LOCATING “CLASS” IN THE TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELD: MIGRATION, LABOUR, AND RACIALIZATION IN AMAZON WAREHOUSES IN THE GTA

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Abstract

This dissertation – Locating "Class" in the Transnational Social Field: Migration, Labour, and Racialization in Amazon Warehouses in the GTA – is a qualitative study of the experiences of immigrants working in Amazon's warehouses in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Informed by anti-racist Marxist approaches to class and extended through a transnational lens, I draw from interviews with Amazon warehouse workers, along with documentary sources, to examine how the racial formations that emerge on warehouse shopfloors shape micro-processes of class formation. Here, I theorize racial formation as the outcome of an interplay between "racialization from below" and "racialization from above." I show that within the warehouse, 'racialization from below' emerges from the transnational repertoires and experiences of diverse groups of immigrants, shaping their practices of self- and other racialization and the development of ethnic boundaries. My analysis of 'racialization from below' engages with the critique of methodological nationalism, which assumes that racialization occurs within bounded nation-states. As my dissertation illustrates, 'racialization from above' arises from both Amazon's management practices and corporate 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI), as well as through the state's discursive practices of multiculturalism. By taking these multi-scalar processes of racialization into account, I offer an analysis of the racialized dimensions of digital Taylorism at Amazon and argue that the use of digital technologies to manage and organize the labour process is a socially grounded phenomenon, situated within a racially/ethnically stratified context that inflects the uneven experiences of algorithmic management, challenging accounts of algorithmic neutrality. By incorporating the transnational into the social, and integrating the social in the digital, my research seeks to shed light on the multiple and nuanced ways in which immigrant workers' identities and solidarities are forged and fissured under digitally mediated precarious work arrangements. Situated within Amazon's expanding logistics infrastructure in the GTA, the warehouse emerges as a strategic node where migration, racialized labour-market segmentation, and the temporal imperatives of circulation converge in the organization and intensification of work

To my parents,
Manal and Reda

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This dissertation may bear my name, but reaching its end was never an individual accomplishment. Many people supported the work itself; others, more importantly, sustained the person trying to do it.

This dissertation was written over many years, under conditions that often made writing only one among many demands on my time and energy. Like too many graduate students, I spent much of this degree navigating financial precarity, care responsibilities, and the exhausting demands of working multiple jobs at once. I also spent *a lot* of time moving through feelings of self-doubt, failure, and defeat, experiences that are far too normalized in academic life. These years were also marked by profound rupture and violence: the 2018 York strike, the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd and the uprisings that followed, and, from 2023 onward, the genocide in Gaza. I carried a great deal of grief, sorrow, anger, and pain through these events, as so many others did. They were not simply a backdrop to the dissertation. They changed what I could see, what I thought mattered, and the questions I was able to ask. The dissertation changed because the world around it changed, and because I changed in relation to that world.

At the centre of this dissertation are the research participants who entrusted me with their time, stories, and struggles. Without their candour and generosity, this project would not exist. I have tried to honour that trust throughout these pages, and I hope I have done some justice to the complexity of what they shared with me.

I was fortunate to encounter people in York's Sociology program who shaped both my intellectual life and my experience of graduate school. Audrey Tokiwa, our former Graduate Program Assistant, was so much more than an administrator. She cried with me in moments of both joy and sadness, offered excellent advice when I needed it most, and fought for me when I found myself up against the bureaucracy of the institution. I will always be grateful for the care with which she treated graduate students and for the many ways she showed up for me. Luin Goldring was one of my earliest mentors at York. She supported me generously, wrote countless letters on my behalf, exposed me to new ideas, and challenged me intellectually in ways that helped shape the scholar I became. Sylvia Bawa has been a dear friend and supporter and has taught me much of what I know about being an empathetic, rigorous, and engaging educator. I had the privilege of learning from her as both a student and a teaching assistant, and I have carried those lessons into my own classroom. I remain a little awed that I had the opportunity to learn from Himani Bannerji. Her teaching taught me how to read carefully and critically through an anti-racist feminist Marxist tradition that has profoundly shaped the way I think. Guida Man's course on migration and transnationalism brought together so much of what I had been yearning to read, learn, and think about, and helped set me on the intellectual path that eventually became this dissertation. Katherine Bischoping deserves thanks for more or less forcing me to confront my fear of public speaking and present my work at conferences when I would never have volunteered to do so myself. I am deeply grateful as well to Ratiba Hadj-Moussa, Radhika Mongia, and Lesley Wood for their kindness, encouragement, and support throughout my years in the program.

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Everyone who knows Mark will tell you that he is gentle, and he is. But his kindness has never meant asking less of me. With patience and persistence, he challenged me to move beyond my intellectual and theoretical comfort zones, including into areas where I was adamant that I had neither expertise nor anything useful to say. In doing so, he expanded my intellectual horizons and helped me trust my own capacity to think beyond the boundaries I had drawn for myself. Somewhere along the way, through meetings over sandwiches and gelato, conversations about labour process theory, and frequent digressions about cats, a supervisor also became a dear friend.

Perhaps what I am most grateful for is that Mark helped me bring together parts of myself that had too often felt siloed from one another: my labour activism, my curiosity about social theory, my political commitments, and my own personal and family history. This dissertation became a place where those different parts could finally speak to one another, and that owes enormously to his mentorship. Mark has been there from the beginning, and my intellectual and political becoming owes more to him than I can adequately express. His extraordinary kindness and care have carried me through this journey in ways that extend far beyond the dissertation itself. A simple thank you does not begin to cover it.

I first encountered Philip Kelly's work in Guida Man's course on migration and transnationalism, and I remember being genuinely excited to find someone writing about questions that felt so close to the ones I was asking. A few months later, I met Philip on the Shoreham picket line, where he walked alongside us in solidarity during the 2018 strike. Having so recently discovered and admired his scholarship, I frequently joked afterward that I had become his academic groupie. I was therefore genuinely honoured when he agreed to join my supervisory committee.

Philip is an exceptionally careful and rigorous reader. His comments were always thorough, thoughtful, and attentive to both the larger argument and the smallest details, and his feedback consistently pushed the dissertation to become sharper and more precise. He also brought a welcome sense of humour to the process, often accompanied by jokes about being English and the easy camaraderie of a fellow cat person. Beyond the dissertation itself, Philip has been a steady supporter, regularly sending along information about conferences, calls for papers, jobs, and other opportunities he thought might be useful to me. His generosity is something many of his students speak of as well, and I understand why. I feel very fortunate to have had him on my committee and, quite simply, to know him.

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beginning she was an extraordinarily warm and supportive presence. The first time I actually met her in person was at a Palestine solidarity protest in Toronto, and after that I seemed to run into her at nearly every one. She also walked the picket lines with us during the 2024 strike.

We both come from a region torn apart by war, and with that comes a particular kind of weary familiarity with violence, but also particular forms of recognition, love, and solidarity. There was something deeply comforting in encountering her again and again in those spaces. Shirin has an exceptionally gentle way of challenging me: her nudges are thoughtful and precise, never imposing, but somehow always leaving me with more to think about. She is brilliant, gracious, and unfailingly kind. Throughout the final stages of this dissertation, she assuaged my self-doubt and brought calm when I needed it most. I am very glad that she agreed to be part of my committee.

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The Global Labour Research Centre gave me an intellectual and political home at York. Through its projects, events, and community, I found a space where questions of labour, organizing, political economy, and social justice could be thought about collectively. I am grateful for the opportunities it gave me to learn, work, organize, and build relationships beyond the boundaries of my own department and the university.

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I am also indebted to the political movements that kept hope alive when the world around us often felt impossibly bleak. Labour, anti-racist, migrant justice, anti-imperialist, and Palestine solidarity movements reminded me that even amid violence and defeat, people continue to organize, care for one another, and insist that things can be otherwise. Much of my political education happened in and through these movements.

There are friends whose love and care sustained me through these years. There is a Palestinian concept I have often thought about in relation to these women: *sumud*, usually translated as steadfastness. It belongs to a particular Palestinian history and political experience, but I recognize something of its spirit in each of them – in their different ways of enduring, caring, fighting, creating joy, and remaining committed to the people and worlds they love.

Grace Barakat is one of those people. We journeyed through graduate school together, and she has been my ride or die across many facets of my life. Grace feels deeply with and for the people she loves. She *sees* me. There were moments when she could articulate my own heartbreak to me when I could not yet find the words for it myself. She is, truly, one of the best human beings I have ever known. Her generosity is so boundless that being her friend can occasionally be frustrating, if only because I am never quite sure how I could possibly reciprocate it. Grace makes me a better person and makes me want to be a better person. If my students have ever experienced me as a kind and empathetic educator, most of that is because I learned a particular kind of humility and care from her. I adore her, and life is simply not the same without her in it.

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This dissertation was completed not because of, but in many respects *despite*, York University's administration. Accordingly, there are those to whom **no-thanks** are due: the Board of Governors and the senior administrators who have presided over the neoliberalization of York University, including Rhonda Lenton, Barry Miller, Rob Lawson, Dan Bradshaw, Lisa Philipps, and others within York's Office of Labour Relations and Department of Faculty Relations.

Over the years in which I completed this degree, I watched an increasingly bloated administrative stratum expand alongside austerity imposed elsewhere in the university, whose substantial salaries consume resources that could otherwise support teaching, research, students, and decent working conditions. They have presided over the erosion of collegial governance, increasingly punitive labour relations, aggressive union-busting campaigns, and overall conditions in which those who actually make the university run have repeatedly been asked to absorb the consequences.

I also want to state plainly my opposition to the Board of Governors and York's senior administration's continued role in reprehensible investments and institutional relationships that fuel death, genocide, surveillance, and climate collapse, as well as their repression of those who challenge the university's complicity. York's treatment of Palestine solidarity, and its failure to meaningfully confront anti-Palestinian racism, have made clear the limits of its institutional commitments to equity, academic freedom, and social justice. A university cannot credibly celebrate those values while disciplining dissent and resisting demands that it disclose and divest from financial and institutional relationships implicated in violence and dispossession.

This dissertation is therefore not a testament to York University's managerial leadership. Its completion owes far more to the collective labour, care, and solidarity that sustain the university despite it.

Nor can I complete a dissertation about Amazon without naming the broader forms of violence in which the corporation is implicated. The labour regime examined in these pages is only one dimension of a corporate infrastructure that extends into surveillance, policing, deportation, occupation, and war. Through Amazon Web Services, Amazon is a partner in Project Nimbus, which provides cloud infrastructure to the Israeli state and military, and the company has also actively marketed surveillance technology to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). I understand these relationships as part of Amazon's complicity in the genocide in Gaza and in wider systems of dispossession and state violence. The exploitation of workers inside Amazon's warehouses cannot be neatly separated from the forms of power enabled by the technological, logistical, and financial infrastructure the corporation has accumulated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Amazon's warehouses have become central sites in the remaking of work in contemporary capitalism. In the Greater Toronto Area, these facilities are located within suburban labour markets shaped by immigration, racialization, and precarious employment. This dissertation begins from that convergence: the expansion of Amazon's logistical infrastructure, the racialized organization of warehouse labour, and the transnational lives of immigrant workers who move through these spaces. This dissertation is being completed at a moment when the relationship between far-right politics, corporate power, and the technology sector is becoming increasingly explicit. At Donald Trump's second inauguration, he took the oath of office as a wall of tech billionaires stood behind him, emblemizing a new political alliance; a parade in which Jeff Bezos participated only days after Amazon management in Queens, New York, activated rooftop sprinkler systems during a union rally, drenching striking workers with cold water in freezing temperatures in an apparent attempt to break up the picket line (Feliz Leon, 2024). Meanwhile in Canada, Amazon has ordered the shuttering of *all* of its Quebec warehousing operations after workers in the Laval warehouse successfully won a unionization drive, leaving a Liberal government grasping at ways to discipline the corporate Goliath, the same entity it actively subsidizes, once entrusted to manage the COVID-19 rollout and with which it holds multiple federal and provincial contracts. These events unfold amidst a rise in anti-immigrant sentiments, percolating in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic – a time in which a prominently racialized and/or immigrant workforce performed essential work, from food and care service and delivery, to retail and warehousing – signaling the ways in which racialized immigrant labour is persistently deemed disposable. Immigration is once again at the forefront of social debate, revealing the fault lines of the Canadian racial-capitalist, settler colonial nation-building project.

In their most recent Impact Report, Amazon presents itself as an indispensable engine of national growth, citing over $50 billion in direct investments since 2010 and the creation of more than 45,000 jobs across more than 70 sites (Amazon, 2024, p. 3). These include fulfilment centres, sortation sites, delivery stations, air hubs, and corporate offices, with major hubs located in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, and significant infrastructure also in Manitoba and Quebec prior to recent closures (Amazon, 2024, pp. 3–4). Ontario has seen the most substantial job creation, with over 25,000 people employed in that province alone, followed by British Columbia with 10,000 employees and Alberta with 6,000 (Amazon, 2024, p. 4).

Beyond these headline figures is a portrait of Amazon's deeper entrenchment within Canada's political economy, not only as a corporate giant that benefits from public contracts and subsidies, but also as a powerful actor shaping labour markets, technological infrastructure, and state priorities. The report highlights Amazon's extensive logistics and data infrastructure, including major investments in cloud computing and renewable energy, as markers of innovation and national progress (Amazon, 2024, pp. 7–10). However, its simultaneous shuttering of all Quebec operations underscores the volatility and conditionality of such "progress", a detail notably absent from the report itself. This corporate narrative, of course, performs ideological work, projecting an image of seamless innovation and inclusive prosperity while erasing the racialized labour struggles, precarity, and collective resistance that increasingly challenge Amazon's dominance.

Multiple civil society organizations and labour advocacy groups have highlighted these contradictions. For example, Good Jobs First and UNI Global Union estimate the potential value of public support for Amazon Web Services' Montréal data-centre operations at approximately $325.6 million over twenty years, largely through preferential electricity pricing (Thomas et al.,

2022). The Centre for International Corporate Tax Accountability and Research (CICTAR) and TaxWatch (2022) further document Amazon's reliance on public contracts and tax concessions alongside opaque corporate reporting practices, calling into question the company's fiscal contributions relative to its public support. These relationships extend beyond direct subsidies. Shore (2021) reports that Amazon received more than $15 million in contracts and purchases from the governments of Canada and Quebec between 2018 and 2021, while Quebec's publicly managed pension fund invested $388 million in the company over the same period. Amazon's operations rely on an overwhelmingly racialized and immigrant labour force whose disposability is built into its model of digital Taylorism, a reality obscured by the report's corporate optimism. As such, the report offers a glimpse not only into Amazon's economic might, but into the racialized labour regimes and state-corporate entanglements that sustain digital capitalism in Canada.

Amazon, Racialized Labour Markets, and Neoliberal Restructuring

Deborah Cowen (2014) argues that "[c]ommodities today are manufactured *across logistics space* rather than in a singular place (p. 2)," unsettling notions about a single site of production and underscoring the central role of logistics in today's just-in-time production regimes (Chua & Cox, 2023; Moody, 2019; Delfanti, 2021). The growing importance of logistics is rooted in the restructuring of capitalist production since the mid-twentieth century. As production became increasingly geographically dispersed, particularly through the expansion of global supply chains, the coordination of circulation itself became increasingly strategic to accumulation. The "logistics revolution" transformed transportation and warehousing from relatively discrete functions into an integrated system for managing the movement of commodities across production, distribution, and consumption (Danyluk, 2018; Chua et al., 2018). Just-in-time

production, inventory management, and increasingly sophisticated distribution infrastructures sought to reduce circulation costs and shorten turnover time by keeping commodities in continuous motion. Warehouses consequently became not simply spaces of storage but strategic nodes through which geographically dispersed production is coordinated with consumer markets. Amazon's rise to becoming a goliath in e-commerce business underlines some of the transformations wrought by the making of its logistics spaces and the role it plays in contemporary capitalist accumulation strategies, its impact on the geographies in which it operates, and their implications on the expansion of precarious work.

In Canada, the key geographical peripheries in which Amazon sets up its "new retail factories" (Chua & Cox, 2023) are suburbs characterized by racially and ethnically segmented labour markets. The arduous work of circulating and distributing commodities across Amazon's logistical space, which includes stowing, packing, shipping, labelling, and delivery, is performed by a predominantly racialized immigrant workforce living and working in suburban regions.

Racialized people represent 54.6 percent of the GTA. Immigrants comprise nearly half of the GTA population (44.8 percent), with 47.8 percent in the York Region, 46.6 percent in the City of Toronto, and 51.8 percent in the Region of Peel (Census 2021); roughly 86 percent of those immigrants are visible minorities (TRIEC, 2018). Despite the region's diversity, racialized immigrants' inclusion in the economic sphere points to a different material reality (Dinca-Panaitescu et al., 2019). The liberalization of Canadian immigration policies between the late 1960s and early 1970s entailed the removal of explicit racial exclusion and a shift from race-based to class-based selection criteria. This change occurred alongside the erosion of the post-war compromise, including weakened welfare-state protections, declining employment standards, and diminishing union power. The fruits of this bygone 'golden era' of labour were

never fully realized by racialized immigrants, for whom the union advantage of better wages, among other benefits, remains elusive (Verma et al., 2016, Thomas, 2010b).

Amazon's expansion in the GTA takes shape within this longer history of immigration reform, labour market restructuring, public austerity, and corporate welfare. Neoliberalism signifies market-oriented reforms through which state policy, labour markets, and public infrastructure have been reorganized through privatization, deregulation, individual responsibilization, and reduced social provisioning (Connell, 2010; Harvey, 2005; Peck et al., 2009, McBride & Shields, 1997; Ong, 2006). In a globalized world, neoliberalism is also associated with reduced barriers to trade, the augmentation of finance capital, and the selective reorganization of borders in the service of global accumulation. These transformations were accompanied by a geographical reorganization of production. The expansion of offshoring and globally dispersed supply chains depended upon, and in turn accelerated, the development of logistical systems capable of coordinating production across greater distances. Containerization, transport infrastructure, information technologies, and increasingly sophisticated inventory systems made it possible to link dispersed sites of production to consumer markets while reducing the time and costs associated with circulation (Danyluk, 2018; Chua et al., 2018).

To facilitate and enforce these market-oriented transformations on a transnational scale, a new architecture of global institutions emerged. As Slobodian (2018) argues, these institutional structures emerged partly in response to mid-twentieth-century decolonial movements in the Global South that threatened to disrupt global markets, becoming tools through which the continuity of global capitalism was secured. David Harvey (2005) makes the distinction between neoliberalism in theory and in practice, suggesting that the theoretical underpinning of the philosophy of liberalism and its offspring, neoliberalism, is utilized to garner acquiescence to a

largely unjust socio-economic order. Harvey puts forth a systemic and structural view of neoliberalism as a political project of socio-economic (re)organization that is created and recreated through and for the sustenance of ruling-class interests. Arguing against the notion that neoliberalism is merely about the "free market," Slobodian (2023) underscores that the protection of global elite interests is secured through governance structures that insulate the market from local, popular democratic demands and ability to intervene in the economic system.

Following Peck et al. (2009), neoliberalization is better understood as an uneven and historically situated process than as an "autonomous system," (p. 103) a point that matters for tracing how market-oriented reforms build upon older racialized and colonial structures. Aihwa Ong (2006) theorizes what she refers to as "small n" neoliberalism to convey the situational contingency of it as a technology of governing, without necessarily overlooking its global dynamism. In *Neoliberalism as Exception*, Ong advances a Foucauldian analysis of neoliberalism as governmentality: "a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and non-ideological problems that need technical solutions" aimed at "optimization" (p. 3). Ong (2006) is careful to note that neoliberalism interacts with various "assemblages" to disembed and re-embed notions of governmentality that are both discursive and nondiscursive. A contextualized conception of neoliberalism is important in understanding the inherently ideological ('knowledge'-based) mechanisms of racialization and reproduction of capitalist power.

In the Canadian milieu, McBride and Shields (1997) identify the advent of neoliberalism as a "piecemeal movement" in the mid-1970s, to full-fledged "systemic shift" after the national triumph of the Progressive Conservative Party in 1984 under the leadership of Brian Mulroney and later the Liberal Party of Jean Chrétien in 1993. The neoliberal doctrine followed the

prescriptions of neoclassical economists who, unlike John Maynard Keynes, focused on supply-side management and the pursuit of economic growth through producer-oriented incentives (McBride & Shields, 1997). In this vein and within the context of globalization, states support their agents of capital as vehicles of growth and competition in the global economy. Focusing on the developments that took place in 1984, McBride and Shields (1997) identify the following key foundations of neoliberalism in Canada: a] the expansion of market forces through the signing of 'free trade' agreements, and the dismantling of social services and unions to eliminate barriers to the market; b] the prioritization of deficit reduction and concerns over inflation and job creation; c] the reconfiguration of taxation so as to make it more favourable to capital; and d] the erosion of Canada's statist tradition to pave the way for privatization and deregulation (p. 28). Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002) assert that these transformations were built on previous structures rather than emerging as a 'pure' type.' Their account helps situate Canadian immigration policy within a broader neoliberal restructuring in which human capital, labour market flexibility, and economic contribution became central criteria for migrant selection.

Canadian immigration policies in the post-war period have been consistently shaped by neoliberal 'human capital' considerations (Abu-Laban et al., 2022). As Ong's (2003) analysis of neoliberalism suggests, the shift from explicit preferences from race to class can be perceived as "a positive decision to include selected populations as targets of 'calculative choices and value orientation' associated with neoliberal reform" (p. 5). That is, formally race-neutral categories do not simply replace older racial exclusions, but reorganize them through market criteria. Skill, education, adaptability, and human capital become ways of sorting migrants according to their anticipated economic value, while obscuring the transnational inequalities that make such sorting possible. Robinson's (1983) critique of racial capitalism is instructive on precisely this

point. In *Black Marxism*, he argues that accounts of European capitalist development rely on a fiction of national boundedness that erases the migrant labour through which that development was made possible. This erasure, he argues, follows from "the mistaken use of the nation as a social, historical, and economic category" and from the persistent reference to national labour "pools" such as "the English working class" (Robinson, 1983, p. 23). Immigration policy helps convert uneven global relations into nationally legible measures of merit, productivity, and employability (Chatterjee, 2025; Nieswand, 2018). The wealth of national economies is not produced within the nation alone, but through selective bordering, differential mobility, and the incorporation of migrant labour under stratified conditions of status, recognition, and disposability.

As I elaborate in the following chapter, Amazon has been steadily expanding across the province and the country, with a concentrated presence in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Exploiting the geographical and class disparities, the company's practices are overlain atop classed, raced, and gendered inequalities that punctuate and perpetuate its access to cheap labour, increasingly reshaping and further degrading the standards of employment across sectors of work. Amazon's warehousing operations are sustained through public logistical and transportation infrastructures, corporate welfare, and racialized suburban labour markets. The apparent mobility of contemporary logistics therefore rests on extensive forms of fixity, including warehouses, highways, airports, communications systems, and serviced industrial land whose development has depended substantially on state investment (Danyluk, 2018). These conditions allow the company to capitalize on and deepen the classed and racialized inequalities that structure the GTA.

Research Questions and Contributions

The preceding discussion situates Amazon's expansion within overlapping histories of immigration policy, racialized labour market formation, neoliberal restructuring, and corporate power. These histories help explain the structural conditions that make Amazon's warehouse regime possible, but they do not fully account for how workers themselves experience, interpret, and navigate those conditions. Existing approaches to class and work often begin from the workplace or national labour market, leaving less room for the transnational trajectories through which workers' class and racial positions are formed. Transnational migration scholarship, meanwhile, illuminates social relations that extend across borders but less often examines how they become consequential within the organization of work. This dissertation begins from that gap. It brings these perspectives together to examine how class is lived and made meaningful across transnational social fields, and how those class relations become consequential within, and are reshaped through, Amazon's racialized and digitally managed labour regime. It asks how racialized immigrant workers make sense of digitally mediated work at Amazon, how they understand hierarchy and differentiation within the warehouse, and how migration histories, labour market precarity, and transnational social worlds shape their subjectivities, attachments, and relations with one another.

This dissertation is a qualitative study of the experiences of immigrants working in Amazon's warehouses (or what the company calls 'Fulfilment Centres' or FCs) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). My research asks the following questions: How do the transnational practices and repertoires of immigrants working in Amazon's warehouses in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) shape their class identities and relations with co-workers? How do the transnational lives of these workers affect how they form connections with one another and develop mutual

bonds or solidarities? What are the labour processes through which Amazon organizes, manages, and disciplines warehouse work? Finally, what are the (multiscalar) processes of racialization that shape the labour processes in Amazon's warehouses, and how do they shape workers' subjectivities and practices?

This research is focused primarily on the interracial and inter-ethnic relations across immigrant groups rather than between "immigrants" and "Canadian-born White workers," and on the local and transnational dimensions of their interactions in their site of destination, that is, Canada and Amazon. Through this dissertation, I seek to bring together and bridge debates in transnational migration studies, the sociology of work, theories of class, and studies of race, racism and racialization, to offer a deeper analysis of the experience of working at Amazon's digitized workplaces, the transnational dimensions of workers' lives, and their bearing on their identities, practices, and dynamics with co-workers.

Informed by a transnational, anti-racist feminist approach to the study of class, I examine how the racial formations that emerge on warehouse shopfloors shape micro-processes of class formation. Here, I theorize racial formation as the outcome of an interplay between "racialization from below" and "racialization from above." I show that within the warehouse, 'racialization from below' emerges from the transnational repertoires and experiences of diverse groups of immigrants, shaping their practices of self- and other racialization and the development of ethnic boundaries. My analysis of 'racialization from below' engages with the critique of methodological nationalism, which assumes that racialization occurs within bounded nation-states, and suggests that immigrants become racialized only after migration. As my dissertation illustrates, 'racialization from above' arises from both Amazon's management practices and corporate 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI), as well as through the state's discursive

practices of multiculturalism. By taking these multi-scalar processes of racialization into account, I offer an analysis of the racialized dimensions of digital Taylorism at Amazon and argue that the use of digital technologies to manage the labour process is a socially grounded phenomenon, situated within a racially/ethnically stratified context that inflects the uneven experiences of algorithmic management. By incorporating the transnational into the social, and integrating the social in the digital, my research seeks to shed light on the multiple and nuanced ways in which immigrant workers' identities and solidarities are forged and fissured under digitally mediated precarious work arrangements. Amazon's expanding logistics infrastructure in the GTA thereby offers a case study through which to examine the racial dynamics of digital capitalism and the challenges of organizing these spaces.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter Two outlines the bodies of scholarship from which I draw and on which I build. Here, I focus on: (i) the vast literature that takes up questions of class formation and class identity; (ii) the related if sometimes distinct scholarship on gender, race, racialization, and race formation, more recently encapsulated in the conceptual framework of racial capitalism. I draw on the framework of racial capitalism to analytically assess the contours of difference, or the racialized and gendered dimensions of class formation both historically and presently in the Canadian context more broadly. I offer a conceptual framework that seeks to marry the ways in which race and class are made and remade at multiple scales by applying a transnational lens. I argue that a transnational approach to racial and class identities helps illuminate some of the complex and contradictory ways by which diverse sets of immigrant groups may or may not come together as a class 'for itself'.

Chapter Three, "Context of Study", offers a thorough historicization of racialized class-making through the evolution of Canada's immigration policies in service of its settler colonial nation-building-project. I trace the trajectory of this past to the present, demonstrating the ongoing dynamics of racialization in contemporary class processes. Within this context, I outline Amazon's presence and growth in Canada and more specifically in the GTA, its relationships to various levels of the Canadian state, and its broader political economic impact in the racialized geographies of the GTA and the racialization of precarious work. In short, I demonstrate Amazon's subsumption of, predation on, and investment in the social constitutions of surplus populations in the (post)-COVID era as cheap and disposable labour (Gebrial 2022; Chua & Cox, 2023).

Chapter 4, "Performing Productivity: Digital Control and Worker Subjectivities at Amazon," provides a detailed account of the labour process inside Amazon's FCs, tracing Amazon's deployment of digital technologies through the trajectories of scientific management and lean production practices, interrogating the ways in which these technologies act on workers' bodies and subjectivities. Within these digitally mediated forms of work, Amazon promotes a 'culture of meritocracy' that intensifies both labour as well as competition between workers through algorithms and digital technologies. Amazon's management practices enshrine promises of upward mobility as a reward for hard work, while simultaneously creating a culture of transience and planned obsolescence, both of which work to undercut workers' ability to form potential solidaristic bonds. Alongside its proclaimed meritocratic ethos, Amazon's profitability hinges on a labour process that necessitates a 'culture of injury' through management-by-stress – requiring repetitive tasks and creating levels of mental anguish that are exacerbated by undisclosed performance goals (the need to 'make rate') dictated by algorithms. The chapter

further argues that these dynamics must be understood not only in technical or coercive terms but also through what I call the *performativity of growth*: accelerated labour is at once the material foundation of Amazon's profitability and staged as evidence of limitless expansion, making the very act of enduring warehouse work appear tied to a broader horizon of progress.

Chapter Five, "'Culture of Diversity': Multiscalar and Intersecting Processes of Racialization", constructs an analysis of how people experience work *racially*, examining how 'favouritism' occurs along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. If digital technology acts on workers and their subjectivities, how do their life experiences and histories in turn shape how its impact unfolds? I analyze the emergence of these inequalities and unevenness in the labour process as an interplay between forms of *racialization from below* and *racialization from above.* *Racialization from below* is articulated through transnational and local experiences of race/ethnicity, class, and status that shape alliances and frictions amongst workers and between workers and managers. *Racialization from above* is constituted through state and corporate practices of multiculturalism. Much of Amazon's 'diversity' messaging is transposed from the United States, while their efforts to promote so-called 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI) are loosely articulated through certain mentorship programs, like "affinity groups." Racialization from above also includes national discourses of Canadian multiculturalism that influence the ways in which immigrants experience work and develop a 'sense of inequality' (Bottero, 2020). The Canadian state's migration and labour regimes structure the contours of the racial and ethnic stratification of workers through different pathways of migration and valuation of skills that shape the uneven distribution of precarity, citizenship, and immigrants' human capital (Gowayed, 2022). I argue that these national discourses have an impact on immigrants' subjectivities and expectations, workers' engagement with one another, as well as their 'work

ethic.' Immigrants who enter Canada with precarious trajectories toward citizenship – including student and work permits– are required to work hard and 'stay out of trouble' to obtain permanent residency and Canadian citizenship. These dynamics can produce racial and ethnic identifications and alliances through which class inequalities are interpreted and expressed, sometimes complicating the formation of class solidarity (Bettie, 2000). Together, these multiscalar and intersecting processes of racialization form the *racial choreography of production*. This concept builds from what Faranak Miraftab (2016) terms the "linguistic choreography of production line" (p. 78) to describe the multi-scalar processes of cooptation, contentions, and divisions that seek to stifle solidarity amongst diverse groups of workers.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation by returning to its central questions through an account of a worker-organized picnic, using the gathering to reflect on the possibilities and limits of solidarity among workers whose racial, ethnic, and linguistic relations are shaped through both their local and transnational social worlds. The chapter synthesizes the dissertation's main arguments about locating class in the transnational social field, the socially grounded character of digital Taylorism, and the multi-scalar processes of racialization through which Amazon's labour regime is organized and experienced. It then considers the broader implications of these findings for digital capitalism and for organizing Amazon across the multiple scales at which its power operates, before outlining the study's limitations and future directions for research on automation, organizing, and solidarities across Amazon's differentiated labour processes.

Research Methods

The findings and analysis presented in this dissertation draw on several sources: 17 semi-structured life-story interviews with current and former Amazon workers; documentary analysis of Amazon corporate reports, government and civil society reports, and media sources, and

labour advocacy documents; contextual labour market data; and engagement with Amazon worker solidarity spaces.[1] Interviews lasted between forty minutes and two hours. I also draw, more selectively, on fieldnotes and observations from worker solidarity events, including an ethnographic account of a worker picnic discussed in the conclusion. The interviews provide insight into workers' experiences, migration trajectories, workplace relations, and subjectivities, while the documentary and media sources help trace Amazon's corporate self-presentation, public controversies, state-corporate relationships, and broader processes of racialization from above. The contextual labour market analysis, including a weighted descriptive analysis of the 2021 Census Public Use Microdata File (PUMF) for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), situates workers' accounts within broader patterns of racialized labour market segmentation.

Seventeen interviews were conducted. The study's participants included fourteen current or former Amazon warehouse workers in the Greater Toronto Area and one community organizer, representing a range of genders, ages, and ethnic backgrounds. Seven participants were women, including one Middle Eastern woman aged 20–30, one South Asian community organizer, one East Asian woman aged 40–50, and four South Asian women aged 50–60. The remaining seven participants were men: three White men aged 20–30, one White man aged 30–40, two South Asian men aged 20–30, three South Asian men aged 30–40, and one Latin American man in his 60s. This composition reflects both ethnic and generational diversity within

[1] Although this project was shaped by engagement with worker solidarity spaces, I do not frame it as participatory action research. The research questions and design were not collectively generated through an organizing campaign or worker collective, and the dissertation does not claim to represent a collaboratively produced research agenda. Rather, my engagement with worker and organizer spaces informed recruitment, contextual understanding, and limited forms of interpretive checking.

the workforce, with South Asian workers forming the largest ethnic group represented in the sample.

Table 1.1: Breakdown of research participants

Name	Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity/Race
Jordan	Man	20-30	White
Dina	Woman	20-30	Middle Eastern
Naomi	Woman	40-50	East Asian
Tim	Man	20-30	White
Dennis	Man	20-30	White
Kash	Man	30-40	South Asian
Devyn	Man	30-40	South Asian
Anika	Woman	50-60	South Asian
Rubi	Woman	50-60	South Asian
Zain	Man	20-30	South Asian
Kyan	Man	30-40	South Asian
Francis	Man	30-40	White
Manuel	Man	60s	Latin American
Khal	Man	20-30	South Asian
Miriam	Woman	20s	South Asian

A life story "consists of all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual" (Linde, 1993, p. 21). Life story interviews focus on the strategies speakers use to fashion coherence from the disparate and potentially contradictory experiences of their lives. This methodological choice is best suited for this study since it permits a comprehensive understanding of an interviewee's subjective worldview, as well as how a speaker creates narrative coherence between discrepant versions of or discontinuities within their life story (Jessee, 2018; Linde, 1993). The use of life-story interviews also reflects the dissertation's broader theoretical argument that workers' present positions within the labour process cannot be understood apart from the migration histories, prior class locations, family relations, and transnational social worlds through which those positions are interpreted.

To enhance the opportunity to gather richer and deeper accounts of life stories, I conducted repeat interviews, where two interviews were conducted with two participants to further develop understandings about multiple identities and shifting realities (Vincent, 2013). Repeat interviews were conducted where participants were willing and available, and where a second conversation could clarify earlier accounts or pursue lines of inquiry that emerged during transcription and analysis. They were not designed as a formal longitudinal sample. The benefits of repeat interviews not only contributed to the quality of the relationship that I was able to build with participants but also facilitated a more iterative process of clarification and interpretation. The repeat-interview design provided an opportunity to clarify and deepen understandings formed in the first interview, to follow up on missed lines of enquiry or to seek additional clarification, as well as allow participants the opportunity to reframe certain sets of experiences, events, or other sensitive issues (Vincent, 2013, p. 351). In one case, a second interview took place approximately one year later, after the participant had become a parent and moved into a managerial role. This later conversation allowed me to revisit questions about management, DEI, work intensity, and shifting class subjectivity, while also revealing changes in tone and interpretation. In most cases, however, I did not pursue a second interview where the first interview had already provided a sufficiently rich account or where asking for additional time seemed ethically inappropriate given workers' long hours and exhaustion.

Research participants were recruited through snowball sampling. The first connection was made through a personal friend who had taken up work in Amazon as an associate, and who subsequently helped virtually connect me with some of her coworkers. Other strategies of recruitment included distributing poster notices through Amazon worker WhatsApp chats and email solicitation. Access to workers was also facilitated through informal conversations outside

formal recruitment channels, including chance encounters in everyday and workplace-adjacent settings with people who worked or had worked at Amazon. These encounters enabled unplanned but productive connections with workers and community members. I initially hoped to conduct approximately 25 to 30 interviews. Recruitment, however, was constrained by the conditions under which Amazon workers were living and working during the pandemic: long shifts, exhaustion, surveillance concerns, fear of employer retaliation, and the difficulty of building trust remotely. My engagement with worker solidarity spaces did not translate into a large pool of available interviewees. These spaces included organizers, community members, trade unionists, researchers, and supporters, not only current Amazon workers. Moreover, workers' presence in or proximity to these spaces did not mean that they were available for, or comfortable with, participating in academic research. I therefore avoided over-recruiting or pressuring workers, especially where participation would make additional demands on people already navigating difficult working and life conditions.

