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# **Untying of Hands: Working Migrants as Social Agents**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

***Master of Applied Psychology (Community)***

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by

**Coni Medel**



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## Abstract

This research elicited in-depth settlement experiences from long-term working migrants who migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand, which were interpreted through an ecological perspective on immigration. The purpose of this study was to provide a contextualised understanding of working migrants' experiences as social agents. Immigration policies in New Zealand are primarily formulated to extract the economic benefits of migrant labour and to satisfy workforce shortages in certain industries (Terruhn & Cassim, 2023). At the same time, mainstream psychological literature usually focuses on the individual process of 'acculturation', describing how migrants adapt and cope in the new place of living (Berry, 2001; Ward, 2001). The community psychology approach applied in this research focused on addressing the societal conditions that surround immigrants' difficulties in settling (Birman & Bray, 2017). This research explored how migrants' settlement experiences are shaped by these broader societal dimensions, examining both the resources that helped migrants to become settled and the barriers that made participation difficult.

This research took a case-based study approach. Five working migrants were interviewed about their experiences of the labour market and navigating the immigration system in their real-life contexts. In this study I explored the precarity of migrant workers, regulatory constraints on the labour market, cases of work exploitation but also constructive employment relationship experiences. This research showed that the individual stories and trajectories of migrant workers cannot be comprehended without considering their context. The findings reflected the heterogeneity and diversity of experiences for working migrants. Not all of their experiences were negative, although there were common threads linked with their precarious migrant status. Working migrants in this study experienced a loss of power, autonomy and social status as migrants, and at some point, in their migratory journey, they all sought to move out of their temporariness and precarity, so they could build their lives with more agency.

Working migrants in this study experienced a precarious migrant status due to the regulatory immigration policies that they were subjected to. The main factors of this precarious migrant status arose from their restricted movement in the labour market and a long-lasting uncertain temporal status. Participants affected by their precarious migrant status pursued more autonomy to be able to learn new skills or enhance their existing skills, which opened new opportunities for them in the labour market and also offered broader contributions to the community. This sense of agency also contributed to their personal growth. Working migrants' experiences extended beyond their workplaces and encompassed broader social spaces. These experiences included participation in the health and housing system, together with achieving a greater work/life balance. Supportive

employment relationships, stable and prosperous working conditions and social support led working migrants to develop a sense of home and a sense of meaning in their migration journeys. Permanent settlement was not a primary settlement objective for four working migrants in this study. However, all working migrants shared a need to gain more agency and autonomy. The findings of this study tentatively suggest that granting working migrants more/full participation may have benefits that outweigh the costs that immigration policies intend to prevent. Through this thesis and by acknowledging the stories of my participants I showed that with the appropriate support, migrants can contribute fully to the receiving community and at the same time improve their well-being significantly.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Research overview

Migrant workers are more than just labour. Temporary migrant schemes often overlook the human element, treating workers as resources needed to fill labour market gaps (Groutsis, 2022). Migrant workers are human beings and citizens often being denied some rights by immigration policies and regulatory constraints. Immigration policies in New Zealand are primarily formulated to extract the economic benefits of migrant labour and to satisfy workforce shortages in certain industries (Terruhn & Cassim, 2023). This research explored settlement processes for working migrants who have voluntarily migrated to New Zealand providing more contextualised understandings of working migrants' experiences as social agents. Mainstream psychological literature usually focuses on the individual process of 'acculturation', describing how migrants adapt and cope in the new place of living (Berry, 2001; Ward, 2001). The community psychology approach applied in this research, focuses on addressing the societal conditions that create immigrants' difficulties in settling (Birman & Bray, 2017). This research explored how migrants' settlement experiences were shaped by these broader societal dimensions, examining both the resources that helped migrants to adjust and become more settled and the barriers that made participation more difficult.

Much of the mainstream migration research on settlement has a fairly short-term focus on people who have only recently arrived (Kuo, 2014). In this research long-term working migrants provided valuable information on their social context, as they have navigated the immigration system and have had a greater range of experiences in the labour market. Psychological research on migration typically includes quantitative or survey-focused methods (Salo & Birman, 2015), or qualitative research that relies on more structured interviews (De Jacolyn et al., 2021; Iqbal, 2017). This research expanded on qualitative methods focusing on biographical self-reflective recollection of working migrant experiences using elicitation methods to gain in-depth contextualised knowledge.

This study was guided by four research objectives that aimed to explore various aspects of working migrant experiences in New Zealand. Firstly, the study sought to explore the impacts of immigration policies on the settlement and participation of working migrants in New Zealand. Secondly, it aimed to describe the experiences of working migrants in the labour market, including their working conditions, limitations, and gains. Thirdly, the study pursued to learn more about working migrant experiences of transitioning from temporary workers to long-term residents. Finally, the study sought to elicit more in-depth, detailed and reflective accounts of people's migration settlement journeys. Overall, these objectives were designed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced

understanding of the experiences of working migrants in New Zealand, with a specific focus on their settlement and participation as social agents.

From a community psychology perspective, this research analysed the potential tensions between immigration policies and the lived experiences of working migrants, moving away from individualistic deficit framing to contextualise the realities of migrant lives, using an ecological framework. Policies that limit access to rights based on migrant status often dehumanise migrants (Groutsis, 2022). Working migrants are not solely economic units meant to fill workforce gaps, but rather human beings-citizens inhabiting a political-social-cultural space, accompanied by families, needs, and aspirations (Terruhn & Cassim, 2023). In this study I explored the precarity of migrant workers, regulatory constraints on the labour market, cases of work exploitation but also constructive employment relationship experiences. In each of the cases, the participants' search for more autonomy in their migration journey was a relevant topic in the analysis. Further, I explored the notion of migrants as social agents occupying various social spaces rather than just the workplace. This form of citizenship is experienced by working migrants in this study, differently than residency or permanent status. Migration is described by the participants of this study as a unique human experience. As demonstrated by the stories of participants in this study, migrating makes them more eager to learn, connect and contribute to the receiving community. Currently, their work contribution is seen narrowly, as migrants are more than assets to fill a labour gap. The findings of this study indicate to what extent the benefits of allowing working migrants more/full participation could outweigh the cost that immigration policies aim to prevent. Through this thesis and by acknowledging the stories of my participants I will show that with the appropriate support migrants can contribute fully to the receiving community and at the same time improve their well-being significantly.

This introductory chapter provides context for the topic and the participants of this research. It provides background information about labour migration in New Zealand, the regulatory immigration system experienced by my participants and recent updates to immigration policies in New Zealand. Then, it offers an overview of several key factors within the New Zealand social context that impact working migrants. These factors include work-life balance and the rising high cost of living in New Zealand, the housing situation, and the New Zealand health system. Finally, the chapter introduces elements of community psychology that have informed the approach I have taken in this study. Community psychology utilises an ecological perspective on migration, settlement and acculturation, and this perspective along with the values of community psychology such as social justice, empowerment and respect for diversity have been applied in this research.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a nation that has a bicultural identity and is often referred to by different names such as Aotearoa, New Zealand, or both. There are ongoing debates regarding which name the nation should officially adopt, but no definitive resolution has been reached yet (Venuto, 2022). Both terms are used interchangeably in various contexts. As a migrant and researcher, I can relate to this unresolved issue and will also take this approach in this thesis. The terms Aotearoa and New Zealand will be used interchangeably, as both are commonly used and better reflect my experience as a migrant since I arrived in New Zealand.

### **Labour migration in New Zealand**

Immigration can broadly be defined as the voluntary movement of people from one country to a new one, seen as a decision to settle in a new place (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). However, there are a variety of contexts for relocation, such as sojourners that move for a determined reason and for a limited time, or refugees that are forced to move to protect themselves from circumstances such as political conflicts or natural disasters (Hodgetts et al., 2020). World trends are showing that the pace of migration has increased dramatically with today's ease of travel and access to technology, creating an interconnected and global economic, social and cultural context (Birman & Bray, 2017). Popular understandings tend to portray migration as people moving from the Global South to the Global North for the sole purpose of accessing employment and welfare opportunities denied in their countries of origin (Lewis et al., 2015; Robins, 2019). Although modern migration is not solely focused on people moving from poor countries to richer countries. Around one-third of the world's migrants have in fact moved from one rich country to another, and another third from one poor country to another (Bastia & Skeldon, 2020; Standing, 2011). In Aotearoa New Zealand, migrants are a prominent part of society. According to the 2018 Census, approximately 30% of the population was born overseas (Stats NZ, 2020). The reasons for migrating are many, and the focus of this research is specifically on the voluntary migration of people to New Zealand along with work as a central characteristic of relocation.

Since the 2000s, migrant workers have become an essential part of several industries in New Zealand fulfilling workforce shortages (Stringer et al., 2022). Labour migration can be advantageous for employers as it allows them to recruit skilled employees for positions where locals are not available (Iqbal, 2017). When employers do not need to offer higher wages to local employees, they could pass on the savings to consumers in the form of lower prices for goods and services (Fry & Wilson, 2018). According to Fry and Wilson (2018), immigration can also have many positive effects on communities, by increasing diversity and vibrancy. In remote rural areas, it can make

unsustainable services viable, including growing rolls for schooling. At the same time, despite public concerns that excessive flows of working migrants and their families into a receiving country can contribute to local unemployment, or increase pressure over the housing and other social services, such as the welfare system and the subsidised health care system characteristic of New Zealand, the New Zealand Productivity Commission (2022a) has reported that immigration has have mostly a positive effect on employment and wages of New Zealand workers. It has also been reported that rapid, wildly fluctuated or unexpected increases in population, including through net migration, can put pressure on infrastructure own or funded by the public sector, however, capacity issues where present long before the immigration surge previous of the COVID-19 period (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a).

Recent research on labour migration has been primarily focused on a dichotomy between workers with high or low skills (Oso et al., 2022). Immigration policies are often constructed and organised using the same category to classify workers and often use salary threshold to associate a role with a level of skill (Terruhn, 2023). However, this skills dichotomy can be misleading as the division of workers with high or low skills is often unclear or even difficult to determine (Oso et al., 2022). The migrant workforce often includes workers with a variety of skills. At the upper end, for example, are professionals and managers who can move internally within transnational corporations. There is also a migration of professionals and highly skilled labour in occupations such as healthcare specialists, teachers, engineers, analyst programmers and construction project managers (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). Nonetheless, contemporary migration flows also include highly-skilled migrants filling low-skilled employment opportunities vacated by local workers who may have moved to better employment opportunities (International Labour Organization, 2004). In New Zealand, the demand for temporary migrant workers has significantly increased in the last decades, particularly in horticulture, viticulture, and dairy farming, all of which are employing a much larger number of migrants than they did in the past (Yuan et al., 2014). With the large number of migrant workers in New Zealand, there is a growing focus on their vulnerability which has raised concerns about potential exploitation. This is particularly concerning in such industries that rely heavily on migrant labour as working migrant status leaves them in a precarious position, thus vulnerable to exploitation (Collins & Stringer, 2022; Yuan et al., 2014).

### **The New Zealand immigration system and visa categories**

The issue of migration is particularly relevant to the history of Aotearoa New Zealand, the implications of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the relationship between the Crown and Māori aspirations

(Collins, 2023). Aotearoa as a place inhabited by Māori has been massively impacted by colonisation and migration of people from other parts of the world in the past 200 years. Te Tiriti o Waitangi can be seen as the first Immigration policy, which aimed to protect Māori rights from a large number of tauwiwi (migrants from other parts of the world) who had already settled into Aotearoa in 1840 (Kukutai & Rata, 2017). From that moment onwards the ratio of Māori to Pākehā changed dramatically, with Māori passing from being the dominant ethnicity to being approximately ten percent of the population. This reduction of Māori presence was largely driven by increased migration from the United Kingdom, but also by an increased Māori mortality as a consequence of exposure to introduced diseases (Kukutai & Rata, 2017).

From the 1840s onwards, Aotearoa transitioned to a capitalist economy, and while the Crown has promised equal partnerships, its policies have undermined traditional indigenous authority, making Māori subject to Crown sovereignty and ignoring their right to self-governance (Pack et al., 2016). Contemporary discussions about migration policies continue to be shaped by this colonisation history. This situation is reflecting a society that privileges a political, economic and social system that largely reflects Pākehā New Zealanders' culture and values (Kukutai & Rata, 2017). Migration was used to grow the economy and ensure Pākehā dominance and nowadays the immigration system function as an instrument to meet labour shortages and support particular industry developments (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). It is within this context, where regulations and visa categories had shaped working migrants' possibilities to apply to a range of visas for different purposes, many explored in my study.

At the time of conducting this study for migrants to be able to enter the country, New Zealand's immigration system offers several types of visas whether a person is visiting, studying, working, joining family, or investing. Visas have different categories and eligibility criteria, and depending on the visa type, some migrants are authorised to work in New Zealand while they are in the country. Working migrants do not belong to a single visa category and they often move from one visa type to another, looking for better conditions and the possibility to settle (Goldring & Landolt, 2012; Schwarz, 2020). The New Zealand Productivity Commission (2022) in their report "Immigration by the numbers" grouped visas by categories which were in place at the time of their report and have since changed. However, the categories below were used by the participants in this study to support their efforts after they arrived in New Zealand:

Entry type	Visa category	Subcategories	
Temporary visas	Work visas Visas to enable non-New Zealanders to work in New Zealand temporarily	<b>Essential skills work visa</b>	
		<b>Work to residence:</b> Long-Term Skill Shortage List; Talent (Arts, Sports and Culture); and Talent (Accredited Employer)	
		<b>Study to work</b>	
		<b>Other</b>	Family
			Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme Horticulture & viticulture seasonal work
			Working holiday scheme, post-study work
	<b>Student</b>	<b>Student visa</b>	
Permanent visas	Resident visas	<b>Recent resident</b>	Skilled resident, eg, Skilled Migrant Category, residence from work, investors, entrepreneurs
			Partner or secondary applicant
			Other, eg, Pacific Access, Samoan quota
		<b>Long-term resident</b>	Those who have lived in New Zealand for 5 years or more

Table 1: Visa Categories, New Zealand Productivity Commission, (2022a).

Considering that often migrant trajectories demonstrate diverse visa pathways, participants in this study were working migrants who were granted visas, at some point of their migration journey, on the basis of temporary work through Essential Skills Visa or Work to Residence Visa, regardless of their latest visa status. Essential Skills and Work to Residence visas were categories available based on offers of work, working for specific employers, regional demands and skilled occupations (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022b). Immigration New Zealand (INZ, n.d.-b) stated that a working migrant’s right to stay in the country and work relied on the employment agreement reached with their employer, valid for up to three years, subject to be renewable. The Essential Skills policy aimed to grant work entitlement rights to migrant workers who possessed the required qualification and experience to fill specific skill shortages in the labour market. Interested applicants had to demonstrate their eligibility by presenting a job offer for a position on the demand list. Employers had to prove to Immigration New Zealand that no New Zealand residents were available or easily trainable to do the job offered (Yuan et al., 2014). Work to residency policy allowed migrants who had been on these visa for two years to apply for residency. This was applicable to migrants whose skills were required by employers stated in the Long-term Skills Shortage Skill List, or those who possessed exceptional talents in the fields of art, culture, or sport. Additionally, people working in areas with absolute occupational shortages or employed as religious workers were also eligible (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022b).

Under the Working Holiday scheme, another relevant category to participants in this study, young adult migrants of certain countries, up to thirty-five years old, coming to the country with the purpose of holidaying, are granted work entitlements while they are in the country (Searle, McLeod, & Stichbury, 2015). Working holiday visas allowed migrants to work in any occupation and region, often limited to working up to six months at a time for the same employer, within a twelve-month period. The number of places is allocated on a country-by-country basis, often within the context of a bilateral treaty. Over the years, there has been a significant increase in the number of places available under this scheme, going from around 6.000 places in 1998, to 65.000 places by 2016 due to an increase of countries affiliating with the scheme and an increase in the number of places on some countries already affiliated (Fry & Wilson, 2018).

Some family visas, such as partnership visas, linked to either a New Zealand citizen or a work visa holder have open work entitlements, however, they rely on their relationship and their partner's rights, to stay in the country. Recognised Seasonal Employer Limited Visa (RSE) workers are allowed to work in the viticulture and horticulture industry for a limited timeframe, often being occupied by migrants from the Pacific (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022b). Migrants could also hold a student visa to study English or to do any tertiary qualification, allowing them to work up to 20 hours per week for any employer while studying. Post-study work visas allow students who have completed their student programme to work for any employer with the purpose of allowing them to find a job in their area.

Migrants often move from one category to another adjusting their settlement pathways or changing circumstances in their migratory plans (Goldring & Landolt, 2011). For example, Working Holiday visa holders to be able to extend their period in New Zealand they can apply to a visitor, student visa or even an Essential Skills visa to fulfil new opportunities or keep travelling around New Zealand. Among all these categories, finding a pathway to residency is sometimes a complex and not a straightforward process for temporary working migrants (Fudge, 2014). Recent and long-term residency visa holders get granted long term stay rights and open work entitlements, which makes an attractive option for many temporary migrants with more limited rights. However, this is not always an option for many migrants. Hence, contextualised working migrants' experiences in this study facilitated a better understanding of the process they went through and the actions and decisions they took in relation to settlement in New Zealand.

The Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) scheme, launched in July 2022, is the new category that replaced the Essential Skills and Work to Residence categories. Eligibility on this visa is based on an income threshold as a proxy for skill (Terruhn, 2023). It is intended to reduce exploitation by requiring employers to provide evidence of their good migrant employer status (Immigration New

Zealand, 2024b). Taking more responsibility when hiring migrant workers, providing training to migrant employees about living and working in New Zealand, and providing supporting evidence to Immigration NZ are all part of this process. However, one thing that has remained in this new visa category is tying employees with a single employer, which has been proven to be the foundation of exploitative employment relationships (Collins & Stringer, 2019). Working migrants in this study were all in the process of, or had already granted, residency status by 2022, this is why this category does not apply in this case-based study.

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic and following border restrictions led to a number of calls from migrant advocacy groups to provide equitable rights to temporary migrant workers specially affected during this period of time (Arkilic & Sardelić, 2023). In 2021 an exceptional 2021 Residency Visa Scheme was introduced, which provided a one-off pathway to residency for up to 165.000 temporary migrants and their families who worked in industries with particular labour shortages, such as health and age-care workers, teachers, construction and manufacturing workers, among others (Arkilic & Sardelić, 2023). However, many temporary migrants living in New Zealand at this time, such as international students, postgraduate students, and their families, were left out of this scheme for not meeting the labour requirements. This exceptional policy is especially relevant as three of five working migrants in this study benefited from it.

### **The New Zealand social context**

Social inequalities in New Zealand have been on the rise since the 1980s. Cochrane et al. (2017) described the New Zealand context of social inequalities and the rising prevalence of people living precarious lives, as high as one in six New Zealanders. This is largely attributed to the labour and welfare reforms introduced since that time. These reforms increased flexibility in employment, reduced worker protection, and established tighter criteria for unemployment and other benefits. The most concerning consequence of these changes has been the growth of low-paid temporary jobs, intrinsically linked with the rise of the flow of migrant workers coming into New Zealand (Williams, 2009). The prevalence of temporary low-paid employment has led to a growing number of households struggling to meet basic needs such as food, health and housing (Cochrane et al., 2017). According to Hodgetts and Stolte (2017) many economic systems globally have been leaning more towards benefiting wealthy individuals, while neglecting people with more moderate incomes. This trend can be seen in New Zealand where the wealth gap has been widening, with the top 20 per cent of the population holding the 70 per cent of the national wealth by 2015 (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Labour market insecurity and immigrant flows can be intrinsically interwoven in New Zealand,

when political and policy decisions have altered the nature of employment resulting in more employment opportunities becoming insecure and precarious, while immigration policies focus predominantly on the needs of employers and certain industries (Spoonley, 2015).

### **Work/life balance**

Balancing work and daily living is a challenge that all workers encounter. One essential factor in maintaining a work-life balance is the time workers spend at their workplaces. In New Zealand 14% of employees work very long hours, which is more than the 10% average of OECD countries. Additionally, full time workers in New Zealand dedicate 14.9 hours to personal care and leisure, which is slightly less than the average of 15 hours in the OECD countries (OECD, 2020). According to The New Zealand Productivity Commission report “Productivity by the numbers” (2021) New Zealanders work longer compared to other OECD countries; however, they produce less. This means that New Zealanders are working hard, longer hours but producing less than their counterparts OECD countries. Productivity, leisure and self-care activities and work/daily living balance can be key to improve living standards of workers. The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) (2022) has proposed a definition of ‘Good Work’ based on mahi (work activity) that enhances the mana (spirit) of workers, affords good pay and conditions and is conducted with respect and dignity for the employee and for the employer. This definition includes fair wages and economic security, but also elements such as being free from worker exploitation, productive but also meaningful and fulfilling work. Such elements can have a positive impact on the worker, the employer and the community, as can improve significantly the work/life balance (The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 2022).

