The Politics of Care and *Criar la Vida*: Precarious and Non Status Latin American Women Building their Lives in Toronto

Nira Elgueta Faundez

Supervised by Dr. Liette Gilbert

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Abstract

My research explores and maps out the resistance processes and territories of racialized, Latin American migrant women with precarious or non-status while examining their settlement efforts, survival, and political actions in the Toronto Area. This research aims to bring academic visibility to the agency mutual aid and community building and networks of support that, against all odds, allows them to build their own version of citizenship and belonging despite restrictive migration systems. Utilizing a qualitative methodological approach, my research weaves deep thematic narrative life histories collected through extensive qualitative interview and a critical social cartography developed during collaborative focus groups to map the counter-geographies of Toronto that precarious-status migrant women inhabit. My research pays attention to the narratives of the migrant women to understand how they resist these processes in their aim remain autonomous and citizens of a city on their own terms.

Foreword

Throughout my adult life in Canada, I have witnessed firsthand the experiences, negotiations, wins and challenges that migrant women with precarious status encounter daily in Toronto. Despite the systemic abandonment, the neoliberal models of migration and reproductive economy that exploit their bodies and territories, their knowledge, and their labour, I have also seen them organize, contest, resist, and reclaim their spaces for joy, knowledge, and communal resilience over and over again. It was only natural for me to want to spend the last two years deeply involved in theoretical and field work to understand how they survive deeply.

This Major Paper brings together the knowledge I acquired to meet the requirements of the Master of Environmental Studies. This research meets my Plan of Study's area of concentration and learning components, including the requirement to complete the ESE Diploma. The objectives in my Plan of Study were to understand the intersections of gendered migrations and the creation of spaces of care and activism built by precarious-status women and their allies to sustain life under global neoliberal systems of oppression that aim to invisibilize their knowledge and contributions; to truly honour the contributions of the migrant women, and to fulfill the requirements of the ESE Diploma, this research is positioned to amplify and share their knowledge using "talk to learn" methodology . My research's theoretical and methodological foundations are grounded in Latin American and decolonial feminist epistemology, critical migration studies and the intersections of gender, race, immigration status, politics of care and mutual aid.

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To all the Latin American women who manage to create and sustain life despite the difficulties and systems of oppression, to all the women who care for, work, create, and nurture life, those who cross borders and safeguard peace, sowing knowledge and a future wherever they are: to all of you, thank you very much.

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Introduction

My research explores and maps out the resistance processes and territories of racialized, Latin American migrant women with precarious or non-status (hereafter migrant women) while examining their settlement efforts, survival, and political actions in the Toronto Area. This research aims to bring academic visibility to the agency mutual aid and community building and networks of support that, against all odds, allows them to build their own version of citizenship and belonging despite restrictive migration systems. Since migrating to this country, I have witnessed how migrant women from Latin American countries, residing in Toronto, sustain life for them and their community, from the margins. Resisting erasure with love joy and communal accountability — this Major Paper hopes to honour their experiences.

This study investigates the intersection of the Canadian immigration system and neoliberal urban, social, and economic planning, observing how these structural forces actively engineer what Goldring and Landolt (2013) conceptualize as the structural production of non-citizenship. Goldring and Landolt ‘s (2013) work and the work of other critical migration scholars is not only treating legal precarity as a localized administrative anomaly, but it is also to capture the systemic efforts of contemporary nation-building that deliberately strips racialized women of their legal rights while simultaneously relying on the extraction of their reproductive labor. My research pays attention to the narratives of the migrant women themselves and understand how they resist these processes in their aim remain autonomous and citizens of a city on their own terms.

As theorized by Silvia Federici (2012), the survival and accumulation of capital under capitalist modernity depend fundamentally on the violent degradation, exploitation, and invisibilization of women's reproductive and care work. Within the hyper-commodified terrain of the contemporary global city, the trajectories of the migrant women who participated in this research project reveal a highly calculated process of systematic deskilling and identity erasure. The host labor market, working in harmony with the always changing migration policies, operates to systematically strip migrant women of their previous professional identities, educational credentials, and histories of personal autonomy -- leaving them to face administrative cracks and barriers for their survival.

Consequently, migrant women are systematically channeled into highly precarious, deeply gendered, and structurally invisible survival jobs within the private domestic, cleaning, and care sectors (Gilbert & Sotomayor, 2023). This targeted exclusion cannot be categorized merely as an economic deficit or a temporary friction of systemic integration. Instead, the

structural denial of citizenship functions as an active mechanism of alienation that purposefully controls the mobility, labor power, and social position of racialized bodies.

Transitoriedad, Internal Borders, and the Rejection of Passive Victimhood

The violence experienced by migrant women experience affects not only their administrative and bureaucratic status, but it also deeply affects their mental, emotional, and physical health through the chronic violence of *transitoriedad* (permanence in transience) — the deeply traumatic, ongoing condition of navigating a hostile, state-sanctioned legal limbo. This psychological and existential displacement functions as an internal border regime, disciplining, fracturing, and exhausting the minds and bodies of migrant women as they navigate years of administrative silence.

Yet, and this very particular "yet", is the impetus for this research. Rather than allowing the state to freeze their existences in a state of suspended animation, the participants categorically refuse the passive position of victims, numbers, or mere orphans of state-managed social assistance. They actively transfigure the existential anxiety of a legal limbo into a space of immediate, defiant commitment to life, space, and future. As one participant firmly asserts when evaluating her path to survival:

> "If it's like this, I am not moving… I need to gain something… I am not going to stay in this country with my suitcases ready to go. I have rights and will fight for them, access to health, a god job, I want to live my life here" (Interviewee 3).

This declaration highlights that instead of treating legal precarity as a state of passive waiting or paralyzing fear, this participant frames her trajectories as active, deliberate projects of territorial reclamation, material negotiation, and autonomous life-building.

By claiming their presence on their own terms, migrant women actively challenge the dominant paternalistic narratives within traditional migration literature that center the crushing power of the nation-state and its border regimes. While mainstream frameworks frequently reduce the non-status migrant to a tragic figure devoid of political capacity, the lived experiences of migrant women demonstrate an ongoing refusal to remain static. Their day-to-day choices represent a sophisticated negotiation with hostile institutions, balancing the necessity of securing immediate livelihoods with an unyielding demand for dignity, safe housing, and health. This active stance redefines the very meaning of survival in the global city, establishing that even under the constant threat of state-sanctioned erasure, the power to define their trajectory, protect their family, define and build their community and assert their right to exist remains anchored within their right to build their own framework of a citizenship.

Unmasking the *"Fachadas de Inclusión"* through Mutual Aid and Care Activism

Another focus of this research involves unmasking the institutional frameworks that, in claim to serve all migrants and vulnerable populations. This research demonstrates that the limited support precarious-status migrants receive within state-sanctioned boundaries — such as formal settlement agencies, conditional work permits, and state-funded community hubs — offers remarkably little meaningful stability. Instead, under the weight of rigid neoliberal bureaucratic metrics, narrow eligibility criteria, and intrusive surveillance protocols, these institutional environments frequently function as systemic limbos. Rather than providing genuine paths to stability or human dignity, these formal sites operate through an exclusionary logic of structural abandonment that manages and disciplines poverty while actively screening out non-status individuals. Recognizing the inherent violence of these frameworks, migrant women and their grassroots allies systematically subvert these institutional spaces from within, transforming physical and digital infrastructures into strategic launching pads for parallel, informal networks of collective survival (Cahuas, 2019).

In the cracks and margins of official programming, through everyday micropolitics such as word-of-mouth communication (*boca a boca*), the sharing of alternative resources and the small spaces available among the formal institutions, that are often based on the cracks on the system and the discretion of front line workers, informal social events, and autonomous entrepreneurial fairs, migrant women trigger material and emotional lifelines (*salvavidas*) to support each other. These horizontal spaces restore their dignity and humanity, directly countering the systematic erasure and lack of recognition experienced before an Anglo-dominant bureaucracy. By collectivizing their migratory mourning and transforming individual trauma into a source of wealth and personal validation and building their belonging to the group to guide newcomers (*cuidarnos entre nosotros*), the participants transition from passive care receivers into active producers of community infrastructure, embodying a radical practice of care activism (Tungohan, 2023).

These mutual aid strategies thoroughly disrupt individualistic, market-driven models of integration and resilience heavily pushed by state agencies. Instead, their actions are deeply grounded in alternative, ancestral, and transnational worldviews centered on *criar la vida* (nurturing and sustaining life) and the *bien común* (the common good). Following Verónica Gago's (2019) framework on la *potencia feminista* (feminist power) and popular economies, migrant women and their allies politicize the domestic and the reproductive, displacing capitalist market productivity and individualistic competition in favor of collective well-being, horizontal networks of care, and autonomous mutual protection.

Decolonial Politics of Belonging and the Right to the City

Ultimately, this alternative social infrastructure serves as a profound mechanism for survival and political mobilization in the direct wake of systemic failure. As Dean Spade (2020) emphasizes, mutual aid is not mere charity or a temporary bandage for capitalist crises; it is a horizontal, coordinated project of collective defense born out of the necessity to survive an indifferent or hostile state apparatus. Mutual aid networks do not ask for permission from the state, nor do they rely on its funding. Instead, mutual aids build sustainable infrastructures of solidarity that directly meet people's material needs while simultaneously cultivating shared political consciousness and mobilization.

When mapping their collective desires, spatial knowledge, and self-directed systems of support through participatory action research, the migrant women who participated in this study explicitly refuse to detach social justice from physical spatiality. They reject the spatial and social isolation imposed on them by the Canadian state, demanding structural equity, universal accessibility, and an anti-capitalist approach to urban governance.

In doing so, this group of migrant women explicitly claim their 'right to the city,' prefiguring a decolonial politics of belonging (Cahuas & Arraiz Matute, 2021) that actively reject Toronto's hyper-individualistic driven urban geography. By occupying and repurposing physical spaces to foster communal life, migrant women replace a market-driven logic of isolation with a communal logic of solidarity, healing, and collective spatial production. This research underscores that the efforts of these migrant women and their allies represent far more than individually developed defensive coping mechanism against the border regime; they represent a transformative, vision and model of how they want to live the city. They are actively building the world they wish to see within the damage created by the old, demonstrating that true community resilience is found in the radical, unyielding commitment to protect, nurture, and sustain life on the margins.

This research paper begins with a unique theoretical framework that I have named "Migrant Women's Journeys." This framework represents a journey of self-exploration and theorizing, shaped by the participants' own experiences. "Migrant Women's Journeys" comprises five themes. These themes emerged from an initial analysis of the collected data, which included eight interviews and one focus group. It aims to capture participants' voices (all translations are mine). The paper then proceeds to four core sections stemming from the five themes, analyzing them and grounding them in the literature. A short conclusion and significance of the research follow.

Theoretical Frameworks

To analyze the migration trajectories, survival strategies, and grassroots infrastructures constructed by racialized Latin American migrant women in the Toronto Area, this study builds a multi-dimensional theoretical framework. Rather than relying solely on mainstream, state-centric migration theories that view migration and settlement through top-down, individualistic assimilation standards or narrow metrics of economic productivity, my research sought to establish an alternative conceptual scaffold. This framework is rooted in three intersecting theoretical pillars: 1) Latin American and diasporic decolonial feminist epistemology; 2) a localized intersectionality and critical migration framework, and 3) a deconstruction of neoliberal resilience discourses. Together, these lenses transform our understanding of precarious-status migrants from passive, displaced individuals into active, knowledge-producing, and place-making subjects of urban resistance.

Latin American and Diasporic Decolonial Feminist Epistemology: *Cuerpo-Territorio*, Communal Care, and *Buen Vivir*

The primary pillar of this framework draws from Latin American and diasporic decolonial feminist epistemologies, which deliberately center the concepts of *cuerpo-territorio* (body-territory), communal relationality, and lived experience over colonial, patriarchal, and state-sanctioned metrics of citizenship. Traditional Western frameworks frequently link an individual's worth and right to belong directly to their administrative status or economic output within a capitalist system. Under these dominant structures, the value assigned to an individual's contributions exists in a direct, restrictive relationship with their citizenship rights — both nationally and, increasingly, within a globalized context.

In contrast, decolonial feminism argues that an individual's true value, belonging, knowledge, and authority stem directly from the lived realities of those resisting and residing on the geopolitical and urban margins, drawing from deep traditions that critique extractivism, coloniality, and state power. By positioning the body as the first territory of defense and reclamation, this lens reveals that the physical presence of non- and precarious status women in Toronto is not a state of passive waiting, but an active, localized struggle to claim space and assert bodily autonomy against a hostile state apparatus, they are not paralyzed in fear or “hiding under the table”, they are, in constant internal dialogue and agency, building and nurturing their relationships.