Conducting research with workers during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be especially challenging both logistically and ethically. Early recruitment efforts in 2020 bore little fruit as many workers were acclimating to dangerous and hectic working conditions. During pandemic health measures and lockdowns, the only option to conduct interviews was remotely via Zoom or another virtual platform of the workers' choosing. One interview was carried out via phone, and 4 were conducted in person. Amazon workers are heavily surveilled throughout their working days, and many were understandably reticent to participate in a virtual interview. The pandemic mitigation lockdowns allowed little to no opportunity to develop relationships with workers prior to the interview(s). In addition, Amazon employees work 55 to 60 hours a week, on their feet, walking roughly 20 kilometers a day as they stow, pick, and ship order across

Amazon's warehouses. Some took on a second job in their one or two days off work to earn more money for themselves and their families. Making additional demands on their time frequently felt ethically unsound, and several workers with whom I had made contact and scheduled interviews were ultimately unable to make time to speak with me.

I transcribed the interviews and coded them thematically. Participants were asked about (see Appendix C) their life histories: if they were immigrants, I asked them when they came to Canada, if they arrived with their families, their professional and education background, and their experiences in the Canadian labour market since they migrated. I also queried their experience of working at Amazon, seeking to gain insight on the labour process, how work is organized and managed and by whom. Given the prevalence of algorithmic and human surveillance, I also asked workers about the social dynamics in the warehouse, whether or not they were able to form collegial relationships with their coworkers, and some of the racial and ethnic dynamics that inflected these interactions. The spectre of surveillance was palpable among workers' engagement with me: three workers asked me to not record the interviews, despite my assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Others felt a deep sense of indignation about their working conditions and felt open to share their frustrations with me.

While my interests in transnationalism and class identities were established prior to the interviews, transcribing them revealed additional questions and lines of inquiry in relation to management practices. As Riessman (1993) argues:

> [Transcription] is not a technical operation but the stuff of analysis itself, the 'unpacking' of structure that is essential to interpretation. By transcribing at this level, interpretative categories emerge, ambiguities in language are heard on the tape, and the oral record – the way the story is told – provides clues about meaning. Insights from these various sources shape the difficult decision about how to represent oral discourse as written text (p. 58).

The interviews offered illuminating insights, including in moments when clear answers were elusive. For example, one participant who – like many – held a white-collar job back home, preferred not to speak about his experience of working for Amazon and his class situation, opting instead to speak about his role as a father and as a musician. These narrative gestures are in themselves revealing, especially in relation to questions about class and class identity. Here, the disavowal of class through the participant's refusal to engage in these inquiries and the absenting of class is also a presence of a strategy to subdue class injury. Discussions around race and ethnicity also produced some interesting insights. Nearly all participants rejected explicitly racial or ethnic interpretations of workplace dynamics, instead adopting a liberal idiom of non-racism (e.g., "I'm not a racist"). This produced a tension in their accounts, in which race and racialization were repeatedly invoked yet disavowed as organizing social forces. These acts of refusal limited the degree to which I was able to get explicit or direct answers around class and race, but the participants' indirect engagement or refusal to engage with them offered some insight into how relations of race and class are obfuscated and animated by these workers.

In addition, I shared selected excerpts and emerging interpretations with a community organizer familiar with Amazon worker struggles. This was not a formal process of participatory analysis, but a limited form of community consultation and interpretive checking that helped me clarify and refine my analysis as it developed, particularly around workplace dynamics, racialized relations, and the broader organizing context.

A Note on Reflexivity

As a sociologist, I am trained to be mindful and self-aware of my own positionality in relation to both my research questions and research participants. To a large degree, my intellectual interests in immigration, inequality, and transnationalism are informed by my own experience as an

immigrant and by my family's social and economic struggles throughout that process. I sometimes disclosed aspects of this background to participants as a way of establishing common ground or solidarity. Still, how I was perceived by participants remains difficult to assess. Any attempt to do so on my part inevitably involves degrees of conjecture or projection, and such perceptions were uneven, shifting across contexts and encounters. In some interactions, older women appeared to relate to me through a familial lens, often invoking their own daughters in conversation – a gesture I interpreted as positioning me, implicitly, as a daughter-like figure. Others saw me as someone who might carry their experiences beyond the warehouse floor – not in the sense of 'giving voice,' but as someone who could relay and amplify the struggles they were already articulating. At other times, gendered dynamics shaped who I engaged with and how. For instance, I was deliberate in setting boundaries around communication, particularly in situations where sharing personal contact information with male participants might compromise my comfort. These choices were not judgments about individual participants, but rather reflections of the risk management and self-preservation strategies that often accompany gendered fieldwork.

These shifting and situational perceptions – whether familial, political, or shaped by gendered sociality – underscore the inherently relational and power-laden nature of research. 'Positioning' myself vis-à-vis participants was never static or transparent but constantly negotiated. Further, while often framed as a gesture of self-awareness or accountability, the practice of articulating one's positionality is itself embedded in power. As Gani & Khan (2024) astutely caution:

> The scholar's emphasis on self through positionality as a process of self-awareness simultaneously obscures the apparently less privileged "other," who is nevertheless always present in reflexivity – *the Other's erasure, as well as the dialectic positioning that is*

> *imposed on them, unasked for, through the researcher's declaration of positionality, is not accounted for in this process* (emphasis added; p. 6)

This insight resonates with my own grappling with the ethical stakes of conducting research from within institutional structures. An ongoing concern I had throughout the course of this research is my embeddedness within a web of institutional practices of extractive knowledge production and the ethical problematics that lay therein. First, we labour and operate within flawed neoliberal institutions that prioritize credentialism, publications, and prestige. As Michael Burawoy (2005) aptly observed about the trajectory of an academic sociology career: "It is as if graduate school is designed to winnow away at the moral commitments that inspired the interest in sociology in the first place" (p. 358). These are reflexivity critiques of the collective 'self' that require going beyond our ethics boards to advance more egalitarian and just futures in the academy (Bhambra et al., 2018; Gani & Khan, 2024). Second, research conducted with workers presents some political risks, particularly around exposing workers' activities and potential employer retaliation at work. This shaped how I have delineated the scope of my research to the broad geography of GTA as opposed to one of its municipalities, especially because this was something about which some workers expressed anxiety.

This dissertation is about class, class identities, and class trajectories. I am a precariously employed adjunct faculty, which places me among the ranks of vulnerable workers, in some ways blurring the boundaries between 'me' and 'them.' Some Amazon workers earn more than I do and a few own their own homes. Here, the boundaries of class get rather fuzzy. As Wolfson et al. (2022) caution, PhD students,

> however precariously employed at any given time, have different life chances and options for mobility compared with others, for example those from a more privileged education or class background, and we should be alert to the ways in which situations that might present such people with new opportunities could constitute a threat to those who have no obvious escape routes from their current situation (p. 117).

One way I have attempted to make my relationship with my research participants more symbiotic than extractive is by being in struggle with those workers. Because some recruitment occurred through worker advocacy and solidarity spaces, participants often encountered me not only as a researcher, but as someone broadly sympathetic to workers' struggles. This did not eliminate the extractive risks of research, but it shaped how I understood my responsibilities to participants and to the broader worker publics with whom I was in relation. In this sense, I consider this dissertation to be in service of a public sociology. Following Burawoy (2005), "public sociology brings sociology into a conversation with publics, understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation" (p. 350). Further along this typology, it is an organic public sociology in which a sociologist works in close connection with an active, local, and often "counter-public" in "a process of mutual education" (pp. 350-1). In practice, this means that while I expect to be accountable to the academic community and meet established standards, I am also in relationship with workers and labour organizers and researchers through my involvement with the Amazon Worker Solidarity, an independent grassroots effort comprised of trade unionists, community activists and researchers working *alongside* Amazon workers to bolster their organizing efforts. I am accountable to this counterpublic.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the dissertation's central problem: how racialized immigrant workers experience, interpret, and navigate Amazon's digitally mediated labour regime in the Greater Toronto Area. It has situated Amazon's expansion within a broader neoliberal political economy of racialized labour markets, immigration policy, and logistical restructuring, while also outlining the Research questions, chapter structure, and methodological approach that guide the study. In the following chapter, I turn to the theoretical frameworks that inform the dissertation,

drawing on critical scholarship on racialized class formation and racial capitalism, labour process theory, and transnational migration studies to examine how digital capitalism is lived, contested, and made meaningful in the everyday experiences of immigrant warehouse workers.

Chapter 2: Class-making, Race-making, and the Transnational Field: Literature Review and Conceptual Frameworks

As immigrant workers navigate the demands of global logistics corporations, their lives illuminate the ways that racial and class relations are negotiated and reproduced across national and transnational spaces. This chapter reviews and synthesizes three key sets of literature in order to establish the conceptual foundations for this dissertation: (1) scholarship on class formation and social difference, including Marxist, Weberian, and cultural approaches as well as work on racial capitalism; (2) labour process theory and the sociology of work, with attention to how control, deskilling, consent, and labour regimes are organized under capitalism; and (3) transnational migration studies, with attention to how migration unsettles methodological nationalism and reframes processes of class identification, racialization and boundary-making. A critique of methodological nationalism recurs across these literatures and anchors my intervention: to analyze racial and class formation as processes constituted across, rather than contained within, national borders. I read these bodies of work together to highlight the ways that class and race are co-constituted and lived across multiple scales.

The chapter proceeds in three main parts. First, I examine debates on class formation and social difference, moving from canonical accounts (Marx, Weber, and their interpreters) through culturalist and historical-materialist approaches to more recent theorizations of racial capitalism. Second, I examine labour process theory and the sociology of work, which provide tools for understanding how control, deskilling, consent, and labour regimes are organized under capitalism. Third, I turn to transnational migration studies, which provide tools for understanding how migrant subjectivities and social relations are constituted across borders. The chapter

concludes by identifying tensions and gaps in these literatures, and by clarifying what I take from them for my analysis: namely, that a transnational lens is crucial for understanding how racial and class dynamics are made and remade in specific sites such as Amazon warehouses. Workers do not enter these workplaces as nationally bounded subjects, but through trajectories shaped by migration, uneven development, and cross-border social relations.

Unpacking Class Analysis: Race, Gender, and Social Difference

Class has been a central preoccupation within various disciplines in the social sciences, and its study has been the site of contentious academic and political debate. Some of these debates revolve around the meaning of class, the degree of differentiation between and within class(es), its salience in people's lives, and its implications for social and political change (Eidlin, 2014; McCarthy & Desan, 2023; Winant, 2024). These debates have also raised questions about whether class can still be meaningfully identified in contemporary contexts (Gibson-Graham et al., 2001; Pakulski, 1993). Broadly speaking, two approaches are especially relevant here. Stratification approaches understand inequality through classificatory schemes organized around variables such as occupation, income, skills, and education, often with the individual or household as the primary unit of analysis (Devine et al., 2017). Relational approaches, by contrast, conceptualize class through social relations of exploitation, domination, and interdependence. While Weber remains important to the former and Marx to the latter, I review both here because the contrast between them clarifies the limits of descriptive and synchronic accounts of inequality and the value of a historical materialist approach for this dissertation. In what follows, I argue that while there is some overlap between Marx and Weber, the theoretical foundations that inform Marxist epistemology and its historical materialist method are more fruitful in mapping a complex array of social relations that come to comprise what we call *class*,

by moving beyond descriptive, diagnostic, and synchronic analyses toward an approach that helps us understand the conditions that produce 'difference' in the first place.

Though the subject of class was peripheral in his work, Max Weber's ideas have informed a number of contemporary conceptualizations of class, labour market segmentation, and social stratification. For my purposes, the most relevant aspect of Weber's work is his attempt to theorize class through differentiated 'class situations' and 'status groups.' Weber took 'class situation' or 'class status' to mean the probability of attaining goods, achieving a position in life, and finding inner satisfaction. These probable gains were to be derived from one's ability to have "relative control over goods and skills and from their incomes producing uses within a given economic order" (Weber, 1978, p. 302). A 'class' contains all persons who share the same class situation/status.[2] While class situations are particular, a class is formed when a group shares similar interests. This need not necessarily imply a "unity of social class," though such unity can be achieved once individuals sharing a similar class situation form associations or class organizations, and they gain political power if they form a party (Ibid.). Classes are broadly differentiated by property ownership and commercial/acquisition class, the latter comprised of individuals with a set of skills or education credentials that they are able to market. Weber understood class structures to be relatively permeable, with individuals being able to access different class statuses in their lifetimes and across generations. Status, on the other hand, is a "claim to social esteem" and "status monopolies" (p. 305), a boundary-making process that takes place along the lines of lifestyle and patterns of consumption, education and training, heritage or 'class backgrounds,' and prestige. Weber posited that class positions do not necessarily

[2] "Class status" and "class situation" are used interchangeably. In *Economy and Society,* "class situation" is used, and in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, the term "class status" supplants "class situations."

correspond to status – for example, an individual may own property, but this doesn't necessarily confer status, and vice versa. Furthermore, Weber suggested that statuses predate the emergence of market-based capitalist economies, ultimately leading him to refer to slaves not as a class (as Marx had) but as a negatively privileged, "unfree" status group.

While Weber's formulation of status groups is still a relational concept that contains an account of power and how it might operate among occupational groups, the domain of these relations is the labour market and the exploitation that takes place therein. It is useful for describing differential market capacities and social honour, as well as patterns of stratification and boundary-making, including though skills, credentialization, and prestige. At the same time, a Weberian approach is more limited in its ability to capture relations that fall beyond the scope of the market or the 'site of production' but that are nonetheless crucial to the production and reproduction of society (see Acker, 2006). While Weber acknowledged that status groups gain prestige through distinct lifestyles and other attributes, it remains unclear why some positions acquire greater value than others in the first place. For this reason, Weber's framework is more useful for describing patterns of stratification than for explaining the social processes that produce them.

Unlike Weber, Marx approached class not primarily as a market situation or status hierarchy, but as a historically constituted social relation rooted in exploitation and domination (Marx, 1990). The strength of the Marxian approach lies specifically in its historical materialism and critique of ideology because these tools help demystify capitalist social relations that may otherwise seem natural, timeless, and inevitable (Marx, 1998). This approach has sustained contemporary analyses that understand the 'social' as mediated through a multiplicity of relations that co-constitute one another. Marx is often critiqued for his seemingly reductionist

classificatory scheme of 'capitalist' and 'labourer' as the two main classes in society – and this surely remains a preoccupation of many contemporary class theorists (see Wright, 2015). A closer examination of Marx's work and his contemporary interlocutors, however, reveals a more complicated picture emerging out of this dichotomous view of classes, and one that is able to account for social relations like gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, among others.

In *Capital*, the two classes that supposedly comprise society do not quite confront one another as discrete social groupings (Balibar, 1991; Camfield, 2004); but their relationship is nonetheless mediated through the commodity form. The central preoccupation of the three-volume text is to put forward a critique of classical political economy and advance a theory of exploitation as the extraction of surplus value that goes beyond the socially necessary labour required for workers to reproduce themselves.

The history of class formation in Canada and its ongoing legacies, which I explore in detail in Chapter Three, requires a historical materialist approach. For the purposes of this dissertation, the co-constitution or co-articulation of class alongside other axes of social differentiation is a way to historicize how categories of race, class, and gender are produced through labour regimes. Marx's historical materialist method begins with his critique of German philosophy, or what he called *ideology*. Unlike conventional iterations and conceptions of the term, Marx understood ideology and its production as a process that entailed the overriding or abnegation of the real and objective material conditions, and a valorization of the realm of ideas. In his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx refused to give in to a view of society as *sui generis,* existing over and above individuals and their activity in the world. The aim of Marx's intellectual project was to introduce an ontology of the social that would allow us to examine the societies that we inhabit as spaces that are constituted through various webs or networks of past and existing

social relations. Marx outlined three key processes in the production of ideology: (1) ruling ideas are detached from their creators and presented as neutral truths, (2) they are dehistoricized to appear timeless and coherent, and (3) they are secularized, making abstract ideas seem like the drivers of reality rather than social relations.

This critique of ideology helps us understand race and gender as ideological categories (or, to put it more sociologically, as social constructs) without compromising their materiality; more specifically, it helps us understand how social relations are coordinated, allowing us to *socialize* race, gender, and class (Bannerji, 1995). If race and gender are 'socially constructed' ways of being that have been deemed 'different', then the task is to examine the conditions that *produce* alterity, rather than treat difference as a *fait accompli.* This is not to simply reduce 'difference' – as class reductionists would argue – as elements of the vast "superstructure" or simply as ideological distortions from the 'real' problem of class. In these vulgar forms of Marxism, "distinct oppressions are understood to exist because (and are considered important only insofar as) they are directly functional to capitalism" (Ferguson, 2016, p. 46). Rather, it is to understand how the multiplicity of social relations is structured, rejecting "the notion that the whole ["capitalism"] is external to its parts" (ibid.). In a similar vein, McCarthy and Desan (2023) advance the concept of "class dynamism" to counter class reductionism (or what they deem to be more accurately understood as 'class abstractionism'), arguing that class structures co-articulate along other class structures to produce class differentiation. They further note that "the segmentation and divisions within the working class in particular historical conjunctures [are] the concrete conditions under which class formation occurs." (McCarthy & Desan, 2023, p. 13).

As I demonstrate further in my discussion of Stuart Hall below, "class" is a mediation of

different axes of experience that may or may not have their own social ontologies, but that nonetheless come to constitute class processes (Camfield, 2004; Ferguson, 2016; McDowell, 2008, Winant, 2024). Drawing on Marx, Camfield (2004) defines classes as a "structured social process and relationship that takes place in historical time and specific cultural contexts," constituted through "multidimensional formations" (p. 421). Understanding class as a historical social formation, Camfield (2004) moves away from synchronic iterations of class (that may help us understand a "class situation" but not a class formation over time) and away from economic reductionist exegeses, thus allowing us to look beyond an individual or group's place in the realm of production. Importantly, Camfield (2004) states that "To say that class is mediated by other social relations means that it does not exist outside of them. *Class is not initially constituted in pristine isolation and then brought into contact*." (emphasis added; p. 425). The author adds that the relationship between gender, class, race and other social relations is an internal and co-constitutive one, such that "Every class formation is affected by how social relations other than those of class are ordered", concluding that "class is never only about class" (p. 426). In other words, a historical materialist approach to class allows us to understand the co-constitutive relationship between race and gender as "modes of mediation" that "produce the constant devaluation of certain social groups' embodiment and labor power" (Bannerji, 2005, p. 153).

Angela Davis's (1981) *Women, Race, and Class* offers a rich historical account of the ways in which class is co-constituted in relation to race and gender, specifically by examining how the possibility of an emancipatory politics (for all) was stifled due to raced, gendered, and classed divisions at various junctures in the history of the Women's Liberation Struggles and the Civil Rights movement. For Davis, the realm of social reproduction and unpaid labour in the

'private sphere' and the hegemonic heteronormative model of the family on which it was predicated did not reflect the experience of Black women either during slavery or after Emancipation. Historically, Black women represented a "new standard of womanhood", different from their white middle-class counterparts in whose homes they worked. Black women were always 'deviant' from standard conceptions of 'the feminine' because they were always labourers, in the fields and in the home. The socially reproductive work that Black women performed post-slavery reveals that at specific historical moments, social reproduction was not unpaid, and that this had implications for the valuing of working-class women's labour across race. The labour and wages of white (immigrant) women, argues Davis, were intricately connected to the convergence of both racism and sexism. Post-slavery, Black women continued to work as domestic workers (the same labour they performed as slaves but now performed under a system of wage labour) for miserly wages. However, the value of this labour and the wages received for this work "by white women domestics have always been fixed by the racist criteria used to calculate the wages of Black women servants" (p. 158).[3]

Robin Kelley's (1996) *Race Rebels* offers us an equally complicated picture of gender, race, and class in the US as he tries to write a history of the Black working class. Writing on the black working class experience in the post-war era, Kelley conveys how a racialized class consciousness was borne among both black and white workers, and the *intraclass* struggles that emerged therein (see also Bettie, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1986). Building on W.E.B. Du Bois notion of whiteness as a "psychological wage", Kelley avers that "Black workers had to perform

[3] It should be noted, however, that the relative ease with which Davis is able to compare Black women's domestic work and white immigrant women's domestic work warrants further problematization. When white middle-class women hired racialized women to do the hard labour around the household, they also relieved their white mistresses from said work and gave the latter supervisory roles. White women in domestic service were referred to as 'housekeepers' while women of colour were identified as servants, laundresses, or cooks (Glenn, 1992).

"n****r work." Without the existence of "n****r work" and "n****r labor," to white workers whiteness would be meaningless." (pp. 30-1). This racialized division of labour was not merely a mechanism of rationalization. The very meaning, value, and prestige of specific occupations were defined by those who performed them, and those who performed these jobs were, in turn, ideologically produced as sub-human workers, and this dehumanization emerged out of very specific conditions that birthed 'white privilege' so that it could become a 'psychological wage' (see also Lamont, 2009 for racial divisions among working class men). Racializing specific tasks had "the effect of turning dirty, physically difficult, and potentially dangerous work into *humiliating* work" (p. 31). When the predominantly white coal miners in Appalachia performed what would elsewhere be perceived as 'Black labour,' it was that no longer. The difficulty, dirtiness and danger then assumed triumphant and brave masculinist undertones. By accounting for race and gender, Kelley underscores how, in response to racist tropes, white workers clung to this work and attempted to reformulate its public perception, only to ultimately conceal the inherent class exploitation that was associated with such work. It had to be converted into a source of masculine pride, lest they be construed degraded labour. But "once derogatory social meaning is inscribed upon the work itself (let alone the black bodies that perform the work), it has the effect of undermining its potential dignity and worth – which frequently means rendering "n****r work" less manly" (Kelley, 1996, p. 31).

Both Davis and Kelley's historical accounts of work tell a complicated story about the social relation of class. First, they demonstrate that an occupation's value is, in part, defined by those who hold said occupation. Second, they explain inequalities within the working class, and in so doing shed light on how class relations are informed by sexist and racist ideologies and practices that give rise to specific social configurations over time. These raced and gendered

dynamics are evident in the ways working class formation took place in Canada, as I outline in Chapter Three. As Gabriel Winant (2024) aptly notes: "to hold only to this more abstract unity and refuse to engage with concrete social variation is to reduce the working class to a mere idea – indeed at worst, a fetish, a talisman, an object" (p. 7). The insights accrued from the class analysis advanced by anti-racist and feminist scholars carry over to this study of the racialization of precarious work: who can be compelled to do which kinds of labour, under which conditions, and how it is valued, both symbolically and materially.

Racial Capitalism

Over the past decade, the concept of racial capitalism has been deployed to describe the relationship between capitalism and racism (Knox & Kumar, 2023; Bhattacharyya, 2018; Paret & Levenson, 2024; Go, 2023). At its core, the racial capitalism literature advances three interrelated claims. First, capitalism is not a universal system that incidentally encounters race, but one that has always been constituted through racial differentiation (Robinson, 1983). Second, processes of accumulation depend on the production and reproduction of racial hierarchies, whether in the form of slavery, colonialism, segregation, or contemporary migrant labour regimes (Kelley, 2017; Melamed, 2015). Third, race functions not only as an ideological justification for inequality, but also as a material means of organizing labour markets, disciplining workers, and legitimating dispossession (Melamed, 2015; Gilmore, 2007). These interventions position racial capitalism as a framework for understanding how class formation, labour exploitation, and racial domination are co-constituted across different historical and geographical contexts.

Its introduction and current ubiquity have prompted a number of critical engagements and appraisals. The term is overwhelmingly attributed to Cedric Robinson[4] (1983) whose thesis in *Black Marxism* is that 'racialism' had already existed within feudal Europe, and thus subsequently shaped capitalist class formation along racial and ethnic lines, both in Europe and as it expanded globally; that is, capitalism was and is always racial (Okoth, 2023; Paret & Levenson , 2024). Similarly, Robinson's contemporary interlocutors – including Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Robin D.G. Kelley, and Jodi Melamed, among others – insist that 'capitalism requires inequality, racism *enshrines* it,' suggesting that capitalism has always been racial.

This position that 'racialism' is formative of capitalism, everywhere and always, has spurred a number of debates. Julian Go (2021) identifies three tensions in 'racial capitalism'. The first tension deals with the signifier "race", observing that it is seldom defined in a uniform manner in this emergent body of literature, and is frequently conflated with ethnicity; the second surrounds its contestations about the adequacy of existing theories, specifically the Marxist theories discussed above; and the third concerns the question of whether racism is contingent or immanent to capitalism. To these, Go (2021) offers some points of exploration and further study. On the question of race versus ethnicity (or other forms of difference – language, religion, culture, etc.), Go draws on Omi and Winant's insights on racial formation to suggest that racialization and the signification of race as a biological category is a process that was a part of modern capitalism rather than its precursor. Relatedly, Go problematizes the "scaling-upwards of capitalism to a global level," arguing that the facile transposition of specific racial classifications or even 'race' as a category of differentiation across time and space obfuscates specific historical

[4] While a full review of the genealogy of the concept falls beyond the scope of my discussion, it is worth noting that the concept first appeared in a 1976 pamphlet written by Lagessick and Hensen to describe the significance of racism in the ascent of South African capitalism (Paret & Levenson, 2023; Okoth, 2023).

and contextual processes of race-making in capitalist societies. Here, he cautions that "we must be more conscious about whether we are referring to analysts' definition of race or a category of practice." (p. 4). To the contingency of race and capitalism – or whether capitalism necessitates racism – Go suggests that a focus on social difference might be more fruitful to underscore other forms of 'othering' or axes of exclusion to divide the working class. Ralph and Singhal's (2019) advance their own amendment to the racial capitalism framework to accounts for multiple forms of difference (gender, ability, sexuality, etc.) through what they call the "forensics of capital" as a path forward.

Acknowledging that race and racializing/racialized processes – including the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism – are constitutive of capitalism's development and exploitation, many have highlighted some methodological and historiographical limitations in Robinson's transhistorical deployment of race, noting that it "can sound like an explanation of the timelessness of racism and the solidity of the category of race" (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 8; see also Ralph & Singhal, 2019; Paret & Levenson , 2023; Knox & Kumar, 2023). For Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018), race is a "mode of social organization" as well as "fictions of embodied otherness." (p. 2). In this analysis, racialization, racial exclusion, and racist boundary-marking are used synonymously to underline methods of social differentiation. Racial capitalism, Bhattacharyya explains, creates "edge populations that "serve as the other and limit of the working class" adding that being cast out or pushed to the edge itself becomes the occasion of racialising discourses and practices" (p. 5). Here, class and status are dialectically intwined: capitalism is both racialized *and* racializing: "modes of exclusion and disentitlement have served to create racialised attribution that links some economic statuses to a kind of racial categorisation" (p. 104).

Paret & Levenson (2024) compare Cedric Robinson and Stuart Hall's theorizations of the relationship between race/racism and capitalism to demonstrate that "*there is no singular theory of racial capitalism*" (emphasis in original, p. 4). For them, while the two thinkers shared a critique of orthodox Marxism's reductive view of politics as emanating primarily out of class position and stressed the "centrality of race and culture to processes of class formation" (p. 4), their respective historical exegeses lead to divergent analytical points. The position that race 'enshrines' the inequality that capitalism necessitates produces an analytical contradiction: it suggests that capitalism produces race (and, thus, racism); however, Robinson's central contention was that race was present at the inception of capitalism. As many have noted, racism is autonomous but constitutive of capitalism (Clarno, 2017; Paret & Levenson , 2023); "racism and capitalism have their own distinct histories" (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 103). Hall (1980) argued that while race may not be swiftly explained away simply by reference to economic relations, he insisted that "racial structures cannot be adequately understood outside the framework of quite specific sets of economic relations" (p. 308). According to Paret and Levenson (2024), where Robinson saw "racial differentiation and domination" as the primary motivating force for capitalist exploitation, Hall rooted his analysis in "capitalist hegemony" that understood racism as secondary and malleable to capital's interests. Secondly, where the "geography of racial capitalism" in Robinson's work is one of "spatial connection" (i.e. globally linked), Hall's is one of "spatial fragmentation" which emphasizes the contextually and historically specific character of capitalism formations, instead of being one that spans the entire globe.

Hall's concept of "articulation" offers a way to think through race and class as mutually constitutive in a non-determinate way: "Articulation represents Hall's way of integrating non-

class elements into the Marxist framework and giving them some "relative autonomy", but without losing sight of Marxist concerns such as class structure, accumulation, exploitation, and class struggle" (Paret & Levenson , 2024, p. 9). Thus, for these authors, the primary caution is that social scientists "must demonstrate how it is that racism continues to enshrine inequality, and how this distinctly capitalist mode of differentiation works to augment profitability" (Paret & Levenson, 2023, p. 15). This elucidation of multiple frameworks for understanding racial capitalism comports with Jordanna Matlon's (2024) "ten theses on racial capitalism," who similarly outlines a genealogy of theoretical exegeses of multiracial proletariatization, from W.E.B Du Bois to Cedric Robinson and Stuart Hall. In so doing, Matlon thus demonstrates that the concept has fellow travelers and that "racial capitalism has a lineage that did not call itself racial capitalism" (p. 9).

In sum, the history of class formation is simultaneously a history of how gender and race are socially produced. In this dissertation, I focus primarily on the racialized and transnational dimensions of class, while recognizing that gender also shapes the historical organization of labour and inequality. In the Canadian settler colonial context, immigration policies reflect racial logics that shaped the trajectories of the political economy of work. As I demonstrate in the following, these historical dynamics remain pertinent as they show how precarious work is distributed in a neoliberal labour market and inform the complexities of racial divisions and solidarities in the multi-racial Greater Toronto Region. While this literature foregrounds the structural entanglements of race and class over time, it tends to leave less space for how class is lived, narrated, and contested in everyday life. To address this gap, I turn first to labour process theory and the sociology of work, which clarify how control, fragmentation, and consent are

organized at the point of production, before returning to the contributions of Thompson, Williams, and others who emphasize class as a lived and contested social relation.

Labour Process Theory: From Scientific Management to Digital Taylorism

Labour Process Theory (LPT) begins with the historical premise that the relationship between workers and capitalists is both interdependent and antagonistic. Under capitalism, workers must sell their labour power to secure their means of subsistence, while capitalists extract surplus value by converting use-values into exchange-values. Central to this process of valorization is control, both over workers and over the labour process itself. This section situates the dissertation within key debates in labour process theory, tracing the evolution of LPT from its classical foundations to more recent engagements with digital Taylorism. In doing so, it highlights how debates around control, deskilling, consent, and resistance continue to shape the study of work in the digital age.

Control and deskilling are foundational concerns in the literature on the labour process. Questions around the division of labour (that is, the division of work into smaller and simpler tasks as well as how work is distributed amongst workers), work standardization, homogenization, and control over workers have remained relevant with each historic shift from Fordism to Toyotaism to the current era of digital capitalism. The techniques and degrees to which management exerts control over workers, as well as the forms and impacts of worker responses to these strategies also remain topics of ongoing debate (Thompson & Smith, 2024).

With regards to the capitalist labour process, concerns over productivity, control, and efficiency date back to Adam Smith, who saw a division of labour (the division of tasks between groups of workers as well as the breakdown of the work process into discrete tasks) as necessary for the maximization of production efficiency. As Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*:

> This great increase of the quantity of work which, in consequence of the division of labour, the same number of people are capable of performing, is owing to three different circumstances; first, to the increase of dexterity in every particular workman; secondly, to the saving of the time which is commonly lost in passing from one species of work to another; and lastly, to the invention of a great number of machines which facilitate and abridge labour, and enable one man [sic] to do the work of many. (Smith, 2000, p. 21-2)

These reflections are animated in his example about pin-making within a small factory where 10 workers together produced 48,000 pins per day once the production process was divided into distinct tasks. Without this division, he estimated a single worker might make only 1–20 pins a day (p. 18-19). For Smith then, the division of labour allows for increased productivity, time-saving, and technological innovation, where each worker's minute specialization creates a web of economic interdependency that ultimately become the primary source of a nation's wealth.

In his engagement with Smith's writing, Marx (1990), too, saw that divisions of labour in the capitalist labour process developed historically to promote efficient production. The labour process, Marx noted, is a cumulative process, the effort of many whose labour is synchronized and interdependent. Beginning with the sale and purchase of labour power as a commodity, Marx emphasized the coercion, exploitation, and alienation involved in this-capitalist mode of production. For Marx (1990), there are three elements of the labour process: first, the "purposeful activity, that is work itself"; second, the subject of labour, or the object on which that work is performed; and third, the means of labour, or the instruments of that work (p. 284).

> Labour is, first of all, a process between man [sic] and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. (p. 283)

The purpose of labour is to produce use-values, which are products that satisfy human needs. Marx distinguished between use-value (the usefulness of a product) and exchange-value (the

value of a product in exchange, measured in terms of money). It is through the valorization process that labour creates additional value (surplus value) beyond the initial value of the labour power and means of production. In the process of securing surplus value, Marx identified two main forms of control in the labour process: the formal subsumption of labour under capital, where existing labour processes are integrated into capitalist production, and the real subsumption, where the labour process is fundamentally transformed by technological and organizational changes to enhance control and productivity.

Taylorism and Scientific Management

Harry Braverman's foundational (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital* offered one of the first Marxist accounts of the labour process, with a focus on scientific management, also known as Taylorism, named after its pioneer Frederick Winslow Taylor. Noting that attempts to establish control over work and workers were an essential component of management throughout the history of capitalism, Braverman averred that with Taylorism, "it assumed unprecedented dimensions" (p. 62). What made this mode of control unique was Taylor's insistence on "absolute necessity for adequate management the dictation to the worker of the precise manner in which work is to be performed" (p. 62). While previously the purview of control was general, with little intervention in *how* the work was actually to be performed by a worker, Taylor's method was "a means for management to achieve control of the actual mode of performance of every labour activity, from the simplest to the most complicated" (p. 62).

Braverman outlined three key principles of scientific management through which the control over the minutiae of work was sought and achieved by managers. The first, *"*dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the workers*,"* a process of deskilling in which the labour process is performed bereft of workers' knowledge and abilities, by the dictates of managers.

Relatedly, the second principle involves the "separation of conception from execution" (p. 70) where work tasks are simplified, without knowledge on how each task fit into the broader set of operations, the latter reserved only for managers. Braverman emphasized the dehumanization that this principle entails as it robs workers of the possibility to apply creativity (or conception) to their work. If workers were indeed allowed to be creative, then it would not be possible "to enforce upon them either the methodological efficiency or the working pace desired by capital" (p. 78). The separation of conception and execution, thus, reserves the study or understanding of the work process to management and shielded from workers, "to whom its results are communicated only in the form of simplified job tasks governed by simplified instructions which it is thenceforth their duty to follow unthinkingly and without comprehension of the underlying technical reasoning or data" (p. 81). The third and final principle is "the use of this monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution" (p. 82). In all, Taylorism – which contributed to the evolution of systems of mass production, working in conjunction with Fordism particularly from 1920s to 1970s – entailed the extraction of knowledge from workers by management, thereby distilling work into simplified tasks that render workers interchangeable, undifferentiated and disposable. Braverman concludes by stating, "in the setting of antagonistic social relations, of alienated labor, hand and brain become not just separated, but divided and hostile, and the human unity of hand and brain turns into its opposite, something less than human" (p. 87).

While Braverman focused his analysis on the 'objective' economic aspects of the capitalist labour process, Burawoy rejected the analytical 'objective/subjective' bifurcation and sought to incorporate workers' experience and agency at work, and resistance to the specification of tasks. Burawoy (1978) described the labour process as follows:

> First, there are the social relations of "men and women to nature": the relations of productive activity and of the labor process, sometimes known as the technical division of labor. I shall frequently refer to them as the *relations in production*. Second, there are the social relations of "men and women to one another": the relations of distribution and consumption of the product of labor and the relations through which surplus is pumped out of the direct producers, sometimes known as the social division of labor. I shall refer to these as the *relations of production* (emphasis in original, p. 258).