The rising high cost of living in New Zealand has become a significant concern for many low-wage New Zealand families but also for many temporary working migrants, especially the ones in the lowest range of paid work (Gabel et al., 2023; Stats NZ, 2023). Various factors contribute to the increase in the cost of living, including housing and healthcare expenses, food prices and general inflation (Gabel et al., 2023). The living wage movement claim that the minimum wage has not been sufficient to cover expenses for workers to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in society. The notion of the living wage includes a calculation of basic expenses, but it also includes expenses dedicated to rest and leisure activities and savings. Increasing the wages of workers to a living wage standard can significantly improve the wellbeing of workers and their families lifting them from poverty and contributing to reducing inequalities (Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023).

The living wage movement does a call for business and employers to account for better economic conditions on their employees rather than focusing solely on state initiatives to address the problem (Skilling & Tregidga, 2019). The limitations of this approach are that many companies use a business model based on low-wage workers to maintain their profits, often in industries such as construction, where migrant workers experience lower pay compared to their local co-workers, keeping migrants as cheap labour (Maclennan, 2018). The income that temporary migrant workers in New Zealand could earn is often higher than the average income for the same occupation in South American countries (Lewis et al., 2015). However, the income needed to afford living expenses (but also immigration fees and applications expenses) often outstrip low wage migrant workers earnings, limiting settlement and participations processes in the new country. Struggling to or not been able to afford minimal living expenses compromises quality of life and potentially could hinder the integration of working migrants into the local communities.

### **Housing situation**

According to Howden-Chapman (2015) New Zealand historically had some of the most notable and innovative affordable housing and neighbourhoods in the developed world. However, Howden-Chapman (2015) claims that, over many decades, New Zealand has neglected this heritage considerably. Speculative financial activities have distorted housing markets in many OECD nations, including New Zealand, allowing wealthy people increase their capital at the expense of people on low incomes (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). The New Zealand housing crisis has for many years and even today been characterised by extremely high housing costs, rapid house price inflation, reduced government investment in public housing, poor standard of current housing conditions and a lack of affordable housing for people with lower incomes (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Howden-Chapman, 2015).

The housing crisis is not only affecting migrants, but anyone who is trying to rent in New Zealand (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Howden-Chapman, 2015). Nonetheless, for many working migrants in low-incomes rental housing is becoming unaffordable leading to overcrowding, often poorly heated, poorly ventilated, damp, and poorly maintained living situations (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Maclennan, 2018). Such living situations can have a significant impact of people's physical health such as respiratory diseases, but also on mental health linked with social isolation (Teariki, 2017). When affordable accommodation is known to be hard to find, many temporary migrants might pursue employment opportunities that can include accessible accommodation through employer provided housing, often in industries such as farming or hospitality, which relieves some of the

settlement pressures. Often affordable weekly rates, saving in travel expenses and sometimes facilitating social interactions with other migrants can be factors influencing migrants' decisions in such accommodation facilities (Maclennan, 2018). However, in some cases, employer-provided housing can be used as a tool to restrict workers ability from leaving the workplace easily as their accommodation is tied to their employment (Collins & Stringer, 2019).

### **Health system**

The New Zealand health system is a tax-funded, universal healthcare service that the majority of people in New Zealand are able to enjoy (Immigration New Zealand, 2023). Unique features of the health system include the existence of some services specifically for Māori, as well as a no-fault accident compensation scheme for both work and non-work-related personal injuries sustained by any person who is in New Zealand. There is also the Pharmaceutical Management Agency, which negotiates with pharmaceutical companies to provide subsidised public access to medicines. Additionally, Plunket and well-child care provide support for parents and assess the health and development of all children up to 5 years old (Goodyear-Smith & Ashton, 2019).

Individuals need to meet certain eligible criteria to be considered for publicly funded health and disability services. Temporary migrants need to prove they hold a work visa for two years or more to be eligible for funded care (Immigration New Zealand, 2023). If working migrants comply with this requirement, they could extend health subsidised to their partner and children. Migrants who have residency and citizen entitlement are also included in the public system. If temporary migrants are traveling to New Zealand with shorter temporary visas, such as a Working Holiday visa, they are responsible for their own health costs, and they are expected to purchase a health insurance policy for the length of their stay (Immigration New Zealand, 2023).

According to Henderson (2014) the health system has not been culturally adapted to meet the needs of all ethnic minorities present in New Zealand nowadays. As consequence, many health needs have not been properly met. Lack of culturally sensitive and responsive health service delivery, reflects the existence of a one size fits all system (Henderson, 2004). Additionally, healthcare providers recognise a lack of preparedness in the healthcare delivery system and workforce to provide culturally competent care for the diverse community living in New Zealand (Kanengoni-Nyatara et al., 2023).

## **An ecological perspective on immigration**

To be able to analyse and understand working migrant experiences, a community psychology theoretical framework is drawn on in this thesis to bring together the individual level of experience of working migrants and their social structures and cultural context. Traditional psychological approaches tend to define people by focusing on their strengths and their difficulties, developing strategies to support them (Berry, 1997; Erez & Early, 1993; Mak & Nesdale, 2001; Tajfel, 1982). This is known as a deficit framing approach as it focuses primarily on what individual people are lacking and can be improved (Riemer et al., 2020). The community psychology approach addresses the relationship between identifying what are the issues that migrants experience and their agency in relation to the social conditions that create either balanced and egalitarian lives or unjust and inequitable outcomes (Birman & Bray, 2017). Migrant experiences arise from the combination of personal situations and structural issues that often go beyond their knowledge or actions. Most migration scholars concur that migration is highly context-dependent (Scholten et al., 2022). This means that migration outcomes in part rely on the circumstances and configuration of driver environments at the specific time and space in which migration decisions are made (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). As part of a community psychology approach, it is important to examine working migrant experiences in relation to their social context by identifying the political conditions that allow discussions toward the politicising of their human experience.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework is used as a theoretical base to conceptualise human behaviour as always occurring in some contexts that shape how it is expressed. This model provides an understanding of how individuals and their environment interact reciprocally (cited in Birman & Bray, 2017). Contemporary adaptations to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model in research integrating attachment theory, black youth developments and anti-racist perspectives (Stern et al., 2022) can be useful to illustrate the validity and the variety of contexts in which this model can be utilised, including this study.

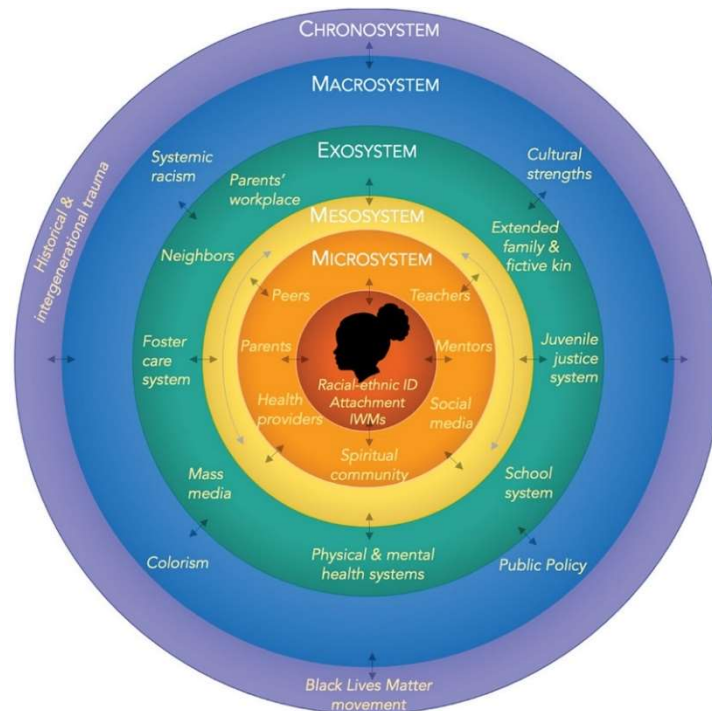


Figure 1. Adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (Stern et al., 2022)

The ecological framework identifies different systems moving from smaller and close to the individual, to larger and more complex social systems, which helps to frame problems and solutions at multiple levels of analysis. This model allows for identifying environmental qualities that have positive or negative impacts on communities and allows for conceptualizing and assessing human environments (Riemer et al., 2020). Overall, the experiences of migrants are influenced by more than one macrosystem, and more than one microsystem, so the ecological perspective provides a more detailed systemic perspective on human experiences (Trickett, 1996).

People often migrate to a new country with the aspirations of better living circumstances, and gaining access to opportunities and resources, hence improving their well-being (Paloma et al., 2016). However, the migratory experiences also typically entail losses of social capital, networks, and bonds (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Robins, 2019; Roy et al., 2021). A community psychology theoretical perspective, and in particular an ecological approach allows us to consider the issues of socio-political dynamics, and power relations in the settlement process (Birman & Bray, 2017). For example, working migrants are a population that has been defined as vulnerable, especially in the early stages of settlement (Yuan et al., 2014). Special attention is given to employment relationships for temporary workers when they are tied to a single employer and depend on them to apply for further visas or to legally stay in the country. More settled migrants might have overcome this stage of vulnerability; however, they still face challenges related to the migration journey, such as

ethnicity, citizenship rights, discrimination, loss of social capital, lack of work experience in New Zealand and access to meaningful jobs that match their skills and knowledge (Roy et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2014).

### **Settlement-acculturation**

In a general sense to be able to appreciate migrant experiences, it is necessary to understand the individual process of adapting to a new culture, but also the social context in which this process happens (Birman & Bray, 2017). Most psychological research utilises the concept of acculturation, which is defined as the process in which individuals become involved in the culture of the new society often assimilating, integrating, separating or marginalizing from the host community (Berry, 2001; Hodgetts et al., 2020). The acculturation model focuses on individual traits resulting in classifying people into types and characterising more positive ways of acculturation and viewing some strategies as more negative (Birman & Bray, 2017). However, many scholars adopting an ecological approach sustain that migrants adapt in a diversity of ways, and there is no best acculturative style independent of context. In conjunction with the acculturation process, the way in which society responds to newcomers needs to be accounted for (Paloma et al., 2016). In that regard, different factors influence the context of reception such as the economic and political conditions, labour market, immigration policies, discrimination, the existing immigrant communities and their size, and concerns about international threats/terrorism, among others. The common assumption that migrants who belong to non-dominant groups are able to choose a strategy to adapt, may be misleading, as their contexts shape their actions (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). Analysing the interplay between individual and social aspects together may bring a more representative understanding of the processes and migrant experiences in their settlement.

Birman and Bray (2016) argue that there are many ways to become members of the new society. Some migrants may assimilate, such as some refugees escaping persecution. Other migrants may pursue selective assimilation, only participating economically in the new country. Some migrants may maintain their ethnic community (separation) if they do not feel welcomed. And others might be able to integrate in a diversity of social spaces more successfully. Acculturation is open to continuous engagement and negotiations of different social representations and identity positions (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). Therefore, in analysing any strategy adopted, is important to note that there are no individual responsibilities or successes without attention to the context in which they unfold.

Community psychology considers the existence of a variety of approaches to immigrant acculturation. From an ecological perspective, the adjustment is intertwined within the context. A

critical view of acculturation addresses some oppressive conditions of the context and asymmetrical relations of power, inequalities and injustices dealt with by many migrants which may minimise the effect of some individual process of adaptation (Paloma et al., 2016). At the same time, consistent with the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's framework (1977), and different domains of human life, it is possible that some migrants could be well-adjusted in some domains, like in their family, but less well-adjusted in others, like work or school (Birman & Bray, 2017). The ecological framework understands the different sources of influence, having the exo and macro system levels filter through the meso and microsystems to shape the immigration experiences. As a result of having varied levels of analysis, more accurate conclusions about acculturation and settlement can be derived from context-specific data.

### **Social Justice, empowerment and respect for diversity**

Contemporary psychological science and psychological theories of culture, identity and human development have been found to be intrinsically linked with colonialism and Eurocentric assumptions (Bhatia, 2020). Community psychology, in contrast, takes a critical approach to traditional individualised psychological perspectives, and demonstrates an explicit awareness of certain values more aligned with addressing issues of injustice, inequalities and oppression (Riemer et al., 2020). Mainstream psychology, on the other hand, tends to overemphasize Western values and cultural assumptions such as individuality and rationality, disregarding unique cultural contexts, history and politics (Bhatia, 2020). Recognising the limitations of mainstream psychology can facilitate making this discipline more responsive, given that psychology deals with individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds, with different abilities, social positions and resources. By acknowledging these differences, research in mainstream psychology could also be more reflective of individuals as social agents who are part of a complex social system.

The values of social justice, empowerment, and respect for diversity are fundamental to community psychology because they impact how communities are studied, the potential research outcomes, and shared knowledge (Riemer et al., 2020). These values guide the actions of community psychologists while also providing a unique perspective to understand the world and the scale by which the discipline views what is important. Similar to how community psychology is framed above, where values promote justice, equality and wellbeing, the approach to the decolonisation of psychology (Bhatia, 2020) argue that traditional psychological approaches should be disrupted to also include community knowledge, indigenous knowledge and other sources of valid knowledge such as lived experience, art, storytelling and cultural traditions.

Embracing the arguments of community psychology and the decolonisation of psychology, my research draws on the cultural context of my participants, gaining a deeper insight into how working migrants settle and the impacts certain immigration policies can have on them. The values of social justice, diversity and empowerment, championed in the literature and the practice of community psychology, are critical for migrants, particularly for temporary working migrants settling in a new community. These values are embedded in my research design and guide my experience as a practitioner.

Social justice is related to reducing suffering and ensuring that all people's freedom, interests and rights matter (Hodgetts et al., 2020). Social justice involves not just the rights and the benefits of certain groups but also how these are provided and considering the impacts on other groups. Participatory and inclusive processes and equity guide the work towards the end of oppression and injustice, towards contributing to building a just and thriving community (Riemer et al., 2020). As researchers, enhancing theoretical understanding and interpreting social justice through the lens of everyday life and attempting to improve conditions so vulnerable communities may be treated justly, has the potential to enhance communities to flourish (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

As community-engaged researchers, issues of power, empowerment and resilience are part of the strength-based approach often utilised in working with communities (Riemer et al., 2020). Changing power distribution is an essential objective to promote social justice incorporating diversity. For working migrants on temporary visas gaining more control over their lives is a central issue, as their regulatory bond with their employer reduces their rights, control over themselves and their ability to benefit from valuable environmental resources. This research utilises a strength-based approach to highlight different resources participants develop during their settlement but also to address opportunities in the social context to strengthen communities' environments and improve working migrants' outcomes.

At the same time, respect for human diversity is a core value of community psychology, which includes the understanding of discrimination, inclusion, oppression and resistance by diverse groups or communities (Patel et al., 2017). Mainstream or Western psychology often focuses on individualised knowledge and therefore fails to address cultural differences that do not apply to universalistic constructs (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Addressing people's issues in context is part of embracing diversity, and in this regard, case base studies, such as this research, provide an opportunity to understand particular experiences situating social context and individual characteristics of working migrants towards a more ethical and culturally responsive research approach (Patel et al., 2017). Immigration policies in New Zealand can also be more responsive to diversity, increasing Māori involvement and Māori concepts in migration policy. Including indigenous

knowledge in migration policies could improve settlement policies and outcomes for migrants but also for indigenous communities (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a).

Indigenous knowledge and Māori perspectives have remained marginal in national conversations about immigration in New Zealand (Kukutai & Rata, 2017; Wynyard, 2023). Colonialism historically has had a negative impact on Māori communities where for example health and life expectancy outcomes are worse than the rest of the population (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). At the same time, Pākehā New Zealanders live in political, economic and social systems that reflect their culture rather than Māori culture and values (Kukutai & Rata, 2017). A treaty-based model of manaakitanga captures the notion of mutual care and respect for people, honouring one another, and protecting the environment. Manaakitanga is a Māori value that acknowledges the host's responsibility to take care of visitors, including migrants, by showing respect, kindness and hospitality (Kukutai & Rata, 2017).

In a system based on manaakitanga and honouring the principle of partnership, Māori and the Crown could address economic imperatives while ensuring that immigration settings are set for collective benefits for all communities (Wynyard, 2023). Furthermore, according to Kukutai and Rata (2017) a system based on manaakitanga would also add care and respect to how New Zealand looks after new migrants, acknowledge its responsibilities to neighbours across the Pacific Ocean and provide greater recognition of whakapapa relationships, and recognise the shifting needs of international communities including refugees and climate refugees. A manaakitanga treaty-based system would also recognise mana whenua as genuine authorities with not just symbolic rights to self-determination, but with the rights to act as true hosts welcoming migrants into their land (Cassim & Terruhn, 2023). This Māori concept of manaakitanga seems to capture a much broader understanding of rights and responsibilities than a Western notion of human rights and is aligned with the values espoused in community psychology. Adopting a value-based approach as such can complement the productivity and economic objectives of migration and could benefit the many diverse communities that inhabit Aotearoa New Zealand embracing social justice, empowerment and respect for diversity. In the following chapter, a more holistic theoretical approach of working migrants as social agents will be explored, including social aspects of work experiences rather than just labour processes, and including the precariousness of life and factors that can challenge this precariousness, especially for working migrants.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the previous chapter I have provided a number of contextual factors that are relevant to the topic of labour migration in New Zealand and explained how a community psychology approach in my study provides a more contextualised understanding of working migrant experiences, which have enabled me to answer my research questions. This chapter offers a review of the literature, exploring relevant theories, theoretical concepts and arguments that have informed the analysis of the reports of my participants' experiences.

Temporary working migrants living and working in New Zealand are often faced by many opportunities but also difficulties framed by their social context and regulatory constraints. The implementation of a neoliberal model that emphasises market competition and labour flexibility has created a global group of people living in constant instability, also known as the precariat (Standing, 2011). Coupled with additional migration regulatory constraints, the precarious living conditions negatively impact the well-being of these migrant workers. However, research has shown that many of these workers are still able to benefit from employment opportunities and enhance their social capital in the host country.

In this chapter I examine the situations of working migrants in New Zealand who have a more limited range of rights that a citizen does, due to the nature and conditions attached to temporary work visas. I started by examining working migrants who are subject to a precarious migrant status, defined by their lasting temporariness and their immobility within the labour market. To understand the differences in outcomes and experiences of temporary working migrants living in New Zealand, this review also considers the literature which explores the diversity of migrant workers and how such diversity impacts migrant workers' different outcomes. The effects of a precarious migrant status will be explored, highlighting the characteristics of migrant precarious employment, forms of migrant worker exploitation in New Zealand and the New Zealand labour regulations aimed at regulating labour issues.

Often working migrants' main barriers to addressing or reporting exploitative practices are linked to their fear of deportation or loss of working rights, which enhance their precarity (Stringer, 2016; Anderson & Kenner, 2019). However, working migrants often display a variety of resources and mechanisms to challenge their precariousness. Therefore, this review of literature also considers work that has been done to explore protective factors, resources and capacities that migrants develop in challenging situations, which also has been a salient theme that emerged from my conversations with participants in this study. Resources such as resilience and self-efficacy, supportive work environments and (re)creating a sense of home, according to both the literature

and my findings, are linked to strengthening working migrants' social agency given their precarious migrant status, having the potential to change working migrants' situations.

### **New Zealand Immigration policy**

Understanding how the New Zealand immigration system has evolved, what has shaped the design and development and structural changes in the immigration policies along with the economic system, gives a political and social context to the current experiences of working migrants in this study. Since the signing of the Te Titiri o Waitangi in 1840, migration from Europe, mainly from England and Ireland, dominated in the late 19th century (Spoonley, 2015). The source of migrants arriving in New Zealand has changed over time. From 1950 to 1970 a Pacific flow emerged, and since 1980 migration from Asia, especially China and India, has grown, thereby diversifying migration flows (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a; Spoonley, 2015). The number of Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African migrants in New Zealand has also increased since 2018, and at the present time, migrants living in New Zealand are from a wide range of countries. These transformations are mainly attributed to changes in policies that targeted certain types of migrants depending on varied economic needs of the receiving country (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022b).

