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# Interlocking migrant illegalization with other markers of social location: The experiences of Mexican migrants moving and working in Toronto

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### SYNOPSIS

This paper is interested in placing the literature on social reproduction in conversation with that of migrant illegalization—the identification of certain migrants as not welcome in a nation-state both through discursive and material processes. More specifically, I am interested in how migrant illegalization interlocks with other forms of social location to designate certain bodies as open to exploitation and exclusion. The paper focuses on a case study of Mexican migrants with precarious immigration status and their experiences in navigating the embodied process of moving through and working in the city of Toronto. I propose that the interlocking of migrant illegalization and the profiling of bodies as exploitable and suspicious limits precarious status migrants' – those that do not have permanent residence or citizenship – ability to access social goods, decent work and the networks required to improve their social context.

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### Introduction

In the past decade, Canada has experienced a narrowing of access to permanent residence due to immigration policy changes. This has led to a reconfiguration of the im/migrant population present in the country, most notably through an increased number of precarious status migrants (Goldring, Berinstein, & Bernhard, 2009)—migrants without access to full permanent status such as permanent residence or citizenship including temporary foreign workers, international students, refugee claimants, tourists, non-status migrants, individuals with expired visas, and applicants for permanent residence under a sponsorship or humanitarian and compassionate applications. This increase parallels an increase in immigration enforcement (Chan, 2005; Pratt, 2005). And, these trends are not unique to Canada. Shifts in global economic, political and social structures have led to increased migration flows, restrictions to secure immigration status and increased enforcement across the world, particularly for racialized and working class people (Anderson,

2010; Calavita, 2005; De Genova & Peutz, 2010; Ellermann, 2008; Willen, 2007). These changes also influence the internal borders that exist within the nation-state and that precarious status migrants confront in their day-to-day lives.

Given this context, this article uses the concept of social reproduction to examine processes whereby social exclusion is produced and reproduced for precarious status migrants in Toronto, Canada. I argue that such processes depend not only on migrant illegalization – the identification of migrants as not fully belonging to a locale because of their immigration status and documentation – they also interlock with other factors of social location to limit precarious status migrants' ability to access social goods and decent work.

I propose that putting the literatures on immigration status and social reproduction in conversation with each other can provide new avenues to understand how social exclusion is co-constituted by complex social factors. Furthermore, paying attention to social location, which in this case involves bodies and their documents in place, is important in understanding how migrant illegalization and

social reproduction interlock with each other. As [Hepworth \(2014\)](#) argues, citizenship (status) should be understood as

an emergent condition that is emplaced and embodied, rather than as simply a collection of rights to be possessed or endowed. This is not to deny the importance of legal status to the ways in which one inhabits the city (and therefore the nation-state), but show how this status is modulated in the everyday to constitute a range of legitimately and illegitimately present non-citizen subjects. (p. 2)

In order to illustrate my argument, the paper focuses on a case study of Mexican migrants with precarious immigration status and how they navigate through, and work in, the city of Toronto.

### **Interlocking social reproduction and migrant illegalization: Bodies, work and social services**

Social reproduction is an assemblage of actors, institutions, practices and processes that are organized through relations of power at different scales. It refers to the “material social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis and through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed” ([Katz, 2001, p. 709](#)). This involves biological reproduction, material and psychological sustenance ([Liladrie, 2010, p. 59](#)), “claims to rootedness” and place-making ([Smith & Winders, 2008](#)), as well as the reproduction of social class. Social reproduction is not limited to the household or private spaces. As [Verschuur \(2013\)](#) notes “an important part [of social reproduction] is realized elsewhere in other institutions—public, associative, or private” (p. 155). Similarly, [Vosko and Clark \(2009\)](#) state that “social reproduction occurs at the level of the household through unpaid work, at the level of the state through government policies and programs and at the inter-state level via processes such as immigration” (p. 27). Social reproduction is also not static and is affected by other processes. For instance, scholars have identified a crisis in social reproduction in contemporary times due to neoliberal shifts that include the disinvestment of social resources and the shift to flexibility in working conditions ([Fudge & Vosko, 2003; Martin, 2010](#)).

Social reproduction interlocks with migration in several ways. One example is that for adult migrants, a bulk of their social reproduction takes place in their context of departure, producing a net gain for the context of arrival ([Katz, 2001, p. 710](#)). Another example is that many migrants, particularly those who are racialized, have difficulties engaging in their trained profession, affecting their ability to reproduce their daily sustenance as well as their class in the context of departure ([Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2005](#)). A final example involves the sending of remittances, which are often viewed as a source of development (and thus social reproduction) for countries in the Global South ([De Hass, 2010](#)).

I am interested in one specific aspect of the intersection between migration and social reproduction: precarious immigration status and its relationship to the (re)production of social inequality and exclusion. More specifically, I am interested in how this reproduction of inequality occurs

through migrant illegalization, the material and discursive practice of identifying certain subjects as not belonging to the nation-state—or only partially and temporarily belonging in the case of temporary residence status.

Part of this process involves paying attention to the specificity of precarious status migrant bodies. While migrant illegalization and precarity are useful to understand the experiences and barriers of migrants without full immigration status, they cannot provide a full picture of how those migrants experience social exclusion and inequality in space and time. Therefore, I propose that we pay attention to how the identification of bodies in space affects how social reproduction and migrant illegalization interlock. This involves the categorization of bodies through power relations. That is, *how* bodies are embedded in social relations influences how they are identified, interpreted and acted upon. As [Haraway \(1990\)](#) notes “[b]odies are maps of power and identity” (p. 222). Similarly, [Butler \(1990\)](#) proposes that bodies are constructions, marked by particular discourses (p. 8). She also notes that “the body is a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power” ([Butler, 1989, p. 601](#)). For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in the interlocking of specific systems of social location onto bodies, particularly race, class, nationality (read through identity documents), gender and sexual orientation. These interlockings, mapped onto bodies and space, produce material effects.

In terms of race, im/migrants are often constructed as racialized outsiders ([Ahmed, 2000; Jiwani, 2006; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010; Thobani, 2007](#)). Similarly, racialized peoples are often categorized as im/migrants ([Aujla, 2000](#)). This double process of hierarchization is augmented when it comes to precarious status migrants because of their association as “fraudulent,” “bogus,” “jumping the queue” ([Pratt & Valverde, 2002](#)) and other modes of representing membership through formal status and perceptions of deservingness ([Willen, 2012](#)). There is also a class component. [Dauvergne \(2008\)](#) alludes to the interlocking between discourses of race, class and immigration status when she states, “[w]hile any number of people may infringe migration laws and regulations, the label adheres better to some than to others. We imagine illegals as poor and brown and destitute” (p. 16).

Similarly, identity documents like passports, which denote nationality ([Torpey, 2000](#)), as well as driver's licenses, work permits and immigration warrants help categorize individuals within populations to better track them and identify those who do not belong. These modes of identification become assembled with bodily markers, for instance through the use of racial profiling or the identification of someone as “illegal” because of how they look, sound and the types of documents they carry.

Gender and sexual orientation are also important ways that bodies are marked as not belonging or partially belonging vis-à-vis citizenship ([Bosniak, 2006; Cantú, Naples, & Vidal-Ortiz, 2009](#)). For example, migrant women's bodies are often used as targets of exclusionary behavior. Such practices often draw on the interlockings of gender, race, class and immigration status ([Inda, 2002; Thobani, 1999](#)). Similarly, queer migrant bodies experience exclusionary practices because of their immigration status, sexual orientation as well as

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