To fully unpack this spatial reclamation, we must destabilize dominant, masculine, and Western cartographies that reduce “territory” to physical borders or territorial government bodies. As Zaragocin (2019) and Zaragocin & Caretta (2021) theorize, territory is an

embodied reality. The decolonial feminist methodological and ontological category of *cuerpo-territorio* (Mies et al., 1988, as cited by Gago, 2018, p.93) suggest that the body and the land are inseparable spaces. For racialized migrant women, this means that knowledge, history, and trauma are not left or erased behind at the border; rather, knowledge and experiences are part of a deep body memory that travels and crosses borders with people. When navigating a hostile immigration regime, the non- or precarious-status body is subjected to gendered geographies of elimination, systemic efforts by the settler-colonial capitalist state to render racialized, non-status bodies invisible, exploitable, and disposable. This objectification and dehumanization of migrant women's bodies is central to the circulation and accumulation of capital and power in the Global North.

When applied to the informal networks mapped by the non- and precarious-status migrant women, this decolonial lens highlights the practices of radical care and alternative socio-ecological structures as deliberate rejections of capitalist exploitation and state neglect. Much like the territorial defense frameworks seen in Latin American anti-mining struggles led by Indigenous women, or the feminist brigades that sustain life amidst urban crises, such as natural disasters, internal conflicts, and wars, the urban survival strategies documented in this research, hope to constitute a powerful form of spatial defense and transformation (Satizábal, P., & Zurita, M. de L. M. (2025). Non- and precarious-status migrant women challenge hyper-individualistic urban spaces by prioritizing collective well-being, mutual aid, and reciprocal emotional support under the logic of the *bien común* (the common good). The alternative infrastructures organized by these non- and precarious-status migrant women, often manifested through precarious jobs (such as cleaning companies, craft networks, and informal food sales), and cemented by their presence and leadership among stablished networks (such as faith, and community-based programs) embody a profound logic of popular feminism. (I later expand on the relationships that exist between precarious status women and stablished community and faith spaces).

These practices directly dialogue with the indigenous and popular-feminist epistemologies of *buen vivir* (living well in community) and *criar la vida* (reciprocally nurturing life). As Chassagne (2019) argues, *buen vivir* is not merely an alternative path to “sustainable development” — which remains bound to Eurocentric, neoliberal ideas of linear growth. Instead, *buen vivir* represents an entirely different ontological paradigm rooted in harmony, community equilibrium, and a deep relational connection between all living beings (Chassagne, 2019). In the Andean cosmovision of reciprocal rearing *crianza mutua* (mutual nurturing), humans are incomplete beings engaged in a continuous conversation with other forms of life, meaning that “We all are involved in the life of everyone, we are all invested in

the sustainability of life". Or succinctly put in the North American Indigenous Cosmovisions, to all my relations.

By shifting the focus to an ecological and social economy that prioritizes care over capital, and the responsibility we all have to *"criar y sustentar la vida"* (to create and sustain life), we recognize that the social fabric of the city is sustained by these very processes of social reproduction. By analyzing these actions through a decolonial feminist lens, we can see that as migrant women protect and navigate their migration trajectories, they openly dismantle the isolation imposed by the border regime and rewrite the terms of belonging in the global city.

Intersectionality and Critical Migration Studies: The Illusion of Sanctuary and the "Non-Pathway" Migrant.

To fully map out the elaborate systems of exclusion and resistance that shape the lives of migrant women, this study utilizes an intersectional and critical migration framework. This approach examines how gender, race, class, and immigration status are not separate, isolated categories of identity, but co-constitutive forces that shape systemic oppression and localized resistance within the settler-colonial state. Critical migration studies emphasize that migration is not merely a single movement across geographical borders, but an ongoing negotiation of identity, belonging, and survival within legal regimes that actively produce vulnerability and enforce structural non-citizenship (Gilbert & Sotomayor, 2025; Goldring & Landolt, 2013). For precarious- and non-status Latin American women in Toronto, immigration regimes function to explicitly restrict access to the basic human rights, healthcare services, and protections readily available to citizens a systemic inequality that became impossible to ignore during the compounding crises of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crucially, this framework addresses a significant gap in current Canadian migration scholarship by theorizing the experiences of precarious-status migrants and recognizing their survival strategies as legitimate popular knowledge. This theoretical move explicitly contests much of the established migration literature, which disproportionately focuses on highly institutionalized, state-sanctioned temporary labor streams, such as live-in caregivers, seasonal agricultural workers, temporary hospitality staff, or international students. While these groups face immense structural exploitation, their presence is recognized, institutionalized, and organized within specific political economies that aim to produce cheap always available disposable and not regulated labour. As Federici (2016) emphasizes, capitalism — and by extension, the contemporary Canadian economy — fundamentally relies on a massive, entirely unrecognized layer of gendered, invisible reproductive labor to sustain its workforce. The state apparatus not only systemically

invisibilizes the interconnected networks and support systems that sustain the lives of precarious-status women it also invisibilize their labour. The participants in this study represent this hidden layer: they are precarious-status women whose labor in the domestic, cleaning, and private care sectors, alongside their labor to build up a structure of support for them and their families; such education, access to health, gender-based violence and safe, long term housing, occurs completely outside formal state frameworks, temporary visa streams, or organized labor and migration pathways. They only rely on their community to secure the minimum social frameworks of support.

Furthermore, this framework interrogates the physical and institutional setting where these struggles take place: the 'sanctuary city.' While Toronto promoted a public image of inclusive municipal protection through its 'Access Without Fear' policy, stablished in 2013, Gilbert and Sotomayor (2023) demonstrate that there is a profound, violent disconnect between municipal rhetoric and local reality. This planning deficit is not an accidental administrative failure; rather, social insecurity remains a persistent and structurally planned feature of everyday life for irregularized people under contemporary immigration policies. Gilbert & Sotomayor (2023) expose the severe limits of this framework by noting that:

> "At present, no status people are caught in overlapping paradoxes of regularisation, access, jurisdiction, and regularisation. We have illustrated how invisibility, hierarchy, and precarity are built and sustained as a constant feature of everyday non-status life despite some basic services and performances of solidarity and resistance" (p.17).

This condition produces what Goldring and Landolt (2013) conceptualize as precarious legal status — a state of perpetual administrative transit and multiple jeopardy, where the threat of deportation, wage theft, and denial of basic services remains ever-present.

By applying an intersectional lens — and deliberately shifting from a deficit framework of 'lack' to a knowledge-based perspective — this study shows how migrant women leverage their shared exclusion to build "knowledge, resistance and support pods" around the city that form horizontal alliances between the cracks and voids in the system (Dean, 2020, p. 12-16). Lacking formal state recognition, women turn their everyday domestic networks into decentralized support systems. In doing so, they perform what Gilbert and Sotomayor (2023) term "non-status citizenship" and what Cahuas and Arraiz Matute (2021) describe as a Latinx decolonial politics of belonging. Rather than waiting for state-sanctioned regularization, they claim a decolonial, relational citizenship at the primary scale of everyday life, proving that localized resistance thrives even without official organizational structures.

Critique of Neoliberal Resilience Discourses: Contesting the "Celebration-Erasure" Binary

The final pillar of my theoretical framework offers a critical deconstruction of neoliberal resilience discourses, which have increasingly dominated state policies, social service programming, and mainstream humanitarian frameworks. Neoliberal governance frequently uses the concept of "resilience" as an ideological tool to shift structural accountability away from failed state systems and onto the individual body of the marginalized subject. However, when invisible, women turn to their allies to build resilience for themselves. As critically analyzed by Evans and Reid (2014) in *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously*, the neoliberal state demands that vulnerable populations become 'resilient' — meaning they must adapt to, absorb, and quietly survive systemic violence, economic deprivation, and state abandonment without demanding structural change. Under this dominant paradigm, a migrant's capacity to endure systemic trauma and legal exclusion is celebrated as an empowering personal virtue.

Feminist and decolonial scholars argue that this glorification of endurance normalizes exploitation, unpaid care work, and emotional labor while imposing expectations that migrant women should persist without meaningful state support, as stated by Federici (2016). This framing labels structural abandonment as an individual responsibility, effectively allowing state institutions to evade structural accountability. This study directly challenges this violent "celebration-erasure" binary (reference), which outwardly praises migrant women for their 'strength' and 'adaptability' while simultaneously erasing the systemic political violence, gendered racism, and deep trauma tied to their struggle. Celebrating their endurance effectively sanitizes the violence of the border regime and excuses the state's retreating welfare systems.

This research refuses to romanticize the participants' suffering as individual resilience. Instead, following traditions of popular feminism and Dean Spade's (2020) work on mutual aid, we reconceptualize these communal networks, composed of cultural groups, mutual-aid collectives, and grassroots advocates, not as passive coping mechanisms, but as political infrastructures of resilience. As demonstrated by Dalla Costa and James (2017), and reinforced by contemporary care activism, women's collective labor forms the backbone of community survival, articulating care as a form of social reproduction that is both deeply political and inherently subversive, they relied on and perform what others have identified as communal resilience.

When precarious-status migrant women engage in affective practices such as *arropar* (to wrap up, shelter, or protect one another), they are staging a decolonial act of political resistance. They are openly refusing the isolation, competition, and systematic erasure demanded by the neoliberal city. Crucially, as Eve Tuck (2009) conceptualizes, this

architecture of care must extend into a profound reclamation of joy, desire, and collective triumph. Rather than pathologizing migrant women as perpetual victims of a broken bureaucracy, their communal resilience and intricate support networks demand that we look closely at their organized capacity for self-determination and re-existence.

Methodology & Research Design

My research asks: What forms of collective knowledge and solidarity do precarious- and non-status Latin American women in Toronto create through their community networks? and at different stages of their migratory journey?

This study adopts a qualitative, feminist, and decolonial methodological framework rooted in constructivist epistemologies. The research design is intentionally structured to integrate two qualitative methods: narrative analysis of one-on-one semi-structured interviews and participatory action research (PAR) asset mapping. Rather than claiming a detached, universal objectivity, this framework explicitly situates the researcher. I transparently disclose my own personal background, identity, and positionality as an active political choice to contextualize how knowledge is co-constructed within this project. For more than fifteen years, I have worked, advocated, and shared spaces with migrant women navigating the cyclical, violent nature of multiple forms of precarious migration status in Canada. I have witnessed firsthand how migrant women invest immense emotional, financial, and social capital to secure their basic right to remain in Toronto. My alignment with these grassroots spaces grants me an insider-outsider status; it provides me with deep communal trust while demanding a rigorous, ongoing ethical reflexivity to ensure that the narratives shared are honored, protected, and never co-opted, and the profound desire to learn more.

My research design therefore fosters a dynamic process of “talking to learn,” where tensions, emerging knowledge, and profound insights are openly shared, mutualized, and negotiated between the researcher and the collaborators. Within this dialogic space, silence is not treated as a passive absence of sound or a communicative failure. Instead, silence functions here as a vital epistemological space — a structured realm of guided reflection that allows participants to sit with their experiences, locate their perspectives in time and place, and theorize their collective learnings. Ultimately, this crucial element of temporality bridges individual and community reflection, allowing a singular, deeply introspective voice to emerge from the lived experiences of those who are actively seeking, producing, and sharing knowledge.

Participants for this study were recruited between January and April 2026 using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques, leveraging deep-seated, established community connections to distribute the research recruitment flyer. Participants were selected based on three core criteria: (1) their current or past precarious immigration status; (2) their active level of informal or formal community involvement; and (3) their distinct motivations or needs for migrating to and remaining in Canada. For more details regarding participants' profile and demographics, please see apendix A and B.

While the initial call for interview participants yielded a strong response from more than 15 women living with precarious status, a deliberate selection process was applied to ensure analytical depth. Ultimately, 11 one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data of 9 of the interviews was included on this research. The group of 9 interviews, was divided into two strategic groups:

- Five (5) migrant women chosen based on their shared background as Latin American newcomers who have resided in Canada with precarious or non-status for a duration of 4 to 8 years, and who participate actively in grassroots care networks; and
- Four (4) service providers and advocates who are also migrant women themselves, selected to provide systemic, frontline perspectives on institutional gaps, funding cuts, and advocacy challenges within the GTA.

All fieldwork was conducted in the city of Toronto between late January and mid-April 2026, transitioning organically across different qualitative and participatory formats to capture the nuances of community resilience, mutual aid, and spatial resistance.

At the conclusion of the individual interview phase, I was invited to engage with a self-directed network of feminist migrant collectives composed of Latin American women who have resided in Canada with precarious status for extended periods. This organic group meets regularly to conduct advocacy work, lead training and awareness campaigns, and foster deep community solidarity. Their weekly sessions blend material support with community care, featuring shared meals alongside the distribution of vital information regarding food security, healthcare access, migrant rights, and immigration policy updates.