Recent research on international immigration policy trends over the past decade has demonstrated that non-EU OECD countries have extended migrants' rights and opportunities for social and political integration in areas like labour market, education, political participation, and anti-discrimination (Solano et al., 2023). However, Solano et al. (2023) has also found that certain migrants' rights such long-term residency and family reunification have been restricted. In countries such as New Zealand, immigration and integration policies, such as family reunion and permanent residence, have generally been restricted, affecting migrants' access to legal and long-term settlement and bringing family into the country (Arkilic & Sardelić, 2023; Terruhn, 2023). In other words, immigration policies have focused on promoting temporary migrant working activities and rights, but they have also increased their control over who can access a more permanent integration into the country.

In the late 1980s, New Zealand's immigration policy shifted from prioritising immigrants from specific countries based on race to prioritising those migrants who met specific economic criteria, in order to support the country's economic growth (Spoonley, 2015). At the beginning of the 2000s, a discourse framed by diversity emerged, valuing the productive benefits that accompany multiculturalism (Simon-Kumar, 2019). More recent updates on policy brought by National and Labour governments since 2008, have prioritised promoting entrepreneurs' investor categories,

tightening sponsorship rules, attracting skilled employees tied with a certain level of remuneration, and restricting family reunification to high-income migrants (Terruhn, 2023). When it comes to working migrants, economic viability is often prioritised over integration or shared identity (Simon-Kumar, 2019). High-income migrants are seen as flexible and adaptable individuals who are part of a global consumption culture. Race and ethnicity play a significant role in determining which migrants are desirable, even though it is not explicitly stated in neoliberal migration policies. Low-skilled migrants from Pacific Islands or Global South countries are seen as less desirable compared to high-skilled migrants and investors from emerging economies (Simon-Kumar, 2015).

The New Zealand Migrant Settlement and Integration Strategy (NZMSIS) approved in 2014 was the Labour-led government's approach to supporting migrants to integrate into New Zealand society (Immigration New Zealand, n.d.-c). This strategy focused on individual achievement in areas such as employment, education, English language proficiency, inclusion and sense of belonging to their communities, and health and wellbeing. The strategy also refers to developing welcoming environments and promoting stronger ties with employers. Specific measures are used to ascertain migrants' progress in well-being, including measures of increased enrolments in health services or a personal sense of safety by migrants. In 2023 the strategy was updated including housing as an additional factor contributing to settlement of new migrants. It appears that the objectives of the policy, to support settlement and promote 'inclusive' multiculturalism, are not being implemented extensively (Simon-Kumar, 2019). The widespread adoption of neoliberal ideas such as individualism, human capital theory and free-markets by policy makers means that immigration policies have tended to prioritise economic growth through temporary statuses, which has affected the well-being and settlement of numerous migrant workers (Ruhs, 2003).

### **Working migrants precarity**

A neoliberal model, based on market competitiveness and increasing labour flexibility has transferred risk and insecurity into workers and their families, creating a global 'precariat' group of people living in constant instability (Standing, 2011). The term precarity refers to the situation of uncertainty, instability, dependency, powerless and insufficiency lived by many people, following the gradual dismantling of the welfare state, the changing nature of work and the increased flexibility in the current global economic system (Groot et al., 2017). Standing (2011) refers to the precariat as a neologism that combines precarity with the proletariat, as a class in the making without bargains of security or trust in exchange for subordination. The world's precariat includes a heterogeneous group portrayed as 'denizens', with a large portion being migrants. A denizen is someone that has a

more limited range of rights than a citizen does. Many denizens not only have limited rights but also lack 'the right to have rights', and this has often been applied to migrants who do not have full citizens' rights (Lewis et al., 2015; Standing, 2011).

Precarity is often associated with the 'new' economy and certain groups of workers, whereas the concept also applies to the conditions in which many migrant workers operate while staying in a foreign country (Standing, 2011). It is important to note that the precariat is not solely about financial hardship, but rather a wide range of experiences that can lead to precarious living situations (Paret & Gleeson, 2016). The precariat is a term used to describe a group of people who experience various insecurities, including low or irregular incomes, lack of stable housing, insecure employment status, and a lack of class mobility, among others (Groot et al., 2017). It can also encompass the loss of an occupational pathway or narrative. Nonetheless, not all migrants face precarity. Affluent, super-diverse migrants can be voluntary transients representing a global elite with high potential earnings and valuable assets, often highly qualified, which may not suffer much from insecurity and uncertainty, even though they still face regulatory constraints (Simon-Kumar, 2019). In this regard, immigration policies do more than categorise people based on their intentions and identities; they create status and visa types that can have long-term impacts on where and how migrants work in the labour market (Anderson, 2010). Immigration policies are not simply conditions of entry to the country but also conditions of stay. The nature and conditions attached to temporary work visas are the main characteristics of a **precarious migrant status**, which is a term used to reflect the limited-less-than-full status that migrant workers are subject to (Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Regardless of their skill level or work industry, working migrants face regulatory conditions that limit their ability to participate in the labour market and various economic, social, and educational activities (Goldring & Landolt, 2012).

Many groups of migrants have gained different rights along their migration journey, such as civil, social, political, economic and cultural rights. However, migrants can still be considered denizens if they have limited rights to socio-economic mobility and limited political rights, giving them reduced opportunity to settlement or integrate to the community (Standing, 2011). Many temporary migrants are also not in the trajectory to gain citizens' rights, becoming highly disposable, with no access to state benefits, and with high chances of deportability if they breach their visa status conditions (Arkilic & Sardelić, 2023). In contrast, migrants with residency rights have more rights and freedom to pursue employment opportunities of their choice, however, as denizens, many migrants cannot practice their occupations if their qualifications are not recognised in the new country, restricting their economic and social rights (Standing, 2014b).

The effect of precarious migrant status reflects a more general concern with the precariousness of life, which prevents working migrants from anticipating the future together with moving freely and autonomously in the labour market, which can end up deteriorating social relations beyond employment (Anderson, 2010, Hodgetts et al., 2017). A more detailed analysis of precarious migrant status considers the temporal and spatial aspects of work and migration, reflected in the experiences of working migrants in New Zealand.

### **Temporariness**

Issues of temporariness for working migrants in New Zealand are often regulated by immigration policies that address how long workers can stay in the country, how much they can work and how their temporal status affects their participation in society. Temporal dimensions of migration processes are not solely linear or unidirectional trajectories from temporal to permanent status. As Robertson (2019) states, migrant mobility pathways are more multidirectional, multi-stage and contingent status patterns affecting the temporal experiences of working migrants. According to Wright (2022) migrant temporariness is a form of insecurity not just due to policies that regulate temporary migrant's entry and stay, but also due to the uncertainty and precariousness of their employment and settlement pathways. Policies regulating the temporary stay of migrants regulate options for mobility within the labour market, opportunities for long term residency, and access to public welfare. Employment regulations influence temporary migrant working conditions, the ability of worker organisation, and the possibilities to enhance job security, pay and benefits. Uncertainty often characterises many temporary migrant societal experiences, embedding power imbalances especially in their employment relations (Wright et al., 2022).

Robertson (2019) describes two temporal occurrences often experienced by many migrants which are referred to as *contingent temporality* and *indenture temporality*. Their temporal experiences are linked with contingent temporality, through dependencies and forms of unpredictability that mediates immigration outcomes and life goals (Robertson, 2019). The experience of career or life goals are mediated by experiences of temporal contingencies such as unexpected changes, new challenges and altered aspirations and desires. Many temporary migrants live in a constant state of motion, with an unfinished journey and an uncertain future. Additionally, experiences of indenture temporality represent a sense of being stuck in one place for a specific period of time representing a state of stagnation (Robertson, 2019). Hence, migrant settlement experiences are often lived in the present time, with the suspension of a sense of forward movement at a biographical scale and also in the everyday experience of time.

Temporary migration schemes often result in an unforeseen prolongation of temporary status, where many temporary migrants adjust their expectations to move to a more stable position, leading to a 'bloating' in the system (Ruhs, 2003). To this effect the immigration policies in New Zealand have become more complex, increasing the requirements to apply for residency, making it more difficult for temporary migrants to obtain residency status. By way of illustration, in 2015 Immigration NZ announced changes in the point system to benefit migrants and entrepreneurs who would prefer to settle outside the Auckland region (Lundy, 2015). Then, the New Zealand Residency programme underwent significant changes during 2016/18. The changes included a reduction in the number of residency approvals, the indefinite closure of the family (parent) category, an increase in the number of points required to apply for an expression of interest, and the introduction of a minimum standard of English proficiency for both principal and non-principal applicants (Ministry of Business, 2016; Williams & Mason, 2016) However, as Ruhs (2003) predicted, the amount of people applying to residency in New Zealand each year has increased over the past decade, still producing long queues in the processing system (Fonseka, 2021). Because of this mismatch, many temporary working migrants live and work in perpetual temporary status (Robertson, 2019, Wright et al., 2022).

In contingent temporality, migratory status depends on particular events or conditions, leading working migrants have to constantly deal with multiple outcomes for their future and constantly prepare for unexpected results (Robertson, 2019). Additionally, in a bureaucratic and complex immigration system, the state creates an institutionalised uncertainty for temporary migrants. This is evident when people working in breach of their migrant visa conditions may be denied basic employment rights, even in the case of abusive employers, as they are forbidden from profit/work in irregular or breach of their employment conditions. Enforced temporariness and threat of deportability then leads to a pressure to maximise the present moment and benefited from any current opportunities (Anderson, 2010). Migrant workers experiencing such uncertainty about their future show ambivalence in their strategy, attitude and actions that on the surface appear as contradictory and discordant actions. Nonetheless, when viewed in context such actions are in effect subtle calibrations to adjust to this temporal scenario (Tazreiter, 2019). According to a recent study by Basok & George (2020), the terms of entry for temporary workers can significantly impact their sense of belonging to the receiving community. The power dynamics between employers and temporary workers, who are often treated as disposable, also contribute to a low sense of belonging (Basok & George, 2021). Temporary employment status is a defining characteristic of the precariat, along with low job security and limited control over labour, which is particularly relevant for temporary migrant workers.

## **Labour market immobility**

Immigration policies produce status through establishing categories of entry, regulating employment relations of those migrants who wish to participate in the workforce and by the institutionalisation of uncertainty (Anderson, 2010; Groutsis, 2022). Working migrants in New Zealand are subject to particular working conditions depending on different visa categories listed in Table 1. Many migrants looking to work in New Zealand had a limited access to the labour market, through sponsors which bond the employee with a certain job in a specific location. This imbalanced power relationship can mean that the employers can withdraw their sponsorship or terminate contracts at their discretion, which would have implications for working migrants beyond the workplace (Anderson, 2010). This ability for employers to assert their power aligns with the state's goal of managing migration flows and using migrant workers solely to address domestic labour shortages (Anderson & Kenner, 2019). Sponsored working migrants are not allowed to move freely from one employment to another. If they wish to, they must go through the immigration application system and request a new work visa or a variation of conditions of the previous work visa, which incurs waiting periods, costs and approval requirements (Collins, 2017). To this extent, sponsored working migrants are dependent on the consideration of their employer for their right to remain in New Zealand. For this reason, Anderson (2010) argues that many migrant workers in New Zealand, similarly to the UK working migrant's scenario, can be considered precarious employees because of their limited mobility within the labour market.

Unfree labour relations, which are understood as situations in which workers experience restricted freedom to exercise their work rights, are commonly associated with human trafficking or slavery. Other forms of institutionalised unfreedom still exist even though they can be less severe, such as the sponsored working migrant systems (Breznik, 2023). The sponsorship system of migrants looking to work in a foreign country, has been described as a form of modern slavery, as it ties workers to their employers who sponsor their visas, providing extensive power to employers while imposing a great deal of restrictions on migrants (O'Connell Davidson, 2013). Migrant workers may face unfree labour relations due to their legal status, which restricts their employment opportunities.

Additionally, they may also experience unfree labour relations due to factors such as low pay, lack of employment rights, and debt (Strauss & McGrath, 2017).

A voluntary employment relationship can become unfree labour due to state policies that limit the mobility of migrant workers, the migrants' financial needs to cover living expenses and/or debts and the presence of contractors or middlemen who help migrants find employment but also limit their ability to organise and bargain for better work conditions (Breznik, 2023). Although migrant workers are not legally bound to their employer, because they have the legal right to quit a job, they still

need to comply with immigration regulations, otherwise they would not be able to look for a new employer or stay legally in the country (O'Connell Davidson, 2013). The right to quit their jobs can become meaningless if it means temporary migrants would be forced to return to their country of origin. Immigration regulations and sometimes financial needs work together to create a situation where migrant workers are dependent on their employers for sponsorship, leading to personal dependency and restricted freedom (O'Connell Davidson, 2013). The effect of such migrant worker regulations can be to limit their mobility in the labour market by making them temporally transient and spatially fixed.

### **Precarious Employment**

The term work refers to a much broader and more meaningful concept than the term labour or employment. Work takes many forms, not all of which are rewarded with wages, such as housework, study or volunteering. Labour instead are activities that have an exchange value, when working for someone, in some position of subordination (Standing, 2011, 2014b). Employment is an important component of successful living, as such the impact of under-employment or over-employment is correspondingly relevant. The negative impact of poor working conditions on mental health is a critical concern, developed since the early work of Marie Jahoda (1933, as cited in Hodgetts, et al., 2020). Their work emphasised the importance of social support to cope with broader social and economic contexts. A structural perspective includes the impacts of labour laws, the availability of decent jobs, the reduced support for people with labour issues and the health consequences for people experiencing poor working conditions (Hodgetts et al., 2020). In this sense, temporary working migrants are faced with varied employment factors that can impact their wellbeing, being precarious employment a prominent one.

Precarious employment and unfree labour relations are directly linked through managed migration policies that restrict geographical and labour market mobility of migrants in receiving countries (Strauss & McGrath, 2017). A precarious job is one in which uncertainty, low income, limited social benefits, and statutory entitlements are influenced by the relationship between employment status, labour market insecurity, and social context (Vosko, 2010). Tucker (2002) has developed a framework to analyse employment precariousness in the New Zealand context. This shows that precariousness is a multidimensional concept on a spectrum that can incorporate the (un)certainly of ongoing employment, the degree of employee control or power over employment processes and working arrangements, the level of income in relation to the ability to maintain the wellbeing of

workers and their dependents, access to benefits like sick leave, parental leave or opportunities to further education or training, and the degree of regulatory protections and union representation.

Precarious employment is particularly prevalent in some highly flexible industries such as the construction industry. According to Hurt-Suwan and Mahler (2021) this is due to the project-based and outcome/target-based nature of such industries, which results in an inability of workforce planning. As a result, contractors are relied upon to fill unexpected workforce gaps, which gives employers the flexibility to dispose of employees without any long-term commitments and employment obligations. Precarious employment in such industries can be characterised by low pay, tedious, and repetitive tasks, creating a transient workforce which is due to a business model that prioritises quantity over quality of employment (Hurt-Suwan & Mahler, 2021). Insecure, flexible and precarious work can have a detrimental effect on individuals, dominating people's lives, as they are constantly searching for work, securing it, or waiting for it (Wilson, 2014). Precarious employment could also impact employees' security and relationships with family and communities, as people in insecure work often do not get sick leave or enough annual leave or resources to enjoy leisure activities or even commit to different activities that are not work-related (Wilson, 2014).

Employers have a significant role to play in immigration status negotiations and in negotiating conditions of employment. Nonetheless, a reasonable approach to assessing precariousness can include worker characteristics in addition to employment conditions (Tucker, 2002). To understand migrant workers' experiences Alberti et al. (2013) suggest considering not only the migrant or the worker aspect of a person, but to include the multiple identities and experiences of social and economic inequalities experienced by migrant workers. Migrant workers are a heterogeneous group that can be differentiated by many factors like country of origin, ethnicity, class, income level, skills, migration status, and time in the receiving country (Zhang et al., 2022). While some migrant workers in New Zealand enjoy high incomes and a certain degree of control over their employment processes, they often still face movement restrictions in the labour market and hence must rely on the duration of their employment to receive the right to stay in the country (Collins, 2017). At the same time, Goldring and Landolt (2012) recognised that migrant workers often experience shifts in status or visa categories, and their migration trajectories move in various directions, even from unauthorised status to some more permanent status. Additionally, when temporary work offers no opportunities for career advancements, migrant workers can view employment more opportunistically and instrumentally rather than in a more long-term and meaningful way (Curtis & Lucas, 2001, as cited in Anderson, 2010). This diversity appears to impact how precarious migrant status affects the everyday life of migrant workers and could help to understand the differences in outcomes and experiences of temporary working migrants living in New Zealand.

## **Worker exploitation in New Zealand**

Although worker exploitation in New Zealand is generally not known to be widespread, certain industries such as construction, agriculture, dairy, hospitality, health and information technology (IT) have developed a concerning trend of exploitation towards migrant workers (Anderson & Kenner, 2019). The Immigration Act 2009 (section 352) defines exploitation in several terms. First, as a breach to not pay workers according to the Minimum Wage Act 1983, Holidays Act 2003, and Wages Protection Act 1983. Second, employers who prevent or hinder workers to leave or seek their entitlements. Nonetheless migrant exploitation is a more complex phenomenon that involves different actors and is influenced by a variety of vulnerabilities that migrants often are more exposed to (Stringer, 2016). Exploitation can occur both through certain employment relations and through employers or other witnesses (such as co-workers or the public) turning a blind eye to exploitative practices (Kaloti, 2023). Collins & Stringer (2019), noted that some employers engage in exploitative practices, such as paying their workers below the minimum wage or failing to pay them at all. Employers may also violate employment contracts, requiring employees to work excessively long hours, denying them leave, and refusing to pay holiday pay or taxes. In some cases, the employer can even deduct taxes from the employee's wages that they are responsible for paying themselves.

Recent research on migrant exploitation in New Zealand has determined that employer-sponsored visas are considered one of the main sources of vulnerability that increase the risk of migrant exploitation (Choudry & Hlatshwayo, 2022; Collins & Stringer, 2019). To ensure migrant worker dependence on and acceptance of exploitative working conditions, employers take advantage of the temporary immigration status and often threaten workers to cancel their visas or report migrant workers to authorities, maintaining control over them (Collins & Stringer, 2019). Fear of losing immigration rights is the main source of vulnerability for working migrants. At the same time, employees' vulnerabilities that increase the risk of exploitation in New Zealand include limited English proficiency, temporary migrant status, living in employer-provided housing, bureaucratic delays by Immigration New Zealand, lack of social connections or support networks and insufficient regulation and a lack of oversight of employment practices (Anderson & Kenner, 2019, Basok & George, 2021). The combination of temporariness and labour market immobility reinforces migrants' precarious status and dependency on employers. This means that migrants might feel unable to challenge work-related issues, as their conditions of stay in the country might be put in jeopardy (Anderson, 2010).

## **New Zealand labour regulations**

The reputation of New Zealand as a developed country is often assumed to be associated with a high standard of living, and a well-performing infrastructure aimed to protect its most vulnerable citizens (Lamm et al., 2013). However, changes to institutional frameworks as well as structural changes in the economy have created a rise in insecure work and deterioration of employment conditions in many countries, including New Zealand (New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 2013). Lamm, Rasmussen & Anderson (2013) described the New Zealand state reform changes, employment policies and the Labour Department modifications that have undergone in the past decades, providing a useful context to their labour regulations. At the beginning of the 1980s the New Zealand state through the Department of Labour regulated employment relations and also the economy and social welfare. It also had warranted inspectorate to protect waged workers. The New Zealand government led by the National Party at the beginning of the 1990s embraced the neo-liberal economic theory which led to the shrinking of government departments and significant changes to employment legislation. The Labour policies that were introduced by 1991 with a neoliberal approach have led to a significant increase in the number of workers who have lost their rights and protections. As result, a growing section of New Zealand's labour force now face issues like low wages, exploitation, and job insecurity (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). The Department of Labour underwent major restructuring in 1988 and continued to be restructured for over two decades until it was disestablished in 2012. Its role shifted from enforcement of regulations to a more passive consultant-like role, providing advice through call centre services, often without the necessary staff expertise to effectively undertake their enforcement duties (Lamm et al., 2013). Since the Department of Labour was disestablished and merged into a supra-agency, the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment, there is no longer a single agency responsible for labour issues (Lamm et al., 2013).

