children. The close networks and relationships that are established among Latinx migrants facilitate the distribution of information related to where children are, who they spend time with, and make parents like Cristina feel more comfortable regarding their children’s safety. Cristina said, “Es un estado muy bonito para criar a los hijos. Aquí los puede uno crear bien porque allá, allá si se le pueden salir a uno y ni los encuentra. Y aquí, ya mero que no.”

9 Cristina attributes the ability to know the whereabouts of her children as something unique to the rural environment. Unlike her life in Arkansas, Cristina’s fears of losing her children are lessened, and she can live a more tranquil life.

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8 No, I hadn’t even heard of it. Nothing, I had not the slightest idea when he told me Wyoming. I said Dear God where is that! (Interview with Cristina, age 46, July 17, 2021)
9 It is a beautiful state to raise children. Here you can raise them right because over there [Little Rock, AR], over there, children can leave the house and you won’t find them. Here, that wouldn’t happen. (Interview with Cristina, age 46, July 17, 2021)
The low population and scattered nature of towns in Wyoming construct a slower-paced environment than is known to exist in urban spaces. These ideas of a slow-paced environment often translate into the work sites migrants occupy. Cristina reiterated a claim about the working environments in Wyoming that differs from those fostered in other states, such as California, Washington, or Texas. When I asked Cristina how Wyoming compared to Arkansas, she said, “Diferente porque vivíamos en una ciudad grande y allá los trabajos son muy diferentes que aquí. Es muy diferente la vida, muy rápida. Aquí es como más tranquilo, más callado, es mejor, a mí me gusta más aquí.” The pace at which life is lived in urban spaces drastically differs from the experiences of migrant workers in Wyoming, granting them slower paced working environments. It additionally associates Wyoming as an ideal place to raise children, keeping them safe from outward, explicit, and physical forms of violence that often erupt in urban spaces.

Three migrant workers that I met, Felipe, Joaquin, and Elias, are young migrant weeders from the same town in Guanajuato, Mexico that travel from California to Wyoming during the summer seasons to labor in the fields. I held conversations with them while weeding fields where they echoed similar ideas as Cristina. These workers relocate to Wyoming during each summer because the work is not as physically exhausting as what is required and expected of migrant workers in large corporate farms in California. Joaquin is a 24-year-old migrant worker that regularly lives with his mother and brother live in California. He first immigrated to the U.S. when he was twelve years old and has been working in agriculture since. Joaquin, like Felipe, has been traveling to Wyoming for work. Joaquin likes that in the fields he has labored in Wyoming, there is no mayordomo. In California, these people abuse workers and create a

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10 Different because we lived in a big city and over there the work is very different from here. Life is very different, very fast. Here it is more tranquil, more quiet, it is better, I like it more here. (Interview with Cristina, age 46, July 17, 2021)

11 Administrator/Manager/Overseer.
hostile work environment where the migrant worker is continuously under surveillance. Joaquin said that they can’t take any breaks when the mayordomo is in the field and that they are expected to work hours without stopping. In California, Joaquin works in different fruit and nut fields, so they are paid by the unit (weight) of how much they cultivate. In piece-rate pay, migrants compete with one another. Often migrants run up and down the rows of the field to pick as many fruits as possible. This creates more stress and exhaustion at work. Therefore, Joaquin appreciates the more tranquil work environment that is cultivated in Wyoming compared to the exhaustion his body experiences during the rest of the year in larger agribusiness farms in California.

Migrants would regularly describe the Wyoming environment as tranquilidad. How can the place of exploitation simultaneously be tranquilo? Through conversations with migrant workers, whether through interviews, during social events, or that came up during the healing program, I learned of the ways Wyoming provides a tranquil life for workers, despite it being the place of their exploitation. Like the voices of Cristina and Joaquin demonstrate, the rural space constructs feelings of a slower paced life and of tranquilidad.

**Finding Libertad in Places of Exploitation**

Lupe, a migrant woman who has established her family in Wyoming, echoed similar sentiments as Cristina and Joaquin about the environment that is cultivated in Wyoming. Her previous agriculture working experience in Mexico demonstrates how migrant farmworkers use their work as a method to remember their lives in Mexico and establish feelings of belonging to transnational lands. During a warm July 2021 evening, after our weekly yoga session as part of the Migrant Worker Community Healing Program, Lupe and I returned to the basement of the
Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Greybull to have a conversation about her life experiences as a migrant worker. She has been working in the agricultural sector since she was a child in Aguascalientes, Mexico. At the age of thirteen, Lupe first emigrated to the U.S., fleeing poverty and with hopes of providing financial support for her single mother. Lupe is a quiet and reserved 41-year-old migrant who has lived in Wyoming for close to nineteen years.

Lupe associate's feelings of freedom when she works outdoors. When I asked Lupe what her favorite employment has been, whether in Aguascalientes, MX, or the U.S., she said: "El campo porque ando libre. Estoy afuera y es el que más me gusta, aunque es bien pesado, ajá sí, es bien pesado." The field, as a place of employment, serves as the site of exploitation, but also allows Lupe to feel free. This testimony by Lupe complicates our understandings of sites of exploitation and the ways they manifest in individual migrant worker lives. This feeling of liberation that Lupe experiences stems from her life in Mexico. Lupe says "trabajé en la pizca del durazno y la uva, pero pues no trabajé mucho allá. Aquí fue donde desde que yo llegué, aquí fue puro trabajar." Lupe, like other migrant workers in Wyoming, associate liberation with memories they hold of their life in Mexico. Although the intensive work in agricultural fields in Wyoming creates physical suffering and migrant workers face challenges associated with legal status, workers like Lupe subvert the site of exploitation to one that evokes feelings of liberation by remembering life in Mexico. Memories of life in Mexico support migrant workers in feeling free in their exploitative workplace. Working in the outdoors as a weeder helps Lupe to connect to her life in Mexico, creating feelings of libertad. These memories and life experiences, prior to being forced to migrate due to poverty, violence, or environmental catastrophes, facilitate the

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12 The fields because I am free. I am outdoors and that is what I like, even though it is really exhausting, yes, it is very exhausting. (Interview with Lupe, age 41, July 23, 2021)
13 I worked cultivating peaches and grapes, but I did not work a lot there [Aguascalientes, Mx]. Here is where, since I got here, here it has been all work. (Interview with Lupe, age 41, July 23, 2021)
categorization of Wyoming as a tranquil space, one that can be correlated with the tranquility once experienced in their homes on the other side of the border.

Despite the feelings of belonging and tranquility migrant workers experience as they establish their families, work outdoors, and remember times in their lives when they felt free, migrant workers endure the violence of nativist rhetoric, reduced access to health care due to legal status, and daily manifestations of structural and symbolic violence. Accompanied by a life-threatening migration experience, Lupe has not been able to find a doctor that she feels understands her pain. Her doctors at Ag Worker Health and Services have said “tienes que aprender a vivir con lo te toco.”

Since her childhood, she remembers being sick and feels like her illness has never been resolved regardless of how many medical appointments she goes to. Compounded structural violence has shaped Lupe’s life to the point of living in continuous debilitating pain. Holmes explains how structural violence is manifested “as social inequalities and hierarchies, often along social categories of class, race, gender and sexuality” (2013, 55). For Lupe, her undocumented status, low-income status, and identity as a woman all create barriers as she seeks to remedy her chronic pain. Unable to understand her pain, medical professionals, including those providing services in migrant clinics, have given up on her. Lupe is left to accept her pain as part of her life, there is no solution to her pain. Unable to locate the source of her pain, it is deemed imaginary. Invisible forms of structural violence manifests in her daily life, impacting her ability to heal and challenging her ability to experience moments of tranquility in the environment she lives in.

In efforts to uncover stories of health inaccessibility and dissatisfaction with care like Lupe’s, this thesis documents and analyzes stories of health instability in relation to migrant

14 You have to learn to live with what you were given. (Interview with Lupe, age 41, July 23, 2021)
worker's existence within historical, transnational, and every-day experiences of embodied structural violence. In the specific context of migrant workers in Wyoming, a lack of self-confidence, lack of solidarity among workers, and a lack of spaces to organize for social change, present avenues for inquiry and places for intervention as an action-oriented scholar. The sections that follow outline the theoretical frameworks that when intertwined with the stories migrant worker's shared, help to uncover forms of structural violence that infiltrate into their daily lives and produce physical suffering.

This thesis brings to light the resiliency of Wyoming migrant workers. Despite their existence within compounding forms of violence, migrant workers in Wyoming establish feelings of belonging and construct places of freedom by remembering their lives prior to migration. In Mexico, they felt free. These associations of freedom result from being near their extended families, but also from having the ability to connect and participate in their culture. Working in the fields gives migrant workers a return to libertad in an environment that confines them to exploitative work, to anti-immigrant rhetoric, and where they do not have the ability to receive care that heals their bodies. The resiliency I observed, and document below, challenges the categorization of migrant workers as solely victims of violence. They are resilient to the structures of oppression that manifest in their lives and challenge historical and contemporary assumptions that deem them "inferior others."

**Forms of Violence**

Due to ongoing processes of colonization, imperialism, and capitalism, violence manifests in visible and invisible ways. Nancy Schepert-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois conceptualize violence as giving birth to itself, and of chains and spirals of violence, or a
"continuum of violence" (2004, 1). In this continuum, political, structural, and symbolic violence are categorized as expressions of violence that produce, conceal, legitimize, and increase each other's power. Existence within this violence continuum produces what Holmes describes as a "continual state of suffering," or the embodiment of structural, political, and symbolic violence that (re)produces and exacerbates poor physical and mental health (Holmes 2013). Violence goes beyond direct physical violence and is both destructive and reproductive.

Structural violence can be defined as, "the violence of poverty, hunger, social exclusion and humiliation - inevitably translates into intimate and domestic violence" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 1). In the lives of migrant workers, structural violence is made invisible by scapegoating migrants as responsible for their poverty. The low-wage occupations available to undocumented migrant workers constrains them into poverty. They must expose their bodies to repetitive, harsh labor within an economy that exists because of exploitation. To maximize profits, capitalism relies on a vulnerable, easily manipulated workforce, for which undocumented migrants fit the criteria. Their undocumented status is socially constructed and made legitimate by the U.S. immigration system. The U.S. immigration system, therefore, is another form of structural violence that impacts the lives and health of Wyoming migrant workers. Its punitive and strict policies depend on racial hierarchies that construct migrant workers as a threat to the nation-state. It has historically established strict criteria for membership that alienates migrant workers from being beneficiaries of the distribution of social goods.

The word structure in structural violence, implies neutrality, where something simply exists and is part of the way the world is. The pairing of violence with structure creates a juxtaposition redirects our attention to the suffering and injustices that manifest and are deeply embedded in our day-to-day lives and are taken-for-granted patterns of the world (Farmer 1996).
Paul Farmer argues that by directing our attention to the hidden forces and the cascading effects of these forces, researchers can dig into both “individual experience and the larger social matrix in which it is embedded in order to see how various large-scale social forces come to be translated into personal distress and disease” (1996, 261). This is extremely important for work done with migrant communities. Farmer points to the forms of violence that manifest as poor health in the lives of marginalized people but are not always visible to health providers or to society in general. One way to understand structural violence and how it manifests in the daily lives of Wyoming migrant workers, is to look at the hierarchal organization of workers in agribusinesses.

Agricultural farms in Wyoming are generally much smaller than the California farms Holmes investigates (see figure 1.1), have fewer employees, and rely on migrant workers’ year-round presence in the state. For example, the group of workers with whom I weeded fields during Summer 2021 were managed by a well-known private individual, Benito, who travels from the borderlands in Mexico throughout the states of Wyoming, Washington, and California during their high-volume work seasons. As an individual contractor, growers hire Benito to manage different weed picker groups and to serve as a bridge for communication. The grower will call Benito, provide him with specific instructions, and he will relay this information to his weeders. In this way, the employers are completely detached from the migrant workers laboring in their fields, facilitating their exploitation. Benito becomes the employer figure; therefore, migrant weeders must depend on establishing a good relationship with Benito to find some protection at work. Migrant workers do not have a direct line of communication with their employer. Therefore, migrant workers are reduced to working bodies that spend their days undergoing the same repetitive work tasks, like in an assembly line. This strains their physical
health and deems migrant workers as disposable laborers. If a worker is too weak to work, Benito will fill in the gap with a new worker. Benito, as a bilingual U.S. citizen exists higher up the farm hierarchy, granting him access to better treatment and income without any physical labor. Benito’s weeder, largely undocumented and therefore lower on the farm hierarchy, are subject to abuse by both Benito and the growers they work for.

![Hierarchical organization of workers in large corporate farms in California](image)

**Figure 1.1**: Hierarchical organization of workers in large corporate farms in California. The table was retrieved from Seth Holmes’s (2013) book, *Fresh Fruit Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States.*

The chart demonstrates how large agribusinesses are organized in hierarchies where one’s proximity to whiteness, whether that be through language, citizenship status, or ethnicity, determines the type of work one has access to. Additionally, there is a correlation between being positioned higher in the hierarchy and with increased respect, better health, financial security, and control over time and other’s labor. The lowest in the hierarchy are Indigenous migrant workers, who experience severe aches and pains due to the type of labor they do, which mostly involves working outdoors while kneeling. In other words, workers embody social hierarchies in
the form of suffering and sickness (Holmes 2013, 55). These hierarchical organizations of farm work can only be uncovered by making visible the experiences of those that fall low in the hierarchy of work. Their embodied experiences point to the histories and social processes that have shaped their life chances.

The general framework of this model can be applied to the working conditions of migrant workers in Wyoming, however the settled nature of their migration and work creates new avenues for analysis. One major distinction is the breakdown of ethnicity in different kinds of work roles. At the small agricultural farm that is investigated in Part I Colonialism, most irrigators at Cactus Hill Corporation are undocumented, requiring the use of their bodies for manual labor. Workers with permanent residency and experience as tractorists are granted moments of temporary relief from manual bodily labor but are also expected to embody the role of irrigators. The U.S. citizen managers on the farm are not exposed to the same work environments as migrant workers and are alleviated of continual exhaustion by being indoors and primarily working on tractors.

The reproduction of these structural inequalities in the farm, in the form of hierarchies where indignity is placed at the bottom, are shaped by larger social structures, like Spanish colonization and in the corporatization of US agriculture and international free trade. Continuing a cycle of displacement, these suffering-producing systems rely on a perceived superiority of modernity and progress over Indigenous systems of organization. The modern suffering of Indigenous and Brown communities in Latin America began with the violence of Spanish colonization. This type of structural violence relies on dichotomies like indigeneity vs. civilization, modern vs. traditional, and individualism vs. community. As descendants of
colonized peoples, migrant workers embody this structural violence of mistreatment and inequality which is reflected and reinforced by current day transnational economic policies.

Many migrant workers interviewed for this research expressed feelings of nostalgia of returning to their small-scale farms in Mexico to work the land with their families like they once had. Like their colonized ancestors, migrant workers in Wyoming were left with no other option but to leave their lands that could no longer sustain their livelihoods. The structural violence leading to the displacement of the poorest communities of Mexico and Central America results from neoliberal economic policies through U.S. intervention. A form of U.S. neoliberal intervention leading to the displacement of people from Mexico is the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which deregulated agricultural trade between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Shaping NAFTA is the neoliberal assumption that “reducing trade barriers is always good and always benefits all parties” (Graeber 2010, 81). However, as the life histories of migrant workers demonstrate in Part II Forced Migration, this trade introduced large farming corporations and businesses in Mexico from the U.S., leaving low-scale, primarily indigenous farmworkers unable to compete in the market. These institutionalized agreements produce poverty, hunger, and ultimately lead to the forced migration of farmworkers that will eventually labor the land for large transnational corporations that led to their displacement in the first place. The neo-liberal economic model depends on the displacement of these workers for cheap, exploitative, hidden labor. Having been placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, having lost their land and livelihood, farmworkers in Mexico embody the violence of transnational neoliberal economic policies and suffer the process of forced migration, and exploited labor once in the U.S. This situation ultimately forces people to migrate. The migration experience for people at the bottom of the hierarchy produces worse health outcomes due to other forms of violence like
employment conditions, housing instability, citizenship status, and the inability to access resources to address these inequalities.

However, migrant workers are not solely victims of abuse. In the context of Wyoming migrant laborers, the violence continuum falls short of recognizing how memories of life in Mexico are correlated with doing work outdoors and therefore alleviate some suffering produced by this violence continuum. Migrant workers in Wyoming experience moments of freedom that contrast the framework of continual suffering by associating field work with moments in Mexico in which they felt free. Their conversations in the field and the companionship that is fostered creates new avenues for understanding spaces of exploitation and suffering. These forms of violence do constitute their daily lives and dictate the resources they can access, however, migrant workers in Wyoming find refuge through participating in work that reminds them of their home in Mexico.

Symbolic violence can be described as “the internalization and legitimization of hierarchy, exercised through cognition and misrecognition, knowledge and sentiment, with the unwitting consent of the dominated” (Holmes, 2013, 89). It can be understood as a type of non-physical violence, although it has physical consequences, that manifests in the power differences that exist between different social groups. It is accepted typically by both the dominant and subordinate group through the imposition of social norms.

Symbolic violence involves the legitimization and internalization of hierarchy due to the interrelation of social inequalities and the perceptual environment and context in which they are manifested and produced. It involves the normalization of racial stereotypes and prejudices that work to justify mistreatment based on false assumptions. Inequalities become naturalized and internalized by those who are marginalized, facilitating the reproduction of social positions and
conditions. Symbolic violence manifests daily and is often reproduced by those that endure its harm.

Conversations while weeding fields uncover the ways internalized understandings of oneself are correlated to the mainstream conservative rhetoric of migrant workers as unskilled and uneducated laborers. Lupe mentioned that farm work was all that she knew how to do, all that she was good at. Lupe misrecognizes the symbolic violence that deems migrant workers as uneducated and “unskilled” laborers as her reality. In effect, Lupe, without a formal education, seems to embody the mythical migrant produced through anti-immigrant rhetoric. Lupe internalizes that for someone like her that is undocumented, the only option is to debilitate her body and labor in the fields. Her internalized and perceived identity of worthiness is tied to her labor, largely influenced by the rhetoric surrounding migrant work and migrants more broadly. These are everyday experiences of violence, including symbolic violence. Lupe embodies her social conditions, impacting her mental health and sense of self-confidence. Due to the violence that manifests in her social environment, Lupe internalizes her social condition as an exploited laborer. However, Lupe previously described that doing outdoor field work also allows her to feel free by remembering the moments she felt free. This complicates our understanding of symbolic violence and points to the ways migrant workers adopt traditionally harmful assumptions and use them to find a sense of belonging and freedom in their sites of exploitation.

So then, what leads to so many migrant workers like Lupe feeling like the health care they receive is not enough? With feelings that they must deal with it. That there is nothing that can be done? The embodiment of systems of inequality mentioned above perpetuates suffering and poor health. As biomedical professionals interact with the migrant community, underlying forms of structural and symbolic violence need to be understood and incorporated into their
treatment plan. This could involve writing letters to employers for migrant workers to receive the rest they need to heal, therefore approaching one of the root causes of illness perpetuated by the working environments migrants labor in. However, poor health continues to prevail in this community due to the ongoing manifestations of colonialism, punitive immigration policies that construct hostile social and work environments, and the colonial legacies of biomedicine as a healing institution. The next section turns to the history of colonial biomedicine to make sense of the current social structures and practices of health care where “suffering is converted into technical problems that transmogrify its existential roots” (Kleinman 1995, 34). The transformation of structural and symbolic violence to technical problems that can be fixed like a machine serve to (re)produce working bodies, not healthy autonomous ones. Compounded sources of suffering lead to layers of strain on the bodies of migrant workers and produce poor health. What are the constructed social environments in which migrants exist that shape their health? What is the history of biomedicine as a healing institution and what social structures are in place that perpetuate poor health?

**Colonialism and Health**

The history of biomedicine reveals that experimentation on people subjected to slavery or colonialism was an important dimension of its emergence as a globally dominant medical system. Biomedical research and interventions in the context of colonial rule focused not on the health of colonized populations but on the health of colonizers. The goal was to protect colonizers from what were seen as “dangerous,” “polluted,” and disease-ridden environments and people. (Lock and Nguyen, 2018). Lock and Nguyen describe four phases of the “tool of empire” (2018, 40) that constituted biomedicine as an imperial, colonial, and nationalist
institutions. They argue that "critical events," where historical moments that threatened individual existence and social orders structure the manifestations of biomedicine for different forms of control, to legitimize new forms of knowledge, and realign social relations (Lock and Nguyen 2018, 80). The authors outline colonial epidemics as the first "critical event" that biomedicine was used as a tool for colonial control and power. New diseases impacted European colonists as a result of their "explorations" and biomedicine was used as a tool for protecting the colonizers (Street 2014, 57). A sole focus on what was categorized as "tropical medicine," neglected to serve native people, even though they were recruited for experimentation. The implications of this, Street argues, is that it gave scientific legitimacy to the notion of "primitive" tropical world as a dangerous environment that was vastly different from the sanitized temperate world of Europe (Street 2014, 58). Colonial biomedical approaches therefore developed enclaves of care that were only accessible to white colonizers.

Lock and Nguyen show how, after World War I, ideas shifted from a view of the distinctness of Indigenous and European bodies to a universalism that focus on their biological commensurability. This shift resulted in the expansion of services where "biomedical techniques were increasingly used to manage the health of subject populations rather than being reserved solely for settlers and conquering armies" (Lock and Nguyen 2018, 80). With this new view of biological equivalence, biomedicine then came to be used primarily as a method to ensure the health of laborers upon whom colonial projects depended. By the 1960’s, waves of colonies began gaining independence which ushered in a third phase of colonial biomedicine, categorized by nation building and modernization (Lock and Nguyen 2018, 80). At this stage, "healthcare for all" became a rallying cry and a goal of newly independent governments.
However, before the dreams of building public healthcare infrastructure could be realized, the imposition of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s forced draconian austerity on newly independent governments, depleting public resources and severely cutting budgets for the healthcare sector. Since then, healthcare infrastructure has been scrutinized and deemed a failure. In recent years, the decay and inadequacy of public health infrastructure in former colonies has been viewed to be the result of corrupt and inept postcolonial governments. This view averts attention from the history of colonialism that created their instability in the first place and the neocolonial forms of power that have prevented governments from building up and sustaining a strong public sector for health care delivery. Instability and failed health systems led to what Lock and Nguyen describe as the fourth phase of biomedicine's globalization where international aid from development agencies, non-governmental institutions, and humanitarian efforts established patchwork programs in former colonies aimed at improving the health of those living in poverty across the globe (2018, 81). Biomedicine therefore attempts to resolve the instability under which it is founded through the continuation of colonial and imperial methods. Continuing to use underlying ideas of colonial domination through “humanitarian” efforts continues the cycle ignoring structural forces. Therefore, the land, people, and society continue to suffer.

The colonial history of biomedicine manifests today in the practices of health providers and the attitudes patients have towards their providers. Lupe, mentioned earlier, felt like she was unheard, and her immigrant experience was not taken into consideration. Lupe exists in an extremely rural environment, far from her extended family in Mexico and alienated from her culture. She weeds fields in the scorching sun, oftentimes for more than 10 hours and is exposed to toxic chemicals while at work. Additionally, Lupe exists in a hostile anti-immigrant
environment that deems her a public charge and unworthy of being a member and receiving resources. These ideas are internalized by Lupe, and her medical providers, therefore impacting the care that she receives. Prolonged exposure to this toxic environment inflames Lupe’s body (Mayra and Patel 2021), leading to the debilitation of health. Being in continuous existence in this constructed environment, the immune system in migrant bodies like Lupe’s detects a threat. Once damage or the threat of damage is detected, inflammation is triggered as a healing response that mobilizes resources that ultimately heal (Mayra and Patel 2021, 4). However, “when the damage keeps coming, the repair cannot fully happen, leaving the inflammatory response running. A system of healing then turns into one that creates more harm” (Mayra and Patel 2021, 4). The damage keeps coming and manifests in Lupe’s daily life given her social status as an undocumented migrant worker that restricts her body to this sector of work. Every day, Lupe, and other migrant workers in Wyoming exist in an environment that inflames their bodies.

Rupa Marya and Raj Patel (2021) investigate how violent social structures become embodied, resulting in the continuous inflammation of bodies. The authors attribute this inflammation to people existing within the violent structures that colonialism, capitalism, and biomedicine uphold and reproduce. Society is inflamed due to the violent structures of which it is founded upon. Inflammation as a healing response is triggered by the immune system when tissues and cells are damaged or threatened to be damaged. The body responds by mobilizing resources to the injured area until it is healed. However, when our bodies exist within an inflamed society built upon systematic racism, xenophobia, global capitalism, and land extraction, the damages and threats imposed onto our bodies are a daily occurrence, leaving the body injured, and the inflammatory response running. Therefore, the inflammation of the earth, of society, is the inflammation of the body.
Marya and Patel describe a cosmology of colonialism that is founded on the extraction of the land, the accumulation of capital through exploitation, forced labor, slavery, racism, sexism, and ideologies that position whiteness as superior and humans over nature. Biomedicine is created and exists within a form of social organization founded on the understanding of the world, non-white humans, the land, and other species of animals as the sources for extraction. Marya and Patel describe the need for specificity in medical diagnosis, one where the time and place of the patient’s life matters. They argue, “experiencing daily traumas at the hands of law enforcement, acute poverty, hunger, discrimination, forced displacement, and disproportionate exposure to toxins- it all makes people sick” (Marya and Patel 2021, 9). They expand on traditional biomedical theories of diagnosis involving solely biological entities and towards one that locates the “casual origin of disease in the multidimensional spaces around and beyond the individual body- in histories, ecologies, narratives, and dynamics of power” (Marya and Patel 2021, 13). The sources of inflammation extend beyond a specific virus or damage to the cells. Instead, inflammation results from the strategically organized systems that construct our lives.

Additionally, the colonial history of violence, like current economic and migration policies, are structured on assumptions about the desirability of Black and Brown bodies, on an imposed criminality onto these bodies, and the necessity to protect the nation-state through militarization. It is important to utilize the experiences of migrants themselves to challenge political rhetoric and assumptions that describe migrants as law breakers, threats, government free-loaders, and “alien” bodies. Doing so does the work of uncovering the contradictions that settler-colonial models rely on. The identity of Wyoming migrant workers is structured by legacies of violence, criminality, and their self-perceptions as embodying “the other.”
Using ideas connecting the extraction and harm to the land, to the manifestations of social and bodily violence that Marya and Patel present, I argue that Wyoming migrant workers embody legacies of violence stemming from Spanish colonialism. Migrant workers across the globe embody the historical violence of colonialism and the contemporary manifestations of its cosmology in the form of social structures designed to uphold colonial ideologies and ways of life. When the land is overworked, altered by colonial powers, the relationships Indigenous people have to the land are also altered. The environmental changes introduced by the high demand of European colonizers for natural resources impacted the availability and quality of food for Indigenous communities. Personhood is attributed to the land in Indigenous cosmologies; therefore, bodies of water, forests, and mountains are respected, cared for, and are a reflection of the people’s vitality and health (Marya and Patel 2021, 16). Colonial cosmologies disrupt these relationships through extraction. The authors argue that “colonial cosmology sees things where persons once were. What was once alive with personhood- a forest, a river, a mountain- becomes inanimate, disconnected from ecologies, open to exploitation” (Marya and Patel 2021, 18).

The different parts of this thesis delineate the histories of violence that shape the health, lives, and bodies of Mexican migrant workers in Wyoming. Bodies have been in continual inflammation since the destructions of Spanish colonization in the Americas, the militarization of the border through measures like Operation Gatekeeper, and the violence of transnational economic policies, like NAFTA. It is imperative to draw connections among these manifestations of the cosmology of colonialism to explore restorative approaches to bodies that have historically been inflamed. The next section explores conceptualizations of the body as the entity on which social inequalities manifest. It explores colonial ideas of the naturalistic body.
that were used to justify the violence of colonialism, the social constructionism of bodies, and the ideas of embodied social inequalities. Migrant workers in Wyoming not only embody systems of inequality, but they also have the agency to incorporate practices of healing that have the potential to heal their bodies, but also to challenge the organization of social structures.

The Migrant Worker Body

The body is molded by and represents the social, political, and cultural environment in which it exists. Bodies are situated within an environment that is dependent on and structured by histories of violence including colonialism, the rise of capitalism, slavery, and imperialism. The body therefore is an entity through which the lasting impacts of these histories are made visible and where inequalities are perpetuated. Bodies not only experience suffering due to the above-mentioned violent histories, but also serve as the physical entities that (re)produce it. For migrant agricultural and service workers, both undocumented and documented, the body becomes a tool for labor. The body as a tool, becomes an object. As a tool, the suffering bodies experience needs to be fixed to fulfill capitalist needs, not healed. Seeing the migrant body as a tool for labor facilitates exploitation, while the aches, pains, and injuries that result from extended hours of labor in the fields is largely made invisible.