In contradistinction to Braverman, Burawoy insisted that the capitalist labour process must be understood in relation to capitalism's ideological, political, and economic components, all of which are inseparable from one another. Ideology – understood not just as a set of ideas but as a set of material practices – is crucial in reproducing the relations of production under capitalism. In other words, it is not just coercion that secures surplus value from labour. The production of ideological consent to the rules of the system is key to both securing and obscuring the extraction of surplus value: "consent is expressed through, and is the result of, the organization of activities." (p. 27). Burawoy showed how, at the factory level, this consent is not simply imposed but actively cultivated through specific workplace practices. For instance, individualized piece-rate incentives transformed production into a game-like competition, encouraging workers to internalize productivity goals as personal challenges rather than expressions of exploitation. Similarly, shop-floor autonomy over minor decisions and formal grievance mechanisms gave workers a sense of participation and fairness, while ultimately reinforcing managerial control. Some of the mechanisms of organizing consent include constituting workers as individuals (rather than as members of a class); coordinating the interests of capital and labour as well as managers and workers; and redistributing conflict and competition laterally (p. 30). Under monopoly capitalism, the predominant way of managing work is through hegemonic rather than despotic labour process organization. Finally, one of Burawoy's key insights in his emphasis on workers' subjectivities is that "[t]he production of things is simultaneously not only the

production and reproduction of social relations but also the production of an *experience* of those relations" (16) – a theme to which I return in Chapter 5.

Sharing some similarities with Burawoy's analysis of the labour process, Richard Edwards (1979) averred that "there remains a certain indeterminacy to the labor process" (15) – that is, insofar as employers consistently search for new ways to organize work to compel production and profit maximization, the labour process "becomes an arena of class conflict, and the workplace becomes a contested terrain" (p. 16). Distinguishing between coordination or administration and control, Edwards claims that coordination is necessary in all social production; however, coordination morphs into control under capitalist production when labour power is purchased. Coordination "necessarily takes the specific form of top-down coordination, for the exercise of which the top (capitalists) must be able to control the bottom (workers)" (17). "Control," then, is defined as the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain desired work behavior from workers. (17).

In contrast to Burawoy, who referred to the 'relations of production' as the broader structural context in which labour is organized and contested, Edwards (1979) introduces the concept of 'social relations of production' within the firm to identify specific systems of control that coordinate direction (methods by which employers direct and specify how tasks are to be done), evaluation (supervision of mistakes and workers' performance), and discipline ("to elicit cooperation and enforce compliance with the capitalist's direction of the labor process") (p. 18).

The evolution of managerial control over the labour process and production regimes more generally are understood dialectically as the interplay of conflict between capital and workers' resistance to exploitation. This partly explains why Burawoy and Edwards both critique Braverman by emphasizing that the impact of Taylorism as a theory varied greatly from

Taylorism in practice. In their analysis, Taylorism made class conflict too visible to be sustainable. As Edwards (1979) explains:

> Systems of control in the firm have undergone dramatic changes in response to changes in the firm's size, operations, and environment and in the workers' success in imposing their own goals at the workplace. The new forms did not emerge as sharp, discrete discontinuities in historical evolution, but neither were they simply points in a smooth and inevitable evolution. Rather, each transformation occurred as a resolution of intensifying conflict and contradiction in the firm's operations. (18)

In his analysis, Edwards identifies three key forms of control in the capitalist labour process. The first is *simple control*, dominant in the 19th century where small businesses competed in a relatively tight and competitive markets. Simple control entailed direct personal supervision of the labour process by a small group of owners and managers who generally behaved as despots, hiring and firing at will. By the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, the tendency towards capital concentration inaugurated the rise of the large corporation. As firms grew, so did the scale of production, reducing the efficacy of simple control and ushering in a need for greater coordination and control over the labour process. As the distance between the capitalist and the workers grew, so did the tiers of management, with those at the closest proximity to workers frequently in conflict with workers, whose numbers had also increased, as had their collective voice to resist arbitrary rule and work speed-up. This intensification of conflict ultimately led to a crisis in simple control. After unsuccessful experimentation with welfare capitalism and scientific management, large corporations began to develop methods of formalized and structured organization of control of the labour process: for Edwards, these could be seen in forms of *technical control* (the physical structure) and *bureaucratic control* (the social structure). These institutional forms of control made control less visible to workers. *Technical control*, best exemplified in the rise of the assembly line, meant that machinery could direct and set the pace of the labour process. *Bureaucratic control* managed the social relations or structure of the

workplace, which includes an array of laws, codes, and policies that institutionalized the hierarchical power in the firm. Performance evaluations, systems of rewards and discipline, and strict job descriptions subjected managers and workers to company policy in a stratified manner. Edwards argues that this typology of control embodies the patterns of historical evolutions of stages of capitalism, with each type of control succeeding the other. However, he also acknowledges that the three (simple, bureaucratic, and technical) modes of control can co-exist at a given time, with some sectors deploying one form of control over another.

While Braverman emphasized the objective reorganization of work under monopoly capitalism – where control is increasingly embedded in machinery, management, and the planning process – Burawoy and Edwards extend this analysis by focusing on workers' subjective experiences and the dynamic nature of class struggle within the workplace. Burawoy critiqued Braverman's structural determinism, arguing that it overlooked how workers might actively participate in reproducing capitalist relations through everyday practices that render exploitation meaningful or even playful. Similarly, Edwards critiqued Braverman for downplaying the variability and contestation of control, emphasizing instead that managerial strategies are not monolithic, but are instead shaped through conflict, mediation, and adaptation in the workplace. Together, these perspectives highlight that control is never total, but always an active terrain of struggle between capital and labour, reproduced but also contested on the shop floor.

Lean Production

The shift from Fordist to post-Fordist regimes of accumulation did not simply reflect economic necessity or technological innovation but was deeply shaped by the dynamics of class struggle and the crisis of capital accumulation that began in the late 1960s. Just as scientific management

under Taylorism and the Fordist compromise emerged to restore managerial control and productivity in response to working-class resistance, the rise of lean production can be understood within a similar context of restructuring and recomposition. In keeping with the discussion above regarding the political underpinnings of the evolutionary development of managerial regimes, management techniques reflect capital's imperative to wrest control over work from workers. Lean production intensifies and extends this logic and practice of control in the wake of the Fordist crisis.

While some scholars attribute the emergence of lean production to declining productivity and profitability under Fordism, others – such as Parker (2017) and Moody (1997) – emphasize the role of class defeat in its ascendancy. The economic restructuring that followed the post-WWII boom, combined with the limitations of mass production and the erosion of the Fordist settlement, opened the door to new regimes of labour control. Drawing on the Japanese model pioneered by Toyota, lean production became a global template for reorganizing work and extracting surplus value under conditions of intensified global competition. Key practices include just-in-time inventory management, standardized work procedures, multi-skilling of workers, and continuous improvement initiatives. Management promotes these techniques as fostering greater worker involvement in problem-solving, efficiency improvements, and quality control, framing participation as a source of empowerment and skill enhancement. Lean production draws directly on workers' tacit knowledge to streamline operations; but it does so through a process that ultimately reinforces managerial domination; however, as critics note, such participation is highly circumscribed by managerial priorities and often functions as a mechanism for extracting more labour effort. Parker and Slaughter (1994) famously coined the term "management-by-stress" to describe lean regimes, which aim to reduce the material and

human resources needed for producing goods and services, decreasing the number of workers while intensifying the labour process, squeezing efficiencies by eliminating slack times, such as the time workers are required to wait, or move or walk between stations and operations. Toyotaism's principle of *kaizen* (constant improvement) is accomplished through less supervision, stressing the production system itself to reveal the 'weak points'. The freeing of supervisors from the task of watching over each worker, however, puts pressure on every worker to keep up. The system quickly identifies those who fail to keep pace, and thus easily identifies the 'problematic worker'. Thus, the features of lean regimes that ostensibly offer workers more control and less supervision actually enable tighter management and control over the work. Instead of identifying problems in the labour process, workers are made to work harder so as not to interrupt the line, compelling them to conform to the system's requirements.

Flexibilization - a key tenet of Toyotaism - incorporated just-in-time production which removed in-process buffers and inventories, while outsourcing the production of certain parts of the production process (Parker, 2017; Moody, 1997, Thomas, 2007). JiT enables greater control over the labour process. With no buffers between tasks, workers are denied even the briefest moments of recovery or adjustment, a small gesture of exercising control in a workday. Instead, they face relentless pressure to perform in standardized, repetitive ways. Quality control translates to the stringent standardization of the materials and every step of the production process, ultimately enhancing managerial ability to define exactly how a job is done and managerial capacity to insist that it be done in that way, exacerbating the problem of deskilling and alienation (Parker, 2017). Such practices negate this system's proponents' claim that lean methods support 'multiskilling.' In addition to the risk of injury wrought by repetitive movement, the standardization of work, much like Taylorism, makes specific tasks easier to

control, and enhances the risk of their automation and/or outsourcing; it also makes job and task rotation easier for supervisors, with little satisfaction derived by the worker from one simplified task to another.

Lean regimes also reconfigure workers' experience of time, embedding employer-centred flexibility into scheduling practices. As Moody (1997) notes, firms increasingly rely on variable shifts, overtime, and rotating schedules, not to accommodate workers' needs but to maximize capital utilization and respond to market volatility. This enshrines a form of temporal precarity in which work time dominates personal time. "[R]ather than hiring new workers," Moody writes, "more overtime is scheduled" (p. 95). Despite its emphasis on teams and worker empowerment (Moody, 1997; Thomas, 2007), workers' participation in the production process through knowledge sharing in lean regimes converges with those found under Taylorism, where workers' knowledge is extracted (see (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2017), organized, and centralized in management.

Digital Taylorism

The convergence of Taylorist and lean principles not only reshaped manufacturing and logistics but also laid the groundwork for newer regimes of labour control under digital capitalism, including in contemporary logistics and warehousing. The core imperatives of scientific management – the breaking down of tasks into discrete, measurable units, the extraction of knowledge from workers, and the centralization of control – are now mediated through algorithmic systems that enable even more granular oversight and discipline. Digital Taylorism represents the latest articulation of this process. Moritz Altenried (2022) traces the continuities in the labour regimes from the Taylorist factories of the early twentieth century to what he calls contemporary "digital factories" –post-Fordist spaces of production and circulation of digital

capitalism. Altenried insists that much of the work presumed to be automated remains, in fact, heavily reliant on human labour that is increasingly "fragmented, decomposed, and controlled" (6). While deploying the term digital Taylorism, Altenried is careful to emphasize that the new forms of workplace surveillance, control, and deskilling are but one manifestation of the ways in which digital technology transforms labour. Instead, the invocation of Taylorism in today's digital 'fourth industrial revolution' and its "algorithmic management and control of the labor process allow for new forms of the subsumption of labor under capital outside the traditional factory" (p. 7).

This dynamic becomes especially visible in contemporary digitalized warehouse labour, where digital Taylorist principles are not only adopted but technologically amplified. In this sense, digital Taylorism functions as an intensified iteration of its namesake. Like its early 20th century counterpart, it breaks work into discrete, simplified tasks and centralizes knowledge in the hands of management. Managerial oversight is outsourced to technological infrastructures that automate surveillance and decision-making, rendering workers increasingly deskilled, interchangeable, and disposable. As Braverman (1974, p. 70) noted, Taylorism entails the "separation of conception from execution," stripping workers of an understanding of how their tasks fit into the larger production process. This analytic lens is crucial to understanding warehouse regimes organized through algorithmic management, such as those found in Amazon. Its system of 'chaotic storage,' for instance, allows its workers to "stow the stuff, [but] not possess an overview of where the stuff is" (Delfanti, 2021a, p. 37). This epistemic disconnection reinforces workers' subordination to an algorithmically governed labour process, deepening the intensification, precarity, and alienation of work.

Delfanti (2021b) describes this system as a form of "machinic dispossession," where the knowledge and activity generated by workers are algorithmically processed to improve warehouse efficiency. In this process, the machinery – now animated by data – emerges as an alien force that dominates the worker: "the incorporation of the results of their labor, machinery becomes an alien power that rules over workers, making them mere "living appendages," as Marx would say, of a labor process whose organization is governed by algorithmic management" (p. 6). This is Taylorism by digital means – "the supervisors' stopwatches and notebooks are replaced by the digital analysis of data generated from human labor" (Delfanti, 2021a, p. 32).

Elements of lean production, particularly its ethos of *kaizen* – the continuous search for incremental improvements by constantly stressing the labour process – are also evident in digital Taylorist regimes. As with management-by-stress models, digital systems monitor performance and eliminate inefficiencies, reducing labour costs by intensifying work rather than expanding the workforce. For instance, Amazon routinely uses mandatory overtime than hiring additional workers, an approach rooted in lean production's preference for flexibility and minimization of slack (Moody, 1997, p. 95). In this way, digital Taylorism synthesizes and extends the principles of both scientific management and Toyotaism, ushering in new forms of labour exploitation under digital capitalism.

At the same time, in sectors dependent on immigrant labour, the labour process cannot be understood in isolation from the wider transnational conditions through which workers are recruited and made available to capital. As Kelly and Ducusin (2024) suggest, labour regimes extend beyond the immediate labour process and have to be situated in relation to wider institutional and political-economic conditions. Where capital organizes production across space and assembles workforces across borders, "a simple focus on in situ processes of production in

workplaces is insufficient" (p. 13). For my purposes, this means that Amazon cannot be analyzed only at the level of the warehouse floor, or only within a nationally bounded labour market. To do so would miss the transnational conditions through which immigrant labour is assembled, differentiated, and disciplined. Workers arrive in Amazon's warehouses as socially differentiated bearers of labour-power, through trajectories shaped by uneven development, migration regimes, labour-market restructuring, and the differential valuation of migrant labour. These differences do not disappear within the labour process. Rather, workers with heterogeneous histories and social positions are brought under common measures of productivity, time, and performance, even as those differences shape the conditions under which labour is disciplined, intensified, and made productive for accumulation.

While labour process theory is essential for understanding how work is organized and how managerial control is exercised at the point of production, it does not by itself explain the full range of ways class is lived, interpreted, and contested. The labour process is one important site in which broader relations of class, race, and domination are organized, but class subjectivities are also shaped through culture, aspiration, and social comparison that stretch beyond the workplace. For immigrant workers in particular, these meanings are mediated not only by immediate experiences of exploitation and control, but also by transnational reference points, prior class positions, and future imaginaries and aspirations. To explore these dimensions, I now turn to approaches that treat class not only as a structural relation, but also as a lived social relation.

Class as a Subjective Experience

Part of understanding class as a multi-faceted process is to understand how class politics is expressed. The cultural sphere has been a site in which some of these class struggles have been

waged. As Raymond Williams argued, inequalities can be felt as a “structure of feeling,” but not politically articulated, and political contestation can thus be “waged less over explicit political ideologies than over modes of identity expression” (Bettie, 2000, p. 14; see Kelley, 1996). It is, therefore, insufficient to simply treat class as an objective condition that one embodies in the economic process of production (or ‘class in itself’), for even though we can point to these forms of social relations, it tells us little about how this position informs processes of subject-formation, or its political consequences. As Winant (2024) posits, it is a “basic Marxist insight that social action must be explained as simultaneously economically rational and ideologically meaningful, and that economic objectivity is accessed subjectively through the cultural meaning that arises from it” (p. 5).

In addition to the insights of anti-racist feminist scholars, this project also draws from cultural theories of class formation from E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams to understand the relationship between class position and class and racial identity in the context of transnational mobility. While Marxist theory often treated culture as a "superstructure" shaped by the economic "base," Williams argued that culture was not simply a reflection of economic forces. Thompson, an historian, rejected deterministic interpretations of Marxism, especially the idea that economic conditions alone define class. Instead, he argued that class is formed through historical struggle, human agency, and lived experience. This analytical framework avoids the ‘epistemology of absence’ that characterize many theorizations of class formation (Somers, 1996). As Somers avers, the point of studying people who work is not to underscore their failure to revolt (i.e. the absence of their agency), but rather to understand and explain “the presence of various dispositions and practices” (p. 180).

E. P. Thompson sought to address the chasm between ‘class-in-itself’ and ‘class-for-itself’ in his seminal text *The Making of the English Working Class*. He rejected ahistorical analyses of class and instead called for a diachronic analysis that pays heed to the making of a class. In doing so, Thompson emphasized that “class’ is fundamentally a cultural formation. It is “an historical phenomenon” that cannot be conceived of as a ““structure”, nor even as a "category", but rather as something that happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships” (Thompson, 1963, p. 9). Thus, class happens as a temporal process that is lived out in experience, and can only exist in time, and consequently only be known historically. It is not the 'objective' identity of interests that makes a class, but rather, the articulation of a collective identity such that working people can become a working class. In other words, no consciousness, no class. Furthermore, for Thompson, this shared identity of working people and their interests is posed or articulated “against other men [sic] whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs” (ibid.). This dissertation’s focus on the transnational class dynamics raises key questions for Thompson’s framework. Specifically, against and opposed to whom is this alterity of class interests posed in the transnational field? In other words, if class is indeed a cultural formation, what is the location of this culture in transnational contexts, where social relations extend across places rather than being contained within bounded national spaces (Massey, 2005; Espiritu, 2003)? I turn to these questions below.

Expanding the Field of Inquiry: Transnational Migration Studies

As an interdisciplinary field of study that spans a number of disciplines and conceptual approaches, ranging from political economy to cultural studies, state theories and multiculturalism, among others, the emergence of transnational migration studies sought to ameliorate previous omissions and biases that are characteristic of migration studies up until the

1990s (Go & Krause, 2016; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Traditionally, migration studies, though vast in scope, emphasized pathways to assimilation in countries of destination, assuming that migrants were 'uprooted' from the countries they left. Another critique advanced by scholars of transnationalism studies has been the nearly exclusive focus on countries of arrival, with little to no attention to the ways in which migration affects sending countries (although analyses of global capitalism and migration have attended to some of the dynamics and dialectics between displacement and movement). As a corrective, transnational migration studies[5] sought to emphasize the lasting relationships that immigrants maintain with their homelands, and how those ties, in turn, shape their assimilation, modes of incorporation, and political practices in sending and receiving contexts.

In their seminal text, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (1994) define transnationalism as "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" through "social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (p. 8). The transnational perspective sought to disrupt the methodological nationalism that uncritically perceived the nation-state to be the natural container of social processes (ibid.). Since then, a number of studies and debates have emerged regarding the scope of these transnational engagements as empirical

[5] While transnational migration studies emerged as a distinct field in the 1990s, earlier work had already examined migration as a process spanning sending and receiving contexts without using this terminology. See, for example, Sayad (2004), whose work, developed in the 1970s–1990s, foregrounds the relational and multi-sited nature of migrant life, as well as Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920).

phenomena, exploring the complexity of occupying two spaces at once and allowing for a notion of simultaneity in transnational social fields (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004).

Transnational activities can be social (contacts with relatives, occasional travel 'back home', participation in family occasions), cultural (like partaking in celebrations of ethnic or religious holidays, among other forms of cultural reproduction like language education or religious institutions), economic (monetary remittances, or investments or property ownership in country of origin), and political (which includes long-distance voting, raising funds for political parties or hometown associations, and lobbying governments in receiving countries regarding homeland issues). There are various typologies of immigrants' political activities: namely, they are immigrant politics, homeland politics, and translocal politics (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Immigrant politics refer to migrant activities aimed at improving their situation in the receiving country, such as obtaining more political, social and economic rights, or fighting discrimination. Homeland politics refers to activities pertaining to the domestic or foreign policy of the homeland. Finally, translocal politics, unlike the former two forms that implicate 'host' or home country governments, include activities that immigrants undertake to support specific localities or communities of origin (Smith & Bakker, 2008; Goldring, 2001; Cheran, 2007). Sometimes, the aims of particular political projects may entail an oscillation between these various forms of migrant politics or their overlap. For example, while migrants may initially set out to address issues in the homeland, they may also begin to address immigrant politics in the process (see Al-Ali & Koser, 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001). Because transnational practices vary in intensity, frequency, scope, and scale, a distinction has been made between 'core transnationalism', which refers to practices that are habitual and undertaken on a

regular basis, and 'expanded transnationalism', which is used to describe those practices that are sporadic (such as responding to a political or natural crisis) (Guarnizo, 1997; Levitt, 2001).

In response to what they conceived to be a loosely demarcated field that defined the transnational so broadly so as to be "banal", Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) advance that transnational phenomena have to be regular and sustained. These attempts to specify the intensity and scales of political engagement have made significant contributions to the way we understand the conditions under which various forms of transnational practices might occur, and have subsequently helped to differentiate between "ways of being" (actual social practices and relations that people engage in) and "ways of belonging" (identity enactments that signal an identification and connection to a particular group) (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). It is also through these attempts at understanding the 'who' of transnationalism that various debates around being 'here' and 'there' have been posed and articulated, raising important questions about the relationship between transnationalism and integration and assimilation.[6] For example, some studies have shown that racialized, lower-status groups who experienced downward assimilation were more likely to feel at home in the country left behind because of the difficult conditions that they experience in the destination country (Haller and Landolt, 2005), while other studies have shown that integration and transnational engagements are not inversely related to one another (see Landolt, 2001), suggesting that there need not be a trade-off between the 'here and now' and the 'there and then' and that, in fact, these may be intimately interconnected (Ley, 2013).

[6] I use the term assimilation to refer to expectations of incorporation oriented toward alignment with dominant social and cultural norms. By contrast, integration has emerged as a policy and analytical category that locates social problems within those labelled "immigrants," while obscuring the ways in which they are already constituted as part of the societies they inhabit (Schinkel 2018; Korteweg, 2017).

Questions around whether or not negatively racialized groups are more likely to develop transnational orientations and practices (sometimes referred to as "reactive transnationalism"; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005) remain a site of ongoing debate, depending on the group under consideration as well as the social context(s) in question. However, there is considerable evidence that racialization plays a significant role in shaping transnational political engagements (for examples, see Winland, 2006; Kelly, 2007; Nagel and Straeheli, 2004; Karpathakis, 1999; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003). Recent work also demonstrates that transnational practices may emerge through the very processes of incorporation themselves. For example, Shahrokni (2017; 2019) shows that among high-achieving second-generation North African migrants in France, transnational mobility is both enabled by educational and institutional integration and shaped by experiences of racialized exclusion, as individuals seek to navigate labour market barriers and assert forms of belonging that are constrained within the national context. Another factor that is understood to shape transnational political engagements are global racial hierarchies, a phenomenon partially taken up in discussions about racialization and assimilation. These dynamics depend on the social context in question; nonetheless, there is significant evidence that racialization is a significant variable in delineating transnational political engagements, among not only first-generation immigrants but also subsequent generations (for examples, see Winland, 2006; Kelly, 2007; Nagel and Straeheli, 2004; Karpathakis, 1999; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003).

For example, Nagel and Staeheli's (2004) study of Arab Americans in the United States and their political activities highlights the ways in which 'civicness' (which is associated with American citizenship) works in tandem with the desire for Arabs, one of the quintessential Others in the US (especially in the post-9/11 era) to be 'good Americans.' By engaging in

transnational political practices, these groups and activists believe that they can change the way 'mainstream' America views Arab causes and the Arab world as a whole; therefore, they can ultimately gain greater acceptance into the social fabric of the American polity, including its civic and political institutions (p. 16). This relationship is not uniform across contexts. In some cases, particularly within assimilationist national frameworks transnational forms of engagement may be downplayed or set aside, as shown in studies of second-generation migrants in France, where there is "normative pressure to assimilate and signal an unequivocal sense of Frenchness" (Shahrokni 2017, p. 439). Similar dynamics related to racialization and cross-border political engagements were observed by Daphne Winland's (2006) examination of Croats in Canada. Though not the 'ultimate subalterns' in the post-1970s Canadian immigration milieu when explicitly racist immigration policies were replaced with the merit-based points system, Croatian Canadians' identities demonstrated their attempt to shed negative stereotypes – which were shrouded in notions of 'tribal Balkan primitiveness'. Croatian Canadians saw their integration as being contingent upon their political views about homeland politics. Thus, they espoused Canadian liberal democratic values and envisioned themselves as political vanguards to Croatians in the homeland in order to perform "Canadianness." Phillip Kelly's (2007) exploration of Filipino activism and political participation in Canada tells us a similar story. As a negatively racialized group whose members, for the most part, experience significant 'downward assimilation' (systemic social and economic exclusion; Haller & Landolt, 2005), the political crisis that manifested during President Ferdinand Marcos's rule in the 1970s galvanized the Filipino community, leading to the collective creation of the Campaign for Democracy and Independence in the Philippines (CAMDI) in the 1970s-80s. Their activities entailed protesting and lobbying the Philippine Consulate in Toronto as well the Canadian government around

issues of human rights. These homeland political engagements marked a step in the incorporation of the Filipino communities in Canadian affairs, generating an ephemeral solidarity amongst an otherwise diverse and occasionally polarized group. In short, homeland political engagements created spaces of encounter for community members and activists to ultimately develop an immigrant politics, particularly around the plight of Filipino domestic workers in Canada.

These, among many other case studies, reveal that homeland politics, while sometimes informed by long-distance nationalism that are indeed encouraged by sending states (like the cases of Haitians, the Irish, and Dominicans in the US), are also simultaneously politics that seek to elevate the perception of the migrant communities in the countries of settlement, and therefore carry with them an element of immigrant politics. Migrant groups engage in nation-building projects 'back home' partly in response to racialization and downward assimilation as enhancing the "prestige of the motherland" would ameliorate their own standing in the country of settlement as well (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003). Organizing around homeland politics can be generative of political incorporation in the receiving country, disrupting the overstated trade-off between transnationalism and incorporation (cf. Karpathakis, 1999). To be sure, racialization itself is a transnational process that unfolds across various geographies, as the discussion below will demonstrate. Transnational migration studies also place an emphasis on immigrants' individual transnational points of references, especially "migrants' symbolic and emotional ties with their past life experience back home," including "attempts to reproduce some fragment of it […] through economic or political activities fuelling significant contacts with 'home' even after settling overseas for good" (Boccagni, 2012, p. 119).

In sum, these examples demonstrate that what may be called 'immigrant' or 'homeland' politics are shaped through a range of processes and discourses, which include but aren't

determined by class dimensions. While this literature sheds light on incorporation, boundary-making, and identity across borders, it does not always directly theorize how these processes intersect with the dynamics of class formation. To bridge this gap, I turn to work that explicitly transnationalizes class.

Transnationalizing Class Identities

This project's examination of class and the translation of class positions across and through borders partially speaks to the call to examine how transnational migration disrupts or deepens inequality. Theories of global capital and various political economy approaches have been crucial in demonstrating how inequalities are generated and sustained within and between regions, states, and hemispheres. These theories have been key in transcending methodological nationalism by examining global and extra-territorial dynamics that shape processes of class formation both between and within nation-states (Basch et al. 1994; Ness, 2015; Harvey, 2003, Sharma, 2006). This literature has also illuminated the various macro social-economic processes that drive migration. In fact, it is often the case that geographic mobility is "an escape from class immobility" (Kelly, 2012, p. 173) as it is a form of physical mobility that is undertaken so one can also embark on "existential mobility" – the sense of going somewhere in life (Hage, 2005).

On a subjective level, by examining 'class' as a temporal and multi-scalar process, the research questions fundamentally seek to understand how the transnational social field, with all of its complexity, dynamism and contradictions, lends to the un/re/making of 'classes', especially in relation to other axes of difference. As Basch et al. (1994) concluded nearly three decades ago, the contradictory social mobilities that materialize in the transnational social field "diffuse to some extent the anger and consciousness that working and middle class members might develop and direct toward challenging… their own ruling elites" (Basch et al., 1994, p.

95). This dissertation seeks to apply a transnational lens to the various theories on class identity formation discussed above, while also remedying the recent absence of class analysis in migration studies (van Hear, 2014; Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017; Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018). Understanding a "transnational habitus"[7] (Kelly & Lusis, 2006) involves an openness to critically examine both affective and symbolic realms of reproducing the past in the present, as well as the various temporal horizons that migrants might occupy (Hage, 2018). When some of these temporal dynamics have been taken up in migration studies, they have been applied to temporary migration regimes, refugee studies, and deportation. In these studies, migrants whose existence is shrouded with deportability become confined to a permanent state of *here-ness* that stifles their experiences of belonging. More specifically, in the presence of precarious legal status, the ability to envision a future makes for a form of temporal 'nonexistence' or the propelling of migrants into a 'temporal void' that effectively disallows any orientation towards future plans (Villegas, 2014; Coutin, 2000; de Genova, 2002). These analyses offer tremendous insights into the role that immigration policies play in shaping everyday lives, and that ultimately "force people to live in an eternal present" (Anderson et al., 2009).

How might the differential inclusion[8] of immigrants affect the dialectical relationship between immigrants' ways of being and ways of belonging? How might these subjectivities of elsewhere that emerge in the 'here and now' generate a 'politics of postponement', or the spatio-temporal deferment of finding comfort, dignity, and respect? As Miraftab (2016) notes, "[h]ow a

[7] Kelly and Lusis (2006) define Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' as that which "provides the context in which capitals of various forms (economic, social, cultural) are valued and given meaning" (p. 833).
[8] Casas-Cortés et al. (2015) define differential inclusion as "the multiplication of migration control devices within, at and beyond the borders of the nation- state (point systems, externalization, conditional freedom of movement, fast-tracked border crossing for elites, short-term labour contracts, etc.) and the multiplication of statuses they imply. It provides a handle for understanding the link between migration control and regimes of labour management that create different degrees of precarity, vulnerability and freedom by granting and closing access to resources and rights according to economic, individualizing, and racist rationales" (p. 79)

worker might perceive the viability of a wage is also influenced by the imagination of a promised elsewhere, a place to go in times of difficulty, a place where one can go and be set for life, a place that promises a better future and hence provides an incentive to endure" (p. 147). In many cases, success and social mobility are understood temporally across generations, where the promise or hope of a better future for immigrants' children becomes a key motivation and a lens through which they perceive and assess movement within social hierarchies (Kelly, 2012; Miraftab, 2016, Schmalzbauer, 2008).

With this emphasis on practices, the project seeks to go beyond understanding identity in inertia and is instead interested in examining how people adopt or refuse certain practices and social categories? What counts as a 'loss' in social status and what is understood by people as 'making it' in Canada tells us about how immigrants implicitly understand their class positions in the context of settlement. 'Home' and the enduring ties with that space also figure in these processes of how people define what success is, as it becomes an "identity reservoir" (Boccagni, 2010, p. 189) from which people draw references about their earlier lives as they confront difficulties in countries of settlement. As Aguilar Jr. (2014) poignantly states, "without a relevant past, the labor migrant has no status apart from that dictated by the labor process and the occupational category as perceived by the locals" (p. 135). We may extend this line of argument for many immigrant workers as well.

Immigrants who have settled abroad (permanently or temporarily) often measure their success not only with their immediate counterparts, but also with transnational groups within and beyond their networks and develop practices and strategies accordingly (Levitt, 2009; Aguilar Jr., 2014), as well as through the generational social mobility of their children (Kelly, 2012; Schmalzbauer, 2008). For those whose sojourn is temporary, the accrual of income abroad

through exploitative work arrangements is tolerated through a future orientation – or what Rhacel Parreñas (2001) calls a "fantasy of reversal" to "ease the pain of contradictory class mobility" (p. 153). In this research, transient domestic workers are presented as occupying two class positions simultaneously – a lower position in the space and time of the present, while achieving a future-becoming elevated class position back home. Often times, this is not merely a fantasy; migrants, while abroad and after return, are indeed able to transform themselves and their families to petty capitalists or an employer of labour back home. In such instances, the migrant is engaged in two contradictory class relationships: the exploited in one set of relations and the exploiter in another set (Aguilar Jr., 2014, p. 77). Furthermore, the presence of transnational reference points further complicates the standards against which immigrants assess their lives and their achievements. As Kelly (2012) notes, "when class positionality is considered in a transnational frame, it is not simply position in one hierarchy that is compared with position in another; it is also the prospect for mobility within that hierarchy, either across a career or across generations, that is a major factor" (p. 170).

By comparing themselves with those back home, immigrants can claim a middle-class identity, contradicting the poor working-class conditions or degraded class position that they occupy in the receiving country, and providing them with the 'emotional resources' to cope with those struggles (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Levitt 2001; Kelly, 2012). Aguilar Jr. (2014) notes that "[w]hat may appear in the country of employment as low status, low purchasing power, and marginality have meaning ultimately in terms of their inversion in a specific locale in the homeland" (p. 157; see also, Kelly, 2012; Miraftab, 2016).

The very process of transit also works to germinate the formation of class identities. Navigating the increasingly class-based and selective immigration policies of the West that seek

a specific type of classed self in merit-based systems also conditions applicants to embody, perform and demonstrate forms of entrepreneurial, self-sufficient middle-class selfhood that would contribute to the economies of countries of destination without encumbering their social safety nets (Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018). As Ho (2011) demonstrates, "the process of assessing an applicant's eligibility… shapes migrant subjectivities and identities in specific ways" (p. 117). Seen this way, immigration policy regimes are key in shaping master narratives as well as micro level 'deservingness frames' through which immigrants interpret their lives (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014; Moffitt et al, 2019). A 'First World' passport is itself perceived as a classed achievement in a world marked by a global apartheid of citizenship as borders demarcate geographies of immiseration and wealth (Sharma, 2004; Polanco, 2016).

Returning to Williams's notion of a "structure of feeling," class inequalities may be lived and culturally expressed even when they are not articulated as explicit class politics. In the context of migration, these classed meanings can take shape through questions of identity, recognition, and social status, particularly as migrants interpret their changing positions through social worlds and points of comparison that extend across borders (Bettie, 2000; see also Kelley, 1996). It is, therefore, insufficient to simply treat class as an objective condition that one embodies in the economic process of production (or 'class in itself'), for even though we can point to these forms of social relations, it tells us little about how this position informs processes of subject-formation, or its political consequences. These fraught experiences of cross-border mobility generate a desire by immigrants to maintain social status (or, in Weberian terms, status as social honour) among their counterparts back home, especially when they move to higher income countries where both immigrants and their networks abroad come with the expectation of accruing greater material success in life. Here, the granularity of how class is lived is perhaps

best understood in Bourdieusian terms. Scholars of transnational migration frequently invoke a Bourdieusian conception of "fields" to overcome nationally bounded ways of understanding social relations. Levitt (2001) defines "transnational social fields" as "public spheres spanning the sending and receiving country", adding that "[t]hose who live within transnational social fields are exposed to a set of social expectations, cultural values, and patterns of human interaction that are shaped by more than one social, economic, and political system" (p. 197). On the cultural terrain, Bourdieu's (1987) multidimensional conceptualization of capitals – economic (wealth and income), cultural (education and taste), social (networks), and symbolic (the recognition and legitimation of those capitals) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) – is useful to capture the multi-scalar ontologies of migrant lives.

Recognizing that cultural outlooks and social practices are implicated in processes of domination and exploitation, culturalist class analyses advance the claim that while collective class action may be weak, people nonetheless engage in relational comparisons with members of various social classes as they develop their own class identity (Devine & Savage, 2005; Skeggs, 2013). However, as Kelly (2012) avers, these cultural reformulations of class analysis do not always account for the spatiality of class identities; he thus insists that "class is central to understanding the way in which the migration process is experienced; but it becomes articulated in unexpected and sometimes contradictory ways when viewed through a transnational frame" (p. 155).

Given the case studies and theoretical interventions reviewed above, the question raised above remains: against whom is the alterity of class interests posed in the transnational field? In other words, if class is indeed a cultural formation, where is this culture located? On the one hand, one might indeed be embedded - in the 'here and now' - in a set of social relations that

may determine one's social location and subjectivity. However, what becomes particularly difficult to identify in Thompson's formulation is the oppositional nature of class consciousness. The presence of transnational reference groups, as well as racial and gendered divisions amongst workers, means that one can cope by disembedding from the present to an elsewhere – an elsewhere that is both spatial and temporal. It is temporal in the sense that previous cultural formations of class consciousness and conditioning have already taken place and, even if those privileges are gone, they retain a space in memory and identity. As Aronowitz (2004) notes, people adjudicate their well-being according "to whether their own situation is equal to the historical level of material culture – the living standard needed to enjoy a decent life *within a specific economic and cultural context*" (emphasis added, p. 35). Within this constellation of transnational experiences, then, how class antagonisms are perceived, articulated, mediated, and animated remains an open question.

