

Migration, Mobility, & Displacement

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Evelyn Encalada Grez in Conversation with Marlea Clarke

Evelyn is a community organiser and a PhD candidate at OISE of the University of Toronto. Her dissertation focuses on migrant work across rural Ontario and Rural Mexico. Born in Chile, raised in Canada, Evelyn has worked in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras with the Central American Network in Solidarity with Women Maquila Workers and with the Workers Support Centre in Puebla, Mexico. Evelyn is a founding member of Justice for Migrant Workers, a political collective that has fought for the rights of migrant farm workers in Canada since 2001.

Justice for Migrant Farm Workers: A Brief History

Marlea: Let's begin by talking about the founding of Justice for Migrant Farm Workers. You were one of the founding members. Can you please tell our readers what led to the creation of the organisation, and what were its main aims?

Evelyn: Thank you for allowing me to talk about Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW). It is a volunteer run political non-profit collective comprised of activists from diverse walks of life, including labour activists, educators, researchers, students, primarily of colour. We are based in Toronto, Ontario, where we were first established.

J4MW strives to promote the rights of migrant workers. Most of these workers come to Canada through the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (CSAWP or SAWP), and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (Agricultural Stream).

When did we begin? I need to go back to 2001. That's when a small group of us went out to Leamington (Ontario), as part of an investigative mission that was organized by Chris Ramsaroop from United Farm Workers of America, in response to specific problems facing a group of Mexican migrant workers. At the time, there were thousands of low paid migrant and temporary agricultural workers in the area and really no organisation was supporting them. Chris reached out to me because he knew that I spoke Spanish, and was interested in social justice and migrant issues.

So we drove out to Leamington. I remember that I was struck by how the physical and cultural landscape changed dramatically as we drove from the Toronto suburbs to Leamington. It was like we were in another world. I was aware of the urban-rural divide both in Canada, the US and Mexico, but

I was struck by how stark that divide was, and what seemed like such a gap between the consumers in Toronto, and the farming communities in Ontario. I don't think many Canadians think much about where their food comes from, and who is picking it. Many consumers are becoming more aware of the importance of 'local', or even 'local and organic,' but few people seem to think much about the workers. Sure, the food might be grown locally, but it is often weeded, watered and picked by temporary migrant workers, and workers who have fewer rights than they do, and generally have low pay. So does local mean fair wages? Does it mean decent housing and working conditions? So there I was in Leamington, a place that I'd never heard of in my whole entire life. We didn't know the workers then, we didn't know much about the community or their lives. We felt like we were bodies out of place. We had a lot to learn. And we were contending with that; we were getting to know another world and getting to know ourselves as bodies out of place.

We went to spaces where we thought migrant workers would be without knowing anybody in the community. So we were basically parachuting our way into the community, establishing initial contact. We talked to a number of migrant farmworkers that day, workers from Mexico and the Caribbean, most employed through SAWP, and quickly realised that these workers faced a number of housing and workplace problems and had limited, if any, support in the community or elsewhere. Sometimes their situation was desperate, because once workers lose their employment, they can't work for anybody else, and they can't show up to, you know, like government office and ask for welfare. They can't go to a settlement agency because they are not here on a permanent settlement stream, they are not immigrants and don't have any of these rights. They are here temporarily, as agricultural migrant workers.

Marlea: So it was this first trip to Leamington that led to the formation of J4MW?

Evelyn: J4MW was formed in 2002, a year later. We wanted to try to raise awareness about these workers' plight and bring their voices to the mainstream; to the rest of Canada. We wanted to raise awareness and to have that awareness result in tangible improvements in the material lives, better working conditions, better housing conditions for these workers.

Marlea: It must have been difficult to prioritise your activities, as the needs were likely so great for many of these workers. I would imagine that these workers faced many challenges; from structural problems in terms of the SAWP, to individual problems between workers and their employers, to problems associated with provincial labour laws. What did J4MW first focus on, and how has this changed over the years?