Colonial theorization about the body was used to justify exploitative slavery and its brutalities. Chris Shilling, in *The Body and Social Theory* (2012) describes how theorization of bodies as naturalistic were used to justify the brutality of colonialism and differences were seen as natural. The body was understood as a natural entity of difference where negative characteristics were imputed to the corporeal existence of people. Race, therefore, is a social category with no scientific basis in nature that depends on efforts of dominant nations and peoples to classify other humans based on corporeal signifiers, such as skin color. In doing so,
“Africans were defined purely in terms of their differences from British culture: whereas Britain was civilized and rational, Africa represented a ‘pre-social’ order governed by the unrestrained instincts of primitive peoples” (Shilling 2012, 60). This is a strategy of white supremacy to justify violence based solely on maintaining the white body alive and as representative of civilization. These views on the body demonstrate repeated attempts by the dominant to justify their position with reference to “inferior” biological makeup of the dominated (Shilling 2012).

Naturalistic views on the body were used to justify slavery as natural due to ethnological understandings of an innate capacity of Black people for knee-bending, and an inherited disease of drapetomania15 (Shilling 2012, 60). Colonial social relations and strategies of domination that categorized Black people as inherently/naturally built for working in the fields demonstrates how dominant rhetoric and world views used to describe people’s bodies as naturally built for work were racially charged. Rather than viewing runaway slaves as escaping from violence, it was naturalized as a racial tendency to run away. Dominant understandings of bodies being naturally different, with white bodies being superior, set the foundation for colonial practices of domination and for the ways society is structured today.

This thesis aims to depart from naturalistic views of the body and the harms these views perpetuate. Migrant workers are similarly constructed as naturally hard workers and built for laboring in the fields. This focus on biological difference is used to justify their exploitation. Shilling argues that the influence of Mary Douglas and Michel Foucault have moved theorization on the body from naturalistic views and towards social constructionism. In this line of thinking, the body is understood as shaped, constrained, and invented by society, and therefore the meanings attributed to bodies are social products (Shilling 2012, 75). Mary Douglas understands

15 The tendency to run away.
the body as a metaphor of society; it is the most telling, most prevalent image of social systems. Ideas about the body correspond to ideas of society, and certain groups utilize approaches to the body that supports their hierarchical social position. The social body therefore constrains how the physical body is perceived and experienced, while those perceptions and experiences sustain a particular view of society (Shilling 2012, 77). Therefore, the anti-immigrant rhetoric that circulates across the U.S., that structures immigration policies, and that marginalizes migrants as inferior “others” constrains how their bodies are perceived in society. Migrant workers experience their physical body as the site for contestation from the broader community and sets the foundation for the spaces they can enter and the resources they are able to access.

For Foucault, the body is wholly constituted by social discourse, therefore vanishes as a biological entity, and rather is an “infinitely malleable, highly unstable socially constructed product” (Shilling 2012, 77-78). Discourse in this context cannot be reduced simply to language. Foucault complicates our perceptions on discourse by describing it as “overlapping sets of deep principles incorporating specific grids of meaning that underpin, generate, and establish relations between all that can be seen, thought and said” (Shilling 2012, 79). Discourse creates the link between daily practices and the organization and exercise of power. He focuses on the history of bodies and how politically strategic forms of biopower target the biological characteristics of humans. The body is molded through these histories of social organization that once understood bodies as entities of differences that required racial categorizations. However, power was not distributed equally amongst the different racial categories, therefore impacted how members of those groups experienced their corporeal existence.

Being an undocumented worker in the U.S. means having a certain relationship to the state. It goes beyond an identity and instead structures life chances, access to resources, and the
(in)ability to rest. The bodies of contemporary migrants hold onto not only the traumas and violence of the colonization of their ancestors, but the legacies of punitive immigration policies and transnational economic policies, forced migration, and exploitative working environments, including exposure to toxic chemicals. Wyoming migrant workers are the products of histories of violence and this manifests in their bodies as poor health. Shilling pushes us to understand social inequalities and the body as an entity for analysis. Embodiment can be understood as the interrelationship between biological and social practices that are made visible in the physical body, not in the sense that they “create the body in a Foucauldian sense, [rather that] they do contribute to its development and can become embodied” (Shilling 2012, 107). The embodiment of society opposes both naturalistic and social constructionism because the body is not just biological matter, but “characterized by higher levels of organization involving feelings, beliefs and a reflexive consciousness that enables embodied subjects to exercise agency” (Shilling date, 103). Migrant workers in Wyoming exercise agency, despite embodying histories of social inequalities. They practice agency when they find freedom in the places that are simultaneously exploitative. Additionally, in opposition to constructionism, the capacities of embodied subjects cannot be conflated with their individual parts or with society (Shilling 2012, 103). Wyoming migrant workers embody legacies of violence, but they also have the agency to challenge and change future social relations and institutions. They do this by finding tranquility in a space away from their known culture and their extended families. They find tranquility through acts of remembering life before migration and reproduce those memories in Wyoming.

This thesis understands migrant workers to embody the forms of violence described in the section above. The violence manifests across social relations and therefore “in equalities and oppressions are manifest not simply in the form of differential access to economic, educational,
or cultural resources but are embodied. The experience, understanding and effects of social relations are not disembodied cognitive phenomena but are thoroughly corporeal" (Shilling date, 132). Inequalities that manifest due to legal status have corporeal consequences and become embodied as migrant workers navigate life and encounter different social actors and institutions in power. Therefore, while aspects of society are embodied, the resilience and resistance of migrant workers in Wyoming challenges their futurity. Embodiment can be given meaning or changed through social practices, therefore through practices of remembering, community building, and finding freedom in places of exploitation, Wyoming migrant workers oppose a totalizing identity of vulnerable victims. They find joy and freedom in unexpected places.

The next section focuses on frameworks of (in)visibility that operate to uphold colonial ideologies of “othering” and make invisible the suffering migrant workers experience. Migrant workers are hypervisible when they interact with the broader community but are invisible in their workplace. Their hypervisibility constructs hostile social environments where their identities are constructed as public charges and immigrant “others,” which structures the resources they can access and their ability to be seen as worthy.
Miles from the nearest highway, town, and restroom, Wyoming migrant workers in the workplace are surrounded by beautiful mountains that serve as physical barriers that hide them from view. From sunrise until late evening, migrant bodies are in continuous movement, yet this movement is largely hidden from the public eye. Serving as a physical natural border, the mountains shaping Wyoming’s landscape and framing the agricultural spaces on the plains create a sense of confinement and bordering (see figure 1.2). The politics of visibility, as described by
Teresa Mares (2019) are inevitably tied to processes of bordering, that ultimately shape the minds and bodies of migrant workers. Visibility impacts the care migrant workers are able to receive in resource-poor environments like the Ag Worker Health and Services Clinic, the chances of being seen and therefore exposed to toxic chemicals in the workplace, and the strategies of resistance migrant workers can participate in. Following in line with this framework of (in)visibility, migrant workers existing within the rural landscapes of Wyoming experience moments of invisibility in the workplace, while being hypervisible in public settings. In line with Mares’s thinking, this paradoxical experience of hypervisibility and invisibility arises when their visibility in public spheres creates conflicts and violence is produced due to citizenship, race, ethnicity, and class. Without a realization of migrant workers as people with histories and stories of displacement, loss, and trauma, popular public rhetoric stays within the settler-state understandings of invasion, criminality, and deems migrant workers as burdens to public welfare. As I will present in Part III, Migrant Worker Health Systems and Strategies of Resistance, this type of visibility that deems them as underserving has material consequences for their physical and mental health.

The visibility of migrant workers in Wyoming serves to facilitate the process of “othering” their bodies. This polar distinction between them, the dangerous polluted immigrant body, and the pureness in hegemonic whiteness, creates tension resulting in confrontations between growers and migrant workers, therefore leading to anxious and docile migrant bodies in the workplace. Ironically, while Wyoming migrant workers embody the violence of othering, their settled nature, the low density of their population on this landscape, and associations of the physical space with tranquility, allows for migrants to experiences visibility that can be positively coded (Mares 2019). By spending years in the same space, interacting with non-
migrant people and slowly integrating themselves and their children into local businesses, schools/sports, and other community celebrations, migrant workers experience instances of community inclusion, however they do not necessarily have their voices heard, or have access to institutions and their resources. More importantly, even in the rural fields that constitute the agricultural sector in Wyoming, traces of global capitalism and rhetoric surrounding migration, are embodied by migrant workers, resulting in their visibility being negatively coded. This constructs an environment where migrant bodies are subject to surveillance, policing, and criminalization. These negative associations with their physical presence in rural society leave migrant workers with few options when seeking social services.

One example of invisibility of migrant workers in Wyoming arose during the early phases of establishing the research design for this project. At this stage, I reached out to different public officials and key service providers to situate my research questions, methods, and practices within the realities of life in Wyoming. When I contacted the Big Horn County Appointed Health Officer, David Fairbanks, to get a sense of his specific roles under this position and how his efforts relate to supporting access to proper health services for migrant workers that labor the land he is supposed to oversee, I asked him: How does Big Horn County work to ensure health needs are met for all its residents? What initiatives are being carried out? In what ways could the Department of Health and the County collaborate with my efforts? He responded, “I don’t have a need for you in Big Horn County, I could use you in El Paso.” This reply illuminates the lack of prioritization of migrant needs by public officials. In a follow-up email, Fairbanks stressed the necessity of garnering my support in El Paso by emphasizing the “10,000 unaccompanied children, far more than in Big Horn County.” For him, the small population of migrant workers in Big Horn County was not as pressing as the challenges being
experienced at the U.S.-Mexico border. Securing the health and well-being of migrant workers in Wyoming is deemed unimportant, therefore made invisible. The dispersed nature of their laboring bodies, the bordering of the physical landscape, and their visible otherness as second-class citizens justifies public officials’ reasoning to ignore this population and their needs.

Therefore, the invisibility of migrants’ labor, health needs, and their existence as migrant workers is tied to the embodiment of structural violence. This violence stems from colonial ideologies that with time have established governmental organizations, their priorities, and restrictions that create barriers for migrant workers as they seek to access social and institutional resources. The colonial settler-state founded on slavery, exploitation, and capital interests facilitates the exploitation of migrant bodies and leaves little opportunities for policy reform outside of the settler-colonial model. Elizabeth A. Povinelli (2002) argues that multiculturism, that is the existence of multiple cultures within one nation-state that is established by colonialism, actually (re)produces harm. She focuses her attention on Australia and the Aboriginal peoples that have historically been abused by colonial powers yet are expected to embody authentic traditional culture (2002). The unequal systems of power that are developed through colonial processes do not allow authentic traditional cultures to be practiced. An illusion of multicultural co-existence is used to reinforce colonial structures and reinforce liberal regimes, rather than being true cultural democracies. In her argument, Povinelli describes how the law facilitates these illusions of thriving multicultural nation-states. A cunning attribute inherent to law marginalizes exploited communities into abstract citizenship, where the settler-state is content with ignoring their basic needs for survival, while depending on their invisible presence for its own capitalist interest.
Similarly, migrant workers in Wyoming are left to exist in an imaginary of essential workers without legal protections for their bodies, their health, and their ability to exist as autonomous people. In viewing law as world-making, and in this case, the making of a world dependent on the deterioration of Black and Brown bodies, policies impacting the livelihood of these laborers are tied to the economic system of capitalism and profit for agribusinesses. By making invisible the suffering bodies undergo to produce food for the population, the commodities their labor produces are fetishized (Marx 1878). This fetishization alienates Wyoming migrant workers from the products of their labor and therefore it remains hidden from the consumers of commodities that are distributed throughout the U.S. Karl Marx (1878) emphasizes how the value of objects are viewed as intrinsic, not because of human labor. In this way, relationships are made to objects, rather than to people: “the existence of the things and commodities, and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection to their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom” (Marx 1878, 321). The phenomenon of commodity fetishism erases migrant worker experiences, their contributions to the food system, and ultimately serves to continue to silence their voices. Under the factory-like production of agricultural commodities, food is produced to maximize efficiency and profit, rather than for the purpose of bringing food from the land to the dinner table. The law, and those elected to reinforce it or change it, become entrapped in the invisible labor of migrant workers due to the fetishization of the commodities produced, therefore limiting the avenues for intervention, and justifying a lack of prioritization to address health disparities migrant laborers experience.

In the context of exploited migrant labor in Wyoming, compounding forces contribute to the invisibility of migrant workers. The physical appearance of the landscape, the parameters
under which laws exist, and the invisibility of their suffering creates the conditions for the
disposable nature of their bodies. Driving through the empty and open Wyoming highways lined by
fields of beans, sugar beets, and alfalfa, it’s difficult to imagine that these spaces are linked to
processes that debilitate the physical health of migrant workers. Like the context of dairy
farmworkers in Vermont, as described by Mares, the beautiful landscapes constituting the farms
in Wyoming present to the outsider a pastoral scene. This creates an illusion of small-scale
farming, selfless employers, and community-based agriculture. This is reinforced by the
interpersonal connections extremely rural environments produce. The striking landscapes
themselves facilitate the fetishization of their work and create the imaginary of farming/laboring
outside of large corporate agricultural systems. Under this illusion, migrant labor is seen as
synonymous to other work industries protected by the law, when in actuality agricultural
employment does not provide health insurance, overtime pay, nor the possibility for workers to
unionize. Therefore, it becomes easier to ignore the physical and mental harm migrant workers
experience.

Since the working conditions of migrant laborers remain largely hidden from the public
gaze, the end produce that lies on the tables of U.S. families is perceived as simply food, without
the blood, sweat, and embodied violence of the worker entering the minds of those who sit down
at the table to eat. Particularly in rural areas like Wyoming, and Vermont that Mares investigates,
physical isolation facilitates these conditions while simultaneously erasing the experiences of
suffering, alienation, and solitude migrant workers experience.

On the other hand, migrants are hypervisible. Their racialization in the U.S. as criminal
threats, made legitimate by the law, creates a target for confrontation and creates a sense of
continual stress and anxiety among migrant workers. The visibility of migrant workers serves the
interest of punishment, rather than that of healing from traumas associated with migration, work, and health. In a world dominated by global capitalism, the commodity fetish, the politics of (in)visibility, and the constitution of the land itself, serve as essential frameworks for understanding the existence of migrant workers in a globalized world. The invisibility of migrant labor is an essential dimension of how and why their work is exploited, undervalued, and made visible.

The next section focuses on an institution of care (the migrant clinic used by the migrant workers in this thesis) as an institution that further perpetuates harm in the lives of migrant workers. It traces the history of the clinic’s existence and the challenges it has faced. The clinic operates with little resources and reproduces harm due to conflicts between clinic staff members that ultimately result in the perception that migrant workers are “gracious” and “content” patients. This leaves little incentive for staff members, particularly clinical providers, to make visible their struggles due to a lack of resources. Additionally, the clinic operates within the reductionist model of biomedicine which isolates disease to biological entities, while ignoring the social and structural forces that produce poor health.

**Wyoming Migrant Clinic System**

The Ag Worker Health and Services Clinic (AWHSC), based in Powell, WY is part of a wave of agricultural migrant clinics established by the federal government in the 1950s, according to the National Center for Farmworker Health\(^\text{16}\) (NCFH). The clinic is composed of one full-time Physician Assistant, one Behavioral Health Specialist, two Outreach Staff that also serve as patient interpreters, one Office Administrator/Secretary, two full-time Registered

\(^{16}\) [http://www.ncfh.org/](http://www.ncfh.org/)
Nurses, and a Physician that treats patients once a week. All staff members are women, with only two being fluent in Spanish. I have personally used services of the clinic and was employed by AWHSC during June-August 2021. This small-scale clinic is mandated by the Montana Migrant Council in Billings, MT which also oversees three other agricultural worker clinics, all in Montana. The clinic in Powell is the only migrant clinic in the state of Wyoming and it registers around 800 patients each year. As an Outreach Staff, I worked to register new patients or renew yearly registrations for returning patients. To qualify for services at the clinic, agricultural workers, regardless of citizenship, must proclaim previous work in agriculture and must meet government-established poverty guidelines. The process of registration for services at the clinic is relatively straightforward and the clinic’s specific modes of operation facilitate the registration process and work to increase the number of workers that can register for services.

The Federal Migrant Health Program, funded under the Consolidated Healthcare Act of 1996, has created migrant health centers and paved opportunities for nonprofit organizations to serve large low-wage migrant communities (NCFH 2014). Through these efforts, high quality care focused on migrant communities, both rural and urban, has become an area for innovative forms of healthcare. However, in 2003, through the services of 400 federally funded clinics, only 12-15% of the migrant worker population was reached (Hansen & Donohoe 2010). In the context of AWHSC in Wyoming, the clinic fails to reach a larger patient population due to regulatory policies stemming from the headquarters clinic in Billings, MT. For instance, according to policy, these agricultural clinics are not allowed to promote their services through different media communications, such as the newspaper, the radio, or other social media platforms. This results in a lack of visibility of not only the clinic, but of the patients that keep it running. Awareness of the clinic, its services, and the patient population it treats is spread primarily by
word of mouth across communities. By failing to promote their services, the clinic misses essential opportunities for reaching a higher number of patients that otherwise exist without receiving proper care. The staff in Powell has not received proper explanations as to why they are unable to promote their services at a larger scale and this creates frustrations and tensions between staff from Powell and staff from Billings.

As will be described in Part III Migrant Worker Health Systems and Strategies of Resistance, the AWHSC has evolved with the changing demographics of agricultural workers in Big Horn and Park County. Changes in agricultural practices by growers have directly caused a decline in the number of nomadic migrants that register for services at the clinic. With an increased use of pesticides, specifically Roundup, in sugar beet fields, migration patterns to Big Horn and Park County have changed. Prior to the 1980s, before pesticide use was the preferred method for weeding sugar beet fields, migrants from different states in the U.S. like Texas, California, and Washington, but also transnational migrants from Mexico and Central America, would seasonally migrate to work weeding these fields. Therefore, AWHSC would primarily register these temporary migrants to receive services.

As pesticides and herbicides replaced human labor, migration patterns to Wyoming began to shift, growers did not rely on human labor for weeding fields, and the sometimes-cost-effective use of pesticides and herbicides became heavily practiced. The settled nature of migrant agricultural workers in Big Horn, Washakie, and Park Counties create challenges for the clinic staff since their operations are year-round, while the Montana based agricultural clinics benefit from temporary experiences of high patient volume that are reduced once the weeding working season comes to an end in mid-September. This difference in workload directly relates to clinic staff bandwidth and therefore the care patients can receive. However, with less temporary
patients visiting the clinic, clinic staff can establish close trusting relationships with their migrant worker patients.

Although improvements in medical care have come about because of the Federal Migrant Health Program, research suggests that even with these resources, migrant patients have less access to medical care than native born residents. Returning to Lupe's story introduced earlier in this chapter, A WHSC is a space where these disparities are perpetuated. Although the clinic is specific to the needs of agricultural workers, it still operates within biomedicine, therefore leading to care that is “mechanistic, reductionistic, and inattentive to the human concerns of patients and families” (Kleinman 1995, 26). Standardized methods for care facilitate feelings of dissatisfaction and feelings of hopelessness as Wyoming migrant workers seek medical attention. Holmes expands on these ideas by focusing upon the patient-provider relationship and “the gaze” migrant bodies experience by providers. Disease is isolated to a specific localized lesion; therefore, physicians focus on the “isolated, diseased organs, treating the patient increasingly as a body, a series of anatomical objects, and ignoring the social and personal realities of the patient, the person” (Holmes 2013, 115). By failing to account for Lupe’s life history of existence in structures of violence, AWHSC decentralizes the patient, focuses on the prescription of medication, and ultimately fails to address Lupe’s health conditions, placing the blame on her body and her perceived illness.

To combat this shift in medical institution relationships between the patient and the provider, Kleinman introduces the idea of illness narratives to promote storytelling to give coherence to the events leading to illness. In this way, the patient can actively process, grieve, and participate in their own healing trajectory (Kleinman 1988). Additionally, illness narratives can be instrumental in uncovering hidden, structural social determinants of health, that are
otherwise missed, and their incorporation can result in more appropriate strategies towards caring for vulnerable communities. If clinic staff in Powell focused on adopting this model of care based on storytelling, patients like Lupe could potentially feel like their experiences with pain are at the least heard. By going through this process of remembering, Lupe is in control of her own healing trajectory, she has a better understanding of the conditions that led to her poor health and can begin a process of healing through retelling.

Methodology

Positionality

Throughout the years, family ties have been made across migrants from different Mexican regions, spanning from the Northern state of Chihuahua, reaching to the Southern states of Oaxaca and Aguascalientes. Community gatherings while working in the fields, during baptisms, quinceañeras, weddings, and other celebratory events provide spaces for migrants and their traditions to come together. Through these events, religious ceremonies, and employment seasons, I became an active and known member of the community. In this context, I consider myself to be a native ethnographer. Being a native ethnographer facilitates my access to different migrant spaces, conversations, and interactions without appearing to be out of place. The familiarity I have of my home community and its dynamics served as an essential entry point into migrant workers life and health experiences. Although it may appear that having shared identities with research participants that are founded in oppression automatically positions myself as an “insider,” researcher Iris López, pushes us to think beyond this dichotomy of “insider vs outsider” (2013). I am a member of the migrant worker community; however, I am privileged to be receiving an education at an elite institution with an overwhelming number of resources. As a researcher, I am both an insider and outsider, “moving in and out of different
worlds, experiencing a fluid shift in perspectives" (López 2013). The insider and outsider dichotomy fails to incorporate the complexity that arises with the perceptions and relationships that surface depending on the shared identities of the researcher and the community.

I first began working as a field weeder between the mountain ranges of Big Horn County when I was thirteen years old. I had finally reached the age where I could work. Though, being undocumented, I was not legally able to work, I was paid under the table. But I did not fully understand what I was getting myself into. Prior to turning thirteen, I begged my parents to allow me to work in the fields. I saw this as not only an opportunity to make my own money, but to distract myself from the walls of my home that entrapped me to the space during the summer seasons. When the time finally came, I was ecstatic to start my new job. During the first season, I worked alongside my grandmother, my mother, my aunt, my sister, and our family friends, primarily in bean fields. I was excited to experience what my mother had experienced for so many years that I had lost count. I was eager to spend the time outdoors and to have picnics under the trees. However, the realities of laboring in the fields quickly consumed my naïve expectations of work. I thought to myself, why must we work for so many hours? Why are we not paid more? I remember my legs feeling numb to the point that I could no longer stand. I remember the laughs carried by the wind as my family members picked on me for laying down across the row, in efforts to give my legs a break.

While I continued to labor as a weeder in the Wyoming agricultural sector, my U.S. citizen school peers managed to find employment opportunities through family connections that did not require them to spend 12+ hours in the scorching sun. I remember my face turning red during the first day of high school as I explained that I had spent the summer working in the fields. Attending an extremely rural, conservative, and white high school pushed me to

47
stigmatize my own community, to stigmatize the work migrant laborers suffered, and to feel a sense of embarrassment and shame towards my own identity.

My motivation for this thesis project represents a personal process of transitioning this sense of embarrassment towards righteous anger and a sense of urgency to improve the experiences of migrant workers in Wyoming. For this reason, I designed a research project that aims to be authentic to migrant experiences, to reduce the harms of objectifying anthropology research, and to provide the opportunity for community building, self-confidence improvement, and increased migrant worker visibility in the broader Big Horn County community.

Working Towards Decolonial Anthropology

Anthropology as a discipline has potential to enact social change only when its research methodologies depart from colonial models of objectification. Objectification results when the interlocutors of the research are positioned as objects that are studied by a detached outsider. Harm is caused when there is no effort to provide immediate relief for the social and physical harm that is being studied. Colonial anthropological research was both critical to the harms and violence Indigenous communities were being subjected to, but also another portion focused on objectifying Indigenous people and studying their cultures for the purposes of domination and control. Some of these early studies produced data that would facilitate colonial expansion through the marginalization of Indigenous communities. In continuing the work of decolonizing the discipline, I follow a line of scholars like Teresa Mares and Dvera I. Saxton that pair their research practices with activism, community projects, and moments of solidarity. Saxton exemplifies this through her work with the families and young community organizers that she cared for and supported in Watsonville, California (2021). Saxon urges anthropologists to become active in bringing light to the inequalities their research interlocutors face and approach their circumstances with care. Saxton says, "the methods of anthropology and activism proved to
be cross-fertile grounds, as research, community service, caring and emotional labors, and organizing work reinforced one another” (2021, 9). In connecting research with a type of political, social, or community action, anthropologists can change the relationships of research and thereby reduce potential harms associated with extractive research practices. Thus, rather than simply documenting social problems, anthropologists can begin to engage in work to address the social conditions interlocutors experience. Community-based research models seek to incorporate this framework of community action and activism into the methodologies of research.

Following this model of community-based research aligned with the needs of migrant workers and to uncover the structural forces that produce poor health among Wyoming migrant workers, it was essential to have established trust with my community at home. Previous employment opportunities weeding fields, along with my personal relationships with migrant workers provided an avenue for establishing trust and diving deep into their personal life histories related to poor health, experiences with migration, and employment on both sides of the U.S-Mexican border. As a member of the community my research focused on, I approached the research with a “double consciousness” (Harrison 1991)—one drawing from my undergraduate training in anthropology, and another drawing on my own personal life experiences. Faye V. Harrison describes a double or multiple consciousness as that which provides anthropologists with multiple lenses when working with a community in which the anthropologist can relate across multiple identity categories (1991). These multiple perspectives help to shape the design and goals of the research by providing anthropologists with special insights and commitments prior to the research process, and rooted in the critical social categories of nationality, race, class, gender, and immigrant status. Additionally, as a native Spanish speaker, I had the language
competence to establish trusting relationships with my hometown community and my identity is directly tied to the community with which I worked. Ultimately, having these shared perspectives and identities facilitated the process of establishing trust and comfortability with research participants.

This research builds upon previous research I conducted during Summer 2020, with support from the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility of Swarthmore College. This initial research aimed to uncover the impacts of COVID-19 on migrant worker healthcare. That summer, I interviewed five migrant workers and four leaders from non-profit migrant organizations to get a sense of the ways the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted employment, organizational operations, and to gauge potential pressing issues that the organizations and migrant workers would face in the future. Overall, most migrant workers in Wyoming felt that the pandemic would not present any challenges to employment since they continued to labor like normal and were simply encouraged to wear a mask. Organizations like Justice at Work, La Comunidad Hispana, and Juntos, all based in Pennsylvania, found the transition to the virtual world to create greater barriers for patients/clients that do not have adequate access to technology. The organization leaders described pressing future issues related to employment stability, housing, and food security.

Through interviews with migrant workers in Wyoming and leaders of migrant nonprofit organizations, I learned about the importance of approaches to health and wellbeing outside of a biomedical model and concluded that approaches to supporting and maintaining health in migrant communities post-COVID-19 must be focused on preventative care. In the specific context of migrant workers in Wyoming, a lack of self-confidence, lack of solidarity among
workers, and a lack of spaces to organize for social change, present promising avenues of inquiry and places for intervention as an action-oriented scholar.

My thesis research focused on the health disparities that migrant workers suffer through ethnographic research focused on migrant workers in Wyoming. As a Medical Anthropology special major, I focused on the embodiment of structural violence and how this creates poor health and various forms of suffering. My research is committed to documenting, interpreting, and applying Wyoming migrant worker narratives of illness to begin addressing health disparities that disproportionately impact my community and begin a process of community building and healing. A large component of this ethnographic research involves participant-observation and interviews involving life histories, including illness narratives, to document migrant workers’ experiences and to understand gaps in migrant healthcare. Through these interviews, often hidden manifestations of structural violence were uncovered and their physical documentation in this thesis serves to construct collective memory of their experiences with violence and suffering.

Collecting life histories has long been a feminist approach to research in anthropology, and other disciplines. I conducted thirteen informal interviews with migrant workers in Wyoming as a way of finding value in migrant workers life histories. Their narratives directly challenge assumptions of the “American Dream” and the U.S. as a nation-state of equal opportunities to living a healthy and safe life. Additionally, the documentation of migrant worker life histories allowed for migrants’ own experiences and voices to serve as a critique of the violence that is enacted by settler-state social and economic systems. The participants were compensated for their contributions. Rather than providing cash rewards and to stray away from commodifying
the experiences of migrant workers, I purchased good quality water bottles and working gloves as a gift for their generous participation.