Given the high relevance of this collective to my theoretical framework on mutual aid, members were invited to participate in a focus group session dedicated to participatory action research asset mapping. This workshop was specifically designed to visually and narratively deconstruct the emotional mutual aid, labor practices, and grassroots resources they collectively create to survive and navigate Toronto's hyper-individualistic urban landscape.

A total of eight (8) women of various migration statuses and Latin American countries of origin participated in the mapping workshop session. However, to maintain a rigorous focus and alignment with the core scope of my research, a final data-bounding selection was made for the analysis phase.[1] To ensure the research remained strictly focused on the lived experiences of structural illegality, data analysis was selectively restricted to the testimonies and map contributions of four (4) specific participants who explicitly met the precarious or non-status criteria.

There are ethical considerations given the acute vulnerability of non-status participants facing systemic criminalization, detention, and deportation, and in order to respect their autonomy and right to choose where to live. To protect the participants' safety and ensure absolute anonymity, alphanumerical codes were assigned to all collaborators. All quotes from interviews and focus groups have therefore been entirely anonymized. Anonymity here should not be understood as robbing participants of their individual agencies but, from ethical limits, emerges a collective voice.

In the case of the one-on-one interviews, informed consent was secured and recorded verbally via Zoom at the beginning of each session. Well in advance, all interview participants received a recruitment flyer, the research consent form and the interview package, followed by a personal phone call to clarify questions and establish rapport. For most interview respondents, building trust and connection required more than two weeks of ongoing conversation and information sharing to ensure that full, comfortable, and well-informed consent was achieved.

For the focus group, connection was established transparently through one of the network's trusted leaders, who acted as the primary point of contact pre- and post-mapping activity. The collective participants provided written consent on paper, the entire process, from first contact to the actual focus group session, took approximately four weeks of conversation, organizing and collective planning, and clarifications. While a four-week planning period for a four-hour workshop may seem extensive within research timelines, this deliberate pacing was an ethical necessity to counter extractive academic practices and to secure trust. This relational approach directly manifested in the high quality of the session and the immense generosity of the participants, who not only engaged deeply with the mapping of their support systems but expressed genuine enjoyment and emotional release during the session. As a researcher, I am deeply humbled by their participation, wisdom, and invaluable contributions to this project.

[1] In the case of one-on-one interviews, the data from participants holding work or study permits was excluded. For focus groups, the data from participants who identified as allies and advocates was excluded.

All interviews and the focus group session were conducted entirely in Spanish. This linguistic choice was fundamental not only to preserve the emotional nuances, cultural idioms, and authentic expressions of the participants, but also to bypass the systemic linguistic barrier they face. Given their precarious-status, women are structurally denied formal access to state-funded language training (such as free Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada (LINC) programs). Conducting the sessions in their native tongue was therefore an act of methodological care and accessibility.

All sessions were audio-recorded (with permission), transcribed verbatim, and coded using Taguette software. I utilized thematic and narrative analysis to identify emerging patterns of care activism, mutual aid infrastructures, and collective resilience. To preserve the integrity of the analysis and honor the authentic phrasing of the participants' narratives, the entire coding process was also conducted strictly in Spanish. Only upon completing the qualitative analysis, I assume the political and epistemological responsibility of translating these narratives into English for the writing of this Major Paper. During this process, I treated the translation of citations, quotes, and narratives not as a neutral, technical task, but as an act of decolonial cultural interpretation that honors the subversive knowledge produced in another tongue by migrant women in the margins of Toronto. Consequently, this paper contains key concepts and quotes in Spanish, with an as-close-as-possible translation to English.

Once all the interviews and the focus groups were completed, the data collected to be used for this Major Paper was reviewed and selected. Codes for analysis were created based on a preliminary reading of the interviews and the three major themes or spatio-temporal narratives from the participants: i) care to migrate; ii) care to settle, and iii) care to stay and share. Furthermore, a number of codes were identified that ultimately gave life to five thematic categories: 1) care, belonging and emotional support; 2) community networks and solidarity; 3) negotiating survival and resource navigation; 4) when the formal gives space for the informal to happen; and finally, 5) a group for responses that did not fit any of the identified themes but still needed to be analyzed, labeled Interesting.

Migrant Women's Journeys

This section presents a unique approach to thematic analysis, as the themes were unpacked, explored, and identified by the research participants themselves. Consequently, the subsequent analysis of these themes reflects the contributions, reflections, and insights of the participants. During interviews and focus groups, they were given time and space to consider each question deeply, analyze their own experiences, and share their knowledge.

Therefore, the following framework incorporates much of their reflections, insights, and analyses, alongside my own. It begins with an exploration of the fragmentation and ruptures of the initial arrival, i.e., the explorations and mapping out of the territories they have available upon arrival, agencies, faith organizations; as well as life in suspension from arrival until the initial protection of a visa runs out. The second theme is the support received and created by the community that cares; the community that supports the transition when migrant women see the institutional doors closing behind them; and who is there to provide care and mutuality -- opening doors to new pathways. The third theme explores their communal and individual efforts (or not) to live within the margins and within the boundaries of a self-built legality, and how they see and explore, expand, and redefine the limits of citizenship and belonging. After analyzing their trajectories and advocacies, migrant women landed on exploring how the trajectory continues to replicate itself, over and over again with each new arrival, and what the role of their community and support networks is, in opposition to mainstream discourses of individualism, resilience, and leadership. The final analysis goes to understand how that mechanism of support happens, how they are created, perpetuated, supported and expanded, providing a tight network *que las arropa, a todas* (that covers and shield them). Here migrant women identified and performed activism, sisterhood and transnational networks of support. Knowledge and care sustain life in a system that wants to erase their territories and tries to dominate and to profit more the bodies.

Finally, rather than mapping directly or linearly onto these themes, the following four empirical chapters synthesize these overlapping thematic threads, with an overarching frame above them based on the understanding that theme five, of Activism, Gender, and Transnational Sororidad (Sisterhood) and the strategies of mutual aid deployed by migrant women that directly challenge Western capitalist models of individualism, are the backbone, and starting point of their advocacy, activism, mutual support and community resilience that brings them in as citizens in their own terms.

Theme 1: When the Fragmentation of Migration Systems Opens Spaces for Community to be Produced in the Margins of Formal Spaces

One of the most vital findings of this research is the paradoxical role of formal, state-funded structures in facilitating environments where precarious-status migrants and their allies can enact mutual aid. Throughout the interviews, participants emphasized that their interactions with settlement agencies, service providers, LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) programs, and community centers were deeply meaningful. While these official channels were not always materially effective or structurally supportive, they consistently functioned as initial entry points — spatial anchors where women could gather information, find mutual support, and organize.

Importantly, formal settlement frameworks are, in fact poorly funded or simple not funded to support and provide services to temporary work permit structures, and refugee claimant pathways. Instead, they function as structural shells or platforms (*cascarones*) within which precarious and non-status Latinx migrant women and their allies weave subversive, informal, and parallel networks of mutual aid and collective survival (Cahuas, 2019; Federici, 2012).

Contradicting mainstream narratives in the settlement sector, these spaces of survival, organization, and solidarity are not engineered from the top down by institutional staff working 'from the side of their desks.' Rather, as the participants make clear, the heavy lifework of community-building is driven horizontally by precarious-status women themselves.

The structural production of "non-status" and legal precarity within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) functions as a deliberate mechanism of institutional gatekeeping — dictating who is structurally included or excluded. However, when the state temporarily concedes formal administrative mechanisms — such as a work permit — it temporarily ruptures the systemic locks keeping women subjected to deep vulnerability and labor exploitation.

As Goldring and Landolt (2011, 2013) argue, "legal precarity" is a condition actively manufactured by state policy rather than a personal deficit. All participants in this study have invested immense time, emotional labor, and financial resources to secure even transient forms of status (such as study or work permits). Because legality is defined and weaponized by the state, obtaining a formal document does not simply grant access to regulated labor; it temporarily suspends structural vulnerability, momentarily legitimizing the migrant subject within a predatory market.

> "Once we had the work permit—well, clearly it was easier… we were able to move into our first rental" (Interviewee 5).
>
> "When I entered a refugee claim, I was given a temporary SIN number, with that, I was able to continue in the language school and spend time with mi friends even after it expired" (Interviewee 6).

While formal institutions operate through rigid, bureaucratic metrics and conditional funding protocols, their physical spaces are systematically subverted by the participants. Agencies provide the material infrastructure (meeting rooms, community programs, food banks, and advocacy spaces across Toronto), but the true social fabric is manufactured on the margins of official programming.

This subversion highlights what Dean Spade (2020) defines as the radical distinction between state-managed, vertical, and conditional charity, and horizontal, participatory

mutual aid built to meet immediate material needs while fostering shared political power. Rather than allowing the non-profit industrial complex to individualize their struggles, migrant women turn formal spaces into decentralized hubs of solidarity designed to bypass state neglect (Cahuas, 2019). The true community fabric is woven on the sidelines — sharing resources, passing on reliable accounting contacts, celebrating wins, or rescuing one another from the shelter system and precarity, as narrated by interviewee 6, a frontline service provider and a migrant woman herself:

> "I heard them say things like "Come and stay with me, you do not have to stay in the shelter'" (Interviewee 6).

This active solidarity reclaims survival outside of market and state logics, aligning directly with Federici's (2012) framework of "communing" and social reproduction. In a city that systematically renders the undocumented body invisible, being looked at and heard in one's native language becomes a space of shared resilience and profound humanization:

> "The platforms are being created for people to connect and talk to one another… we are moving in parallel… I see women talking and making plans to go somewhere, or give advice, or brainstorm and support each other" (Interviewee 6).
>
> "It was a large room… they let us use the space to gather there" (Interviewee 11).
>
> "They come here, and they feel like human beings again… they say, 'No one had ever looked me in the eye'" (Interviewee 6).
>
> "I met all my friends at the English school; through them, I found out where to get a job and where to volunteer" (Interviewee 8).

Less rigid, non-formal environments allow migrant women — including highly educated professionals whose credentials have been stripped by the Canadian immigration system — to reactivate traditional, ancestral, and familial knowledges. This process does not deny the intersectional oppression and spatial marginalization documented by Gilbert and Sotomayor (2023) in the GTA, but it brings to life the grassroots activism that sustains precarious-status women.

Community-led initiatives — such as cooking circles, sewing groups, arts programs, and alternative entrepreneurial fairs — are not merely survival strategies. Grounded in a decolonial understanding, they represent the practice of *criar la vida* (nurturing and sustaining life). Through the lens of Verónica Gago (2019), this is a manifestation of *la potencia feminista* (feminist power) — the capacity to weaponize the domestic, reproductive, and local spheres as terrains of resistance. These popular economies, do not

conform to capitalist metrics as noted by Nicholson, 2018 and Gago, 2018; instead, they center community well-being, transforming domestic tasks into economic and emotional lifelines (*salvavidas*). They preserve dignity and *amor propio* (self-respect) while actively resisting the isolation, deskilling, and systemic labor exclusion of the GTA (Goldring et al., 2024).

> "Spaces where they are working on other, less formal activities… getting together to cook, to knit… entrepreneurship fairs, where they also share helpful information" (Interviewee 9).
>
> "Professionals who reinvented themselves… cooking has become a lifeline for many" (Interviewee 9).
>
> "I know I won't be practicing my profession here; for now, I work at a café and volunteer at a community center—that's how I manage to be who I want to be" (Interviewee 7).
>
> "I know that here I am not the same independent professional I was in my home country; I had to reinvent myself" (Interviewee 3).

Theme 2: Care, Belonging, and Emotional Support Among Migrant Communities

This theme reveals how institutional erasure produces an intense identity shock and profound isolation within Toronto's individualistic urban geography, which is further magnified by a lack of status and intense labor exploitation. To counter this systemic coldness, participants establish micro-spatial practices of affective sanctuary, building belonging through everyday moments where their history, dignity, and humanity are validated.

The lived experience of legal precarity creates a profound existential crisis, stemming from the systematic loss of professional identity and social status. Gilbert and Sotomayor (2023) critique how Canadian labour markets channel racialized immigrant women into highly precarious, gendered "survival jobs." Women experience a violent transition from autonomous professionals and with full participation in the network of care and mutual aid in their home country to hyper-invisible labour subjects in Toronto while also experiencing the erasing of their ability to participate in the social fabric of the city. Here, interviewee 8, a woman with extended and intertwined professional and community expertise in her home country, analyses how her professional identity is erased upon migration, while at the same time society suppresses her social identity and excludes her from community roles as well.