In New Zealand, workers, including migrant workers, have a degree of protection through a combination of public policy, monitoring, and enforcement with varying degrees of effectiveness (Anderson & Tipples, 2014). Minimum employment standards are regulated by the Minimum Wage Act 1983, The Holidays Act 2003, the Wages Protection Act 1983, and the Equal Pay Act 1972 (Anderson & Kenner, 2019). Temporary migrant worker exploitation protections are acknowledged in recent legislative amendments, such as the Worker Protection (Migrant and Other Employees) Bill (2022), but labour abuse continues to be a persistent problem for many working migrants (Stringer, 2016). Sanctions and penalties in place at the time of writing did not seem to discourage breaches effectively due to weak supervision mechanisms for investigating all infringements and enforcing

regulations (Zhang et al., 2022). Additionally, the under-resourced labour inspectorate contributes to the problem (Anderson & Kenner, 2019). Enforcement is constrained by budgets and by conflicting priorities between the need for flexible workers to support the economy and migration controls to combat irregular migration (Anderson & Tipples, 2014; Anderson & Kenner, 2019).

Migrant workers with bonded sponsored visas present significant conflicting consequences in accessing justice and approaching the Labour Department, as their right to stay in the country depends on the employer. This is one of the most significant issues in reporting exploitative practices, as fear of deportation or loss of working rights are the main barriers to reporting exploitation (Stringer, 2016; Anderson & Kenner, 2019)

### **Challenging Precariousness**

People often display a variety of resources and mechanisms to overcome obstacles in life. Many working migrants facing precarity, exploitation and hardship can develop protective factors that buffer them from precariousness. Riemer et al. (2020) suggest that protective factors are viewed in mainstream psychology as personal resources that can help people to counteract the negative effect of risk factors and reduce vulnerability. However protective factors can exist at multiple levels of analysis, such as an individual level or a social level (Riemer et al., 2020). In precarious conditions, many working migrants have their agency compromised, affecting for instance, their labour security. A person's agency is their capacity to shape their lives, capitalise on opportunities, or even open up new possibilities for themselves and their families by having the possibility of converting motivations into actions (Triandafyllidou, 2019). Within a similar approach, autonomy and self-determination can be important abilities set out for working migrants to pursue chosen goals in life without excessive frustrations.

It is important to note that protective factors do not prevent issues from happening, moreover they can help to lessen the impact of difficulties or stressful life events, such as precarious employment for working migrants. According to many researchers in the field of community psychology it is important to address social agency, or agency in the human system, together with the availability of environmental resources and opportunities (Riemer et al., 2020). It is believed that better accessibility to public resources gives more possibilities to people of fulfilling personal goals, especially for vulnerable or disadvantaged individuals and their families, increasing their autonomy. Groot et al. (2017) highlight how people's social and emotional wellbeing are interconnected with the land, language, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community. An understanding of the

interconnectedness can also provide sources of resistance, actions, and meaningful work to address the struggles faced by many on the precariat.

### **Resilience and self-efficacy**

Resilience, as the ability to adapt in the face of difficulties, stressors, hardship or trauma, is a strength-based approach often utilised by community psychology to work with communities (Riemer et al., 2020). Resilience is seen as a type of agency or capacity to overcome obstacles but at the same time having the ability to be opening up new possibilities with sometimes looking to changing the context (Triandafyllidou, 2019). Resilience is also related to the ability of people exposed to isolated and disruptive environments to maintain a stable and healthy level of functioning (Schwarz, 2018). Psychological mainstream approaches utilise resilience as an individual strategy that often leaves out the socio-political contexts people live in, such as economic assets, working conditions, or education which also has a main influence in how resilient a person might become (Schwarz, 2018).

Triandafyllidou (2019) has linked migrant resilience with actions that have the potential to change their own situations, and the situation of other migrants. Transforming overall conditions under which many migrants find themselves, is in some cases not possible as restrictions in movement and conditions of stay may limit collective action. For some migrants, such as irregular migrants, their resilience can sit alongside a lack of collective element of action. However, Triandafyllidou (2019) has also noted that migrants can exert different forms of agency to navigate migratory restrictions and negotiate employment conditions such as recuperation (solving individual issues), resilience (changing individual situations and attempting to modify own's circumstances), resistance (actions to disrupt social conditions) or defiance (non-compliance with restrictions, controls or sanctions). Privileging acts of individual agency without intending to modify the overall context could still indirectly shape the context for other people even if it does not transform it entirely (Triandafyllidou, 2019).

An ecological constructionist approach to resilience defines it as the outcome of negotiations between individuals and their environments (Ungar, 2004). The goal of these negotiations is to acquire the resources needed to define oneself as healthy, in conditions that are collectively viewed as adverse (Ungar, 2004). Resilience is defined by the relationship between individuals and the social constructions of wellbeing that shape their interpretation of health status and can enable or undermine the ability of people to respond to adverse circumstances (Hodgetts et al., 2020). This means that is possible that individuals often labelled as 'disordered' can maintain a good mental health and wellbeing. At the same time, it is also possible that deviant behaviours can help some

individuals to experience themselves as resilient (Ungar, 2004). Resilience involves both personal resources and relational and collective resources, such as social support (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

Self-efficacy, similarly to resilience, is seen as an individual mechanism that people display to overcome adversity (Riemer et al., 2020). Beliefs about levels of self-efficacy can vary depending on the cultural context of people. It has been reported that self-efficacy and achievement motivation are rooted in individualistic environments and cultures, hence self-efficacy beliefs are higher in these contexts (Klassen, 2004). The role of cultural dimensions such as individualism, social isolation and lack of social support also have a prominent role of the formation of efficacy beliefs (Klassen, 2004).

### **Supportive employment**

Supportive work environments and job satisfaction are strongly associated with career advancement opportunities, personal achievements, decision-making autonomy, and work recognition (Goh & Lopez, 2016). Nurturing employment relationships can provide a resourceful environment for migrant workers to develop numerous skills, such as career adaptability. Many migrants thrive in their new work environments and this success has been associated to the existence of career adaptability. Career adaptability is an individual resource that enables people to manage work transitions, favouring social integration (Ocampo et al., 2022). Career adaptable individuals are equipped to prepare for diverse future careers, explore different career options and achieve career success, even in the face of certain adversities. This is particularly true when these individuals have access to employment resources and opportunities that enhance their capacities (Ocampo et al., 2022).

However, many migrant workers face pressures to adjust to work environments, especially if the job is highly demanding, or if they undertake employment that underutilise their competencies and qualifications. Sometimes securing economic stability becomes a priority rather than career development (Ocampo et al., 2022). Moreover, career development is not an option for many temporary migrants hindering their commitment and their belonging with what they are doing. Paid employment can have positive effects on people's wellbeing, when work conditions are fair, providing living wages and when workplaces support employees to flourish (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

### **Sense of Home**

It is often assumed that migrant settlement is based on labour outcomes, language proficiency or matching qualifications with new employment opportunities, but sense of home experiences can

also play a key role in migrants' sense of belonging and satisfactory settlement (Philipp & Ho, 2010). The process of relocating from one's hometown to a new place of living can cause a significant shift in a migrant's perception, experiences and understandings of what 'home' means. In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, migrants can maintain varied relations with their country of origin and the new destination. As a result, the traditional dichotomy of 'here' and 'there' might not accurately reflect the lived experiences of migrants (Philipp & Ho, 2010). Reconstructing a sense of home and belonging can be an embodied, situated and relational experience for new arrivals (Cain et al., 2015). This means that affect and the emotion are centrally implicated in the migration journey of people articulated and influenced by different social interactions and environmental contexts. Migrants navigate between their spaces of origin and their new spaces of living, creating a new sense of home, many times where conflicting memories and affections coexist (Cain et al., 2015).

Consideration of the role of food and domestic objects in the (re)construction of sense of home are highlighted in this study. Migrants often utilise simple objects brought from their home countries to evoke positive feelings of familiarity, many time countering feelings of disruption and dislocation of the new place of living (Philipp & Ho, 2010). Additionally, through simple everyday activities such as preparing and eating food, migrants can engage in social interactions, enact belief systems and connect with broader social identities (Graham, 2013). Food practices are strongly interwoven with the creation of culture, identity, memory and place, contributing to the reconstruction of a sense of home (Graham, 2013). The (re) production of familiar food cultures have a key role in the lives of transnational migrants. Food is one of the experiences that can help (re) create home while migrants live abroad and reground lives that have been uprooted (Collins, 2008).

Many times, people can be restricted to have sufficient time to prepare and eat their home-made meals. Increases in everyday time pressures and financial instability often have the effect of further marginalising food experiences and traditions (Graham, 2013). This means that people with greater economic and job stability and less time constraints may have more availability and resources to create food experiences that can strengthen cultural traditions (Graham, 2013).

The review in this chapter has drawn on literature that has examined working migrants' precarious status and the different effects this status could have on their work experiences and their everyday lives. Such studies have attempted to explore the diversity of outcomes and settlement pathways working migrants could have. While there is a variety of circumstances in which working migrant could strengthen their experience, the literature indicates (Anderson, 2010; Anderson & Kenner,

2019; Robertson, 2019; Wright et al., 2022) that there is a definitive influence on the lasting temporariness and the limited labour mobility that working migrants experience given their regulatory constraints. From my review of the literature, it strongly appears that the presence of mechanisms, or strategies such as resilience, nurturing employment or (re)creation of a sense of home developed by working migrants do not prevent issues from happening. It is evident that such strategies, moreover, can help to lessen the impact of difficulties or stressful life events, such as precarious employment for working migrants.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter describes the research design and approach employed to inform my study. In this chapter I will describe how I gathered and analysed stories of working migrants in New Zealand and their migration journeys, using participatory and culturally appropriate methods. I outline the methodological processes undertaken in this research, including an overview of the methodology and philosophical underpinnings, which understand migration process and contexts as socially and politically constructed realities. Contextualised approximations of working migrant experiences provides a more comprehensive framework to understand how the trajectories of migrants are impacted by their own cultures and histories and not viewed as reflecting intrinsic characteristics of all migrants. Next, I justify the methodological approach taken, giving especial attention to the case-based study as well as the relational ethics approach utilised in this qualitative research. The following section provides an overview of the cases, setting the rationale and some background information about each case. Then, I describe the different methods utilised in this research that allowed me to elicit the stories from the participants. Special attention is given to the object-elicitation technique as a more participatory way of conducting research. Ethical considerations, and my positionality as researcher are explained, together with the recruitment and informed consent processes. The following section discusses the analysis of the data and conceptualisations of the interpretative and relational content approaches. The final section discusses some methodological reflections where the approach taken worked well and some lesson learned along the research process.

### **Overview of Methodology and Philosophical Underpinnings**

Migration studies is a broad and diverse research field that covers topics ranging from the economics of migration to studies of race and ethnicity. Over the decades, the field has evolved from a heavy reliance on quantitative data such as census and demographic statistics to a more qualitative cultural approach that focuses more on migrants rather than migration (Scholten et al., 2022). I have used a qualitative approach to understand working migrants' lived experiences in their social, institutional, political, and economic contexts, using a direct and contextualised approach to data collection. The qualitative methodology used in this research is particularly effective in eliciting details, richness, and depth about people's experiences and processes, through an iterative and explorative process that goes beyond descriptive, predictive, or causal approaches (Brinkmann, 2014). Qualitative research is often based on a relativist ontology, recognising that realities are subjective constructions based on subjects' perceptions and meanings (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). It

is assumed that subjects experience reality from their own point of view denoting that on an epistemological level, meaning comes into existence in the interplay with the realities in every subject's world (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

Social constructionism provides the epistemological approach of this research. From this perspective, research approaches should take a critical stance toward the idea that conventional knowledge is founded solely on objective and impartial observations of the world (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism focuses on understanding how people, organisations and structures construct the environment and how at the same time, the environment shapes their perceptions (Moon & Blackman, 2014). The basis of this research is derived from the understanding that the migration policies, environment, narratives, and practices, cannot be viewed as external value-free facts, but as socially and politically constructed realities (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2022). A social constructionist perspective requires the understanding that knowledge about people and their lived experiences are not only culturally and historically dependent, but they are products of that culture and history (Burr, 2015). In this sense, contextualised approximations of working migrant experiences gave me a more comprehensive framework to understand how the trajectories of migrants are impacted by their own cultures and histories and not viewed as reflecting intrinsic characteristics of all migrants.

In addition, phenomenology provides a theoretical perspective to my research and influences the methods chosen, as it is interested in the lived experiences of human beings as a source of consciousness and shared meaning (Patton, 2015). Taking into account this perspective, this research is not focused just on the experiences themselves, but rather on the ways in which migrants experience their migration journey and the meanings these experiences create for them (Spencer et al., 2014). I have used methods that allowed me to capture perceptions, descriptions, feelings, memories, and stories of working migrants' lived experiences settling in the new environment (Patton, 2015). Utilising in-depth interviews with migrants working in New Zealand and object elicitation techniques to symbolised part of their migration journey, provided useful firsthand recollections of their experiences.

### **Methodological approach**

Working migrants are a diverse and heterogenous group within labour migration that could display divergent trajectories, moving from different migrant statuses or types of employment depending on varied circumstances (Zhang et al., 2022). Existing research about labour migration often applies

the high/low-skilled migration dichotomy to characterised working migrants (Oso et al., 2022). For instance, there is a tendency in migration discussions to overlook unskilled middle-class migrants whose qualifications are devalued in the host nation, leaving them out of this classical dichotomy (Hussain, 2018). This research draws on case study methodologies applying a relational ethics perspective, which provides a more detailed portrayal of working migrants' divergent and diverse trajectories, including a more nuanced characterisation of working migrants.

I have taken a case study approach to gain in-depth insights about the settlement experiences of working migrants. A case-based study methodology is a comprehensive description and analysis of a specific subject or situation in their real-life context (Mills & Birks, 2014). Case studies provide subtle distinctions and specific knowledge about migrant trajectories and settlement experiences from participants' perspectives. In this project, less emphasis is placed on finding generalisable knowledge based on statistical frequency or counting themes. Instead, the objective is to facilitate a deep understanding of working migrants' settlement experiences (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). For this research, a case study methodology is suitable since the individual stories and trajectories of migrant workers, which serve as the unit of analysis, cannot be comprehended without considering their context. As part of this approach, I utilised participants' stories to explore how personal and structural factors may affect certain migration paths.

Case studies provide a way of studying social processes that unfold between participants including their different values, expectations, opinions, perceptions, resources, controversies, decisions, and behaviours (Swanborn, 2010). Current critical perspectives of migrant studies highlight the need to broaden general migration or ethnic lenses to include intersectionality between ethnicity and class, citizenship, education, location, and cultural or political disposition (Scholten et al., 2022). Cases in this research brought general common experiences of working migrants settling in New Zealand while at the same time expanding on specific complexities and contradictions of their everyday practices. This allowed for analysing and discussing the relevance of theories and literature while maintaining the connection to participants' everyday lives.

The current study applied relational ethics, which is often used in qualitative community psychology research (Hopner & Liu, 2021). Relational ethics focuses on how and why knowledge is produced, acknowledging the researcher's interpersonal bond with participants, and generating a dialogue where both are implicated in the production of knowledge (Hodgetts et al., 2022). Therefore, relationships were key in the research processes, requiring building trust and rapport and a safe space for participants to share their stories. Case studies are helpful in understanding how relational ethics, researchers, and participants work together in practice. They show how relationships in research can be complex and produce context-dependent knowledge gained through experience,

rather than just theory (Hopner & Liu, 2021). The positionality of the researcher held a crucial impact on research processes and outcomes, as they affected and influenced the access to the field, the relationship with participants, and the lens to draw on findings and conclusions (Berger, 2015). As a migrant researcher having shared experiences with participants and with some experience in collaborating with working migrants provided a useful environment to gain more in-depth stories. Critical reflective practice incorporated in the data analysis included motivations to do this research, selection criteria of cases and topics, and elucidation of possible blind spots as part of the iterative research process.

## **Cases**

New Zealand's immigration system offers a variety of visa types with various categories and eligibility criteria for entry as shown in Table 1. Depending on their visa type and nature, migrants can stay in New Zealand for a certain amount of time and work if they qualify to do so. The purpose of this research was to elicit in-depth settlement experiences of long-term working migrants and to interpret these using an ecological framework. Therefore, participants were working migrants, whose work visas gave them the right to live in the country and to remain there. Considering that migrant visa trajectories entail a diversity of pathways, participants' migrant history included a period of time as temporary workers in New Zealand regardless of their latest visa status. This included having been the main applicant for their Essential Skills or Work to Residence visas, which were the visa categories available for participants on the basis of work. Participant needed to have lived in New Zealand for at least eight years, which defined their long-term migrant status.

### **1. Rafael**

Rafael is a husband and father in his forties, from South America. Before coming to Aotearoa NZ, Rafael worked as an emergency health professional, a career that fulfilled him. Rafael arrived in New Zealand with a Visitor visa, and then transitioned to a Student visa, where he was allowed to study and also work for a maximum of twenty hours per week. Then Rafael was able to find a full-time sponsored job in the construction industry and applied to an Essential Skills visa. Rafael worked in the construction industry while on an Essential Skills visa as a skilled tradesperson and after eight years got granted Residency status through the exceptional 2021 residency scheme.

### **2. Josefina**

Josefina is a middle-class, qualified single woman in her thirties, from South America. Before coming to New Zealand, she was living with her family, had recently graduated, and starting to work as a

graphic designer in her country of origin. Then she applied and travelled to New Zealand with the Working Holiday visa. She obtained her first Essential Skills visa by applying for a manager-in-training role at the same retail company where she had worked during her working holiday visa. Josefina then transitioned to a Partnership visa as she was in a long-term relationship with a New Zealand citizen. She was able to gain Residency through her partnership status.

### 3. Valery

Valery is a woman in her thirties, from South America. Valery is an agricultural professional who specialised in produce quality control in her country of origin. She applied to an Essential Skills Visa from her country of origin to work in a New Zealand farm. After holding two Essential Skills visas in the dairy industry, she got granted a partnership visa with work entitlements. Valery was able to get Residency thanks to the exceptional 2021 residency scheme.

### 4. Jose

Jose is a man in his thirties, from South America. He is a skilled professional in the agricultural industry and had recently graduated before coming to New Zealand. Jose applied for his first Essential Skills visa from his country of origin. He arrived in Aotearoa to begin his first employment on a certain farm. Jose worked in New Zealand solely in the dairy industry, holding various Essential Skills visa seasonally. Jose was able to get Residency thanks to the exceptional 2021 residency scheme.

### 5. Simon

Simon is a young man who came from Central America in his thirties and, travelled to Aotearoa New Zealand to live the working holiday experience, just for one year. He is a qualified IT professional. While on his working holiday visa, he did various hospitality jobs. Then, he applied to an Essential Skills visa as a Chef, twice. After five years he applied and got granted Residency through the points system.

## **Description of Method**

This research used data, where participants had direct opportunities to tell their stories and convey their own interpretations about their migration experiences (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2022). The methods that allowed me to elicit the stories from the participants were two-step semi-structured interviews, utilising object elicitation. The diversity of qualitative methods and having more than one interview were valuable to deepening rapport and expanding beyond the surface of each participant's migrant stories (Chamberlain, 2012). The case-based study approach benefited from

these methods as I could access detailed recollections of working migrants' trajectories while at the same time identifying similar experiences and struggles.

Prior to the initial interview, participants were asked to fill out an immigration historical timeline template (Appendix 1), with the purpose of doing a brief recollection of significant events in their migration journey. This exercise was intended as a brief self-report of general demographic information, a trajectory of visas granted, and occupations. After conducting the first interview, I came to the realisation that it was not necessary for every participant to complete the timeline. The migration trajectory of each participant needed to be shared in conjunction with their personal circumstances and context as working migrants. The timeline template was sent to each participant, yet it was not requested to be filled out prior to the interview. It was just used as a guidance for participants about the topics that were covered in the interview.

An initial semi-structured interview was conducted with five participants about their migration and settlement experiences in New Zealand. Semi-structured interviews are useful in qualitative research for in-depth explorations of individual accounts (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2022). Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via Zoom, depending on the location and convenience of the participants. These interviews used the information gathered from the timeline template as a starting point for conversation and then followed an interview agenda (Appendix 2) that reviewed the topics relevant to this research, allowing the discussion to flow in a way that suited the participants. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility when following the interview agenda allowing the interviewer to adjust the order of topics and wording of questions to achieve a more natural style of conversation (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). The purposes of the semi-structured interviews were to build rapport with participants, reflect on their experiences as working migrants, and explore in depth their settlement processes in New Zealand.