Another dimension of my research was to work as a weeder during the Summer 2021. In this approach, my body became a site for investigation. In his ethnography with Triqui migrant laborers in Washington and California, Seth Holmes challenges ethnographers to pay close attention to their own bodily experiences while conducting research. Holmes introduces readers to the methodological approach of embodied anthropology, where researchers are actively involved in the conversations andJos activities of their research participants, while “reflecting upon the body of the ethnographer” (Holmes 2014, 33). Holmes critiques the ways ethnographers ignore their own bodily experiences while conducting research and see the body only as tool for observation. In focusing upon his own bodily sensations as he experienced the pain of migrant farm labor and felt the stress of migrant employment, Holmes gained valuable insights into the ways migrant workers come to embody suffering. The data generated by his body’s response to poor working conditions serves as a prototype for understanding how social inequalities produce deteriorating bodies.

Inspired by this methodological approach of embodied anthropology, I took detailed notes of my bodily aches, pains, and sensations while working alongside and conversating with migrant workers in Wyoming. I conducted participant-observation weeding fields as an unpaid laborer alongside a group of migrant workers I had previously worked with for a total of 72 hours. This method of embodied anthropology sheds important light to the literal ways working conditions become embodied and produce poor health. Without paying close attention to how my body reacted to the weather conditions (which includes smoke-covered skies for weeks), continuous bending of the back, continuous walking, and continuous shoveling, I would have
lost valuable insights into the important role employment plays in structuring debilitated migrant worker bodies.

Another component of my research involved investigating the day-to-day operations of AWHSC, frequently used by myself and other migrant workers of my community. I worked at AWHSC part-time as an Outreach Staff during the Summer 2021. I paired interviews with participant-observation to investigate the day-to-day operations of the migrant clinic. I interviewed all the staff members of the clinic to understand their healing philosophies, their

Figure 1.3: Image of researcher with Cecilia and Mayra while during the early morning at a grass field near Ralston, WY.
work practices, and to find gaps in the care they provide based on the experiences of migrant workers receiving services from the clinic. My field notes during my part-time employment consisted of conversations with my supervisor of the history of the clinic, the challenges it faces, and the disconnect between the small clinic in Powell and its headquarters in Billings, MT. Note taking allowed me to document my experiences as a staff member of a clinic designed to serve migrant agricultural workers, and it provided valuable insights into the complex and intertangled forces that perpetuate poor health among this community, even when clinics are designed to support it.

This research is also tied to a project I implemented as part of a Lang Opportunity Scholarship. This project aimed to build community among Wyoming migrant workers through creation of art; experiences of remembering; practices of healing; and conversations around colonization, U.S. imperialism, displacement, transnational work, among other themes impacting migrant workers' lives. The implementation of this project relates to my desire to stray my research methodologies away from extractive practices and towards finding application for my research outside of academic purposes. Rather than simply entering my home community and gathering and documenting life histories for the completion of my senior thesis, I wanted to incorporate frameworks of reciprocity, as described by indigenous scholars like Robin Wall Kimmerer, to reduce the harms enacted by my research and to alleviate suffering experienced by Wyoming migrant workers. Kimmerer teaches us of the importance of balance in relationships of exchange between people, and people and the Earth. The incorporation of a social impact project aims to bring balance to the relationship of gathering life narratives through practices of community healing and solidarity. In this way, my research falls within Kimmerer's reciprocal framework where "reciprocity is a matter of keeping the gift in motion through self-perpetuating
cycles of giving and receiving” (2013, 165). Through this model of care, researchers and community interlocutors benefit from the research through a balanced relationship of exchange.

The program for migrant workers utilized a critical thinking curriculum related to different forces of structural violence that lead to poverty, displacement, self-blame, and poor health among migrant workers. The purpose of the program was to illuminate these forms of violence to migrant workers as they told stories of their lives in Mexico and the U.S. By connecting structural forces to their stories of forced migration, work opportunities in Mexico, and their health in Wyoming, the purpose was to shift the blame of poor health from their individual bodies and towards larger forces of violence. Healing from these experiences of violence was approached through art production experiences. Migrant workers were encouraged to express their lives using art or other forms of expression like journaling. At the end of the summer, migrant workers participated in an art show called, “We are More than our Labor,” where the broader Big Horn and Park County communities were invited to attend. Here, the artwork created throughout the 4-week program was highlighted, alongside the declaration of migrant worker rights and demands created by migrant workers. During the program, I kept detailed fieldnotes to document the trajectory of the program, to document the conversations that arose during these spaces of coming together, and to gather any observations of participation and engagement with the program.

Paul Farmer calls on anthropologists to feel a sense of responsibility while conducting research and provide some sort of immediate service to try to alleviate their suffering (2004). This type of “pragmatic solidarity,” as described by Farmer, actively provides direct services or goods needed to reduce hardship created by powers, both global and local. Pragmatic solidarity seeks to apply research with action, and this is what all anthropologists, and researchers in
general, must strive for to actively fight against structural violence, rather than being a part of it. Inspired by Farmer, as part of the healing program for migrant workers, I organized for two immigration attorneys, Christopher Flann from Immigration Law of Montana, and Rosie Read from the ACLU Wyoming, to travel to Greybull to provide individual immigration related conferences with migrant workers. Their sessions provided the potential to alleviate immediate stresses and anxieties related to citizenship status and helped to establish networks of trustworthy resources that can be shared through the community of migrant workers. Additionally, continuing to practice pragmatic solidarity, I also organized a visit from the Mexican Consulate based in Salt Lake City, UT, who traveled to Greybull to provide migrant workers with information of its vast services available to them. Further, I organized a Physician Assistant from AWHSC to provide a session detailing measures migrant workers can take while working in the fields to protect themselves from the sun, dehydration, harmful chemicals, and from poisonous bites from insects or rattlesnakes. Since transportation and time off work are both barriers for migrant workers seeking services from the clinic, the Physician Assistant was able to speak to migrant workers during one of the sessions of the program and I served as a bridge of support by gathering and delivering their prescriptions.

Through bidirectional exchange of information, an emphasis on community-building through healing, the improvement of migrant worker self-confidence, and moments of pragmatic solidarity, this action-based community research model offered a decolonial approach to anthropological research. My ethnic identity and lived experiences—along with the design and implementation of a social impact project for migrant workers—substantiates how a conscious and informed research methodology reduces historical harms associated with colonizing research that community participants endured.
Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized around three different parts: Part I, Colonialism, Part II, Forced Migration, and Part III, Migrant Worker Health Systems and Strategies of Resistance. The organization reflects the different forms of structural violence and inequalities that manifest in the lives of migrant workers in Wyoming. Within each part, the first chapter intertangles histories of violence with the life stories migrant workers shared with me to demonstrate how these legacies of violence come to be embodied. The second chapter in each part resists power and the forms of violence that produce poor health using the experiences and voices of migrant workers that directly challenge dangerously normalized ideologies and structures of power.

Chapter 1 outlines the rhetoric, practices, and assumptions guiding Spanish colonization in the Americas and their influence in our current day social structures. This chapter argues that Wyoming migrant workers embody the impacts of ongoing forms of colonialism that deem their bodies as naturally built for harsh labor, ultimately manifesting as competition and broken relationships between workers, frequent exposure to toxic chemicals, and feelings of being entrapped to their lives in Wyoming.

Chapter 2 understands the categorization of migrant labor as “unskilled” as a necessity to reproduce capitalism and justify the exploitation, abuse, and disposability migrant workers experience. Focusing on the body, this chapter details how migrant labor becomes embodied and requires skill, innovation, and resiliency. The lived experiences of migrants resist their devaluation as “unskilled” workers and challenge the rhetoric of “hard workers.”

Chapter 3 traces migrant criminalization and “othering” by looking at the history of punitive immigration policies that construct dangerous environments that migrants navigate and eventually result in their forced migration. The immigration system is designed within colonial
ideologies of "superiority" and "inferiority" that ultimately result in the continuous creation of policies aimed to exclude racialized people. In this chapter, I argue that punitive immigration policies and transnational economic policies like NAFTA, become embodied. They dictate migrant worker life chances, create an environment of prolonged uncertainty and fear, while simultaneously contributing to their feelings of entrapment by confining them to exhaustive daily work routines in Wyoming.

Chapter 4 uses poetry as a creative mode of protest that incorporates migrant worker stories of migration to challenge the criminalization of people and of mobility. The chapter focuses on the 1994 Operation Gatekeeper measure that militarized the border and pushed migrants to more dangerous routes through the desert. The stories composing the stanzas of two poems, coupled with migrant worker art, challenge dangerous assumptions that structure immigration measures like Operation Gatekeeper, and instead demonstrate how they (re)produce injury.

In chapter 5, attention is focused onto Ag Worker Health and Services as an unstable biomedical institution that ultimately creates more barriers for migrant patients as they seek care. The little visibility the clinic has in the broader community is tainted by anti-immigrant rhetoric that circulates across rural communities, through conflicts that erupt among co-workers and between the managing clinic in Billings, and due to a scarcity of resources and staff. Ultimately, the clinic, operating under biomedical forms of care, treats migrant patients to work and ignores the exploitative working conditions that manifest as poor health. The clinic fails to reimagine what care could look like by incorporating structural forms of violence into their diagnosis, leaving migrant workers entrapped in environments that produce poor health in their lives.
Chapter 6 focuses on art as a tool for resistance that transcends language barriers and provides migrant workers with the opportunity to explore new forms of self-expression. The chapter highlights the artwork created by a cohort of migrant workers participating in the Migrant Worker Community Healing Program and understands their life stories as direct refusals to forms of power and oppression. Migrant workers use practices of remembering to construct their homes in Wyoming and to begin a process of healing from the legacies of violence that have shaped their lives. In this chapter, I end with concluding thoughts about the resiliency of my community and the power in documenting life histories as a form of resistance and protest.
Part I. Colonialism

Inflammation is a biological, social, economic, and ecological pathway, all which intersect, and whose contours were made by the modern world.
- Rupa Marya and Raj Patel (2021, 5)

Chapter 1: Colonial History, Violence, and Inflamed Bodies

The legacies of violent colonialism manifest in the lives of Wyoming migrant workers. The ideologies that structure colonial thinking position migrant workers as inferior “others” and justifies their exploitation at work. Migrant workers embody the histories and structures of violence, including capitalism, that result from colonial expansion. The first section focuses on the attitudes, perceptions, and ideologies of Indigenous people that continue to organize farm hierarchies today stemming from Spanish colonization in the Americas. The remaining of the chapter focuses on how colonial ideologies and forms of violence manifest in the workplace of irrigators at Cactus Hill Corporation. Competition among workers results from capitalism as an ongoing structure of colonialism that ultimately individualizes the struggles of the workers, leaving little opportunities for collective action. The chapter expands on the harms that prolonged exposure to toxic environments has on the health of migrant irrigators. Jose’s story of severe exposure points to the structural forces that make his body intentionally invisible, pointing to a broader disregard for the health of the irrigators. These forces of structural violence entrap migrant workers to their daily routines of exploitative work, creating feelings of disillusion and of forced labor. Without other employment options, workers like Jose and Cecilia are trapped to their life in Wyoming.
Remains of Spanish Colonialism

People existing in the region that is now called Latin America have undergone and continue to experience the effects of Spanish colonization. The present-day suffering of Indigenous and Brown communities in Latin America began with this violence. In 1493 Cristobal Colon sent a letter to Luis Santangel, who, with support from the empire leaders, financed Colon’s violent conquest in the Americas. In this letter, Colon uses descriptive words that exemplify the beauty and fertility of the land and describes the bodies of Indigenous peoples as naturally young and strong for laboring. Colon wrote:

En las tierras hay muchas minas de metales, y hay gente en estimable número. La Española es maravilla; las sierras y las montañas... y las tierras tan hermosas y gruesas para plantar y sembrar, para criar ganados de todas suertes, para edificios de villas y lugares. Los puertos de la mar aquí no habría creencia sin vista, y de los ríos muchos y grandes, y buenas aguas, los más de los cuales traen oro (1493).  

In this first letter describing the newly “discovered” land in the Caribbean islands, Colon alludes to the possibility of using the land for cultivating crops, to extract natural resources (such as gold), to build homes, and he describes the abundance of bodies of water that facilitate the importation of laboring bodies and the exportation of products. Colon’s letter expresses the archetype of colonial extraction. Seeing the land as a reservoir of raw materials with the potential to accumulate capital, Colon’s letter begins to instill exploitative ideas of the land and the people as resources. During the first encounters with indigenous populations, Colon further used his letter to describe Indigenous bodies as naturally made for harsh labor and constructs their identities as inferior “others”. Colon wrote:

La gente de esta isla y de todas las otras que he hallado y he habido noticia, andan todos

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17 In the soils there are a lot of metal mines, and there are people in estimable numbers. The Spanish is wonderful; the hills and mountains... and the soils so beautiful and thick to plant and grow, to raise cattle of all kinds, for building homes. The ports in the ocean, you would not believe without seeing, and of the rivers, there are many, and they are big, and good waters, more that have gold. (Translation of an excerpt of Colon’s letters to the Spanish empire)
In describing the physical appearance of the Indigenous groups he encountered, Colon focuses upon their lack of clothing. Their physical bodies served to create a distinction between the modernity, “civilized” Spanish colonist, and the uncivilized Indigenous body. Colon continues his letter by describing the “good-hearted” and “content” attitudes of Indigenous people by saying:

Ellos de cosa que tengan, pidiéndosela, jamás dicen de no... y muestran tanto amor que darían los corazones, y, quieren sea cosa de valor, quien sea de poco precio, luego por cualquiera cosaica, de cualquiera manera que sea que se le dé, por ello se van contentos (1493). 19

Colon writes that whatever is asked of from the Indigenous person, they give. Colon constructs Indigenous people as vulnerable, easily manipulated. Colon further describes their gratitude for gifts as another attribute that facilitates their manipulation and the control of their bodies. Colon says they are easily made happy with any scrap that is given to them, of any or no value. This serves as an incentive to the Spanish empire to not only continue funding his violent massacres, but to also control the population of Indigenous people easily and inexpensively. Colon explicitly states the necessity to give Indigenous people Spanish goods as a way of gaining their trust to facilitate their conversion to Catholicism and exploit their labor. Colon says:

Daban lo que tenían como bestias; así que me pareció mal, y yo lo defendí, y daba yo graciosas mil cosas buenas, que yo llevaba, porque tomen amor, y allí, si esto se hagan cristianos, y se inclinen al amor y servicio de Sus Altezas y de toda la nación

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18 The people of this island and from the others I have found and made notice of, they are all naked, men and women, like their mothers birthed them, although some women cover themselves with a piece of a leaf or a cotton net that they make. (Translation of an excerpt of Colon’s 1943 letters to the Spanish empire)

19 Whatever they have, asking them for it, they never say no... they show so much love that they would give their hearts, and, they want things, even things of little value, then with any little thing, in any way that it is given, for that they look happy. (Translation of an excerpt of Colon’s 1943 letters to the Spanish empire)
Colon’s words detail the importance of gaining trust among the Indigenous communities they would encounter as a strategy for exploitation. Colonists thought that once their trust was gained and indoctrination had occurred, Indigenous communities would be willing to cooperate and give to the Spanish colonists the necessary labor and resources that were in “abundance.”

Furthermore, in a rewriting of Colon’s diary, Bartolome de las Casas summarizes the way Colon described Indigenous bodies. De las Casas rewrites Colon’s words: “Y todos los que yo vi eran todos mancebos, que ninguno vi de edad de más de treinta años: muy bien hechos, de muy hermosos cuerpos y muy buenas caras” (Serna 2007, 130). The use of descriptive phrases, such as “bien hechos” and “mancebos” construct Indigenous people as healthy, young, and readily available laborers. With the goal of colonial expansion, the Spanish empire required strong bodies to labor. This description demonstrates how colonial ideologies naturalize certain bodies to be used for harsh labor. With the arrival of Spanish colonists, who had previous interactions with Africans and Arabs, it came as no surprise that they continued to reproduce these ideologies where darker skin was correlated with servitude and inferiority.

Colon set the precedent for understanding Indigenous bodies, the goals of colonial expansion, and the violence that would erupt as Spanish colonists moved from the Caribbean

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20 They gave what they had like beasts; therefore I thought it was wrong, and I defended it, and I would give them thousands of good things that I had, so that they would love us and as a result they will be Christians, and will be inclined to the love and service of your Highness and to all of the Spanish nation, and will ensure their help and give us things that they have in abundance, and are necessary for us. (Translation of an excerpt of Colon’s 1943 letters to the Spanish empire)

21 A Spanish bishop born in 1484 known for his accounts (Destructión de las Indias) of the devastations Indigenous people faced due to Spanish colonization.

22 And all of the ones I saw were young, none were over 30 years of age: very well made, with beautiful bodies and very nice faces. (Translation of an excerpt of Bartolome de las Casas’s summary of Colon’s 1943 diary to the Spanish empire, retrieved from Crónicas de Indias Antología by Mercedes Serna, 2007)
Islands and towards Central and South America. His influential diary entries painted a specific image to a geographically separated Spanish empire. The descriptive words allude to potential capital benefits from colonial expansion. The colonizer gaze saw the land and the bodies that inhabited it as the materials and tools for extraction. Colon depicted the “New World” as fertile land with large ports for trade, where a Brown Indigenous population guaranteed an available and vulnerable labor force to facilitate expansion.

Colon’s words were used to introduce the “New World” to a Spanish empire abroad. His letter would eventually lead to increased colonial destruction. Colonizers like Hernan Cortes, following Colon’s footsteps, were determined to coerce Indigenous groups into Catholicism, slavery, and to disrupt their relationships to the land and to each other. Fertile soil became infertile as it was overworked for over-seas profit. Once depleted and exhausted of their natural resources, Indigenous workers were displaced from their lands and forced to move or work their land under the Spanish empire. This type of violence is a direct result of a cosmology of colonialism that sees bodies and the Earth as raw materials whose value lies only in the potential to generate capital. Mayra and Patel describe how colonial cosmologies were imposed onto Indigenous communities and replaced by a new colonial cosmology of domination where “relationships with and duties of care for water, land, and living beings were uprooted, replaced with a worldview animated by domination, exploitation, and profit” (Marya and Patel 2021, 15). The land, individual bodies, and future societies were constructed under these violent ideologies, resulting in a cascade of downward effects. The authors point to the ways systems of inequality directly alter bodies and their susceptibility to disease. The trauma inflicted onto bodies is generational (Marya and Patel 2021). Small epigenetic changes in DNA arise when bodies experience trauma. Although DNA is not necessarily changed, the expression of genes is. These
changes in gene expression or suppression increase the body’s vulnerability to disease. The traumas associated with colonialism such as the destruction of life systems, genocide, cultural erasure, sexual violence, labor exploitation, and the introduction of new diseases, were experienced at the community level.

Marya and Patel describe how this ideological model for structuring society remains today and “these structures continue to persist and continue to wreak havoc on individual bodies, on our societies, and on the planet. Its signature is damaged relationships, and the outcome is inflammation” (Marya and Patel 2021, 26). What does it mean to be a product of this extremely violent and traumatizing history? How does colonialism manifest in the bodies, daily routines, and relationships between migrant workers in Wyoming? The next section focuses on conflicts that erupt between workers at Cactus Hill Corporation as manifestations of colonial violence.

**Daily Manifestations of Colonial Violence in the Workplace**

As Marya and Patel describe in their book, colonialism creates devastating impacts on how life is organized, how people identify themselves with others and the land, and as an ongoing process, colonialism manifests differently across race, class, gender, etc. It alters the ways people can connect with one another and the imposition of new cosmologies involves the demeaning of a previous cosmology. They write:

Colonialism isn’t simply the physical occupation of land. It is a process, an operation of power in which one cosmology is extinguished and replaced with another. In that replacement, one set of interpretations about human’s place in the universe is supplanted. Patterns of identity, language, culture, work, relationship, territory, time, community, and care are transformed (Marya and Patel 2021, 14).

When traumas resulting from colonialism occur, community cultures and identities shift in response to the imposition of new cosmologies. In what is now called Mexico, a national cultural identity erupts in response to colonialism. Historically, forced labor, migration, and disillusion
construct a Mexican national identity that can be defined by suffering. Due to the imposition of colonial ideologies, Indigenous ways of understanding and relating to one another were disrupted and replaced by enslavement, exploitation, genocide, cultural erasure, and prolonged suffering. Constructed as bodies for labor since Colon’s violent arrival, soon-to-be migrant workers normalize their bodies as tools for exploitative labor. By occupying the status of “the other,” the identity of Mexican peoples is connected to the exploitation, abuse, and trauma their ancestors experienced. However, Mexican people also learn from the resistance and resilience of Indigenous communities.

These cultural identities of servitude and suffering result from the imposition of extractive desires and necessities that fuel colonial ideologies. As the stories below will show, in the lives of migrant workers in Wyoming, colonial violence, resulting from capitalism as an economic system, manifests in the form of broken relationships among workers, which ultimately disrupts the possibility for workers to organize around shared struggles. This is not always the case, however. Indigenous farmworkers working for J&G Berry Farms in Santa Maria, California, are currently on strike, demanding a pay increase. Right now, they are being paid $2.10 per box of strawberries and are requesting an increase to $3.50 (Dizon 2022, ksbym.com). These workers are organizing around a similar cause and demonstrate the power in collective action. Resilience and resistance are also something that migrant workers carry with themselves from the violence of colonialism. In Wyoming, migrant workers internalize their suffering and understandings of their bodies as tools for servitude, eventually reproducing acts of violence against each other. Legacies of colonial violence also manifest to construct migrant worker bodies as disposable tools of labor.
Migrant workers labor within an economic system of capitalism where they are positioned as low-skilled disposable workers. Under capitalism, there is no regard for the safety and well-being of workers. The workers participate in repetitive tasks, like if they were in an assembly line. The repetitive work that agricultural workers experience correlates their bodies to machines. Their bodies serve the purpose of continuing the assembly line, while the employer reaps the most benefit from this transaction of labor. The capitalist system in which migrant workers labor, creates competition among workers by individualizing their work. This competition manifests as co-worker conflicts and results in migrant workers reproducing violence against each other.

These acts of violence manifest in a small agricultural farm in Emblem, WY previously Werbelow Brothers Inc., but now known as Cactus Hill Corporation. The former employers, Victor, and Todd are white men and brothers that grew up in Wyoming. Years after their father passed away in 2012, they decided to sell most of their land to Cactus Hill Corporation in 2020 and Victor stepped down from his leadership position. However, Todd continues to serve as the workers’ point of communication and oversees their daily tasks. Before lands were sold, the farm was structured with approximately nine Mexican male workers, with ages ranging from 40-85, that would primarily irrigate bean, beet, and barely fields, burn unwanted weeds blocking water flow in irrigation ditches, use chemical spraying backpacks to kill weeds, fix fences, tear down trees, and a few workers would operate tractors for plowing and harvesting. The additional three workers were white men in their 50s that served as tractorists and mechanics, staying within the boundaries of the farm shop or relying on a tractor to stand in for physical labor. My father and two uncles have dedicated over 20 years of labor to this family-run farm and their bodies have experienced the consequences of years of intense labor. This farm often works with the
contractor, Benito (who oversaw my cuadrilla\textsuperscript{23} during Summer 2021), during the summer seasons to fulfill the need of weeding fields where chemicals cannot be used.

My father, Obed, my uncles, Oscar, and Jose, an 85-year-old worker from Oaxaca, Aldo, and a family friend, Jesus, have been working at the farm for the longest time, therefore they were the few that were not let go after lands of the farm were sold to Cactus Hill Corporation in spring of 2020. Prior to the other workers being fired, tensions would arise daily between workers. Instilled with ideas of hard work, workers often found themselves in arguments. Rather than working as a team, a few workers would purposefully situate themselves near their employer as if to be perceived as hard workers. By situating themselves near the employer, these workers would avoid helping the rest of the team with their daily tasks. Arguments would erupt regarding worker support and those few workers benefiting from speaking some English would often report to their employer what had occurred. By controlling the narrative, these workers ascribed themselves as the hardest workers and positioned other workers as lazy. A common phrase, barberos\textsuperscript{24}, used to describe workers that behave in this manner, was introduced by Oscar and Jose during their interviews. Since praise and less physically intensive tasks are awarded to those perceived as being hard working, irrigators at this farm appear to be in competition with one another.

Guiding this competition is an internalized perception of their self-worth based on servitude through the labor that they provide. This stems from the imposed identities colonizers placed onto Indigenous bodies as servants and well-made for hard work and from the ongoing processes of colonialism through capitalism. In this example, the violence of colonialism and the

\textsuperscript{23} A term used to describe a group of migrant workers that labor together throughout the season. Typically, these groups have some sort of familial connection to one another.

\textsuperscript{24} Slang used by workers that indirectly translates to the English phrase “kiss ass”.

68
cultural transformations (Marya and Patel 2021) that result from this violence facilitate the disruption of worker relationships, in effect pitting migrant workers against each other. When worker relationships are disrupted, workers are unable to organize to collectively demand better working conditions. The ways migrant farm labor is historically organized (see figure 1.1 in the Introduction) facilitates the disruption of worker relationships. Colonial ideas that deem Indigenous bodies as occupying the lowest level of the social hierarchy are reproduced in the farm. As Holmes’s framework shows, the closer a body is to indigeneity, the least respect, financial security, and control over time and others’ labor one has (2013). Migrant irrigators at Cactus Hill Corporation internalize the colonial violence of “othering” and in effect inflict violence onto each other. This is an ongoing and essential function of capitalism that alienates workers from each other to create competition and redirect blame of poor working conditions, exploitation, and suffering towards those marginalized, therefore preventing the possibility for unionizing or other forms of worker’s organization.

Without the possibility to organize, exploitative work environments are reproduced daily. Migrant irrigators are expected to operate like machines, repeating the same bodily motions of shoveling, walking, crouching, and bending. The exploitative conditions of labor at the farm mirror those experienced by Indigenous people during colonization. Colonial perceptions of Indigenous bodies as “the other” and as disposable tools for labor, justify long hours of repetitive work in the sun and the heavy use of pesticides that become embodied, leading to poor health. Additionally, it fulfills the necessity of having a cheap and exploitable pool of laborers to reproduce capitalism.

The migrant irrigators begin their workdays in the summers at 4:30 am. The summer season is the most labor intensive, where migrant workers must use shovels to fix rows in the
field that have caused flooding. This job requirement leaves migrant bodies achy and sore for the entire season. The repetitive motion of the arms, particularly the strain it puts on the forearm joints that tightly grip the shovel and pick up wet soil, becomes embodied by workers in the form of arthritis. Obed, my father was diagnosed with osteoarthritis in his right arm. Biomedical professionals have attributed this diagnosis to the type of work he does and the time he has spent doing it. My father’s body, seen as disposable to his employers, like the bodies of Indigenous people during colonization, is debilitating year after year of intense field work. He recently started taking opioid medication for the pain, which has the potential to lead to worsening health given the potential for addiction. Additionally, pain medication only masks the pain, making it endurable for him to continue laboring.

The work expectations and requirements for migrant irrigators are extremely dangerous, which further points to the strategic ways their bodies are constructed as disposable through the labor that they produce. They utilize toxic herbicides to kill weeds and are exposed to the effects of extended hours of labor in the sun. Particularly, migrant irrigators expressed deep concern over the use of Roundup for daily farm operations. At Cactus Hill Corporation, migrant workers walk down the ditches that contain the water for irrigation with a heavy white jug-like backpack secured onto their backs. Attached to this apparatus is a hose that releases the toxic chemicals into the soil, the atmosphere, and into the eyes and skin of migrants.

Migrant workers are aware of the health threats that result from interacting daily with toxic chemicals. During one of the arts-based wellness sessions of the Migrant Worker Community Healing Program, the Physician Assistant, Patricia, that I worked with at Ag Worker Health and Services, joined us for a session to answer questions migrants had related to their health. Obed, Lupe, and Pedro spoke to Patricia about irritations in their eyes caused by being in
close contact with toxic chemicals at work and being exposed to long hours in the sun. Patricia explained that the sun burns the whites of our eyes and that wearing a hat while outside for prolonged hours does not provide enough protection from the irritation this causes. She recommended that workers wear sunglasses when being exposed to long work hours outdoors. Patricia said that it is common for patients that come into the migrant clinic with these eye problems and the solution is to prescribe them Erythromycin Ophthalmic Ointment that is applied onto the inside of the eyelids. However, the ointment requires to be applied four times a day, and it is often difficult for migrant workers to find the time during their busy work schedules. Additionally, prescribing ointment for their eyes serves only as a temporary fix as migrant workers will continue to expose their bodies to harsh chemicals for survival.