Evelyn: Initially we focused on understanding SAWP and migrant workers' rights. We wanted to better understand the program and the problems or limi-

tations with it. At the time there was no so-called expert who was readily available at that time. There were a number of people who had done work on migrant agricultural workers in Canada, and we learned from people like Tanya Basok (who wrote *Tortillas and Tomatoes*) and other researchers. But there was still a lack of knowledge about the problems workers were facing, how to address these problems, and how to provide support to them in their struggles and in their lives.

Agricultural migrant workers faced many problems, many of them linked to employment legislation or the SAWP, but there wasn't one particular lawyer that could handle and take on these cases, so lots of migrant workers were falling through the cracks. They had no ongoing source of support or organisation to turn to. If they raised issues with their employer, they risked losing their job and being forced to leave the country. Remember, these workers do not have permanent status. They are only allowed to be here temporarily.

So, initially we focused on understanding employment legislation and the SAWP, and the problems they were having with both. We knew there were many problems, but we didn't want to call for the abolishment of the SAWP. Many migrant workers depend on this program for their livelihoods. Their families back home also depend on their income. So we could not call for an abolition of this program, especially when there is no alternative. Instead, we worked to address the problems with the program. We are aware that this puts us in what might seem like a contradictory position, critiquing a program, its assumptions and the ways it reinforces inequalities and segmentation, while at the same time supporting its continuation.

Marlea: Tell our readers about the program, and some of its core weaknesses or problems, and some of the work J4MW has done to address these problems.

Evelyn: SAWP is a guest worker program for the agricultural sector. In contrast to other temporary worker programs, this is a bilateral program, involving Canada, Mexico and some Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean. In theory, the SAWP is aimed at meeting the temporary seasonal needs of the agricultural sector during peak harvesting and planting periods. Workers are placed in fruit and vegetable, flower and nursery tree farms across Canada, many of them here in Ontario. In reality, the program is often used as an ongoing way that the agricultural sector can benefit from cheap migrant labour, as a pool of workers that have limited voice.

The program began in 1966, with Jamaica, on a trial basis, and was extended to other countries, such as Mexico in 1974. The program is authorized by the federal government through the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development (HRSDC) and administered by privately run user-fee agencies. Under this program, workers can stay a minimum of 6 weeks, and a maximum of eight months in an eleven and a half month period, (January 1 – December 15).

What else? Well, some people might not realise that while it is a federal

program, it is the provincial governments that legislate human rights, employment standards, workplace health and safety laws, and human rights. Issues linked to migrant workers' accommodation, such as defining health standards for migrant workers' accommodation is also up to provincial governments. This can create many problems and disparities across the country.

This is an important program for the agricultural sector. Around 18,000 to 20,000 workers from Mexico and the Caribbean come to Canada every year on this program. Most of these workers are for farms and greenhouses in Ontario, primarily vegetable farms in southern Ontario and Quebec. Mexican workers now make up a large percentage of workers under this program. For example, in 2004, two years after we were formed, we found out that about 10,777 seasonal workers came to Canada from Mexico alone, many of these workers came here, to Ontario.

There are many problems with the program. One is that these workers are temporary, and don't have the same rights to immigrate as other foreign workers. They aren't here undocumented. They are here on a temporary visa. They are supposed to have all of these rights as temporary residents, but in essence they do not whatsoever. So, over the years we have aimed to modify this program to reform it and also push Canada to change its immigration policy to be more inclusive of people that are considered to be so-called low skilled. We believe that all workers coming to Canada as temporary workers should have the right to apply for permanent residency, if they want to. Some temporary workers can, such as live-in-caregivers, but farmworkers cannot. We have challenged this policy, and also have tried to challenge the perception of low-skilled associated with this work, and the way low-skilled and high-skilled temporary workers are treated differently by the system. We have challenged the fact that so-called low-skilled migrants who are disproportionately coming from the global south are kept segmented within the low-skilled stream with no chance of becoming a permanent resident.