At the end of the first interview, participants were asked if they wished to proceed with a second interview within the following month. If they agreed, participants were invited to bring an object (or objects) to the follow-up interview that represented some aspect of their migration experiences. The object(s) could be anything and the purpose was simply to help tell the story. Object elicitation techniques use visual, verbal, or written stimuli to encourage participants to explore sensitive, controversial, or conceptual topics that are not often discussed in everyday conversations (Barton, 2015). Some suggestions of objects I proposed to participants were: everyday items, gifts, mementos, photos, heirlooms, souvenirs, cultural artifacts, etc. Object elicitation is usually a more participatory way of conducting research that is used to give participants more agency in constructing their stories (Barton, 2015). The use of the objects chosen by participants further

helped me to understand the migration stories from the participant's point of view (Ashton, 2018). I reassured the participants that it was up to them whether they wanted to engage in this deeper and personal way of telling their stories.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with four participants, as one participant declined to proceed with the second interview, and all of them brought a significant object with them. The purpose of the second interview was for the researcher and the participant to explore any further thoughts, questions, and clarification since the previous interview. Doing a biographical recollection of migrants' settlement journey implicated self-reflection, remembering, revisiting, and interpreting experiences. This follow-up interview allowed participants to deepen rapport, explore more in-depth some of the circumstances they thought were relevant to share, give space for them to bring up forgotten events, and continue with the interview agenda (Chamberlain, 2012). The participants were invited to share the significant object and to expand on what the object meant and how it symbolised aspects of their migration experiences. All the participants involved in the follow-up interview provided a picture of the object chosen.

### **Ethical considerations**

This research was guided by the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations, as well as the Psychologists' Code of Ethics (2003). The research activities of this project were granted ethical approval by the ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee of Waikato University prior to any dissemination or contact with any participants.

As a principal researcher, I am aware and informed of the challenges faced by many migrant workers in NZ, so I understood how to approach participants in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner. This research was conducted with cultural awareness and sensitivity toward participants and their cultural differences. Migrant workers are a population that has been defined as vulnerable, especially in the early stages of settlement. Special attention was given to employment relationships for temporary workers when they are tied to a single employer and depend on them to apply for further visas or to legally stay in the country. More settled migrants might have overcome this stage of vulnerability; however, they still face challenges related to the migration journey, ethnicity, citizenship rights, discrimination, loss of social capital, lack of work experience in New Zealand, and constrained access to meaningful jobs that match their skills and knowledge. I also have lived experience with migrant workers through my work experience as a volunteer of the Citizen Advice Bureau running Spanish language clinics and through my work as a facilitator of the Visitor Care

Manaaki Manuhiri programme from the Red Cross NZ. The supervisors on this thesis have migration backgrounds themselves and have researched migration topics previously.

I acknowledge my position as a migrant, cis-gender, heterosexual female who comes from a middle/working-class family in Chile. I am familiar with the experience of language limitations, as English is not my first language, and I was able to provide support to participants with the same experience. As a student who is on a career path to becoming a registered Community Psychologist, I am learning and applying reflexive practices to reflect on my social positioning in the research process.

### **Recruitment and Informed Consent**

The recruitment of participants took place through contacts with community organisations that collaborate with migrant workers and through disseminating a poster (Appendix 3) in social media groups that focus on migrants. Then using a snowball method, I was able to engage with five participants that arrived as working migrants, and have been living in New Zealand for at least eight years and have been the main applicants on their essential skills or work-to-residence visas. A small token of appreciation was offered, recognising each participant's time and generosity to share their experiences for this research.

Once participants expressed their interest in being part of the research, an information sheet (Appendix 4) and consent form (Appendix 5) were emailed to the participants detailing the project and their expected contribution. On arrival at the initial interviews, I checked with them if they had read and understood the information on both sheets. Informed consent was gained through a written consent form given to participants before the commencement of the data collection. Participants received a supermarket voucher at the end of each interview, which was delivered in person when the interview was face-to-face and by post if the interviews were by Zoom.

### **Data analysis**

To analyse data for this research, I employed interpretative and relational content approaches. The interpretative narrative methodology focuses on the biographical details as narrated by the individuals who have experienced them (Mills & Birks, 2014). The methodology relies on using stories as data, which are first-person accounts of experiences shared in narrative form. These stories provide insights into everyday life and serve as autobiographical recollections of human actions and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interpretive narrative inquiry approach

emphasizes inductive processes, contextualised knowledge, and acknowledges the personal and environmental influences of meaning-making (Mills & Birks, 2014). A structural analysis in combination with interpretations of participant experiences required a relational approach to address my research objectives, which focused on the relation between meaning, social interaction and wider social structures. The utilisation of interpretative methods in a relational approach enabled deeper understandings of social meaning and practice, while structural analysis provided connections to social structures, institutions, or policies that influence limitations or opportunities of individuals and communities (Holdo, 2020).

The qualitative data in this research was organised in the analysis chapters to tell the stories of each participant/case. First, initial interviews provided a general approach to topics covered in this research. Then a second round of interviews plus an object elicitation technique provided more in depth, reflective accounts of the participants' experiences. During the data collection I transcribed and translated all interviews which allowed me to identify topics, reflect on the experiences of participants and start making links through similarity on experiences but also differences between participants. Analysis of each interview separately, and then as a whole, allowed the selection of topics that would allow tell the stories of the cases of this study. The analysis chapters follow a general structure where first I provided general context to the participant's experiences, then utilised a quote from the interviews to reflect the topics analysed through the lived experiences of working migrants. Finally, I provided a tentative explanation of the reason why things were happening, linking to literature and theoretical concepts. Analysis was made collaboratively between the principal researcher and the ongoing reviews of both research supervisors, Dr Otilie Stolte and Dr Ritu Parna Roy, which made the analysis of this research more robust and enriched. Participants experiences were linked with some historical events, social context, and relevant regulations to each of the cases. Analysis of immigration policies was used to apply an ecological systems lens to extend the theoretical interpretation.

## **Methodological reflections**

### **What worked well**

Participants were not intentionally targeted to be Spanish speakers, however, due to social media groups that responded to my invitation and my own ethnic background, I ended up doing all of the interviews in Spanish. Enabling participants to express themselves in their native language to tell their stories, facilitated detailed, accurate but also emotional stories of their migration journey. For bilingual migrants using their native language facilitates the ability to remember and describe

experiences in greater detail, as emotional expressions are more spontaneous and less inhibited (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009). Research has shown that in therapeutic contexts bilingual migrants assumed a particular identity in the language they were speaking, as cultural identity is often expressed linguistically in language and word choices, expressions, and intonations (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009). From a place of shared language, it was easier to connect with participants and understand their own slangs and cultural expressions to talk about themselves. Non-English speaker migrants often cope with stressors associated with language and cultural demands from the host society and feelings of inadequacy in expressing themselves in a foreign language (Imberti, 2007). Language was an important topic and participants were also able to share with me their struggles regarding English proficiency and the impact it had on their migration journey.

Asking participants to bring a significant object to the second interview was a participatory means for them to highlight some aspects of their journey in a more subtle way. Often qualitative data collection relies solely on linguistic methods, such as interviews, to access meaning-making; however, such methods often do not fully capture the complexity of human communication, as individuals are multidimensional beings who can utilise various modes of expression (Willig, 2017). At the same time, addressing abstract concepts or conceptual understandings that are rarely discussed in everyday conversations, such as settlement, can be difficult as participants are not used to talk about them easily or have not discussed them before (Barton, 2015). Objects by themselves were not the data this research was after, but the stories, associations and memories that these objects opened up were the most valuable. Objects did not speak for themselves, or give direct access to the participants' inner worlds, the stories emerged in the connection with the objects and reflected deep emotional meanings, symbolising important aspects of each participant's migration journey (Willig, 2017). Objects were diverse and brought new topics into this research, such as recreating home through food practices. Establishing a relationship with participants was essential to the completion of object elicitation activity, as facilitated participants to share objects that were intimate and personal for them. One participant recognised she really wanted to share her object with me and this was an important motivation for her to do the second interview.

### **Lessons learned along the research process**

Initially, the data collection design contemplated the use of an immigration historical timeline template (Appendix 1), with the purpose of collecting general demographic information, a trajectory of visas granted, and occupations held in New Zealand. It was also intended to spark the reflective process on the participants' migration journeys as a way of preparation for the initial interview. In

the initial interview, the first participant did not have time to complete the template, however during the conversation we were able to address their migration journey successfully. Often in qualitative constructivist research designs, neither the researchers nor the participants know exactly how personal interviews will unfold (Ponterotto, 2010). I realised that discussing the migration trajectory of each participant alongside their personal circumstances and context as working migrants was more meaningful and relevant to this research than just collecting a list of visa statuses and occupations. The interview agenda was a dialectic process that followed a different direction based on each participant's experiences and the ability of the researcher to guide the interview. Thus, it can be difficult to prepare participants fully for what will take place or what will ultimately be discussed during the interviews (Ponterotto, 2010). Part of working creatively, critically, and reflexively means carefully considering and justifying the data collection methods chosen, and rejecting some methods is also part of this process (Chamberlain, 2012). I revised my approach as a researcher, trying to encourage participants to come prepared with material for the interview, and instead of sticking strictly to the initial plan I was able to modify the data collection process. The participants showed they did not need prior preparation to be able to share detailed and reflective stories about their migration journey. I linked the template to the desired outcomes of this research, modifying its use.

As a principal researcher, interviewer and transcriber, translation of transcripts was a challenge. Translation of transcripts is an iterative process that needs to consider variations in the meaning of words based on regional differences, and contextual meanings to obtain the best possible accurate translation (Lopez et al., 2008). When you are translating from Spanish to English, sometimes there is no exact correlation of words that can be used to translate a sentence or idea. As Lopez et al. (2008) noted translators often interpret participant responses rather than just translating them, which may lead to more appropriate meanings replacing the initial translations. The interpretation of transcripts was a process that was evolving and refining every time I read over again each narrative. The final transcription and each translation were sent to each participant and I did not get any feedback or corrections from them. Interviewing in Spanish was useful as communication was easy and stories were deep and meaningful. However, translating posed a challenge in selecting the most representative words to reflect what the participant was trying to explain. For example, *impotente* in English translates as *impotent*, but it is better represented by *powerless*. My main concern was ensuring the accuracy and meaningfulness of the data collected. I realised that translating was a complex process that required multiple revisions to make transcripts readable and accurate in the English language. I would recommend that future researchers consider the advantages of interviewing participants in their native language but also consider the commitment

to accuracy requires considerable time and effort to translate transcripts from one language to another.

People nowadays are more familiarised and used to online, face to face platforms for conversations such as Zoom. The use of new technologies opens up discussions regarding the importance or not of face-to-face traditional ways of conducting research. Pandemic and post-pandemic ways of interacting provided new methodologies to learning, such as online classes, and new ways of distance-working from home. As a result, I did not perceive a lack of closeness with my participants due to not being physically face to face. My experience as principal researcher suggests that using new technologies could be an advantageous way of conducting future research as it provides greater flexibility, minimum resources and good accessibility. Recruitment using new technologies, such as social media platforms and online groups was also useful in this research. The flexibility that online applications provided, such as Zoom, made possible to interview participants from outside the Waikato area, with flexible and last-minute changes on the schedule, at late hours of the day, and even when participants were overseas by the second interview.

The findings of this research are presented in the following chapters. Chapter Four examines working migrants' experiences in the workplace, discussing limitations in the labour market experience by participants, due to the precarious migrant status. Positive and constructive work relationships are also examined. Chapter Five examines working migrants' experiences as social agents, beyond workplace experiences, settlement experiences and resources developed by working migrants to find a greater sense of meaning in their migration journey.

## Chapter Four: Migrants as Workers

In the previous chapters I have shown that temporary work visas often result in precarious working migrant status due to regulatory conditions of entry and stay, influenced by limited employment relations and institutionalised uncertainty (Anderson, 2010; Terruhn & Cassim, 2023). This precarious migrant status is defined by a restricted movement in the labour market and the creation of a long-lasting uncertain temporal status for many working migrants (Goldring & Landolt, 2011). Immigration policies have increasingly relied on use-and-discard logic of low-wage migrant workers and perpetual conditionality and restrictions for permanent settlement (Terruhn & Cassim, 2023). In this chapter I present my analysis of my participants' stories of their experiences in the labour market in Aotearoa, highlighting experiences of employment precarity and exploitation but also experiences of employment satisfaction and personal growth.

A number of participants in this research were directly impacted by their precarious working migrant status, evident in their accounts of difficulties and limitations to improve conditions of employment, to avoid conditions of exploitation, and to engage with regulators about complaints. Not all participants were affected by their precarious migrant status. Participants with constructive work relationships were able to enjoy career development and strengthen social relationships. However, these participants were still constricted by the limited scope for movement in the labour market and were still inclined to pursue different visa and/or residency pathways to gain more autonomy.

### **The precarity of working migrants**

The precarious situations that many migrants find themselves in was a salient theme in my conversations with the participants in this study. As described in chapter three, participants in this thesis were working migrants who were granted a temporary visa and working rights contingent on having a job in Aotearoa New Zealand. The New Zealand Productivity Commission (2022a), reported that temporary working migrants are more likely to find employment in industries requiring flexible, low-wage, and often seasonal workforces such as agriculture, horticulture, fishing, construction, food and accommodation services, administration, and retail trade industries. Participants' work experiences reflected in this thesis were predominantly circumscribed in the industries mentioned above. The temporary migrant workers in this thesis were also more likely to engage in precarious, non-standard jobs. Precarious employment according to Vosko (2010), is characterised by atypical employment contracts, job insecurity, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements. Similarly, non-standard jobs typically entail irregular hours, including casual, part-time, seasonal, temporary, on-call work, self-employment, or any combination of those, including jobs in

the black market (Whatman, 1994). Tucker (2002) also includes contractors within the self-employment category, relevant to these results as the construction industry is where some working migrants are prominent. Precarious non-standard employment is influenced by tendencies in late capitalism where employers use subcontracting and other strategies, like restricted work immigration policies, to reduce labour costs, drive down wages and keep the labour market functioning in a 'sustainable' manner for big industries and business owners (Vosko, 2010).

Employment relationships for many working migrants are affected by a dependency on a third party for residency or employment rights, creating a power imbalance between the employer and the employee (Goldring & Landolt, 2011). The employer determines how long a worker is going to be able to stay in a specific employment position and this determines how long a working migrant can stay in the country. As a result, employment rights and social rights for many working migrants have been largely lost (Anderson, 2010). This is evident with one participant, Rafael who worked in the construction industry while on an Essential Skills visa as a skilled tradesperson, and he shared his thoughts on his experience of being tied with single-employer visas.

*When you have a work visa you belong to that employer, they are the one who keeps you here (...) Belonging to someone feels like being a slave, that is the feeling. That you are that person's slave, because you do not have the flexibility. Although yes, one can do a variation of conditions of your visa, but it is a process that, apart from that, is expensive (...) It is not nice to feel like a slave, because you belong to that person. They can tell you at any moment "you are not needed anymore, and you have to leave this company". And they don't give you much time to look for another job, and if you don't find one, bye. I mean, it was nice to meet you... [you have to leave the country]*

Rafael here talks about feeling 'like being a slave', which may reflect his experience of being spatially fixed, temporally transient, and unfree to move in the labour market. As argued by O'Connell Davidson (2013), the emergence of 'modern-day slavery' is an outcome of particular immigration policies that are designed to fulfil business demands for low-paid, flexible and compliant workers. This aspect is most apparent when labour shortages occur within jobs that are unappealing to citizen workers. Migrant workers tend to be favoured for such unappealing jobs because they will often endure exploitative employment in the hope of someday being able to progress toward residency (Standing, 2011). Yet the number of residency visas is much lower than the number of applicants,

which therefore advantages migrants who have higher qualifications and greater wealth (Terruhn, 2023). Consequently, low-paid migrant workers risk ending up trapped in poor-quality jobs and visa uncertainty. Although these migrant workers do receive a (low) wage, their lack of agency and rights suggests new forms of servitude. O’Connell Davidson (2013) also explains that in this context working migrants retain their right to leave unwanted employment, however, they are not allowed to remain legally in the country if they do not find another bond sponsorship, defining their feeling of enslavement. Being unable to leave a job due to the threat of then needing to leave the country is another fear reported by Rafael.

Working conditions for temporary migrants in the construction industry are known for their short-term contracts, informal employment practices, complex sub-contracting chains, demanding work hours, risk of unemployment and other insecurities inherent to the precarious migrant status (Searle, McLeod, & Ellen-Eliza, 2015). The construction industry relies on migrant labour during high-demand periods as a way of enabling flexibility and growth, which results in an unpredictable and rapidly changing workforce (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). These work conditions generally leave working migrants more likely to be subjected to work exploitation (Stringer, 2016). Rafael’s accounts of his work experience in this industry reflect the flexible and irregular work practices described above. He started working as a skilled tradesperson for a foreign employer, which paid him by task instead of the contractually agreed hourly rate. Then Rafael managed to apply for a variation of employment conditions, and he moved to a different company doing the same job. Here, like his previous employment, he was on paper getting paid by the hour but in reality, he was being paid by task.

*between staying with one foreigner [employer], who was a scoundrel, and this other one who was also a scoundrel, but at least he was from my same country of origin. I could talk to him and he was offering me a good job, and I moved with him. Big mistake (...) it was, more or less, a similar theme, by production [being paid by task].*

This second company was subcontracted to do construction work on a hotel. Rafael was more inclined to work for them as he assumed that sharing the same language would be beneficial in order to overcome language barriers faced by many workers. According to Collins and Stringer (2019), many employers can use their cultural and linguistic familiarity to establish more trusting relationships, based on seeming more friendly and promises of reciprocity. However, it is the link

between low-wage business models, restrictive immigration settings and cultural/linguistic familiarity that can make working migrants more vulnerable to exploitation, rather than just a particular predisposition solely based on foreign ethnicity. The managers at the hotel then offered Rafael to work with them directly and he started to get paid by the hour, as per his contract. Rafael shared that all of these employers threatened to fire working migrants if they were not sufficiently productive. As a consequence, Rafael worked long hours, sometimes six or seven days a week. The job was very mechanical, which allowed Rafael to quickly learn what to do and become more productive and thus avoid being fired. Nonetheless, after some years under these working conditions, Rafael was injured due to overload, and from repetitive exercise. Only because he had gained his residency entitlement, was Rafael able to quit from a job that was harming his health and switch to a different industry.

The dairy farm industry also increasingly relies on migrants to supply a 'motivated' labour workforce. The industry is composed of large-scale corporate farms as well as many family-owned and small-scale farms (Tipples et al., 2012). Both the Essential Skills policy and Work to Residence policy, tied to single employer visas, did not allow migrant workers to change all conditions of their employment without applying to Immigration New Zealand (INZ) for a new work visa (Immigration New Zealand, n.d.-a). Working migrants on these two visa categories were allowed to apply for a variation of conditions of their visas and modify only one of the following: their job, employer or location of work.

If a working migrant was employed as a dairy cattle farmer on a certain farm in the Waikato area, to be able to change employment conditions without losing their work entitlements, they were entitled to modify only one of the three conditions listed above. If a migrant farm worker wanted to change the type of job they were doing, they then would still have to keep working for the same company and in the same location. The other alternative was to keep doing the same job (dairy cattle farmer), in the same area, but apply to change employers. If a working migrant decided to change job title AND employer or employer AND location then they needed to apply for a new Essentials Skills visa or Work to residence visa and go through the application process again.

With the introduction of the Accredited Employer Work Visa system in 2022, which replaced the Essential Skills and Work to Residency visas described above, 'variation of conditions' has now been replaced by 'job change' applications to change employment conditions. This 'job change' category is less restrictive in terms of employment requirements as allows workers to change employer, job title, location, or a combination of all these, allowing them to apply for three modifications at once. However, the Accredited Employer Work Visa system imposes wage thresholds, does not allow migrant workers to spend more than five years in the country and employment is also still subjected

to job check approvals from INZ, maintaining restrictive regulations for working migrants. The participants in this study were restricted by previous Essential Skills and Work to Residency visa regulations, which restricted their employment mobility.