> "You go from being an independent professional to finding yourself reduced to precarious jobs—to having to scrape gum off the floor just to survive" (Interviewee 8).

To then continue with a deep analysis on the erasure of her social and value in relation to the community as a precarious status migrant woman.

> "I am an educator; I am used to caring for and working with children and their families. Do I have to live life the way people in this country do it? If my neighbor is struggling, why is it frowned upon me to help?" (Interviewee 8).

This identity shock is heavily exacerbated by linguistic barriers. The inability to speak fluent English functions as an institutional wall, blocking access to stable employment, healthcare, legal support, and basic social services.

Furthermore, the structural violence of *transitoriedad* (permanence in transience) deeply impacts psychological well-being. Living chronically "*con las maletas hechas*" (with packed suitcases) while awaiting bureaucratic verdicts or facing deportation regimes fractures the mind. As Goldring and Landolt (2011) argue, conditional legal status acts as an ongoing form of state-sanctioned psychological displacement. This displacement is echoed respectively by Interviewees 3 and 8:

> "Living in limbo with your bags packed can take a toll on your mental health" (Interviewee 3).

> "I didn't want to accept that I'd have to stay here; I never saw myself as a refugee" (Interviewee 8).

This state of permanent temporality can act as an unconscious defense mechanism, where women block the formation of deep emotional ties to protect themselves from further heartbreak and uprooting (Interviewees 6 and 7). Additionally, because they are structurally isolated, participants are highly vulnerable to misinformation when they first arrive, often relying on unproven and sometimes predatory information networks simply because it is the only information accessible to them in their language.

To survive the hostility of the state and the urban isolation of Toronto, precarious migrant women collectivize their emotional processing, transforming community resilience from an individual burden into a collective shield. As Spade (2020) emphasizes, mutual aid recognizes that social problems cannot be solved by individualizing trauma. Instead, informal gatherings are intentionally used as alternative therapeutic spaces where structural and individual traumas are processed:

> "We *Latina* women get together to have coffee and talk about our husbands, our children, and our frustrations… that is, quite literally, 'doing therapy' so we don't lose our sanity" (Interviewee 8).

When prompted during the focus group about spaces of support and resistance, a heavy, reflective silence initially emerged. One focus group participant described their daily routine as a form of mechanized alienation:

> "We are like robots; we have work to do every day. We have to take care of our families in our home countries and here, we have to work to find ways to stay, and when we aren't doing any of that, sometimes we rest" (Focus Group Participant).

Grounded in Gago's (2019) concept of *la potencia feminista*, breaking this alienating cycle through non-hierarchical spaces triggers an internal awakening. It represents a direct refusal to let the body be reduced to mere exploitable labor, restoring dignity and self-esteem over structural losses (Cahuas, 2019). This refusal is clearly shared by focus group participants:

> "The question about which places we have access to made things easier; it's like an awakening—realizing that, despite the years you've spent here, there are moments when you feel really good and can reconnect, and that there truly are spaces where we do many wonderful things". (Focus Group Participant).
>
> "It was hard for me to identify those spaces—I hardly have any. My home, with my partner and my dog. But it was difficult to think of such places. Back home, the house comes last; I was always out… Outside the home, there are the organizations—where who I am is better recognized and I can speak Spanish — and the café where we can have a beer" (Focus Group Participant).

A foundational pattern in these narratives is the rapid transformation of participants from recipients of aid into active producers of community infrastructure, driven by an unspoken collective ethics:

> "It is a community ethic: I was helped when I had nothing, and now it is my turn to pay it forward—to accompany someone who has just arrived as she goes to enroll her child in school or looks for a doctor who doesn't ask for papers." (Interviewee 3).

This practice of '*devolver la mano*' (pay it back) is a direct manifestation of *criar la vida* (nurturing life). The practice challenges state-centric, individualistic integration models that frame the migrant as a passive drain on public resources (Goldring & Landolt, 2013). By sharing survival tips, translation labour, and cultural navigation strategies, experienced migrant women drastically shorten the learning curves for those who arrive after them (Interview 4). This circular economy of care is deeply empowering; the act of providing

support transforms their past trauma into collective wealth and personal validation: "*Me siento bien conmigo misma*" (translation) (Interviewee 5).

For many precarious-status mothers who spend years navigating urban spaces exclusively for their children (such as libraries or family drop-ins), these mutual aid networks provide the first real sanctuary dedicated strictly to themselves:

> "Almost everything I do is for my son; I don't have anything special for myself. This group comes first for me" (Focus Group Participant).

> "For the past three years or so, everything was focused on the children. Now, the focus has shifted closer to home. From there, it moved more toward social justice—I liked this group and the space it provided, and through it, I was able to do something for the undocumented community" (Focus Group Participant).

When extended family structures are severed by migration, community is reconstructed among other migrants, allies, and grassroots spaces. These include faith-based organizations, online and offline advocacy networks, and, more recently, networks centered on shared Indigeneity. This community steps in to fulfill essential logistical and emotional protective functions missing due to the distance from home support networks (Cahuas, 2019). This is one of the most recognized systems of support; all participants recalled pivotal moments where friendship and guidance were provided by their new community. Support was expressed by participants:

> "He, the carnitas vendor, called someone who was his friend, and helped us rent an apartment, he also offered to lend us money for first and last [month's rent]" (Interviewee 5).

> "I used Facebook groups to connect with people from my country in Toronto, they helped me secure an apartment to rent, groceries, and they collected some furniture for me" (Interviewee 3).

However, this transnational sorority and grassroots advocacy work — undertaken on top of their multiple daily responsibilities — carries distinct, gendered challenges. Women frequently shoulder the invisible, highly taxing burden of managing their families' access to Canadian institutions, acting as translators, school mediators, and healthcare advocates (Interviewees 3 and 5). Within the Canadian context, women must actively learn to establish boundaries to balance communal social processes with necessary self-care:

> "In the Canadian context, you learn to set boundaries to balance self-care with social processes" (Interviewee 7).

> "Here, the causes and actions aren't a matter of life and death; in our countries, they are. If we don't respond, one of our fellow activists could die. Things are different here" (Interviewee 9).

Ultimately, this intense emotional and political engagement can result in a profound state of existential uprooting and exhaustion — the wounding sense of being "*ni de aquí, ni de allá*" (neither from here, nor from there), where a definitive loss of absolute belonging takes root (Interviewee 11).

Theme 3: The Paradox of (Il)Legality and the "*Deber Ser*" (Must be)

My participants' life experiences offer a brilliant analytical approach to how "legality" is constructed. The testimonies challenge mainstream, hegemonic institutional narratives by separating administrative legal status from the intrinsic legitimacy of everyday labor and contributions, effectively demystifying the criminalization of non-status populations (Goldring & Landolt, 2011).

The participants enact a profound conceptual redefinition of status, arguing that the essential care and maintenance labor they perform is inherently legitimate:

> "I came to work, to help my family; when I arrived here, I realized I had been scammed" (Focus Group Participant).

As a result of the participatory action research mapping, a focus group participant stated:

> "With this map, I realize that I work all over the place, as a *'trabajadora sin papeles'* (worker without paper) I have access to many, many places — hotels, restaurants, schools, offices, houses, sick people, children. But in reality, I have zero access: no work permit, no language, no possibility to secure status and have my family with me."

From this perspective, there are no criminal or illicit activities, but rather a violent administrative exclusion by the state apparatus. This echoes Verónica Gago's (2019) analysis of popular economies: legitimacy does not flow downward from the state's legal architecture; it is produced from below by the bodies and labor of those who actively reproduce and sustain the city.

This structural tension manifests as an exhausting, continuous effort to perform the archetype of the "good migrant" and remain within the margins of correctness (*el deber ser*/the must be). This is demonstrated by women actively seeking corporate social security numbers to pay taxes (Interviewee 10) or adhering to the community mandate to do things as correctly as possible: "I have a tax number, play my taxes for my company, I am trying

my best to show that I can be a good citizen, but I also know the system is not recognizing my efforts and will rule out my case" (Interviewee 5).

This hyper-compliance functions as a direct refusal of the xenophobic stigma that paints non-status migrants as individuals who come to drain public systems (Goldring & Landolt, 2013).

Conversely, the experiences of migrant women reveal how the state acts as the primary source of instability. The violence of transitory and administrative cruelty is corporealized in the participants' mental health, forcing them to navigate life on the verge of erasure:

> "I really came here to put some space between me and my abuser. When I went back 3 months later, my abuser knew that I was back the moment I landed. I stayed in my country and returned here a week later. How can anyone prove that to an immigration officer?" (Interviewee 10).

Theme 4: Urban Individualism of Toronto and the Subversive "*Boca a Boca*" (Word of Mouth)

Participants frequently contrast the hyper-individualistic, market-driven structure of Toronto with the intimate, collective social fabric of their home countries, exposing a structural "hole" in the host society's capacity for community care. This geographical alienation is what Gilbert and Sotomayor (2023) describe as the spatial isolating effect of neoliberal urban planning:

> "Here, people live to work; everyone stays in their own bubble… back home, the streets are alive, and neighbors say hello. In Toronto, the winter and the isolation leave a hollow space in your chest, and if you don't seek out your community, you sink" (Interviewee 4).

When formal institutional networks or commercialized migration industries collapse or actively exploit migrants — vividly exemplified by private student consultants who disappear after pocketing massive payments, or paralegals who do not complete their hired services (Interviewee 3) —Spade's (2020) framework on mutual aid becomes vital. Spade (2020) demonstrates that mutual aid emerges precisely as a coordination mechanism to facilitate survival in the wake of systemic failure. When predatory migration industries extract resources from migrants, horizontal mutual aid networks step into the vacuum to provide immediate, unconditional infrastructure.

The community fabric is not engineered from above by settlement agencies when the state does not recognize humanity; it is meticulously crafted from below in the micro-spaces of

the everyday, as witnessed and narrated by one of the front-line workers who participated in this research;

> "Participants come to my programs and I see them building the strong community that holds them; 'I will open my home for you', or 'I know where to buy good affordable groceries' or 'On Tuesday's there is a program at X centre, they provide TTC passes and dinner' and so on, I am just a witness, they do it all" (Interviewee 6).

Vital survival data regarding auto insurance, trusted doctors who do not demand papers, housing leads, or precarious employment dynamics flows through alternative database structures like WhatsApp groups, Facebook networks, and word-of-mouth (*boca a boca*). This collective communication is an example of what Federici (2012), and Spade (2020) identify as autonomous channels of knowledge distribution necessary for survival and the active preservation of community resilience.

The participants shared their deep frustration regarding the administrative absurdity of these legal barriers, which actively force them into precarious employment and block continuous access to healthcare:

> "Not having a work permit is the stupidest thing! We ought to have a work permit, even if we have to pay for it. How am I supposed to work without eating? I need to eat, and so I need the work permit" (Focus Group Participant).

Even institutional spaces designed for aid, such as the shelter system, often reproduce exclusion through severe language barriers and systemic neglect, turning what should be shelter into a space of active alienation:

> "I live in a shelter. There's no translation, and they tell you to go to this or that meeting, they do not have translation to Spanish, but they do have for other languages, for other people—mostly refugees. I feel there are people who abuse the system (taking advantage of the system vs. exploiting the system)" (Focus Group Participant).
>
> "The system takes advantage of us. The money going to social programs is minuscule compared to the funds allocated for weaponry. Yes, it is exclusionary" (Focus Group Participant).

Theme 5: Activism, Gender, and Transnational *Sororidad* (Sisterhood)

The strategies of mutual aid deployed by migrant women are grounded in alternative, ancestral, and communal worldviews that directly challenge Western capitalist models of individualism. The concept of the *bien común* (common good) guides their collective

organization, prioritizing networks of care over market productivity, embodying the *criar la vida* (nurturing life) cosmovision shared by Garcia, Cahuas (2019) and Federici (2012), Gago and Tungohan

When examining the role of autonomous, self-directed grassroots networks, participants unpacked two of the most violent forces of the migration experience: hunger and loneliness. Within the Latinx diaspora, the act of sharing food in good company is a deep-seated cultural mechanism where food, resources, and knowledge are mutually shared among the members of a group.

As Gago (2019) argues, these practices are central to the economy of the *bien común* — they refuse the market logic of profit, focusing instead on solidarity and mutualized safety nets. It functions as a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship where all members are equally invested in the survival and well-being of the collective:

> "It's not about business; it's about the common good. If we make empanadas or hold the fair, it's not just for the money—it's so we're all okay, so no one goes without food or fails to pay rent this month. It's about looking out for one another in the face of a system that wants us to be alone" (Interviewee 4).