Another problem is the rights they are entitled to aren't adequate, or are hard to enforce. As I said, rights are mostly governed provincially and there are problems in certain provinces, and some common problems. For example, workers have to be paid what is called "the prevailing wage rate", and aren't supposed to be paid less than Canadians doing the same work. But, while wage rates for migrants in Ontario might be close to the legal minimum wage rate for Canadians, many migrant workers are paid less, some quite a lot less, and more skilled migrant workers, or returning experienced workers are not necessarily paid higher rates. So they might return year after year, and become more experienced and skilled, but their wage rate might not go up and might still be less than what Canadians doing the same work would make. Workers frequently complain to us about their wages. The other problem is with the law itself. The law does not set overtime rates for farm workers in Ontario, so most migrant farmworkers we have worked with say that they don't get overtime pay, regardless of how many hours they work. Many of them work long hours, especially during harvest season and they don't get any overtime pay.

Also, the Ontario Employment Standards Act doesn't give vacation and public holiday pay to 'general farmworkers'. Most migrant agricultural workers are in this cluster, so therefore they don't get vacation or public holiday pay.

You see? These are some of the problems with the law. There are many other problems with the Act or provincial laws, or with the enforcement of the rights these workers have. One other example is that workers have to pay into employment insurance (EI) and contribute to the Canadian Pension Plan, but they are never able to collect either! If they lose their job in Canada, they have to return to Mexico or whatever country. They would only be able to collect EI if they stayed in Canada to look for another job. But if they do this, then they would be here illegally. Their permit doesn't allow them to stay in Canada if they lost their job. So in practice none of these workers can collect EI even though they pay into the system.

We have worked on all these issues. First, it was national awareness. It was holding the government accountable nationally because these programs are federal programs. But like I said, every single province has different jurisdictions when it comes to agriculture, so when we turn to the government at the federal level they have said that they can't do much because it would be overriding the provincial jurisdiction. So we've called for national standards for a national program so that way there is uniformity for all workers coming into Canada, because you know workers come to Ontario, they get used to a particular set of rights and then they go to Quebec and it can be different. And then they go to Alberta where their conditions of life and work are vastly different. But they are coming under the same program. So we wanted to change the law so there is uniformity.

Marlea: Change the SAWP or provincial labour laws?

Evelyn: We want national standards for agricultural workers. And we want to harmonize employment standards across the board for all migrant workers, farm workers, in the industry. We see the problems emerge with migrant workers, but it isn't just them, it is the sector. Whether you're a migrant worker or a Canadian citizen worker you have less rights because of the virtue of the industry that you're in, in comparison to other industries. For instance here in Ontario because you're a farm worker you cannot unionize. So we wanted to increase workers' rights within agriculture. So we say raise the standards for everyone. Raise the standards in all of these sectors, particularly agriculture that is still involves the three D's; dirty, demeaning, difficult. We can add on even more adjectives. Every worker should have full protections in whatever jobs.

And so we've been part of Supreme Court cases. Migrant farmworkers in British Columbia are able to join unions, but they can't here in Ontario. We were an intervenor in the Supreme Court case that was demanding the rights of all farm workers to unionize here in the province, but that was defeated. We lost that case, but we won't stop with that fight.

We also wanted to make the government accountable by having snap in-

spectations and making sure that every single farm was also adhering to the basics. They were not even adhering to the basics at that point. But the basics, minimum standards, were also not enough. As I said, we have been fighting to increase standards and to have national standards for all agricultural workers.

Housing has also been a priority. Housing is governed by each individual municipality and employers are only required to provide 'suitable housing'. What does this mean, 'suitable'? There is no definition or understanding. A small room with one bathroom that is shared by 10 workers. Is that suitable? Housing must be inspected, but this system isn't working. Migrant workers have told us that they know that inspectors have come to the farm where they live. But many times employers will get away with violating those housing inspections by maybe showing the housing inspectors a particular unit that looks nice and telling the housing inspector that a certain amount of workers live there. But then when the workers actually arrive they will put in more workers, many more than they reported live there. And the housing workers actually might not be as nice as what the inspector was shown. We see that the housing standards are very, very basic and minimal. And some are bad. So we've worked with many workers to get them to come up with their own housing needs. What we've asked them, is what would be their ideal for housing that is dignified and decent after a long hard days' work.