Transnationalizing Racial Formations

At the individual level, race, as Hall (1980) famously postulated, is "the modality in which class is lived, the medium in which class relations are experienced" (p. 394). Nonetheless, as discussed above, the signification of race and racialized social relations are context specific. As Omi and Winant (2015) remind us, "race is a social construction and not a fixed, static category;" thus, "what race means in different regional and national settings is highly variable" (p. 12). While non-white immigrants enter a context that places many of them (albeit unevenly) on the bottom of Canada's racialized hierarchy, their own historical experiences of 'race' - or absence thereof – means that the agentic capacity for immigrants to engage in racial projects is open, even as Canadian discourses and policy uphold or interpellate a specific form of ideal classed and raced citizen subject. A number of strategies and practices are employed by individuals and

communities to accumulate what Hage (1998) calls "national capital" in white settler contexts, which includes a number of strategic alliances and other political practices by which (non-white) immigrants, already in racial deficit, differently attempt to appropriate or accumulate whiteness as a component of Canadian national capital.

Karimi and Wilkes (2023) adopt a transnational analytical lens to critique the methodological nationalism latent within a range of assimilation theories. They note that racial categories or racial formations (see Omi & Winant, 2015) espoused in these frameworks are imagined to be occurring within bounded nation-states, when they are, in fact, the result of transnational/global processes. Traditional assimilation theories, segmented-assimilation and the 'post-racial' neo-assimilation theories fail "to explain the transnational circulation of racial meanings" between geographies (p. 6). Similar to Omi & Winant's (2016) critical evaluation of the ethnicity paradigm, Karimi and Wilkes (2023) argue that when it comes to different assimilation and integration trajectories, "the main distinction is between the White and non-White colour line" rather than socio-economic outcomes (p. 4). Eastern and Southern Europeans were able to make claims for "citizenship and inclusion into Whiteness by proving that their country of origin was White," thus expanding the boundary of Whiteness to include European homelands (p. 4). However, "non-Europeans' homeland geographies remain outside of transnational Whiteness" and therefore remain the subject of assimilation research in the West (Karimi & Wilkes, 2023, p. 3; see also Korteweg, 2017; Schinkel, 2018 on the racialized and neo-colonial contours of 'migrant integration research'). This critique resonates with Bhambra's (2017) concept of "methodological whiteness," whereby white experience is treated as the unmarked or universal standpoint from which racialized others are understood. In the context of migrant integration research, this can position the national "mainstream" as a neutral baseline

against which immigrants are measured, rather than as a historically constituted and racialized social formation. Thus, although racialization and racial formations are often imagined as occurring within bounded nation-states, they are also constituted through transnational processes. Methodological nationalism "indicates that newcomers are 'racialized' when they arrive here or, put differently, that they do not have racial identities prior to their arrival" (p. 3–4)**.** A transnational lens on racialization helps to illuminate additional layers of racial alliances and the ways these can either contribute to or hamper multi-racial/ethnic class-based solidarity. As Karimi and Wilkes argue, "As social groups move across national borders, they carry their homeland's understandings of self- and other-racialization. These groups, upon arrival in their host country, develop new experiences of racialization through inter-group relations in both host and home countries" (p. 7). Thus, the authors' transnational amendment disrupts the methodological nationalism that uncritically understands the nation-state to be the natural container of racialization processes.State discourses and policies influence the ways in which immigrants experience racialization, work, and develop a 'sense of inequality' (Bottero, 2020). In the Canadian milieu, multiculturalism is an example of the "non-performativity of diversity speech" wherein 'non-performativity' signifies not a failure of a set of 'diversity' politics; rather, their success lies precisely in the fact that they do not do what they claim so that a nation's claim that it is 'non-racist' (or 'anti-racist') generates the paradoxical effect in which racism can no longer be criticized (Ahmed, 2006). As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, the Canadian state's migration and labour regimes structure the contours of the racial and ethnic stratification of workers through different pathways of migration and valuation of skills that thusly shape the uneven distribution of precarity, citizenship, and immigrants' human capital.

Linking multiculturalism with racial capitalism, Melamed (2015) argues that "contemporary racial capitalism deploys liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differentially to fit the needs of reigning state-capital orders" (p. 77). The management of diversity as a cultural rather than an explicitly racial matter deflects the structural unevenness produced by capitalism and reinscribes them as problems of economic competitions, the amelioration of which are the promotion of individualism to address racial inequality (Melamed, 2014). Much like state discourses and practices, employers also engage in the management of multiculturalism and race at work, shaping how workers identify with both the employer and other workers. Nancy Leong's writing on racial capitalism seeks to address the commodification of racial identity. In her analysis, racial capital is described as "the economic and social value derived from an individual's racial identity, whether by that individual, by other individuals, or by institutions" (p. 2190). In her analysis, racial capitalism - the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another - occurs when racial capital is exchanged in the market (p. 2190). Similar to Ahmed's analysis of the non-performativity of diversity-speech, Leong's intervention is useful in assessing institutional enclosures of racial identity as a way to accrue value. In Chapter Five, I draw on this scholarship to assess the impact of the state's discourses of multiculturalism and Amazon's deployment of diversity discourses and the ways in which they are embraced and contested by workers.

Conclusion

From Marxist accounts of class, I take the recognition that class is not only a structural position but also a historical process. These accounts are essential for understanding the long arc of racialized class formation in Canada. However, they are less effective in capturing the granularity of everyday life and boundary-making. Here, cultural approaches add value by

showing how class is lived and contested in practice. Labour process theory adds a further dimension by showing how classed and racialized relations are organized at work through managerial control, fragmentation, and the production of consent at the point of production. From racial capitalism, I take the insight that racial logics penetrate the daily organization of life. While much of this literature emphasizes macro-historical analysis, my concern is with how these logics are experienced at the micro-level. I frame this interplay through the concepts of *racialization from above* and *racialization from below*: the categories and practices imposed by states and corporations on the one hand, and the repertoires and everyday practices of migrants and workers themselves on the other. This distinction is central to my framework because it highlights both the structural imposition of racial categories and the everyday practices through which immigrants themselves reproduce or challenge racial boundaries.

Nonetheless, there are limitations in the existing literatures. First, class analysis often treats race and gender as secondary, rather than as co-constitutive, a limitation this dissertation addresses primarily through a focus on the racialized and transnational dimensions of class, while recognizing the broader role of gender in shaping labour and inequality. Second, both class and race are too often examined within national containers, leaving underdeveloped the question of scale and borders. Without a transnational lens, we cannot fully understand how micro-processes of class and racial formation emerge and play out within the work site. Conversely, transnational migration scholarship has paid less attention to how these cross-border trajectories become consequential within the labour process itself. Bringing these approaches together allows me to examine how workers' transnationally constituted class and racial positions shape, and are reshaped through, managerial control, consent, and workplace relations. My contribution is to conceptualize racial and class formation as co-constitutive, multi-scalar processes that unfold

across and through borders. Amazon warehouses provide a concrete site in which to examine these dynamics, revealing how macro-historical structures and transnational trajectories converge in the lived experiences of workers.

Chapter 3: The Racial Labour Geographies of Amazon in Canada's Greater Toronto Area

"In some way or another Amazon affects you."
-Sultana Hossain, Amazon Labor Union[9]

Before dawn breaks in the suburbs of the Greater Toronto Area, streams of workers prepare for long shifts inside massive, windowless warehouses nestled between highways and industrial zones. Many navigate irregular childcare, shifting household routines, and limited employment options as they begin their ten-hour days, tracked by invisible code and digital rhythms. These workers – disproportionately racialized immigrants – are embedded in a labour market shaped by a long history of racial stratification and a present marked by deepening precarity. In the wake of pandemic job losses and shrinking employment protections, Amazon's expanding warehouse empire offers the illusion of stability – delivering instead a regime of relentless productivity and disposability. It is within this landscape that Amazon has flourished, drawing from and reproducing the racialized geographies of work in Canada's largest urban region.

This chapter highlights the dynamics of racial differentiation both within the broader Canadian context and within the political economy of Greater Toronto Area (GTA). I outline the ways in which Amazon both exploits and (re)makes the racialized geography of the GTA, and how Amazon's capitalization on neoliberal austerity and corporate welfare perpetuates class and racialized inequalities. These processes adversely affect these suburban localities and negatively impact employment in both quantitative and qualitative ways. In this context, I argue that Amazon's success has been, in no small part, due to its exploitation of Canada's racially stratified labour market (Abdelbaki, 2024).

[9] Morris, L. (2024, December 22). *Fighting the giant.*

The chapter unfolds in three parts. First, I provide a brief historical overview of Canadian immigration policy to show how settler colonial logics and racial capitalism have shaped a stratified labour market – a context in which racialized workers, especially immigrants, are overrepresented in low-wage and precarious employment. Second, I examine how the COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing inequalities and created the conditions for Amazon's rapid expansion in the e-commerce sector, highlighting the intersections of racialization, health risk, and economic insecurity. Third, I examine racialized labour market segmentation in the GTA, using Toronto CMA data to show how racialized workers are disproportionately concentrated in low-income, temporary, and precarious employment. I then show how the COVID-19 pandemic intensified these existing inequalities while accelerating demand for e-commerce. Finally, I turn to the specific case of Amazon's warehouse network in the Greater Toronto Area, where I explore how the company exploits and reproduces local patterns of racialized precarity through its employment practices, logistical strategies, and spatial footprint.

Canadian Immigration Policies: A Brief History of Racialized Class Formation

The politics of immigration, and the social relations of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability that informed them were central to Canada's white settler colonial nation-building project and to the longstanding racialized divisions of labour that characterize Canada's labour market. Historically, British settlers sought to dominate North America and establish it as a 'white settler' colony by explicitly seeking Anglo-Saxon Protestant immigrants for farm labour. After Confederation in 1867, the newly sovereign Canadian state continued to reflect hierarchies both between races and within the 'white' race, gradually conscripting various groups of Europeans into 'whiteness,' such that the most favourable citizen ideal would be British or American,

followed by those coming from other Western and Northern European nations, and later from Southern Europe (Sharma, 2020; Abu-Laban et al., 2022; Stasiulis & Jhappan, 1995; see also Ngai, 2004).

The construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway[10] between 1880 and 1884 propelled the government to recruit Chinese workers to perform the most onerous and dangerous low-wage work involved in the completion of the project. Shortly after its completion, Canada passed the Chinese Immigration Act in 1885 to substantially prohibit further immigration from China by imposing a prohibitive 'head tax' (started at $50 and later increased to $200 per worker), and through which the Canadian government and provinces accumulated roughly $23 million dollars (James, 2004). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 banned Chinese immigration entirely until its repeal in 1947 under the Canadian Citizenship Act (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010), making it the most explicit measure of exclusion in Canadian history of immigration. The racial logic informing this move is perfectly articulated in 1883 by Sir John A. MacDonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada:

> It is better to have Chinese labour than no labour at all… At any moment when the Legislature of Canada chooses, it can shut down the gate and say, no more immigrants shall come here from China; and those in the country at the time will rapidly disappear and therefore there is no fear of permanent degradation by a mongrel race. (Macdonald, quoted in Valverde, 2008)

Further corroborating the centrality of the politics of 'racial purity' to the creation of the white settler colonial project, Ena Dua examines (1999) the state's management of familial relations in First Nations, Asian-Canadian, and Caribbean-Canadian communities, noting that "in nineteenth

[10] Importantly, and parallel to more recent dynamics in immigration governance, the federal government did not take on a central role in managing migration and recruitment in the post-federation period, despite its significance to Canada's nation-building project. Instead, it partnered with private sector actors like the Canadian Pacific Railway, which played an active role in immigration and settlement activities, and by extension, in internal processes of colonialization and land dispossession (Abu-Laban et al., 2022).

century nationalist discourses, the icon of family became a powerful symbol through which national identities were constructed and where individuals were tied to the nation through a national genealogy" (p. 249). Articulated as such, the value of the 'family' to the Canadian white settler colonial project was to not just reproduce labour, but to also physically reproduce the nation. Thus, in addition to the 'Asian peril' that informed the circumscription of Asian immigrants and prevention their permanent settlement and family unification, Caribbean women from Jamaica and Barbados were almost exclusively employed as temporary domestic workers first during the 1910s to the 1930s and later through the West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955-67). This program was created when the number of European women migrating to Canada began to decline. Regarded as the 'daughters of empire,' British white women who migrated to perform domestic work were encouraged to stay and marry white men to reproduce the nation (Walia, 2021; Dua, 1999).

Another distinct form of exclusion predominant in the 1920s was related to ideological and political concerns, expressed through the perceived threat of communism, to which the state responded by actively barring groups from Scandinavian Europe, Ukraine, and other Soviet nations. The World War Two era marked a period in which immigration, in the words of Prime Minister Mackenzie King, was a "privilege… a matter of domestic policy" (quoted in Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002, p. 40).

The latter half of the twentieth century marked a qualitative shift in Canadian immigration policy. Canada's need to supplement its lagging demographic growth and growing industries placed immigration at the forefront of economic policy. The newfound significance of immigration policy was demonstrated in the creation of a specialized ministry of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in 1950. The Immigration Branch was, at the beginning of the

postwar era, lodged within the Department of Mines and Resources (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). Prior to this – between 1917 and 1936 – immigration governance existed under the auspices of the Ministry of Immigration and Colonization, signaling the strong linkage between the dually violent logics of the Canadian settler colonial project and its deeply racialized immigrant recruitment practices.

As the route toward recovery from the Great Depression in Europe became imminent, Canada's primary supply of migrants diminished, and explicitly Eurocentric policies were abrogated in favour of a class-based system (Pendakur, 2000; Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). While this shift is prosaically attributed to a sweeping tide of ecumenism and tolerance, the neutralization of racial and national discrimination was more a matter of pragmatism than a change in principle. Under the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker, an overhaul of the *Immigration Act* of 1952 was implemented, which officially removed racial barriers. In lieu of racial exclusion, a new regime of immigrant regulation was incepted and the government sought immigrants with 'economic potential' (Pendakur, 2000; Abu-Laban, 1999; Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). As such, the independent class of immigrants (a primary male applicant and accompanying family) was created, under which applicants were admitted based on assessments of criteria including skills, education, training, and other qualifications. The family reunification program remained intact but was now extended to immigrants coming from Asia and Africa.

It was only five years later that a solid set of criteria were fashioned to evaluate immigrants' potential, and the points system, formally known as the Norms of Assessment, was established (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010; Walsh, 2011). Prime Minister Lester Pearson's Liberal government's 1966 *While Paper* on immigration was the seminal policy document on which further practices were structured. It advocated the removal of racial and national discrimination

while simultaneously highlighting the significance of making immigration subservient to Canada's national economic prosperity (Abu-Laban, 1999). This marked the first step toward economic rationalism as a trade-off for accepting racial difference.

The tumultuous economy of the 1970s led to a tapering of immigration intake, and more restrictions were implemented in accordance with labour market and overall economic conditions. As a result, points allotment to independent and nominated immigrants were conditioned upon the procurement of formal job offers prior to admission. For example, in 1974, 10 points were subtracted from immigrants under those two classes unless they had job arrangements for which no Canadian or permanent resident was available, ultimately culminating in the 'Canadians First' policy (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010).

The Immigration Act of 1976 was introduced and implemented after much public debate. It was preceded by the government-sponsored *Green Paper* commission report designed to reveal factual background on policy issues and recommendations in order to forge a consensus on new legislation (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). Though intended to be value-neutral, the four-volume document conveyed a negative tone towards the proliferation of immigration, citing it as the primary culprit for the economic and social problems of the time, including ethno-racial tensions and increasing urbanization. It proposed a stricter alignment of immigration with labour market and economic demands. In response to the *Green Paper*, the Joint Senate-House of Commons Committee proposed that a global quota for the total number of immigrants admitted to Canada be set by department officials as well as the provinces, organized on a first-come-first-serve basis whereby those meeting points requirements would enter until quota for the year was met (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). The *Immigration Act* of 1976 ultimately gave leeway to the provinces in determining immigrant intake, established a more generous refugee policy, and

lessened the amount of administrative and executive discretion with regard to issues of deportation as well as admittance.

The influx of refugees from 'non-traditional' (i.e. non-White) countries in the period that followed frayed the consensus that was achieved in the early 1970s. Amidst a global economic crisis, the second half of the 1970s was marred with stagflation, rising unemployment, and mounting government deficits, leading to two pernicious recessions in 1981 and 1991 with very modest recoveries in between. Congruent with the bleak economic climate of the era, immigration dropped by a steep 60 percent from 210,000 in 1974 to just 86,000 persons in 1978. While it did rise in subsequent years, it dropped to an unprecedented low of 84,000 persons – the lowest intake figure since 1962 (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010, p. 380).

By the mid-1990s, the economic uncertainty that had shaped immigration policy in the 1970s and 1980s gave way to a renewed effort to redesign immigration governance around competitiveness, flexibility, and labour-market responsiveness. From 1995 to 2008, the Canadian economy experienced significant prosperity, growing faster than all G7 countries. Inflation was low, debt-to-GDP ratio declined sharply from seventy-one percent in 1995 to twenty-nine percent in 2008 (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). In 1994, however, Immigration and Citizenship set out for another overhaul of the Immigration Act of 1976 to match the new economy. In 1997, the federal Immigration Legislative Review Advisory Group, chaired by Robert Trempe, released the report *Not Just Numbers: A Canadian Framework for Future Immigration* for Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC). The report marked an important shift in Canadian immigration policy toward labour market gaps, economic integration, and administrative flexibility (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). By framing immigration increasingly in terms of economic contribution, it

recommended that policy should "facilitate the entry, whether temporary or permanent, of those persons who will contribute to Canada's prosperity and to the economic well-being of Canadians" (Immigration Legislative Review Advisory Group 1997, Recommendation 4). As Jennifer Hyndman (1999) observes, the report reflected broader neoliberal restructuring processes in which immigrants were increasingly expected to demonstrate adaptability, flexibility, employability, language competence, and economic self-sufficiency. While notions of "adaptability" and "ability to establish" had appeared in earlier immigration and refugee selection frameworks, the report consolidated these ideas within a broader neoliberal emphasis on labour-market flexibility, employability, and economic self-sufficiency. The panel report also reopened questions of administrative discretion. Whereas the Immigration Act of 1976 sought to curtail the discretionary powers of the executive and immigration officers, the reforms expanded the state's capacity to govern immigration, thus re-empowering the executive with minimal parliamentary oversight under the auspices of national security that loomed large after 9/11 and the so-called 'War on Terror.' With respect to family reunification, the IRPA expanded the range of those who would be eligible for sponsorship but tightened the financial requirements that accompanied the process. The criteria for economic immigrants were loosened to facilitate the entry of temporary workers. The 1990s marked a considerable rise in temporary labour migration programs which include the domestic worker stream (Foreign Domestic Movement, which was later replaced by the current Live-In Caregiver Program), and the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) (Thomas, 2010a; Faraday, 2012). This marked a significant shift toward employer-oriented, neoliberal policy-making. The skilled immigrant class had consistently made up the largest group of the economic class, especially after the 'preferred occupations' requirement was dropped and replaced by an emphasis on flexibility and

transferable skills. Overall, the mid-1990s marked a shift in immigration policy that significantly departed from *the Immigration Act* of 1976. New policies gave primacy to risk management through heavy health and financial assessment procedures and emphasized general skills and training rather than specific labour demands and shortages.

An examination of this history suggests that immigration policies have longstanding orientations towards employer and labour market demands. At the institutional level, the economic interests of employers and capital exerted a superior level of influence over contemporary immigration policies, as illustrated in the surge of temporary worker programs in comparison to permanent residents (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010; Sharma, 2006; Abu-Laban et al., 2022). Immigration costs and settlement service (settlement, language classes, and travel) have, since the mid-1990s, been relegated to immigrants. Immigration services and social policy have been developed to increasingly champion the principle of "doing better for less" (Sears 1999, p. 102) and the actions of the state and its priorities have been reoriented toward market liberalism and flexibility, in a turn toward "neoliberal stateness" (Walsh, 2011, p. 864).

More recent shifts in Canadian immigration policy indicate what might be referred to as probationary (non)citizenship (Moffette, 2014; see also Vosko, 2025) or what Goldring and Landolt (2015) term 'conditionality' embedded within policies to scrutinize migrant desirability and deservingness. As Goldring and Landolt (2015) state:

> Conditionality denotes the material and discursive conditions that must be met to acquire and exercise the formal or substantive right to remain present within a national territory and/or to access entitlements and social goods, including the labor market. Conditionality is framed by regulations, policies, and procedures that take hold through social relations, interactions, and negotiations. (p. 857)

These transformations are evident in the pivot from a mostly one-step process in which immigrants are admitted from abroad directly to a two-step process where immigrants first enter on a temporary basis (either as temporary foreign workers or international students) before they

might qualify for permanent residency (PR) status. These include the increased salience of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and the Canadian Experience Class (CEC). The PNP was introduced in 1998 to both bestow greater authority on provinces to choose immigrants and enable employers to sponsor temporary foreign workers as provincial nominees, while the CEC was specifically devised to retain 'highly skilled' temporary workers and international students who have at least one year of Canadian work experience (Banerjee, 2023; Chatterjee; 2015; Flynn & Bauder, 2015). In 2015, Express Entry further consolidated this shift by introducing an application-management system for federally administered economic streams, including the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP), CEC, and PNP, that ranks applicants according to factors such as age, education, language proficiency, Canadian education, and Canadian work experience. Express Entry shifted Canada's immigration system away from a more supply-driven, first-come-first-served model and toward a more targeted, demand-driven approach (Banerjee, 2023). The Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) has also become central to this two-step pathway, allowing international graduates to work in Canada after completing their studies in order to accumulate the Canadian work experience often required for PR transition. These developments of temporary pathways and permit conditions shape migrants' job mobility, access to settlement supports, exposure to precarity, and long-term economic security (Banerjee, 2026).

While the manifest goals of these policies' emphasis on 'Canadian experience' and training serve to optimize immigrant 'integration outcomes' (see Schinkel, 2018), the policies are latently imbued with racial meaning. As Chatterjee (2015) argues, "these policies enable the simultaneous functions of a 'pro-active state', procuring necessary immigrant labour, and a 'defensive state', shoring up the traditional imagination of the nation along a

racialized/ethnicized discourse of skill and standard in which immigrants are typically cast as lacking" (p. 547). Two-step migration makes permanent residency conditional on prior labour market incorporation, while temporary status deepens dependence on employers who mediate access to work experience, references, sponsorship, and stable income. It also makes Canadian education, recognized credentials, and "Canadian experience" central to (im)migrants' ability to move from temporary to more secure status. Immigration pathways, status insecurity, and labour market precarity recur in workers' accounts in Chapter Five, where different routes into Canada shape not only workers' subjection to precarious employment but their subjectivities within and beyond the workplace.

Racialized Labour Geographies in the GTA

Despite the emphasis on skill and education that is enshrined in both immigration policy and public discourse, reports on labour market trends have time and again showed that many educated and skilled immigrants continue to 'lag' behind white Canadian-born workers: immigrants frequently experience downward occupational mobility, professional displacement, and deskilling (Guo, 2015; Bauder, 2003). As Himani Bannerji (1995) poignantly notes, "in a society based on the ethics of upward mobility, the non-white population will be mainly expected to reproduce the working class, making class formation a 'raced' affair" (p. 134)

Although all groups of workers saw a deterioration in labour market conditions between 2006 and 2016, national data show that these effects were unevenly racialized (Block et al., 2019). While racialized workers overall had a higher unemployment rate than non-racialized workers in 2016, these outcomes varied by group: Black workers had an unemployment rate of 12.5 percent, Arab workers 13.5 percent, and West Asian workers 11.0 percent, compared to 7.3 percent among non-racialized workers and 5.2 percent among Filipino workers. Earnings gaps

followed a similar pattern. Racialized men overall earned 78 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized men, but Black men earned only 66 cents, West Asian men 71 cents, Korean men 72 cents, and Filipino and Southeast Asian men 73 cents. These inequalities are not reducible to immigrant status alone. Among prime-age workers, racialized immigrant men earned 71 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized immigrant men, while racialized immigrant women earned 79 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized immigrant women. These gaps also continued into the second generation: second-generation racialized men earned 79 cents for every dollar earned by second-generation non-racialized men, while second-generation racialized women earned 96 cents for every dollar earned by second-generation non-racialized women (Block et al., 2019, p. 14; Banerjee et al., 2024). Together, these national patterns suggest that racialization produces differentiated forms of labour market exclusion rather than a single, uniform racialized experience. They are also echoed in studies of immigrant labour market integration, which consistently identify wage disparities, deskilling, and concentration in non-standard, precarious, and low-wage employment as central barriers facing racialized immigrants (TRIEC, 2018; Dinca-Panaitescu et al., 2019; Block et al., 2019; Banerjee, 2023). Thus, while "migration is often seen as – and can be – a means of moving out of the precariat, migrants often find themselves stuck in it in host countries […] In effect they move out of one section of the global precariat in their homeland to another part in host countries, sometimes indefinitely" (Van Hear, 2014, S115). To examine how these patterns appear in the regional labour market relevant to this study, I turn to 2021 Census data for the Toronto CMA.

Using a weighted analysis of the 2021 Census Public Use Microdata File (PUMF), this section uses the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) as a proxy for the GTA. Census division boundaries such as Peel Region are not available in the PUMF, making the Toronto

CMA the most appropriate geography for this analysis. Variables were recoded to compare racialized and non-racialized groups, immigrant/permanent resident and non-immigrant groups, and income, poverty, labour force status, and job permanency outcomes. Against a Toronto CMA baseline in which racialized people comprise approximately 57.7 percent of the population captured in the labour force status table, the data show clear patterns of overrepresentation in precarious employment. Among those in the bottom income decile, 67.6% were racialized, with 53.4% identified as racialized immigrants or permanent residents. In contrast, 62.8% of those in the top income decile were non-racialized, underscoring the racialized stratification of income. These disparities extend to labour market conditions, where racialized individuals are more likely to be employed in temporary or precarious work arrangements (including fixed-term, casual, seasonal, or short-term positions) with 62.8% of such workers being racialized and 44% being racialized immigrants or permanent residents. Patterns of poverty reflect similar trends: 68.7% of those falling below the 2018 Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty line were racialized, and 53.5% were racialized immigrants and permanent residents. These figures show that the Toronto CMA's diversity is not evenly reflected across the labour market as racialized workers are disproportionately concentrated in low-income work, temporary and precarious employment, and unemployment.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated immigrants' experiences of labour market precarity, intensifying racialized labour market inequalities that were already well established. Recent immigrants in particular were more likely to experience job loss as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on economic activity since they were mostly employed in frontline service sector work (Statistics Canada – The Daily, 2020). In fact, data shows that racialized groups and immigrants are more vulnerable to layoffs and protracted periods of unemployment, especially

during economic crises, that have detrimental long-term effects (Shields & Alrob, 2021; Hou & Picot, 2022).

The pandemic also accelerated demand for e-commerce. As people turned to e-retailing businesses amid pandemic lockdowns as a primary site of consumption, Amazon saw a boom in demand for its goods and services. A Deloitte Canada report highlights that "47 % of Canadians [were] shopping online more often since the pandemic began," noting that Amazon was the dominant platform, with 66 % of Canadians using Amazon to find and purchase items during the 2020 holiday season. (Newswire Canada, 2020) Amazon's ability to seize market share in the context of a pandemic was made possible by recruiting and exploiting this now augmented reserve army of labour of predominantly racialized immigrants.

As elucidated in Chapter Two, the concept of racial capitalism is useful here as it underscores the relationship between capitalism and racism, or the racial dynamics of capitalist accumulation (Knox & Kumar, 2023; Bhattacharyya, 2018; Hall et al., 1978; Paret & Levenson, 2023) in the Canadian context. It helps to describe and explain the relationship between racialization and class formation in capitalist societies. Canada's establishment as a settler colonial, racial capitalist state was and continues to be predicated upon practices of race-making, including Indigenous confinement, evictions, and genocide (Walia, 2021), alongside policies of the "differential inclusion" of migrants that "create different degrees of precarity, vulnerability and freedom by granting and closing access to resources and rights according to economic, individualizing, and racist rationales" (Casas-Cortés et al., 2015, p. 79). These race- and class-making practices take place at multiple scales, both at and beyond the nation-state border to create and reproduce racialized social boundaries (De Genova, 2023; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). As Kundnani (2021, p. 53) rightly posits, "race provides a means of coding and managing the material boundaries between

different forms of labour under neoliberalism." The "stickiness"[11] (Ahmed, 2004, p. 14) of precarity to racialized workers is further corroborated by Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018) who maintains:

> [m]uch if not all of what we describe as instances of racial capitalism as it is enacted in the workplace overlaps with a more wide-ranging erosion of working conditions and a growing insecurity and deregulation of employment. In regions where there remains some memory of workplace regulation, this process of loss may be termed precaritisation (p. 109).

Such processes of precariatization can be observed in changes to basic legislative labour protections, such as minimum wage, minimum hours of work, and vacation and overtime pay. Mark Thomas's (2010b, p. 68) analysis of the amendments to Ontario's *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) between 1995 and 2001 suggests that "racialized inequality in the labour market and the regulation of minimum employment standards […] are intricately linked." Under the auspices of making Ontario 'Open for Business,' the neoliberal reforms enacted by Mike Harris's Progressive Conservative government both weakened minimum standards and their enforcement in the service sector, where a vast majority of immigrants work, while altogether exempting certain forms of employment (like domestic and temporary/contract work) from labour protection. These processes (whose ramifications are further discussed below and in Chapter Four) are part of what Burawoy (1983) termed the "politics of production", a concept he advanced to "undo the compartmentalization of production and politics by linking the organization of work to the state" p. 587).

[11] Sara Ahmed (2004, 14) uses the term "sticky objects" to describe the ways in which certain ideas, concepts, and practices can become ingrained or "sticky" within social and cultural contexts. Sticky objects are symbolic entities that adhere to people and structures, shaping their experiences and interactions. They can be restrictive, exclusionary, and oppressive, enforcing conformity and maintaining power structures.

Given these historical and contemporary social policies and dynamics, I argue that Amazon's success has been, in no small part, due to its exploitation of Canada's racially stratified labour market, where its expansion is made possible through the recruitment and exploitation of a predominantly racialized immigrant workforce. Amazon has been successful in subsuming the relative surplus populations produced in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizing these labouring bodies into a cheap disposable workforce (see also Gebrial, 2022). Further, I suggest that the concept of racial capitalism helps to explain both the racialized and racializing processes underpinning the making of this reserve army of labour and the precariatization of work where "accrued histories of racialised belief influence what can be tolerated in terms of disposability" (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 122). The racialized geography of the GTA offers a case study through which to examine the racial dynamics of digital capitalism. Amazon is therefore best understood here as a conjunctural beneficiary of the racialized labour market described above. Its expansion in the GTA was made possible by the convergence of racialized labour market segmentation, suburban logistics growth, pandemic-era e-commerce demand, and a flexible workforce already rendered vulnerable by immigration policy, austerity, and labour market deregulation.

Amazon's Logistical Expansion

Amazon's rise rests on its ability to turn e-commerce into a sprawling logistics operation. Amazon Inc. was founded by Jeff Bezos in 1994 as an electronic bookstore at the zenith of both the dotcom era of the 1990s and the rise of finance capitalism, a period when venture capital was cheap and investors sought innovative start-ups (Moody, 2020). By 2001, Amazon had already attracted $2.1 billion in investments, far surpassing other tech start-ups at that time (ibid.). The market fundamentalism of neoliberal politics allowed Amazon to avoid U.S. sales taxes because

it had not yet established brick-and-mortar stores, and, as a "low-margin earner," Amazon paid only USD $2.3 billion in corporate incomes taxes from 2002 to 2017 (Moody, 2020, p. 22). Today, Amazon is a key player and beneficiary of the logistics revolution. Cowen (2014) traces this transformation to the postwar emergence of logistics as a science of circulation', through which transportation, warehousing, inventory, and production were increasingly conceived and managed as parts of an integrated system. Rather than treating distribution as an activity that followed production, this logistical perspective brought the movement of commodities and the spatial organization of production itself within a common calculus of cost and coordination. Operating a transnational network of sprawling warehouses, sortation centers, and delivery stations – spaces of employment that represent digital capitalism's new factories (Delfanti, 2021a). As Chua and Cox (2023, p. 125) state, "Amazon directly – and radically – integrates formerly distinct spheres of production, transportation, and consumption into a single e-commerce system aimed at the long-term consolidation and transformation of the retail industry into a vast logistical enterprise." As Cowen (2014) notes, the rise of just-in-time production also transformed the warehouse from a site primarily concerned with storing inventory into a distribution centre organized around sorting, redistributing, and keeping commodities in motion.

Operating on this ever-expanding geographical scale, Amazon sells products procured from manufacturing in the Global South to relatively more affluent consumers in the Global North, particularly in North America and Europe. In the United States, Amazon is the largest retailer of clothing, the biggest seller of toys, books, shoes (among other consumer products), the fastest growing logistics provider, and through the creation of Amazon Web Services (AWS), one of the leading providers of cloud computing services (Alimahomed-Wilson *et al*., 2020).

Like Bezos' original online bookstore, the immensely profitable AWS arm was also heavily subsidized by public funds (Thomas et al., 2022). It is one of the largest providers of web and computational services, powering the servers of other major companies like Uber, Netflix, Airbnb (Alimahomed-Wilson et al., 2020; Delfanti, 2021a), as well as a number of public sector organizations (AWS Economic Impact Canada, 2021). The lucrative business of AWS allowed Amazon to cross-subsidize and re-invest profits into its logistics operations to both increase its warehouse footprint and continue to cut its prices to outcompete other retailers (Chua & Cox, 2023). However, as Massimo (2022) underscores, AWS *originates from* the logistics business – Amazon needed to build an IT infrastructure in order to manage its expanding physical infrastructure. The warehouse is thus ground-zero for experimenting with new technologies that are then sold to other parties by Amazon Logistics. Through 'Fulfillment-by-Amazon', Amazon sells logistics services to third-party sellers that use its platform to reach a wider range of consumers (Massimo, 2022; Press, 2023; Weigel, 2023, Mitchell, 2021). In their analysis of Amazon's market power, Maher and Aquanno (2024) underscore the ways in which Amazon centralizes the flow of commodities and intensifies price competition between sellers: first-party sellers (1P), or those who sell inventory directly to Amazon; second-party sellers (2P), or independent retailers whose inventory supplements Amazon's; and third-party sellers (3P), who use Amazon to sell to consumers, whose inventory is primarily managed by Amazon and that now supply a greater proportion of the products Amazon sells via third-party logistics contracts. Beyond these contracts with small businesses, Amazon is now offering inventory and supply chain management services to other large corporations through 'Supply Chain by Amazon' services (Maher & Aquanno, 2024).

In terms of revenue streams, the fees extracted from external vendors to use Amazon's Marketplace e-platform accounted for 23 percent, whereas AWS accounted for 12 percent of the company's total revenue (Mitchell, 2021; Massimo, 2022). Thus, while AWS's profitability counterbalanced the losses of the company's retail arm (which as of 2022 has yet to report a profit) and made it an attractive investment for Wall Street (Chua & Cox, 2023), the warehouse constitutes the condition of possibility for AWS and continues to be the core of the Amazon empire in its pursuit of monopoly power in the retail world, both through the exploitation of workers (discussed further below), price-gouging of small businesses, and undercutting its competitors. In fact, competitive pressure on Amazon drives its immense investments in Research and Development (R&D) to protect its market dominance, from spending to improve "productivity of labor through robotization, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic discipline and coordination" to "undertaking strategic acquisitions of firms that have developed critical new technologies." (Maher & Aquanno, 2024).

Amazon's capacity to expand and fulfill orders necessitates the creation of fixed physical infrastructural investments to facilitate its access to consumers (Moody, 2019). This apparent tension between the mobility of commodities and the fixity of logistical infrastructure is central to what Danyluk (2018) describes as capital's "logistical fix." Investments in warehouses, transportation networks, and related infrastructure can absorb capital into fixed assets while subsequently reducing the time and costs of circulation. As Rodrigue (2020, p. 2) notes, "digitalization has a pronounced physicality." The locational strategy of Amazon's new "retail factories" (Chua & Cox, 2023) and last-mile logistics is characterized as a process of "logistics sprawling" where "warehouse and distribution centres tend to move away from urban areas and toward more suburban and exurban ones, offering lower land prices and good access to highway

networks" (Woudsma et al., 2016, p. 475). In sum, Amazon's rise can be attributed to its exploitation of class and geographical urban/suburban disparities, generous corporate welfare and tax regimes, lax regulatory environments to facilitate its access to cheap land in close proximity to its target consumers, public transportation infrastructure (highways, airports, and rail systems) and labour market (de)regulation that enable the exploitation of low-wage workers.