Biomedicine, as colonial medicine, offers temporary fixes to ease the eye irritations of migrant workers with medications. The eye is seen as the entity that needs to be fixed or restored, however there is no recognition of the systematic inequalities that reproduce this violence. Migrant worker bodies experience their work as poor health due to the work expectations imposed onto them and the classification of their bodies as disposable. Additionally, ongoing colonial ideologies that dictate and label their bodies as naturally built for labor normalize the working conditions migrant workers endure. As they seek to alleviate their pains by accessing biomedical institutions, their bodies remain inflamed despite receiving care, since these institutions fail to uncover and address the root cause of their eye irritations that result from continuous exposure to toxic chemicals. Colonial medicine, “which focuses on the individual to keep the systems invisible” (Marya and Patel 2021, 26), becomes another source of inflammation. Patricia’s narrow biomedical solution serves as a temporary fix, while migrant workers will return to laboring in the contaminated fields after they tirelessly apply ointment.
onto their eyes. Patricia’s training as a biomedical professional restricts her to approach health solely through a biological lens, without working to transform the labor conditions for migrant workers. This results because “the medicine we rely on to heal from these insults is itself rooted in colonial cosmology. The history of modern medicine is the history of colonialism” (Marya and Patel 2021, 18). The employment and health of migrant workers is constructed through harmful colonial ideologies and the institutions that are designed for healing, achieve the opposite. Rather than heal, biomedical institutions perpetuate the continuous inflammation of bodies. The next section details Jose’s severe exposure to toxic chemicals while working for Cactus Hill Corporation. His story points to the prolonged damage migrant workers endure.

**Jose’s Story of Toxic Chemical Exposure**

Exposure to toxic chemicals on the farm occurs regularly at Cactus Hill Corporation. One summer morning, Jose, a 52-year-old undocumented Mexican worker, was using his backpack to spray a field. At around 9:00 am he noticed a small aircraft flying above him. Before he knew it, toxic chemicals were falling from the sky and drenching his body. Jose explained:

> Pasó el helicóptero y me echó un báñito, paso pegado a mi, y me echó un báñito rozándome de química de química. Luego fue y dio vuelta y volvió a pasar otra vez y yo no alcancé a salirme rápido y me volvió a dar otro baño. Pasaron como unos tres días y tuve que ir al hospital, tuve que ir con el doctor y me dio unas medicinas. No me hizo luego luego, pero como al siguiente día, dos días, me empecé a sentir con el cuerpo como con un dolor en la espalda, como los pulmones, como los músculos bien adoloridos, los huesos, no sé qué me dolía y eso me quiso hacer sentir poco mal.°

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°The helicopter passed and showered me, it flew above me, and it showered me in chemicals. Then, it turned around and passed over me again, and I did not have enough time to leave the field, so it showered me in chemicals again. Around three days passed, and I had to go to the hospital, I had to go to the doctor, and they gave me medicine. It didn’t impact me right away, but the following days, around two days after, I started to feel it in my body like a pain in my back, like my lungs, my muscles were very sore, my bones, I’m not sure exactly what hurt, but it made me feel bad. (Interview with Jose, 52 years old, July 18, 2021)
Three days passed, and Jose found himself in the hospital. During this time, he continued to labor in the fields, exacerbating the impacts of toxicity that the Firestone chemicals were causing in his body. Jose could not exactly locate his pain, but exposure to the chemicals was impacting his health.

At the doctor’s office, Jose was asked who his employer was. Jose did not want to tell his doctor, because he felt bad telling the doctor who his employer was, fearing any type of repercussion that could escalate. His doctor had a conversation with the farm supervisor, Kurt, related to the chemical exposure, but the farm management had not previously known about the incident. Todd, Jose’s employer, had a conversation with the doctor about the incident and paid for Jose’s hospital bills. Shortly after the incident, the employer at Cactus Hill Corporation set new rules on the use of toxic chemicals, prohibiting those irrigators to work with Firestone. Although migrant workers stopped using that specific chemical, they continued to use others such as Roundup. Since the people operating the aircraft were from an external corporation that was paid by the Cactus Hill Corporation, the employers alleviated themselves of partial responsibility. They hired the company, but it wasn’t a farm employee or employer that dumped the chemicals onto Jose’s body.

By paying for Jose’s medical bills, the employer’s actions appear to demonstrate a departure from the exploiter/exploited dichotomy. In reality, his employer likely paid for Jose’s medical bills due to an imagined fear of being in legal trouble, if Jose had legal status, had the financial means to pay for legal services, and did not have to maintain his job to survive. His employers likely paid for the medical bills to keep Jose content, like Colon gifting Indigenous people scraps for gifts. This is a tactic that both the colonizer and Jose’s employer used to ensure that the exploited would continue exposing their bodies to harsh and dangerous labor. What may
seem on the surface to be a generous act of kindness can be viewed as a continuation of colonial
violence where those in power maintain power through pacification. The systems in place that
resulted in Jose’s toxic exposure are left invisible.

Despite Todd paying for Jose’s medical bills to what appeared as an accident at work,
Jose feels like the incident with the Firestone chemical was intentional. Jose explained:

De todos modos, seguimos esprayando, seguimos esprayando, pero si esa vez no
fue culpa exactamente del patrón, sino que el que traía el helicóptero, la compañía
que se encargaba de eso. Pero si lo hicieron yo pienso a propósito porque ¿cómo
no me iban a divisar? El helicóptero pues se baja para tirar la química y me dio el
baño ese y pues yo lo vi mal.26

Digging deeper into the incident, Jose’s identity as a migrant laborer facilitates the justification
for the exposure of his body to the chemicals. Valued primarily for the labor his body produces,
Jose embodies the violent structures of colonialism that position him as inferior and that create a
sense of indifference about his safety at work. As previously mentioned, the employer paying for
Jose’s medical bills should not be viewed as caring for the wellbeing of Jose, rather protecting
themselves from potential legal repercussions and ensuring Jose is content enough to continue
providing the labor the farm requires. Jose considers his exposure to be intentional. His body was
visible in the field, but intentionally made invisible by the people operating the aircraft. Jose said
he doesn’t understand how he wasn’t seen. The aircraft had to come closer to him, before
releasing the chemicals, in effect making visible his body in a vulnerable environment. By
attributing intentionality to the incident, Jose demonstrates the perceptions he has about the way
he is perceived, or not perceived, by locals. Intentionality implies that there is a reason for his
body being sprayed and damaged. This reason is rationalized by Jose as being part of the migrant

26 Despite it, we continue spraying, we are continuing spraying, but yes that incident was not exactly the fault of the
employer, but of the person in the helicopter, the company that is in charge of that. But I do think they did it
intentionally, because how were they not going to see me? The helicopter has to come down to release the chemicals
and it gave me that shower and I saw it as wrong. (Interview with Jose, 52 years old, July 18, 2021)
experience. Internalized understandings of his identity as a migrant in a country that has
designed a violent immigration system shape how he understands instances that enact violence
onto his body.

According to the Firestone Material Safety Data sheet, this chemical may be fatal if it is
swallowed or inhaled, causes skin irritation, substantial temporary eye injury, sensations like
tingling, itching, burning, and onset may occur immediately to 4 hours after exposure lasting up
to 30 hours (CHEMICAL PRODUCT AND COMPANY IDENTIFICATION n.p.). The safety
sheet advises the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling these chemicals,
which was not provided to Jose by his employer. Despite the known harm that these chemicals
cause, they are continuously used by the agricultural sector across the U.S. Migrant irrigators,
like Jose, Obed, Jesus, and Aldo, and like Cecilia weeding fields, are in the most direct contact
with these harmful toxins. Jose alluded to this idea when I asked him if he thinks that using these
toxic chemicals at work for years have had an impact on his health. Jose responded:

Si hijo ahorita le apuesto que ahorita desgraciadamente ya estamos medio
fregados de eso, no nomás yo, le apuesto que mis compañeros también. Con el
hecho de que vamos a esprayar, hay veces que estamos esprayando, y se viene
cualquier airecito, aunque este tranquilo y se viene el airecito, y ya nos remolina
pocito la quimica y nos la avienta para la cara, al rato tenemos los labios asi
como enchilados. Yo digo que todo eso con el tiempo nos va a afectar,
desgraciadamente casi casi estoy seguro. Diosito Santo quiere y no nos vaya a
pasar una cosa de repente, suceder una cosa asi, pero puede que si. Aquí todo el
tiempo, todos los años, usamos muchas quimicas, de unas y otras, pero todo el
tiempo estamos esprayando con quimica y si, si, yo estoy seguro de que la
quimica nos tiene afectados, si, no nomas a mi, cómo le digo a los compañeros
también.27

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27 Yes, son I bet you that right now unfortunately we are somewhat injured from that, not only me, I bet you that my
coworkers are too. With the fact that we continue spraying, there are times that we are spraying, and a little breeze
comes, even if it is calm and a breeze comes, the breeze swirls the chemicals and throws it on our faces, and later on,
our lips start to tingle. I say that all that with time is going to affect us, unfortunately I am almost almost sure. If God
wants hopefully nothing will happen suddenly, but it is possible. Here, all the time, every year, we use a lot of
chemicals, a variety of them, but all the time we are spraying chemicals and yes, yes, I am sure the chemicals
have affected us, yes, not just me, like I’m telling you, my coworkers too. (Interview with Jose, 52 years old, July
18, 2021)
In his response, Jose points to Rob Nixon’s framework of slow violence (2011). Nixon defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2011, 2). Despite the dangers that toxic chemical use presents to workers, the employer still expects irrigators to handle chemicals. This results since chemicals like Ready Roundup are commercially and readily available based on claims made by scientists, agencies with different stakes on the use of the glyphosate-based herbicides, and corporations that manufacture them. An article in the international news agency company, Reuters, written in December of 2017, details how despite claims of its carcinogenic potential, “the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has said that glyphosate, the key ingredient in Monsanto Co’s top-selling weed killer Roundup, is not likely to be carcinogenic to humans, contradicting a World Health Organization panel” (Polansek 2017). The WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer had previously raised concerns about glyphosate, concluding it was “probably carcinogenic” (Polansek 2017). The article continues to say that Monsanto Co. refused to accept these conclusions and along with other associations and farm groups sued the state of California for requiring cancer warnings on products containing glyphosate. Scientific “expertise,” manipulated to support corporate greed, and faulty data leading to “probably” and “probably not” conclusions, allow for toxic chemicals to continue to be sold and normalized as safe to use. Regardless of the inconclusive findings related to the toxicity and carcinogenic impacts of glyphosate, if the chemical products have cancer warning labels, they are less attractive to the consumer, resulting in a decrease in profits. Detached corporate figures, agency decision-makers, and “objective” scientific researchers determine if the health of migrant
workers will or will not be impacted upon exposure to glyphosate. Colonial ideologies of human superiority over nature allow for the acceptance of company profits over human health.

In line with the uncertainty of research that grants safety to toxic chemicals allowing them to be sold and used regularly, the uncertainty of a threat posed by the chemicals Jose interacts with daily induces inflammation in his body. Jose’s uncertainty about what health outcomes will emerge mirrors the uncertainty that is strategically used by researchers, farm groups, and safety agencies to allow toxic chemicals to continue to be used. This type of slow violence uses migrant workers as experimental bodies of the impacts of long-term exposure to toxic chemicals. Since the impacts of chemical exposure reveal themselves over time, it is difficult to scientifically and objectively “prove” a link between chemical exposure and poor health. Those with capital stakes in the use of chemicals leverage the uncertainty of cause and effect to continue accumulating capital, at the expense of deteriorating the health of migrant workers. Jose is aware, but also unable to prove the harm toxic chemicals cause to his health and wellbeing. Without clear and immediate manifestations of their impact, the manufacturing and selling of toxic chemicals is not labeled as violence at all (Nixon 2011). The health effects that emerge from prolonged exposure are not “event focused, time bound” (Nixon 2011, 3), furtherly complicating its categorization as a form of violence.

Jose’s retelling of his severe bodily exposure to toxic chemicals directs our attention to invisible forces of power that result in continuous exposure, such as scientific research and corporate greed. During our conversation, Jose mentioned that it was not exactly his employer’s fault, but by including the word “exactly,” he points to forces that are not always made visible, (like the conversations, refusals, and priorities of those dictating the safety of chemicals) that aligned for this terrible toxic exposure to occur. Additionally, language barriers and an overall
lack of communication between Jose and his employer failed to prevent his presence in the field that morning. Prolonged exposure to the toxic chemicals results in Jose’s body being inflamed every day at work (Marya and Patel 2021).

Additionally, his identity as a migrant, his legal status, the responsibility of sending remittances to his extended family in Chihuahua, his desires to build a home, and the structured colonial identity of using his body as a tool for labor keep him encerrado28 in Wyoming. Without the ability to get a different job, his body endures the historical and contemporary legacies of violence that structure capitalism. His labor provides material gain for him and his family, but he is exhausted doing this work. After 14 years of living in Wyoming and not returning to Chihuahua, MX, Jose feels forced to stay. Jose says:

Me veo hijo como muy forzado, como muy comprometido a estarme aquí. Como que tengo que estar muy comprometido aquí porque no tengo otra opción. Como que me siento muy amarrado aquí donde estoy trabajando y donde vivo. Como que me siento muy amarrado, ya porque no tengo uno la manera de salir para afuera a buscar otro tipo de trabajo por no tener papeles legales, y se me hace como muy difícil, tiene que aguantar uno mucho aquí, forzado el trabajo.29

Compounding forms of structural and symbolic violence including the lack of legal protections at work, rhetoric, and ideologies of colonialism, separation from extended family, inability to safely move and seek employment within the boundaries of the U.S., and continuous exposure to inhumane working conditions, leaves migrant workers like Jose feeling hopeless. The labor he produces is forced. There is an illusion of freedom and the American Dream. Jose works because he must survive and feed his family, not because he is free to choose a particular occupation and pursue it. His life is confined to undergoing the same routine as the seasons advance. By

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28 Entrapped.
29 I see myself, son, like very forced, like obligated to stay because I have no other option. I feel tied here where I am working and where I live. I feel obligated because I don’t have the option to leave and look for a different job because I don’t have legal documents, therefore it is very difficult, one must tolerate a lot here, forced labor. (Interview with Jose; 52 years old, July 18, 2021)
marginalizing migrant workers into the shadows of the U.S. economic system, leaving their bodies unprotected, and simultaneously demanding their labor, but criminalizing their existence, migrant workers in Wyoming are entrapped by the structures of violence that shape their lives. Migrant workers experience feelings of obligation to continue exposing their bodies to harsh labor, which is an embodied manifestation that stems from colonial ideologies that created the Indigenous “other” through racialized ideas of superiority and inferiority.

The next section explores Cecilia’s embodied experiences in Wyoming. Like Jose, she feels stuck in Wyoming and is tired of experiencing the same daily routines year-round. She is alienated from her loved ones, from her culture, and she feels alone. As a migrant woman, she experiences abuse not only in the workplace, but from her male partner. She does not have the ability to prioritize her health and continues to labor in the fields, despite her doctor’s recommendations, due to the accumulation of medical bills and her inability to access health insurance. Cecilia’s story presented below demonstrates the harm migrant workers endure as they navigate life in rural Wyoming, far from aspects of their life that once brought them joy.

**Embodied Life Histories**

During the first week of June 2021, I met up with Cecilia at 4:30 am in our agreed upon location and we drove for a little more than an hour until we reached the base of Heart Mountain in Park County. Cecilia, the leader of our *cuadrilla* is a 44-year-old woman that migrated from Cuauhtemoc, a city in Chihuahua, Mexico. When Cecilia was a young adult in Cuauhtemoc, she worked at a boutique for children where she sold clothing for special occasions like baptisms and birthdays. Cecilia remembers this time in her life with happiness because she felt as if her employers were like her family. Before she had the opportunity to begin high school, Cecilia
dropped out of school so that she could continue working at the boutique. Eventually, however, she started taking night classes to make up for the education she was missing. To this day, Cecilia maintains communication with the owners of the boutique, but she was forced to quit her job after she married her first husband—the father of her two oldest children. During both of her pregnancies, Cecilia used a tourist visa to cross to El Paso, TX to receive prenatal care and to give birth. She paid for these services in full. She recalled an experience when she was crossing at a different port of entry that was not at El Paso and the border patrol agent was not allowing her to cross with her children (even though they were U.S. citizens, and she had a tourist Visa). The border patrol agent claimed that Cecilia had taken advantage and birthed her children in the U.S. without paying for the medical bills. Luckily, Cecilia had a receipt of these bills and was able to cross with her children.

Cecilia crossed the U.S.-Mexican border to permanently stay in the U.S. when her children were eight and two years old. Once in the U.S., Cecilia settled in Amarillo, TX and found employment cleaning hotels. Cecilia did not like this work because of the heavy expectations it required and the low pay. Eventually, Cecilia met a woman from Amarillo that independently cleans houses for employment. Before she knew it, she was managing three service jobs that involved cleaning homes, working at a dry cleaner, and cleaning a clinic. While in Amarillo, Cecilia met a man, Pablo, that would eventually become her boyfriend and move into her home with her children.

Although Cecilia and her children were living comfortably in Amarillo, a visit from Pablo’s sister resulted in Cecilia and her children being relocated to Wyoming. Pablo’s sister talked of a great opportunity in the Wyoming agricultural sector where employers provided housing and paid for utilities, granting Cecilia the ability to stay at home and watch her children
without having to work. In February of 2014, they decide to leave Texas and settle in Burlington, WY (population ~240, mostly white and Mormon). Pablo had never worked in agriculture but found a job as a ranch hand. His lack of experience led to continuous work abuse in the form of disrespect, exhaustion, and degradation of his body. During her first summer, Cecilia joined a **cuadrilla** of migrant women, including my mother and my aunt, that worked weeding bean fields. Cecilia said she did not know that *limpiando frijol*\(^{30}\) entailed picking weeds in the sun, but rather thought it was a process that was done in the space of a factory after the beans had been harvested. Two years after their arrival to Wyoming, Cecilia was expecting her third child at the time Pablo quit his job as a ranch hand due to the abuse he was experiencing by his employer.

After Pablo quit his ranch hand job, the employer arrived at their home and demanded they leave it immediately. Although Cecilia was pregnant and there were no available homes or apartments for rent, the employer wanted them to leave his home. The employer demanded that the house be clean when they left or else he would not pay the last paycheck. After Cecilia and her family frantically got their things together and cleaned their home, the employer went to the house and ensured all appliances, faucets, sinks, etc. of the home were working before providing the final paycheck. Since housing was provided by his employer, and with no other option left, Cecilia and her soon-to-be-family of five were forced to relocate to a hotel for a period of 2-3 months.

Coupled with the anxieties of having to move out from their home, Pablo was not a good partner to Cecilia. Pablo mentally and physically abused Cecilia throughout their relationship. These harms were exacerbated when they moved to Wyoming and she found herself further north, away from her family and from her place of comfort. Pablo’s actions are forms of

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\(^{30}\) Cleaning beans.
symbolic violence related to gender hierarchies and norms. Pablo views Cecilia as an object that he has ownership over. The actions of Pablo led to depression and anxiety for Cecilia. As a migrant woman, Cecilia felt pressured to stay with Pablo despite the abuse she was experiencing. Without a consistent stream of income, she felt like there was no other option. Her children would face the consequences. The abuse she experienced manifested as poor mental health and self-confidence. Without a stable home, she, and her soon to be born child, would have to endure the abuse that Pablo enacted onto her body.

Cecilia missed Texas and felt like migrating to Wyoming was a mistake. Cecilia missed living in Texas because she had family there and her mother that lives in Mexico can more easily take the shorter trip there and visit for an extended amount of time. She also had access to culture that granted her the ability to maintain some aspects of her life in Mexico, like access to Mexican ingredients for cooking, bailes, and the ability to use her native Spanish language during medical appointments. In Texas, she felt like each day had something new to offer, nothing like the same routine she now finds herself stuck in while living and working in Wyoming.

Cecilia’s mental health diminished due to the domestic violence she was experiencing with Pablo, due to relocating to Wyoming, experiencing abuse from employers, and feeling disconnected from her family and culture. Cecilia finds no purpose in putting energy into her appearance in Wyoming because she says she sees the same people, the same stores, the same products, and endures the same routine year-round. In the summer, her family is confined to the area because their work schedules do not allow for them to participate in different activities available in Wyoming for fun or for leisure, such as visiting Yellowstone National Park and camping in the mountains. In the wintertime, the snow and cold temperatures confine them to

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31 Social events where Mexican community members gather to dance. The music ranges but includes regional Mexican music and cumbias.
their home. Year-round and year after year, the routine is the same. Cecilia described her life in Wyoming as sad, tiring, and *muy fea.* She is exhausted of the same routine and hopes to one day return to Amarillo, Texas. She would leave in a heartbeat if she could. For Cecilia, the small population of people in Wyoming and the lack of access to her culture contribute to her debilitating health. The physical environment creates the conditions for her suffering and leaves her feeling no purpose.

A few years after the birth of her third child at a motel in Greybull, WY, Cecilia made the decision to start using contraceptives to avoid pregnancies. Her previous experiences with childbirth had created a lot of anxiety around birthing given that she had to cross the border into the U.S. and had to undergo being evicted from her home shortly before her last birthing experience. In February of 2018, Cecilia began taking birth control pills. She had previously taken a different form of contraception in the form of an injection. One night, Cecilia began to feel as if her left leg was getting numb. She ignored it and went to bed, only mentioning the numbness she felt in her leg to Pablo.

The next day, she had headaches, and the side of her face was numb. She had never felt like this before. She felt terrible. Before she knew it, she began to vomit, and her head continued to be in pain. She woke up on the ground, with vomit around her, but was too weak to get up. Pablo made it home and found her lying on the ground. Cecilia was not conscious of what had happened to her. Pablo thought Cecilia had eaten something that was causing the vomiting and headache. He went out to purchase oral rehydration solution for her. When he came back home, he found Cecilia laying on the ground again, unable to stand. Pablo called his sister so that she could help him care for Cecilia. His sister also believed she was having stomach problems, but

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32 Very ugly.
suggested Cecilia visit Midway Clinic, about 5 miles from Cecilia’s home. Cecilia did not want to go to the clinic given its reputation for being extremely expensive and ineffective (Cecilia did not have insurance and would have to pay for all medical costs out of pocket). She decided instead to opt for resting at home. By now, her oldest son was home, and he became the primary form of support for his mom. Cecilia continued to feel an intense headache, continued to vomit, and her arm was going numb. In front of Pablo and her two sons (the oldest and the youngest), Cecilia began to seize. This would account for her third stroke in the span of a single day. Pablo immediately called an ambulance, and she was transported to Midway Clinic.

At Midway Clinic, she was transported again by ambulance to Billings, Montana so that she would be able to receive better care. The medical professionals in Montana explained to Cecilia that she had suffered three strokes and heart attacks. They discovered a blood clot in her brain caused by the contraceptives she was taking. It was a miracle she survived three strokes without any major physical damage to her body. To this day, Cecilia is concerned about all the medical expenses she must pay. For her follow-up appointments, Cecilia uses the services provided by the Ag Worker Health and Services Clinic which has offices in both Powell, WY and in Billings, MT. Cecilia has felt very supported by them, and they are her preferred provider. The Ag Worker Clinic is able to help cover some costs for MRI scans and for some of her medications, but she still has a lot of debt that she will have to pay out of pocket. She is concerned about having the ability to repay this debt, but her doctors and her neurologist advised her to continue receiving care even if she doesn’t know how she’ll repay it.

Cecilia did not clarify the types of medication she has been prescribed but mentioned that she takes 30 different kinds each day. She takes blood thinners three times a day and must do so for the rest of her life. If Cecilia experiences another stroke, the doctors predict that she will not
make it. The doctors that assisted Cecilia told her she should refrain from working in the fields, given the intensity of the labor and the amount of time she would spend in the sun. Cecilia did not work during that Summer 2018 and spent most of her time resting in her home. The summer of 2020 was the first time Cecilia worked in the fields after her health condition first began, despite her doctor’s advice of refraining from work in the fields. Cecilia was experiencing pain from her health condition, which was exacerbated by the fact that the cuadrilla she joined that summer was very strict and did not allow the workers to take a break.

During this time, she was working with a different cuadrilla than she had been used to since it involved working with a complete family. Cecilia joined the members of the family, including the wife, husband, and their two young children. The husband was very strict and would make efforts to try to impress the contractor, Benito. Cecilia remembered when they were working in a hemp field with multiple cuadrillas and the man expected them to work fast, without any breaks. He would even get upset if the migrant workers were having conversations in the field while they worked. This made Cecilia stressed and uncomfortable, therefore she did not want to continue working, but said “lo hacemos por necesidad, no porque nos guste.” Other workers of Cecilia’s cuadrilla even became ill (vomiting in the fields) due to the atmosphere of urgency and stress that the man was creating, to the point that they stopped working. Cecilia did not understand why the man was working so intensely or why he would not allow them to take a break. She expressed her frustrations by saying “todos somos iguales, todos valemos lo mismo.” What surprised Cecilia the most or made her the most frustrated was that the man that oversaw the cuadrilla is a Latinx migrant worker as well. Here we can see connections between the workers at Cactus Hill Corporation and the experiences Cecilia encountered with a new

33 We do it out of necessity, not because we like it. (Fieldnotes of conversations with Cecilia from June 10, 2021)
34 We are all the same, we are worth the same. (Fieldnotes of conversations with Cecilia from June 10, 2021)
cuadrilla as she started working again. In both situations, internalized perceptions of hard work stemming from colonial ideologies manifest in exploitative relationships among workers.

Cecilia has headaches every day. She has learned to exist with them. In the fields, her headaches worsen when she bends over to pick weeds. She must lift her head slowly as she comes up to avoid the pain getting worse. Cecilia’s vision in her left eye is still blurry and gets worse when her headaches worsen. Cecilia keeps her health condition largely a secret from her family. This ends up foreclosing opportunities to receive support from them. Cecilia’s mother lives in Chihuahua, Mexico and is still to this day unaware of Cecilia’s health conditions. Cecilia said her mother is also battling her own health issues and is of older age. Her relatives in Mexico advised her not to tell her mother of her health issues. They are concerned that her mother’s health would worsen because of the stress and fear of knowing her daughter has had three strokes and has to be on blood thinners for life. These fears of the worsening health of Cecilia’s mother stem from her inability to travel to the U.S. to visit and care for Cecilia. Without the ability to see her mother, Cecilia finds no purpose in exposing her health deterioration to her mother.

The border enacts this harm and violence, contributing to the worsening of Cecilia’s headaches. Cecilia emphasized that she plans to have a conversation with her mother about her health conditions once she can visit her in person, so her mother can see that she is doing alright. Despite Cecilia feeling like she physically appears to be healthy, she fears her health condition and is worried about having another stroke. Despite these fears and although she was advised not to by her doctors, Cecilia continues to work weeding fields. The medical bills that accumulated during her medical emergencies, in addition to her frequent medical check-ins, push her to continue exposing her body to harsh working conditions. Without insurance and without legal
status to receive governmental assistance, Cecilia, like hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, must continue to use her body as the tool for labor, resulting in worsening health.

The legacies of colonial violence manifest in the daily lives of workers like Cecilia and Jose. These forces of violence interrupt their relationships with their co-workers and position their bodies as disposable. Cecilia and Jose embody this violence as poor health. This poor health is sustained because their legal status entraps them in Wyoming. They feel forced to continue living and working in Wyoming but see no other option for survival. They must exist in an environment that produces prolonged inflammation, resulting in deteriorated physical and mental health. The manifestation of colonial violence in their daily lives creates feelings of entrapment that are not eased. They both understand that their life situation could improve if they weren’t constrained to be in Wyoming by compounding forces of violence.

The next chapter Part I Colonialism, works to challenge mainstream rhetoric of migrant labor as “unskilled.” I argue that this categorization stems from colonial ideologies that pushed Indigenous bodies to the margins and deemed them naturally fit for labor. As constructed “inferior others,” the labor they produced was also categorized as “inferior” and therefore low-skilled. These labels sustain and reproduce colonial systems like capitalism by ensuring workers remain unprotected at work and constructs their bodies as disposable. The experiences of Wyoming migrant workers laboring in the fields construct a new narrative, one where the innovation and adaptability of workers is brought to the forefront and used to resist the harmful categorization of migrant work as “unskilled.”
Chapter 2: “Unskilled” Workers

Migrant workers feel entrapped in Wyoming because their labor consists of the same daily and yearly routines. Without legal status, migrant workers do not have the possibility to find other employment opportunities. The perceptions and rhetoric that deems their labor unskilled contributes to their feelings of entrapment. Under capitalism, it is beneficial to the growers for migrant workers to be categorized as unskilled. It guarantees an available workforce and justifies low wages.