When mapping the city, participants envision building with their contributions — their "map of desires" — migrant women completely refused to idealize a distant future. *"No me caso con el futuro, vivo en el presente"* (I am not married to the future, I live in the present) — stated a focus group participant, choosing instead to demand structural equity, universal accessibility, and preferring an anti-capitalist approach to their lives in Canada:

> "We need a status—we can't go out. We work very hard, and we can't go out to visit" (Focus Group Participant).

The participants insist that social justice must happen in real, physical spaces—demanding their equal "right to the city" (Gilbert & Sotomayor, 2023). Specifically, immigrant women describe their ideal city as one where everyone can physically get around, and no one faces discrimination based on their identity. They directly connect the struggles of young people working insecure jobs to the failures of city services, like public transit and healthcare.

> "My daughter is applying for jobs for teenagers and can't find one… She has a disability (one leg is shorter). They won't hire her; it's discrimination. We need more accessible spaces on the TTC and in buildings, and access to healthcare for everyone—even those with OHIP don't have it easy" (Focus Group Participant).

This critical awareness highlights a stark contrast in how political activism is lived. In their home countries, community organizing is often experienced as a matter of “life or death” due to armed violence (Interviewees 5 and 11), whereas in Canada, people must navigate a different, highly institutionalized landscape that puts barriers for people to mobilize.

Ultimately, they challenge the state's top-down management by proposing an alternative urban logic modeled after ancestral governance and community resilience. This collective push perfectly merges Dean Spade's (2020) vision of mutual aid as an engine for social mobilization and Verónica Gago's (2019) *potencia feminista* — the radical desire to change everything from the ground up, where communal care and structural redistribution permanently replace capitalist individualism:

> “We want a self-managed city with better education. We should take an example from Indigenous communities that managed things themselves rather than asking for money; they grew their own food. The money collected should be directed toward the programs we truly need” (Focus Group Participant).

The following 4 sections present the analysis of the knowledge stemming from the fieldwork and selected literature.

Navigating Hostile Terrains: The Realities of Gendered Migration

The migratory trajectories of precarious-status and non-status Latin American women in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) are defined by a continuous negotiation with exclusionary institutional frameworks. Far from finding an unproblematic sanctuary, migrant women navigate an urban and legal terrain that systematically produces vulnerability across vital dimensions of survival, such as school registration, healthcare access, the labor market, and protection against gender-based violence.

As Goldring and Landolt (2012, 2013) argue, Canada’s immigration regime functions as an assembly line of precarious non-citizenship. Legal precarity is not an accidental administrative delay; it is a structural condition actively manufactured by the state, conditioning how individuals experience everyday life and institutional violence. Following Verónica Gago (2020), there is no inherent criminality in the act of migration or the reasons for arrival. Rather, migrant ‘criminality’ is a state construction that occurs when people fall between the cracks of immigration systems designed to deny status, enforce invisibility, and extract labor without recognition or proper compensation.

To fully comprehend how this precarity operates at the ground level, it is essential to look beyond the physical borders of the nation-state and analyze what Bhuyan et al. (2023) conceptualize as *bureaucratic violence* within Canada's contemporary immigration model. Under the weight of complex administrative borders — manifested as systemic barriers, closed doors, and perpetually shifting eligibility criteria — immigration procedures are never neutral administrative tracks. Instead, they operate as internal bordering practices that actively enforce social control, surveillance, and oppression within local institutional settings.

The primary areas in which precarious-status women experience violent exclusion include:

- Structural exclusion from consistent and good quality education and healthcare;
- Systemic exposure to workplace abuse, injuries, and gender-based violence without protection; and
- Denied access to a legal system capable of defending human and labor rights.

During interviews and focus group and drawing from my own extensive experience working alongside migrant women, I identified that precarious-status women experience systemic barriers across these three major intersecting areas in Toronto, Canada. These barriers create a destructive domino effect. For example, if a woman is forced into a highly precarious job that puts her at risk of workplace injuries, a physical injury is often met with restricted or non-existent access to medical care. This results in forced, unpaid time off or the total loss of employment — with zero access to legal recourse or state support systems. Interview and focus group participants were acutely aware of the precarity of their conditions, describing their daily lives as a dangerous balancing act requiring immense care to avoid falling deeper into state-induced vulnerability.

When interviewing service providers, allies, and advocates — and looking particularly at the insights from focus group participants — there was a clear consensus that the settlement and immigration programs and services for newcomers have shifted from welcoming, integration-focused spaces into sites of internal immigration policing and gatekeeping. Advocates and frontline staff at community centers noted how the non-profit sector is being co-opted as an agent of the state, fractioning access to basic human needs based on arbitrary legal categories and funding constraints. While community centers are intrinsically valuable, they rarely hold mandates or funding to officially serve precarious-status newcomer women.

As stated by two frontline service providers, staff must actively search for “cracks in the bureaucratic system” to support undocumented women. They often utilize small pockets of unrestricted funding to open up informal participation in cooking programs, arts and

crafts, or language conversation circles. These function as small, subversive spaces where women can congregate, receive advice, or access counseling if they are experiencing gender-based violence, which are key for their survival.

Ironically, the relationship migrant women have with state-funded organizations can be transactional and it clear the limitations the legality of their status imposes on them. While they cannot legally or formally register for core programs, they are frequently "given the opportunity to volunteer", contributing their specialized skills as free labor under the paternalistic premise that volunteer hours will strengthen their Refugee or Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) claims. For instance, three interview participants highlighted this paradox: one of them, a former legal professional who worked with land defenders and torture survivors in her home country, has spent the last four years volunteering as a yoga instructor and on-call receptionist for a local community center. In exchange for this free labor, she has found a vital community, social connections, and pro-bono, under-the-table legal advice from allied staff.

This institutional paradox is vividly exemplified by a focus group participant when comparing her dual reality as a precarious status migrant woman and as a worker in the care giving sector:

> "When I work, my work is all over the city and in places I never imagined, entering big houses, small houses, big, important offices, fancy restaurants, families, children, elderly. But as a woman with no papers, I can't get to see a doctor to do more than a basic assessment for my medical condition" (Focus Group Participant).

Here, the participant highlights the violent contradiction of her spatial existence: the extraction of her labor allows her to physically occupy elite, restricted spaces across the city, while her body remains structurally excluded from the city's healthcare infrastructure.

This institutional gatekeeping is further deconstructed by Interviewee 9, a former human rights and land defender from Colombia who now works as an ally and advocate for precarious-status migrant women in the GTA. She questions the capitalist paradigm of migrant labor exploitation by untangling the legitimacy of women's daily labor from their state-imposed administrative status:

> "The labour of house cleaning and childcare are both intrinsically legal and fulfill a legitimate social need; however, Canadian economic and migration policies are what deny the workers a legal and truthful recognition of their legality" (Interviewee 9).

This narrative highlights the profound disconnect between the economic necessity of cheap, disposable migrant labor and the legal erasure of the human beings performing it. While protecting, nurturing, and caring for the lives of those who hold full citizenship rights — their children, homes, and sick relatives — the structural value of these migrant women's contributions is systematically diminished, and their right to basic social services is denied.

In the GTA, this tension plays out across what Gilbert and Sotomayor (2023) describe as a landscape of heightened, planned vulnerabilities. While Toronto promotes a public image of multicultural inclusion, its municipal and provincial operational guidelines frequently act as structural barriers to healthcare and schooling for undocumented families, placing them in positions of "multiple jeopardy" (Goldring et al., 2024: page number). Despite Toronto being declared a "Sanctuary City" in 2013, advocates and allies are acutely aware of the immense labor families must perform to enroll their children in schools due to widespread misinformation, administrative gatekeeping, and a lack of training among school officials.

One of the participants (Interviewee 5), who arrived in Canada just months before the COVID-19 pandemic, shared the trauma of attempting to access education for her children. Her family fled Mexico due to targeted cartel violence and, unable to safely return, overstayed their visas. Out of fear of state surveillance and lacking English fluency, they spent months confined to a run down basement apartment. The participant visited a local Catholic school multiple times in hopes of enrolling her children to the local school, only to face repeated rejections from administrative staff. Around Christmas, a neighbor noticed the isolated family and knocked on their door with a basket of toys, clothing, and the contact number of a daughter-in-law, a Latin American teacher working at that same school. It was only after this teacher intervened as an advocate, explicitly invoking Toronto's sanctuary legislation to demand that the children be enrolled free of cost and barriers, that they were admitted. By that point, the children, aged 3 and 6, had been trapped at home without access to education for over seven months.

More recently, a focus group participant who has secured refugee status and works as a healthcare advocate for irregularized women noted an alarming institutional trend: some hospitals have begun delaying or creating barriers around issuing hospital discharge papers for newborns of non-status mothers, an administrative hurdle that directly impedes the family's capacity to secure the child's birth certificate.[2]

[2] This specific institutional practice could not be independently verified through formal policy documents, yet it remains a powerful indicator of the community's pervasive fear and experiences of systemic gatekeeping.

Furthermore, through the lens of Bhuyan et al.'s (2023) 'Migrant Mothers Project,' this structural exclusion reveals a deeply gendered layer of vulnerability. Precarious immigration status functions as a systemic tool of patriarchal and state control that traps racialized women in ongoing isolation, where the fear of detention and deportation deters them from seeking protection from abusers or accessing public services.

For instance, one interviewee shared that she originally entered Canada on a visitor visa to find a temporary safe haven from an abusive relationship in her home country. She briefly returned to her home country, only to face immediate threats from her abuser, forcing her to flee back to Canada. She has spent the last seven years working to secure status while navigating legal precarity. Reflecting on the impossibility of proving her lack of state protection to Canadian immigration authorities, she states:

> "I am here in Canada, I'm safe from my abuser, but now, I am in a very vulnerable situation. I have received bad legal advice, experienced wage theft at work, and I have no access to health or education. I am not going to get killed in Canada, but having to constantly work and fend for myself under these conditions is an exhausting amount of work" (Interviewee 10).

Similarly, Interviewee 7, a former human rights lawyer who fled political persecution with her family, underscores the violence of this downward social mobility and forced labor exploitation.

The structural production of "non-status" and legal precarity within the GTA functions as a deliberate mechanism of institutional gatekeeping — dictating who is permitted inside the boundaries of rights and who is systematically cast out. However, the boundaries of legality are neither static nor completely impenetrable. When the state temporarily concedes formal administrative mechanisms — such as a temporary work permit, a temporary social insurance number, or the temporary lowering of administrative restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic — it briefly fractures the systemic locks that keep racialized migrant women subjected to structural vulnerability and labor exploitation.

As Goldring and Landolt (2011, 2013) elaborate, "legal precarity" is an active, ongoing condition produced by state policy rather than a personal deficit. Legality is defined, shifting, and imposed from above; it is not a reflection of the migrant's moral character or economic contribution. For the participants of this research, obtaining a formal document does not simply grant access to the regulated labor market; it temporarily ruptures the daily trauma of structural illegality, offering a fleeting moment of legitimacy before a predatory urban economy. This relief is captured in the testimony of Interviewee 6:

> "Once we got the work permits, clearly it was easier for us to secure all the paperwork and money needed to rent a better place with a real contract that protected us… a real place to live."

Here, the acquisition of a temporary permit directly translates into spatial mobility and an immediate improvement in housing conditions, allowing the family to escape the immediate precarity of temporary shelters, overcrowded rooms, or predatory, exploitative landlords. For others, even a highly conditional status serves as a temporary anchor to maintain personal networks and look toward a future, as shared by Interviewee 10:

> "When I submitted my refugee claim, even though I had a bad lawyer, at least I got a temporary SIN [social insurance number] and access to language programs. Once my claim was rejected and I could no longer formally enroll in the school, my teacher subverted the rules and let me stay in the classroom without registration so I could continue learning English… This was amazing for me; it helped me a lot. I was able not only to learn English, but to spend time with my friends and get out of my house".

As demonstrated by this participant and supported by critical migration literature, these formal mechanisms offer an *illusion of stability*. In her analysis of Canada's two-step immigration system, Bhuyan et al. (2023) notes that temporary regularizations frequently institutionalize a state of long-term, conditional belonging. A temporary permit or a temporary social insurance number does not signify full inclusion; instead, it codifies *institutional transience* (transitoriedad). It forces women into a state of hyper-compliance where they must constantly perform the archetype of the "good, productive migrant" to preserve their temporary legality, all while knowing that the state can retract this recognition at any moment, plunging them back into the margins of the informal economy.

While the institutional frameworks of the settler-colonial state operate through rigid bureaucratic metrics and restrictive funding protocols — leaving less and less room for formal agencies to support precarious-status migrants — the physical spaces of community organizations in Toronto are systematically subverted from below. Indeed, many formal settlement organizations, language schools, and neighborhood hubs frequently function as institutional shells (*cascarones*). Stripped of substantive transformative power to serve the migrant community due to neoliberal restructuring and shifting state mandates, these organizations are compelled to act as soft sites of internal bordering (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Wolch, 1990). The municipal and organizational funding intended for long-term community engagement has largely been reduced or restricted.