Amazon in the Greater Toronto Area

Since the opening of its first warehouse in Mississauga, Ontario, (a large suburb in the GTA) in 2011, Amazon has been steadily expanding across the province and the country. Today, Amazon operates 23 warehouses (or what the company refers to as 'fulfilment centres') across Canada, nearly half of which are concentrated in Ontario, Canada's most populous province. Of the 11 fulfilment centres in Ontario, eight are in or near the GTA, located in Toronto's inner and outer suburbs. The GTA is a logistics hub. Located close to the Toronto International Pearson Airport, a significant proportion of jobs are in the transportation and warehousing sector. While there has been growth in the warehousing cluster, the quantitative and qualitative job losses due to cuts in the fmanufacturing sector in the GTA (previously an industrial powerhouse in Canada), especially in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Recession, were never fully recuperated. The growth of warehousing and goods movement in the GTA should not be understood as a simple replacement of production by circulation, but as a reorganization of the region's position within increasingly integrated production and distribution networks (Johal et al., 2019; Peel-Halton Workforce Development Group, 2016). This restructuring has thus far been unsuccessful in reversing the rise of precarious work—work that is insecure, offers low wages, and provides little regulatory protection (Thomas et al., 2020).

Within the logistics sector, Amazon has been aggressive in its acquisition of warehousing real estate to expand its distribution network (Altstedter, 2021), squeezing out brick-and-mortar retailers (Chua & Cox, 2023; Johal et al., 2019; Rodrigue, 2020), a phenomenon that some have called the "Amazon effect" (Alimahomed-Wilson et al., 2020). This phenomenon is most acute in the Greater Toronto Region – the logistics capital of the country – where a bulk of Amazon's activity has been focused (Deveau, 2019). This has implications on the broader political economy of the region and its labour market. The gradual reduction of physical retailers and the rise of e-commerce have implications on the fiscal capacities of the region's municipalities. The politics of municipal governance and finance, and the making of neoliberal urbanism is linked to broader patterns of austerity in the Canadian context. The end of the postwar Fordist era in the 1970s saw governments at multiple levels shift resource allocation in an effort to court capital and encourage private investment.

At the federal level, these neoliberal reforms took shape in the form of government's receding role in overseeing urban development, while at the provincial level it involved a series of municipal amalgamations that "rationalized" services to sprawling suburbanized spaces. In the early 1990s, the Conservative federal government initiated restraint in fiscal transfers to the provinces, a process that was intensified and accelerated under the Liberal government of the mid-to-late 1990s. The resultant reduction in provincial revenue led governments to subsequently download many funding responsibilities onto municipalities, marking the beginning of permanent austerity politics at the municipal level, to which the responses have been increased privatization of services and heightened reliance on residential property taxes, the latter occurring to compensate for declines in non-residential tax revenues (Albo & Fanelli, 2019). Importantly, this neoliberal policy paradigm also shaped the spatial stratification of Toronto's

inner and outer suburbs along racial and ethnic lines (Kipfer & Keil, 2002; Albo & Fanelli, 2019). In the Peel region, for example, the GTA's logistics capital, where nearly 40 percent of Amazon's packages to Canada are processed, municipalities are failing to establish infrastructure to support its overwhelmingly racialized, immigrant working class population:

> Peel has been the fastest growing region in Ontario for decades, with the most underfunded health care system in the province: there is only one hospital in Brampton to serve over 600,000 people. It's home to the province's largest number of international students, new immigrants, and workers in distribution centres. Many of these people live in multigenerational homes, not just because it's a feature of their culture, but because of their inability to afford housing and childcare while working paycheque to paycheque (Syed, 2021).

The downward trend of the share of revenue from industrial property is in large part due to the decline in the manufacturing sector. The growth of e-commerce and the establishment of massive warehouses in the region have not offset these revenue losses for two main reasons. Firstly, there is a distinction between industrial and commercial property classifications: a warehouse that is not attached to a goods production facility is classified as a commercial property, which is taxed at a lower rate than an industrial facility (Johal et al., 2019, p. 38). Secondly, the number of jobs per hectare associated with the new distribution and logistics facilities (some of which are highly automated) is lower than would have been the case with manufacturing plants (City of Toronto, 2022). Thus, the success of Amazon's geographical strategy in the GTA relies on the exploitation of struggling suburban municipalities desperate to generate revenue and employment in the context of neoliberal austerity and capitalist crises. In addition, Amazon's efforts to monopolize the logistics and retail industry by hoarding warehousing space in the GTA, contrary to its hailing as a job creation machine (see Sorkin, 2017), will likely result in a net loss in retail employment due to a reduction in properties used for commercial purposes, and decreased tax revenue (Johal et al. 2019).

Amazon's expansion has also had a *qualitative* impact on work beyond its own warehouses. Its growing power across retail and logistics has increased its capacity to shape employment practices across the sector, contributing to what Alimahomed-Wilson (2020) describes as the "Amazonification of logistics." As I show in the following Chapter, these dynamics materialize in the reorganization of working time, labour intensity, and everyday life within and beyond Amazon's warehouses. The concept of a "race to the bottom" is frequently used in the globalization literature to refer to how transnational or multinational firms enhance their competitiveness and profitability by operating in geographies – primarily in the Global South – characterized by lower wages, weaker labour and environmental protections, and lax tax regimes. Researchers have also shown that this dynamic affects labour practices in the Global North, particularly in the weakening or uneven enforcement of labour protections (Davies & Vadlamannati, 2013; Olney, 2013). While Amazon's warehousing network requires a degree of geographical fixity to maintain proximity to consumer markets, this does not preclude strategic relocation within regions in response to labour organizing or regulatory changes. Indeed, the threat or enactment of regional withdrawal can be used to discipline or pressure workers, as seen in Amazon's recent decision to cease operations in Quebec (Lau & Switzer, 2025). In this sense, Amazon participates in a regionalized "race to the bottom" within the Global North, not through offshoring but by playing localities off one another. More broadly, the dynamic of the "race to the bottom" – originally used to describe differentiated labour regimes across borders – can also help explain how workers from the Global South encounter Global South working conditions within Global North geographies.

These dynamics of 'Amazonification' are manifesting beyond the warehouse space and into the last-mile delivery process, where Amazon is further entrenching the gigification of work.

The gigification of work is a phenomenon where gig economy dynamics (algorithmic systems, task-based evaluation and heightened automation and precarity) are extended and applied across traditional industries, effectively transforming a broader range of jobs into gig-like work (Gilbert & Thomas, 2021). A year after it established its first warehouse in 2011, Amazon extended its Prime membership to Canadian residents. The e-commerce giant had previously relied on Canada Post, UPS, and FedEx to deliver its parcels, whose capacities to keep pace with the immense volume of Amazon deliveries ultimately waned. Now Amazon relies on a 'contracted out' workforce to fulfil its Prime program's promise of free one-day shipping. To do this, Amazon created *Amazon Flex*, a platform through which drivers are hired as gig workers who are 'legally' (mis)classified as independent contractors. Similar to what has been dubbed the 'uberization' of work – that is, the hiring of temporary workers through digital platforms to perform on-demand work without any employee rights – "self-employed" drivers must use their own vehicles or rented vans and are compensated based on each delivery route completed (Hassel & Sieker, 2022; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020).

In addition to the exploitation of "independent contractors" to deliver its packages, Amazon introduced its *Delivery Service Partners* (DSP) program where it relies on small, subcontracted parcel delivery services that operate 20-40 vans to deliver exclusively to the Amazon Prime membership. Like the workers deployed through the Amazon Flex program, drivers hired through a DSP are also not considered Amazon employees. From training to uniforms to work assignments, monitoring and discipline, as well as firing and retention, Amazon controls all aspects of work with DSP managers as their intermediaries (McIntyre, 2022). A delivery service partner can also subcontract another smaller delivery company to handle Amazon's packages, thus creating a complex network of subcontracted and sub-

subcontracted drivers where "the further down the chain from Amazon, the worse the gig" (McIntyre, 2022).

In its crucial last-mile distributional operations, Amazon's labour strategy is to exploit (mis)classified categories of predominantly (im)migrant workers towards whom it can abdicate any responsibilities but over whom it can retain full control. In sum, Amazon's profitability is made possible through its capitalization on the broader political economic milieu of austerity and flexible labour regimes that produce a just-in-time, racially differentiated workforce.

Conclusion

The racialized labour geographies that shape Amazon's presence in the Greater Toronto Area are the product of layered histories and structural decisions that have long defined Canada's political economy. As this chapter has shown, the foundations of Amazon's labour regime are rooted in Canada's settler colonial immigration policies, which have consistently channeled racialized and immigrant workers into precarious, low-wage sectors. These dynamics have only intensified under neoliberal restructuring, producing a stratified labour market in which job stability is elusive and workers are deemed disposable. The COVID-19 pandemic further deepened these conditions, enabling Amazon to rapidly expand its logistical footprint while embedding gig-like precarity more deeply into the regional economy.

Existing within this historical or spatial context, Amazon's operations actively sustain and profit from the socio-spatial inequalities of the GTA's suburban peripheries – places where racialized labour are concentrated. Amazon's rise exemplifies the consolidation of older forms of racialized labour control with new digital techniques of governance. Its operations are not only shaped by existing geographies of inequality but actively reproduce and intensify them – particularly in suburban zones where racialized workers are both concentrated and rendered

structurally vulnerable. The company's ability to scale and dominate relies on this geography of stratification: on historic divisions of labour, on the spatial marginalization of immigrant communities, and on the flexible governance of precarious work.

The next chapter builds on this analysis by turning to the internal dynamics of the warehouse floor. Tracing the shift from classical Taylorist and Fordist regimes to lean production and digital Taylorism, I examine how Amazon's labour process reflects a broader consolidation of digital capitalism and neoliberal governance. Here, managerial control is not limited to the shop floor but extends into the social conditions under which work is endured, normalized, and consented to. Understanding these dynamics requires more than a focus on surveillance or efficiency – it demands attention to the political economy of disposability, the reconfiguration of worker subjectivity, and the structural conditions that allow such a managerial regime.

Chapter 4: Performing Productivity: Digital Control and Worker Subjectivities at Amazon

A machine which is not active in the labour process is useless […] Living labour must seize on these things, awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values.

- *Karl Marx (1990), Capital Volume I. p. 289*

Inside Amazon's warehouses, time governs everything: how long it takes to stow a bin, how many seconds between picks, how much 'time off task' (TOT) a worker accumulates before receiving a warning. Labour unfolds in an environment structured by surveillance, digital productivity metrics, and layered management oversight. These technologies of control shape not just the pace and organization of work, but also the everyday rhythms of life on the warehouse floor and the social relationships between workers.

This chapter builds on the labour process framework developed in Chapter 2 to analyze how control and consent are organized inside Amazon's warehouses under digital capitalism. It examines how these dynamics manifest through hierarchical management structures, digital Taylorism, and the symbolic and material fragmentation of the workforce. I advance the concept of the *performativity of growth* to capture how Amazon enacts and projects its identity as a company of limitless expansion and opportunity. This growth, however, is not only performed discursively but is materially enacted through the acceleration of the labour. Thus, beyond the technical organization of work, this performativity shapes how managerial control is legitimated and how workers are interpellated: growth is staged not only as an economic fact, but as an aspirational horizon that makes endurance inside the warehouse appear purposeful and even worthwhile. The chapter concludes by situating Amazon within the broader neoliberal labour

market, where precarious conditions intensify the coercive power of workplace technologies and hegemonic forms of managerial control.

Beyond the Workplace: The Politics of Technology and Production

While labour process analyses have illuminated how digital technologies intensify control and surveillance within the workplace, they have at times abstracted these dynamics from their wider political-economic context. However, the adoption of workplace technologies is deeply embedded in the politics of production, shaped by state policy, regulatory frameworks, and neoliberal policy changes (as discussed in Chapter 3), infrastructural investments, and capital accumulation imperatives. As Thompson and Laaser (2021) note: "workplace centric approaches of [labour process analysis] remained influential throughout the 1990s and beyond, while a political and materialist concept of technology was not consistently advanced" (p. 141). They propose a theoretical framework that rejects "technological determinism" – the tendency to overdetermine or overestimate the causal impact of technology on work and broader economic relations (p. 149). Rejecting technological determinism requires an account of the social agents and institutions that mediate business models and shape capital investments. As they write, "the 'materiality' of technology becomes 'decisive' when it is embedded in specific business models and their distinctive logics of value creation and extraction. These exist prior to and frame the control purposes to which management seeks to adapt and deploy technologies" (p. 146). While technological innovation may offer a variety of options with different implications for work and employment, the technologies that are financially and politically supported tend to be those aligned with the interests of actors who possess the power resources and capital to shape investment decisions (p. 147). De Stefano and Aloisi (2022) similarly argue that technological choices are shaped by asymmetries in institutional and economic power.

Amazon's patenting practices make this logic especially visible. Rather than treating technological innovation as a neutral process of invention, these patents show how Amazon imagines and develops systems for extracting more data, directing labour more precisely, and extending managerial control. As Delfanti and Frey (2021) argue, Amazon's technological horizon is one in which workers are incorporated into forms of "humanly extended automation" where labour remains necessary but is increasingly coordinated and subordinated to digital systems. Patents for wearable devices, including wristbands designed to track and guide workers' hand movements, exemplify this tendency. In short, they reveal a political economy of innovation in which technological development is oriented toward the tighter integration of workers into infrastructures of surveillance rather than full automation. Technological innovation, thus, is not a purely technical process but is instead one shaped by power relations and institutional interests, with the state actively involved in directing the politics of production.

Inside the Amazon Warehouse: A Labour Process Analysis

These abstract forms of algorithmic control and "machinic dispossession" take concrete shape in the everyday routines and bodily disciplines of warehouse labour at Amazon, where digital Taylorism is enacted through the granular organisation of tasks, time, and movement. These temporal pressures reflect the wider logistical imperative to accelerate circulation by minimizing delay and keeping commodities in motion. As Cowen (2014) argues, this drive is translated across logistics systems into intensified pressures on labour productivity. At Amazon, productivity rates, time off task, and real-time scanning are among the mechanisms through which these pressures are imposed at the point of work. Across all tasks, technology plays a central role in guiding, controlling, and intensifying the labour process. Handheld devices, scanners, and automated systems dictate workers' movements and activities, tracking their

performance in real time against pre-set metrics such as items picked, packed, or stowed per hour, error rates, and "time off task" (TOT). This technological oversight ensures operational efficiency but also imposes significant pressures on workers to meet demanding productivity targets.

As outlined in Delfanti (2021a) and Altenried (2022), and as revealed through the accounts of research participants, the warehouse workflow is structured around four main functions – picking, packing, stowing, and sorting – each carefully designed to maintain the rapid, accurate, and efficient delivery of products to customers. While automation supports some elements of these processes, human labour is indispensable to managing the sheer volume of products and sustaining operational continuity.

Pickers are responsible for retrieving items from designated storage locations, known as "bins," guided by handheld devices that provide precise instructions. Their movements are closely monitored, with performance metrics recording items picked per hour and the time spent between tasks. This role demands constant walking, often across expansive warehouse spaces, creating significant physical strain and cognitive demands. Rubi, a South Asian women in her 50s who began working at Amazon after getting laid off from her office job with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, vividly illustrates how these organizational and embodied challenges play out in practice:

> I start at 7:45. I get there around 7:30. They will give you the station. Sometimes the rebin wall – you pick, you put – there is a big wall and on the other side the packers are there. So you have to pick for two packers. Sometimes the regular station, so you pick, you put in a tote, sometimes single, sometimes multiple totes, so whatever number you have, and when it's full you take it out and the water spider[12] comes and takes the tote. I used to pick in the tote before, but later I found it easier in the wall because in the wall you don't have to deal

[12] Water spiders are workers who circulate supplies and materials to other stations, ensuring that pickers, packers, or stowers have what they need to keep work flowing.

> with anyone. You just pick and put in the wall, but there you run out of totes, you have to wait or go get one yourself, and when it is filled, you have to take it down or put it down. Sometimes the water spider doesn't come, and you just keep piling. It takes time, and you have to look for an empty tote too. Later I found it easier to pick in the rebin wall: you just have two packers, you have to be very fast for the two packers, but you don't have to deal with anyone else. In the morning it's okay, but as the day gets later and later, I feel so tired. Sometimes the heavy items, like detergents, are really difficult. You have to push them to the packer, but when you take it out it's hard. If you ask for help, you have to wait, and they watch your speed. […] When we need help, you don't get any. How are we supposed to manage health and safety? I cannot lift all those heavy items, go up the ladder, pick it, come down, and put it, while keeping up speed.

Rubi's account underscores the physical and cognitive toll of picking, as workers navigate continuous movement, heavy loads, and the constant scrutiny of performance metrics. Even experienced pickers like Rubi must negotiate speed, accuracy, and fatigue while anticipating managerial oversight or scanner alerts and navigating safety at work.

Once retrieved, items are transferred to *packers*, who are tasked with selecting the appropriate packaging materials and box sizes to ensure that goods are securely prepared for shipment. Packers scan each item to verify accuracy, print shipping labels, and are similarly monitored for speed and error rates, with automated systems providing assistance in selecting packaging supplies but little relief from the pace of work. *Stowers*, by contrast, manage the intake of products, scanning and placing items into storage locations with precision to optimize space and maintain inventory accuracy. Finally, *sorters* organize packages either for outbound shipping, grouping items by region or carrier, or for inbound processing, categorizing goods prior to stowing. Although conveyor belts and mechanized systems assist in this work, the volume and pace of packages, particularly during peak periods, require continuous manual intervention under tightly enforced time constraints.

Together, these tasks are embedded within a technologically mediated and highly regimented system designed to maximize throughput while exerting considerable physical and

mental demands on workers. Workers' activities are continuously recorded, analyzed, and used to recalibrate individual and collective performance expectations. This system reflects the broader trend of digital Taylorism, wherein labour is fragmented, monitored, and optimized through technological means, extending and intensifying the principles of early twentieth-century scientific management. Productivity targets at Amazon are dynamic, frequently increasing during peak seasons such as Black Friday and Christmas, and failure to meet these shifting benchmarks can result in disciplinary action or termination, fostering a high-pressure, precarious work environment.

These systems of control create what Burawoy (1979) might describe as a "game of making out," wherein workers develop informal strategies to navigate and meet production targets. However, unlike in Burawoy's study of factory labour, where some degree of collective agency and tactical resistance was possible, the rigid, data-driven nature of the warehouse environment leaves workers with little to no room to maneuver, constraining their ability to subvert the system. The game persists, but it is one played under conditions of extreme surveillance, minimal autonomy, and constant risk, fundamentally altering the nature of worker participation and resistance in the contemporary labour process. In fact, Amazon deploys its own top-down gamification techniques as a form of 'soft' control. On the surface, gamification is simply the incorporation of play into productive activity. However, in many contemporary digitalized employment, "[g]amification facilitates capital's need to control the rhythms of work and serves to counter workers' natural tendencies to slow down and take it easy" (Delfanti, 2021a, p. 67) and can thus be understood as an extension of Taylorist mechanisms of control. In what Delfanti calls Amazon's "culture of mandatory fun," the work is literally gamified as workers' movements are virtually transposed on tablet screens placed nearby for all to see as

they race to fulfil the task at hand. In this process, workers also encounter one another as competitors. Tim, one of the young men I interviewed, recounts these dynamics of competition and the ways in which they are actively produced by management to incentivize or subtly threaten workers to work faster:

> If you're consistently slow... Basically what they do is they set for every different department or job, you know, based on whatever factors they come up with, they set like a minimum, like you need to... And they reward you if you go really high, but that's not so important. The point is there's a minimum and if you go below that consistently, you get in trouble. Even if you go below that for like half a day or a day, they'll send some message to the manager who will send some message so the supervisor and that supervisor will come up to you and say 'you know, hey, are you having a good day? Are you ok?' which is like basically *'what the fuck is going on?*' but you know, they'll be all sweet about it, depending on the person. But, you know, yeah it's very like condescending or whatever. Or sometimes they're just say *'this isn't acceptable'*. It depends on their style. And some of them will also play up the – they use it to make you go fast but also to create a culture of competition and all that, like divide and conquer thing, like *'oh, you see that person over there? Oh, that person - they kill it! They do 300 an hour*' or whatever and *'you should be like them*' and you know, most of the time if you ask that person, they're like *'yeah they're lying, like I'm not that fast*' or whatever. Definitely they exaggerate and then they'll show you their computer with all the numbers and it won't be what they described, like it'll be maybe a few people up top. So they just- there's a lot of sort of like psychology behind it like *'oh you gotta do this and we'll give you more money'* but actually the reality is you don't make any more money no matter how fast you go. There's no incentive.

On the games that workers play, Burawoy sought to highlight workers' agency at work through acts that may not challenge managerial dictates but that are nonetheless expressions of agency: "participation in a work game contributes to the reproduction of capitalist relations and the expansion of surplus value." (p. 81). Burawoy's observations illuminate the ways in which interests and consent are organized on the shop floor: "consent rests upon – is constructed through playing the game. The game does not reflect an underlying harmony of interests; on the contrary, it is responsible for and generates that harmony" (p. 82).

Just as every game has rules, so, too, do work games. Burawoy astutely observed that within the context of a capitalist labour process, consent is constructed even when the rules of the games are challenged, as "a violation of rules has the consequence of strengthening their hold

over productive activities and relations." (p. 82). Thus, when workers contest the employer's adequacy in the provision of the necessary conditions to play the game, consent is "continually being reestablished and reinforced (p. 83). Rubi offers this contradictory account, reflecting both adherence to corporate expectations and subtle acts of care and coordination with coworkers. She describes how she supports her peers to navigate workflow and avoid reprisals, translating cooperation into the company's language of efficiency:

> Sometimes you cannot scan on the scanner. It doesn't scan. If you call for help, it will take time and you have to wait. Then I tell them, *"Ok, I will scan from my phone,"* so I do that from my phone and let the packer deal with what they do. So I solve their problem; I try to help them. Sometimes, when they're working next to me and show exhaustion, I say, *"Ok, don't worry, just take rest, I will pick for you too."* I'll pick mine and for them too, so that it's continuing and people won't see that they're not working. So I try to help. So many people don't know the basic things, so I help to solve it. Because if I work and she keeps idle, it's a company loss. If I spend a few minutes to help them, it's the company's betterment. That's what I think, so I help them. I think as a group. I'm not doing it for myself, I'm doing it for the company.

This illustrates the paradox of work games in digitalized warehouse labour: acts of cooperation, care, and tactical problem-solving are simultaneously expressions of agency and mechanisms that reinforce the norms and productivity expectations of the company. Importantly, it is not the rate and its impact on work peers that is being disputed, but the company's provision of properly functioning tools (the scanner) and supports (replacement of malfunctioning machines) that becomes the object of contestation. The deflection of this antagonism onto workplace technologies ultimately establishes consent to the game of 'making rate' by reinforcing the requirement that the employer provides a fair playing field. These everyday negotiations of workload and peer support also occur within – and are circumscribed by – a rigid hierarchical structure that further organizes and disciplines labour.

Alongside algorithmic surveillance, Amazon's internal hierarchies further entrench control and inhibit worker solidarity. The company's finely tuned chain of command – extending

from entry-level associates to symbolic peer-monitoring roles – creates micro-strata of authority that reinforce compliance and fragmentation, isolate workers from one another, and extend managerial control. At the base are Tier 1 (T1) workers, who perform the bulk of warehouse tasks – picking, packing, stowing, problem solving, water spidering, and dock work. These workers are subject to strict surveillance and productivity targets, with limited job security and often minimal training. Despite their shared working conditions, this layer is internally stratified through symbolic, non-supervisory roles that create differentiation among peers.

Among these roles is the *Process Guide*, a peer worker tasked with offering on-the-floor task support and performance guidance. Though not officially management, process guides function as internal enforcers of corporate discipline, keeping coworkers "on rate" and correcting behaviours aligned with management expectations. Similarly, *Learning Ambassadors* are high-performing associates selected to train new hires, model corporate norms, and socialize new workers into Amazon's culture of productivity. While framed as opportunities for advancement, these roles often serve as soft management positions that reproduce control while blurring the boundaries between labour and supervision (Vallas et al., 2022).

Other symbolic positions include *Problem Solvers*, who troubleshoot workflow disruptions and interface between Tier 1 workers and Area Managers. Though they perform more cognitive tasks, they remain within the hourly associate classification, performing a hybrid of mental and manual labour that extends managerial oversight without corresponding authority or compensation. Additionally, roles such as *Safety Champions* or *Amnesty Floor Monitors* are nominally about health and safety, but in practice deputize workers to monitor each other for compliance with safety and efficiency rules, also in the service of soft discipline under the guise of peer accountability.

Directly above T1s are *Process Assistants* (PAs) who, while not officially managers, carry out many supervisory functions. PAs coordinate workflow, monitor rates and time off task (TOT), and often deliver informal discipline or feedback. Their ambiguous role between management and rank-and-file positions them as an extension of managerial authority.

Formal management begins at the Tier 3 level, with *Area Managers* overseeing distinct sections of the warehouse floor. These managers monitor worker productivity through dashboards that display real-time metrics such as 'time off task' (TOT) and scanning rates. Area Managers are the main point of contact for disciplinary action and performance feedback, yet they too are under pressure from *Operations Managers*, who supervise multiple zones and are responsible for ensuring the entire shift meets corporate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). At the top of the facility hierarchy is the *Site Manager* or *General Manager*, who oversees the entire warehouse operation and liaises with regional and corporate leadership. The higher the level of management, the more limited their interactions with workers and the more removed they are from daily operations. On this level of managers, Naomi, who formerly worked in the healthcare sector and began working for Amazon after leaving her work amidst health and safety concerns at the height of the pandemic, had this to say:

> I never see them on the floor. You'd think they'd come around and do some inspection. At least the operation managers, the white guys, you think they'd come around and do an inspection. There's pictures of them. They're invisible. They're not present and they're not involved. Maybe they look at the camera. Nobody's accountable. You know what I think? They don't have to go there physically and look at what's around them. They're so glued to their laptops. *It's a video game. We're the players*. They push a button and something should happen, things should speed up, things should slow down!

Naomi's account underscores how the racialized image of "the white guys" in management is tied to a form of spectral authority – phantom-like figures who embody power through absence. Rather than engaging directly on the warehouse floor, these managers preside from behind

screens, turning the workplace into a "video game" interface where workers are reduced to data points and commands, a process that reinforces both their invisibility and the alienation of labour.

Above the warehouse level, corporate managers, HR staff, and tech integration teams define the parameters of algorithmic management, set performance benchmarks, and develop the data infrastructure that underpins the culture of surveillance. This multi-layered hierarchy creates a fragmented workplace where peer roles like Process Guides and Learning Ambassadors blur the lines between supervision and solidarity, reinforcing divisions among workers. The structure is further shaped by racialized, gendered and agist dynamics, as younger men are often placed in physically demanding, unrated roles like water spiders, while older women may find themselves forced to choose between constant surveillance or more injurious work. These hierarchies organize authority, and, equally important, they also contribute to Amazon's projection of itself as a company of limitless advancement and mobility – a theme I return to in my discussion of the performativity of growth. In these ways, Amazon's warehouse regime institutionalizes fragmentation as a form of labour control, diffusing responsibility, cultivating competition, and undermining collective resistance.

This intricate chain of command not only diffuses managerial authority but also contributes to a culture of compliance that suppresses dissent and normalizes overwork. The presence of these layers of internal hierarchy helps Amazon enforce productivity expectations without constant direct oversight, creating an environment where algorithmically generated targets become internalized by workers themselves. As workers compete to meet or exceed performance benchmarks, even under ambiguous or shifting expectations, the hierarchical structure facilitates a culture in which overexertion and physical wear come to be valourized or

seen as part of what it takes to show commitment and move up the company ladder. As Kash, a worker who later moved into a supervisory role, explained, "My shift is at 7:30 in the morning and ends at 6:30 for four days. I would take my lunch at the facility and even stay after my shift to browse computers, to look at internal promotions, leadership and resume building." His account shows how extra effort can become folded into workers' own efforts to move forward inside the company.

In addition to these hierarchies and symbolic peer roles, Amazon has also deployed a "Pay to Quit" program – informally known as "The Offer" – which further reinforced workplace fragmentation. Introduced in the U.S. and Canada, this program gave long-tenured employees a financial incentive, often a lump sum plus stock options, to voluntarily leave the company, under the condition that they could never return in any role across Amazon, Whole Foods, or corporate positions (Semuels, 2018). In his 2014 annual letter to shareholders, Jeff Bezos (2014) announced the introduction of "Pay to Quit" under the banner of "employee empowerment:"

> Once a year, we offer to pay our associates to quit. The first year the offer is made, it's for $2,000. Then it goes up one thousand dollars a year until it reaches $5,000. The headline on the offer is "Please Don't Take This Offer." We hope they don't take the offer; we want them to stay. Why do we make this offer? The goal is to encourage folks to take a moment and think about what they really want. In the long-run, an employee staying somewhere they don't want to be isn't healthy for the employee or the company ("Employee Empowerment" section, paras. 2–3)

The program, which ended in 2022[13] (Tan, 2022), was explicitly designed to encourage turnover among experienced employees, preventing the formation of long-term peer networks that might

[13] Amazon framed "Pay to Quit" as a way of encouraging workers who no longer wanted to be there to leave, suggesting that it was undesirable for both employees and the company when people stayed in jobs they did not want. Its suspension for most warehouse workers in 2022 suggests that Amazon's willingness to offer workers an exit was contingent on how replaceable that labour was at a given moment (Tan, 2022; Semuels, 2018).

foster collective solidarity. Dina recounts her experience upon learning about ‘the offer’ as follows:

> I remember the general manager. We have these things called "all hands" meetings, where they get everyone on a shift to come to the lunchroom and they talk to you about something, they give you an update or whatever. The general manager was telling us about this offer. I remember asking him: "*Why is it that you can't come back if you take this offer?*" And he says, "*Well, it's because we're trying to encourage you, we're giving you this money to maybe start your own business or to do something with it that is fulfilling to you. We don't wanna stifle you by allowing you to come back*." Which didn't make any fucking sense, and everyone looked at each other weird. Everyone knew it was like this weird thing. It's very strange. *Because the turnover is so high and because they actively encourage it, it's really hard to have any kind of real social fabric at these warehouses. Nothing. There isn't a culture.*

The Pay to Quit program highlights another mechanism through which Amazon structures fragmentation: by financially incentivizing exit and reinforcing transience, it not only removes experienced workers from the workforce but also cultivates an environment in which interpersonal ties are difficult to maintain, ensuring that institutional or workplace knowledge does not circulate and be passed on to more junior workers. This mirrors the broader pattern of managerial control, where both algorithmic monitoring and internal hierarchies serve to individualize accountability and suppress long-term worker cohesion. These structural pressures are further compounded by internal promotion practices and workforce dislocation. As Tim explained:

> So a Tier 3 person probably did start working as a Tier 1 employee at the warehouse, but they're transferred to a different warehouse when they get promoted. They're not brought in from the outside meaning like they just never really worked the hard work. They have worked the hard work, but they don't actually know those people in this new warehouse because they just shifted, right. And so these people who really wanna work their way up in Amazon, they basically have to – there's also something about the dislocation, a lot of them will like literally move, like they'll move where they live. It’s kind of like their whole life starts revolving around Amazon. To work their way up, you have to be kind of devoted in a strange way. Or you don't move but you have a crazy commute, which other people do. Which is like, you make these sacrifices and you lose touch with your community in a way, whether it's where you live or, you know, the people you used to work with or whatever.

The experience of transience is not uniform across all segments of the workforce. Older employees, who often have families to support, are less likely to view their work as temporary and therefore experience the warehouse as a more permanent arrangement. As my interview with Jordan, a young worker who works in a non-direct role, revealed: "In terms of transience, older workers [are] less likely to see themselves as passing through as they have families to support and so this work is seen as more permanent." These accounts show how Pay to Quit, promotion-induced dislocation, and varying temporalities of employment combine to fragment social relations in Amazon warehouses. As Delfanti (2021a) notes, whether or not a worker does take the offer, this type of "planned obsolescence" of the workforce "affects a profound psychological conditioning: producing workers who anticipate and accept their ultimate disposability" (p. 106), adding that this most acutely manifested in health and safety risks. As I show in the following section, injury is not a byproduct of warehouse work, but an outcome of a labour regime that disciplines the body through both digital surveillance and organizational fragmentation.

A Culture of Injury

Amazon's digital Taylorist "culture of metrics" (which some have dubbed "Bezosism" (Mims, 2021; Henaway, 2023) generates a culture of injury through the introduction of immense physical and mental stress, exacerbated by undisclosed performance goals (the need to 'make rate') dictated by algorithms and monitoring of any 'slack' time, or what Amazon calls 'time off task" (TOT) (Moody, 2020; Alimahomed-Wilson, 2019; Hanley & Hubbard, 2020; UNI, 2023, Delfanti, 2021a). Workers can check their rates at the digital kiosks available at the warehouse and how they compare to the warehouse average. At certain times, Amazon will also display the rates of the top performers on a given shift (Interview with Dina). These two metrics have been identified as the top algorithmized techniques that contribute to Amazon's high injury rates. The

'rate' measures the number of items a worker scans over a period of time. This arbitrary "floating rate" is an "overall rate at which workers must complete a task in an Amazon warehouse, whether it's putting items on shelves, taking them off, or putting them in boxes, is calculated based on the aggregate performance of everyone doing that task in a given facility" (Mims, 2021). Other reports suggest that the rate is set at the 25th percentile of productivity across a five-week rolling average of workers who perform a specific role (Tung et al., 2024). The second metric, 'time off task,' continually records the number of seconds in which a worker is not actively scanning, including during bathroom breaks or pausing to troubleshoot an issue in their work process. TOT is measured all day long, and an automated system alerts managers about workers who have reached a certain amount of TOT. However, workers also report that the 'quota' of TOT is never disclosed, nor are they informed about their own TOT when they are disciplined by managers. This ongoing automated surveillance exacerbates Amazon's culture of injury and psychological stress (Tung et al., 2024).

The physical toll of warehouse labour is staggering. Workers are on their feet for 10-hour shifts, walking several miles each day, bending, reaching, and lifting repetitively. The physical strain quickly accumulates: legs swell, joints ache, muscles inflame. Even young and healthy workers like Dina, who is in her late 20s, describe their bodies breaking down under the workload:

> I used to always be like '*what the fuck?*' like I'm young and relatively healthy and I feel dead. But everyone used to tell me - like when we get in our cars and we drive home, it takes us like 15 minutes to get out of the car because their legs would be swollen. You're picking for example heavy things, like cat litter from the top shelf. You're lifting your totes. There is a lot of heavy lifting depending on what items you're carrying. Even books can get pretty heavy. And you're walking this whole time. You get used to it eventually. Your body get used to walking that much. People's feet get really inflamed.

Tasks that might appear mundane, such as lifting cat litter or packing books, become gruelling through repetition and speed. Devyn, who worked at Amazon for a summer while he was an

international student, described his various visits to clinics during his time working at the warehouse, going as far as saying "if you work there for too long, you can't really work at all after that," revealing fears and realities around the disabling effect of some of the workplace injuries. In his experience, leaving Amazon and moving on to working on a ride-sharing platform was, in a way, an act of relative physical self-preservation. Thus, in addition to the uneven organization of work, the labour process also distributes bodily wear, injury, and exhaustion along racialized lines, recalling Gilmore's (2007) idea that racism produces group-differentiated vulnerability to harm. This physical degradation also spills into workers' non-working hours. Describing disturbed or erratic sleep schedules which make recovery incomplete, many workers report persistent anxiety and nightmares. Naomi described to me her experience at length, including the impact of work on her psychological and mental health:

> I have nightmares about the company. I do have nightmares. I hear that horn [simulates horn blaring] in my sleep. You think it's my alarm clock, it's not, it's in my head. The conveyor belt horn. I hear it in my sleep. And when the boxes start piling up on the conveyor belt, the blue light rings, it flashes and it makes that noise 'ding ding ding.' It's very annoying. The workplace permeates into your sleep, into your dream, not like in my past jobs. I've never had that.

Naomi, a former nurse, went on to assert that "the way Amazon runs business... it's a public health issue," emphasizing that the demanding nature of work and its encroachment on workers time outside of work leaves little to no room for self-care or other care responsibilities, the latter especially an issue for the women she works with:

> You leave out of the place physically broken, and also long hours leaves you very little time to take care of yourself. You know, 10 hours. And say you live far away? What can you do to catch up with 8 hours of sleep? You have to do your laundry… do you take care of somebody? Is somebody taking care of you? Like, where do people make time to take care of themselves. And then they gotta take care of a child or a spouse. They demand your time.