Migrant laborers are acknowledged solely due to their labor contributions. Their bodies only have social value when they are laboring. Otherwise, they are invasive, contaminated, and seen as a threat. We must acknowledge and be grateful for the work migrant workers do, but not solely because they produce labor. Their work ethic does not define their worth and until the narrative of “hard workers” evolves to exploited/overworked workers, then we can begin to understand the histories of violence that produce unhealthy migrant bodies and funnel them into this sector of work. By changing the narrative that is presented about migrant labor, migrant workers in Wyoming can begin to feel less trapped by structural forces that constrain them to repetitive and exploitative labor.

Ironically, the categorization of migrant workers as “hard workers” is tied to the simultaneous categorization of their labor as “unskilled.” These stereotypes can be traced back to the descriptions Colon used to frame Indigenous people as laboring bodies (see chap. 1). By attributing their bodies to the role of the worker, and describing their behavior as uncivilized, Colon began the foundation for the association of migrant workers with low-skill jobs. Their ascribed “otherness” deems migrant workers as only capable of doing repetitive, low-skill labor. The stories below will demonstrate how migrant workers are skilled, innovative, and contradict
the mainstream ideas that label migrant labor as low-skill, and therefore undeserving of being legally protected. In this chapter, colonial ideas of unskilled workers will be challenged by describing the daily realities of laboring as a weeder in Wyoming. By shifting mainstream attitudes, perceptions, and understandings of migrant labor as “unskilled labor,” and shifting perceptions of the disposability of the minds and bodies of those that perform this labor, migrant agricultural work can begin to experience changes in employment conditions.

**Daily Suffering at Work**

![Figure 2.1: Cecilia (on the left) and her daughter, Evelyn (on the right), dumping out the weeds on the side of a dirt road near an irrigation ditch by the grass field where the cuadrilla labored in June 2021.](image)

This section traces the daily experiences of being a migrant weeder in Wyoming, the effects produced by this labor, and how they are experienced by the body. In doing so, this
section demonstrates how the labeling of migrant workers as exceptional and natural “hard workers” does nothing to alleviate the pain their bodies experience due to their work.

Migrant labor in Wyoming, like other environments of migrant agricultural work, requires hours of walking, bending, and shoveling into the soil while the temperatures range from 75°F during cloudy days up to over 105°F with clear skies. Migrants are expected to labor in these conditions and their health, both mental and physical, faces the consequences. As can be seen in the image of Cecilia and her daughter Evelyn, migrant laborers cover their entire bodies with clothing, even when temperatures are very high. Given the long hours that their bodies are exposed to sunlight, to toxic chemicals, and for protection from skin irritations and scratches from the plants they interact with, migrant workers have learned the importance of using long pants, long sleeves, and layers of clothing to protect their skin. The layering of clothing contributes to the exhaustion experienced by migrant workers since it traps the heat. However, migrants are left with the choice of either experiencing this over exhaustion or having permanent skin damage due to long exposures in the sun. The layering of clothing serves a dual purpose as the early morning produces wind chills even during the summer season. The clothing serves as a form of protection from the cold. Take for example this entry from June 11, 2021, in my daily notes describing the cold and its impact on our ability to work:

Strong winds welcomed us at the grass field today at 5:15 AM. The wind lowered the temperature to the point that we were cold as we began walking on the rows. Our noses were running, and we were all bundled up in three or more layers. The cold temperature made me more exhausted and drained my energy. As we continued to walk and work, our bodies got warm, and this made the rest of my time working more bearable.

Additionally, workers wear hats or another form of head protection as another strategy to block out the sun. Cecilia encourages workers to wear more comfortable clothing, like sweatpants and sweatshirts, rather than jeans and collared shirts, as a strategy to make working conditions more comfortable.
On the first day of work, I noticed that the field was not as wide as it was long. The grass is grown for seed, so our job is to use a shovel to dig up any unwanted weeds. These weeds are piled into a sack, like the one Cecilia and Evelyn are emptying in Figure 2.1, that is strapped across the migrant worker’s chest. The employer does not provide these tools for the workers; therefore, they must purchase a sack and engineer a way to attach a piece of cloth, string, belt, etc. so that it can remain close to the body without falling with every bend of the back. We are each in charge of looking over four consecutive rows on our walk up the row, then a set of four new rows once we are on our walk back. Depending on the number of weeds that have infiltrated into the field, the sack can get full very easily. Once sacks are full, migrant workers must walk back to the end of the row that has already been inspected to dump out the weeds. The worker must remember where they have yet to inspect and continue walking down the row. Depending on the conditions of the field, it may only be possible to make it to the far end of a row once during an entire day of work. This happened on most occasions during my work experience and created feelings of overwhelming frustration since only slow progress is made. The rows of the field seem eternal and what remains to be cleaned reminds the migrant worker of the pain that is still left to experience.

Migrant agricultural work is commonly described as a “low-skill” job, however, as can be seen, the attention to detail that is required to distinguish between the weeds from the grass for seed, while carrying a heavy sack of weeds, under the scorching sun, requires a great deal of energy, skill, and innovation. Migrant agricultural work requires innovative minds to make their own work tools, to organize the rows, and to use the land to track progress, and mark unfinished rows. The categorization of migrant work as low-skilled facilitates the reproduction of capitalism.
as the dominant economic system and justifies exploitation. This is beneficial for growers since they can maintain a readily available and exploitable workforce.

During my first day of work, the rows I oversaw were somewhat clean, so, as I had learned from previous work weeding fields, the members of the cuadrilla support one another, therefore I would help those with weed infested rows, so that we could maintain a similar pace. A unique bond of mutual understanding, care, and support is created between members of the same cuadrilla. The cuadrilla establishes the work atmosphere and helps to shape how enjoyable or dreadful the workday will be. This section of a journal entry from June 11, 2021, demonstrates the relationships that are made within members of the cuadrilla:

Overall, my first week working alongside migrant workers felt very familiar. I felt like I was back in high school, and my body felt the same. Most of all the conversations and laughs transported me back in time. I know that I will always have this migrant working community by my side, and I on theirs.

As we continued to labor, after about thirty minutes, the sack being sustained by a cloth belt across my chest started to get very heavy. Here is where I could feel my legs, shoulders, and my back begin to ache. The constant repetitions of bending over and standing upright while holding the sack of weeds over my shoulder made me exhausted. Luckily, the morning was cloudy, blocking the sun from hitting us directly. Regardless, I felt my body begin to sweat. My fingers felt numb, and it hurt to bend them, probably from holding the shovel in the same position and from the force that was needed to dig up the weeds from the dried-up soil.

The morning after my first day at work, my body was experiencing the symptoms of migrant labor. Due to the repetitive nature of the job, my legs were aching. The aching in my legs was making it difficult to stand, bend over, and use my arms to pull a weed from its roots. Most notably, I could feel a numbing sensation every time I tried to close my hands and fingers to grip something. These body aches and pains continued, and by the fourth day, I began to feel a
sharp pain in my lower back. This pain persisted throughout the rest of my time weeding fields, creating in me a sense of hopelessness. My work in the fields would typically end between 9-10 am, while my companions would end their workdays between 3-4 pm. My bodily experiences only offer a small window into what their bodies were experiencing. The next section pays attention to the different ways differently racialized body experience agricultural labor. Tourist workers have more control over their time and can choose when to leave their role as a worker, while migrant weeders are trapped by compounding forms of structural violence to this sector of work.

Hemp Work: Tourist Labor and Migrant Work

Figure 2.2: Cecilia and Mayra transplanting small hemp plants into the rows. This labor requires the worker to be on their knees until they reach the other end of the row.
Working as a migrant laborer in Park County means being supervised by a well-known contractor that speaks Spanish and has made connections throughout the region with growers. Benito has the privilege of traveling freely between Mexico and the U.S. The growers of the region communicate solely with Benito, while he gathers workers to fill open positions. This means that Benito oversees bargaining with the growers and setting the wage rate. Having a closer relationship to Benito could mean being placed in a field that is less plagued by weeds and getting access to growers that have historically paid higher wages. Benito determines where he will send a cuadrilla, oftentimes making the place of work unpredictable.

During an early morning in July, Benito took Cecilia, Mayra, Julio, Evelyn, and I to a field down a dirt road far from the main highway. As we arrived, I was surprised to be welcomed by a strong odor. We shortly learned that we would be laboring in a hemp field. This work was completely new for me and involved transplanting premature hemp plants into the ground and
across the rows (see figure 2.3). Since planting the seeds directly into the soil proved to be ineffective for the growers, migrant workers were hired to manually do the planting. Before beginning to use my body for this labor, I perceived the work as being less physically intensive because it did not require heavy shoveling and the act of uprooting weeds. I was very wrong. The next day, my body would experience the pains of kneeling over the rows of hemp plants that had not been experienced before.

In this section, I focus upon the experience of laboring alongside white men with the cuadrilla I worked with during the Summer 2021. In my years weeding fields, I had never labored alongside white people in the same field. Although they are doing similar work (less rows to oversee), they do not labor for the same amount of time. Their work attire of shorts, tank tops, and sunglasses points to a different type of labor. One where their racial identity and social position grants them the privilege to work less hours, therefore there is less incentive for protecting themselves from the sun. This type of labor contradicts the labor Latinx migrant bodies must endure. As a daily occurrence during the summer season, weeders like Cecilia and Mayra experience the debilitating effects of migrant labor. They do not have the option to leave work early and the daily routine of their work requires that they continuously protect themselves with appropriate working attire for 10-hour workdays.

Like most farms in the surrounding area, the growers were white men. However, these growers were much younger, probably in their late twenties. Additionally, unlike other growers that contract migrant labor for weeding fields, these growers were physically present in the field and participated in the act of transplanting the hemp plants into the soil. One of the growers taught us how to transplant the hemp plants into the ground, giving us specific instructions to be diligent with the amount of water we poured, however our names did not seem to matter. Not
once were any of us asked about our names or where we were from. Our experiences were reduced to our physical bodies, since that is what mattered to the grower. As long as we could get the work done, nothing else mattered.

Cecilia told me that they worked in hemp fields during the summer 2020. They weeded these fields rather than transplanting small hemp plants into the ground. They worked in hemp fields during all their stages of growth: while they were small and while they had already flowered and were tall bushes. Cecilia’s boyfriend would tell her that he could smell the hemp on her when she would get back home from work and the cuadrilla was faced with questioning glares when they entered a local store after working in hemp fields. These interactions and public exposures further criminalized them when they were not working.

The white man kneeled like Cecilia and Mayra in Figure 2.2 was not restricted to this sector of work by his legal status. He appeared to be in his early to mid-twenties and only oversaw transplanting in one row, while the hemp farmer instructed each of us in the cuadrilla to transplant small hemp plants on two rows as we walked down. This man asked Evelyn, Cecilia’s daughter in high school, why she had a sweater on and why we all worked with long sleeve button-up shirts. The white man was dressed in gym shorts, a tank top, and had sunglasses on. He was a tourist worker. He was amazed at how we could work with so many layers on given the intensity of the heat. This amazement led Julio, another high school student worker, to ask him how long he worked each day, and he replied that it depended on the heat. Julio explained to him that he and his cuadrilla work 10 hours a day, despite weather conditions, so it is important to keep their bodies protected from the sun during that long period of work.

The work attire used by the white man reinforced ideas of migrant labor as low-skilled labor. His leisure attire presents agricultural work as something that anyone can do. In shorts, a
tank top, and sunglasses, he would only be in the fields temporarily. As a white Anglo-American, with citizenship status, and English as his primary language, the tourist worker was higher on the agricultural division of labor hierarchy (see Figure 1.2). He had more control over his work time, greater respect from his employer, and increased health. Unlike the life of Cecilia and Mayra, he worked when there was free time and when the temperatures were more bearable. The white tourist worker can leave this role whenever he wants and can rest when the sun is unbearable.

The morning after our hemp work, we were all exhausted. Although I only labored for four hours, my back and legs were very achy. We were excited to be moved to a different field by Benito. We waited for over 45 minutes so Benito could show us the field we would be working for the day. During this time, I checked-in with Cecilia to see how the rest of their day had gone after I left. Cecilia said she was exhausted. She, like the other members of the cuadrilla, did not get to the end of the same row they started with earlier that day. Their exhaustion resulted in interpersonal conflicts among workers. The cuadrilla was exhausted of working in the heat and doing the repetitive motion of bending over, digging a hole, and planting the hemp plant. During lunch time, everyone was in a bad mood. Cecilia said everyone preferred to lay down, rather than eat their food. The white employer and his white workers remained in the field during the entire day. This made the cuadrilla feel uncomfortable. Since the employer was there, he was asking them to do more tasks than they had originally expected. Workers weren’t given a wagon (there was only 3 available) to carry the tray with plants, a huge gallon of water, and a small shovel as they kneeled and walked down the row. He wanted them each to finish planting hemp on the row they had started, and the expectation was for the cuadrilla to do the same with the row I had started and did not finish earlier that morning.
At the end of the day, Cecilia said she would not return to the hemp field and if she did it would be “la muerte.” Mayra described it as “un abuso.” Mayra said she was ready to quit and go back to El Paso. As soon as Mayra got to her sister’s house, which is where she was staying for the summer, she immediately fell asleep and did not wake up until it was time to go to work the next day. She did not feel as sore as Cecilia did, but she had bruises on the outer section of her thighs from the work yesterday. Mayra mentioned that since she began working in WY, her hands and legs have been swollen.

Evelyn also complained about her outer thighs being very sore. She described the employer’s expectations and her experience as “we were doing a machines job.” The conversation about the conditions of work yesterday continued and Mayra said she didn’t want to think about it anymore because it was going to make her pain come back just by remembering how terrible it was. Working in the hemp field was “un dia fatal” as Cecilia described it.

The experiences presented throughout this chapter demonstrate why migrant agricultural labor should not be understood as unskilled. Migrant agricultural workers are constantly adapting to their environments, enduring challenges unimaginable to workers in other industries. To increase legal protections in the workplace for migrant agricultural workers, it is essential to bring forth these stories of innovation, but also of pain and injury. Differently racialized bodies experience exploitative labor differently, contributing to ungrounded assumptions of the lack of skill required to labor in the fields. By shifting the narrative on unskilled laborers to innovative, adaptable, and skilled laborers, the agricultural sector can gain the same legitimacy as other

35 Death.
36 An Abuse.
37 A deadly day.
valued sectors of work in society. In effect, migrant laborers can gain legal protections at work, overtime pay, health insurance, among other benefits granted across different sectors of work.

The next part of this thesis, Forced Migration, focuses on the experiences of Wyoming migrant workers with the immigration system and the violence it enacts. The legacy of punitive immigration policies furtherly contributes to the entrapment migrants experience in Wyoming. A legacy formed following colonial ideologies of “othering”, the U.S. immigration system produces physical and mental suffering. Migrant workers are criminalized and therefore their restriction from the nation-state is constructed as a “necessity” to protect itself from foreign bodies. The chapters demonstrate how migration is not voluntary, rather a result of decisions made by international elites in power, including wealthy decision-makers in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. Additionally, this part of the thesis engages with the creative writing strategies of poetry to bring forth the realities of harm produced through punitive border militarization measures like Operation Gatekeeper using the voices and migration stories of migrant women.
Part II. Forced Migration

Chapter 3: Embodied Punitive Immigration Policies

This chapter focuses attention to the criminalization of migration through the history of U.S. immigration policies. Migrant workers in Wyoming embody the history of punitive immigration policies that contribute to their feelings of entrapment. Without the possibility to gain legal status, given the heavy criminalization they experience and the strict criteria for membership, migrant workers feel trapped in Wyoming. In this chapter, I argue that despite Wyoming being over 100 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, migrants are faced with the daunting presence of ICE in their communities and live in continuous fear of the unknown. This contributes to their overall well-being and understandings of belonging. Additionally, I argue that neoliberal economic policies, such as NAFTA, can be directly correlated with the forced migration of small holder farmers. These policies can be seen as a continuation of colonialism where the livelihood of people is being determined by detached stakeholders. Both the history of migrant criminalization and neoliberal economic policies like NAFTA manifest as poor health in the lives of Wyoming migrant workers.

History of Migrant Criminalization

The colonial cosmology of extraction, expulsion, and white hegemony are also reflected in the histories of immigration policies in the U.S. and the national attitudes that develop as a result. Immigration law structures migrant lives by dictating eligibility for inclusion and justification for exclusion. As Alina Das describes, “there is nothing inherently moral or even natural about criminalizing movement across borders. Migration is a natural phenomenon” (2020, 30). Restrictions that are placed on the movement of people are therefore constructed by
particular people with acquired decision-making power through the violence of colonialism and racism. Das argues that racism is deeply entrenched in U.S. systems, and that accepted, legalized, and open racial discrimination ascribe an innate criminality to people of color migrating across borders (2020, 30). Therefore, race is a significant and consistent prejudice that colonial actors, and current policymakers alike, utilize to exclude, punish, and exploit.

Racism has historically and contemporarily been a driving force behind punitive immigration laws. As Das describes, “it feeds the cycle of criminalization: first associating immigrants with criminality, then criminalizing acts associated with immigrants, and finally punishing immigrants with incarceration and deportation” (2020, 31). Immigration policies have become a colonial method used by nation-states to exclude racialized bodies, maintain white hegemony, and create easily exploitable migrant workers. New manifestations of the violence of colonialism, such as “illegality” as a form of structural violence infiltrate into the daily lives of migrants, dictating the services they can access, the types of jobs they can work, their social position within the national imaginary, and their ability to speak out against injustice.

In her book, *No Justice in the Shadows: How America Criminalizes Immigrants*, Alina Das traces the history of colonialism and slavery in the U.S., governmental policies, and nativist attitudes that have criminalized mobility based on the enforcement of racial hierarchies that exploit people of color, while preserving whiteness. Notions of the desirability of the inhabitants of the new U.S. colonies shaped the laws that were passed, not necessarily focused on the foreign born, since this would include colonists, but rather based on “racial, ethnic, and economic desirability” (Das 2020, 32). To be a citizen, therefore, and be worthy of occupying the space and of accessing the rights entitled to citizens is a highly racialized endeavor that sets the foundation for future immigration and transnational economic laws.
As colonial agents gained power and expanded West across the U.S., migration was encouraged, but solely for propertied white men from western Europe to provide the capital needed and fill in new settlements, but this also meant the involuntary mobility of indentured and enslaved people to provide the necessary work force as colonists settled further West. The movement and settlement of white colonizers across the West, under racial hierarchies of desirability, necessitated the use of exploitable labor to facilitate expansion. As Das argues, “America has always strived to protect itself from those deemed undesirable, while exploiting them at the same time” (2020, 30). Here lies a major contradiction of immigration laws, where the perceived “threat” of colored bodies creates tension with economic interests, requiring vulnerable and easily exploited labor. Immigration law becomes a tool, founded upon racism and the expulsion of undesirables, where migrants are kept in a continuous state of uncertainty, fear, and criminality. This allows the U.S. capitalist system to maintain its pool of cheap and exploitable labor.

Since the end of the American Revolution, “the country’s very first federal law of naturalization, reserving such rights to ‘free White persons’ in 1790,” immigration law has had a racist design (Das 2020, 30). Citizenship had been established as a birthright; however, this was only applicable to white people. Therefore, Indigenous and Black bodies were actively made marginal through policies that restricted their birthright citizenship based on colonial ideologies of desirability, cleanliness, and racial categories. These ideologies continued to shape birthright citizenship until the passage of the Nationality Act of 1940, which clarified that anyone born inside of the U.S. is a citizen (2020, 35). In the time that transpired before and after this legal clarification, the U.S. continues to use racial hierarchies based on colonial ideologies of desirability to design its immigration policies.
The histories of immigration policy violence continue to impact the lives of migrants today. The 1900s saw a period of policies that conceptualized migration in terms of desirability based on race. There are several important policies that contributed to the criminalization of migration, leaving migrants vulnerable and their labor continually exploitable and disposable. For example, the National Origins Act of 1924 “restricted immigration outside of the Western Hemisphere to 155,000 people annually and divided those numbers by country of origin” (Das 2020, 52). In setting quotas on migration, the U.S. continued to actively construct itself as a white American race. Immigration law can therefore be seen as a tool for strategically engineering the racial composition of the U.S. to fit under colonial cosmologies of white superiority and preserve the racial status quo (Das 2020, 52). However, even within these overtly racially charged immigration restriction laws, the U.S. had to maintain its cheap immigrant labor force. Therefore, laborers from Mexico were not restricted under these racial quotas and “could provide the source of labor that American agribusinesses required” (Das 2020, 52). Despite their exclusion from the quota system, Mexican migrants had to apply for expensive visas and pay taxes upon entry. Deportation was the punishment for failing to pay for these bureaucratic processes. Shortly after these regulation changes established for profit, in 1929, “a growing segment of immigrants from Mexico found themselves subject to deportation for evading increasingly prohibitive requirements” (Das 2020, 53). Furthermore, amidst increasing national rhetoric against immigrants in the 1930s, the white supremacist Senator Coleman Blease proposed criminalizing, not just deporting those without legal authorization (Das 2020, 53). The law was broadly defined, complicating what the punishments would entail. However, this legal change resulted in increasingly high rates of imprisonment for Mexican immigrants. In doing so,
Mexican immigrants became synonymous with criminals, leading to increased government funds to establish more prisons.

Although Mexican immigrants did not fall under the quota system, they continued to endure violence because of immigration policies. The quota system was established in the context of the Great Depression. During this time, the Hoover administration ignited massive deportation campaigns, resulting in the deportation of “1.6 million Mexicans, including U.S. citizens, to Mexico” (Das 2020, 54). However, soon after the economy had recovered, the U.S. incentivized Mexican labor migration through temporary labor programs. After their labor was no longer needed, in the 1950s, President Dwight Eisenhower authorized “Operation Wetback” with the goal of forcibly deporting around 4 million Mexican migrants from the U.S. In doing so, the Border Patrol agency shifted the language of using the explicitly racist term “wetback” to language that labeled migrants as “illegal and criminal” to change public sentiments from feelings of sympathy to fear (Das 2020, 65).

The 1965 the Hart-Cellar Act ended the use of national origin quotas, therefore opening the possibility of increased immigration from places across the globe that were previously restricted (Das 2020). Newly arrived migrants from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean were received with violence, both onto their bodies and targeted towards their employment. Armed members of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) patrolled white neighborhoods, burned boats used by Asian fishermen, and contributed to the national imaginary of the criminality of immigrants (Das 2020, 65). New anti-immigrant and overtly racist lobbying groups formed, creating a social environment of hatred, disgust, and public manifestations of anger towards immigrants. For example, eugenicist, John Tanton, along with his supporters under the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an organization established in 1979 that has since been labeled a
hate group, viewed immigration as a threat to white America (Das 2020, 66). This organization, along with others like Immigration Law Reform Institute, the Center for Immigration Studies, and NumbersUSA seek to restrict migration, and contributed to a social upheaval of protests that further encouraged the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agency to respond with mass incarceration. Legislators would allow the agency to hire more officers, build new facilities, and enter partnerships with county jails and with a private prison industry dedicated to the further creation of anti-immigrant policies that would increase their profits (Das 2020, 68). In augmenting the scope of the INS agency, its ability to make partnerships with prisons, and to justify the growth of the deportation machine (Das 2020, 68), U.S. legislators and political leaders had to mask explicit racism with the use of criminality. Their goals of making invisible the racist ideologies shaping punitive policies resulted in the war on drugs, facilitated by FBI reports indicating dramatic increased crime rates during the post-civil rights era.

During and after the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., Black activists were routinely criminalized. This criminalization does not depart far from the one experienced by immigrants in the U.S. Justifications for criminalization were based on racial grounds. Crime became increasingly associated with Black people, in large part due to histories of “junk science” (Das 2020, 69) that had allowed the association of Black people with inferiority and criminality, but also through the protests and other demonstrations of civil rights activists that associated Black communities as criminal. A new method of governance, introduced by President Nixon in the 1970s, one defined by law-and-order, would lead to the increasing criminalization and punishment of people of color in the U.S., immigrants, and non-immigrants.

In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which provided amnesty to many undocumented migrants, so long as they could pass a background check.
Although naturalization was achieved for a select few, embedded into this Act were laws that criminalized the employment of undocumented migrants, in effect bringing immigration enforcement into the workplace, and policies that directed INS to “identifying and detaining immigrants in jails and prisons” (Das 2020, 71). At the same time this amnesty was being passed, government legislators passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. Under this legislation, lengthy mandatory minimum sentences were established for drug offenses, including higher penalties for crack cocaine than powder cocaine (Das 2020, 72). Additionally, immigrants became targets for deportation based on the possession of drugs, even for small amounts of cannabis. In 1988, legislators drafted a harsher Anti-Drug Abuse Act that resulted in the expansion of mandatory minimums, and even authorized the use of the death penalty.

Additionally, this new Act expanded penalties for drug offenses, leading to higher rates of evictions from public housing (Das 2020, 72). Most notably, however was the introduction of “aggregated felony” as grounds for deportation. Under this term, immigrants with serious criminal records, such as murder, drug trafficking, and firearms trafficking, were supposed to be targeted (Das 2020, 72). Under this mandatory imprisonment based on different hierarchies of crime, immigration judges could no longer grant bail. Immigrants entangled with law enforcement would face imprisonment and deportation, which correlated to increased profits for jails. Anti-immigrant groups lobbied in support for policies like Anti-Drug Abuse by further drawing connections between the “backward” natives and “criminal” activity. FAIR, under leadership of John Tanton, published an essay in 1993 called “Immigration and Crime” that correlated crime with the waves of migrants since the elimination of national quotas in 1965. Tanton, with support from white nationalist, Wayne Lutton wrote: “Criminal activities in the U.S. run by Third World natives can be traced back to the Immigration Act of 1965 and failure to
control illegal immigration” (Das 2020, 74). Nativist language pointed to Brown and Black immigrants as criminal and the lack of “toughness” and action from legislators as a major fault. In doing so, white supremacist ideologies are easily incorporated into national policies.

Following the use of policies to criminalize drugs, immigrants, people of color, and resulting in the industry of mass incarceration, the Clinton administration would make use of these punitive policies to develop their own tough approach on “law-and-order”. The administration passed legislation like the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). Under these acts, the criminal grounds for detention and deportation were dramatically expanded. Most notably, under these laws, “the list of subcategories for aggravated felonies swelled to twenty-one, many with their own subcategories” (Das 2020, 75). This meant that grounds for mandatory detention were expanded beyond previously described aggregated felonies to capture a long list of offenses, including “crimes involving moral turpitude” (Das 2020, 75), which encompassed all drug offenses. Immigrants that had been living in the U.S. for years suddenly became deportable overnight, while Congress claimed ignorance of the devastating impacts these laws would have.

Operation Gatekeeper was a further measure ordered by Bill Clinton in 1994 to halt immigration from the southern border through “deterrence”. The measure increased border surveillance, militarized border patrol agents, and used methods of intimidation and fear to dissuade migrants from crossing the border. The introduction of new surveillance technologies, such as “6 nightscopes to help agents see illegal traffic crossing the border in darkness; 40 seismic sensors to detect traffic around the clock; and 80 portable radios to enable agents in the field to communicate and coordinate operations” (U.S. Department of Justice 1998), helped to
establish new networks of communication between border patrol agents where there is complete visibility of migrants attempting to cross the border. The highly militarized and surveilled border established it as a site of war, therefore justifying the necessity to use this equipment to control the border. As will be demonstrated with the stories below, immigration policies rely on an endless cycle of criminalization where anti-immigrant national rhetoric is leveraged to reproduce criminalization of colored bodies through punitive immigration laws that restrict their mobility, separate families, incarcerate bodies, and produce devastating mental and physical health defects.

ICE in Rural Spaces: Tactics of Intimidation

The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, reproduced fears and anxieties associated with immigrants. It was after this event that the National Commission of Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as the main agencies responsible for investigating and enforcing the nation’s laws regarding border control, customs, trade, and immigration (Das 2020). The continued promotion of a rhetoric that deemed communities unsafe and the necessity to control migrants, led to the increased presence and infiltration of ICE in communities as an internal policing institution. Since its creation, ICE agents have conducted workplace raids, instilled fear in migrant communities, and contributed to the further criminalization of and fear that migrants experience inside of the borders of the U.S. Crossing the border without bodily injury does not guarantee migrants a safe environment for their families to thrive. Instead, community policing and violence enacted by ICE leaves migrants with chronic stress, anxiety, and fear, leaving their bodies susceptible to injury and illness (Marya and Patel 2021). The constant anxiety of potentially being separated from their
families, being sent to an unknown country, and having to endure the harm of the U.S. criminal system creates inflamed bodies. It is within this social environment that migrant bodies exist and labor daily.