And so our aims have been quite multipronged, changing the law, lobbying government, raising awareness among the rest of Canadians so that they use also their voice and their citizenship to lend to the rights of migrant workers, because migrant workers are not courted by governments since they cannot vote.

Marlea: So for a small organization, you have focused on a number of different issues. If you reflect on your work now, more than a decade after the organization was formed, what have been some of the main changes? Have your objectives or main activities changed? Or have those remained fairly consistent over the last decade and longer?

Evelyn: I completely forgot to mention, before I get to that question, the problems with workers' health. So, health and healthcare are major issues around migrant farm workers because once they get injured or sick, they risk deportation.

WSIB isn't set up to accommodate migrant workers, or to properly protect them at work. Workers are often forced to go back to work when they are not able. And if they have an injury that means they cannot work and are sent back, what can they do? They cannot really make claims to WSIB when they are back in Jamaica, back in Mexico. And then there has been cases where migrant workers have tried to get compensated, receive WSIB benefits when they've been in their home countries. But then WSIB forces them to get comparable work. But if you are in rural Jamaica, where are you going to work as a seasonal worker and receive the type of wage that you were receiving in Canada? So, as an organisation, we have also focused on healthcare. Our approach has had to be multipronged here too.

I have to also say that here in Ontario, migrant workers have the best case scenario when it comes to health because they get OHIP, and the Mexican workers have an additional private insurance that they pay into where they can go to a drug store and not have to pay not even \$3.00 for the medication that they were prescribed. But then they have to wait three months to get OHIP. But, if they get injured or sick many times that means that they are on their way out of the program. And even if they get sick they try to hide that from employers because they don't want to attract that kind of attention because they are here not to get sick, not to do anything else but to work. So many times if a migrant worker is asking to be sent to the doctor, then that means that he or she is quite, quite ill.

So we have worked on a number of different issues. We do advocacy work, educational work and legal work. We've intervened in cases, there was one case where a Guatemalan woman was repatriated for becoming pregnant on her farm. We intervened in that case and she was able to receive a settlement back to Guatemala, but will never again be able to come back to Canada most likely. So we've won those particular cases like that. But it's really hard to assess triumph when we operate on a different scale. We operate on the level of trust. We operate at the level of community. Sometimes when I've been involved in certain projects, when we've gotten funding for cars and gasoline and then were told by our funders to basically count how many people we've reached out to, how many people we met with. But our work isn't about 'counting' how many people we've reached out to. We think of victory more in terms of helping to change lives, about helping to remind people of their rights and of their power, supporting them in how they were already resisting problems in their work. It is about supporting people.

Sometimes I'm told by the migrant women, oh you're my angel, you're my this, and I'm like no. You are doing this, I am just supporting you. When I offer them advice, it's not advice that's coming from me as this expert, it's advice that's coming out of community knowledge, community knowledge that belongs to her and him and that I'm just giving back to them. I'm just mirroring back how community has trained me. So I think we assess victory in different way. But mostly it's the contacts, the connections that we've made to migrant workers, and have made them feel like they belong. That for me is the ultimate triumph.

Community and Transnational Organizing

Marlea: There is much more we could talk about in terms of the problems facing migrant workers and the work J4MW is doing to help address these issues, but I'd like to ask you about community and transnational organising. Of course you haven't been the first group to work to support migrant farmworkers. There have been numerous attempts to organise migrant farm workers throughout the decades in Canada. One of the things that makes J4MW unique seems to be your community organising approach, and the organisations' commitment to transnational organising. Tell us a little more about J4MW's

community organising approach.