Today's settlement and community organizations, particularly those oriented toward migrant families, present a public facade of inclusion. However, precarious-status and non-status migrant women merely absorb this institutional abandonment and actively take over the physical spaces they need. Community centers, drop-in programs for seniors and new mothers, food banks, and underfunded cooking or crafting sessions are re-appropriated by migrant women — both those with status and those without — to build solidarity, create horizontal networks of support, and share resources and survival knowledge. Migrant women and their allies occupy these state-funded spaces as launching pads for communal aid, community accountability, and collective resilience.

As Spade (2020) contends, a radical distinction exists between state-managed social services — which are vertical, surveillance-heavy, and conditional — and *mutual aid*, which is horizontal, participatory, and built to cultivate shared political power. Rather than allowing the non-profit industrial complex to individualize their struggles, participants turn these rigid institutional settings into decentralized hubs of solidarity. The true community fabric is manufactured precisely on the sidelines and in the margins of official programming. It is within the physical confines of language classrooms or community center basements where women look each other in the eyes and activate immediate material and emotional lifelines (*salvavidas*), as narrated by one of the service providers participants in this research:

> "In these spaces, which are technically open to all, a launching pad is created for people to congregate and talk; they share information and care. We provide services, accompanying them from the side of the institution, but also in parallel and solidarity. They give each other advice, they organize meetups, share tips, or simply tell each other where to buy good *frijol* and *tortillas*" (Interviewee 6).

This horizontal exchange directly subverts the alienating logic of the host bureaucracy. Within a city that systematically renders the non-status body invisible through calculated exclusion from healthcare and education, being looked at and heard in one's maternal language becomes a profound act of re-humanization and shared resilience:

> "They come here to the programs and I see the change — they acknowledge it too. They come here and they tell me: 'We feel like humans again; no one has looked me in the eyes for a long time'" (Interviewee 6).

Furthermore, these institutional shells, formal spaces serve as the primary geographical coordinates where initial survival networks are established. For instance, state-funded

language programs (such as LINC or ESL classes) — which officially exist to deliver linguistic capital for market integration — are repurposed by participants into spatial nodes for alternative resource navigation:

> “Someone — I don't remember his name — worked at a language school on College Street inside a church. They had a big open space, and he let us use the space to meet up, organize, and plan our collective. They had free computers for people to use; so, we used them for activism, pretending we were learning computer skills” (Interviewee11).

> “It was in the language school that I met all my friends, not all of them from my country, but from all over Latin America. They told me where to find work, where to volunteer to complete my hours for my refugee process, and how to find a good food bank” (Interviewee 8).

Through the practice of the *boca-a-boca* (word-of-mouth), vital survival information — such as the location of pro-bono medical clinics for the uninsured, safe housing leads, gender-based support organizations, or the names of reliable legal advocates — circulates completely outside formal state channels.

This autonomous, communal reliance on horizontal information frameworks becomes even more critical when contrasted with the structural failure of Toronto's municipal protective “sanctuary city” mandate. Within mainstream public discourse, Toronto is celebrated as a progressive haven of inclusion where non-status residents can theoretically access essential services — such as food banks, libraries, and emergency shelters — “without fear” of immigration enforcement. However, the reality of precarious-status women reveals that the sanctuary mandate “don't ask, don't tell, and do not deny service” is a policy that is rarely successfully invoked or utilized by the community. As critical migration scholars note, the sanctuary model in Toronto operates as an empty bureaucratic gesture rather than an enforceable legal shield (Coherted, 2017). Because municipal services are heavily intertwined with provincial funding streams (such as healthcare and subsidized housing), frontline municipal staff are often untrained, unequipped, or explicitly legally required to demand proof of legal status.

Consequently, the “sanctuary city” framework functions as the ultimate barrier — a progressive institutional shell that projects safety while masking a landscape of deep vulnerability, exploitation, and risk of violence. As a result, non-status women cannot rely on the city’s hollow promises of sanctuary; instead, they must actively bypass formal institutional spaces altogether. When the state's official “sanctuary” is exposed as a

performative myth, it is the community organizing, horizontal mutual aid networks, and the *boca-a-boca* among racialized women that step in to build genuine community resilience and advocacy from below.

Ultimately, by treating these community agencies and municipal spaces not as sites of passive receipt but as territories to be subverted, precarious Latinx women rewrite the urban geography of Toronto. They temporarily transform a cold, superficial, and fragmented service model into an autonomous social infrastructure that protects, recognizes, and values their existence.

Subversive Infrastructures: Care, Affect, and the Politics of *Criar la Vida*

In the context of structural non-status and legal precarity within the Toronto Area, the daily survival of racialized migrant families cannot be attributed to the benevolence of municipal frameworks, or the performative promises of "sanctuary city" policies. Instead, life is sustained through what I conceptualize as subversive infrastructures — autonomous, affective, and deeply gendered networks forged by Latinx migrant women outside, beneath, and against the settler-colonial state apparatus. This section positions the labor of social reproduction not as a passive domestic obligation or an isolating burden, but as an active space of political resistance, community governance, and decolonial reconstruction.

To theorize this phenomenon, I draw heavily upon Gago's (2020) conceptualization of *potencia feminista* (feminist power) and the collective Latin American feminist framework of *criar la vida* (nurturing or raising life). Gago (2020) argues that under the pressures of neoliberal despoliation and state abandonment, the domestic and communal spaces where life is reproduced become intensely politicized territories. *Criar la vida* goes far beyond the mere biological survival of the individual; it encompasses the collective generation of housing, food, emotional sanctuary, and historical memory against a system that marks these bodies as disposable. For precarious-status women in Toronto, *criar la vida* represents a radical refusal to allow their families to be crushed by the cold mathematics of the immigration regime.

This framework directly dialogues with Rita Segato's (2016) critique of the "pedagogy of cruelty" (*pedagogía de la crueldad*) inherent in contemporary colonial-capitalist structures. Segato (2016) posits that the state apparatus seeks to desensitize bodies, breaking communal ties to make individuals compliant, hyper-exploitable, and isolated. In contrast, the acts of mutual aid, emotional holding, and communal sharing documented among migrant women in Toronto cultivate a counter-pedagogy of affect and proximity. By creating

spaces where non-status women are looked at, heard, and deeply cared for, they enact an alternative urban governance. Subversive infrastructures manifest materially and emotionally navigating through migratory mourning, spatial isolation, and economic exclusion to build alternative territories of belonging in the global North.

The construction of parallel, subversive infrastructures does not occur in a vacuum; it is born as an urgent response to deep spatial, emotional, and psychological ruptures. The initial phase of arrival for precarious and non-status migrant women in the GTA is marked by an acute sense of *duelo migratorio* (migratory mourning) — a continuous process of grieving for lost social networks, professional identities, and territorial connections. This emotional fracturing is compounded by the hostile geography and urban spaces that the migrant women have access to, where extreme weather and a highly atomized urban design isolate non-status women within precarious basements or high-rise apartments and sub-rented rooms in residential area, cutting them off from traditional communal spaces.

This isolation is actively weaponized by the immigration system, creating a fertile ground for the circulation of institutional misinformation and fear. As established in the previous section, when a precarious migratory status intersects with language barriers, a paralyzing fear of state surveillance emerges. Particularly when they first arrive, non-status women find themselves vulnerable to predatory information networks or exploitative community intermediaries who capitalize on their fear of detention and deportation. This structural gaslighting traps women in a permanent state of hyper-vigilance.

However, it is precisely within this landscape of isolation that the affective dimension of *criar la vida* emerges as a vital survival mechanism. As documented in the empirical data, the transition from being an autonomous professional to an invisible, racialized caretaker in an alien environment constitutes a profound "identity shock":

> "I spent a year without tortillas, I had no idea where to buy them, until someone I meet at a program told me where to buy them". (Interviewee 10)
>
> "It's the clash of identities… going from being a professional to finding yourself dragging a stroller through the snow in Toronto, feeling like a nobody" (Interviewee 6).

The violence of this spatial and social erasure demands an immediate, collective counter-response. When the formal structures of the city offer only isolation or bureaucratic barriers, the alternative networks built by migrant women function as emotional and logistical shock absorbers. The act of gathering becomes the primary geographic site where migratory mourning is validated and collectively processed.

When conducting the focus groups for the purpose of this research, Migrant women gathered on a Friday evening in April. The meeting place — a local educational establishment lent to them on a weekly basis — was arranged with tables, chairs, tea, coffee, and pizza. The participants arrived one by one not only carrying their emotions openly, but also caring food, and snacks, and goodies to share with the rest of the group, each one of them had something to contribute. It seems to me that by entering this space, they felt like they could fully be themselves. One of the most articulate participants in the group responded immediately to the prompt: "Why do you, after a week-long of work, struggles, and barriers, make time to come here?" She immediately jumped to answer, leaving little to no room for further prompting: "I decided to come to this group because I was hungry and lonely" (Focus Group Participant).

Her response perfectly reflects the human need to congregate, a tradition among Latin American communities, and to share, to be accountable, and to exist in community with one another. It highlights their commitment to mutual care and, crucially, their shared capacity to "twist the hand" of the state through small, continuous acts of rebellion against the system.

The Materiality of Survival: Communal Spaces and the Popular Economy

The subversive infrastructures created by precarious-status women in the GTA are not merely abstract concepts; they are real, functional, daily practices of mutual aid and social reproduction. When the colonial-capitalist state enforces absolute exclusion from formal welfare frameworks and the legal labor market, migrant women activate what Verónica Gago (2018) conceptualizes as the 'popular economy' — a space of labor, value, and resource distribution that emerges precisely where neoliberal institutions abandon racialized bodies. In this research, this phenomenon was observed not as a past recollection or a static hope, but as a live, ongoing practice with both interviewees and the focus group participants.

During the focus group sessions, participants explicitly demonstrated how they overcome isolation through autonomous organization. In every single gathering, the women instinctively engaged in practices of self-governance and horizontal distributions of resources:

> "After moving many times and encountering bad landlords that keep places really dirty, overcrowded, and do not fix problems, through this group and the workshops we run, I met other women in my same situation. We now share the first floor of a house. The landlord is not the best, but now it is four of us united. We care for each other, we support each other, and more than anything, we feel

> safe, respected, and at home. We have been able to build that, and it's nice" (Focus Group Participant).

An interview participant, a former teacher from Venezuela who — like others — came to Canada not to initially claim asylum but to find a temporary refuge from political persecution, overstayed her visa and later applied for refugee status after her house was vandalized back home, her migration trajectory, was "easy" in her own words. She came to stay with her daughter and her family, all of them well stablished in Canada, where care, support and good advice where present all the time. However, she stressed during our interview how difficult was it to find place and community in Toronto, and how critical it was to relate to a group of migrant women, also learning together to navigate their place in the city.

> "The friends that I met at the language school are my community here. With them we learned that if we volunteered at a local food bank, we could get a free lunch every day after school and a food box twice a month, that box was fundamental to get to the end of the month, but also help us to feel responsible for the wellbeing of other people" (Interviewee 8).

All the participants of this study shared, in various ways, how relevant it is for them to "pay back," to remain accountable to their community, and to *criar la vida* using the scare resources at their disposal: their bodies and their alternative territories. As stated by Gago (2020), Segato (2016), and Federici (2012), women's bodies and traveling knowledges are what allow them to keep the traditions of nurturing life alive. They do this not as an individualistic, isolated burden inside private, restricted domestic spheres, but as a collectivized project — pulling each other up, holding each other, creating horizontal support systems, resisting oppression, and refusing to be excluded. The act of sharing food and organizing these "collective therapy" sessions validates their existence, proving that their lived experiences, and not just their extracted labor, serve as powerful vehicles for solidarity.

Furthermore, the horizontal circulation of material goods like clothing and vital survival information acts as a direct example to Rita Segato's (2016) critique of the *pedagogia de la crueldad*. While the hostile immigration regime relies on separating and isolating non-status individuals to keep them compliant and exploitable, migrant women use their meetings and claimed communal spaces to weave an alternative social safety net. The redistribution of clothes, food, and survival strategies ensures that resources received by any single individual immediately benefit the collective.

Anecdotally, I witnessed how this strategy is performed firsthand when approaching key individuals for interviews, the responses I receive and guidance was fantastic, sharing flyers and posters, connecting me with potential participants, making sure the success of the research. I also witness this during the focus group. One of the participants shared the previous day she had gone to work at a house, where she was given children cloths. She, who does not have her children with her in Canada, shared all the resources with the participants of the collective during the session. Transforming the focus group itself ceases to be a passive site of academic data extraction; it operates as an active, living snapshot of how migrant women navigate the city, share resources, and enact an autonomous, deeply political project of mutual care.