Although Wyoming exceeds the 100-mile border zone established by the U.S., ICE agents have historically had a presence in its rural towns. While interviewing my cousin Reina, a 31-year-old undocumented woman from Chihuahua, Mexico, she detailed an encounter she had with ICE. One early morning during the Summer 2015, Reina was getting ready to work at a daycare operated by one of her sisters-in-law in Greybull. She noticed a Border Patrol van parked outside her home and the agents’ eyes staring back at her. Reina immediately thought she was going to be questioned but was relieved when she was able to re-enter her home, pick up her 3-year-old daughter, and drive to work. She remembers being followed by la migra on her way to work. She told one of her co-workers that she was being followed, so they looked out the window and la migra was parked on a street adjacent to the daycare. They felt they were being surveilled but continued with their normal morning routines.

During their lunch, they heard a knock at the door and a local policeman asked if the person (Reina did not provide a name) they were looking for worked at the daycare. Reina’s employer responded by saying that no one with that name worked there. Despite their truthful response, the policeman argued that the car of the person they were looking for was parked outside of the daycare and therefore worked there. Reina’s employer decided to cooperate and was headed to her car, however the policeman said he was referring to the other car, Reina’s car. The police offered Reina the option of riding in the patrol car or driving to the Greybull Police

38 Jose’s daughter.
39 Term used by Reina to describe Border Patrol. It is slang used for ICE and other immigration law enforcement agencies.
Station on her own. Reina decided to drive her own vehicle, despite not having a driver’s license, fearing that if she stepped inside the patrol car, she would not return.

Once at the station, she entered an interrogation room where three ICE agents met her, only one that was fluent in Spanish. The agents claimed to be trying to locate a migrant woman that fit Reina’s description, but they did not question her, rather imposed an identity onto her, insisting that she was who they were looking for. After denying their claims, she was asked to present her ID. Having left her ID in her vehicle, Reina was escorted to her car by the two non-Spanish speaking agents. They opened her door, dug through her purse, and pulled out Reina’s Mexican Consular Registration Card. The Spanish peaking agent carefully inspected her card, claiming that it was fake, and that Reina was the person they were looking for. Remembering this terrifying day, Reina said:

La agarró y la aventaba en la mesa. Me decía que era falsa, que cuánto había yo pagado para que me hicieron esa identificación. Le dijo al otro oficial que llamara al consulado mexicano para ver si la identificación era real. Pero me gritaba, me aventaba la identificación en la mesa. Me gritaba que no que esa no era real. ⁴⁰

ICE agents create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation by leveraging their positions in power. Reina’s ID is real, but in efforts to either get her to provide information about the person they were looking for or intimidate her into a false confession, the agents deny yell and are aggressive. Shortly after this interaction, and without reason for detaining Reina, she was able to leave the police station. Before leaving, the ICE agents demanded that Reina keep quiet about their presence in town. Reina was threatened with criminal charges if she spoke about ICE being in town. She said:

Me dijo, no vayas a decirle a nadie que estamos aquí, que estamos buscando a esta

⁴⁰ He grabbed it [her ID] and would throw it on the table. He would tell me it was fake, asked how much I had paid for this fake identification. He told the other agent to call the Mexican Consulate to verify if the ID was real. But he would yell at me, throw my ID on the table. He would yell saying that the ID was fake. (Interview with Reina, age 31, July 22, 2021)
ICE agents use threats as a tactic to silence migrants and maintain their presence in rural towns largely invisible. In rural towns like Greybull, information about ICE’s presence travels quickly, demonstrating the power in collective solidarity. However, it also oftentimes creates unnecessary stress and fear when untrue claims circulate. Reina wanted to speak out about their presence but feared the repercussions she would face. Reina does not understand why she was investigated. She had no previous encounters with law enforcement, and although Reina tirelessly explained they had the wrong person, she had no credibility.

When I asked Reina what was going through her mind when she interacted with ICE, she said, “Mis hijos y mis papás. Desde que el policía de aquí del pueblo me dijo que eran de Homeland Security, yo me sentí que ya estaba afuera.” Being in Wyoming, far from her extended family in Mexico, ICE threatened to take away everything that made her feel safe and had helped her to establish a life in Wyoming. ICE agents, in separating migrants from their families, create unnecessary trauma and pain that becomes embodied as poor health.

Prior to Reina’s encounter with ICE, she felt safe in her home in Greybull. She described Wyoming as a tranquil environment. She attributed the small population of Greybull (1,800) as one of the primary reasons she felt protected from more overt dangers of ICE raids that exist in

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41 He told me, don’t tell anyone that we are here, that we are looking for this person. Because, if you say something and that person hides, if you say that ICE is here looking for that person, then I am going to come for you and place charges. I am not going to place charges to have you in jail and the next day sent to Mexico. No, I am going to place criminal charges so that you go to prison and spend 10-20 years there. Then after, you will be sent to your country. I don’t care if you have children, if you have parents, if you have a family. (Interview with Reina, age 31, July 22, 2021)

42 My children and my parents. Since the police from town told me that they were Homeland Security, I felt that I was already out. (Interview with Reina, age 31, July 22, 2021)
cities. However, despite the feelings of tranquility she associates with her home in Greybull, the impacts of punitive federal immigration policies infiltrate into her isolated home in the plains of Wyoming and create fear, stress, and anxiety of the unknown. Reina no longer feels safe at work knowing that ICE agents could return any day and threaten her ability to live with her family. Returning to Nixon’s framework of slow violence, the impacts of prolonged stress resulting from the uncertainty of being detained by ICE manifest in Reina’s body. In 2018, she was diagnosed with arthritis in her back and her doctors are unsure as to what may have caused it and believe she is too young to be experiencing chronic pain. Although her pain persists, Reina continues to work at the daycare and without citizenship status, she continues to labor under an environment of stress.

The next section turns to the border as the site where both punitive immigration measures and transnational economic policies produce mental and physical suffering as migrants undergo migration to the U.S. Both policies depend on the categorization of the border as a war zone needing to be controlled.

**Background to Operation Gatekeeper and NAFTA**

The border between the U.S. and Mexico serves as a site of continual suffering and of death. Transnational politics and policies, underlined with racial discrimination establish the border region as an uncontrolled space that depends on a national narrative of violence, fear, and invasion. Operation Gatekeeper is a direct result of histories of colonial violence that deemed white bodies as superior, Indigenous bodies as uncivilized, punitive immigration policies that leverage on racial criminalization, and in the process, the labeling of the U.S-Mexico border as a site of uncontrolled movement (namely through the punitive immigrations policies described
above). Measures like Operation Gatekeeper depend on narratives perpetuated by anti-immigrant hate groups, like FAIR, that construct a social environment of fear and uncertainty where the physical presence of Black and Brown bodies is framed as a threat of invasion, threatening to taint the whiteness that is so central to colonial ideologies and power structures.

Operation Gatekeeper as a method of halting immigration, did not achieve its goal. It did however achieve its goal of removing the spectacle of migration from the public gaze in suburbs and cities near the border and therefore presents to the national imaginary a controlled border that results from violent policies. Migration did not stop, rather it was pushed towards more dangerous routes that require migrants to undergo days of intense walking through the desert, often without water, without forms of communication, and leading to the death of thousands of migrants that attempt to cross. Measures like Operation Gatekeeper, and the other immigration control policies presented above do not stop migration to the U.S. because they fail to address the root causes of migration, including poverty, insecurity in one’s home country, and natural disasters, all of which are a direct result of U.S. intervention. Rather, the policies work to make invisible these forms of structural violence, while inflating false claims of migrant criminality.

As presented earlier, immigration policies have historically been utilized to supplement a depleting workforce and are used to maintain workers in a vulnerable state. Legislators and employers both understand this aspect of vulnerability that migration presents to workers, and they leverage it to maximize profits while exploiting migrant bodies. The disposability of migrant labor is directly tied to the economic system that structures life in the U.S. Depending on a reserve of vulnerable, cheap labor, the U.S. as a nation-state utilizes economic policies as transnational intervention tools that disrupt local economies, increase violence, and ultimately produce migration across the border, as a method of securing this cheap labor force. A well-
known example of these interventions that have the most devasting impacts on poor people of 
color is the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) implemented in 1994. The NAFTA 
agreement involves the three North American nation-states, Mexico, Canada, and the United 
States, where their borders open for free trade/commerce. This policy utilizes the border as the 
space of continuous free movement of goods and capital, but not of bodies. In Mexico, under this 
new agreement, any tariffs or subsidies that were previously set in place to protect domestic 
products from foreign competition were removed (Saldaña-Portillo 2005). Statistics related to the 
economies of the U.S. and Mexico present a narrative of success, managing to create new jobs 
and increase GDP. In Mexico in particular, there is an increase in the manufacturing of foreign 
industries for international export, where the foreign investment for these products comes 
primarily from the U.S. (Saldaña-Portillo 2005, 754). In this way, U.S. corporate powers benefit 
from the labor of Mexican nationals, without their bodies being physically present in the U.S. 
Through this agreement, new transnational networks of labor are born that facilitate the 
exploitation of Mexican labor without granting them legal transnational protections, with 
reduced wages, both of which constitute similar experiences as those lived by migrant workers in 
the U.S.

The NAFTA agreement not only established these new networks of transnational cheap 
labor, but also ensured the continuation of migration of poor people to the U.S. to fill its demand 
for cheap labor. It does this through the exportation of goods to Mexico, creating unbalanced 
competition between small-scale peasant farmers and large agribusiness corporations. In other 
words, “Mexican peasants who traditionally farmed basic grains simply cannot compete against 
the cheaper imports in foodstuffs that have flooded the national market” (Saldaña-Portillo 2005, 
756). Although the NAFTA agreement was proposed as a method for reducing migration by
“modernizing” the economy of Mexico, it has had the opposite impact. This strategy of unbalanced competition created conditions for displacement of people who can no longer survive off of their land. This process serves the purpose of forcing soon-to-be workers into the U.S., maintaining a cheap labor force at its disposal.

The Violence of NAFTA: Forced Migration

To understand how colonialism comes to make bodies inflamed this section turns its focus to NAFTA. In this section I will explore how this neoliberal transnational trade agreement represents a new form of colonialism, that has led to displacement. Obed, my father, experienced these life altering impacts of NAFTA. He was born in 1965 in a rural town in the Sierra Madre mountains that run through Chihuahua, Mexico (see figure 3.1). In Chihuichupa, formerly a Mormon colony, he worked alongside his eight siblings and my grandparents on their piece of land, cultivating corn, beans, and other crops that would sustain their diets and provide the necessary income to live.

Figure 3.1: The landscape that surrounds my father’s family farming land in Chihuichupa, Chihuahua, MX. Photo taken by researcher on December 22nd, 2021.
In December 2021, I went back to Chuhuichupa (also my place of birth) for the first time in over 14 years. I talked to my tio Eliezer, about the family farm since he is the only brother that stayed behind to continue working the land. He mentioned memorable events that have led to the decay of agricultural production in the lands, and the eventual migration of residents of Chuhuichupa. Remembered in the memories of those that still live there, but also the ones that were forced to leave, Chuhuichupa was once a thriving rural agricultural town. My tio Eliezer recounted when the crops he, my father, and the rest of their family worked so tirelessly to grow, were not selling at their usual price. Globalized economies, with the support of NAFTA, infiltrated into the most secluded and rural parts of Mexico. Unable to compete with the prices being set for goods now imported into Mexico by transnational agribusinesses from the U.S., corn produced locally became unprofitable for small holder farmers, and eventually around 2007, violence began to take over these rural towns in the Sierra Madre mountains of Chihuahua.

Increased insecurity due to the presence of narcotraficantes\textsuperscript{43} from the state of Sonora led families to leave behind their beloved towns and migrate towards larger cities in Chihuahua or to the U.S. Narcotraficantes use tactics of intimidation to establish control in rural towns like Chuhuichupa. The geographic landscape in the mountains provides ideal opportunities for narcotraficantes to grow crops like cannabis and remain hidden from authorities. Rather than growing vegetable crops like when my father was young (see figure 3.2), narcotraficantes have taken control of these lands, they have stolen farming tools from our front yard, and created a new social order where residents of Chuhuichupa and the neighboring towns must obey their rules, stay out of their way, or face the consequences, and live in continuous fear of the unexpected.

\textsuperscript{43} Drug traffickers.
The rise in narcotrafico in Mexico, however, should not be conceptualized as communities composed of inherently bad people. On the contrary, many of the narcotraficantes that operate in the Sierra Madre mountains are men and women my grandparents, my parents, and extended family members grew up knowing. In small rural towns like Chuchuichupa, those involved in narcotrafico are victims of neoliberal globalization. Policies like NAFTA reduce state influence in the economy through privatization, the deregulation of private markets, and the introduction of transnational corporations, leaving rural community members in poverty and with the necessity to find alternative strategies for survival. Additionally, policies like NAFTA and other immigration regulations depend on the continuous categorization of narcotraficantes like
those living in Chuhuichupa as criminal and “bad hombres.” Given the demand for drugs that U.S. citizens create, many small-scale peasant farmers have resorted to the drug trade as a form of survival when their livelihoods became unviable under the new economic regime ushered in by NAFTA. Unable to compete with foreign crop prices, and given the changing climate experienced in Chuhuichupa, where it used to snow heavily in the winter season and now rain and high temperatures are reported, there are no other forms of subsistence to ensure survival. Community farmers and cattle caretakers, like my tío Eliezer, that continue to labor in this sector, often receive threats from narcotraficantes from outside of the state.

For example, my tío Eliezer told me how he was actively threatened for selling cattle. Following in the footsteps of his older brother, my father, he began selling and buying cattle to make a living. Shortly after, he was seeing profits. The narcos noticed his financial success and demanded that he pay them monthly allowances for him to continue working as a cattle salesman. After being threatened at gun point, my uncle decided it was time to stop. He drastically reduced the amount of cattle he would sell, even if that meant having to go a day without eating.

NAFTA, therefore, as a policy drafted by global elite decision-makers, and influenced by the wealthy through their lobbying practices, created a cascade of social and economic disruptions across Mexico, which impacted poor rural communities especially severely. Despite its initial promotion as a method to reduce migration, the eventual migration of those impacted by NAFTA eventually served to fill in gaps of the disposable cheap labor workforce in the U.S. My father (see figure 3.3), as a migrant worker in Wyoming, is someone whose life has been deeply shaped by the impacts of NAFTA. As a disposable worker in Wyoming, his health is not

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44 This is the rhetoric powerful politicians, such as Donald Trump, use to describe immigrants from Mexico. The language is charged with criminality and deems migrants as inherently “bad people”.

prioritized, his memories of a better time in Mexico create feelings of depression, longing, and frustration, all which become embodied as poor health once in the U.S. His eventual migration to the U.S. is a direct result of NAFTA’s policies which led to the introduction of cheap commercially produced goods into Mexico, impacting rural local economies severely. Eventually, over the years, rural farmers like my father become frustrated and disappointed with the inability to make a living from working the land. Since my family’s livelihood is heavily connected to the land, laboring the land, and sustaining oneself from the land, there was no other option but to migrate when this was no longer possible. Like the immigration policies detailed above, economic policies serve to structure migration patterns and exacerbate violence in communities and (re)produce poor health outcomes.

Figure 3.3: My father Obed in his family’s farm in Chihuichupa, Chihuahua, Mexico. Photo taken by researcher on January 3rd, 2022.
The next chapter utilizes poetry as a creative method to resist the violence of punitive immigration policies. At the level of the text and language, the voices and experiences of migrant women are intertwined with the rhetoric used by the Office of Inspector General on Operation Gatekeeper. Migrant stories, artwork, and voices challenge normalized assumptions about the necessity to militarize the border and instead demonstrate the bodily and mental harm measures like Operation Gatekeeper produce in their lives.
Chapter 4: The Violence of Operation Gatekeeper: Illustrative Migration Stories

"Colonialism has changed the architecture of how we live... It has changed how stories are told and which ones are told, and which ones are forgotten."

- Rupa Marya and Raj Patel (2021)

Telling the stories of migrants and the impacts that globalization has on their livelihoods and by extension their health does the work of challenging the assumptions and taken-for-granted rhetoric that structures their social positions in the U.S. Disrupting legal, historical, and racist assumptions about migrants requires the disruption of the language that is used to describe migration and the bodies that move across borders. In efforts to stray away from colonial models of knowledge production and the standard use of academic language and structure, this section will utilize the stories and artwork of two migrant workers, Lupe, and Elisa, to destabilize mainstream rhetoric that is used when policies like Operation Gatekeeper are institutionalized.

Inspired by poets like Layli Long Soldier and Natalie Diaz, this section will put into practice ideas of resistance and refusals as described by anthropologist Audra Simpson (2017) through acts of poetics. Audra Simpson describes refusal as the act of questioning colonial practices, policies, and forms of organization through the embodied experiences of Indigenous peoples. Simpson exemplifies an “ethnographic refusal” (2017, 23) at the level of the text, where deliberate, willful, and careful words are chosen in recognition that settler-colonial assumptions about the bodies of “the other” infiltrate into our daily lives and are world-making assumptions. In other words, refusal “holds on to a truth, structures this truth as a stance, and as the revenge of consent” (Simpson 2017, 26). Revenge here does not imply individual harm, rather the avenging of prior injustices and directing attention to its continuation in the present.
Bellamy Mitchell describes *poesis* as rewording texts that are encoded and obscured at the level of language (2021, 12). Through a process of re-writing as poetry, the text takes on a different meaning that what is assumed, one where its original lack of logic and its social meanings/purpose can be more easily exposed. *Poesis* is also defined as a process of making the text into something of use by positioning it phrase by phrase in complex relation to a project (Oxford Dictionary, 2021). The process of *poesis* inevitably involves intervention into the text. In other words, there is a dialogue created by all groups implicated within the text, rather than the power-holding authoritative group controlling the dialogue and therefore how something is understood.

In this chapter, I dig deeper into the ways immigration law is embodied and produces poor health. I analyze interviews with Wyoming migrant agricultural and service workers in relation to their experiences with migration to the U.S. Particularly, I relate their stories of migration to Operation Gatekeeper. The stories told by migrant workers serve as a form of poetics that can be put into conversation with an investigation done by the Office of Inspector General on Operation Gatekeeper. Given the polarizing opinions of the measure as a success and failure, the purpose of the investigation was to determine if the measure had been successful at halting immigration to the U.S. and serves to outline the structures and procedures of the measure. By writing in poetic language, I aim to refuse the language the investigation uses, to uncover the contradictions within measures like Operation Gatekeeper. In the process, I aim to show how these contradictions and militarized solutions produce injury and poor health. This chapter thus explores the possibility of using poetics as a method for thinking about the law and its violence and role in producing poor health. I intervene in sections of the report of the investigation by the Office of Inspector General on Operation Gatekeeper to situate and contrast
the realities of migration as experienced by Wyoming migrant workers. The following poems are inspired by and contain words of migrant women that have migrated across the desert, their artwork supplements their stories, and their life experiences refuse settler-colonial assumptions of criminality and illegality.

First Poem

The first poem is inspired by the artwork and words of Elisa, a woman migrant worker from Aguascalientes, Mexico, who correlated border patrol agents with owls. As all-seeing vigilant beings, owls, come to represent border patrol agents. The eyes of the owl symbolized those of border patrol agents, even if they were not in sight. Rather than protecting, border patrol agents surveil migrants’ bodies, hoping to apprehend and deport. One of Elisa’s fondest memories during her migration process is of an owl that stood in the middle of the road as they drove across the border. She remembers the eerie feeling of staring back at the owl. She felt watched, as if the owl was going to deport them back to Mexico. Her artwork (see Figure 4.1) portrays this unforgettable experience during her migration process and fits well within the context of the poem. The owl, embodying border patrol agents caused anxiety and fear in Elisa. This fear would continue to impact her health once in the U.S. given her undocumented status and ever-presenting possibility of being deported. Stress, anxiety, and fear are all symptoms that result from structures of colonial domination, like immigration laws and policies, that inflame Elisa’s body. For both poems presented below, the bolded words/phrases reflect migrant voices, italicized are my own words, and the regular font are words from the report of the investigation by the Office of Inspector General.
The land is divided.

Fences and walls tear through the soil, through the bushes, through life.

The fencing serves two important functions: it provides a barrier to vehicles crossing the border with aliens and/or drugs, and it defines a clear line of demarcation between the two countries.

Borders claim to create a sense of security.

But for who?

Is it for the bodies living in poverty? Or for the bodies plagued by violence?

Or could it be for the wealthy, the greedy, the stealers of land?

If borders offer protection, then who protects the borders?

The Border Patrol, an agency of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is responsible for criminalizing controlling illegal immigration along the 2,000-mile United States/Mexico border.

Agents in “high visibility” fixed positions along the border received new equipment including infrared night scopes, and electronic sensors.

El tecolote nos vigilaba, como si nos fuera a devolver.

Technologized owls pierce their eyes onto migrant bodies, looking for any opportunity to attack, to apprehend and deport.

45 "The Vigilant Owls"
46 "The owl watched us, like if it was going to send us back."
On October 1, 1994, the Border Patrol’s San Diego Sector introduced a new violent border control plan at Imperial Beach Station.

Previously, the Sector had operated with no coherent strategic plan and no real aim other than to apprehend as many illegal aliens as possible.

Operation Gatekeeper.

The purpose of the new plan was to stem the tide of illegal immigrants crossing the border from Mexico into the United States and to shift the remaining traffic eastward.

Eastward meaning the treacherous desert.

Eastward meaning miles and miles of walking.

Eastward meaning a lack of water.

Fue bien difícil ver llegado aquí. Sufrimos mucho cuando salimos... pero la segunda casi me cuesta mi vida para llegar aquí. Es que caminamos mucho, mucho tiempo, caminamos, se puede decir todo un día, toda una noche, y parte de otro día, y nos agarraron47.

Tuvimos la experiencia de ver hasta muertitos48.

The gatekeepers produce suffering.

The gate becomes more dangerous to cross.

Lawful death masked in the name of deterrence.

47 “It was very difficult getting here. We suffered a lot when we left... but the second time, it almost cost me my life to get here. We walked a lot, for a lot of time, we walked, you could say a full day, a full night, and part of the next day, and we were detained.”

48 “We even had the experience of seeing dead bodies.”
By intervening migrant voices into the report from the investigation on Operation Gatekeeper and crossing out sections of the investigation that dehumanize migrants, this poem does the work of refusing a neutral tone prevalent throughout the text of the investigation. The investigation positions the measure as an apolitical policy that needed to be implemented. It simply discusses it as another law, unrelated to the real experiences of migrants. It fails to discuss the dangers this measure introduced to migrant bodies as they continued to cross the border, since the measure’s goals were to deter migration to more remote and less visible routes, not stop it. Lupe’s story of walking across the border was included in the poem to demonstrate the devastating effects of Operation Gatekeeper. The newly and highly militarized border left migrants with no other option but to walk hundreds of miles across the desert. Lupe’s voice is bolded throughout the poem to call the reader’s attention to her words. Her life experiences
crossing the border are the most important words that constitute the poem and directly refuse any neutral tone of the investigation. Additionally, to authentically practice strategies of disruption and refusal, Lupe’s words are maintained in Spanish. The translation of her words is kept within footnotes, allowing her voice and experiences to do the true work of refusal and disruption within the text of the investigation on Operation Gatekeeper without the interruption of flow that is caused by having the English translation directly next to the Spanish words.

Second Poem

The second poem below stems from Lupe’s story of migration and the suffering she experienced due to being injured while walking across the desert and being at the bottom of a pile of migrant bodies. The included text of the investigation into Operation Gatekeeper highlights how there was an awareness of dangers being introduced through deterrence, yet the measure was still implemented. Migrants embody these types of poorly designed immigration policies and experience both physical and mental suffering.

Lo que se deja

The mountain and its immediate surrounding are extremely rugged, and include steep, often precipitous, canyon walls and hills reaching 4,000 feet above sea level.

The mountain is physical and mental suffering.

Migration continues even if it is deterred to dangerous lands.

Ya pues nos fuimos, descansamos un rato, y vuelve a darle de vuelta para volver intentar.

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49 “What is Left Behind”
50 “We went back to rest for a bit, then we attempted again.”
Border Patrol management believed that if the risk of apprehension became sufficiently high in a particular area, the number of persons attempting entry there would fall.

*Lupe attempted to migrate again.*

*Her body would face the consequences.*

Lo levantan a uno como costal, uno tras el otro, tras otro, y pues fui una de las que cayeron más abajo y mis piernas se me lastimaron mucho\(^51\).

*Lupe would be unable to walk for a month.*

The Sector was not adequately staffed, and its agents lacked proper *skills* equipment to contend with the *disabled migrant bodies* flood of *aliens* who overran them *suffer* on a *nightly* *daily* basis.

*Border patrol failed, failed to protect Lupe.*

*Failed to ensure the wellbeing of Lupe’s mind and body.*

*Me sentía desesperada, triste, desilusionada. Más desesperada porque mis hijos se habían quedado en México\(^52\).*

*Lupe suffered.*

*Operation gatekeeper continued; death continued.*

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\(^{51}\) “When we would get picked up like a sack, one after the other, and well I was one that fell towards the bottom and my legs were badly injured.”

\(^{52}\) “I felt anxious, sad, and disillusioned. More so anxious because my children had stayed in Mexico.”
Due to her leg injury during migration, Lupe was unable to walk for a month once she reached the U.S. Her physical injury is directly caused by immigration measures like Operation Gatekeeper, which eventually produces poor mental health as she is unable to leave her bed and is plagued with thoughts about her life in Mexico, including the children she left behind. By crossing out phrases of the investigation and replacing them with words that direct the attention to the suffering migrants experience in the 3rd stanza, the poem criticizes and questions what the role of border patrol agents and police in general should be. If they are meant to protect, why do they fail to protect migrant bodies? Why are they trained to detain, to punish, to produce fear, rather than to comfort? The re-wording of this section brings to light these important issues and allows the reader to question the role of authorities and how we can begin to (re)imagine a world without them.
Interventions into the investigation on Operation Gatekeeper utilizing the experiences of migrants themselves serves to expose the realities of immigration law and its functions. In efforts to use poesis under Audra Simpson’s call for ethnographic refusal, as a strategy that sees refusal as a “symptom, a practice, a possibility for doing things differently” (2017, 29), migrant voices and experiences draw attention to the failures of militarized solutions to migration that rely on intimidation and violence. Their experiences allow us to think more deeply of what more can be done. Their voices refuse any positive outcomes perpetuated by those in power that design and oversee policies like Operation Gatekeeper, while their injured bodies direct us to reimagine how a world without borders, founded with care could eventually heal bodies. Migrant experiences crossing the border demonstrate how the outcomes of the measure are not “eventful and episodic” (Simpson 2017, 21), rather serve to physically deter migrants towards dangerous hikes across the desert, while presenting to the nation-state imaginary a controlled border, evidenced by lower apprehensions. The measure is not a solution to migration that has completely stopped migration across the border. Rather, it has removed the spectacle of migration from the gaze of suburban Americans, giving them a sense of safety and feelings of contentment with the practices at the border (Davis 2019), while simultaneously heightening the risks and physical dangers for migrants. The effects of Operation Gatekeeper are ongoing, continuous processes of migrant criminalization and violence against migrant bodies that shape the health and wellbeing of migrants.

Wyoming migrant workers embody numerous forms of structural violence, such as historical, political, and economic. Their identities and self-perceptions are influenced by governmental, economic, and other social institutions that impose criminality onto their bodies, force them to cut ties to the land, to their communities, and to their cultures, eventually leading
them towards dangerous paths of migration. Once in the U.S., they continue to embody the violence of deinstitutionalized protections at work, exposure to long hours in the sun, forced contact with chemicals, and eventually damages relationships between workers through competition, therefore challenging their abilities to build solidarity among each other. Existing within these violent structures and increasingly severing their ties to Indigenous cosmologies, migrant worker bodies become inflamed and produce poor health.

The poetry and artwork presented in this chapter highlight the resilience of Wyoming migrant workers. Their words and life experiences directly challenge normalized assumptions about migration and the false necessity to militarize the border. By contrast, their stories demonstrate how immigration policies create more harm through a narrative of “protection.” As is demonstrated through Lupe’s story of migration, measures like Operation Gatekeeper result in higher rates of migrant injury as they cross the border. Their voices resist and challenge ungrounded assumptions about the “danger” migrants pose to the nation-state and instead demonstrate how the policies designed to exclude them are dangerous.