Evelyn: So at the beginning we were accumulating community knowledge. So then having more knowledge about how this operated, about the communities where the workers were based, about their communities at work, and their support communities in their home country. We approached these workers as workers, as migrant workers, but also as members of a community here in Canada. In Leamington, for example, they are part of that community, whether the people in that community see it or not. And we started building bridges among migrant workers themselves, and strengthening community power by unifying workers because these programs are premised on dividing and conquering workers. The SAWP tries to divide workers into different groups, depending on the country they are from or the job they are doing. This way employers are able to extract more production from workers. They cannot immigrate here, they are only here temporarily and their stay here is dependent on continued work. So they constantly have to prove themselves at work. And employers will tell them, oh the Jamaicans are working faster, the Mexicans are working better. And even within one particular country workers also compete amongst themselves. So then our job has been to challenge this divide and conquer tactic, and to help build community.

So our work has been to organize across nationalities, across languages. This has become more difficult because of changes in national programs. In 2002 the federal government introduced the Low Skilled Workers Pilot Project. Its aim was to deal with labour shortages in jobs that do not require more than a high school education. To qualify, employers must demonstrate that they have been unable to hire Canadian nationals before they can only bring in foreign workers. So-called 'low skilled' workers are those whose occupations generally requires either a high school diploma or a maximum of two years of job-specific training. Farmwork is one occupation that fits this category, so more temporary farmworkers started to be brought into Canada under this program. Workers came from different countries that had been the case in the past.

And then the government introduced changes to this program, I think they came into effect in February 2007, and these changes extended the maximum period of time an employer can hire a foreign worker in a 'low skilled' job from 12 months to 24 months. Then, in 2011, the government put a new rule in place, the 'cumulative duration rule,' referred to as the 'four years in and four years out' rule. The rule devastated many workers because it meant that they could not migrate to work in Canada for consecutive years like the SAWP. They could only work for 4 years and then wait another 4 years more to re-apply with a temporary work visa. So we have seen lots of changes and new problems in the sector as a result of this program. One thing we have seen is an increase in temporary workers coming into Canada. For example, I recently saw government statistics that showed that in 2006 there were just over 170,000 temporary foreign workers living in Canada, which represents more than a 100 percent increase over the previous decade! That growth is incred-

ible. There was a growth in the number of temporary workers in agriculture, and also changes in where farmworkers were coming from. More temporary migrant workers coming into the agricultural sector from different countries. We also saw that employers started to use programs against one another. So, just when we thought we understood the dynamics in Leamington and in Simcoe and other rural areas in Ontario, then the dynamics started shifting and changing. And so we've had to stay on top of those changes and respond effectively to not recreate divide and conquer. Our work became more and more community focused. But it wasn't easy.

Yeah, so it was actually really challenging. Workers were coming in as migrant workers from a bunch of different countries. So, we started bringing in Thai translators and organizers. And then our work also extended to being more transnational. We realized that if you really want to understand and support the lives of migrant workers, we couldn't look at migrant workers in isolation. We had to look at migrant workers in relation to their families and their sending communities. So our work started to involve understanding the transnational aspects of these workers lives, we had to follow migrant workers back, so we understood what happens to wives and other family members left behind.

And on our trips to Mexico and our lives in rural Mexico we've encountered so many workers that were thrown away by Canada. These are stories we haven't necessarily heard here because they were already disposed of here in Canada. These workers had been sent back. But we would connect with them again in Mexico, in rural Mexico.