The long shifts, commutes, and persistent fatigue leave little room for recuperation, let alone for fulfilling responsibilities as parents and caregivers. For women in particular, these demands intensify the structural imbalance between waged labour and unpaid reproductive labour.

Additionally, workers must maintain high levels of concentration to avoid errors in scanning, stowing, and packing, as mistakes can disrupt the fulfillment process and result in penalties or disciplinary action. Across the United States and Canada, injury rates inside Amazon's warehouses continue to be well above industry standards. Notably, Amazon's injury crisis in Canada is particularly severe: injury rates in Toronto-area warehouses have more than doubled since 2016 (Mojtehedzadeh, 2020). Despite ongoing reports of the harm faced by employees in its warehouses, Amazon consistently disputes and undermines the severity of workers' injury in order to reduce the company's accident costs and their Workers Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) premiums, as well as the benefits injured workers might ultimately receive. Amazon frequently contests whether injuries are work-related, especially in cases like repetitive-strain injuries, where onset is gradual and difficult to date. Nearly 30 per cent of serious injury claims filed between 2018 and 2019 in Ontario were disputed or challenged by Amazon (Mojtehedzadeh, 2020), which King (2024) and Gindin (2024) highlight as part of a broader strategy to minimize company costs and undermine worker compensation. Mojtehedzadeh (2025) further shows that these disputes are accompanied by reporting practices that complicate how injuries are documented and communicated to the WSIB, including repeated instances of late or incomplete reporting and internal procedures that create confusion for workers attempting to file claims. Gindin (2024) further emphasizes that Amazon's health and safety data is deliberately opaque, with far less transparency around facility-specific injury rates in Canada than in the United States, limiting the ability to assess the scale and distribution of

workplace injuries. The issue also appears especially acute in Canada because the official figures are shaped by disputes over how Amazon's operations are classified. Mojtehedzadeh (2025) documents a years-long conflict over whether the company should be categorized as warehousing or as mail-order retail, the latter a lower-risk designation with substantially cheaper WSIB premiums, reflecting Amazon's efforts to minimize labour by obscuring how operations are classified.[14] Moreover, Amazon has rejected critical health and safety reforms – such as mandatory microbreaks – that could mitigate injuries because they conflict with its production-driven model (Gindin, 2024). Meanwhile, in its own safety reports, Amazon insists that its disabling performance expectations and safety are simultaneously achievable, claiming to use the "science of safety" and touting that the deployment of more automation and tech-based solutions will enhance workplace safety (Amazon Safety Report, 2021). This assertion persists despite leaked data revealing that automated warehouses, for example, have injury rates more than 50 percent higher than those that do not use robots (Evans, 2020). In a system that weaponizes metrics against labour while masquerading as 'innovation', workers are pitted against one another as they are pushed to their physical limits in these techno-panopticons.

Injury at Amazon is not also gender-neutral. Work is stratified along gendered lines (see also Vgontzas, 2022). Water spiders – Amazon's borrowed lexicon from lean production methods – are workers who provide supplies to other workers in the work process (e.g., ensuring

[14] This classification dispute stems from a multi-year legal battle between Amazon and Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). Amazon actively sought to maintain the low-risk regulatory profile of NAICS 454110 (Electronic Shopping and Mail-Order Houses) by isolating its physical logistics network under a separate corporate entity, Amazon Canada Fulfillment Services, ULC. An internal WSIB audit revealed that this arrangement allowed the corporation to pay erroneously low insurance premiums while simultaneously under-reporting its actual insurable payroll by $113 million between 2017 and 2019. Despite Amazon's aggressive legal appeals to retain its 'mail-order retail' status, the WSIB ultimately overruled the company. The regulator forced the subsidiary into NAICS 493110 (General Warehousing and Storage) and ordered the repayment of over $4 million in back-premiums and penalties, correcting an operational misclassification that had long externalized the costs of Amazon's hazardous industrial fulfillment centers (Mojtehedzadeh, 2025)

there are enough boxes). These roles tend to be more physical and are predominantly assigned to young men. In the warehouses, these are considered "indirect process" roles that facilitate others' work and are not monitored or subject to a specific performance rate in the same way that "direct processes" like picking or stowing might be. The workers who perform the role of a water spider in the warehouses note the physicality of the job but also express feeling relatively more secure in their jobs because their work is not 'rated', as Dennis, a young worker, explained to me:

> A lot of indirect roles are more physical. So for example, like aunties,[15] older ladies, probably don't want it. I think they would rather be tracked than have to do physical work that's gonna, you know, hurt their back or something.

Women in the warehouse can end up in more precarious work situations when confronted with the difficult choice of heightened surveillance or potentially injurious work. As Crowley (2013) shows in her study of gender and labour control, women-dominated groups are more likely to face "coercive" control arrangements, particularly direct supervision. These differences highlight how gendered control structures contribute to workplace inequality beyond just pay disparities. The technological infrastructure of surveillance which is so central to digital Taylorism can also be exploited in gendered and abusive ways. Workers report instances where managers used warehouse location data for inappropriate monitoring and even sexual harassment. Several workers highlighted the ways in which the surveillance technology that are available to managers to use: "their positions of authority for sexual harassment and whatnot" (Interview with Dennis).

In sum, Amazon's culture of injury is shaped not only by its digital Taylorist techniques and lean-inspired efficiency metrics, but also by the gendered organization of labour. The pressure to produce at any cost disproportionately harms women and older workers of a

[15]A term used endearingly to describe older racialized women.

predominantly racialized workforce, whose experiences are frequently obscured in generic accounts of productivity and injury.

Amazon and the Broader Labour Market

Many of Amazon's warehouse workers are employed under precarious conditions, with a significant proportion hired on temporary or seasonal contracts. This precarity gives management a significant degree of control over workers, who may feel pressured to maintain high productivity to secure permanent employment or avoid termination. Amazon recycles vast amounts of its workforce by hiring hundreds of temporary workers (colloquially called "white badges" in Amazon jargon) during peak seasons who are then discarded once demand winds down. To be sure, Amazon's ability to enforce mandatory overtime and normalize a 'high churn' workplace are part of a broader politics of production (Burawoy, 1983) whereby the neoliberal legislative changes outlined in Chapter Three create the social conditions that allow employers to extract more time and flexibility out of workers. In the Canadian context, these include labour market deregulation, weakened employment standards enforcement, and immigration policies that produce a racially stratified and precarious workforce. These conditions actively enable the uptake and effectiveness of Amazon's labour process and technologies of control by ensuring a steady supply of workers with limited bargaining power. For example, one of the 2001 amendments to the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) enacted by the Mike Harris government in Ontario concerned the regulation of overtime. The revised legislation revoked the requirement of a government permit for excess hours and instead introduced a requirement for employee 'consent' to work overtime (Thomas, 2010b). As one Amazon worker explained to me, workers hired by Amazon can opt out of overtime but hiring managers do not inform them of that option. Mandatory overtime is discretely embedded in the employment contract that they sign upon

being hired. Dina told me, "*they punish you for [opting out]*" by suggesting that it would not be possible to opt back in. The power imbalances between the employer and the employee thus make it difficult for workers to practice their legal right to *not* consent to overtime, and this is especially the case in the face of economic insecurity, concerns about immigration status, and language barriers, all of which represent another key dimension of racialized exploitation (Thomas, 2010b).

Given Amazon's scale, it has the capacity to reshape as much as it relies on these labour market conditions, influencing working conditions across the sector and inducing qualitative impacts on work. Its rapid growth, increased monopolization of retail and logistics, and augmented power in the global supply chain and over various suppliers afford the company a greater role in shaping work and employment practices (Kassem, 2022; Delfanti, 2021a; Chua & Cox; 2023; Vgontzas, 2022). This "Amazonification of logistics has detrimentally impacted workers by contributing to the further erosion of labor standards, while simultaneously increasing competitive pressure on existing unionized parcel delivery firms" (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020, p. 70). In Ontario, even workers in unionized warehouses have not been able to stave off Amazon's "megacycle" shifts (Gurley, 2021) of 10.5 hours a day. Dina, now a former Amazon warehouse worker who took up work at a large warehouse in Brampton (a large municipality in the GTA) explains the impact this has had in her new workplace:

> They [current employer] used to have normal 7AM-3PM, Monday to Friday. Very reasonable. People could, like, drop off their kids to day care and be home for lunch. When [they] jumped on Amazon scheduling, which is 10 hours a day, 4 days a week schedule, it meant starting at 5 o'clock, so people were complaining about all of a sudden having to wake up at 3:30 AM, not knowing what to do with their kids in the morning.

In an effort to keep up with Amazon's aggressive pace and rapid subsumption of market share, workers in the logistics sector now face a "race to the bottom," in which work colonizes massive

portions of workers' time outside of work and reorients workers' lives around longer and irregular shifts.

As discussed above, Amazon's managerial techniques and the labour process within the warehouse vacillate between coercion and consent. Beyond its technologies of digital surveillance of workers, however, there are broader social-economic dynamics that compel or thrust workers into these labour processes. As Burawoy (1983) emphasized, "the state directly establishes limits on those methods of managerial domination which exploit the dependence of workers on wages" (589). Khal's trajectory illustrates how Amazon's appeal is produced within a segmented labour market that devalues migrant education and funnels workers into low-wage employment. Khal came to Canada from Punjab as an international student in 2017, having already obtained a post-secondary degree in computer science. In Canada, however, he enrolled in programs he described as more suited to "Canadian culture," including project management and human resources management, though he reflected that these credentials "don't help me much." Before Amazon, he worked in a restaurant while studying, but during COVID, restaurant work became unavailable. "There [were] no job opportunities on that time," he explained. "So I do have only that option." Amazon, by contrast, was hiring: "Everybody was there. Educated person, uneducated person."

Vallas et al (2022) use the term 'techno-economic despotism' which both appreciates the role of management-by-algorithm but recognizes that the effectiveness of these techniques "owes much of its effectiveness to the company's ability to recruit workers who have been chronically exposed to precarious forms of employment and have few alternative sources of work" (p 23). These broader dynamics of labour market precarity (PEPSO, 2015) enhance the power of algorithmic control. Workers' own accounts illuminate the significance of looking at labour

control beyond the immediate physical confines of the workplace. As Tim, a younger worker who joined Amazon during the pandemic, explained: "especially with COVID and stuff, so many people lost their other jobs and people are coming from all over. It's like bees to honey." Dina put it more bluntly: "I don't wanna stay here but jobs elsewhere are pretty shit too. There aren't too many good jobs out there nowadays." Their accounts show that the power of Amazon's labour regime does not rest solely on workplace surveillance technologies but equally rooted in a wider context of labour market precarity, where insecurity, displacement, and limited alternatives compel workers into jobs they may not want but feel they cannot easily refuse or leave. Thus, workers' own experiences in the labour market corroborate what Vallas et al. (2022) argument that while digital technologies of surveillance and control are important pillars of Amazon's managerial regime, they are coupled with hegemonic mechanisms of securing consent from workers.

Through *normative control*, Amazon partly draws its managerial omnipotence from prevalent notions regarding "work ethics" and being a "diligent worker," while *relational control* evokes sentiments of gratitude and loyalty from workers, especially for those whose experience in the labour market provides is particularly challenging (Vallas et al., 2022). As the authors note, being a "diligent worker" is one way for workers to avoid discipline and negative interactions with managements. Rubi's attitude elucidates this when she confidently avers: "I am one of the fastest pickers, so they won't say anything to me. They know." For Kyan, on the other hand, 'gratitude' and relief of finding employment was a key theme. He began working for Amazon in 2019, shorting after immigrating from India. His only working experience in Canada before his employment at Amazon had been for a variety of food delivery apps. His lack of "Canadian experience" (which many employers will implicitly demand, despite its potential for

violating Canadian human rights laws),[16] severely limited his employment opportunities. He was relieved to learn that Amazon – "a really huge company, big in the world as well" – has no such demands:

> They don't need anything. They don't want any experience in Canada. [My] warehouse is like the world's second largest warehouse in world. Amazon is hiring newcomers and new people and students and everybody. They hire everybody. But if you want some higher position in Amazon, so then you need some Canadian experience.

For Kyan and many newcomers, working for Amazon offered a way to earn a living in a context of discriminatory hiring practices that enshrine a nationalistic gradient to the value of skills, education, and professional experience, as discussed in the Chapter Three and further elaborated in Chapter Five. Amazon becomes a gateway through which to escape this degraded status, to mitigate this 'national deficit,' in the hopes of moving forward in their working lives**.** For others, Amazon's relative appeal was also tied to the wages and benefits it offered, even when the work itself was experienced as harsh and exhausting. As Kash put it, "I never thought I'd be working for Amazon," then he laughed and said "you *survive* Amazon," before adding that "the benefits are great, vacation, and salary is good." His comment captures the contradictory place Amazon occupies in workers' lives where arduous work is offset by wages, benefits, and the promise of relative stability. Khal's account similarly complicates the meaning of Amazon's apparent advantages. He explained that many workers prefer Amazon because "they cover 40 hours in four days," but this compressed schedule was valuable precisely because it allowed workers to take on additional paid work: "Most of the people, they still choose Amazon for four days and the rest of the three days they work somewhere else." Even with base pay at roughly "24 to 25

[16] The Ontario Human Rights Commission identifies "Canadian experience" as a discriminatory barrier that discounts immigrants' prior work and cautions employers against using it as a blanket requirement or a proxy for competence or "fit" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013)

dollars" an hour by 2023, Khal was clear that Amazon wages were not enough to live on. When I asked whether the earnings were sufficient, he answered simply: "No." Still, for other workers, relational control operates through the difficult realities of low-wage precarious work and its power is exercised through the company's provision of a modicum of stability through what some might consider a decent wage and benefits package. Tim wanted to offer nuance to the way Amazon is perceived by workers:

> In the media, you know, about Amazon being a terrible job and it sucks. And it is of course, like we shouldn't have to live like this. But you know from the perspective of so many people who work there, it pays much better than under the table cash jobs, it's not [temp] agency, the schedule is pretty consistent, they do have all these perks and benefits, they give you stocks, and they give you this and that. I mean here like minimum wage is not actually enforced and a lot of people work like that under the table for cash. And then, you know, it's probably more so in smaller communities compared to Toronto where they're very intentionally like setting a high industry standard so that they're perceived as a kind employer, and they are perceived that way, like oh 'it's better than this shit job I was working,' it's better than that. And you know long term they're almost like, especially if you look at it from smaller towns, they're almost… the government is just collapsing more and more, they're basically bit by bit, in a million ways, starting to do what a government might do in the sense of like, you know, they're helping you with your tuition, they're giving you some extra benefits for your medical.

Such programs and benefits are framed as opportunities for advancement, reflecting not just managerial control but also the company's broader performance of itself as a site of continuous expansion. These include initiatives such as the Career Choice program, internal promotion pathways, and various training and mobility schemes that promise movement within or beyond the company. Khal linked Career Choice to Amazon's broader promise of opportunity: "I started as a warehouse associate, so they do have different opportunities… they're really helpful in career building." He described the program positively, explaining that Amazon "provide[s] fees to your courses" if workers want to study further. Khal used the program for a short trucking course at a private college: "They paid my exam fee, they paid my tuition fee… it was just a four-to-five-month course." He also emphasized that the program was accessible to eligible

workers and that management adjusted schedules around classes: “If we let them know, I do have a class… they’re gonna move it to full-time to part-time, part-time to full-time, or… morning shift, nights, according to your school schedule.”

Henaway (2023) argues that such provisions comprise Amazon’s “corporate Keynesianism” within a broader neoliberal milieu of welfare state retrenchment, which is used to attract new workers on an ongoing basis instead of retaining existing staff. He notes that “corporate Keynesianism contributes to the ‘labour fix’ as it works to motivate and compel existing workers and continuously attract new ones, sustaining a steady stream of flexible labour for the platform wheel” (p. 11). Dina relayed to me some of the tensions that may emerge amongst workers with temporary (white badge) and permanent (blue badge) employment status and delineated some of the boundary-making that emerges between temporary and permanent workers:

> Sometimes there's tension to be honest. Sometimes the blue badges will kind of be like, they'll feel like at least we're full-time, it's like some sort of status. Sometimes that happens. The white badges I think- I would say the white badges don't really have disdain for the blue badges. They're trying to become blue badged often. And when you're a white badge, you usually work really hard if you want to try to get a blue badge obviously.

The company’s promise of upward mobility – through promotion tracks, individualized performance incentives, and programs like “Career Choice” – are akin to what Edwards (1979) describes as *bureaucratic control*, a system that uses internal labour markets and formalized procedures to secure worker consent. These forms of control are not merely about managing tasks efficiently; they operate ideologically to align workers’ interests with the company’s. In fact, it is this ideological function that led Vallas et al. (2022) to signify this as a form of *governmental control*, in which workers are interpellated as individuals who successfully meet the company’s expectations. As Burawoy (1979) argued, the internal labour market “not only

redistributes conflict in a lateral direction and fosters individualism and autonomy through limited mobility; it also provides a material basis for the presentation of the company's interests as the interests of all" (p. 106). At Amazon, this manifests in a fractured job structure where "carrots" such as symbolic promotions in titles like "Process Guide" or "Learning Ambassador," and the illusion of choice or exit through retraining programs like Career Choice serve to individualize workers and place them in competition with one another. Manuel, who had been working for Amazon for six years when I spoke with him, is a learning ambassador and spoke with pride about his role, even though he recognized he was underpaid for the work that he performed. He is beyond retirement age, but he reconciled that he had to continue working by finding some purpose and meaning in his work and future trajectory:

> I ended up there because I needed the money. Listen, I have accomplished not all the things in life that I wanted to, but I still have some in my bucket list. You know, at my age, I would like to continue with the computers. I already have accomplished, way back in my years as an engineer and as a technician here as well, but I still want to do now [work] with computers. I am passionate about it. Data analysis, I would love it. And then they will pay it. Amazon pays. Amazon pays 95% of your education either in university or 2 years college and they will accommodate you for 30 hours of labour so you don't lose your benefits that they give you. I'm tempted to do it at my age.

Manuel's account illustrates how programs like Career Choice help workers reconcile exhausting labour conditions by translating endurance into an investment in the self. Rather than framing his continued employment as a matter of financial necessity alone, he interprets it as a chance to pursue unfinished ambitions and develop new skills. In this way, Amazon's educational benefits reconfigure warehouse work from a dead end into a stepping stone, encouraging workers to narrate the course of their working lives in terms of personal projects and future possibilities. Such narratives reveal how managerial strategies do not simply organize production but also shape the meanings workers attach to their jobs, turning precarious and extended employment into a source of purpose and hope for social mobility.

Interestingly, when discussing Career Choice, Manuel immediately shifted to talking about Amazon's Pay to Quit program, suggesting he understood them as part of the same repertoire of strategies:

> Well because you see, this comes from long way. I believe that – my understanding is companies like Google or Microsoft, they give all these options to the people that work for them. Amazon is the same. It's nothing different. So if you are not happy with what you're doing, you can pursue other careers. Every year, beginning of the year, they offer you if you wanna quit. Let's say five season peak season, they will pay you $1,000 for every peak season that you work for them, if you quit.

When I pressed him on *why* Amazon might run such a program ['The Offer'], Manuel laughed and brushed it off: *"well, you do the analysis."* His response is revealing in that he situates Amazon within a world of prestigious firms that frame "options" as worker-friendly benefits, while implicitly acknowledging that the real rationale lies elsewhere. On the other, his refusal to elaborate reveals an awareness that such initiatives serve managerial ends. By presenting both retraining and quitting as voluntary, compensated choices, Amazon individualizes the problem of exhaustion and turnover while naturalizing its control over labour mobility. In this sense, Career Choice and Pay to Quit are not only mechanisms of workforce management but also performative practices: they stage the company as a site of expansive opportunity, even as they obscure the conditions that make such "choices" desirable or necessary in the first place. Manuel's response suggests that workers are not necessarily misled by these practices. In fact, they recognize their limits but continue to engage with them. This awareness does not straightforwardly translate into resistance but can instead operate as a way of maintaining a sense of dignity and agency while navigating structural constraints and limited options. In this sense, workers' understanding of how these programs work, even when they are critical, does not necessarily undermine their effectiveness, but can coexist with workers' continued engagement with them.

Amazon and the "Performativity of Growth"

While labour process scholars have shown how Amazon combines algorithmic, normative, and relational forms of control (Vallas et al., 2022; Henaway, 2023), these strategies are also sustained by what I term the *performativity of growth*. By this I mean the ways Amazon's continuous expansion does not merely describe an economic reality but is actively realized *through* workers' labour, shaping their subjectivities, cultivating aspirations, and securing consent in the face of precarity. Growth is not simply a metric that describes economic performance but is produced through the very practices that measure it. Workers' efforts are continuously absorbed into these systems and reappear as the company's own momentum, productivity, and promise. This formulation draws on performativity as an account of how social realities are brought into being through practice: in Judith Butler's (1990) sense, identities are iteratively produced through regulated acts rather than pre-existing essences, while Karen Barad (2003) argues that performativity extends beyond discourse to encompass the entanglement of bodies, technologies, and institutional arrangements – i.e. material discursive practices. Ahmed (2010) extends this insight by showing how orientations and affective attachments *direct* subjects toward certain futures.

In Amazon's case, growth attaches workers to corporate expansion as the horizon of their own advancement. This dynamic is evident in the ways workers are positioned to see expansion as an avenue for security and economic mobility. Opportunities for promotion from "white badge" to "blue badge," education subsidies through the Career Choice program, and even the distribution of company stock embed Amazon's growth into workers' imagined futures, aligning endurance in precarious conditions with their aspirations for upward movement and success. Amazon's global scope reinforces this orientation: being part of a rapidly expanding

multinational lends symbolic value to employment, shaping how workers understand both their own trajectories and the company's place in the world. Kash's account makes this connection explicit. Noting that "Jeff [Bezos] already put up two new warehouses and now there's 16 of them," he described actively tracking this expansion and looking for ways to align himself with it, seeking out leadership principles and opportunities for advancement rather than questioning workplace demands. For Kash, the company's rapid growth is a signal of possibility, reinforcing a disposition oriented toward self-advancement. Amazon's rapid and visible expansion lends material credibility to the promise that 'hard work' may translate into advancement, reinforcing workers' orientation toward growth (and by extension, their own 'existential mobility', à la Hage, 2005) as a plausible horizon. In other words, growth becomes a resource for meaning and motivation, not only an accumulation strategy.

Workers scan their badges at the start of each shift, becoming measurable objects within the company's technological apparatus. Performance metrics, dashboards, and scanner technologies, thus, do not simply record productivity; they produce workers as calculable, comparable, and promotable subjects. At the same time, the scanner and the algorithmic software embedded within are produced *through* workers' activities. As Barad (2003) asserts, matter matters: "matter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency" (p. 822). The pace and intensity of what workers do on the warehouse floor is taken up by these systems and appears back to them as the company's rate, momentum, and future. Growth thus works affectively and materially, directing workers' endurance toward imagined futures while binding their labour and subjectivities to corporate accumulation. This performativity is not only discursive or symbolic but materially enacted through the accelerated labour process itself. As Maher and Aquanno (2024) show, Amazon's expansion is made

possible by the intensification of work on the warehouse floor, where growth is not merely projected but produced in and through the bodies of workers compelled to speed up and sustain the tempo of accumulation.

This performative dynamic helps explain how workers endure the injurious and precarious conditions of warehouse labour. Even as the work is physically taxing and precarious, the expansion of Amazon projects a horizon of advancement that aligns personal aspirations with corporate accumulation.[17] That said, Amazon's acknowledgement that it overextended during the COVID-19 boom and its subsequent slowdown in hiring and warehouse openings (Lee, 2022) underscore that the performativity of growth is not dependent on actual rates of expansion. Rather, it is the *projection* and *promise* of growth – circulated through 'badges,' incentive structures, and stock options – that secures consent. The persistence of this orientation, even amid contraction, demonstrates both the power and fragility of growth's performativity: while it can stabilize worker willingness to grind through arduous shifts, moments of slowdown reveal the gap between promise and reality, reminding us that consent is contingent and subject to rupture. In this way, growth operates ideologically and materially to transform consent: rather than simply acquiescing to managerial control, workers often see their endurance as an investment in future possibilities, whether inside or outside the company. The performativity of growth therefore extends labour process analysis by showing how capital's promises of expansion do not only stabilize labour supply but actively constitute subjectivities oriented toward survival and mobility, thereby deepening managerial power while normalizing precarity.

[17] On performativity in cultural political economy, see Jessop and Sum's (2013) account of how policy narratives, semiotic framings, and calculative practices contribute to the constitution of accumulation strategies. While their focus is on state projects and economic orders, my use of the "performativity of growth" emphasizes how similar dynamics operate in the labour process itself, shaping worker subjectivities and orientations toward consent.

At Amazon, this performance of growth materializes through its status as a globally recognized employer that hires on a permanent, full-time basis and offers *relatively* competitive wages, extended healthcare benefits beyond the limited public system, and pathways of upward mobility through its internal labour market. This is especially true as it increasingly shapes the labour market itself as a dominant infrastructure of employment. These features allow Amazon to extract consent within a broader neoliberalized labour market, where workplace diligence becomes a shield against job loss. Career mobility – whether through the Career Choice program, which funds education and training for advancement within or beyond Amazon, or through promotion, becomes an individualized strategy of exit and survival.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that managerial control is reconstituted through the adoption of digital technologies, not as neutral tools but as class strategies embedded in broader political-economic transformations. While Taylorism and Fordism centred on standardization and direct control, lean production introduced flexibility under the guise of worker empowerment. In the current conjuncture, digital Taylorism extends these logics, using algorithmic technologies to intensify surveillance, deskilling, and real-time control.

Inside the warehouse, Amazon's labour regime materializes abstract forms of algorithmic control into the concrete routines and rhythms of everyday work. The digitally Taylorized labour process, structured around the core tasks of picking, packing, stowing, and sorting, is orchestrated by handheld devices, scanners, and real-time performance tracking systems that maximise productivity while intensifying physical strain and psychological pressure. Further, an elaborate hierarchy extends corporate control through the workforce itself. These internal strata perform symbolic forms of differentiation and bestowal of status, and in the process, fray

solidarity and reinforce consent through a proclaimed culture of meritocracy. Amazon's labour control regime, enforced through a strict culture of metrics systematically degrades the physical and psychological health of its workers. The enforcement of performance standards and opaque surveillance practices cultivate a culture of injury that extends far beyond the warehouse floor, intruding into workers' time beyond the workplace and into their sleep, mental wellbeing, and capacity for care. Through digital Taylorism, a rigid chain of command, and metric-driven monitoring systems, the warehouse is transformed into a techno-panopticon where speed, discipline, and compliance are extracted from workers under threat of discipline, injury, or dismissal.

Nonetheless, these mechanisms of control operate not only through coercion; they are buttressed by wider structural dynamics of precarity in the neoliberal labour market. Amazon's widespread reliance on temporary contracts, seasonal "white badge" workers, and mandatory overtime arrangements exploits workers' economic insecurity. In this way, the power of algorithmic surveillance is activated and intensified in the lives of workers already exposed to chronic precarity. Amazon's promise of security – manifested in comparatively high wages, stable schedules, and access to healthcare and education benefits – functions ideologically to generate consent. Framed as a lifeline in an otherwise deteriorating labour market, Amazon's relatively stable employment and provision of extended health benefits is interpreted as a form of corporate benevolence, mitigating contestation and resistance in the absence of a robust welfare state.

This dual operation of coercion and consent is reinforced by bureaucratic controls like internal promotion tracks and symbolic titles which individualize ambition and depoliticize collective struggle. Through the ideological promise of upward mobility through the Career

Choice program and other internal labour market schemes, Amazon interpellates workers as individual subjects responsible for their own success or failure. Ultimately, these mechanisms pit workers against one another and normalize a system where endurance becomes the path to survival.

Bringing these dynamics together, I have argued that Amazon's labour regime must be understood not only in terms of its technical and coercive controls but also through what I term the *performativity of growth*. This concept highlights how Amazon sustains its legitimacy by staging itself as an engine of perpetual expansion where the language of innovation, and opportunity reframes warehouse labour as part of a larger narrative of progress. At the same time, this performance is materially enacted: expansion depends on the intensified tempos borne by workers whose bodies sustain accumulation. These tempos connect the labour process inside the warehouse to the wider logistical imperative of accelerating the circulation of commodities. The warehouse thus becomes not only a site of production, but a stage upon which growth is performed – a performance that secures consent, normalizes exploitation, and channels workers' endurance into Amazon's expanding frontier.

In sum, Amazon's labour regime exemplifies the consolidation of digital capitalism with neoliberal governance: a regime that instrumentalizes technology not only to manage work, but to restructure the social conditions under which work is endured, consented to, and made to appear desirable. As this chapter has shown, understanding the workplace experience of Amazon's warehouse workers requires not only a focus on internal managerial techniques, but also an analysis of the broader labour market that renders those techniques effective. The concept of the performativity of growth shows how Amazon's regime of control is enacted through everyday practices that are captured through technologies and metrics, making growth appear as

measurable performance and, in turn, the company as a site of boundless expansion and opportunity. Amazon is not unique because it grows, but because it renders growth visible, credible, and experientially meaningful to workers. While elements of this dynamic can be observed in other contexts (e.g. small businesses or start-ups that similar strategies to get workers buy-in and investment in both their future success and the firms'), the performativity of growth is most fully realized under Amazon's conditions of large-scale expansion and digitally mediated labour processes. In this sense, it points to an emerging tendency within contemporary labour regimes, one that *may* become more generalized as systems of AI, data capture, and algorithmic control continue to spread across workplaces. In this way, the performativity of growth secures consent while deepening coercion, as workers come to orient their effort and expectations toward the very processes that intensify control over their labour, embedding managerial domination beyond the shop floor and into the wider social imagination. In the next chapter, I build on the analysis presented above. While this chapter has sought to answer the question "how does digital technology impact work and workers?", in the next chapter, I explore how workers in turn act on technology and how it is implemented and investigate the multi-scalar racialized and classed dynamics under which their labour unfolds.

Chapter 5: ‘Culture of Diversity’?: Multi-scalar Processes of Racialization of Warehouse Labour

Introduction

Amazon publicly presents its fulfillment centres as workplaces that “reflect the world’s diversity” (Amazon, n.d.,-a). In demographic terms, diversity is simply a fact in Amazon’s warehouses. The warehouse floor brings together workers from multiple backgrounds, migration histories, languages, and regions. The warehouse, however, is also a social terrain in which differentiation is reproduced, shaping how workers are judged, managed, and sorted. What appears as a neutral, data-driven system is, in practice, shaped by multi-scalar forms of social differentiation. This takes forms that are constructed ‘from above’, such as state management of labour and immigration regimes and corporate diversity logics, as well as ‘from below’, including transnational repertoires and everyday boundary-making among workers on the shop floor. By scale, I do not mean a fixed ontological structure or a set of discrete spatial containers stacked from the local to the national to the global. I use scale to denote an epistemological and relational frame, or what Jones (1998) calls “a way of knowing or apprehending” how social processes are organized and connected across differently constituted spaces (pp. 27–28). This approach treats scale as contested and processual. Swyngedouw (1997) describes it as “a nested set of related and interpenetrating spatial scales” (p. 160), while Cox (1998) cautions that moving across scales is not “a movement from one discrete arena to another” but occurs through networks of association and “spaces of engagement” (p. 20). Following Conway (2008), I therefore understand “the transnational” not as a single fixed scale equivalent to “the global,” but as a fluid set of relations that can imply “many geographic scales,” both “within and across the

juridically recognized borders of nation states," and is "constantly being produced through sociospatial practices" (p. 224).

The previous chapter examined how Amazon's warehouse labour process is organized through digital Taylorism, combining algorithmic surveillance, rate-tracking, managerial discretion, and symbolic pathways of advancement. This chapter turns to the reciprocal ways workers' migration experiences, transnational social worlds, racialized identities, and class trajectories both shape and are shaped by the labour process, including how it is lived, interpreted, and contested. I examine racialization not as a process located at one scale, but as one produced through the interaction of state, corporate, workplace, and transnational relations. Canadian multiculturalism, immigration policy, and labour-market institutions shape the national terms through which racialized immigrants are incorporated into work, often through credential devaluation, demands for "Canadian experience," and blocked access to prior professions. Nonetheless, racial and class meanings travel across borders as workers bring prior class locations, political attachments, status expectations, and racial vocabularies into the warehouse, where they are (re)worked through Amazon's labour regime. Corporate DEI draws on the language of multicultural recognition, translating diversity into workplace practices of belonging, appreciation, and symbolic inclusion that leave the underlying process of exploitation and organization of work largely intact. Warehouse technologies and supervisory practices then give these contradictions practical form through everyday decisions about scheduling, promotion, discipline, and task allocation.

The analysis proceeds in three parts. First, I examine processes of racialization from above, tracing how Canadian multiculturalism and the state's migration and labour regimes structure differential access to employment and who becomes subjected to Amazon's gruelling

labour process, as well as how Amazon's corporate diversity discourses shape workers' experiences of both their work and their relationships with their coworkers. Second, I turn to racialization from below, analyzing how workers interpret and negotiate favouritism, scheduling, surveillance, and hierarchy through racial/ethnic boundary-making practices. Finally, I develop a transnational account of racial formation, showing how migrants' histories and cross-border class comparisons shape both conflict and alliance inside the warehouse. Together, these processes demonstrate that Amazon's labour regime organizes the labour process through discretionary forms of control that distribute authority, discipline, and opportunity unevenly across the workforce**,** while workers make sense of and navigate those hierarchies through both local and transnational racial repertoires.

Taking seriously Stuart Hall's (1980) formulation that "race is the modality in which class is lived" (p. 341) this chapter understands race not as secondary to class, nor as a separate identity layered onto it, but as the medium through which class relations are experienced, interpreted, divided, and fought through. For Hall, race shapes the "internal fractioning and division" of the working class and has consequences for the class as a whole, not only for its racially defined segments. Class formation is therefore not simply obstructed by racism from the outside; rather, capital reproduces class relations through racialized divisions that organize how workers understand their relations to one another and to capital. Amazon's warehouses, then, emerge not as a site of unified class formation but as a terrain of racial projects – understood, following Omi and Winant (2015), as "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (p. 125). As discussed in Chapter Two, scholarship on class, race, and more recently, racial capitalism, increasingly understands

race and class as co-constitutive rather than analytically separate (Bannerji, 2005; Camfield, 2004; Paret & Levenson , 2024; McCarthy & Desan, 2023, among many others). While this scholarship has powerfully demonstrated the co-constitution of race and class within capitalist social formations, these analyses have tended to focus primarily on nationally situated histories and institutions. My intervention extends these insights by examining how racialized class formation is also mediated through transnational migration trajectories and cross-border social fields, and interpretive frameworks that cross multiple national contexts. Race is not a stable or nationally bounded category but is continually rearticulated within a transnational social field, which manifest locally within the warehouse where this contingent racial project unfolds. In this context, digital capitalism mediates racialization and class formation in ways that can complicate the formation of shared solidarities, even as workers confront common conditions of exploitation.

Racialization From Above

State Multiculturalism

I begin with Canadian multiculturalism because Amazon's warehouse diversity does not emerge only from corporate policy, but from a national racial formation in which immigrant labour is incorporated through the language of 'recognition' and labour-market merit. Racialization processes in Amazon's Canadian warehouses cannot be read entirely through racial formations developed elsewhere, but must be understood through Canada's official frameworks of diversity, immigration, and belonging.

Canadian multiculturalism is often celebrated as an exemplary model of liberal inclusion. Framed as a project of inclusion, multiculturalism has overwhelmingly emphasized cultural recognition rather than the structural redistribution of power, resources, or labour-market

opportunities. This shapes how the Canadian state manages diversity, legitimates inequality, and produces subjects expected to demonstrate civic gratitude and adaptability within a stratified social order. As Nancy Fraser (2000) argues in her critique of "recognition without redistribution," state recognition of cultural difference coheres with deepening material inequality.

Liberal-pluralist accounts of multicultural citizenship emphasize political incorporation, symbolic affirmation, and civic participation (Kymlicka, 2007; Bloemraad, 2023), often presenting multiculturalism as a framework for inclusion and democratic participation. Critical scholarship, however, has shown that political incorporation can coexist with economic marginalization, labour-market segmentation, and differential access to security and socio-economic mobility (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Juteau, 2008).