The last part of this thesis looks at the AWHSC in Powell to uncover the conflicts between staff and between clinics that furtherly entrap migrant workers to their life in Wyoming, resulting in poor health. The clinic is an additional force of structural violence that ultimately creates greater barriers as migrant worker patients seek to access health resources. The final chapter focuses on the practices of resistance migrant workers have used to enact change in their lives. Wyoming migrant workers practice acts of remembering and artmaking as a strategy that resists their categorization as solely victims. Through their practices, they demonstrate that they have agency and the power to change the social conditions which they embody.
Part III. Migrant Worker Health Systems and Strategies of Resistance

Chapter 5: Good Intentions, Bad Management: How Rural Migrant Clinics Struggle

A small sign makes visible the existence of the Ag Worker Health and Services Clinic (AWHSC) after its relocation from a small clinic space in downtown Powell during the Spring of 2020. Hidden in the basement of a dorm of the local community college (Northwest College), the new location provides patients and clinic staff with ample space to do lab work, organize their files, house patients in individual consultation rooms, and feel like an established clinic. Despite the new space that was granted to the program by the college, seasonal\textsuperscript{53} and migrant\textsuperscript{54} patients face barriers to accessing health services. These barriers range from transportation, the inability to get time off work, the categorization of patients as public charges, understaffing, and overworked migrants, conflicts between clinic staff, and incongruencies in staff motivations, desires, and accountability to the patient population.

The Montana Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Council, Inc. funds, manages, and enacts control over the operations at AWHSC in Powell, WY. Both institutions serve similar patient populations and were established with the same goals of improving the lives of agricultural workers, their families, and others living in rural poverty. The focus lies on preventative and primary care, while at the same time increasing patients’ ability to access specialized resources through referrals. The referral system is established through working agreements and collaborative arrangements with the community, and therefore is dependent on

\textsuperscript{53} The term used to describe farmworker patients that are settled in Wyoming and receive services year-round from the clinic.

\textsuperscript{54} The term used to describe patients that temporarily reside in Wyoming during the summer working season and receive services from the clinic.

*Throughout this chapter, I refer to both seasonal and settled patients as migrants to account for much of the patient population existing and receiving serviced without having legal status.
the ability of those in power, like the executive director, to contact and set arrangements with other health institutions. With eight direct service sites located in Montana, and only one in Wyoming, most resources are allocated for patients in Montana. To keep operating, the clinics under the Montana Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Council are expected to collectively register around 5,000 patients or families yearly. Conflicts between clinic staff and a lack of visibility to the Montana Migrant Council of the struggles faced by the staff in Powell create further barriers for migrant patients as they interact with clinic services, providers, and the referral system.

In this chapter, I argue that AWHSC, like most federally funded clinics operates with a scarcity of resources. Further, the little visibility the clinic has in the broader community is tainted by constructed perceptions of migrant patients as public charges, creating stigma towards the work of the clinic and the patients it serves. White clinical providers often reproduce these sentiments when they refuse to see patients or complain about the work they have to do. The staff members encounter challenges with implementing changes in workflow due to a lack of communication between the clinic in Powell and the clinic in Billings. Staff members like Daniela and Stephanie must opt for using technology for interpretation as a strategy to make visible their need for a full-time clinical interpreter. It is within the history of biomedicine as a colonial tool for empire, and the need to make visible the struggles providers and patients face to external others controlling the distribution of resources, that AWHSC experiences conflicts that serve as barriers for migrant patients seeking care. Finally, operating under a biological model for understanding disease, clinical providers at AWHSC fail to incorporate structural analysis into their diagnosis, therefore migrant patients remain trapped in the structures of violence that ultimately produce their poor health.
History of Migrant Health Programs in the U.S.

Despite the long history of migrant farm labor, according to the National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc. (NCFH) it wasn’t until the initial phase of the Bracero Program in the early 1950s that governmental committees were established to investigate aspects of foreign migratory labor. These committees helped to bring visibility to the poor social, economic, health, and educational conditions of farmworkers. In conjunction with these committees, the Public Health Service began to expand its migrant-specific services, eventually leading to the creation of the Migrant Health Unit, which would eventually become the current day Migrant Health Program. With growing awareness of the conditions in which migrants labored, the Migrant Health Act was passed, emphasizing a “simple and flexible program, adapted to the needs of migrant workers, and focused on the provision of health services” (NCFH 2022). The program was designed to allocate funds, facilitate inter-agency cooperation, disseminate information, and monitor the health status of migrant farmworkers. The Migrant Health Program experienced reauthorizations that expanded hospitalization to the scope of services that were able to be provided by migrant clinics. Further modifications to the program would encompass larger patient populations by including “seasonal farmworkers who were often indistinguishable from migrant farmworkers in the major home base areas where migrants reside throughout the country” (NCFH 2022). Modifications to the bill would establish community health centers, migrant health centers, healthcare for the homeless, and for those participating in public housing programs.
As Figure 5.1 shows, Wyoming has only one direct service clinic. Its geographic location in the Northwestern part of the state, near the Montana state border, restricts access for patients around the state that are blocked by mountain ranges. Even for patients that live nearby, (and by nearby, I mean within 100 miles from the clinic), difficulties accessing transportation creates barriers that prevent many from being able to access the clinic. The staff of the clinic gather whatever scarce resources are available to try and mitigate these barriers and support migrant patients’ access to their services. For example, when available, gas gift cards are provided to patients to facilitate their transportation to the clinic. Additionally, staff members utilize their familial relationships and networks as a method to distribute resources to patients that live up to 85 miles away. The clinic’s only full-time Physician’s Assistant, Patricia told me about a diabetic migrant patient that had recently become unemployed and was suffering from inadequate amounts of food in their home. Patricia explained that Anne [one of the Registered Nurses at the
These strategies of resource distribution are facilitated by the close connections and networks that extremely rural environments, like Wyoming, foster. In a region where patients are known to providers and clinical staff on a first name basis, and often through familial relationships, most clinical staff can empathize with the migrant patient population, and they show genuine concern, care, and acknowledgement of the social barriers to their health. However, as will be demonstrated in the pages to come, new management practices and policies, internal conflicts between staff, broader community perceptions of migrants and the clinic, and differing staff motivations and understandings of structural health forces, continue to make invisible not only the existence of the migrant clinic, but the historical and contemporary suffering migrant workers experience.

Patterns of Migrant Health Programs and Migration in Wyoming

Before the clock reaches 8 am, officially signaling the opening of the clinic, the sound of the ringing phone echoes through the empty walls. Per usual, Daniela and Stephanie, who undertake various responsibilities such as serving as interpreters, receptionists, financial application assistants, and much more under the umbrella of Area Service Coordinator and Outreach Staff, warmly greet the patient on the phone. Using quick judgement, and oftentimes recognizing who the patient is based on their phone number, they switch to Spanish.

After answering calls from workers that found a small window of time from their work duties to ask questions about their health or schedule and cancel appointments, the clinical

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55 Interview with Patricia, Physician Assistant at AWHSC, July 2, 2021
providers slowly trickle into the clinic. By 9:00 am, we all gather in the waiting room space to participate in our daily huddle meetings where we discuss the patients that will be coming in, the health conditions they are experiencing, and to catch up on local COVID-19 news, share laughs, and make side comments about how expensive healthcare has become. These daily operations ensure that enough staff, resources, and time are available to meet the patient needs of the day. Despite it being the summer season, with new families arriving in the area to labor in the fields, there is little time for outreach work. The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the high expectations placed on Daniela and Stephanie to take on other roles outside of their official job descriptions, have created resource shortages in the clinic. The inability to do outreach and given the harsh restrictions from Montana banning the public promotion of the clinic, contribute to the invisibility of migrant worker bodies, decreasing their ability to access care, and maintaining the work of the clinic largely hidden from the public’s awareness.

Daniela, my supervisor, has been working as an Area Service Coordinator for migrant health programs in Powell for over 15 years. Daniela moved to Wyoming as a teenager when her family relocated from the Rio Grande Valley in Southern Texas in 1971. Her family decided to settle in Powell and her mother got a job with the NOWCAP\textsuperscript{56} program as an Outreach Worker. Her mother would go out to the fields, hold clinics in the evenings, and through these experiences, Daniela started learning about migrants from California, Texas, and other surrounding states that would arrive in Powell for summer employment.

As an 11-year-old, Daniela would help her mother register migrants working in the fields for the migrant health program. In high school, Daniela worked during the summers as an

\textsuperscript{56}NOWCAP is a private, non-profit community action agency founded in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty in the 1960's, starting programs for low-income communities, like Head Start, Senior Centers, Family Planning, Job Training, and Migrant Health. For more info visit: http://www.nowcap.com/AboutUs.aspx
Outreach Staff for NOWCAP and at the time there was also a voucher program. Given the harsher restrictions employers had on migrant workers not being contacted while laboring in the fields, Daniela would go to migrants’ homes after their workday to talk to patients and register them for services. Most of the families registered during this time permanently settled in Wyoming, grew their families, and to this day continue to do agricultural work in the area.

For eight years, Daniela worked as the Executive Director in Powell under the Wyoming Health Council based in Cheyenne. The program was identical to the current program, however there was more flexibility with funding and the voucher system. Having visibility of the budget, Daniela knew exactly how much money the program had and how to spend it. In 2016, after an 11-month absence due to a lack of funding, the program was taken up by the Montana Migrant Council using the Health Center Cluster grant supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Daniela no longer has direct access to the budget, which impacts how the voucher funds are used. Previously, there was no existence of dollar amount restrictions on the vouchers. For example, today, under the Montana Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Council, a voucher for dental can’t go over $350, but with the previous program, there was no limit. Commenting on this shift Daniela explained:

Our hands are tied because Carol, the Executive Director in Billings, takes care of all that. She does not let nobody in on how much money we have or nothing like that. She is the one that puts all the stipulations of how we are going to spend the money and where we are going to spend it.57

Under the Wyoming Health Council, additional vouchers were granted if the first was not enough and there were no restrictions on the amount of funds that could be used for prescriptions. With new restrictions placed on the voucher system, the clinic staff in Powell is

57 Interview with Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC, July 27, 2021
faced with the impossibility of providing full direct financial assistance for patients needing to be seen by health specialists or needing to access prescriptions.

Daniela expressed that for the Powell clinic to be able to give vouchers to the patient population that they see, the executive director in Billings must take initiative and inform pharmacies and providers in the surrounding areas, (such as in Greybull, Worland, and Basin) about the health program. In doing so, new partnerships can be established that facilitate the use of vouchers at these locations. This kind of groundwork is essential for migrant workers that lack transportation to Powell, struggle to get time off work, and require the financial assistance of vouchers to receive care. The lack of management action from the headquarters in Billings leaves patients in Powell and the surrounding towns with limited options to seek specialized support.

The voucher system and continuation of the clinic is dependent on reaching a threshold of registered patients for clinical services. The registration process is a relatively straightforward bureaucratic process. Patients and their families are asked to provide basic demographic and income information, agricultural employment history, undergo a needs assessment, and receive health education. As an Outreach Worker, I was responsible for filling out these forms and as I labored with migrants in the field, I would regularly encourage workers that were not enrolled to register for services. In addition to the bureaucratic forms, patients undergo a complete health assessment, oftentimes requiring that they spend most of their day in the clinic. The health assessment can take between 2-3 hours for each patient, depending on language barriers, staff availability, and the state of the patient’s health. Patricia highlighted the challenges that arise with the continuity of care. She told me:

Some of the things, questionnaires that we have to do, I don’t think are always applicable, so I think that’s taking up time. I’m afraid sometimes that would keep
patients from coming in if they’re not feeling good, they may not come in because they know it’s going to take time coming from Greybull or Worland even. I mean that’s a long drive and that’s a big deal when you’re here to work and then we’re saying come over and spend half a day with us, we’ll do everything. That’s the challenge. 58

The process for registering patients involves long hours in the clinic, which translates to lost time from work. Despite patients being seasonal or settled, the summer season provides the most opportunities for work, and when patients have families to feed, work is prioritized over their health. Additionally, the long waiting times and consultation visits discourage workers from scheduling future appointments when they are ill or from continuing to receive treatment to manage their health. The process of registration is essential to receiving services and migrant patients must follow these institutionalized policies to have an opportunity to receive services. Further, the continuation of the migrant health program is dependent on registrations, complicating the process of instilling changes in the workflow for registrations. However, as will be shown, clinic staff use creative strategies to re-register settled families and therefore work towards shifting motivations for patients to continue to make use of its resources.

Additionally, migration patterns to Wyoming, from abroad or other U.S. states, impact the number of registrations the clinic can process. Migration patterns to Wyoming for agricultural labor are directly shaped by the toxic chemical practices of growers. Prior to the use of Ready Roundup, growers required the physical labor of migrant bodies to weed fields for their land to pass inspections. Since its commercial use in the 1970s, Daniela estimates that if 70% of growers use this toxic chemical then there is a parallel decrease in the seasonal migrant population in the area. Growers reasoned the high use of toxic chemicals solely through economic terms. The use of chemicals, they thought, would cut costs associated with hiring

58 Interview with Patricia, Physician Assistant at AWHSC, July 2, 2021.
laborers for weeding fields. Since the chemical is primarily used in bean and beet fields, the labor environments for migrant bodies also began to change. In recent years, the community has seen a need to weed new crops, such as hemp, sunflower, and different seeds for animal feed. Additionally, with less seasonal migrant patients to register for the clinic, the health program in Wyoming became dependent on the settled families that would have access to the clinic year-round. Therefore, the continuity of migrant health programs is structured by new farming technologies that are adopted by growers and used to replace physical labor.

The settled migration of workers facilitates the eruption of confrontation with the broader community. The next section traces the construction of a hostile anti-immigrant environment in Big Horn and Park Counties through political rhetoric, but also perceptions of migrants as “freeloaders” that the broader community holds onto. These stigmas and tainted perceptions of migrant workers have consequences as migrant patients interact with AWHSC and are met with similar attitudes.

The White Gaze and Public Charges

“They [the broader community in Big Horn and Park Counties] say [migrants] come get free medical, they get on food stamps, they get Medicaid, they get WIC.”

- Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC

In a state where elected U.S. senators, John Barrasso and Cynthia Lummis, dedicate their political efforts to bring an end to federal tax money from being distributed to the migrant population of the state, it comes as no surprise that Wyomingites would hold these same attitudes. In November of 2021, the senators from the state co-drafted legislation with Senator Steve Daines from Montana, after reading press reports of the Department of Justice considering
payments to undocumented migrants in response to Trump’s immigration policies. The Senators argue the absurdity of such policies, emphasizing how the Biden administration is determined to provide financial assistance to those who have “broken the law” over the protection of U.S. citizens (www.lummis.senate.gov 2022). In a press release of Senator Lummis’s political website, she emphasized how “People in Wyoming are not interested in bankrolling yet another handout from the federal government, especially to those who broke the law. It’s long past time to secure our borders and begin taking our crippling national debt seriously” (www.lummis.senate.gov 2022).

This kind of nativist rhetoric conflates the provision of funds and services to undocumented migrants with a dangerous open border crisis. It depends on manufacturing the perception of an environment of chaos, one where the migrant freeloaders pose dangers to the citizen community. Senator Daines has strategically appealed to low-income families in Montana using a rhetoric of deservingness, to construct linkages between financial assistance to undocumented people and increased violence and crime at the Southern border. For example, in November of 2021, almost a year after Joe Biden’s inauguration, he stated:

Montana families are struggling with inflation and skyrocketing costs on everything from gas to groceries because of Biden’s wasteful spending policies, and now the President wants to give hundreds of thousands of dollars to illegal immigrants. Because of Biden, our southern border has been taken over by Mexican cartels and this effort will only continue to incentivize illegal immigration making it worse.\footnote{www.lummis.senate.gov 2022}

The senator implies that financial assistance to undocumented communities will serve as an incentive for more migrants to cross the border. In doing so, migrants are made out to be freeloaders, unfit to care for themselves and their families.

\footnote{www.lummis.senate.gov 2022}
In these kinds of rhetorical framing, the use of public benefits to overcome poor health, are not seen as needs perpetuated by structural violence and conditions outside of individual migrant control, but rather as an indication of unfitness for citizenship. In other words, as Lisa Sun-Hee Park has noted, the use of public benefits, “implies dependence and that dependence is a sign of weakness or moral deficiency” (Park 2011, 86). This view imagines that migrants will inevitably contaminate the nation due to their dependency on public resources. Park focuses her analysis on the politics of migrant reproduction and how immigration policies are used to restrict healthcare access to migrants, but particularly migrant women, and to establish grounds for deportability based on likeliness of becoming a public charge. Similar frameworks can be used to contextualize the social environment that migrant workers in Wyoming navigate. Their lives as low-income workers are assumed to be constructed under “a particular morality-based understanding of poverty in which people cause their own poverty as a result of bad decision making and consequently should not be allowed to make greater mistakes (i.e., to have children) that will produce yet another generation of burden upon the state” (Park 2011, 12). Much like what Park highlights about the ways the US governments targets migrant women’s bodies as a site for surveillance, U.S. political leaders, like Barrasso and Lummis, create conflicts related to the physical and moral dangers that migrants present to the citizen population. The settled nature of migrants in Wyoming intensifies these feelings as migrant families grow and more patients become eligible to receive services from the clinic. The presumed moral deficiency and weakness of migrants is used to justify their alienation from accessing health services and to justify violent rhetoric about the mythical burden migrants pose to “worthy” taxpayers.

Political rhetoric that reproduces harmful myths of migrant farmworkers as freeloaders filter into the conversations of the local population in Northwestern Wyoming that further make
invisible the hardships migrants must endure to receive public services and ignore the behaviors and roles of U.S. foreign policy in producing poverty (Saxton 2021, 41). Daniela has experienced how this rhetoric manifests, even when local community members attempt to bring visibility to the services offered at AWHSC and seem to have genuine concern over the wellbeing of migrant farmworkers.

Before the clinic was relocated to its location near the college, Daniela was approached by a local radio station host requesting to run an ad on their radio informing the public of the work of the clinic. The host told Daniela, “People don’t know that you’re here. People need to know that the program is here.”60 The radio host left information with Daniela and would consistently come into the clinic to see if the director in Billings, Carol, had approved of this project. Daniela passed along the message to Carol but did not receive a response. Due to a lack of response by Carol, the radio host would regularly insert herself into the clinic space asking for more communication and a response. On one occasion, Daniela remembers the radio host attentively watching as a patient checked out of the clinic and walked towards their car. Her gaze now was set on the Cadillac that the patient drove away in. As a signifier of wealth, the radio host was in disbelief. She said, “How could those people afford a Cadillac, and they are in here getting free services? How are they doing that? Isn’t your program supposed to be serving people that are poor and have no money?”61 For the radio host, the mythical freeloding migrant farmworker and the patient leaving the clinic did not align. The Cadillac symbolized wealth, making the owner into someone that did not have the right to access the services of the clinic. In doing so, the radio host reproduced harmful rhetoric commonly shaping conversations about

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60 Interview with Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC, July 27, 2021
61 Interview with Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC, July 2, 2021
migrants as placing “undue burdens on more deserving citizens who struggle to find work and survive amid economic crises” (Saxton 2021, 41).

Daniela detailed another ironic incident where the White public gaze seemed to have the right intentions but became infiltrated with hateful rhetoric. Approximately six years ago, the daughter of a local farmer brought attention to the lack of private restrooms available to migrant workers in the field. She organized her father, along with other local employers to make portable restrooms available to migrant workers in the field. While working as a weeder in high school, I distinctly remember being surprised to see a portable restroom at the edge of the field where we were working. In all my time as a weeder, and from the stories my parents would tell, restrooms had never been available to workers. However, this most basic and humane service was short lived. Soon after, growers that had participated would no longer provide portable restrooms in the fields. During the Summer 2021, conversations about the lack of restrooms were a daily occurrence in the fields. Joaquin, a 24-year-old seasonal migrant from California (see Intro) that I met expressed how uncomfortable he feels relieving himself outside with no privacy. He mentioned raising this issue up with Benito, his overseer, and even offered to transport the portable restroom from field to field. Cecilia echoed these concerns and specified how her identity as a woman creates further necessity to have an accessible restroom in the fields. Despite what appeared as genuine concerns and efforts from the local community, Daniela told how the rhetoric quickly shifted after portable restrooms became temporarily available. “What are they going to want next, telephones in the fields?” was frequently expressed by the very people that organized around providing private restrooms to migrant workers. These attitudes reproduce the idea of migrants becoming a burden to the public, even when it involves basic entitlements to

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62 Interview with Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC, July 27, 2021
accessing a restroom while at work. It is within this hostile social environment that migrant workers in Wyoming labor, seek access to health services, and are labeled as public charges.

Furthermore, when migrant patients are granted vouchers for specialized care or treatment, providers take advantage of the financial assistance migrants receive, regularly charging patients more money for procedures that would otherwise be fully covered by the amount of the voucher. One morning during our daily huddle, Daniela mentioned that she went to a local Mexican restaurant and saw one of our patients working as a server. He had called into the office earlier to schedule an appointment with a dentist and to get a voucher from the clinic for this appointment. At the restaurant, he reiterated to Daniela how he had been having terrible tooth pains and was hoping to get some pain relief from attending the appointment. However, even though the dental office did not do any procedures on him, they did take the voucher. They rescheduled him for an appointment in a month, which is far in advance from his original appointment and his tooth was still causing a lot of pain.

Although these vouchers are supposed to cover the entire cost of the consultation, this dentist has the reputation of charging patients from the migrant clinic inflated amounts that surpass the voucher. The staff had a conversation about this dentist and his inability to be considerate of their specific experiences as migrants and their inability to pay for dental services. Local specialist providers hold onto the perceptions of migrant workers as public charges to the state. As underserving recipients, the dentist overcharges for the services to patients referred by the clinic out of resentment and retribution. This type of reasoning ignores historical and systematic forms of violence that create barriers for patients as they seek to access health services without status. This dentist fails to recognize that access "requires hours of paperwork, eligibility screenings, interviews and assessments, waiting in line, and figuring out, logistically,
how to get from point A to point B” (Saxton 2021, 41) and utilizes his authoritative power to profit from the vulnerability of his patients.

Migrant status is hyper visible and criminalized, creating tensions among the broader community where basic worker rights, such as having access to restrooms in the workplace becomes a site for contestation. As underserving non-citizens, hostility erupts when issues like restroom accessibility are brought to light, and the clinic, as an institution that provides migrants care is similarly pinpointed as a site where the exchange of free services is facilitated. When members of the broader community, such as the radio host, interact with the clinic and its patients, ungrounded assumptions related to the incomes of migrant patients’ surface, further perpetuating the myths of migrant workers as freeloaders. The little visibility the clinic has in the broader community is tainted by these constructed perceptions, creating stigma towards the work of the clinic and the patients it serves. The next section focuses on conflicts that erupt at AWHSC when certain staff members internalize migrants as public charges.

**Conflicts in the Clinic**

The staff members at AWSC have been in Wyoming for years and therefore have been exposed to certain perceptions of migrant workers as “free-loaders.” The white staff members struggle to connect with the patients, and this results in poor motivations to work. Emma, the receptionist patients reach when calling in to the clinic, regularly expressed long sighs and continuous complaints about the long workday. I would regularly write in my fieldnotes how uncomfortable I would feel when Emma would make side comments about answering the phone and communicating with patients. Her body language and vocalized complaints pointed to her lack of motivation for working within the community. As a white woman employed in an air-
conditioned clinic, the stakes for caring for the population are not high. The ticking clock seemed to be the only concern Emma had. She would repeatedly make comments like “Is it 5 o'clock yet” or “I'm ready to leave,”⁶³ even when other staff members, like Daniela and Stephanie were running back and forth between consultations. For Emma, her receptionist position was simply a job.

These observations of Emma’s behavior prompted my questioning of some of the staff’s motivations for working in the clinic. Relationships among staff members in Powell, operating under limited resources, become strained when there are incongruences in staff motivations and commitments to the migrant patient population. Daniela and Stephanie are the only Latina staff members with relationships to migrant patients that extend beyond the walls of the clinic. Daniela and Stephanie have both worked in the fields and have personal experiences with the strain this type of labor takes on the body. Conflicts arise between staff members when carefree attitudes manifest in the workplace by staff that have little stakes in the wellbeing of migrant patients.

On several occasions during my employment at the clinic, Daniela became frustrated with the clinical providers' hesitancy to see patients, even when the staffing was available. One early morning, Daniela got a phone call from a patient that works in Burlington, WY, 33 miles away from the clinic. This patient was not feeling well and had not felt well for a few days. He was hoping to be able to come into the clinic to be seen by a provider. Daniela thought this would work out great since two providers were available on that day. However, when she spoke to the nurse Anne about this, Anne told Daniela to advise him to take over-the-counter

⁶³ Fieldnotes entry from June 24, 2021.
medications to alleviate some pain, but that they were full today due to the vaccine clinic and would not be able to have him come in.

Anne’s response frustrated Daniela because Daniela felt that it is not her responsibility to be providing clinical advice through the phone since she is not a nurse. Daniela feels as if Anne continuously abuses her power and does whatever she can to get out of doing work.

Additionally, Teresa is a doctor that works in the clinic one day each week. She only had one scheduled appointment for that day, and she does not participate in vaccination efforts, therefore, Daniela thought it was possible to have the patient come in and be examined by Teresa. Teresa refused to see the patient by claiming that since they would be doing a vaccine clinic, regular patient consultations should not happen.

Daniela elaborated that it was nothing new for Teresa to deny seeing patients, even when her schedule allows. She said that Teresa likes coming in to get paid for not seeing any patients, emphasizing how it is wrong for the providers to deny services to patients when the clinic was established for that purpose. On occasion, the behaviors of some providers at the clinic reveal a lack of interest or dedication to the program. Teresa’s presence in the clinic once a week detaches her from the realities of exhaustion that working in an under-resourced clinic entail. Her identity as a white woman further serves as a barrier to being empathetic towards her vulnerable patients. Teresa’s commitments to supporting the health of migrant workers falls short of those Daniela and Stephanie enact daily. These incongruencies manifest daily and end up exacerbating violence felt by both migrant patients and Teresa’s co-workers. Daniela and Stephanie are burdened with providing clinical advice to patients without official training, while simultaneously juggling all the other tasks that fall under their responsibility. Meanwhile, migrant patients are denied services, even when staff is readily available. Instead, Teresa isolates
herself and her medical knowledge from the reach of migrant patients, denying them services they will otherwise not receive.

Despite the lack of motivation of other staff members in the clinic, and in order to fill gaps in patient care, Daniela and Stephanie challenge bureaucratic processes to facilitate the registration of new patients. The Outreach Staff has developed strategies for registering patients that facilitates their heavy workload and ensures patients are eligible to receive services from the clinic. Part of the registration process includes an income statement document to determine the sliding scale fees that the patient would have to pay after their consultation visits. The Outreach Staff does not require new patients to provide proof of income. They can simply provide a verbal estimate on their yearly income. Some patients do bring in pay-stubs or tax documents, but such proof is not a requirement to successfully register and qualify for services. However, other staff from the clinic do not agree with this practice.

One of the Registered Nurses, Casey, self-appoints an investigator role to get more information on the patient to see if they are lying about their income. Casey has vocalized that she does not understand how so many people qualify for services. The Outreach Staff, on the other hand, complete the paperwork required by fully trusting the patient and writing down the information the patient provides. Daniela told me that she does not understand why Casey makes a big deal out of the income section, saying "[Casey] is not paying for the services out of her own pocket so why does she care?"64 The mission of the clinic is to reach as many migrant workers as possible, not to try to find ways to disqualify people from receiving services. While Daniela and Stephanie have complete trust in the patients’ words, facilitated by their closer connection to the migrant community, Casey actively looks for information that will prevent

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64 Interview with Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC, July 27, 2021
patients from registering. Patient income is under scrutiny of clinic staff members that have no responsibilities with the registration process, outside of the physical consultation. Medical providers in the clinic continue to uphold national myths and anxieties associated with the freeloading migrant patient. In doing so, Casey positions herself as an authoritative figure that scrutinizes the health of her migrant patients and places all responsibility for their health on individual migrant bodies. Therefore, she ignores the historical, social, and economic forms of violence that prevent migrant laborers from accessing care.

Casey’s behavior and unwillingness to cooperate with migrant patients has been made visible by patient complaints. Daniela said that it feels like Casey does not want to be at the clinic nor does she understand how to navigate treating migrant communities. This claim was further made visible while I looked to interview clinical providers for this thesis. I initially approached the other Registered Nurse at the clinic, Anne, given that she was more receptive to learning about my project and was eager to support by being interviewed. Shortly after we began the interview, Casey interrupted our conversation to say, “I agree with what Anne is saying and I do not need to be interviewed.”