The work experience of another participant, Jose, was solely on dairy farms. He is a skilled professional in the agricultural industry and has been focus on his career. He liked working with ruminants and he enjoyed what he was doing and learning on the farm. Jose rotated seasonally through different farms, simply out of interest, having to apply for an Essential Skills visa every time. Jose shared why he has rotated seasonally and how it has been for him to find new farms to work every season:

*To move to a second contract, I have to look for another job, find another sponsor and apply and that's it (...) mostly to look for a change. Being on a farm for a while it becomes monotonous. I move to refresh (...) I do what I have to do for a season, I commit myself, and then I move*

A large number of dairy farms in Aotearoa are small to medium businesses with only a small number of staff, role options and work locations (Tipples et al., 2012). Potential options to move around within the same company and same location are less workable for farm workers of small to medium businesses compared to options in larger companies that have greater levels of vertical or horizontal integration. This hinders working migrants' options to move within the labour market given the restrictions imposed by immigration policies and the characteristics of this particular industry. Opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge have been defined as a key factor in retaining working migrants in the dairy industry (Poulter & Sayers, 2015), which in Jose's case was a relevant factor towards working in the same industry for several years, but changing employers seasonally. It has been relatively easy for Jose to find employment offers from different farms due to the high demand for farmworkers, his recognised qualification in the agricultural field, and the accumulation of work experience in New Zealand. In this sense, Jose met all immigration requirements for applying for new Essential Skills visas and he reported accordingly that the process of reapplying has gone smoothly for him. Farm working conditions for migrant workers are often fixed yearly seasonal contracts accompanied by labour-intensive tasks, with rosters requiring twelve days of work followed by two days off (Tipples et al., 2012). Jose reported that he has been able to improve his working conditions every time he changes employers, finding better-managed farms, more manageable rosters, and more generous payment agreements.

Hospitality is another area in which temporary migrant workers often find employment opportunities. This industry is often highly flexible, low-paid, and labour-intensive (Searle, McLeod, & Stichbury, 2015). Simon, another participant in this study, had a background in IT, however, while on his working holiday visa, he did various hospitality jobs. At some point, he started working in a kitchen and that restaurant offered to extend his employment and Simon applied for an Essential Skills visa as a Chef. Simon worked there on a sponsored visa for two years. Then he went to a different restaurant for another two years. Both experiences were fun and Simon enjoyed his time there, even though he described that working in hospitality as a Chef was physically demanding and exhausting. Generally, chefs have demanding work, as it requires working long hours, with very few days off, and working at times when other people are socialising. Simon shared his experience of being in the hospitality industry and being bound to work for one specific employer, doing a specific position, in a particular location.

*Yes, a thousand times [I faced work difficulties, and felt like quitting but I couldn't]. Who likes to stay at the same job all the time? There were times when I wanted to learn different things, and like in my case, I did this job honestly only because I liked to cook. There was a point when it was no longer so difficult to learn [the way a restaurant works], and I wanted to learn other types of cuisine. Or simply if someone offered me other opportunities, I wanted to be able to move around and learn other different things. And I couldn't without having to apply with all the paperwork.*

At some point, the conditions of Simon's chef job became too limiting for him because he wanted to improve his cooking skills. He felt stuck doing a repetitive job, which meant that he was not able to build his career or grow, known as a main factor of working migrant attrition (Poulter & Sayers, 2015). He also aimed to have the ability to accept better job offers from other employers in different industries. However, going through the application processes for a new Essentials Skills visa is time-consuming, expensive and the waiting times are uncertain (Collins, 2017). Simon shares that during his time on Essential Skills visas, he was not able to work where he wanted, nor on his own terms. This means that he could not change restaurants easily, modify anything he did not like about any job, or change careers. Unlike Jose, Simon previously had a career in a different field. Simon could not say that he was not going to put up with some unfair or exhausting working conditions and simply leave. Further, it is also problematic for working migrants on bound employers' visas who

intend to change their employments and apply for another visa, because they face layers of paperwork, dealing with agents who assist with the process, and medical, police, and qualification checks. This process can take a considerable amount of time, and there is limited scope for action if applications do not go as expected (Collins, 2017). To avoid such bureaucratic hurdles, uncertainty, and fear of being left without an income, many working migrants appear to decide to stay in unwanted employment even though it may not be that beneficial for them anymore. In addition, Simon reported that due to his precarious migrant status, he probably got paid less than his non-migrant coworkers in similar positions. This wage disparity arises because non-migrant co-workers have more options to leave compared with temporary migrant employees, which Simon viewed as a form of migrant worker abuse.

### **Exploitation of temporary migrant workers**

A report sponsored by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment about temporary migrant worker exploitation in New Zealand (Collins & Stringer, 2019), showed that certain groups of working migrants with specific circumstances and in certain contexts are more vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace than most non-migrant workers. Workers who are not native English speakers and have low proficiency in the language, those who are employed in low or unskilled jobs, coming from low-income countries and are dependent on a steady income to sustain themselves, as well as migrant workers who are less aware of the employment laws in New Zealand and their legal entitlements, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation (Collins & Stringer, 2019; Stringer, 2016). However, such characteristics of working migrants are not the only contributing factors associated with work exploitation. Vulnerabilities in employment for working migrants mainly arise because of the sponsorship requirement that often results in employers exerting control mechanisms that they do not have over permanent citizens (Ruhs, 2003). Workplace exploitation is also linked to certain industries where exploitation was most commonly reported, such as construction, dairy, hospitality and horticulture industries (Stringer, 2016). Forms of exploitation and exacerbating factors relevant to the experiences of working migrants in this research were wage abuse or underpayment of wages, excessive working days or hours, lack of systems in place to monitor working conditions and support employees, and workplace living accommodation provided by employers which made any complaints about the employers more difficult and stressful.

Rafael transitioned from a student visa, where he was allowed to study and also work for a maximum of twenty hours per week, to an Essential Skills visa since he was able to find a full-time sponsored job in the construction industry. Rafael shared his experience with his foreign national

employer and explained the abusive wage arrangement he was forced to accept to gain employment rights that at the same time would allow himself and his family to gain other social rights.

*I said it was like selling your soul to the devil, that's how I felt, and I started working with this foreign employer, he gave me the work visa, but he had a trick for me, where he told me, "every week I'm going to pay you the minimum that immigration demands, but you are not going to work by the hour" (...) I worked by production, that is, if I produce, I earn. If I don't produce, I don't earn. And in a period where one is learning this job, it wasn't much. (...) So he paid me approximately \$570 NZD [per week], but if I didn't make that money, I would be in debt. That is, the moments that I managed to make more money, he would take that money. And there would always be in my account what I was asked for immigration NZ, which was \$570 dollars. That was always in my account, but it was not what I earned. I always got less money, that is, I was always owing him. And the times I earned more, he paid himself from that and he was always obviously going to make a profit...*

There are a considerable number of employment regulations in New Zealand, especially compared to other less robust jurisdictions around the world (Anderson & Tipples, 2014). Employers are supposed to operate in accordance with employment regulations, however, Rafael shared an experience he had with an employer who has found a way to work-around employment regulations and appears to know how to circumvent detection by authorities. Rafael has frequently both heard of and experienced work practices where employees are paid informally or not paid according to the agreed terms. Many employers in the construction industry seem to be able to modify working arrangements for working migrants due to minimal monitoring of how regulations are actually operating in practice (Searle, McLeod, & Ellen-Eliza, 2015). Worker exploitation can still occur if there is too little policing of those employers who find unscrupulous solutions that are barely legal.

At the same time, employers can go undetected by authorities, because migrants like Rafael are unlikely to lodge a complaint against their employers. The right to quit a job becomes meaningless to those working migrants relying on their jobs to gain the right to stay in the country and/or gain basic rights (O'Connell Davidson, 2013). Further, if working migrants become indebted to their employers due to these irregular arrangements, they lose even more power in the employment relationship, and working migrants become more entrapped. Immigration regulations loopholes and worker debt

can be used by opportunistic employers to exert control over and profit from migrant workers on temporary visas. These factors work together to prevent migrant workers from leaving their jobs, forcing them into personal dependence on the employers who sponsor them (O'Connell Davidson, 2013). Recognising the limitations of regulation, monitoring and enforcement highlights the issues of power imbalances that exist at the present between migrant workers and their employers (Anderson & Tipples, 2014). Employment regulations appear to be insufficient to protect migrant workers in situations where they have little or no power. Establishing greater worker protections, improving incomes, and strengthening union campaigns and bargaining to support workers can be utilised to improve work precariousness, insecurity and exploitation (New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 2013).

Employers who rely on low-wage migrant workers to maintain their business model often benefit from exploitative employment conditions. These workers may be hesitant to report such irregularities due to their vulnerable status. However, some migrants may see exploitative employment still as an opportunity to extend their rights to their families. Rafael explained the benefits he obtained from accepting and enduring his exploitative work arrangement:

*I could give her [his wife] the partnership visa [with work entitlements], and the student visa for my daughter, because my work visa was for more than two years*

Migrants who gained Essential Skills visas for two years or more were entitled to extend work, health and educational rights to the worker's families (Immigration New Zealand, n.d.-b). In Rafael's case, he was able to apply for a partnership visa for his wife and a student visa for his daughter for the length of the duration of his visa. This option significantly improved their living options, as their daughter started attending a publicly funded school full time and his wife started working, bringing in a second income to the household.

Rafael's objects of reflection bring to the analysis the importance of his role as a husband and father. Sustaining employment was crucial for him and further explains how providing for his family became a key factor in enduring exploitative conditions. Rafael objects and comments are below:



Picture 1. Painting



Picture 2. Drawings

*[Picture 1] This is a painting that my wife and my daughter did. It is the hand of my wife and my daughter before I left Chile. My family was the reason [to migrate to NZ], and mainly to give our daughter a better future (...) I put aside what is my priority and I put the family priority first and what we want as a family to move. Because I loved everything that I experienced [in his previous occupation], but this for me [pointing to the painting] is more important. Despite the fact that I was working here [in NZ] for 8 years on something that is not my thing.*

*[Picture 2] These are some little drawings that my daughter made for me. It was one of the first times she started to write. Because she arrived without writing either Spanish or English, and she learned to write here in New Zealand. Here was her education. So, they are her drawings that she made for me and they were her first words that she wrote to me in English.*

The painting and drawings are touching images representing Rafael's priorities and what gave meaning to their migration journey. Work requires hands, but so does holding our loved ones. Their daughter used her hands to show Rafael how much she loved him and how much she had learned in school. Through the painting Rafael felt supported by his family and the painting was a reminder for why he was doing what he was doing. Rafael seemed knowledgeable about his rights and options and how he was being exploited, indicating that he was not simply a helpless victim. He demonstrated agency by being deliberate in what he would endure to reach particular goals. Rafael's resilience and agency helped him to overcome obstacles and take a longer-term view in

order to create new possibilities for his family, while looking to change their context in the future (Triandafyllidou, 2019). Rafael's selfless acts and his willingness to sacrifice his own needs for his loved ones are in aid of a longer-term goal to improve the well-being of his family.

Let us now consider Jose's work experiences, which had been solely on dairy farms. Jose applied for his first Essential Skills visa from his country of origin. He arrived in Aotearoa to begin his first employment on a certain farm. Jose shared some of his unexpected working conditions at the beginning of his employment reflecting some abusive employment practices:

*And when I got here, to my surprise the roster was eighteen on three off (...) eighteen days of continuous work, three days of rest (...) I have already evolved and experience has helped me to find better calving seasons, because with that rhythm, who lives like that? I don't have the slightest idea, but that's not life (...) but at the beginning, there were things that I had to accept*

The New Zealand dairy industry is known for its hazardous working conditions and high rates of work-related injuries and illnesses (Tipples et al., 2012). Workers with intensive job schedules, who worked more than 12 hours a day and workers who worked for more than five consecutive days without a break are linked to higher risk of workplace injuries (Dembe et al., 2005). Employment conditions on farms are recognised to be over-exploitative, not respecting the working hours established, often reaching a minimum of twelve hours of work per day, even though a balanced and productive work time has been estimated by DairyNZ and Federated Farmers of New Zealand to be no more than ten hours per day (Stringer, 2016). For Jose, his lack of information about minimum employment rights and lack of previous New Zealand work experience was a factor contributing to his acceptance of that exploitative employment for at least one season. Such a lack of information is a factor recognised as contributing to migrant exploitation (Boocock et al., 2016; Tipples et al., 2012). As Jose states, the following season he was able to apply to a different farm and improve his working conditions, mainly because he had a recognised relevant qualification and had gained relevant experience in the industry. In his case, the fact that he was new to the country, unaware of usual work practices, he liked his career choice, and he felt he was learning meant that he tolerated that schedule. However, these unsafe working conditions were also facilitated, again, by the lack of monitoring of employment conditions by authorities (Anderson & Tipples, 2014; Anderson & Kenner, 2019).

Some participants state that agencies such as Employment NZ, or a Labour Inspectorate are not visible in New Zealand, and that there is no agency which appears to offer workplace support compared to what they experienced in their home countries. In New Zealand, Rafael suggested that workplace negotiations were much more casual and relaxed. Rafael, who was working in the construction industry, shared his experience trying to resolve work issues through mediation.

*We are vulnerable because somewhat we are by ourselves here, in terms of labour support from an institution. It is not like in my country of origin, where we had the labour inspection (...) they investigate and they penalise employers. But here everything is so "friendly", [there is an expectation to act] in good faith. They tell you, first settle among yourselves, and talk, here things are very much to talk about the issues, but sometimes it doesn't work that way, that is, one has to have an institution that is kind of supporting you and takes sanctions...*

At the time of writing this thesis, the Labour Inspectorate is the primary organisation tasked with ensuring compliance with employment standards by identifying and investigating breaches and taking enforcement actions (Employment New Zealand, 2020). Despite a number of sanctions and penalties on employers at this point in time, there appears to be a lack of capacity to investigate breaches effectively as well as weak monitoring mechanisms and inspectorates being unable to investigate all infringements and enforce regulations (Zhang et al., 2022). The notion of there being an under-resourced labour inspectorate is also mentioned by Anderson & Kenner (2019) which contributes to this problem. A more detailed description of the modifications in the Labour Department over the past few decades can be found in Chapter Two. Enforcement is constrained by government budget and competing priorities between the need for flexible workers to support the economy and migration controls to combat irregular migration (Anderson & Tipples, 2014; Anderson & Kenner, 2019). Rafael describes his experience when following the advice of Employment NZ where he, the employee, was expected to find solutions through mediation with the employer. There appears to be much less emphasis in New Zealand on employer monitoring and sanctioning bad practices. Rafael's accounts demonstrate the complete lack of acknowledgment of the issue of imbalanced power relations between many working migrants and their employers. Many migrant workers often have limited bargaining power in their workplaces, and the feeling of 'friendliness' expressed by Rafael can be seen as a form of 'gaslighting'. This manipulative mechanism may confuse migrant workers and make them believe that they do have more bargain power within their

employment constraints, ultimately enhancing Employment NZ's "friendly" image and the relatively low level of employer investigations and sanctions.

According to Collins & Stringer (2019) hesitations to report employers are oftentimes related to employees needing to find proof and that employers were automatically believed. At the same time, official inquiries to gather information about work issues might also result in the ability of employers to identify workers (Collins & Stringer, 2019). Rafael reported that his experience was that if both parties do not reach an agreement, Employment NZ encouraged them to prioritise finding friendly agreements between parties, which is unrealistic for exploited or vulnerable employees. While useful for resolving certain work issues, mediation also has the unwanted effect of keeping evidence of exploitation hidden as it includes confidential agreements between the parties (Collins & Stringer, 2019). For non-English speaker workers, like Rafael, mediation could be a painful process as it requires them to be able to communicate their demands in a foreign language (Boocock et al., 2016). Many migrant workers also cannot afford to spend a lot of time in mediation meetings as they have high economic needs and cannot afford to stop working to participate in these processes. In New Zealand immigration and employment laws, employers are responsible for acting lawfully, inspectorates with limited resources do not have the capability to enforce protective legislations and worker's rights are inconsistently protected (Anderson & Tipples, 2014).

The participants who worked on dairy farms had housing provided as part of their employment. Given that New Zealand has very high housing costs, being offered accommodation as a part of one's job is an advantage for a migrant worker. There are also other benefits including saving time travelling to work and expenses since the accommodation is on the premises, facilitating the recruitment and retention of workers (Poulter & Sayers, 2015). Despite receiving this considerable employee benefit, the participants also discussed the downsides of living in the same place as they work. It seems evident that some workers are constrained from reporting or leaving abusive employment conditions as they not only relied on their employment to stay in the country but in this case, they relied on their employment to have a place to live. In the case of Valery, she was working on a farm on an Essential Skills Visa, and she shares how it was for her intending to file an animal welfare complaint after just two months of starting a new employment while living on the premises:

*The second time I got a work permit [in a dairy farm], I was with this man to whom I filed a complaint for animal abuse. And that was very difficult, because obviously I couldn't leave that job, that is, if I left there, where would I go? Because on the farm they generally give you accommodation, so of course, if I*

*leave, what do I do? In other words, I have to go back to my country and I hadn't been here for even two months. (...) So yes, they were some hard days, because it means packing everything in the car and being left there with no place, with nothing.*

Valery tried to talk with her managers about the animal mistreatment she was witnessing at the farm. With no success in improving these working conditions, she tried to report an animal welfare concern to the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Valery shares the difficulties of wanting to file a complaint for animal mistreatment and leaving this employment but at the same time living in a provided house by the farm. She feared that she would be forced to leave New Zealand because leaving the job was a breach of her work visa. Since Valery had been in New Zealand working on the farm for only two months, she did not have many social connections or support to be able to move somewhere else easily. Living on the premises meant that she rarely left the farm to do other social activities. Employer-arranged accommodation could lead to social isolation among farm employees, as they tend to stay on the premises for extended periods, which is also shown in Valery's case and is discussed in chapter five (Poulter & Sayers, 2015). Valery was also relying on her employment for her work rights and right to stay in the country. Around this time, Valery met a New Zealand citizen in a church and he was able to help her and her husband with temporary accommodation so they could leave that employment. Further, Valery reported that because English was her second language there was a struggle to find information on how to file a complaint together with information about the consequences of filing against an employer that gives you the accommodation and right to stay in the country. For non-English speaker working migrants it is also an obstacle to make complaints in a foreign language (Boocock et al., 2016). Getting information on procedures and processes, making calls, writing emails to get information, or submitting a complaint and explaining what is happening is really challenging for non-English-speaking working migrants. Valerie seemed trapped, but she defied and took a stand against her employer, despite her migratory restrictions (Triandafyllidou, 2019). Her sense of responsibility with the animals and not complying with those aspects of the employment enabled her to still leave that employment, despite risking losing everything and starting all over again.

Participants' responses to migrant exploitation suggest that current configurations make it very difficult for migrants to come forward and discuss their exploitation. The most pressing concern is the risk of loss of immigration status or reduced employment ability due to reputational risk (Collins & Stringer, 2019). Further, migrant precarity seems to reflect how employers with a particular

business model that relies on very low wages and poor employment conditions to make a profit or to enhance profit to desirable levels operate without much monitoring or enforcement (Collins & Stringer, 2019).

### **Constructive employment relationships**

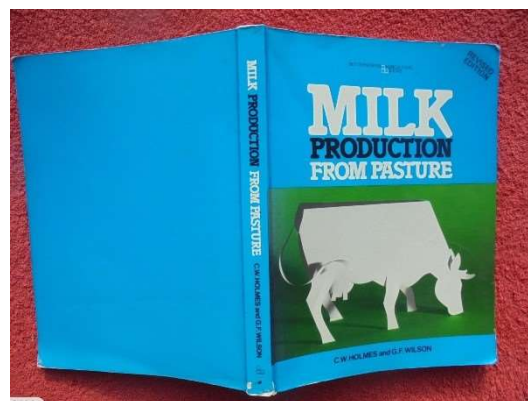
Although the exploitation of many working migrants remains a persistent and systemic issue in New Zealand (Collins & Stringer, 2019) there are also instances of positive working relationships. Not all working migrants are impacted negatively by their precarious migrant worker status. For instance, some participants reported having constructive and trustworthy relationships with employers that supported their growth and offered stability in employment. Few working migrants in this study reported that they had no issues working for the same employer for many years or even doing a job that did not match their qualifications and skills, because their work environment was good and/or there were some opportunities for career development. In Josefina's case, she obtained her first Essential Skills visa by applying for a manager-in-training role at the same retail company where she had worked during her working holiday visa. She came with qualifications and work experience in the graphic design industry from her country of origin. Despite working in New Zealand in a completely different field, she reported that the retail work was not conflicting or harmful to her personal growth.