And then we also started working more with women. When I started working with women I realized that there is much more to the experiences of migrant workers that go beyond material types of conditions. I was able then able to delve into the emotional aspects of this work, because of gender constraints and boundaries that I had to hold being a woman working with migrant men. All of that I could let go when I was with migrant women. So they brought me into the sea of emotions and contradictions of life between here and there that I had not seen before as an organizer focused on just the material conditions. So we started focusing more on gender and on women workers, and started developing workshops specifically for migrant women that looked at their specific gender needs and looked at the social stigma they were migrating with because of the fact that they had left their children. That was what was communicated to them by their home communities, or by people here in Canada. They were told that they were irresponsible women and were socially punished for transgressing gender. Basically they were being emotionally critiqued for leaving their children to come to Canada and work. But men weren't criticized in this way. Women were being criticized for transgressing gender norms and ideals of what motherhood meant. And so they were carrying that stigma with them here in Canada. At the same time, they also often really felt bad about leaving their children behind and faced many challenges in caring for their children afar. But then being here means that they were not abandoning their children. They were here for their children, to provide for them. This was a job, this was income for

their families and they were providing for their children.

Our community approach is important, because workers are part of the community. Some of what I would say are our victories are also about the community and how workers are becoming more part of it. So when we started organizing in Leamington, the Mexican government was prompted to open up a consulate office in Leamington. And we've seen throughout rural Ontario where there's been communities that have never had any spaces or any community programs all of a sudden now create these for migrant workers because of the fight that we've been organizing there, they've responded with programs of their own. So I've seen, so that for me is a triumph and that shows the importance of our work but there is still so many more things to do, there is still a wide divide between the Canadians and the migrant workers. Even now in Leamington, even though there is a consulate office and a support centre, Canadians will just cross the other street if they see migrant workers walk by.

But these workers and transnational families are a part of Canadian agriculture. Our transnational work allows us to better understand what is happening here, and also trace and support workers as they move back and forth. Canada has been important to these workers, but we don't see that. For instance, I once met this one man, just as a fluke, back in Mexico. He had been coming to Canada for many, many years, but he said he was no longer called back to the program he was selling cacti in Mexico to survive, and he wasn't doing very well in terms of survival. And he opened up his wallet and then he showed me a business card from every single province where he had worked in Canada. And then I thought, you know, Canada, he's carrying, literally carrying Canada around. And I could see it in his wallet. Canada has clearly imprinted him. But where are his imprints here in Canada? Part of our work is about making the workers' lives more visible here in Canada, about making the imprint they have here more visible and about reaffirming this to migrant workers themselves, that yes, you are a part of our community.

Yes, so this work is transnational. It has to be. Thinking about our work, their work as transnational has allowed me to also understand workers' situation, and really envision migrant workers with a long trajectory, many generations of knowledge of farming that is being lost and that inspires me to see what kind of changes need to happen with our food systems. We can't just look at Canada in isolation. You know our food systems are transnational, are global. And so even if we reformed this program there is, you know, many more pieces that have to come together and those pieces are transnational and global. So it's just given us a more expansive visioning of how our work with an individual migrant worker in a particular community in rural Ontario is really connected to the whole.

Transnational Emotions

Marlea: Scholars and activists have begun talking about emotion in other forms of migrant work, but it is rare that we see emotion discussed in the literature or organising work focused on farmworkers. But, as you noted in

your talk, migrant men and women are constantly managing their emotion across and within borders. How does the work of J4MW take ‘transnational emotions’ into account in its work?

Evelyn: Yes, so there is much more to labour migration than meets the eye. In the past, as an organizer I was trained to focus on the material, more on workers’ experiences in the global economy today. I was trained in Central America working with various organizations; I was trained to see the obvious which many times is not so obvious. And I also had been exposed to different organizing models, ones that were not, you know, led by traditional unions, but mostly by the new global workers, and by women.