Counter-Cartographies of Survival and Emotional Sanctuaries

Initially, this research aimed to create a GIS map of places and resources available to migrant women in Toronto. However, I quickly realized that my idea was flawed and unnecessary. I had assumed that there was a widespread lack of information about available resources. Instead, as outlined in this paper, I discovered that the resources, support, and networks that sustain migrant women are built, managed, and maintained by their communities and allies. Those of us with secure status are often oblivious to these efforts. Consequently, I shifted my focus to the idea of a map inspired by the counter-cartography work of Sofia Zaragocin. Her approach is informed by her experiences as a transnational feminist cartographer. Rather than limiting her work to her experiences as a migrant woman in specific spaces, she draws upon all of her identities and knowledge across the various places she inhabits. This perspective allows her to engage with locations without being constrained by her citizenship or migration status.

For that reason, I set to work with the participants of the focus group to create a map of their city, a map of the city they experience; places of work, advocacy, building community and support, including the places that, as precarious-status women, they must constantly negotiate. migrant women participants produced what can only be understood as a counter-cartography — a radical remapping of Toronto that rejects objectivity in favour of lived, emotional geographies. Understanding that the tension will always exist that the map they created is a map that is always under construction and revision, that a map of emotions and lived experiences cannot be taken as a static document, but a living one. Rather than plotting points of service delivery or official settlement agencies, the women used colour, texture, and narrative to divide the urban landscape into highly personal zones of *violencia* (policing and exclusion) and *gozo* (joy, sanctuary, and mutual aid).

Figure 1: Migrant Women Counter-Cartography: Spaces of Violence and Spaces of Care

Spaces for violence and systemic barriers	Spaces for care, solidarity and support
Subway, and public transportation in general	LINC programs
Abusive landlords and employers	Respectful workplaces, where value and contributions are recognized
Government funded agencies and services that put barriers for them	Parks and open spaces where they can share community
Workplaces; where they experience harassment	Their homes; when landlords acknowledge their right to safe and secure housing
At home, when the precarity of their status prevent them from seeking and receiving support to flee gender-based violence	Their shared living spaces, where roommates support each other and act as extended family
Their bodies and territories, when access to health and	Faith and advocacy spaces; where they can congregate and build community

For non-status migrant women, danger is not merely represented by the physical border at the airport or the detention center; it is diffuse, woven directly into the invisible borders of the everyday, interactions i.e., the fabric of the city; the workplaces, public spaces. On our collective map, transit hubs and official spaces most will take for granted as hospitals, walk-in clinics, day cares, schools and other spaces where some form of identification is needed to access were consistently marked with sharp, anxious lines or warning colors. As one participant recalled while pointing to a major subway interchange on the map:

> "For a long time, the subway station and the Streetcars were super scary for me. Every time I entered, I was scared that one of the transit officers would see and arrest me; my heart stopped. It's full of TTC inspectors; if they have so much money to police people on the TTC, why don't they have money to have inspectors visit bad workplaces?" (Focus group participant).

This spatial anxiety transforms public infrastructure and institutional spaces into hostile terrain. The map reveals that the state's presence is felt most acutely in the very places designed to facilitate public movement and deliver essential services. The transit system, municipal and social agencies, schools, and daily workplaces expose these individuals to continuous danger and a lack of protection, compelling them to maintain constant vigilance in public spaces.

In stark contrast to these hostile nodes, participants mapped alternative networks of safety, care, love, and activism—what the women in this study collectively conceptualize as emotional and communal sanctuaries. Rather than formal, institutional shelters, these

are informal, domestic, and community-led spaces actively carved out of the neoliberal city by the women and their allies.

During focus group sessions and interviews, these zones of *gozo* (joy), sanctuary, and mutual aid were represented not by just an address, but by symbols of warmth, empathy, activism, and collective care and what at times described by participants as key individuals or allies that open doors for them. Examples included a kitchen table, a community garden, a quiet corner in a public park, a living room used for informal childminding, a food bank, or a community center program. Crucially, these spaces also included formal services where empathetic insiders or volunteers actively found ways to include women with precarious status.

Ultimately, participants demonstrated that these support networks are defined by more than physical location. Every sanctuary relies on the active will, emotional labor, and ongoing advocacy of allies who fight to create and maintain spaces where precarious-status women are seen, protected, and valued.

> "That was my whole journey. And, of course, along the way you meet other people who have come from different countries and also speak Spanish. And you realize that…well, you aren't the only one going through tough times. There are others, and they feel just as frustrated, just as…sad, and everything else. And, well, that's what led me…to choose this program, to create community to help people who are struggling here" (Interviewee 5).

These sanctuaries function as vital "breathing spaces" where the constant performance of hyper-compliance and hyper vigilancy can be temporarily abandoned. By mapping these domestic and informal/formal spaces as primary centers of importance, the counter-cartography shifts the focus from where migrants are *excluded* to where they actively *exist, resist, and care* for one another. It demonstrates that under the radar of the state lies an entire infrastructure of collective joy — a network of safety nets woven out of solidarity, shared grief, and subversive mutual aid.

Decentering 'Resilience': Formulating Counter-Narratives of Joy and Triumph

Within the mainstream migration studies and immigration policies discourses in Canada, precarious and non-status populations are frequently evaluated through the narrow, disciplinary lens of "resilience." This neoliberal definition of resilience individualizes systemic failure (Evans and Reid, 2014), while at the same time, erasing state

responsibility. It applauds the migrant's capacity to absorb structural shocks, endure systemic poverty, and adapt to institutional abandonment without ever disrupting the settler-colonial status quo (Rothe, 2017).

As Evans and Reid (2014) critically observe, the neoliberal state actively demands that vulnerable populations become resilient, meaning they must learn to absorb the violence and structural abandonment as a permanent condition of their existence. Under this paradigm, a migrant's capacity to endure trauma is celebrated as an empowering personal virtue, which effectively labels structural abandonment as an individual responsibility. In the context of the Toronto Area, expecting non-status migrant women to be infinitely "resilient" implicitly absolves the state of its violent exclusions, normalizing exploitation and unpaid reproductive labor (Federicci, 2012).

> "We came to this country as professionals with a study permit for my husband and a work permit for myself. We have spent five years working hard, trying to enter the immigration system via Express Entry, but to this day, we have nothing. Canada has been incredibly hard on us. I finally have a stable, but still precarious now, and I volunteer at a community centre each week. The ironic part is that they cannot legally provide me with immigration services because my status does not allow it, but I am perfectly welcome to volunteer my free labor there… We cannot go back" (Interviewee 7).

The subversion of individualized resilience requires the deliberate construction of parallel political infrastructures of mutual aid. Following Spade (2020), these infrastructures are not formal, state-sanctioned programs; rather, they are grassroots architectures that step in to fill the institutional vacuums intentionally left by the state. By operating outside the boundaries of state validation, these networks allow precarious-status migrant women to formulate spaces of alternative belonging where their humanity is absolute, not conditional upon immigration metrics or economic output.

Within these political infrastructures, mutual aid is stripped of any charitable or paternalistic undertone. Instead, as Tungohan (2023) observes in her work on migrant social movements, it functions as a highly sophisticated coordination where resources, legal strategies, and emotional safety are horizontally distributed. The collective triumphs achieved within these networks — such as successfully navigating a housing crisis, resisting an exploitative landlord, or bypassing institutional barriers — are celebrated not as individual strokes of luck, but as collective victories against a hostile administrative apparatus.

When subjected to close analysis through Spade's (2020) mutual aid framework, this autonomous organization challenges the conventional limits of social reproduction. The act of sharing resources and, crucially, vital survival information acts as a direct counter-response to state-enforced isolation. These grassroots networks do not merely help women adapt to the margins; they actively transform those margins into territories of political agency and mutual holding, proving that collective triumph is the ultimate counter-narrative to state-sanctioned exclusion.

Elevating Joy and Triumph as Political Resistance

To experience, manufacture, and celebrate joy under the constant threat of deportation is a radical, insurgent refusal to be defined by structural trauma. While the state's administrative apparatus seeks to reduce non-status existence to a state of permanent anxiety and hyper-vigilance, the cultivation of collective triumph claims a right to re-existence and wellbeing. Joy, in this framework, becomes both a defensive shield and an offensive political strategy — a direct materialization of what Tungohan (2023) conceptualizes as the capacity of migrant communities to assert their dignity, humanity, and laughter against structures of exploitation.

> "I like to be part of this collective, I feel that I contribute to the group, we built the group together, we are responsible to make sure everyone fell welcome and their need are met" (Focus group participant).

The transition from individual fear to collective celebration is a profound reclamation of the self. The production of these emotional sanctuaries allows counter-narratives of joy to flourish. When women gather not only to process grief but to celebrate their survival, their friendships, and their small and large triumphs, they strip the global North city of its efforts dehumanize them.

Ultimately, by substituting the cold, transactional metrics of the Canadian immigration regime with an infrastructure built on reciprocity, horizontal mutual aid, and shared triumph, precarious migrant women rewrite the urban geography of Toronto. As emphasized by Evans and Reid (2014: page number), refusing to merely "absorb danger" allows the subject to transition into a life that demands more than mere survival. They prove that sustaining life under the shadow of the state requires more than just material resources; it demands the collective production of affect, dignity, and radical, insurgent joy.

Trans-Hemispheric Continuities and Futurities

The spatial geometries of the settler-colonial state attempt to enforce a strict epistemic and physical rupture upon the arriving migrant body. Within dominant Eurocentric and

state-centric migration paradigms, crossing a border is treated as a forced reset — a point of zero-origin where the migrant is expected to enter a process of top-down assimilation, shedding past social fabrics to become a raw, individualized unit of economic productivity.

Migrant women explicitly dismantle this linear, border-centric narrative. By engaging with decolonial feminist geography and critical migration studies, I argue that the survival strategies, horizontal mutual aid structures, and architectures of care mapped among precarious-status migrant women in the Toronto Area are not spontaneous, isolated adaptations to Canadian state neglect. Instead, they represent profound trans-hemispheric continuities: historical, embodied, and traveling genealogies of resistance that are carried across borders as part of a deep body memory (*cuerpo-territorio*).

> "Coming to this place helps me a lot; I learn, we help each other, we eat together, we can talk about things, we look each other in the eye, and we feel alive" (Focus Group Participant).

Following Sofia Zaragocin (2019), territory is not a fixed administrative unit bounded by national sovereignty, but an embodied and relational reality. The knowledge, memory, and defensive mechanisms developed by migrant women in their home countries are not left behind at the border checkpoint; rather, they cross with them.

> "We congregate here in Canada because this is what we do; it is how we keep our knowledge and traditions alive, even if we live far away" (Interviewee 4).
>
> "I can see my grandmother, making a big pot of food for people, our house was really close to the train tracks of "La Bestia", her house always had people who needed a place to rest" (Interviewee 5).
>
> "In Mexico, I was an activist and a lawyer, advocating for the rights of the LGTB community, here I advocate for the rights of migrant workers" (Interviewee 11).

When migrant women face the structural violence, isolation, and administrative erasure of the Canadian state, they activate pre-existing, ancestral, and communal frameworks of collective preservation. By mapping these trans-hemispheric lines, this section untangles how contemporary urban survival in the global North dialogues directly with Latin American community feminisms, historical anti-extractivist struggles, and territorial defense frameworks. Ultimately, it positions these alternative spaces not merely as coping mechanisms, but as decolonial futurities — living templates for alternative ways of organizing urban life, reclaiming autonomy, and practicing the *bien común* (common good).

Transnational Genealogies of Collective Care and Resistance

The structural practices of *criar la vida* (nurturing life) and *arropar* (sheltering one another) that sustain non-status communities in Toronto have explicit historical roots in Latin American grassroots movements. To understand why racialized migrant women instinctively turn to horizontal redistribution and self-governance when faced with institutional abandonment, we must look to the long traditions of community feminisms *(feminismos comunitarios)* (Gago, V. 2019) and territorial defense across Abya Yala.[3]

As documented by scholars of Latin American resistance, among others Deonandan et al., 2017; García, 2021, 2025; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2014), Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and peasant women have historically formed the backbone of defensive fronts against state-led violence and multinational corporate extractivism. In struggles against mining, mega-projects, and environmental devastation (e.g., the historic defense frameworks led by women in El Estor, Guatemala, or across the Andean region), territory is defended through the collectivization of care. In these contexts, protecting the land is indistinguishable from protecting the bodies that inhabit it; social reproduction — cooking communally, establishing alternative health networks, sharing historical memory — becomes the primary trench of political warfare.