*I was super happy doing what I was doing. We had a super good team. I had a lot of friends at work. The workgroup was very diverse, there were a lot of young people and a lot of international people (...) I was the Latina of the crew and I enjoyed it. I had a good time; it was a beautiful time for me. And I didn't question it much either, I felt that it was still progress (...) I was doing something different [from what I was doing back in my country of origin] and in terms of opportunities, it was a large company and no, I did not question it.*

Over the three and a half years with that company, they offered Josefina career growth opportunities. Josefina started as the assistant of a CEO, then she was offered a manager-in-training position, and then was promoted as a department manager, taking charge of one of the company's largest departments. Josefina felt that company offered her professional development opportunities and a positive work environment, which strengthened her social relationships. Josefina reported

that she still has friends from that time. Her accounts of her experience demonstrate that despite not working within her previous career, Josefina still felt a sense of progress. Career adaptability, described as the ability to adapt to new work circumstances and still perceive personal career growth, has been shown to be an effective factor in working migrant retention and satisfaction (Ocampo et al., 2022). Josefina also reports that she felt supported by this company in her promotion opportunities and her application process to Immigration NZ. The company was experienced in the immigration application processes and offered her full support to complete all the paperwork needed. As consequence, she reported that the application process was easy and hassle-free. Josefina worked happily for three and a half years there. Her experience reflects how a supportive and constructive workplace could facilitate a temporary working migrant commitment and growth within a company despite not developing her original career (Goh & Lopez, 2016).

Jose worked in New Zealand solely in the dairy industry. Jose reported that he was satisfied with his job despite some difficult working conditions such as long shifts and physically demanding rosters with poor work conditions. Nonetheless, his chosen object of reflection was a book he had owned since university, and reflects the central role and significance of his career in his work and settlement experiences in New Zealand:



Picture 3. Book

*It's a book, it's a book called "Milk production from pasture". It's a book from Massey University, and it's like the bible. For me, it's like the farming bible. So, to begin with, leaving from my home country, was one of the first things I packed to take to New Zealand. And I have read it and it has been useful and I think it has been the best thing I have loaded onto my luggage, to be honest (...)*

*I studied it in my last year of university. It explained where I was going to [the NZ farm]. And I knew that it would be a good tool throughout because it is a*

*scientific book. It explains the whole system of New Zealand dairy farming, animal production, and biochemistry. I love that book (...) Excellent knowledge. I still use it, that knowledge is gold.*

Jose packed this book before coming to New Zealand. He did not know much about the country, and this book provided more insights into where he was going and what he was going to be doing. Jose's career was very important to him and he was motivated to migrate to New Zealand because of the opportunities this presented. That book was his 'guiding bible' where he often consulted relevant information about his work in the dairy industry. As previously discussed at the beginning of this chapter, due to his qualifications and work experience, Jose was able to move around farms, learn, and improve his working conditions every time. Jose shared how working on dairy farm has become for him a lifestyle that he enjoyed, reinforcing the significance of his job, despite the work conditions associated.

*Maybe working on a farm is... it's not for everyone. But for me, that I consider myself almost a hermit, it becomes my daily life, I mean, I sleep at work. The Kiwis here say that this is not a job, it is a lifestyle and yes, I understood it, I have adapted.*

For dairy workers, career opportunities are key factors in migrating to a country such as New Zealand (Poulter & Sayers, 2015). Jose's account demonstrates the existence of opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge, which are highly valuable for him. Dairy working migrants are often highly motivated to perform in their workplaces and very proud of their affiliation with the dairy industry (Poulter & Sayers, 2015). Jose enjoys the solitary farm lifestyle, which leads him to call himself a hermit, a lifestyle that he has adapted to. His enjoyment of his agricultural career, and working with ruminants plus his personal traits of being comfortable in more socially isolated environments, appear to be a good combination for Jose. In addition, Jose also reported that often he established good relationships with his co-workers, as they become his family and provide companionship during the season. According to Poulter and Sayers (2015), positive relationships with supervisors and coworkers create support which leads to employee commitment and retention. Dairy workers often receive assistance from employers, such as provided accommodation, and employers can also be sensitive to workers' wellbeing. This is explored later in Chapter Five, where

Jose reported that he also enjoyed his accommodation arrangements, assuring that the solitary farm lifestyle was suitable for him.

### **Pursuing more autonomy**

Despite enjoying his dairy farm work and lifestyle for many years, Jose, like the rest of the temporary migrant workers in this study still at some point in their journey sought greater autonomy. The main reason for pursuing more agency in the labour market was to allow working migrants to explore different work opportunities or interests. Often, working migrants in this study applied for residency or partnership visas primarily to achieve the objective of autonomy. In Jose's case, he had a strong interest in sports. However, the farm work lifestyle did not allow him to develop his sport interests or give him time to train. He liked his career in the agricultural industry and has enjoyed his jobs on dairy farms very much. However, after eight years of doing the same job, he wanted to pursue a career change in his life, but his migrant status would not allow it. Jose shared his thoughts about his reason for pursuing residency and what it would mean to him:

*I (will) have the option to choose, I don't know, carpentry, or salesman in my area, the farm. I am evolving in what I could offer. Yes, it will change me, to have that freedom, to not be completely tied to a sector, especially to an employer and to a specific place. It is a tremendous untying of hands.*

Jose reported that he felt he was changing his interests professionally, and he was starting to explore different options for his personal growth. He had aspirations to obtain a different type of job, improve his skills, improve his income, have more time to do sports, and maybe engage in further education. The possibilities to extend his agency, act or create new possibilities, given the social conditions and resources available, were for Jose, limited to applying to residency (Triandafyllidou, 2019). On an Essential Skills visa, workers who want to pursue a career change have to apply for a new Essential Skills visa, comply with the requirements, and go through the application process again (Immigration New Zealand, n.d.-b). It appears that the Essential Skills visa policy makes it highly unlikely that a migrant worker could be a suitable candidate to make a career change and meet at the same time all the necessary requirements, qualifications, and work experience in more than one field. Consequently, the main reason Jose applied for residency was that his essential Skills

visa restricted him from being able to explore a job in a different field that would also allow him to develop other activities, like sports.

For Josefina, who was happily working in a retail company, with options for career development, she also still sought a more flexible migrant status. After the first year with an Essential Skills visa, she started a stable relationship with a New Zealander and moved with them. She decided to apply for a partnership visa in part to consolidate her relationship but also to gain increased autonomy in the labour market:

*The fact that I had stayed here and stayed for love, I felt that the partner visa protected me a little, that it was a relevant commitment (...) so I said yes to the partner. It also gave me the flexibility to change jobs, the freedom to change at that time. Although I had no problems with work, but I felt that it made more sense...*

After obtaining the partnership visa she stayed at the same retail company for some time as she was happy working there. She then decided to change jobs and was able eventually to acquire work in the graphic design field, which was her original occupation. Additionally, before gaining residency, Josefina reports that she never felt dependent on her partner to gain employment rights as she felt empowered to apply for a new Essential Skills visa if she needed it in the future, as her first experience with this type of visa was gratifying and easy for her. Josefina's case demonstrates that having the ability to adapt to different jobs away from her main career appears to be sustainable only short term (Ocampo et al., 2022). For Josefina, despite having a positive retail career, she still sought to return to her original occupation and have other work experiences within her migration settlement processes.

In contrast, Valery's decision to pursue a partnership visa was mainly driven by her previous traumatic experience of being bonded to unwanted employment and to achieve more agency and to avoid potentially harmful new employment. Valery and her partner were leaving a farm because of a welfare animal complaint, leading them to pursue work opportunities elsewhere. Her partner was the first to find a new sponsored job in a different region. His new Essential Skills visa entitled Valery to apply for a partnership visa with open work rights. Applying for the partnership visa was not an easy decision to make, as her relationship was going through difficult times. Valery shared her feelings about what it meant to apply for a partnership visa:

*[depending on a partner] it's terrible, isn't it? It is that in part it takes away your independence, it makes you depend on a person, on a location (...) So yes, you don't feel so free to make decisions*

Family immigration policies, including partnership visas, are based on sponsorship provided by an immediate family member, such as a partner, who is a New Zealand permanent resident or citizen (Liu & Ran, 2022). Among other requirements, the basis for this visa category is having a genuine and stable relationship (Immigration New Zealand, 2024a). In some cases, it is possible that such a visa situation, which requires a level of dependency on another person, can mean that an individual feels rushed and pressured to commit to someone before they are ready. Most people need to take time to get to know and trust a partner, and Valery's accounts shows that she was not yet in a comfortable position having that level of dependency within her relationship. The inability of the dependent partner to move away from partnership dependency is a factor in dependent partners remaining in not-so-stable relationships (Robertson et al., 2007). In Valery's case, she had also suffered from not being able to leave a harmful employment experience, and this plus the partnership visa, contributed to creating significant distress. Valery showed courage, and mental strength to cope to speak up and leave the employment. Working migrants in harmful working relationships often exert high levels of emotional distress, to contain fear and anxiety, as they need to channel frustration and anger toward action that can change their individual situations (Collins & Stringer, 2022). Like Valery, many migrants show extraordinary resilience, and instances of resistance manifest in challenging employment or seeking support from advocacy organisations (Collins & Stringer, 2022). In this case, gaining autonomy in employment relationships was possible at the expense of autonomy in her personal relationship.

### **Disadvantages in the labour market**

When a migrant moves from one country to another to face a different labour market, they are likely to face challenges. This is because they may have limited knowledge of the local labour market conditions and requirements, and may not have any networks to help them identify and secure employment (Spoonley, 2015). But these factors are not the only challenges working migrants often encounter. Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, or difficulties in gaining qualifications is a significant disadvantage for temporary working migrants in the labour market, especially for those

from non-English speaking countries (Standing, 2011). Before coming to New Zealand, Rafael worked as an emergency health professional. It was a job that fulfilled him. He was passionate about helping others, and he also enjoyed the adrenaline of emergencies and how one day was never the same as the following. He shared with deep emotion on remembering his old profession:

*...to this day it is one of the big griefs that I have for having left my country of origin, because I liked it. I was good at what I did. I always had good reviews, from all my colleagues, from other people. At the same time, I was imparting classes, so I loved that. And it's difficult [to not work in that field anymore]...*

Rafael's experience was that finding a job in the New Zealand health industry for temporary migrants is difficult. Health professionals who can get their qualifications recognised tend to have more opportunities to secure sponsored employment within the New Zealand health system (Howe et al., 2019), which was not Rafael's case. For Rafael, his qualifications as an emergency health professional were not automatically transferable to the New Zealand context. Rafael experienced, like many middle-class working migrants, that the lack of recognition of his qualifications, led to some form of downward mobility, and loss of his previous lifestyle (Hussain, 2018). If he wishes to apply for professional registration using an overseas qualification, Rafael would need to provide, among multiple documents regarding his professional development and past experiences, evidence that he meets the English language requirements, in the form, for example, of the IELTS test with a certain score (Hill, 2023b). However, for Rafael, meeting the English language requirement was perceived as an important obstacle, due to his lack of English proficiency. Informal sources utilised to improve migrants' English proficiency such as being part of the workforce or in English speaking social networks, seem insufficient towards developing more advanced language skills (White et al., 2002). Additionally, some educational providers and community organisations that provide services to migrants, offer English courses low or free of charge often to New Zealand residents and their partners, and temporary migrants are often not included. Rafael despite his low English proficiency was, however, able to find a job in the construction industry, which was possible because he had some experience working in this field back in his home country and this occupation did not require English proficiency and required less previous experience to be able to perform.

In her country of origin, Valery was an agricultural professional who specialised in produce quality control. After holding two Essential Skills visas to work in the dairy industry, she applied to a partnership visa with work entitlements. During that time, Valery worked in many different seasonal

employments in the hospitality, horticultural and agricultural fields. At some point, she found employment in a horticultural processing company. Valery shares why that work experience has been the closest she has been in New Zealand to working in something related to her produce quality control career, and the main reason she was not able to keep that employment:

*It was the closest thing I did in my career. It was not such an operational job, but rather it gave you the opportunity to think more, to make a decision. However, the experience there was short, due to the English issue. That is, it did not allow me to be one hundred per cent productive in that type of work*

Valery experienced challenging working conditions in this horticultural processing company as it required a roster with twelve-hour night shifts for four nights, then being off for one and a half days, and then twelve-hour daytime shifts for four days on rotations. This schedule impacted her ability to, for example, feel hungry or sleepy on a regular schedule. Despite the challenging working conditions, Valery viewed her work in the processing company as rewarding because her position allowed her to make decisions and think, rather than just functioning as an operational labourer. Valery's time in this job lasted for a short period because she needed to develop more English language skills to be able to progress. Developing her English language skills as a temporary employee was not an option given by the company. However, it appears she would have happily stayed and worked there if the company had allowed her or supported her to develop her career and improve her language skills during employment, despite the challenges faced by the roster. Similarly to Rafael, options to improve English proficiency as a temporary worker are limited and can stagnate the possibilities of career development or upward mobility (Roy et al., 2021; White et al., 2002).

A couple of temporary working migrants in this study tried to gain qualifications during their employment, although they faced a number of obstacles. Valery's last employment was in aged residential care, an industry that often uses migrant workers not to necessarily bring in unique or specialised skills, but to fill workforce gaps (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). Valery's experience raised issues regarding remuneration and qualification opportunities for temporary workers. She explained that her coworkers doing the same job would receive a better remuneration based on them having a valued qualification. She also shares her experiences in trying to gain qualifications in her aged-care employment:

*Now in my current job, I am the one who earns the least. Obviously, I have no qualifications in that area. But I have gone to speak three times, and in my old company too, I went to speak so that they would let me do the levels [the qualification], so they would let me study (..) They haven't given me the opportunity to do the levels. They always tell me, "yes, later, when you sign the permanent contract". Because I'm casual now. "When you signed the contract, we'll put you in training", but nothing. They have me waiting. So obviously my coworkers who are level 4 or 5 are earning way more than me, and I'm doing the same [as them]. I don't know if it's convenient for the companies to pay you less, or if they think you're going to leave because you're not a resident. I think that this has been an obstacle [to improve employment conditions].*

One of the characteristics of precarious employment is employee low access to further education and training opportunities (Tucker, 2002). The impermanence of Valery's migration status constrained her labour market options and career development. It appears that some employers might prefer not to invest in working migrants simply because the employers may assume that they are only in the country temporarily. This view has some logic behind given that working visas are temporary and not all migrants pursue residency or are successful if they do. Temporary working migrants can have limited access to professional development as to be able to undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship a temporary worker needs a visa or work agreement valid for the length of time that the qualifications would take to be gained. That means that working migrants with casual or short-term agreements are not good candidates for this type of professional development, which is also the case in Valery's situation. Paradoxically, to be able to improve their employability and gain long-term or stable employment, working migrants have better options when they have recognised qualifications or have gained training in previous employment (Iqbal, 2017). The precarious migrant status lived by many migrant care workers is designed in such a way as to create a "trapdoor," which channels frontline care workers into permanent temporary status in low-paid employment without a clear path to permanent residency (Howe et al., 2019, p.220).

Most of the participants in this study appeared to carry much of the responsibility for upskilling themselves. Through the lack of training opportunities, employers can shift the responsibilities and risks associated with hiring permanent staff to employees (New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 2013). Valery's employers were perhaps less likely to offer training because she is a temporary worker. This situation presumably applies mostly in sectors where there are enough migrant workers

to take the jobs. Nonetheless, employers in the aged care sectors had reported challenges in attracting local workers due to the work being physically demanding, with limited career pathways and low wages (Howe et al., 2019). Additionally, temporary migrant workers in the aged care sector may be more willing to accept these conditions since their right to remain in the country is linked to employment, while local workers have no such incentive (Lovelock & Martin, 2016). In more specialised occupations where there are fewer migrant applicants, employers may be more likely to invest in training and retaining migrant workers, due to the need of keeping the workforce but also, because they cannot easily replace workers. Employers at the same time benefit from retaining temporary workers at a lower wage. This is evident in Valery's case, where the employer offers potential training for when she is more permanently employed, but to be more permanent in the job she would need to be more qualified.

This chapter has shown the diversity of experiences of temporary working migrants in the labour market. Not all their experiences were the same or were negative. Some working migrants were able to enjoy constructive and trustworthy employment relationships that supported their growth and offered stability in employment. However, there are some common threads around their precarious migrant status. For example, all participants, to varying degrees, experienced a loss of power, autonomy and social status as working migrants. When wanting to move out from unwanted employment situations, for various reasons, or when facing labour issues such as exploitative employment practices, working migrants experienced migratory regulatory restrictions or lack of institutional workplace support. Working migrants also experienced some disadvantages on the labour market such as a lack of recognition of their qualifications, or lack of training opportunities due to their temporal status. All participants at some point of their migratory journey wanted to move out of their situation of temporariness and precarity so that they can build their lives with more agency. The following chapter examines the experiences of working migrants beyond their workplaces, as social agents rather than just labour.

## Chapter Five: Working Migrants as Social Agents

Temporary migrant workers are granted entry into New Zealand on the basis of employment; however, they need to be considered more holistically as people and families who are living in New Zealand rather than simply being here to work. While citizens are often individuals who have all their civil, cultural, political, social, and economic rights established in their own country, most working migrants are, in contrast, considered denizens, meaning people with a more limited range of rights than the citizens of the host country (Standing, 2014a). This research reveals that working migrants want to be considered in a broader sense as people who have lives and existence beyond simply being used to fill labour shortages.

In this chapter, I explore the 'realities' of living as a temporary migrant in New Zealand with a particular focus on migrants' experiences in broader social spaces beyond their workplaces. The working migrants in this study experienced difficulties when trying to settle in the country, not only in workplace environments as described in Chapter Four but also in other social spaces. The high cost of living, constraints in the New Zealand health and housing systems, and relations with Immigration New Zealand have shaped the experiences of working migrants in this study as citizens, denizens and social agents. An analysis of the relationships of working migrants with Immigration New Zealand is made to highlight how policies and procedures impact the ability of working migrants to overcome precarity and gain more human agency, especially in the labour market.

I will also explore working migrants' experiences as more than inhabiting workspaces and simply adjusting to employers and visa requirements. Participants in this study appeared to develop social agency through varied experiences of their migration. Working migrants in this study highlighted their migration as a unique, life-changing experience. This study has demonstrated that resilience, self-efficacy, and building a sense of home were resources developed by working migrants as they overcame obstacles and found a sense of meaning in their migration journey. At the same time, having social support and nurturing employers appear to be protective factors that mitigate the effects of adverse social conditions due to precarious migrant status. The emergence of protective resources appears to arise from the precariousness of working migrants' circumstances. Although these resources are beneficial, they can be in many cases insufficient to improve migrants' experiences or even employment outcomes.

In the last section of this chapter, I analyse the underlying value that employment has for working migrants settling in Aotearoa New Zealand, helping to clarify the processes and pathways migrants take into settlement. Working migrants in this study raised issues related to temporariness, residency, and permanency. It was clear from their accounts that, they each experienced such issues

differently. Employment for many migrants is used as an instrument to gain permanent residency (Curtis & Lucas, 2001, as cited in Anderson, 2010), such as the case of Rafael, a working migrant in this study. However, four working migrants, utilised employment opportunities as pathways to career development and used their residency status to gain more autonomy in the labour market, rather than to settle permanently. Permanent residency was not a primary settlement objective for four working migrants in this study. Instead, wanting to live and settle in New Zealand longer for Josefina, Valery, Jose and Simon was associated with aspirations to extend their social agency rather than to focus primarily on settling permanently in the country.

### **The 'reality' of living in New Zealand as a temporary migrant**

Living in New Zealand as a temporary working migrant appears to present opportunities but also challenges and uncertainties. For many working migrants, New Zealand provides valuable opportunities to live, work and study, and provides systems to ensure people are well looked after (Thornber, 2019). However, not all migrants seem to agree. Participants in this study appeared to expect more full social participation in New Zealand, yet the day-to-day circumstances meant such expectations were not met. A mismatch of expectations can arise when migrants rely on websites, media and information that is less accurate and fails to prepare migrants for the challenges associated with for example the high cost of living and lack of affordable rental accommodation (Collins, 2017; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). As a result, it is likely that some migrants can be surprised by the difficulties they face when trying to settle in the country.

Participants in this study reported on the limitations and difficulties of living in New Zealand as working migrants which hindered their social agency. Salient issues were the work/life balance and the high cost of living, limitations in the health and housing systems, and concerns related to their interactions with Immigration New Zealand.