Throughout the interview, however, Casey would impose her perspectives of her healing philosophy, even if they did not align with Anne’s. A couple of days after this awkward interaction, and on Casey’s day off, Anne approached me to clarify that Casey would not have had the same answers as her. After working alongside Casey for several years, Anne emphasized how Casey tends to be stricter with her patients and does not attempt to accommodate to the migrant worker schedule. For Casey, migrant patients should have the same agency over their health as non-migrant patients. Additionally, her unwillingness to be

65 Interview with Anne and Casey, Registered Nurses, June 23, 2021.
interviewed demonstrates a hesitancy to uncover places for performance improvement and an overall disengagement with the issues migrant patients face.

At the AWHSC, as is common with most grant-funded service institutions, resources are scarce. Staff members are impacted by policy changes, the availability of resources, and the communication between those providing direct services and their management. One hundred miles away, and under scrutiny and supervision of the Montana Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Council, the staff in Powell desires for visibility of their needs, therefore they attempt to make visible the complications that arise from a lack of resources to authorities with decision-making power. This however results in less personal communication between service providers and migrant patients. The staff in Powell are faced with the invisibility of their efforts and challenges they face when treating patients.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the clinic hired a clinical interpreter, therefore alleviating Daniela and Stephanie of this responsibility. This relief was short-lived since management in Billings determined that there was no longer a need for a clinical interpreter in Powell. Daniela, again being asked to extend her responsibilities as the Area Service Coordinator, was tasked with firing the interpreter. The clinical providers in Powell played a large role in the decision of letting go of the interpreter. Daniela explains how the nursing staff complained about how the interpreter managed their time when there were no patients and that they felt the interpreting services were not up to the standard Daniela and Stephanie had established. However, during the initial phases of the pandemic, the clinic was not attending to its regular patient population, therefore limiting the opportunities for the clinical interpreter to improve through practice. Additionally, the newly hired interpreter did not have the same opportunity as Daniela and Stephanie to attend interpreter trainings and certifications in Billings.
During my employment in the summer, it was evident how overworked Daniela and Stephanie are. They would scramble from consultation interpreting, to answering the phone, checking patients in, assisting patients with external financial assistance applications, and completing registrations. During the summer, the Montana office delivered iPads to be used for interpretations. Using iPads, the clinical providers could call an interpreter in Billings during a consultation. However, this method proved to be ineffective. Patients and providers alike became frustrated with the faulty technology and the impersonal communication between the patient and the provider. Like the patients in Madang Hospital, the use of technology for biomedical purposes and its complications further made the patient invisible (Street 2014). The instability the technology caused left patients with their concerns unheard, and their health left as largely the same as when they came into the clinic. For migrant patients, technology further disrupts essential communication. Patricia alludes to this when describing patient hesitancy to communicate their needs during consultations:

I don’t know that they would say, because I feel like our patients wouldn’t complain even if there is a valid complaint. There is not a lot of questions, so I feel like I’m talking and trying to tell by body language, are they okay with this plan? And when the interpreters ask it is always “yeah, yeah”. I just don’t know that they would say, even privately that “yeah I wasn’t happy with Patricia.”

During our conversations, Patricia frequently labeled migrant patients at the clinic as “gracious” for the services they receive. The graciousness they express manifests as acceptance of the authority of the provider, resulting in less questions being asked. Communication between providers and patients is impacted by these perceptions of migrant patients as grateful and content with the services they receive. By ascribing them the label of gracious patients, there is little incentive to challenge the lack of resources under which the clinic operates, therefore

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66 Interview with Patricia, Physician Assistant at AWHSC, July 2, 2021
ignores the possibility of reimagining what care can look like. If Patricia had a different perception of her patients, it would be easier to hold personal conversations that uncover the root cause of their poor health, and therefore services would be extended outside of the physical space of the clinic.

However, the use of iPads for interpreting creates moments of visibility to the concerns and frustrations of both the migrant patients and the providers. Daniela and Stephanie recognized the need for an interpreter and would continuously advocate for a new clinical interpreter, however Daniela says juggling so many roles “It is very tiring. The nurses need to realize our struggle and make use of the iPad system.”67 In doing so, the staff works towards bringing visibility to the frustrations that result from using technology as a solution for staff shortages. Visibility serves the dual purpose of potentially alleviating overworked clinic staff and brings recognition to the faults in patient-provider relationships that erupt when technology replaces more personalized interpreting services.

In a health program where interpersonal conflicts between the clinic staff and across different institutions like the Montana Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Council constitute daily realities, biomedicine is defined by instability. The lack of communication between the executive management in Billings and the clinic staff in Powell perpetuates conflicts in the clinic. New workflow requirements from Montana erupt in conflict as the staff in Powell tries to adjust with little to no guidance. Further, collaboration in the clinic is complicated by a lack of resources and staff. Staff members like Casey are reluctant to bend the rules of bureaucratic processes and biomedical protocols, therefore a hierarchical organization of biomedical providers governs these attitudes that she holds onto. There are certain expectations imposed on

67 Interview with Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC, July 27, 2021
migrant patients and the control over their health, as well as expectations for Daniela and Stephanie to take on numerous responsibilities. In contrast, Daniela and Stephanie adapt to the resources that are available. The conflicts that arise between the staff members furtherly create barriers for patients as they seek care by restricting resources and failing to approach their poor health at the root cause.

The following section analyzes the reductionist approaches of biomedicine that fail to approach migrant health holistically by focusing solely on biological causations for disease and ignoring their social conditions. The staff members are tied to a goal of fixing patients health so that they can work. Although they are not wrong in assuming that migrant patients have a desire to work, this approach to health furtherly restricts their ability to reimagine what care could look like outside of biomedicine. They miss the opportunity to extend their power into the working environments their patients find themselves entrapped in.

**Treating Bodies to Work**

“What I enjoy with this population of patients is the graciousness. With healthcare a lot of things are just expected, people as patients, the expectations are you come you do this, you send this, you give me exactly what I want, when I want it. With this population of patients there is so much motivation, people are motivated as far as patients. They want to stay working, they want to be able to work, I mean that’s the goal, so whatever we can do.”

- Patricia, the full-time Physician Assistant at AWHSC

“If it wasn’t for them, we would not be here. They are the ones that keep our program running and going.”

- Daniela, Area Service Coordinator at AWHSC

Despite differing attitudes, motivations, and commitments to the migrant patient population at AWHSC, the staff treats patients to be able to continue to work. Migrant patients are understood as “gracious” patients that accept biomedical advice without vocalized questioning of the treatment plan developed. The bodies of migrant patients become the site for
intervention that under colonial biomedicine provide temporary, band-aid-like fixes that allow bodies to continue laboring in the fields. These approaches, and construction of migrant patients as passive, allow clinical providers to feel like they are successfully improving the health of patients, without addressing the social structures that push migrants into exploitative sectors of work for their survival.

In “What is Specific to Biomedicine?” Arthur Kleinman describes doctor dependency on biological reasoning when treating patients and the effects this has on the patient receiving care (1995). This closed-minded approach to care deems the social and cultural factors as irrelevant since the single all-encompassing truth behind illness and disease is framed as existing within the realm of biology. These practices of conceptualizing the body as a separate entity, free of social influence, allow the practitioner to continue participating as a “provider” of the body to manipulate/manufacture the desired “product.” For example, Patricia enacted this manifestation of biomedicine when describing the prevalence of high blood pressure and diabetes in the migrant worker patient community. When asked why she thought there were higher rates, Patricia ignored the exploitative working conditions migrants face by a focus on molecular level, saying:

Genetically Blacks and Hispanics have higher just overall, and I don’t know why they are more prone to blood pressure and diabetes, and I don’t know why because I think our patients or the migrant workers are a lot more fit, they eat better than a lot of the general population. I think it is a genetic predisposition, and also familial.68

Patricia focuses on genetic predisposition as the reasoning why the migrant community has higher rates of elevated blood pressure and diabetes. In doing so, she ignores other social structures, including the long workdays migrants face, coupled with the low wages they receive for their labor, that ultimately reproduce the prevalence of diabetes. Without the time or income

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68 Interview with Patricia, Physician Assistant at AWHSC, July 2, 2021.
to prepare healthier food options, migrant workers are often restricted to fast-food options and other unhealthy foods. Patricia reduces these experiences of inequality to genetic predispositions to diabetes. Therefore, biomedicine leads providers to justify care that is "mechanistic, reductionistic, and inattentive to the human concerns of patients and families" (Kleinman 1995, 26), therefore reproducing capitalism and ignoring the roots of poor health. Understanding chronic conditions like diabetes as rooted in genetic predisposition is a form of reasoning that closes opportunities for extending care and resources that address the social structures that migrants are confined to.

Kleinman’s approach of illness narratives (1988) become instrumental to uncovering the different social structures, like socioeconomic forces, that reproduce poor health in migrant bodies. Kleinman presents a non-Western approach on healing that focuses on the different ways that society and culture are embodied, which is influenced by the learned ways to think of the world. These perspectives are distinct to each culture, and this understanding establishes a “conventional commonsense about how to understand and treat illness” (Kleinman 1988, 5). The establishment of shared perspectives and understandings of the experience of illness is therefore culturally shaped and shapes culture itself. The approach taken by biomedicine, and providers like Patricia, is reductionist. Isolating and categorizing experiences of illness to fit a biological model of disease, which looks at diseases as contained in biological bodies and ignores broader structures as sites of causation or intervention. The factors leading to illness are seen as “things” that must be fixed or altered to match the idealized body and mind conventions established by biomedicine.

Migrant patients in Wyoming are seen as wanting to continue laboring, without acknowledging the conditions of their work environments that produce their poor health.
Extending Kleinman’s argument of a failure in biomedicine to address the structures impacting health, I argue that ignoring the conditions that confine migrant workers to exploitative labor is dangerous and ultimately fails to provide the patient with resources to heal and address the root causes of the experienced illness (1988). Instead, Kleinman offers an approach to healing that incorporates empathy towards the experience of suffering by listening to stories of illness to holistically assess the experience of suffering and illness. This allows the healer to understand the patient as an actual human being, shaped by culture and society. Additionally, by giving patients the time and space to express their experience of illness, healers establish trust with patients and therefore establish relationships. Ignoring these illness experiences causes harm since the patient feels unheard, dissatisfied, and dismissed.

Daniela demonstrates how to engage in this type of care actively and ethically. She received a phone call on my last day of employment at AWHSC from a patient that required follow-up for her thyroid health condition. However, this patient was stuck in Mexico given conflicts her family was experiencing at the fault of the immigration system and increasing insecurity prevalent throughout Mexico. The patient’s son had been missing in Mexico since July 21st and her daughter was under surveillance and scrutiny of ICE. Realizing that her thyroid health was not a priority now, and that the patient was experiencing vast emotional distress, Daniela opted to console the patient and expressed that the clinic would support her in any way that they could. Daniela understood the patient as impacted by social forces that she has no control over. The patient needed to be consoled, rather than talking about her condition, furtherly adding to her distress. Daniela demonstrates a departure from biomedicine and towards a form of caring that aligns with Kleinman’s illness narratives. The patient feels heard and supported, even if Daniela had no way of providing immediate relief to her suffering. Furtherly, Patricia also
participates in acts of solidarity with her migrant patients. Towards the end of July, Patricia had a patient that came into the clinic with severe sore throat and cough symptoms. The patient complained about feeling continuously tired and attributed this exhaustion to their labor outdoors. Patricia decided the best course of action to take was to write a letter to her employer requesting that the patient receives time off work to rest and heal. This method of care looks beyond the biological body and provides the patient with temporary alleviation from the working conditions that exacerbate their symptoms. In doing so, Patricia approaches the health of this migrant patients using systems thinking. This seemingly simple solution of drafting a letter to an employer can be more effective to migrant patients that continuously expose their bodies to harsh environmental and physical conditions while laboring in the fields, than biological solutions that reproduce the social environments migrants exist in.

**Conclusion**

The colonial legacies of the purposes for and evolutions of biomedicine to fit imperial and nationalist ends demonstrate how, as an institution of care, biomedicine is not designed to acknowledge and change structural causes of disease. The AWHSC, as a clinical institution where biomedical approaches are used to treat patients, reproduces the violence of colonial biomedicine. The clinic, entangled within a social environment where the visibility of laboring migrant bodies becomes a site for judgement and the reproduction of harmful rhetoric against migrants as public charges, reproduces these ways of thinking through the actions, gestures, attitudes, and motivations of the staff. A lack of communication between the management clinic in Billings and the clinic in Powell and a lack of transparency of the availability of resources facilitates the eruption of conflict in the clinic. Staff with different stakes and commitments to
the patient population creates challenges for collaboration and the equal distribution of work. Daniela and Stephanie are members of the migrant community, and therefore have higher stakes in ensuring migrant patients are appropriately treated. This leads them to undertake numerous responsibilities outside of their job descriptions, eventually leading them to feel overworked and unseen. They must use strategies to gain visibility, like forcing nurses to use iPads for interpretations, that often create frustrations for providers and patients alike, to be recognized by the management in Billings. In doing so, they hope to demonstrate the necessity for hiring additional staff that can undertake some of their responsibilities, therefore allowing for more outreach work to be possible. Despite the challenges that arise, and although providers regularly look to the scientific and biological explanations of illness, creative strategies are sometimes utilized by staff and clinical providers alike that challenge biomedicine’s colonial roots. Whenever possible, resources are distributed for transportation, medications are kept in the clinic to facilitate their distribution to migrant patients, and registration times are reduced by trusting migrant patients. The Ag Worker Health and Services Clinic reproduces biomedicine’s harmful legacies, while simultaneously staff members adapt to the resources available and reimagine new forms of care.

The final chapter of the thesis explores the engagement and participation of Wyoming migrant workers in the Migrant Worker Community Healing Program. The stories and art pieces reflected in the chapter counter harmful narratives that have been presented throughout the thesis. This chapter is committed to highlighting the resiliency of migrant workers in Wyoming and their strategies for finding libertad in an inflamed environment that makes them feel encerrados.
Chapter 6: Towards Healing and Restoring Community: Storytelling and Art

The life histories of Wyoming migrant workers serve to resist structures of power and point to their absurdity and contradictions. This chapter focuses on the stories and artwork of migrant workers that utilized practices of remembering to heal. Their artwork and voices challenge the structures of violence and power detailed throughout this thesis and humanize my community.

The impossibility to connect to culture exacerbates migrant worker suffering. Their minds become clouded with nostalgia, a longing for a life that no longer exists. Without the ability to reconnect with their ancestors, their families, their cultures, or to a life known before migration, frustrations erupt that often manifest as poor mental health. Poor workplace conditions that extract from migrant bodies reproduce this cycle of suffering. Overworked migrants lose hope when they experience the same daily routine of exploitation and are disconnected from cultural and familial ties. Throughout my time spent with migrant workers, they regularly emphasized how exhausted they were of the same routine, the same drive, of the same life being lived day after day. In efforts to instill creative practices for improving mental wellbeing, my hopes were to provide migrant workers with the space to come together, build relationships with one another, learn from their shared struggles, gain self-confidence, and use art to remember, represent, and ignite the process of healing.

Ethnographers like Teresa Mares offer an example of the power in combining rich ethnographic research with action. Mares, in conjunction with her research, actively participated in local organizing efforts to improve the lives of migrant dairy workers in Vermont (2019). In attempts to follow in her footsteps, and practice what Paul Farmer coins as “pragmatic solidarity” (2004, see Introduction), the research for this thesis was connected to a Lang Opportunity Scholar social impact project.
During July 2021, I regularly met with a cohort of 12 migrant workers (see figure 6.1) from my community to make art together, share life stories, learn about structural violence, practice yoga, share meals, exchange resources, and draft a Wyoming migrant worker rights document. The program fostered a safe space for migrant workers to come together, for most, the possibility to practice a new hobby, and build solidarity based on shared struggles and identities. Even though the conversations that took place, the community bonds that were strengthen, and the stories that were told through the production of art cannot be quantified, they are valuable outcomes of the project. There is great value in showcasing the art, and the stories that inspired it. The program adopted art as a tool for community building, storytelling that transcends language barriers, and as a tool for self-expression that promotes healing through remembering. The artwork and stories in this chapter bring visibility to the lives of Wyoming migrant workers. Their artwork resists anti-immigrant narratives, histories of violent U.S. immigration policies, that are detailed in the previous chapters, and demonstrate the power in building community ties through art. Their stories explore ideas of belonging, libertad, family, migration, work exploitation, and resistance.
Longing for Libertad in the “Land of the Free”

During the Migrant Worker Community Healing Program, conversations regularly arose correlating feelings of libertad, or freedom, to life in Mexico. Existing in the U.S. as bodies without legal status, legal representation, and without the basic protection of human rights, migrant workers in Wyoming, rather than being free, are confined to their work, their daily routines, and to a longing for a freedom only known to them in their home country. The longing for a freedom only reachable in Mexico manifested in the conversations and artwork that migrants would produce. Jose, whose story is presented in an earlier chapter describing his exposure to toxic chemicals and how he feels forced to work in the fields, represented his life in Mexico compared to the U.S.
Jose used words and art to create a piece that demonstrates how his life in Mexico brought him freedom (see Figure 6.2), while his life in the U.S. made him feel trapped. I think this piece is beautiful because it contradicts nativist ideas and false narratives of the U.S. as a place founded on freedom. He does not feel free in the U.S. His libertad exists in Mexico, living near his mother and sister, not trapped in his daily routine of working in the fields. He writes on the page the time he comes into work and the time he leaves. On the margins of the page, he wrote out every day of the week to emphasize the time requirements of his irrigator job.

Figure 6.2: Jose describing his drawing to me that compares life in Chihuahua, Mexico to the life experienced in Wyoming. Image taken July 8, 2021.

Reina, Jose’s daughter, was only eighteen years old when her family of five migrated to Wyoming in 2008. Reina’s understanding of libertad is shaped by the memories she cherishes with her family in Chuhuichupa, Chihuahua, Mexico. Growing up, she remembers spending the
Holidays with her tías, tíos, primos, and primas at our grandmother’s house. For Reina, libertad manifests through family (see Figure 6.3). Practicing one’s culture is freedom. Teaching one’s kin where they come from, the histories that produce them, and keeping traditions alive across generations is freedom. Living in Mexico ensured her access to cultural goods and the possibility to practice her culture, strengthen bonds with her family members, and to learn from her family.

Figure 6.3: One of Reina’s projects describing her life in Mexico and after arriving to Wyoming.


Middle left: “Difficult because of the language”. “Years later, two of us formed families”.

Bottom: “One of my dreams is to one day be able to take my children to meet my family that is in Mexico, and to show them where we come from, the different traditions that exist between countries, and the traditions that we often forget when we for such a long time in another country.

Now in Wyoming, with a husband and three children, Reina fears her children will lose her culture and forget their roots. I prompted migrant workers to write down other words/rhetoric to describe migration as opposed to the way migration rhetoric circulates in the news, in social
media, and even in our own communities. Reina shared that the realities of migration are sad. There is an illusion created about the benefits of migration. Reina continued by saying that it is difficult to move to another country as an adolescent because she had to learn a new culture, a new language, and way of life. Upon arriving to Wyoming, Reina said, “Al principio me sentía bien feo. Yo lloraba todos los días y ya no quería estar aquí porque me sentía sola, me sentía triste. Me hacía falta todo, sentía yo que me hacía falta todo.” Reina did not know English, she was away from her extended family, and missed living in community. After being in Wyoming for over 14 years, Reina feels tranquility in her new home. At the same time, years later, she fears her children will lose important family and community values she grew up with. She fears her own children will learn only this new way of life. Reina emphasized that it is disappointing to her to see her children lose the culture that shaped her life as they assimilate to life in Wyoming. For Reina, therefore, the experience of migrating and existing as a migrant is intertwined with the loss of freedom.

**Remembering to Heal**

Migrant workers that participated in the program remembered specific bodily sensations that made them feel at home and connected to the land. These memories and their representation through artwork allowed for migrants to recall moments in their lives that brough them joy. This is extremely important, particularly for exploited migrant workers that have endured the trauma of leaving their land, their families, their cultures, and oftentimes, their sense of self. My mother, Mariana, created a beautiful painting that represented her life in Chihuichupa, Chihuahua, Mexico. In her description (see figure 6.4), Mariana highlights remembering how her bare feet

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69 I first, I felt really bad. I would cry every day, and I did not want to be here because I felt alone, I felt sad. I missed everything, I felt like I needed everything back. Interview with Reina, age 31, July 22, 2021.
felt on the shallows that formed after heavy rainstorms in the mountains. She felt free and she longs for feeling that sensation again. There is great power in her art piece description because it demonstrates how the act of remembering involves the physical body and what it once felt. The memory of the sensation of stepping through the shallows is connected to moments in her life that she experienced happiness. By remembering the ways her body felt, she ignited new streams of thinking that reminded her of a beautiful childhood. She longs for the day she will have the opportunity to experience the same bodily sensation. By showcasing this piece to the broader community, she helps to counter narratives of migrant workers as solely working bodies. She challenges ascribed assumptions that deem her as unworthy of a joyful life.

**Figure 6.4:** Painting by my mother, Mariana, describing her childhood memories in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Chihuahua, Mexico. Artwork displayed at the “We are More than Our Labor” art show in Shell, WY on August 7, 2021.
Similarly, Cecilia created an art piece representing the beach trips she would take with her brother before he passed away in Mexico (see figure 6.5). These experiences brought her joy, unlike the life she lives in Wyoming. By remembering these moments of happiness with her brother and representing them through artwork, she continues honors his life and their memories together. The process of remembering helps her to heal from her brother’s death and feel connected to him.

Figure 6.5: Cecilia’s painting of the beach that commemorates her memories with her brother. Artwork displayed at the “We are More than Our Labor” art show in Shell, WY on August 7, 2021.

In her art piece description, Cecilia describes how her life horribly changed after coming to the U.S. She cannot return to the beach and feel the same sensations as she once did in her brothers’ presence. The title of her piece “El mejor tiempo de mi vida que nunca volvera”

70 The Best Time of my Life that will Never Return

168
points to a sort of recognition that her life has drastically changed since the death of her brother, but also due to her migration to the U.S. She acknowledges that life in Mexico will never be the same and has to live with this painful resolution. However, through these acts of remembering, storytelling, and painting, Cecilia can physically represent her emotions of disillusion and began a process of healing. By placing these memories of a previous life that is now unattainable, Cecilia can grow from these past traumas.

Protesting Through Art

The art pieces presented earlier all challenge mainstream assumptions of immigrants as solely bodies for labor. They point to the harms of forced migration and the suffering that is perpetuated at worksites. These are valuable tools for bringing forth migrant worker stories and taking control over their own narratives. Mariana created an art piece that resists the criminalization of migration and points to the absurdity of restricting free movement across the land. In her piece (see figure 6.6), my mother describes herself as a monarch butterfly. In doing so, she embodies the butterfly and challenges colonial ideologies described previously (see chapter 1) related to the superiority of humans over the land and the creatures that inhabit it. She draws parallels between the butterfly and the migrant experience to demonstrate how natural migration is.
Figure 6.6: Mariana’s painting of a monarch butterfly that challenges ideas of migration as unnatural.

In the art piece caption, Mariana describes the monarch butterfly as a migrant. She says that the butterfly is free, and that like her, migrants want to be free to come and go. It is important that Mariana positions herself at the same hierarchical level as the butterfly. By saying “al igual que ella,” she shows respect for the butterfly and the challenges they must also endure to migrate. In doing so, she challenges colonial assumptions of the land and animals as sources for extraction and profit. Rather, Mariana demonstrates how all life should be valued and respected. Restrictions on the free movement of people only cause harm and further perpetuate the use of racial hierarchies to categorize people in the world. Like the butterfly, migrants want to be free.

71 Just like her.
Building Confidence

The cohort of migrant workers were hesitant to make art. As a new practice for most of them, they did not believe they had the talents to make anything they would be proud of. It was rewarding to see not only their artwork improve, but their confidence navigating life as migrant workers. Gloria, Reina’s mother, and Jose’s wife is 49-year-old migrant woman from Chihuahua, Mexico. She works as a kitchen staff at a local restaurant, Lisa’s. This restaurant has a long history of existence in Greybull, WY and regularly hires undocumented migrants. Gloria’s confidence developed immensely as she worked alongside her community of workers, allowed her body to rest, and developed a new practice to improve her mental health through artmaking.

The following images are all art pieces created by Gloria that represent her migration to Wyoming, the feelings she experienced, and her life in Wyoming.

The collection of art pieces made by Gloria trace her path to Wyoming, beginning with the painting of her home in Mexico. Gloria takes the audience through the emotional experience of leaving family and cultures behind, to be overwhelmed with feelings of nostalgia and sadness. Her art pieces reflect the alienation she experiences in Wyoming, but also how the process of growing and cultivating crops is a source of pride for migrant workers. It was truly a privilege to see Gloria’s confidence develop after each week of the program. She went above and beyond to make visible her life stories, the cultural and religious forces that have shaped them, and ended beautifully with a recognition for migrant workers that produce the food that we eat.
Figure 6.7: Gloria’s painting of her home in Chuhuichupa, Chihuahua, Mexico. Artwork displayed at the “We are More than Our Labor” art show in Shell, WY on August 7, 2021.

Figure 6.8: Gloria’s art representing the U.S.-Mexico border. At the margins, she writes how her family has grown in the U.S. and in Mexico her extended family remains.
Figure 6.9: Gloria’s artwork representing her story of migration to Wyoming. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is a Mexican national and religious symbol. Gloria adopts this symbol to emphasize the dangers migrants face crossing the border. *La Virgen* was her guide, her protector.

Figure 6.10: Gloria’s image highlights the nostalgia she experienced after arriving in Wyoming. She remembers looking out the window, where endless crop fields met her eyes. All she could think about was what she left behind in Mexico. “Nostalgia, the family that is left, the friends, the tastes. Coward? One must be brave to migrate.”
Figure 6.11: Gloria’s art representing the geography in Wyoming. Gloria’s words that constitute the description of the piece demonstrate how ties are made to transnational land, contributing to strengthened feelings of belonging.

Figure 6.12: Gloria’s piece represents the solitude experienced during harsh Wyoming winters. The settled nature of her family’s migration allows her to appreciate the beauty of the winter, but she also acknowledges the increased nostalgic feelings that take over her mind.
Figure 6.13: Gloria uses her final art piece to make visible feelings of pride that manifest after a long season of hard labor. She uses her art to show her appreciation for the migrant bodies that tirelessly labor in the fields for the cultivation of food.

During the last day of migrant healing program, I was collecting art descriptions from the participants to hang with their art projects. Gloria wanted me to know that she learned a new strategy for relaxing and allowing her body, and her thoughts, to take a break from the labor she produces. Her painting skills improved immensely throughout the course of the program, and she called herself a good painter. In providing overall feedback for the program, Gloria said:

Se me hice un proyecto muy bonito porque aprendimos muchas cosas que no sabía sobre mis derechos como migrante. Me gustaba venir cada semana, la convivencia con otras personas. Por último, descubrí que la pintura me relaja y que soy buena para pintar. Aprendí a pintar y descubrí que me relaja.  

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72 I thought it was a beautiful project because we learned a lot of things we did not know, especially my rights as a migrant. I enjoyed coming every week, the time I spent with other people. Finally, I learned that painting relaxes me and that I am a good painter. I learned to paint and learned that it relaxes me. (Conversation with Gloria, age 49, August 8th, 2021)
I loved receiving this feedback because it demonstrates the power in using art as a mechanism for self-growth, remembering, and healing. It also points to Shilling’s ideas of the malleability of embodiment. Migrant worker bodies are not solely vessels where violence is produced, rather they have agency and can change or give meaning to their embodiment through social practices, such as painting. The practice of painting about her life allowed Gloria to realize the agency she holds allowed her to practice remembering, community building, and finding freedom in places of exploitation.

**Conclusion**

This thesis has taken on the process of documenting the life histories of migrant workers in Wyoming. In doing so, I have demonstrated how the documentation of life histories is a powerful tool of protest that sheds light to the absurd contradictions ongoing processes and systems of colonialism depend on. Wyoming migrant workers are resilient, and their long-term settlement demonstrates their fight for gaining visibility and respect in their communities. They find tranquility in their new homes, despite the compounding forms of structural violence that manifest in their daily lives and produce suffering. I am proud to be a member of this resilient community and am fortunate to have had the opportunity to document these stories.
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179