By reifying "culture" as the primary locus of difference, the discourses and material practices of multiculturalism displace analyses of racism, colonialism, and capitalism. As Bannerji (2000) cautions, discourses of diversity cannot be read as "innocent pluralism" because they "allow for an emptying out of actual social relations… and obscure any understanding of difference as construction of power" (p. 548). Sharma (2012) makes a similar argument when she notes that "the nation is thought to be able to simply transcend conflict through respect and celebration of difference without the elimination of any differentials of power and wealth and with no transformation at the systemic level" (p. 337). Multiculturalism also reduces groups to fixed and internally homogenous categories, rendering "difference" through expressions variously described as carnivalization, festivalization**,** folklorization, or the staging of culture as spectacle (Hinz, 1996; Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Juteau, 2008). Multiculturalism thereby operates as a mode of liberal governance that translates structural inequality into the language of

cultural difference and individual adaptation (Bannerji, 2000; Sharma, 2012; Razack, 1998; Arat-Koç, 1999).

These critical theorizations of Canada's seemingly progressive diversity discourses demonstrate that multiculturalism is an ideological companion of racialized socio-economic hierarchy. Here, multiculturalism functions much like what Ahmed's (2006) terms of the non-performativity of diversity speech, where declarations of diversity succeed precisely because they do not transform racialization. The public claim that Canada is multicultural and non-racist creates an environment in which racism becomes harder to name or critique. Melamed (2015) situates this within racial capitalism, noting that "contemporary racial capitalism deploys liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differentially to fit the needs of reigning state–capital orders" (p. 77). Diversity thus becomes a mechanism through which inequality is legitimated, and discontent is either contained or made illegible.
Building on these critiques, Soma Chatterjee (2025) shows how the language of "skills," "integration," and especially "Canadian experience" operates as a racialized idiom of liberal inclusion rather than a neutral evaluative framework. In her account, post-racial Canadian liberalism simultaneously interpellates skilled immigrants as desired and deficient, at once welcomed as future contributors *and* positioned as lacking subjects whose exclusion is presented as a technical problem of training, credential alignment, and professional adaptation. In this framing, integration becomes a racialized process through which immigrants are judged against nationalized (and implicitly racialized) hierarchies of expertise, professionalism, and belonging.

These dynamics are reflected in broader labour-market outcomes. Statistics Canada data show that the low-income rate for recent immigrants has risen relative to Canadian-born people over time – a pattern that unfolded during the period when multiculturalism became

institutionalized and neoliberal restructuring took hold. In 1980, recent immigrants had a low-income rate of 25 percent, about 1.4 times that of the Canadian-born population; by 2000 it was 35.8 percent, about 2.5 times higher (Picot & Lu, 2017). This gap continued into the 2000s, with many newcomers significantly more likely to have low incomes than native-born Canadians. More recent data indicate that racialized populations still have higher poverty rates than White Canadians. In 2023, the poverty rate for racialized individuals was 14.0 percent, compared with 8.5 percent for non-racialized Canadians (Picot & Hou, 2019).

The convergence of neoliberalism and multiculturalism produces a contradictory terrain for immigrants: symbolic celebration of diversity (which, to be sure, remains deeply uneven, fragile, and contingent on salient racial, cultural, and importantly, geopolitical dynamics at a given time) paired with chronic material precarity. Bauder (2008) and Roberts & Mahtani (2010) show how public discourse oscillates between portraying immigrants as desperate, compliant workers *as well as* threats to labour-market stability. These contradictory representations help sustain what Galabuzi (2004) describes as the economic segregation of racialized workers and the 'competitive racism' generated by intensified competition for secure employment. Such narratives provide ideological scaffolding for precarious employment while obscuring systemic discrimination under the guise of cultural difference.

These broader discursive and institutional arrangements also shape how immigrants come to interpret and make sense of inequality in their everyday lives. As Bottero (2020) argues, inequality is not simply an objective condition to be recognized or misrecognized but is lived through what she calls a "sense of inequality:" people's attitudes and perceptions, values and beliefs, as well as more tacit and affective ways by which people come to understand the world (p. 2). Bottero advances this definition in opposition to dominant paradigms that frame inequality

and its persistence as a chasm between an objective reality and the subjective interpretation of that reality – i.e. whether or not people recognize or misrecognize structural inequality. She argues that such approaches tend to identify people's understandings as problematic, distorted, fragmented, or even paradoxical (Bottero, 2020, p. 2). Instead, she posits that "[p]eople's sense of inequality must be located within their *daily negotiation* of practical tasks in contexts of unequal relations," that they "emerge with various kinds or practical engagements, and people's knowledge is formed to navigate given situations and shaped by their practical capacities for action" (emphasis added, Bottero, 2020, p. 3).

It is through these everyday practices of interpretation that the effects of multiculturalism and migration regimes are lived and made meaningful in workers' everyday experiences of work, as reflected in the accounts of the Amazon workers I interviewed. Kash's migration trajectory illustrates how multicultural inclusion and labour-market exploitation unfold together, and how he makes sense of this dynamic. Arriving in Canada in 2012 as an international student who was trained as a mechanical engineer in India, Kash was unable to re-enter his chosen profession. As discussed earlier, his experience illustrates the workings of racialized framework of exclusionary credential regimes through which immigrants are positioned as both needed and lacking (Chatterjee, 2025). He subsequently enrolled in a Human Resources program (the only one with available spots), moved provinces through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), secured permanent residency, and cycled through sales and rideshare driving before joining Amazon through its delivery station operations. From there, he moved into the Amazon warehouse and eventually became an area manager. As a manager, Kash lauded the 'diversity' of workers at Amazon while implicitly communicating an awareness that labour-intensive work is 'non-white' work. He said: "even citizens who are not born here work there too. Not just immigrants.

Leadership is also diverse. Mixed crowd. Not many white people. It's a *labour job*." Immigrants typically use the phrase 'labour job' to refer to manual blue-collar work, and Kash situates his own experience in the warehouse – from associate to manager – subtly recognizing these racial dynamics. Hard, manual work appears as an expected domain of immigrant endurance, a tacit extension of the multicultural narrative in which occupational displacement and strenuous labour are framed as acceptable stages in the pursuit of a better life, and a narrative sustained through the aforementioned language of "skills," "integration," and "Canadian experience" (Chatterjee, 2025). As Wimmer (2008) writes, immigrants seeking to cross boundaries into the "mainstream" may selectively acquire traits that signal full membership. Proving one's worth through "hard work, including accepting jobs the majority has abandoned" (pp. 21–22), becomes a strategy of belonging and deservingness. These dynamics are visible in how immigrants enter and move through Canada's labour market.

Workers arrive with different migration trajectories and conditions of exit from the places they left, but many expressed frustrations with the devaluation of their prior education, training, and work experience after arrival in Canada. Several described this not simply as labour-market mismatch but as a form of institutional abandonment. These articulations often coexisted with a reluctance to explicitly name racialized inequality, even as their accounts reflected its effects. Their narratives frequently oscillated between critique and internalization. Anika narrated this trajectory through a sustained account that moved between structural critique, collective frustration, and self-reflection:

> I studied accounting and I did my colleges there. I was working in an accounts department, like an assistant accountant. It was so nice. Beautiful. But I had to move. I had no choice. There was a civil war.
>
> Immigrants… they didn't assess very good and they didn't give the opportunity to grow here, that's what I can say in 1999. They had those immigrant welcome, immigrants that and this. For me, I think they didn't do anything there. They just had ESL classes which I

> don't need. I speak English when I came there. They should have done some education, some training initiatives […] I met so many ladies like me, they're in their 50s, in their late 50s. The same stories that they're saying that they didn't have any opportunities to study and grow.
>
> I came with experience. You know ACCPAC version 6? I came with that, which they were using here. I worked there in Sri Lanka. But they never, for me, they never looked after the immigrants, that's what I can say. They never encouraged people to do this, do that, and they never evaluate you: 'Ok, what did you do? Ok then we can find you a job or we can train you like this, Canadian experience.' Always they ask you, Canadian experience. Where do I get Canadian experience if you don't give me experience? If you don't give me experience, how do you ask me where is the Canadian experience. I never had that.
>
> If I come with nine years experience, they should have given us some training, some classes […] When I talk to people my age who came to Canada when they were 30 years old, everybody struggled […] If you come at 30 years, it's like punishment.

Anika's reflection unsettles the assumption that exclusion results from inferior training and instead shows how deskilling is produced through institutional evaluation rather than differences in knowledge or competence. She later added:

> Sometimes when I talk to people like 'I wasted my career here.' Then they told me: 'Don't say that you raised your children good' so I satisfied myself now with that word. You enjoyed with your children,' they said, but they said, most of the people did that… you get sad… But sometimes it comes to me and goes. 2021 when I go to work, I'm like depressed when I go to work.
>
> This is a developed country. Do you think all these people came from the other worlds? They are all smart people. They should have done more than this […] I came from a third World country to a developed country. But I feels like I was in Third World country still. That's not me.
>
> I have seen like so many nurses came from Sri Lanka, there are so many accountants, engineers […] they couldn't succeed […] They should have done a lot of things, the Canadian government.
>
> We should have stayed there. There are so many teachers from Sri Lanka […] mathematics, it is math everywhere in the world the same […] like science everywhere the same […] geography everywhere the same […] I know a lot of teachers from my country […] they're working at Amazon.

At the same time, she captures how immigrants interpret labour-market exclusion through competing explanatory frameworks: at once invoking institutional neglect, collective struggle, and the individualized language of improvement that state discourse encourages. Particularly striking are her descriptions of exclusion as "punishment," her repeated encounters with

demands for "Canadian experience," and her sense that migration to a "developed country" still left her feeling as though she remained in the "third world." At moments, she challenged the legitimacy of Canadian professional hierarchies themselves, questioning why globally standardized fields like accounting or teaching are rendered non-transferable while others in her community offer the moral language of sacrifice, motherhood, and perseverance as a consolation prize emblematic of partial success. These narratives thus reveal not misrecognition but a lived and shifting sense of inequality formed through everyday encounters with settlement institutions, credential regimes, and processes of structured devaluation within Canada's labour market – encounters that evoke a repertoire of affective responses ranging from anger and indignation to disillusionment.

Rubi's experience further complicates the assumption that credential recognition hinges on distance from Western training systems. Coming from Nepal, she trained in information technology at Cornell University, Rubis described how her credentials were formally recognized by credential evaluation agencies and educational credential assessment providers yet practically devalued upon entering the Canadian labour market. As she explained:

> My husband… he was working in the government, he was actually an advisor to the Prime Minister… he didn't want to come, and when we came he didn't want to work, he said he didn't want to do 'survival jobs'… so I had no choice. I had two kids… how long can you survive? … I was graduated from Cornell, and when I went to WES [World Education Services] they told me you don't need evaluation. But here… Canadian experience – what type of experience? … so I had to go look for a job… I ended up working… in online order processing, and I stayed there for 16 years.

Despite her formally recognized credentials, Rubi described being pushed into entry-level employment, where she worked in online order processing for over a decade. Her account underscores that exclusion cannot be explained through lack of skill or distance from recognized training systems. Rather, it reflects how credential value is reconstituted within national labour-

market regimes, where even highly valued and institutionally validated forms of expertise are subordinated to requirements such as "Canadian experience." At the same time, her narrative highlights how these processes are mediated through gendered responsibilities, as labour-market re-entry becomes less a matter of professional mobility than of economic necessity and the hard work of motherhood and care.

Like Rubi, Manuel's account highlights how the demand for retraining collides with the material realities of settlement, particularly in the absence of meaningful material state support. Manuel came to Canada in 1982 as a political asylum seeker after extensive experience in social and migrant justice organizing across El Salvador and the United States and brought with him a transnational political background that shaped how he later interpreted labour institutions in Canada (a dimension returned to later in the chapter). Trained as a civil engineer and having worked on infrastructure projects prior to migration, he described encountering institutional barriers upon arrival:

> I faced those obstacles, those hurdles as a new immigrant. I tried to get my accreditation here and then I was told, no, no, you have to go back two years to university. I couldn't go back two years, especially when you have kids and wife and you need to put food on the table, take the train, pay for clothes, medicine, and all these things.

This requirement persisted despite his prior training being conducted in English and in collaboration with engineers from British institutions, which, as he emphasized, meant that his "problem with the language never was really critical here." For Manuel, the issue was not a lack of skill or technical knowledge, but the categorical devaluation of credentials based on their place of origin. As with other participants, his account highlights how the demand for retraining operates less as a pathway to integration than as a mechanism that filters, delays, and reorders migrants' trajectories under conditions of economic constraint.

Deskilling, then, does not begin in the warehouse but earlier in migrants' encounters with Canada's migration frameworks, credentialing regimes, the settlement sector/industry, and labour-market institutions. As discussed in Chapter Four, workers responded strategically to these constraints. Many underscored how the Canadian system had pushed them backward in their careers while simultaneously viewing Amazon's Career Choice and tuition programs as partial opportunities for recovery, even as these initiatives folded training into the company's labour control regime. Gowayed's (2022) concept of "state-structured human capital" helps situate these trajectories. She argues that human capital is not a fixed measure of merit but a dynamic outcome of immigration regimes that shape whether migrants' skills are recognized, transformed, or devalued through institutional processes. In particular, Gowayed identifies two mechanisms through which this occurs: investment, referring to whether states provide resources that allow migrants to use or develop their skills, and recognition, referring to whether prior training and experience are acknowledged as economically viable (p. 5). Many of the workers in this study described navigating both constraints. This process can also be understood through what Nieswand (2018) terms "conversion regimes," which govern how different forms of capital (educational credentials, professional experience, and social capital) are translated across national contexts (pp. 601–602). From this perspective, the issue is not simply that migrants lose skills upon arrival, but that the value of their existing capital is re-evaluated within a new social field shaped by immigration policy, labour-market structures, and global hierarchies of education and expertise. While some forms of capital are more readily convertible across borders, others are systematically devalued, reflecting broader inequalities between nation-states and their positionalities within the global economy (p. 602).

In this context, state-mediated devaluation becomes economically useful, as Amazon absorbs workers whose credentials have already been filtered, downgraded, or displaced through national labour-market institutions. However, as Chatterjee (2025) argues, these processes cannot be understood as purely institutional mechanisms of recognition and investment. They are also articulated discursively through the implicitly raced language of skill, integration, and "Canadian experience," which recast structural exclusion as individual deficiency while simultaneously producing Canada as a benevolent, liberal nation. Deskilling, then, occurs both through policy but is also discursively reframed in ways that obscure its structural basis, enabling its reproduction across both state and corporate domains. Hence, for the Amazon workers I interviewed, this meant that the warehouse became a destination for workers whose skills, credentials, and prior occupational or professional histories had already been devalued through institutional and discursive networks of racialized immigrant labour devaluation, allowing Amazon to draw on a workforce produced through processes that preceded the firm itself.

Corporate DEI and the Management of Difference

At the level of the firm, these broader dynamics take on a more explicit managerial form through corporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Rather than treating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a coherent or uniformly implemented corporate project, this chapter approaches DEI as a fragmented managerial discourse that circulates unevenly across Amazon's labour regimes. DEI operates less as a transformative intervention into workplace inequality than as a series of symbolic practices oriented toward reputation management, risk mitigation, and the governance of difference within the workplace. In this way, DEI functions as an organizational extension of Canadian multiculturalism, recognizing difference in ways that make existing relations of labour control, precarity, and inequality more governable.

A growing body of organizational and management research identifies what is often described as the "diversity paradox" that point to the empirical gap between the stated objectives of DEI initiatives and their limited impact on material inequalities within organizations. While DEI frameworks promise inclusion, belonging, and opportunity, they are structurally constrained by short-term performance imperatives, competitive pressures, and the prioritization of shareholder value. As a result, diversity initiatives tend to concentrate on surface-level indicators (representation, visibility, and cultural recognition) rather than redistributive changes to power, wages, or working conditions (Fletcher & & Lovelace Jr., 2024, Arciniega, 2021).

Corporate engagements with racial equity increasingly operate through what some have described as "corporate racial responsibility:" voluntary, market-based approaches to racial inclusion that extract value from racial difference while subordinating equity to profitability. In this framework, racial identities become reputational assets, and commitments to equity are calibrated to the extent that they enhance brand value, mitigate legal liability, or respond to external pressure from consumers, investors, or regulators (Fletcher & Lovelace Jr., 2024; Leong, 2013, Melamed, 2014).

Kash understood Amazon's diversity initiatives in precisely these terms. He compared DEI programming to health and safety protocols, oriented toward liability prevention rather than transformation. As he put it, companies form awareness initiatives "for appearances… to prevent liability." In his account, diversity programming was not a moral commitment to equity but a reputational shield, a strategy of risk management embedded within the company's broader growth model. Amazon's Affinity Groups (often referred to in the organizational and human resources literature as Employee Resource Groups, or ERGs) like networks for Asian and Latinx employees, as well as the Black Employees Network exemplify this. Kash described them as a

"double-edged sword." On the one hand, they create bounded spaces organized around ethnic identity, making the workplace "less open" in his words. On the other, they are integral to the company's growth model wherein ethnic networks make it easier to "build trust" and consolidate influence within particular segments of the workforce.

The instrumentality of DEI becomes clearer when affinity groups and ethnic networks are considered alongside labour recruitment. Miriam, a community organizer I spoke with, shared that:

> Before COVID, when Amazon was in a period of expansion, hiring happened easily online, at job fairs and through referral programs when employees could refer family and friends. Post-COVID Amazon's hiring reduced generally, but hiring still does go up occasionally online.

As I discuss later in relation to post-COVID "white-badge" (temporary) hiring, these recruitment channels did not remain stable as organizers described a shift from formal referral systems toward more opaque and exploitative routes of labour-market access. In its earlier pre-COVID form, however, these networks can lower recruitment costs and reduce uncertainty for new hires, who enter the warehouse already embedded within recognizable social worlds. Seen this way, formal referral systems and corporate affinity practices could intersect with ethnic networks in ways that helped secure a steady labour supply by channeling recruitment through social networks that can carry expectations of loyalty or obligation.

These intra-communal dynamics can also be understood through Taiwo's (2022) notion of "elite capture," in which representational frameworks are redirected toward the interests of powerful institutions. Within the warehouse, ethnic networks can become conduits through which corporate authority is extended rather than challenged. Rather than dismantling hierarchy, diversity initiatives can intersect with existing community leadership structures in ways that

stabilize managerial control. As Dennis, a young university graduate who wound up at Amazon, explained:

> There's different social groups that are often sort of like ethnically bound. [Amazon] can win over the leaders of the different groups and basically their job is easier in a lot of ways because they have the actual material incentives and power of the company, and the company hierarchy that they can use to win people over.

At lower levels of supervision, this often involves working through informal hierarchies already present on the shop floor and incorporating influential figures into formal roles such as Process Guide or Process Assistant. The incorporation of respected intermediaries into formal supervisory roles does not eliminate ethnic boundary-making but can co-opt it into corporate authority. In this way, what appears as 'recognition' can also narrow the conditions under which informal networks become bases for collective dissent.

Amazon's engagement with DEI is uneven across its organizational landscape. In divisions more exposed to public scrutiny, investor pressure, and reputational risk (such as corporate, technology, and media-facing sectors), DEI is professionalized and performed more visibly through managerial discourse, branding initiatives, executive appointments, and formalized governance commitments.[18] By contrast, in labour-intensive and high-turnover

[18] Following the murder of George Floyd by police in 2020 and the ensuing anti-policing racial justice protests, Amazon publicly expressed "solidarity with the Black community," pledged $10 million to racial justice organizations, updated Alexa responses to affirm Black Lives Matter, and appointed its first Black executive after criticism of the racial and gender homogeneity of its leadership council (Fletcher and Lovelace Jr., 2024, pp. 363-64). Rather than indicating a transformation of workplace power relations, these gestures show how DEI could be mobilized as a public language of corporate responsiveness. Wickham et al. (2025) describe this as part of the "diversity paradox": the gap between the promised benefits of DEI and its often mixed or contradictory organizational outcomes, especially when DEI is constrained by short- and medium-term structural and performance imperatives (p. 6261). They also note that DEI can operate as a reputational resource, tied to brand image, labour-market perception, recruitment, risk management, and the avoidance of more intrusive regulation (2025, p. 6268). This is consistent with Melamed's argument that diversity discourse often operates as a form of "crisis management," translating structural inequalities into manageable forms of difference. The ruling-class appropriation of racial justice does not prove that such language is empty, but that they are contested socio-cultural formations (see Abdelbaki, 2020). As J. W. Mason (2025) argues in his discussion of Trump-era attacks on "DEI" and professional standards, billionaire backlash against "wokeness" also reflects anxiety over the relative autonomy of professional employees, including technicians, engineers, and low-level managers who used corporate social-justice language to challenge managerial authority.

settings such as fulfillment centres, DEI is thinned into practices of cultural celebration, affective belonging, and symbolic recognition. Here, diversity is expressed through posters, affinity groups,[19] and themed events rather than through structural changes to scheduling, discipline, promotion, or workload.

Workers repeatedly described corporate diversity initiatives as out of sync with their lived realities and social worlds. Racial scripts developed at the level of U.S. corporate headquarters were brought into Canadian warehouses in ways that appeared clumsy, stereotypical, or culturally flattening. For example, diversity initiatives oriented toward "Latinx" identity, transposed from U.S. racial formations and demographic realities, were experienced by some Latin American workers as reductive and even offensive, collapsing diverse national, regional, and political histories into a singular caricatured cultural frame. Dennis relays his coworkers' frustrations these superficial practices with these racial representations:

> Definitely that's something coming from the American HQ because there are a lot of Latino workers in the United States. So, it's really like very ham-fisted stuff. The Latinos in Amazon thing in particular, I know a couple of Latino people who were quite offended by it. It's just very like stereotypical. The guy that was talking about this is Colombian and he was like this everything on here is like, obviously it's very vulgar stereotypes, but it's also all things associated with Mexico so it's like that whole thing in particular was just viewed as ridiculous by the Latino workers I talked to about it.

[19] At Amazon, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) – which the company refers to as affinity groups – are employee-led networks organized around shared identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexuality, and are framed as spaces for community-building, mentorship, professional development, and belonging (Amazon, n.d.,-b). More broadly, ERGs are frequently presented in corporate discourse as beneficial for both workers and firms, contributing to inclusion, retention, and organizational performance (Kratz, 2026). At the same time, critical scholarship suggests that such initiatives can function as forms of non-performative diversity work, in which commitments to inclusion are institutionalized through practices that signal responsiveness while leaving underlying relations of power largely unchanged (Ahmed, 2012). Thus, ERGs may offer workers only a modicum of voice – one that is recognized and supported within the terms set by the organization – while potentially redirecting attention away from unionization and other collective forms of worker organization (Odessky, 2020; Thrasher, 2026).

Here, Latin American workers took offence to Amazon's attempt at pacification and performative "recognition" politics. Instead of securing loyalty or enhancing motivation, these forms of corporate multiculturalism intensified a sense of disjuncture between corporate representations of diversity and workers' own histories and identities. This disjuncture is especially pronounced at the lower rungs of the company's operations, where diversity is less a matter of strategic corporate effort of inclusion than a demographic reality, and where standardized DEI scripts appear particularly detached from workers' social worlds. As Bhattacharyya (2018) observes, "the spectacle of corporatised multi-culturalism is an odd display," particularly where "diversity with an American flavour maps awkwardly onto the preoccupations and divisions arising from other histories" (p. 163).

These corporate racial scripts also collided with workers' own transnational solidarities and political attachments. During the 2020-21 farmers' protests in India, Jordan, another young university graduate who has bounced between two warehouse locations over the past 5 years, recounts observing: "*Many Punjabi workers put stickers of support of the protests on forklifts and similar messages of support on the VoA [voice of associates board].*[20] *Amazon displayed a digital "Black Lives Matter"*[21] *on its board*."

Punjabi workers who represent a significant proportion of Amazon's workforce in the GTA were asserting a form of transnational political identification with a militant agrarian movement that was neither anticipated nor sanctioned by Amazon's diversity framework,

[20] The VOA board is a large scrolling digital message board inside Amazon's warehouses, with individual posts stacked like a feed and visible to both workers and management. It offers a company-controlled forum where workers could register workplace concerns in a semi-public digital space.

[21] Despite Amazon's public statements of racial equity in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in 2020 by police, Amazon's actual record is one of consistent anti-black racism, exemplified in their treatment of Black employees, as well as the company's strong ties to policing, provision of (racist) surveillance and facial recognition software, and financial support of politicians who vehemently opposed the movement for Black Lives (Fletcher & Lovelace Jr., 2024).

highlighting the disconnect between corporate performances of racial inclusion and the specific histories, struggles, and solidarities that animate workers' cross-border ties and subjectivities. This highlights the limits of corporate multiculturalism as a framework for recognition, and underscores how workers' political and social worlds exceed (and at times disrupt) the categories through which the corporation seeks to name and manage difference.

Nonetheless, this transnational identification was not uniform. Khal, who also identifies as Punjabi, states that people are free to support political causes in public spaces, but not at Amazon because the "workplace is a place where you want to work in every situation with everybody" – "workplace is a place of peace." His account complicates any broad reading of Punjabi solidarity on the warehouse floor. Distancing oneself from homeland politics could be read as tied to aspirations toward professionalism and workplace respectability, and perhaps to a broader understanding of successful integration as the ability to keep political conflict outside the workplace (see Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003, on the context-specific character of migrant homeland politics). In this framing, respectability required keeping disruptive politics outside the workplace.

Other workers related to Amazon's diversity initiatives on a spectrum of embrace, ambivalence, or rejection. Some rejected corporate recognition as superficial, while others interpreted gestures of inclusion through gratitude, ambivalence, and conditional belonging. For example, Kyan, who I introduced in the previous chapter expressing gratitude that Amazon hires newcomers, was one the participants who interpreted Amazon's 'diversity' gestures with some degree of positivity:

> Amazon is providing each and every benefits for their workers and for their family and they celebrate all the festivals over there, they arrange some foods and snacks. There is no cost about food and snack right, but that this is something like appreciations to your worker

> right. This is something related to appreciation right. Events and everything, that's how they care about their worker.

For Kyan, festivals, food, and social events signalled that the company recognized workers' hard work and cared about them. As our conversation continued, however, his appreciation sat uneasily alongside his awareness of the coercive underside of that care. Kyan himself brought up workplace issues and suggested that if workers collectively challenged Amazon over Time Off Task (TOT), the hectic pace of work, or safety concerns, the company's generosity might disappear. His account shows how corporate recognition can produce ambivalent attachments to company diversity initiatives where workers may experience gestures of 'inclusion' as care while also sensing that such care is conditional on compliance.

Kash's reflections, by contrast, point to the limits of this recognition: beneath the language of diversity, workers still encountered a racialized class hierarchy in which immigrant labour was treated as both indispensable and cheap. Reflecting on wages and workforce composition, Kash asked rhetorically, "Who would work for so little? They make millions off Indians." In the same breath, he observed that "white people quit." These statements condense a racialized class logic: immigrant workers sustain the warehouse and generate value, while White exit appears normal. Chua's (*forthcoming*) book demonstrates that workers often apprehend underlying structures of labour arbitrage and inequality through racialized interpretations of difference rather than abstract processes of capital accumulation. As she writes of Asian seafaring workers, they "saw their 'value' *in* their efficiency and denigration as cheap labor: what distinguished their popularity […] was that the value of their labor was below the average price." In her analysis, such racialized understandings are the "concrete form of appearance" through which wider class relations become visible in everyday life. Kash's remarks similarly register an internalized understanding that immigrant labour is valued not despite its cheapness,

but precisely *because* it is cheap (i.e. made cheap). To return to Hall's (1980) formulation, class exploitation becomes apprehensible through racialized difference.

His reflections reveal an awareness of what might be called the *spectrality of whiteness* within the warehouse: an intangible sense of (in)familiarity and managerial recognition that, as Kash put bluntly, reflects how "there is white supremacy" shaping workplace interactions. Kash jokingly described how White workers can connect with managers instantaneously – "like that, snap!" – "'Steven will connect with 'VP Brittany'" (invoking stereotypically White names) to capture what he saw as seamless movement across corporate levels. Such interactions, he suggested, did not require strategic self-modification or careful self-presentation. They unfolded with ease. As Banerjee et al.'s (2025) research shows, even where employers profess commitments to diversity, newcomers are still expected to "discard markers of cultural difference" and assimilate to Canadian norms, including "shedding their accents, dressing appropriately," and adapting to workplace expectations; their "foreignness" interferes with merit (Banerjee et al., 2025, n.p). Kash understood that professional advancement required forms of self-adjustment in ways he believed would render him more respectable, promotable, or trustworthy in the eyes of management, including anglicizing his name and changing his appearance in order to approximate a higher degree of legibility to authority. These uneven and often opaque pathways into professional advancement, including financial and symbolic rewards, are sustained through systems that present themselves as neutral or meritocratic.

In sum, these accounts show that Amazon's diversity discourse did not simply fail to recognize workers' identities. Instead, it encountered social worlds that exceeded, complicated, and sometimes refused its terms of recognition. Diversity could be experienced as recognition, coexistence, ambivalence, or strategic self-adjustment, but it did not resolve the racialized

organization of labour, authority, and mobility inside the warehouse. The next section turns to how racialization is reproduced through technological systems that are purported to eliminate social judgement from the labour process.

The Myth of Algorithmic Neutrality

Despite the dominant narrative that Amazon's warehouses are governed by neutral, data-driven systems, workers experience the labour process as deeply discretionary. What is presented as algorithmic objectivity is, in practice, a regime in which rules are selectively enforced, discipline is unevenly applied, and managerial judgement remains active. Far from replacing discretion, algorithmic management provides a technical alibi for decisions that remain fundamentally social, and thus inevitably subject to the various idiosyncrasies that the social entails. As Dennis explained:

> I don't know, like, the whole idea that this is just an app running things or something… that doesn't really correspond to what my view of how it is at work. There is this whole surveillance system and all this rating and everything, but that's just kind of used to enhance the managers' power in a lot of ways because they still have the discretion. They can choose to go complain to certain people and not to other people. There isn't like some automatic process where it's just like based on these metrics that that's how people are being promoted.

Although digital technologies have greatly reshaped the management and intensification of work, it is still human managers who decide how work is distributed and who gets disciplined. Technology enables managers to mask practices of favouritism behind the veneer of neutrality (Abdelbaki, 2024). Delfanti (2021b) refers to this as "augmented despotism:" a labour regime in which technologies do not replace managerial authority but extend it, allowing disciplining power to appear automatic, data-based, and therefore incontestable. Lauren Kelly (2022) makes a similar point on the language of "algorithmic management," which, she argues, has "the unintended effect of erasing the human labour of middle management which remains important

to the labour process" (835). Workers experience this directly. As Henaway (2023) notes, "[s]upervision through algorithms and surveillance masks the power dynamics of this technical division of labour" (pp. 3-4), adding that a labour process that is broken down into simple, small, and repetitive tasks that require little training also allows management the opportunity to assign tasks arbitrarily, opening the possibility of nepotism and favouritism towards certain workers. Dennis observed this frequently at work:

> The arbitrary power of the company over workers worsens the ethnic and gendered dynamics because it gives them power that they can use to do the sort of ethnic favouritism and pit different groups against each other.

Khal's account clarifies how this discretionary power operated through the distribution of direct and indirect work, and how uneven exposure to algorithmic discipline could itself become an object of managerial discretion. While Amazon's productivity system appears to evaluate workers through neutral metrics, Khal explained that managers could shape how much of a worker's performance became visible to the system by assigning them to direct or indirect roles. Direct work generated productivity data and exposed workers to warnings, whereas indirect work, though often harder on the body, was "less stressful because the rate is not there." As he put it, "if manager don't like you they will give you direct work," and repeated direct assignments could lower a worker's productivity record until "Amazon system algorithm will give you warning." Conversely, a manager could "save you" by splitting a worker's time between direct and indirect roles, reducing the amount of rate-based data attached to them. Algorithmic discipline, then, did not eliminate human discretion; it created new ways for discretion to operate through the selective exposure of workers to measurement.

This discretionary power is not abstract or hidden, but, in fact, materializes in the everyday organization of space, movement, and interaction. Managers do not simply review dashboards.

They intervene in where people stand, who they speak with, and how long they can pause. Naomi, introduced in Chapter Four as a former nurse of Chinese descent, explained what this looked like in practice:

> I worked at ship dock. They dictate who you're allowed to be around and who you're not to be around. They don't want certain kinds of people mixing together. […] I noticed they had me separated from other East Asian people. Always kept us separated. And when I'm talking, they would come in and break us up. That's what they do [but] they'll say, 'your rate is too slow'.

Miraftab (2016) refers to these strategies as the "linguistic choreography of the production line," a practice in which racialization is mobilized to quell solidarity and restrict intercultural understanding among workers. Naomi's account shows one side of this choreography: the dispersal of co-ethnic sociality when it appears to threaten managerial control. Her account of being deliberately separated from other East Asian workers points to the tension between informal solidarities emerging from below and the corporation's more controlled and managerial forms of diversity governance (including, as discussed above, Amazon 's promotion of affinity groups and inclusion through official DEI initiatives). Khal's account shows the other side of this choreography: the selective incorporation of shared language when it can help management coordinate labour. He did not describe shared-language mediation primarily as ethnic solidarity, but as a practical mechanism through which managers moved workers, ensured compliance, and maximized output. Managers, he explained, favoured workers who were "really active," who would "listen," and who could "manipulate the workers to push the work," shuffle workers across stations, and keep productivity high. For him, that "Punjabi-Punjabi favoritism came with the language" because workers themselves often sought out supervisors who could "speak my language" and communicate more easily with them. However, he underlined that managers ultimately "consider workers as numbers" and "just need more volume and work." These

workers can be understood to be serving as *ethnic ambassadors* or informal intermediaries whose authority derives not only from procedural knowledge, but from their linguistic and ethnoracial proximity that allows managerial pressure to travel through the existing socio-linguistic fabric. This form of mediation can *appear* to workers as ethnic favouritism, while also enabling management to secure cooperation and maximize output through a shared language and the relations of familiarity that it can imply. Naomi's account shows how the power of algorithmic management lies partly in its ability to deflect discretionary decisions as data and objectivity, while Khal's account shows that, rather than dispersal, managers may selectively mobilize the impact shared language when it helps coordinate labour and sustain productivity.

This same movement between formal neutrality and informal discretion is also visible in scheduling. Workers' accounts suggest that scheduling is one of the key sites where abstract claims of fairness and neutrality are translated into ethnic favouritism. Although scheduling systems are presented as rule-based and impartial, workers consistently described access to desirable shifts as mediated through frontline discretion rather than automated allocation. Jordan explained how this operated in practice:

> There are three different types of shifts. Front half is Sunday to Wednesday, back half is Wednesday to Sunday, and the donut shift is Tuesday to Friday. Front half is the most desirable. The Process Assistants are usually Punjabi, and they tend to give Punjabi associates front-half shifts, which causes a lot of frustration for Nigerian and Eritrean workers.

From below, workers make sense of these arrangements by reading them through a racialized lens. Scheduling outcomes are interpreted as privileging those embedded in particular ethnic or social networks, while marginalizing others who lack proximity to discretionary authority. Here, the distribution of time becomes a medium through which inequality is expressed and interpreted, as workers experience predictability, relief, and exhaustion unevenly and selectively.

Just as discretion does not operate in a social vacuum, managers are also not indifferent to the social composition of the warehouse. They actively recognize and work through its existing group formations, identifying workers who hold informal credibility within particular ethnolinguistic networks and incorporating them into intermediary roles within the warehouse's hierarchy. In this sense, ethnic groups can become sites through which labour is more effectively governed in such a way that informal authority is not simply suppressed, but selectively drawn into the formal hierarchy, and their strategic incorporation operates not only through subtle favouritism but through formal promotion pathways. Dennis explained some of the challenges that emerge from these tactics:

> It's just clear to me because we're trying to do leadership identification when we're organizing something, and there's key people to win over. And then they're often the people being brought into the PG [Process Guide] position. These people are leaders within their groups and they're also both PGs. I don't think it's because they're particularly hard workers necessarily. It's more just because they're well-liked and respected, and they recognize that if they can kind of have them on side, it helps them.

Here, informal authority within ethnic networks becomes convertible into managerial status as social legitimacy is transformed into organizational leverage, and "leadership identification" becomes a racialized mechanism of governance and corporate counter-organizing. These discretionary practices govern through differentiated solidarities, selectively incorporating 'ethnic bloc' leaders into the company hierarchy.