When translated to the context of the Greater Toronto Area, this exact logic is mirrored within the urban popular economy. The precarious basement apartments, informal cleaning squads, community center basements, and language school networks are the new urban territories being defended. As seen before, when the participants navigate predatory landlords and exploitative employment sectors, they do not default to hyper-individualistic competition. Instead, they replicate the structural frameworks of the *bien común* that organized rural and urban popular sectors across Latin America.

The Venezuelan teacher who transforms a casual gathering into a site of “collective therapy” (Interviewee 8), or the undocumented women who collectivize to rent a shared floor of a house to ensure mutual safety and dignity against a predatory system, are operating within a shared historical memory. They are drawing from an ancestral toolkit that knows that under regimes of dispossession — whether it is an extractivist corporation in Colombia or the mining in Guatemala or regimes that normalize violence against women.

To fully comprehend the depth of these continuities, we must trace the precise thematic lines that connect the survival frameworks utilized in home countries to the adaptation

[3] Abya Yala is the preconquest term of the Kuna Indigenous peoples for what is considered Latin America today

methods deployed within the GTA city. This epistemic bridge can be analyzed across three distinct yet complementary structural dimensions: 1) the collectivization of the domestic sphere; 2) the subversion of institutional shells; and the 3) the politics of *cuerpo-territory* (body-territory).

In Latin American popular sectors, the private home has historically been cracked open to serve as a communal space during times of crisis — manifested through ollas comunes (communal soup kitchens), horizontal childcare networks, and neighborhood defense committees. In Toronto, because the state systematically bars non-status women from formal institutional support, the domestic sphere undergoes an identical subversion. The home becomes a sanctuary where undocumented status is sheltered, jobs are shared, and material goods are redistributed through word-of-mouth networks.

Completing the collectivization of the domestic sphere, the subversion of institutional shells takes place overtime. Just as popular movements in Latin America have historically occupied and re-appropriated formal state structures (such as schools, municipal plazas, and local parishes) to serve autonomous goals, migrant women in Toronto perform an identical spatial seizure. As seen before, state-funded language schools and neighborhood community hubs are stripped of their rigid, neoliberal mandates. Such spaces are transformed into informal hubs of mutual aid, where women gather to pass legal secrets, exchange resources, and re-humanize one another.

Re-humanization is vital and migrant women know that. The body is the first territory that experiences violence and, consequently, the first territory of liberation (Zaragocin, 2019). The physical and psychological exhaustion of non-status women performing hyper-exploitative labor in Toronto (cleaning elite offices, caring for children and the elderly of other people, while being denied healthcare and access to basic rights for their own self and families, is met with an embodied counterstrategy. The act of looking each other in the eyes (*mirarse a los ojos*) and creating spaces of joy, laughter, and celebration under the permanent threat of deportation is a direct continuation of Latin American feminist resistance. It is a radical refusal to allow the body to be reduced to a disposable tool of capitalist extraction.

By looking closely at these continuities, it becomes clear that what mainstream Canadian policy labels as ‘resilience’ or ‘successful settlement integration’ actually reveals a sophisticated, trans-hemispheric resistance strategy. Migrant women are not assimilating into a hostile Canadian urban landscape; they are actively remaking it, carving out spaces of dignity and life using the exact historical tools that have kept their communities alive across the global South.

Yet, trans-hemispheric continuities do not merely look backward to past histories; they point toward radical decolonial futurities. By maintaining, adapting, and expanding these transnational networks of care within an unwelcoming global North city like Toronto, migrant women are doing more than just surviving the present — they are constructing blueprints for alternative future. Their daily acts of horizontal resource distribution, autonomous self-governance, and collective emotional holding explicitly challenge the capitalist, individualistic assumptions that underpin Western urban planning and neoliberal state organization. Within a system that measures human value strictly through legal status and market output, migrant women establish a counter-logic where life is inherently valuable, and care is treated as an absolute public good.

Ultimately, these subversive infrastructures rewrite the very meaning of the city. While Toronto's municipal government projects a corporate image of multicultural inclusion through hollow "sanctuary city" policies, irregularized, racialized women are building a genuine sanctuary from below and from the margins. By anchoring their survival in the principles of reciprocity, mutual aid, and shared triumph (*bien común*), they suspend and at least temporary reinvent the disciplinary boundaries of the state. Their lives and collective struggles prove that even within the heart of a hostile urban terrain, the ancestral, traveling power of *criar la vida* (nurturing life) remains a potent weapon of liberation, offering a transformative vision of community and care that transcends borders, nations, and legal walls.

Conclusion

This study addresses the vital need to narrate and map out practices of care, mutual aid, and resilience as distinct bodies of knowledge and survival mechanisms within the context of migration and transnationality — particularly for structurally invisible or under-researched demographics, such as undocumented and precarious-status migrant women from Latin American countries living in Toronto.

Furthermore, it addresses a critical gap in migration scholarship regarding the gendered dimensions of survival and community building. Much has been written within Canadian established frameworks about the labor and care that migrant women invest in securing access to basic services and acting as anchors for their families — tracing their failures and successes when interacting with the state to enroll children in school, find medical care, or secure stable income. However, little to no academic attention has been dedicated to recognizing the immense labor migrant women take on to actively produce, maintain, and create the very environment and social fabric that will sustain them. Or, in the urgent words

of one of the focus participants (2026) “I am here, part of this collective because I was hungry and lonely.”

Rather than conceptualizing migrant women as passive, vulnerable subjects or mere recipients of settlement programs and services for which, paradoxically, they often do not even qualify — this research positions them as active agents. They intentionally cultivate livelihoods for themselves while simultaneously producing and sustaining alternative systems of community care. My research identifies that these subversive spaces are built upon three crucial, overlapping ingredients that are vital for survival in Toronto: 1) the migrant women’s own deeply rooted knowledge in matters of care and community aid; 2) the strategic support of allies, most notably, other migrant women who have already secured legal status, have spent more time in the city, and are well-versed in navigating the gaps of the system; and 3) the tactical appropriation of institutional spaces. These spaces are often inadvertently provided within organizations funded for immigrant women, whose formal programs operate as *“fachadas de inclusión”* (façades of inclusion), environments that have increasingly seen their funding restricted, narrowing down who they can legally support while providing a physical space that the women and their allies infiltrate and occupy.

By exposing this hidden labor, my research unveils a profound political-economic paradox within the Canadian immigration regime: the state structurally relies on the unrecognized social reproduction of non-status women to subsidize the urban economy of the Greater Toronto Area, effectively externalizing the costs of a retreating welfare state. Moreover, my research offers a critical intervention in migration studies by shifting the analytical lens from state-centric, top-down definitions of settlement to a model of grassroots reciprocity, wherein migrant women transform from service-recipients into the primary producers of alternative urban infrastructures. Finally, by decentering mainstream, neoliberal frameworks of individual “resilience,” my study conceptualizes collective joy, mutual aid, and affective practices — such as *arropar* (to wrap up, shelter, or protect one another) — not as mere coping mechanisms, but as explicit counter-narratives and decolonial acts of political resistance against systemic erasure.

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Appendix A: Profiles and Demographics of Participants

Interviewees

	Int. respondent #1	Int. respondent #2	Int.respondent #3	Int. respondent #4	Int. respondent #5
Country of Origen	**Colombia**	**Chile**	**Chile**	**Mexico**	**Mexico**
Age	**over 50**	**40-45**	**30-40**	**40-50**	**30-40**
Reason for migration	Initially migrated seeking better job opportunities. Later realized they were fleeing indirect violence from internal conflict	Left employment in a tax haven due to lack of citizenship/legal status rights for children of migrant workers. Enrolled in a Canadian study program to secure a study permit	Sought new experiences and personal development abroad.	Family reunification	Fled targeted cartel violence directed at her and her family. Intended as a temporary protective measure to escape danger and secure immediate safety.
Migration trajectory	Husband arrived first, Respondent and children arrived later.	applicant holds a study permit; husband holds a work permit.	Entered Canada on a study permit via an education consultant; husband held an accompanying work permit. Transitioned to a work permit tied to her husband's employer and achieved Permanent Residency via Express Entry within three years.	Arrived on a visa and subsequently transitioned to permanent resident status through sponsorship.	Overstayed her visa on her family's advice as ongoing cartel violence made returning unsafe. Applied for refugee status during the COVID-19 pandemic to secure permanent legal protection.
Family composition	Respondent, husband, and adult children.	Husband and young child	Respondent, husband, 2 children	Partner and 2 children who are at home while in University	Husband, and two children
Years in Canada	20 years	5 years	5 years	20 years	6 years
Caring of others	Information access and community networks are critical for newcomer support.	Driven by personal conviction despite the personal toll of learning and navigating the system.	Views service as paying back a debt to newcomers rather than a shared, collective effort.	Serves as a bridge between Indigenous diaspora groups and Turtle Island (Canada) Indigenous communities.	Consistently supports community members, colleagues, classmates, friends, and family.
Occupation	Settlement worker	Settlement worker	Pursuing Canadian education to further her career, fully aware of the shift away from her past professional experiences as am engineer	Outreach and housing worker at a refugee centre	Community worker student

	Int. respondent #6	Int. respondent #7	Int. respondent #8	Int. respondent #9	Int. respondent #10	Int. respondent #11
Country of Origen	**Spain**	**Colombia**	**Venezuela**	**Colombia**	**Mexico**	**Mexico**
Age	**40-50**	**30-40**	**50-60**	**40-50**	**30-40**	**30-40**
Reason for migration	Decided to settle in Canada due to her husband's job and the birth of their child	Fled gender-based violence to find safety. Entered Canada via a migration consultant, with her husband holding a work permit and herself holding a study permit.	Identified and targeted for her anti-government political activism.	Fled human rights targeting to seek safety, rest. Forced to remain in Canada due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.	Fled to seek immediate safety and protection from domestic abuse	Targeted based on political/social activism and gender identity.
Migration trajectory	Relocated to Canada primarily for practical considerations, maintaining an ongoing intent for her stay to remain strictly temporary.	Received a three-year extension through July–August 2026 and is in the process of applying for permanent status.	Arrived on visitor status for a temporary rest. Decided to seek refugee status after receiving news of a second violent attack on their residence in their home country.	Forced to remain in Canada due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.	Refugee claim was submitted with limited supporting evidence and subsequently denied Currently out of status; retained a lawyer to file a Humanitarian & Compassionate (H&C) application	Exhausted every legal recourse available over five years before finally securing her landed Permanent Residency.
Family composition	Husband and 2 children	Respondent and husband	Respondent and husband	Respondent and partner	Single	NA
Years in Canada	6 years	5 years		6 years	6 years	20 years
Caring of others	Observes that Canadian society can present greater barriers to social integration than other regions, leading her to adopt a holistic settlement approach that combines formal programming with deep relational support.	Worked in the Human Right sector in Colombia (GBV), Volunteers her time and knowledge at different organizations in Toronto	Being unable to freely express her humanity through caring for and being close to others has been a significant emotional hurdle for her.	Empowers migrant survivors through skill-building and empowerment programs.	She serves as a vital resource hub, proactively connecting individuals with the information and tools they need to thrive.	Longstanding advocacy and community organizing for precarious-status migrant women. Personal lived experience as a racialized, queer, and undocumented individual drives her commitment to human rights advocacy.
Occupation	Community development coordinator	She manages a café, hopes to open a hub for migrant women to focus on their wellbeing	Settlement support worker	Skills development for precarious status migrants	Multiple part time jobs across the city	Labour organizer and activist

Focus Group Participants

	FG. Participant #1	FG. Participant #2	FG. Participant #3	FG. Participant #4
Country of origin	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	need t confirm this.
Age	40-50	40-50	30-40	30-40
Reason to migrate	To reunited with husband searching for job opportunities and work authorization	Experienced substantial economic loss due to job and permit fraud. Misled by unfulfilled job offers and promised work authorization. Currently holds over $10,000 in debt incurred through these efforts.	Driven by economic reasons to seek employment opportunities abroad. Deceived by false promises of guaranteed work upon arrival.	Not known
Family composition	Resides in Canada with husband and two children (one Canadian-born) Leads all family initiatives to secure legal immigration status in Canada	Left children in the care of her family The initial plan was to secure employment and status and bring them to Canada	Has one Canadian-born child; other children are still in the care of family back home.	Alone in Canada, renting a room with other women in similar situations
Experiences of activism and care	Provides ongoing care for family and manages community support networks in Mexico Participates in Canadian feminist collectives to help non-status migrant women access family services.	Worked as a caregiver and seasonal agricultural worker. Engages in Canadian workers' rights movements and feminist collectives.	She is part of a feminist collective for migrant women in Toronto	She was always interested in advocacy, specifically women's land rights. In Canada, she is part of two feminist collectives