But I’ve kind of subdued some of those lessons until they were reawakened again when I started working with women more recently, and I started seeing that they carry with them all of these torn emotions because they are living transnational lives and are managing transnational households. Their life is partitioned in one place and another, and they are partitioned between different jurisdictions and different laws and different states, but they are also partitioned against different gender regimes. So there is much that they have to manage and then when I started looking more at their whole life in relation to their families, not just the small bits about their work here as farmworkers, I started seeing them in the wholeness of being a woman, of being a worker, of being a mother, of being a lover, and I saw how they become new people. They develop new subjectivities and new ways of seeing themselves by migrating back and forth. They have to devise strategies on how to love and care across borders. So, for a lot of the women that I have been witnessing over the years, they had to even develop a way to leave their children. Most of them leave their children in the middle of the night, so that way their children don’t see them leaving. I hadn’t considered any of that before, and I didn’t consider the way that, you know, children have to adapt and discipline themselves by these programs, by what capital is expecting certain families to adapt around.

And so, if we want to develop an effective social justice project, we have to look at how capital coerces emotions. And with a lot of the women, when I asked them about how they feel they, a lot of them say *se siente feo*, which literally means, “it feels ugly.” But that encapsulates a whole set of depressing and awful feelings. And when I asked them about more adjectives, to really get to the heart of what that actually means for them they communicated very few adjectives. And then I thought about how many Mexican women have been disciplined culturally to take on the self-sacrificing ideals of Mother Mary. So then that works perfectly with capital, when you just take on the weight of the world on your body, on your heart, on everything, and then you put yourself aside to support others. But then they do have all of these words, all of these adjectives, for resistance, for power, for strength to carry on. And so that’s what, that’s where a social justice project can emerge. Otherwise it would be completely incomplete.

I have been reminded of that many times! I remember once, I had to go

and speak to a migrant worker who was really adamant about speaking to me. He had recently had suffered an accident. He fell from the top bunk bed and broke his arm. So I thought he needed help with WSIB forms. And then I drove all the way to Leamington to see him, which is four hours away from where I live, and once I got there all he wanted to do was talk about his broken heart. And then I thought, I'm here for WSIB forms and I'm dealing with my own emotions. I'm like, I need a counsellor! You know, it really took a lot out of me to go there that day, because in our work we do care work too. That worker needed support that day, but not for his broken arm. It's radical care work. It's not like the work of a social worker, it is different, but we are doing care work. We have to think about workers' emotions, about transnational emotions. Maybe theirs' and ours too! We are out there at the edges of the global economy too, with workers, catching and helping deal with their transnational heartbreaks. And then I realized that day, okay, I'm here. What is my role? I had to put myself aside. So that was my emotional work too. Putting my emotions on the side and to really be there for that worker. And then I realized in that moment what my work was actually all about. It was about putting community back together again. Putting individuals, reaffirming strength within individuals and countering the fragmentation within ourselves that we experience because of this migrant work, and because of all the policies that regulate their lives without most workers having any say. So maybe that is what our work is really about, it is about collective work, and strengthening the individual in order to have stronger collectives across borders and beyond borders. But it is more than that.

Marlea: Yes, I remember you talking about this at CAPI's [Migration and Late Capitalism Conference](#) last summer. You said that community organising is not only about putting "the community back together again" within a capitalist system that exploits, displaces and fragments, but that it is about defying the illusion that we are incomplete and broken. This is an important and powerful argument. Can you expand on it for our readers by way of conclusion?

Evelyn: Thank you and just to end off, right now what I'm trying to do is find the right words to describe the type of work that we do and is required of us because I don't always have the words for emotions and the emotional labour and that care work. I think what's on my mind is the importance of storytelling. We see that in Min Sook Lee's new documentary, *Migrant Dreams*, where she was also able to have that wide lens, her film and her storytelling does what we try to do, to see workers holistically, to think about emotions and dreams. This is what we frequently leave out when we think about migrant work. We shouldn't, like her film shows.

So it is about putting the community back together again, but it is more than this. Capitalism has involved breaking us down. It's involved us having much more anxiety about survival, about being in this world. So, being a community organizer is countering all of that. And reclaiming our spirits and our

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minds to figure out how to do things differently, in a more humane way, in a more ethical way. So it's defying the illusion that we cannot do it. That you know, this is the only way. Actually there are multiple ways to live, and we could live in a world that doesn't depend on the exploitation of anybody.