These interpretations illuminate a broader dynamic of algorithmic governance. The more work is quantified, the easier it becomes to deny that judgement, bias, and hierarchy remain embedded within it. Algorithmic systems reorganize discretion rather than eliminate it. What appears as automated fairness is, in practice, discretion shielded by data, legitimized by software,

and enforced through human intervention. Standardized systems do not produce standardized experiences; instead, they structure differentiated outcomes through selective enforcement, uneven protection, and socially mediated decision-making. These differentiated outcomes are not only produced through workplace dynamics but are also shaped by the broader regimes outlined above – state migration policies, labour-market stratification, and corporate diversity practices – which structure how inequality is both organized and rendered legible to workers in everyday life.

Racialization from Below

Against this backdrop, workers develop their own explanations for why these inequalities emerge. In what follows, I use the term *racialization from below* to describe the everyday practices of interpretation through which workers apprehend inequality on the warehouse floor through race, ethnicity, language, and migration status. These are not the formal categories produced by the state or the corporation, but lived explanations of how trust, cooperation, discipline, and opportunity appear to be distributed across workers in everyday workplace interactions. While scholarship increasingly recognizes race and class as co-constitutive, analyses of racialization often remain nationally bounded (Bannerji, 2005; Camfield, 2004; Paret & Levenson , 2024; McCarthy & Desan, 2023, among many others). In the warehouse, workers do not interpret social differentiation through Canadian categories alone, and racialization is not simply imposed from above. Its lived contours are also shaped by transnational histories and prior social locations that inform how these distinctions are understood within the labour process. As Omi and Winant (2015) argue, race and racial difference are not fixed across time and space but are continuously produced through historically specific social relations.

Extending this insight, Bhattacharyya (2018) argues that "there is a political economy arising from contemporary practices of racialisation or racial exclusion or racist boundary-marking" (p. 7). These interpretations often take the form of ethnic boundary-making, but they are not reducible to 'ethnic conflict' or interpersonal and cultural prejudice. Rather, they emerge as part of workers' efforts to make sense of unequal distributions of power within the workplace and the labour process. Following Wimmer's multilevel approach to ethnic boundary-making (2008), ethnic categories become salient when they appear to map onto unequal distributions of power, resources, and opportunity within a given social field. These distinctions are not *fait accompli* but an "outcome to be explained" (Wimmer, 2008, p. 999). In the warehouse, what might otherwise appear as a broad "South Asian" category fractures into more specific and politically meaningful distinctions (e.g. Punjabi, Tamil, Gujarati, Malayali, Arab) because these are the lines through which managerial authority, informal networks, and workplace advancement are perceived to flow. Tim, a young worker, observed this dynamic of racial/ethnic categorization in detail:

> There's a whole thing at our facility in particular where a lot of the managers are Punjabi and a lot of the PAs and stuff are Punjabi so there's… they show quite a lot of ethnic favouritism and it causes a lot of issues because a lot of people perceive the problem as being that the Punjabis are in charge and there's sort of like different levels of… for example, people who are maybe, let's say Arab or something, say oh these Indians are the ones causing all the problems here, they're all in charge. Whereas the other people from India or Sri Lanka who might be like Tamil or Gujrati or, you know, Malayali or something like that, they know, they say oh it's these Punjabis who are in charge and then the other people who are Punjabi, the other workers who are Punjabi just say there's a lot of favouritism here, it's just them hooking up their friends.

Tim's account shows that workers do not experience "Indians" as a unified category. Broad racialized labels fracture – expanding or contracting depending on workers' position and perspective – into more specific distinctions as they try to explain why authority appears concentrated in certain hands. Khal, who identifies as Punjabi, acknowledged internal regional

and linguistic distinctions, but he did not interpret hierarchy at Amazon as Punjabi dominance or ethnic favouritism in the same way. Instead, he distinguished between regional differentiation in India and the categories he considered relevant inside the warehouse. “In India, you can consider different area-wise or region-wise,” he explained, but in the warehouse context “we’re going to not tag them as Punjabi or Gujarati or Tamil” and instead “consider” them as “Indians.” Khal’s account therefore complicates Tim’s: ethnic categories do not simply describe fixed groups carried intact from one national context into another. They shift depending on who is speaking, what hierarchy is being explained, and whether transnational distinctions are being emphasized, minimized, or kept out of the workplace altogether. In other words, workers draw on the distinctions most available to them (region, language, migration history, and prior experiences of domination) to make sense of why favouritism, promotion, and protection from reprisals appear unevenly distributed. Ethnic boundary-making thus emerges not outside the labour process, but as one of the ways workers understand and experience discretionary power.

Anika’s account further illustrates how workers translate uneven workplace hierarchies into regional, cultural, and moral distinctions. Reflecting on perceived workplace segregation, she described South Indians and Tamils as fundamentally connected, sharing similar food and spices, culture, and social worlds, while drawing a sharper distinction between those groups and Punjabis. As she put it, “we are same people” when speaking of South Indians, whereas “we are very different” from North Indians and Punjabis. At the same time, she contrasted Punjabis with Gujaratis, whom she described repeatedly as “very hard workers.” Anika’s judgement and interpretive labour convert uneven workplace outcomes into cultural and moral distinctions. Perceived concentration of authority in Punjabi hands becomes legible through a transnational repertoire in which regional background, upbringing, and work ethic already carry social

meaning. In this way, workplace hierarchy is translated into familiar forms of demarcating difference.

These distinctions are not produced within the warehouse alone. As Karimi and Wilkes (2023) argue, "as social groups move across national borders, they carry their homeland's understandings of self- and other-racialization […] and develop new experiences of racialization through inter-group relations in both host and home countries" (p. 7). What appears as workplace favouritism or interpersonal resentment is therefore not simply a dispute internal to Amazon. It can also be the reactivation of older histories of domination, displacement, and political violence, now refracted through new labour hierarchies in the country of destination. As Tim explained:

> this anti-Punjabi thing isn't coming just from the realities of the warehouse. like especially if you're Tamil, like you might have had people from the Indian army at your doorstep because they occupied Sri Lanka and all that, right. so it's not just because you're my manager today, it's also because, you know, your people did this to me back home.

These testimonies demonstrate that the warehouse does not produce racialization from scratch; it provides a new setting in which distinctions produced or emergent elsewhere and at a different time are reanimated and attached to authority and discipline. In this process, prior histories of ethnic, regional, and class differentiation are not simply reproduced, but selectively reactivated as workers attempt to make sense of how power operates in the present. What appears as workplace-specific hierarchy is thus mediated through social meanings forged across multiple national and historical contexts.

However, what workers often perceive as ethnic solidarity or cultural difference is also shaped by state-mediated precarity. Some of the workers perceived to be especially compliant, tightly networked, or willing to endure poor conditions were also navigating precarious legal status and heightened vulnerability to employer discipline. Many young Punjabi men described in the aforementioned accounts and who worked as process guides and process assistants only

held temporary work permits and striving towards to permanent residency in Canada. Thus, while co-ethnic networks may appear as favouritism from the outside, they also function as infrastructures through which workers manage risk and uncertainty. What is perceived as Punjabi solidarity is inseparable from differentiated vulnerability produced through migration and labour regimes that intensify workers' exploitation and reliance on social networks for continued employment and legal stability (for example, the provision of a job letter for a PR application). Precarity, as Bhattacharyya (2018) notes, "places workers in imagined competition without end, in the process encouraging the deployment of any and every racialised defence available in the struggle to retain some remnant of security at work" (p. 110). State policy thus enters the warehouse not only through formal labour market sorting mechanisms, but through the meanings workers attach to one another's actions and positions.

These sorting mechanisms also reshaped access to Amazon as reliance on ethnic networks extended into the post-COVID labour recruitment milieu. Miriam, a community labour organizer, explained that post-COVID labour recruitment became far more opaque: "postings, for fulfillment centres especially, will only be up for a fraction of a second before going down," making it "near impossible to just apply online." Hiring for "white badge (temporary) positions" nevertheless continued, and organizers observed that those hired were "almost all young Indians," especially Punjabi and Gujarati workers. Miriam described this as more than the informal circulation of jobs through community ties. Workers reported paying "an exorbitant fee (upwards of $1000) to a middleean from the community to get the job." In her words, "the shifts are not just being informally circulated through community ties. It's an under-the-table business within the community where these middlemen are exploiting unemployed people from their own community." Miriam was careful to note that organizers did not have "a full picture" of how

these middlemen accessed Amazon's hiring channels and Amazon publicly disclaims connection to such practices and, as Miriam noted, its hiring website includes a fraud warning against paying for jobs. Either way, she argued, Amazon "certainly hasn't done anything to crack down or further open up their hiring to prevent these middlemen from auctioning off jobs" because it likely benefited insofar as it delivered workers perceived as "an easily exploitable and manageable workforce." In short, whether or not these practices were formally connected to Amazon, their effects were felt within the warehouse. They intensified the perception that access to employment flowed through ethnic channels rather than transparent procedures, feeding suspicion among workers who could not bring their own family or friends into the workplace. In this context, labour-market access itself is inflected by race and class, where the same community networks that could help workers secure employment could also become sites of intra-community exploitation and inter-worker resentment, shaping how workers understood who belonged in the warehouse, who had access, and whose presence appeared to be favoured.

These perceptions of favouritism also crystallize spatially within the warehouse. Departments come to be read as racialized spaces, producing an informal cartography of the labour process. Jordan described Transportation as primarily Gujarati, while Inbound – dominated by Punjabi workers – was colloquially referred to as "Indiabound." Such labels reflect how workers map the social composition of departments, linking particular areas of the warehouse to specific ethnic networks. These signifiers function as forms of classificatory labour through which workers comprehend the organization of work.

Racialization from below, however, is not limited to racialized boundary-making alone. It also includes efforts to preserve dignity and revalue selfhood in the face of occupational displacement. Immigrants draw on what Boccagni (2010) describes as an "identity reservoir,"

where “home” and enduring ties become resources through which earlier lives are mobilized in the face of settlement difficulties (p. 189). Aguilar Jr. makes a related point when he argues that “without a relevant past, the labor migrant has no status apart from that dictated by the labor process and the occupational category as perceived by the locals” (2014, p. 135). Several of my participants refused that reduction. Anika’s account offers a clear example of this. After describing the humiliation of downward mobility and the devaluation of immigrant credentials, she reappraised her coworkers through their prior professional identities:

> I know a lot of teachers from my country. They're working at Amazon. One lady I met last week, she is a teacher. She works with me. I'm proud. A math teacher works with me! I'm very proud.

Rather than being surrounded by pickers and packers, she reconstructs the social world around her as one populated by teachers, nurses, and accountants displaced into logistics work. Anika is engaged in what Tyler (2015) calls a classificatory struggle “where class is understood as *the struggles of the exploited against classification*” and “against the social destinies described and prescribed by ‘class names’” (emphasis in original, p. 502). In doing so, she reworks the meaning of her present conditions through reference to a prior class position that remains socially and morally significant. Because the professional lives she recalls were devalued through migration, credentialing, and deskilled racialized incorporation into low-wage work, the dignity she restores to her coworkers is inseparable from a racialized modality of class experience.

Manuel’s account reveals a different but related process. He does not narrate himself solely as a deskilled immigrant worker. He remains, in his own account, an engineer, organizer, political activist, father, musician, and student of anthropology – something like a “renaissance man,” as he would say. These ‘identity reservoirs’ matter to him because they mediate how he

interprets both occupational displacement and labour relations in Canada. Coming from a revolutionary context in El Salvador, having organized with solidarity networks across the United States and Canada, and later reflecting on belonging and survival in Canada, invoking, in his own words, Che Guevara's idea that "one's country is wherever one does one's struggle," Manuel situates his present not simply within the Canadian labour market but within a broader political trajectory of struggle, displacement, and reconstitution.

This transnational political formation also shapes how he understands unions, race, and labour control in Canada. Recalling his first encounters with organized labour in Canada, he described working in a factory where he "really didn't like the way they [the union] were treating people," noting that unions appeared to represent "the needs of the owners" rather than workers. He recounted how Latin American workers, many of whom spoke little English, were asked to sign and vote for things they did not understand, "lining up" without explanation and later asking him what they had agreed to. In that moment, he said, "I was treated like cattle," a phrase that condensed both his own experience and his perception of how racialized workers were managed, misled, and misrepresented by both the employer and the union. Across subsequent jobs, including his work along Highway 407 and later at Amazon, Manuel returned to a consistent critique that the existing forms of unionism divided workers, failed to meaningfully represent them (especially immigrant labour), and lacked the "valiance and courage" required to confront capitalist exploitation. At Amazon, this critique took a more explicitly classed form as he spoke openly about wages, emphasizing that he knew he was "worth more," yet expressed little confidence that collective organization in its current form could effectively challenge these conditions. At the same time, he suggested that efforts to organize were not without consequence, insinuating that he may have been dismissed from a previous job because of

suspected involvement in union activity. While significantly less dangerous than the repression he associated with El Salvador, this experience reinforced his sense that collective action remained constrained, even where it appeared formally protected.

What emerges from Manuel's account is not a rejection of collective struggle, but a transnationally informed critique of its institutional limits. His understanding of unions, race, and labour is shaped through a comparison between militant, often clandestine organizing under conditions of political repression In El Salvador and the bureaucratized, fragmented forms of representation he encounters in Canada. At the same time, his account also points to how prior experience shapes how workers understand their place and trajectory more broadly.

Rubi's account similarly suggests that prior professional and class location continued to shape how workers interpreted both the work itself and the people around them. Trained in information technology, educated in reputable Western universities, and accustomed to professional employment before migration, she experienced her move into low-level clerical and later warehouse work as a compulsory economic adjustment rather than a natural occupational pathway. She narrated this shift through the language of sacrifice and necessity, emphasizing that she had moved for her children's future and that she "had no choice" but to accept work beneath her training. As Kelly (2012) notes, "when class positionality is considered in a transnational frame, it is not simply position in one hierarchy that is compared with position in another; it is also the prospect for mobility within that hierarchy, either across a career or across generations, that is a major factor" (p. 170). Her references to "survival jobs," to her husband's refusal to accept them, and to her own eventual acceptance of them indicate that occupational decline was continuously evaluated against both a prior class position and anticipated future mobility through

her children's success. In this sense, class does not disappear but instead persists as a standard through which present class conditions are interpreted and evaluated.

These classed evaluations similarly shape how workers perceive one another, adding yet another layer of differentiation. Dina recalls that some workers contrasted Punjabis imagined as coming from "villages" with Indians who came from more professional backgrounds, and that these distinctions shaped expectations of behaviour, compliance, and acceptable standards of living. For some, Amazon was understood as preferable to life "back in the village," and therefore not something to contest; for others, particularly those with professional backgrounds, the same conditions were experienced as degrading or humiliating. What appears from the outside as a unified ethnic category is thus internally differentiated through classed and regional histories that precede migration but that nonetheless manifest within the warehouse social space. Naomi's account reinforces this demarcation from a different angle. Reflecting on her own experience, she emphasized that for workers who had previously occupied professional or managerial roles, the transition into warehouse labour was not simply a matter of adjustment, but of loss. Being supervised by younger or less experienced managers felt particularly difficult, not because of the conditions themselves, but because it inverted prior relations of authority and competence. In this sense, prior class position shaped not only how work was experienced, but how workers evaluated the legitimacy of those who exercised authority over them.

These accounts show that workers do not interpret workplace inequality through ethnicity alone. They also draw on prior class positions, professional identities, migration trajectories, and political histories to make sense of their place within the warehouse and beyond. These interpretive frameworks shape how workers understand hierarchy, value, and difference, and how they explain why authority and opportunity appear to attach to some groups more than

others. What workers narrate as ethnic favouritism, cultural difference, or hard work can therefore be understood as the local expression of a broader process through which labouring populations are fragmented, sorted, and differentially valued.

Racialization from below is therefore neither reducible to ethnic hostility nor adequately captured by nationally bounded accounts of racial formation. Workers do not simply import racial categories unchanged from elsewhere, nor do they produce them anew inside Amazon. Rather, they draw on transnational histories, class positions across the life course, and migration trajectories to interpret how inequality is organized and lived. What emerges in these accounts is an ongoing process through which race and class are rearticulated across spatio-temporal contexts. Returning to Hall, then, race is not an identity added to class 'from the outside' or as a secondary layer, but one of the forms through which class relations are lived and fought through. Workers' accounts show how common conditions of exploitation do not produce common class identification. Instead, they are mediated through racialized understandings of who works hard, who is favoured, who is more exploitable, who belongs, and who is seen as deserving recognition or advancement. In this sense, race becomes part of the practical and interpretive terrain through which workers understand their relation to one another and to capital. Examined in this way, the warehouse is not only a site where social difference is managed from above, but also one where these forms of differentiation are made, *through* workers' transnationally informed understandings of themselves and others. The interplay between these multiple scales of racialization show how workers form potential alliances, experience division, and negotiate the possibilities and limits of class-based solidarity.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how racialized inequalities within Amazon's warehouses are produced and experienced through the interplay of multiple interpenetrating processes of racialization. Challenging narratives of algorithmic neutrality, I have shown that digitalized labour processes do not eliminate discretion but reorganize it in such a way that enables uneven enforcement, selective discipline, and differentiated access to opportunity. These dynamics are embedded within broader regimes of racialization from above, including state migration and labour-market policies, national discourses of Canadian multiculturalism, and corporate diversity initiatives that repackage racial difference as an object of management. Together, these processes structure the uneven distribution of precarity, recognition, and value across the workforce, shaping not only workers' positions within the labour process but also the terms through which inequality is made legitimate and intelligible. These dynamics constitute what I call the *racialized choreography of production*, extending Miraftab's notion of the "linguistic choreography of the production line" to capture how racialized difference is not only managed from above but actively produced and navigated within the labour process, and subsequently taken up through workers' own practices of meaning-making.

The chapter has shown that these inequalities are not simply imposed from above but are actively interpreted and reworked through processes of racialization from below. Drawing on transnational histories, prior class positions, migration trajectories, and political experiences, workers develop situated explanations for why authority, discipline, and advancement appear to attach to some groups more than others. These interpretations take the form of ethnic boundary-making, spatial classifications, class distinctions, and moral evaluations of work, but they are not reducible to cultural difference or interpersonal bias. Rather, they represent efforts to explain

why authority, discipline, and advancement appear to attach to some groups more than others within the labour process. In this way, racialization from below operates as the terrain through which broader processes of differentiation are lived and understood, shaping how workers form alliances, experience division, and negotiate the possibilities and limits of class-based solidarity.

These findings advance a theoretical understanding of racial formation as a transnational and processual phenomenon that unfolds across multiple scales. Rather than treating race as either imposed from above or reproduced within bounded national contexts, this chapter has shown how racial projects are reconstituted through the interaction of institutional structures and workers' interpretive practices. Attending to these dynamics complicates accounts of both race and class. If race is a modality through which class is lived, then it is neither fixed nor singular, but continuously rearticulated across contexts. Conversely, class formation cannot be understood as an abstract structural position but must be analyzed through the differentiated and historically specific ways it is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated. Under these conditions, the same processes that organize inequality also shape how it is apprehended, thereby impacting not only divisions among workers but perhaps also the conditions under which solidarity may be forged, fragmented, or foreclosed.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

July 2022. The day was bright and warm when workers gathered in a local park for a BBQ they had organized themselves. Across the field, a large handmade banner read: “Amazonians, Together and Strong.” Before the event formally began, some had already arrived to prepare the space: setting up tables, posting signs to aid in the logistics of parking, directing people toward the gathering, preparing food, and setting up a bouncy castle for the children, where volunteers took turns making sure they played safely. Later, there would be henna, face paint, music, food, conversation, and approximately fifty workers, family members, and friends gathered together in the open air.

People arrived carrying plates, gradually assembling a colourful smorgasbord. Food became an opening – a way to ask questions, exchange recipes and ingredients, compare, and share. Workers posed for photographs in front of the banner, smiling beneath the word “Amazonians,” a corporate name remade, however briefly, into something handmade and social. At first, many assumed I also worked at Amazon. In facilities so large, it was not surprising that many co-workers were sometimes meeting one another for the first time outside the warehouse. People mostly sat with those with whom they could speak most easily, gathering in ethno-linguistic clusters structured mostly by language. Some groups mingled more readily than others. The centre of the gathering, where music and dancing took place, became the space where these boundaries softened, without fully disappearing. Workers who may not have shared a common language nevertheless found moments of mutual recognition in food, music, movement, humour, and the simple relief of being together outside work.



Figure 1.1: Handmade banner reads "Amazonians, Together and Strong" prepared for at the July 2022 worker-organized picnic in Toronto suburb.

It was a cacophony of sounds and smells – music and laughter, food sizzling on the grill, children calling to one another, and songs blaring from the speakers that the early arrivals had set up. Workers took turns requesting songs from the DJ of the hour, proudly offering pieces of their own musical worlds to the gathering. Where words did not always travel easily, movement did. People watched, copied, laughed, joined, and learned one another's steps. It was a rehearsal of a choreography of multiculturalism from below, and the park became, for a moment, a different kind of floor. People's bodily movements were not synchronized by scanners, rates, and the pace of production, but one where movement was autonomous, improvised, and shared

collaboratively with others. Some even brought the stretching exercises of the warehouse into the dance, turning gestures associated with fatigue and bodily discipline into play.

Halfway through the event, a few workers gave prepared speeches about the beauty of the gathering and about returning stronger to fight for a better and more just workplace. One worker in attendance enthusiastically yelled, "Off with their head!" in reference to Jeff Bezos. The scene was not the cosmetic diversity of corporate branding, nor the official multiculturalism of policy language. It was ordinary, spontaneously expressive, and loud: food in foil trays, children running between adults, music moving across groups, people sitting apart and coming together beneath a banner that named them as a collective before such collectivity had fully formed. The speeches did not dissolve the clusters, the differences in language, or the varied relationships workers had to Amazon. But they gave those differences a direction and drew the scene back toward the workplace and toward the unfinished business of solidarity among the fragments Amazon brought together but did not allow to cohere.

Locating "Class" in the Transnational Social Field

This scene returns us to the central questions of this dissertation: how immigrant workers' transnational subjectivities, lived experiences of racialization, and class trajectories shape their experiences of digitized warehouse labour. More specifically, the dissertation seeks to explore how class is lived through multi-scalar processes of racialization spanning transnational migration and prior class location, national multiculturalism and immigration policy, regional labour-market stratification, and workplace diversity practices on warehouse labour. Amazon's significance here lies in its concentration as a site of contemporary digital capitalism, where logistics, algorithmic management, racialized immigrant labour, and corporate multiculturalism converge. Theoretically, the dissertation has sought to bridge labour process theory, transnational

migration studies, and scholarship on race and racialization in order to examine how class formation unfolds within digitally mediated and racially stratified labour regimes.

This dissertation has argued that class formation among Amazon warehouse workers in the Greater Toronto Area cannot be understood only at the point of production, nor only within the boundaries of the Canadian labour market. To locate class in the transnational social field, then, is to refuse a methodologically nationalist account of class formation and to insist that it is a lived relation shaped by multiple axes and scales. These include uneven geographies of racial capitalist development, displacement and migration, racialized Canadian immigration and labour-market regimes, and the labour process in which workers are ultimately absorbed into Amazon's warehouses. As discussed in Chapter Three, a nexus of immigration regulation, a long history of racialized class formation, neoliberal market flexibilization and associated crises of social reproduction, and contemporary corporate logi(sti)cs produces workers as "Amazonians."

Digital Taylorism and the Performativity of Growth

Amazon's digital regime of control does not operate in a social vacuum. Scanners, rate targets, algorithmic dashboards, and productivity metrics matter, but their power is not merely technical. They form part of a techno-despotic labour regime. Some saw Amazon as temporary, others as a necessary compromise, and still others as a source of limited stability in an unforgiving labour market. I advance the concept of *performativity of growth* to underline the ways in which growth is staged as both a corporate imperative and an aspirational horizon – that is, workers, through their labour, are compelled to enact Amazon's expansion through speed, discipline, endurance, and the promise of individual advancement through corporate growth. Digital Taylorism, in this context, is a labour regime that incorporates racialized immigrant workers into a system of speed,

surveillance, discipline, where internal promotion pathways hold out *possibilities* of professional mobility exist alongside – and, in fact, sustain, *probabilities* of physical injury.

Race, Class, and the Question of Solidarity

Workers are embedded in dense social worlds, their lives exceeding the categories through which Amazon and other institutions d/evaluated them. They entered Amazon as socially differentiated bearers of labour-power, through a confluence of past, present, and future trajectories: migration pathways, educational backgrounds, legal status, family obligation, racialized labour-market incorporation, and transnational spaces. These differences do not stand outside capitalist abstraction. Amazon's metrics render heterogeneous workers commensurable through standardized measures of time, rate, and productivity, even as their differentiated social positions shape the conditions under which labour-power is disciplined, intensified, and made productive for accumulation. They interpret work, hierarchy, and one another through social repertoires shaped by race, ethnicity, language, citizenship, gender, age, prior class location, life course experiences of work and life elsewhere.

Furthermore, this dissertation has shown that Amazon's digitalized labour process does not eliminate older forms of managerial power. Quantified forms of measurement and work assessment coexist with discretionary practices, formal and informal hierarchies of roles, and uneven access to opportunity, protection, and discipline. Workers described a workplace in which metrics often obscured the social relations through which work was assigned, promotions were allocated, and discipline was implemented. The myth of algorithmic neutrality, then, is not that metrics are irrelevant, but that they *appear* to stand outside the discretionary and racialized relations through which work is organized.

Amazon's warehouse does not merely gather already-existing differences under one roof. It reorganizes those differences through the labour process, corporate discourse, and everyday workplace relations. Racialization from above appears through state immigration regimes, the reverberations of its multicultural narratives, the racial sorting of the labour market, as well as corporate diversity frameworks that ostensibly celebrate 'difference' while leaving the underlying structures of power and exploitation intact. Racialization from below appears in workers' own attempts to make sense of hierarchy, favouritism and exclusion, as well as competence and trust, frequently drawing on transnational repertoires to interpret one another and workplace dynamics.

Chapter Five therefore left the question of solidarity unresolved because the empirical material itself does not support an easy conclusion. Workers confronted shared conditions of exploitation, but these conditions were understood through racial, ethnic, linguistic, and transnational frames of identification produced both inside and far beyond the warehouse. What emerges instead is a more contradictory terrain in which workers recognized common pressures, injuries, unfairness, and managerial discipline, while also navigating differentiated histories, social locations, and racialized frames of identification. Rather than treating 'racial projects' as obstacles external to class formation, the analysis I offer here is aligned with Hall's framework of racialized capitalism. Race is not an external division imposed upon an otherwise 'unified' class, but a relation of the historical forms through which class is organized, lived, and fractured. Because race and class are 'articulated' rather than fixed, racialized and ethnic identifications do not have a single political outcome. They can fragment workers, but they can also become routes through which workers recognize shared exploitation, build trust, or form *partial* alliances.

The picnic returns to this question in a different register. It does not resolve the problem of coalition, but it shows some of the social conditions from which solidarity might be built, as well as the limits that continue to shape it. By incorporating the transnational into the social, and integrating the social in the digital, this dissertation has shown that the use of digital technologies to manage and organize Amazon's labour process is a socially grounded phenomenon. It is situated within a racially and ethnically stratified context that shapes workers' uneven experiences of algorithmic management and the fractured possibilities of solidarity.

Broader Implications

The implications of this study extend beyond Amazon. Amazon is not an exception to contemporary capitalism, but one of its most concentrated expressions. Its warehouses reveal how digital capitalism depends on established histories of racialized labour, migration, and social reproduction, even as it presents itself through the language of innovation, efficiency, flexibility, and diversity. The expansion of automation, robotics, and algorithmic management does not make workers less analytically central. It makes it all the more important to understand how technologies reorganize labour without escaping social relations. Robots may move goods and algorithms may assign tasks, but **A**mazon's automated systems continue to depend on workers whose bodies remain essential to accumulation. These systems also connect the warehouse to delivery networks, regional labour markets, subcontracted labour, and transnational circuits of production and circulation. The warehouse is therefore not only a site of labour control but a strategic node through which the temporal imperatives of circulation are translated into labour discipline. The intensification of warehouse work through speed, productivity targets, and continuous measurement helps sustain the accelerated movement of commodities on which Amazon's logistical model of accumulation depends.

Returning to the question of scale, Amazon's power lies not only in the warehouse but in its capacity to organize labour across a wider logistics infrastructure: fulfilment centres, delivery stations, subcontracted delivery networks, data systems, and regional labour markets. As Chapter Three demonstrates, Amazon's expansion in the GTA is locally embedded in racialized labour-market stratification and suburban logistics geographies, while also coordinated through much larger corporate and logistical networks. This has implications for organizing. Labour geography shows that workers do not simply organize within pre-given scales; they also struggle to construct scales of representation capable of confronting capital's own spatial organization (Herod, 1997).

This scalar problem is also a transnational one. If this dissertation has shown that workers do not enter Amazon as nationally bounded subjects, then Amazon itself cannot be understood as a nationally bounded employer. Organizing Amazon therefore raises questions about how workers might build forms of collective power capable of moving across the same scales through which the company organizes production and circulation: warehouses, delivery systems, subcontracted labour, regional logistics networks, and transnational supply chains (Chua, 2021; Alimahomed-Wilson & Reese, 2020).

Recent Canadian developments illustrate the stakes. In Quebec, Amazon announced the closure of seven sites after the Laval unionization drive, shifting back toward a third-party delivery model and eliminating about 1,700 full-time jobs; CSN characterized the move as an anti-union campaign. In Delta, B.C., by contrast, workers at the YVR2 fulfilment centre won certification with Unifor after the B.C. Labour Relations Board found Amazon had interfered with the organizing process and granted remedial certification. The case is important not only as a worker victory, but also because it shows the limits of a facility-level win against a company

whose power operates across regional, legal, and corporate scales. These cases suggest that Amazon organizing is not only a question of workplace solidarity, but also of scale: how workers build durable collective power across the fragmented geographies of logistics.

Limitations and Future Directions

This dissertation has focused on Amazon warehouse workers in the Greater Toronto Area, a region where logistics expansion intersects with racialized labour-market stratification, suburban employment geographies, and transnational migration. The study therefore does not claim to represent all Amazon facilities, all logistics workers, or all national contexts. Rather, it uses Amazon in the GTA as a site through which to examine how digital capitalism is locally embedded, socially mediated, and transnationally constituted.

The qualitative design of this project allowed me to trace workers' narratives, meanings, and social relations in depth. At the same time, future research could extend this analysis through longer-term workplace ethnography, comparative studies across Amazon facilities, or longitudinal research following workers across jobs, immigration statuses, and post-Amazon trajectories. Such work would help clarify how workers' relationships to Amazon change over time, especially as workers move between direct warehouse work, platform labour, delivery work, care work, and other forms of precarious employment.

Further research is also needed on the organizing question that remains open in this dissertation: how workers build durable solidarities across racialized, linguistic, generational, gendered, and migration-based differences. This is especially important in logistics workplaces where turnover, injury, automation, subcontracting, and managerial anti-union strategies continually reshape the terrain of collective action. Future work might therefore examine not

only whether workers organize, but how they build the social bonds, interpretive frameworks, and collective infrastructures through which organizing becomes possible.

As robotics, AI, and algorithmic management expand, future research should examine not whether automation replaces workers in any simple sense, but how it reorganizes labour, authority, skill, bodily risk, and solidarity. Amazon remains a useful site for such research precisely because it condenses many of the central contradictions of contemporary work: technological innovation, racialized labour dependence, corporate mobility, and the continuing necessity of living labour.

A further line of inquiry would extend this analysis across Amazon's operational branches, examining the relationship between warehouse workers, delivery workers, AWS employees, and tech professionals whose labour sustains the company's logistical, cloud, and surveillance infrastructures. Recent tech-worker organizing against border enforcement, policing, military occupation, and war-making infrastructures suggests another terrain on which questions of race, migration, and solidarity are being contested within digital capitalism. This raises the question of whether solidarities can be built not only across fragmented warehouse workforces, but also across the differentiated labour processes that make Amazon's corporate power possible.

By incorporating the transnational into the social and the social into the digital, this dissertation has shown that Amazon's labour regime cannot be understood apart from the racialized and transnational social relations through which workers enter, experience, and interpret the warehouse. These relations can produce boundaries and fragmentation, but they are also part of the terrain on which collective identities may be formed. A transnational approach shifts the question away from whether race or class provides the primary basis of identification and toward how workers' racialized and classed experiences are formed across multiple social

and political contexts. These experiences may deepen divisions, but they can also create grounds for recognizing shared conditions and building solidarity across difference. Because this study was not conducted in sites where union or other forms of collective organizing were formally and broadly established, it cannot show how these possibilities might be developed in practice. It does show, however, why such organizing cannot proceed from an abstract or undifferentiated conception of class. What is at stake, at Amazon and beyond, is whether workers' differentiated experiences can be connected to the shared relations of exploitation that organize them, and whether the institutions through which they organize can build collective identity across, rather than by erasing, those differences.

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Appendix A: Interviews Conducted

Name	**Gender**	**Age Range**	**Ethnicity**
Jordan	Man	20-30	White
Dina (x2)	Woman	20-30	Middle Eastern
Naomi	Woman	40-50	East Asian
Tim	Man	20-30	White
Dennis	Man	20-30	White
Kash (x2)	Man	30-40	South Asian
Devyn	Man	30-40	South Asian
Anika	Woman	50-60	South Asian
Rubi	Woman	50-60	South Asian
Zain	Man	20-30	South Asian
Kyan	Man	30-40	South Asian
Francis	Man	30-40	White
Manuel	Man	60s	Latin American
Kh38al	Man	20-30	South Asian
Miriam	Woman	20s	South Asian

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

This is to inform and confirm your consent to participate in the study "Locating Class in Transnational Lives: A Case Study of Immigrants in a Global Suburb." My name is Rawan Abdelbaki, and I am a PhD Candidate in the Graduate Program in Sociology at York University. I can be contacted at rbaki@yorku.ca.

The purpose of the research is to understand immigrants' experiences of professional displacement post-migration to Canada.

You will be asked to participate in an in-depth life story interview. The interview should take approximately 1-2 hours. You may also be asked to participate in a second follow-up interview.

I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with me, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.

Hard copy data and consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Electronic data, such as audio files, will be stored on a password-protected computer and a secure online server. Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only I will have access to this information. All data will be destroyed through the deletion of electronic files and shredding of hard copy data and consent forms at the completion of the study in May 2031. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at rbaki@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Mark Thomas at mpthomas@yorku.ca and/or (416)736-2100 Ext: 77985. You may also contact the Graduate Program in Sociology at gradsoci@yorku.ca and/or 416-736-5013.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any further questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of

Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

If you could please state your name, today's date, and repeat the following: I consent to participate in the study, "*Locating "Class" in the Transnational Social Field: Migration, Labour, and Racialization in Amazon Warehouses in the GTA*," conducted by Rawan Abdelbaki. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by agreeing to participate.
If you consent to being contacted for a follow-up interview, please also repeat the following: I consent to being contacted for a follow-up interview.

At time of second interview, I will repeat the information above, and obtain consent again.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

1. Tell me about why you decided to move to Canada?
2. How old were you moved to Canada?
3. Where did you move from?
4. Who did you come with, and how?
5. What did you do back home? What did you study?
6. What was it like trying to find work here? Did you try to work in your field? What steps did you take?
7. What did you do when you first moved? What jobs have you held here?
8. Amazon
    i. Where do you work and what is your job? Can you describe your basic duties/responsibilities. Can you describe a typical day. What is your favorite part of the job in a typical day? Least favorite?
    ii. Who decides these things? Who do you report to/take direction from?
    iii. Do you get to build relationships with other people at work? What is the relationship like? What are people's backgrounds? Does this affect the duties they are assigned?
    iv. How do you feel about your work? What effects does it have on your life? Have you ever had difficulty in trying to balance the needs of your work and other needs in your life? How did you navigate this?
9. How do you see yourself? How have you reacted to this change in occupation?
10. How would you describe your economic situation?
11. What were your expectations for when you came?
12. What did you tell folks back home about your early work experiences here?
13. What kind of social or economic level in society did you and your family come from back home?
14. Were your family among the wealthier in their community back home?
15. How did the class system work in your home country?
16. Do you see a class system/structure in Canada? Where do you see yourself within it?

17. What are your aspirations for your children (if relevant) in terms of their upward mobility in Canada?
18. What impact has Canadian citizenship had on your life?
19. Where do you see yourself settling down when you retire (or in 5-10 years)?
20. Do you own your home/property there? Do you own your property or property here?
21. How would you evaluate your life here?
22. Is there anything that I have overlooked that you would like to discuss?
23. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?
24. Is there anyone else you are aware of who might be willing to be interviewed on this topic?