### **The work/life balance for temporary workers**

Transition to new locations and processes of re-settlement often present challenges for migrants including cultural misunderstandings and unfamiliarity with the conditions of the new place of living (Hodgetts et al., 2020). Moreover, the working conditions in the new country may differ and may require some adaptation and adjustments. Jose had some previous work experience in his country of origin in the agricultural industry, in livestock farming, but not specifically in dairy farms. Jose's first employment in his home country as a professional was, in his own words, for a 'good company', working Monday to Friday, however his employment was unstable as he was only given monthly

contracts. Before coming to New Zealand, Jose was uncertain about the job prospects that would be available for him every month. Taking all of these aspects into consideration, Jose shared the main discrepancies in his experiences of living and working in New Zealand compared to his country of origin, realising the impact of high cost of living could have on his remuneration, expressing a sense of disappointment:

*The only thing I can tell you that shocked me was the workload and that it was so normal. They spoke as if that were basic. I even still have the mentality that I work from Monday to Friday and Saturday and Sunday is to rest, to do other activities. I still have that chip, although I lived working under that other [farm] regime. So, for me to think about that was honestly the most shocking thing. Then comes the economic issue, of remuneration. From the beginning I have always felt well compensated. So, let's say that this has always been the prevailing belief from abroad. At least from the Latin American point of view. That if one goes out, and goes out to earn in dollars, simply multiplication, everything is multiplied. The money still pays offs, but just as it is earned in New Zealand dollars, it is spent in New Zealand dollars.*

Farm employment conditions in New Zealand have been recognised as being demanding and with a high workload (Tipples et al., 2012), which Jose was not aware of. Once he arrived in New Zealand, he was surprised to learn that working more than five days a week, in long daily shifts, can be a common practice in the farm industry. Beyond the usual level of adjustment to a new employment setting, Jose's employment conditions were an additional factor to adapt to. Some of the abusive working conditions Jose experienced in some farms were explored in Chapter Four. The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) (2023) has defined 'Good Work' as employment that can provide a sustainable livelihood and a work/life balance for individuals and their families. This proposal included fair wages, meaningful and fulfilling employment and opportunities to work productively and cooperatively. Nonetheless, it is also essential to protect workers against harm, provide workers with mechanisms to voice their concerns and be free of worker exploitation, measures which in Jose's case appear not to have been established.

Attempts by working migrants to try to build a new life are shaped by practical everyday limitations, often associated with limited access to economic resources necessary to sustain everyday life (Hodgetts et al., 2020). In economic terms, New Zealand has higher salaries than an average Global

South country income in the same position (Lewis et al., 2015). This difference appears to sustain the image that New Zealand is a prosperous place for migrants looking to work and earn a higher salary than their countries of origin. Although the New Zealand pay for Jose was higher than back home, it was not that high relative to New Zealand's costs of living (Gabel et al., 2023). Accommodation, food, and essential needs can be more affordable on an average farm salary because employment in farms often reduces accommodation and travel expenses (Tipples et al., 2012). After spending some time in New Zealand, Jose realised that the cost of living was higher than expected. Jose's sense of disappointment appears to be related to the belief that in his current conditions, as regularly employed, with arranged work accommodation and with no dependents, he can maintain a sustainable life, despite his demanding working conditions. If Jose moves away from his employment in the farm industry, presumably, he could lose these advantages. The high cost of living in New Zealand often outstrips low wage migrant workers earnings, which can have an impact on Jose's ability to participate in society and therefore his wellbeing (Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023).

Jose appears to be disappointed with the future possibilities he has as a temporary working migrant. Jose's expectations of improving his employment conditions and work-life balance given his migration regulatory constraints, have not been able to be fulfilled. This has resulted in him feeling stuck in his current farm job which involves long working hours and rural isolation. The limited possibilities of working migrants' participation in society are what is referred to as precarious migrant status (Goldring & Landolt, 2012). The precariat is not solely about financial adversity but also includes a range of experiences, such as low or irregular incomes, insecure housing, occupation, or employment status, the lack of class mobility, and the loss of an occupational pathway or narrative (Standing, 2011, 2014b). Precarious migrant status can be influenced by many factors, and together with the high cost of living in New Zealand also can impact a working migrant's sense of progress and achieve a work/life balance.

### **The health system for working migrants**

In New Zealand, regulatory constraints on working migrants leave them in a longstanding, in-between status with limited rights to participate in many social spaces, like education, health and the welfare system (Collins, 2017). Limitations on migrants' participation as citizens are also exacerbated by a lack of 'the right to have rights', typical of the condition of a temporary working migrant (Standing, 2014a, p.9). Rafael has been living in New Zealand for more than eight years as a temporary working migrant. He has had vast experience in the New Zealand labour market, but also

with the health, educational, and immigration systems. He shared his positive early experiences in New Zealand and how his perspective changed when he experienced limitations as a migrant in different social spaces, emphasising experiences with the health system.

*...at first everything looks nice. To be honest, everything looks tidy. But when you start to spend years living here and where you are already integrated into this country, you feel that there are many things that are not as nice as they look. Which is like a beautiful painting, but from behind it also has its B-side. Especially in health, especially when you are an immigrant who does not have residence [entitlements]. Let's say, it is very expensive, it is very expensive.*

The initial experiences of New Zealand for working migrants often shows economic benefits and working opportunities that working migrants gain by migrating and settling in New Zealand. However, there is less information to reflect the obstacles that a migrant as a social agent/civilian might face (Collins, 2017; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). Rafael's accounts demonstrate struggles for temporary working migrants to access the health system. If a working migrant does not have citizenship, or resident entitlements or a work visa that entitles migrants to stay in the country for two years or more, healthcare can become very expensive (Kanengoni-Nyatara et al., 2023). Although, even if working migrants are entitled to full subsidised coverage, they might still find that their health needs are not met since the New Zealand health system currently is struggling to provide adequate care for all citizens (Pepworth & Nash, 2009).

Despite the sixth Labour government's commitment to reduce health inequalities, problems with access to care and structural barriers to working migrants result in not delivering equitable health outcomes for all population groups (Goodyear-Smith & Ashton, 2019). Policies and frameworks regulating access to resources for non-citizen working migrants with limited migrant status are identified as a main barrier to improving health outcomes for migrants (Kanengoni-Nyatara et al., 2023). The cost of appointments for any individual, but also the additional increased cost to access healthcare for working migrants and their families who do not have resident entitlements are also considered barriers to healthcare. Additionally, healthcare providers recognise a lack of preparedness in the healthcare delivery system and workforce to provide culturally competent care for the diverse community living in New Zealand (Kanengoni-Nyatara et al., 2023). At the time of this research, the New Zealand health system reportedly suffered from long waiting periods for GP appointments, and a long waitlist for specialist services (Davison, 2023; Hill, 2023a). The public-

funded New Zealand health system has shown many strengths and attempts to provide proper care for all citizens. However, Rafael's experiences with the health system in New Zealand can reflect the flaws of a health system used by a culturally diverse community that does not experience these constraints in their own countries.

### **Housing for working migrants**

Having a place to live is an essential need for any human being given that people often spend most of their time at home (Howden-Chapman et al., 2021). The housing crisis in New Zealand has led to an affordability crisis, leaving families with unstable, overcrowded, unaffordable, or unsafe homes (Leahy, 2021). Simon, in an illustrative sentence, described his experience around the housing issues that many New Zealanders, but also many temporary working migrants face:

*The standards are very low, the housing conditions are very bad, a lot of humidity, little insulation, bad rental requirements, apart from very high rents.*

Finding a house to rent is becoming more difficult and expensive not only for migrants, but anyone who is trying to rent in New Zealand (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Howden-Chapman, 2015). Migrants with low/mid incomes are struggling to afford rental houses. Howden-Chapman et al. (2021) stated that the rental quality conditions can be poor because most rental properties are older dwellings built before the introduction of the 1978 Building Code. The government regulatory responses to these challenges have been insufficient to facilitate the supply of housing and regulating the demand for it (Howden-Chapman et al., 2021). In this scenario, many working migrants find sharing accommodation facilities that are more affordable but many times overcrowded (MacLennan, 2018). The precarious living situations of many migrants can become an unexpected outcome in their migration journeys, putting them at risk of a decrease quality of life and loss of wellbeing (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). At the same time, affordable rent shortages may cause tensions between different social groups, as New Zealanders may look at migrants as taking up rental housing that they might otherwise be able to access (Kukutai & Rata, 2017). However, apart from salient shortages of houses and apartments in most of New Zealand cities, the major gap in housing policy is the absence of a plan to monitor need and implement effective policies to address the perceived need (Howden-Chapman, 2015). As a consequence, the housing market does not cater to the increasing number of low-income households.

## **Relationships with Immigration New Zealand**

Relationships with Immigration New Zealand (INZ) as social agents are critical for working migrants, as INZ is the main port of information access and is the agency in charge of issuing visas, receiving appeals, and processing applications. For all the participants engaging with INZ was in general a satisfactory experience, especially when it came to applications for work, student or visitor visas. The process was reported to be relatively expedited for them and even though they consider it an expensive process, most working migrants consider the cost to be within a reasonable range. Jose had several experiences with INZ in applying for seasonal Essential Skills Visas. He holds relevant recognised qualifications and accumulated work experience in the dairy industry. Jose shared his positive experiences and perspective of INZ:

*I came here because I am a professional, otherwise I would not have made it. I have what you would say here, a bachelor [degree]. If I hadn't had that qualification, I think it would have been quite difficult to get here, get a contract, get to this country.*

*I simply, when I need to make an application, I read what they need, and what they are requiring, and I comply with the requirements. Simple. And I do the pertinent procedure and for me, everything continues to work out.*

Highly skilled and qualified working migrants have benefited from the latest immigration policies (Terruhn, 2023). Jose illustrates that complying with Essential Skills visa requirements through recognised qualifications and work experiences is the basis of smooth processes. At the same time, once many working migrants have been through the application process, they are able to replicate that process without much inconvenience if they still meet all immigration requirements.

Nonetheless participants, such as Rafael, reported experiencing difficulties in trying to access immigration information from the official website, but also from officers. Receiving less accurate information is highlighted by Rafael in his many experiences with dealing with INZ:

*If you go to the immigration page, it is not very friendly, it is not easy to understand, and especially for a person who does not speak English and who does*

*not read English, it is not easy, it is not friendly (...) The other thing is if you want to talk to someone from immigration NZ, you won the lottery before getting someone to answer the phone. It takes at least an hour to get someone to answer the phone. And if they answer you, the answer they give you is not always accurate.*

Migrants often need to access specific information or they seek support to understand applications, outcomes and procedures. The INZ official website and the call centre presented several obstacles for Rafael such as clearer pathways to access information and long waiting times. Consumer NZ in 2022 investigated government call centre wait times, finding that INZ was the hardest agency to get in contact with (Mcilraith, 2022). The wait times can be considerably long, causing many people to put their lives on hold to access help from an INZ officer (Mcilraith, 2022). Many people reaching INZ also appears to experience the provision of inconsistent and inaccurate information (Pennington, 2021), similarly to the case of two participants in this study. Rafael's experience with INZ appears to reflect a customer service that is lacking, especially in cases where there is a monopoly or where 'customers' cannot go elsewhere to find information or support. Since 2021, New Zealand has had record levels of net migration, while it halved worldwide offices (Hindmarsh, 2020). Given these circumstances, it is likely to be challenging for individual INZ agents to address all the inquiries from migrants. However, it would be more beneficial for migrants if INZ information was more accessible and communicated more clearly and consistently.

Relationships with Immigration New Zealand tend to become more problematic for working migrants when they try to apply for Residency Visas. The process can be uncertain and often involves long wait times and delays in processing applications (Collins, 2017). Rafael intended to apply for residency from the beginning of his migration journey. He, since 2015 started to collect paperwork and gained New Zealand work experience, when in 2018 the English requirement came into effect. Then in 2019 he applied for a Work to Residency visa, and after waiting for two years for a response, their visa expired. He shared how it was for him to set a plan to achieve residency and then suffer a change of policy:

*Since the period we arrived, too many changes have occurred. And these are often harmful. Because one has a vision, a goal, where these are the rules that the government sets for you. That's what immigration says, those are their rules. So, I plan according to those rules. And what happens, they come after six*

*months, and they completely change those rules. And with that, what I had is destabilised.*

Policies for gaining residency have been focused on highly skilled migrants who have to earn high salaries to opt for residency and have recognised qualifications and New Zealand work experience, all of which are barriers to the majority of migrants (Terruhn, 2023). Immigration New Zealand between 2015 and 2018 raised the required points for the expression of interest to apply for Residency. Then added English proficiency requirements. And then raised the minimum salary to be able to apply for residency (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2016; Williams & Mason, 2016). Some of these changes came with additional expenses, for example, taking an English Language test with minimum score requirements. In contemporary immigration policy, skills and income requirements have been the two key pillars in favour of economic value and financial self-sufficiency, while length of residency and social ties have been devalued (Terruhn, 2023). For many temporary migrants that already were living in New Zealand and experienced these rapid changes in policy, they created as Rafael described a sense of 'destabilised' certainty. Many scholars have referred to this as institutionalised uncertainty (Anderson, 2010; Bauböck, 2011; Terruhn, 2023).

As migrants applied for Residency under different categories, they were challenged by long processing application times. Consequently, working migrants lived with uncertainty for long periods of time (Hindmarsh, 2020). Ruhs (2003) analysed the bloating of the immigration system defined by high numbers of applications exceeding the yearly quotas for residency. The problem with bloating and long processing times for residency for many working migrants is that work is central to applying for residency, as it is the main path for applications. Working migrants are expected to maintain the same employment while they wait for a resolution of their application (Hindmarsh, 2020). Consequently, if there is a change in employment, migrants have to file a new application and lose their place in the queue, increasing their vulnerability and uncertainty.

According to a newspaper article (Fonseca, September 26) for example, since 2018 when the Labour Government came into power, targets and policy criteria were undermined enhancing delays. Additionally, the year 2022 was an outlier in terms of immigration policy change, since there were more than 70 amendments to immigration policies (Fonseca, 2022). Normally, average amendments, in a year reach no more than ten. The migration policy changes in 2022 were reflective of the COVID-19 pandemic, but many other significant changes occurred before that. Such dramatic changes can amplify the risk of a poorly planned and mismanaged immigration system, and participants' stories reflect the negative impacts these changes can have on their daily lives.

## Developing agency through the experience of migration

In the process of migration, life patterns are disrupted, losses occur, stress is experienced, and new challenges and experiences arise (Pepworth & Nash, 2009). Participants in this study shared personal reflections regarding how they have processed the obstacles of migrating to a new country and what they have learn from the experience of resettlement. These stories situated migrants as more than entities inhabiting workspaces and simply adjusting effectively to employers and visa requirements. This is evident in the case of Josefina where her migration journey appears to be strongly connected with personal growth, overcoming numerous challenges, and reconstructing a sense of home in the new place of living. Josefina had different types of visas throughout her migration journey. Initially, she had a Working Holiday visa, then moved to an Essential Skills visa, then a Partnership visa, and finally a Residency visa. Now that she has settled more permanently into New Zealand, she reflected on what it meant for her to migrate and the impact this experience had at a personal level.

*I believe that the experience of migrating is generally very personal, it entails growth, development, and knowing oneself greatly (...) There are a lot of small, day-to-day processes that people [from the outside] don't know and perhaps will never understand (...) I feel that it is a super personal process and that deep down, the vast majority of the challenges that one has as a person in the host country, one does not put them on Instagram, one does not tell everyone.*

Josefina's accounts of her migration journey portray migration as a lengthened, multifaceted, and challenging change process that entails more than intercultural contact and adaptation processes (Birman & Bray, 2017). Josefina's reflection suggests that migrants may not always openly communicate the hardships and challenges they face with their family, friends, or those who haven't migrated with them. As a result, people looking from the outside may not fully understand or be aware of these difficulties. Additionally, as analysed in Chapter Four, participants faced other challenges related to the power imbalances within their employment conditions. The processes of dislocating and relocating to a new host community are therefore broadened beyond acculturation processes to include personal, social, and community processes (Van Tonder, 2013). Understanding working migrants as more than just being labour units, means viewing migrants as persons, including their unseen challenges belonging to the private spheres of their day-to-day lives.

Rafael and his family have gone through a variety of rewarding and challenging experiences in their migration journey. Rafael shared the difficulties of their settlement processes, experiences of exploitative working conditions, issues with obtaining residency entitlements, and constraints in different social systems. He described what he and his family have learned about their settlement experiences and skills acquired in their migration journey.

*For us, despite everything I have told you in all this time, how difficult it has been and everything, but it has also helped us grow. It has made us grow a lot as a family and as a person too. In other words, facing all this big change and being able to endure it, I think it is a good experience. In other words, if tomorrow I had to return to my country, it is not time wasted, it is time gained, always*

Rafael's comments reflect that in moving to a new country migrants take risks, leave their comfort zones, and make changes, but they do so with the hope of pursuing a better quality of life (Paloma et al., 2016). Successfully migrating to a new place requires both physical and emotional strength, and it is especially important to have support from family and loved ones during this process. Despite the challenges and difficulties faced by many working migrants, Rafael's story illustrates that these experiences can help migrants grow, learn how to adapt to change, and develop some self-efficacy needed to overcome obstacles. In such cases, the process of migration can be a positive and transformative experience.

### **Sense of Home**

It is often assumed that migrant settlement is based on positive labour outcomes, language proficiency or matching qualifications with new employment opportunities, but developing a sense of home can also play a key role in migrants' agency, sense of belonging and satisfactory settlement (Philipp & Ho, 2010). Josefina seemed to develop a strong sense of home including a diversity of elements. She identified spending time connecting with her family and also investing time on a journey of self-discovery. She engaged in cooking activities as a way to connect with family traditions, allowing her to build a sense of home for herself:

*At that time [the first years], perhaps much more than now, I talked a lot with my parents. Once a week, once every two weeks. And my dad was always very*

*emphatic in reminding me of the issue of the roots: 'a tree without roots dies, and you have to be in touch with that'.*

*(...) There were moments where I had to rediscover myself, or establish who I was as an adult, who that person was who went on a trip, and who I was and how I was going to function here in the long term. And I focused a lot on cooking.*

*(...) I started making my own recipe book and asked my grandmother and my aunts for recipes. I feel like it's a super nice way to connect with my country of origin.*

*(...) The topic of food is an emotional comfort that connects me a lot with the comfort of everyday life, of what my life has always been. Besides, my family was super good at sitting at the table and eating delicious things. So of course, [food is] comfort and connection.*

Josefina learnt from her father about the importance of being connected with her family and her roots. She embodied the ability some migrants develop to build their own families abroad, create meaningful connections in the new place, and at the same time follow their own cultural traditions (Liu, 2014). Food practices as everyday activities are strongly interwoven with the creation of culture, identity, memory and place (Graham, 2016). And Josefina utilised learning how to cook traditional foods from her country of origin to rediscover herself as an independent woman and build her own sense of home, but at the same time to stay connected with her family and her own roots. Increases in everyday time pressures and financial instability often have the effect of marginalised food experiences and traditions (Graham, 2016). Thereby, working migrants less affected by their precarious status appear to have more opportunities to develop such activities and enhance their sense of home in the new place of living.

To reflect on her migration journey, Josefina utilises a family heirloom connected with the act of cooking traditional foods. She reflects through her grandfather's 'special spoon' which now belongs to her and that she brought over to New Zealand:



Picture 4. Spoon

*It is an object that has merely sentimental value and at some point, it came into my hands. My uncle had it, and he had kept it. But he told me "I'll give it to you". And when I got home [New Zealand] I thought of framing it and putting it as a photo. And then I said no. I want to use it. I want to see it. And I want it to be my spoon when we eat soup. [Through the spoon] I feel super connected to my family history because it is part of my everyday life too. It's part of my life here, of putting together lunches or meals with friends. It is part of that tradition of gathering around the table to eat and having eternal conversations. And it's part of who I am as a person and what I want to be.*

Recreating home from everyday practices is often part of the negotiation between past lives and belonging to new spaces for migrants (Cain et al., 2015). By articulating and negotiating the food practices of their household, Josefina appears to be identifying aspects of her cultural heritage she would like to preserve and/or discard. Utilising the family spoon and recreating family gathering traditions plays a key role in creating and maintaining Josefina's personal and social identity (Graham, 2016). Affect and emotion are centrally implicated in the migration experience of individuals, families, and communities as an embodied, situated, and relational experience (Cain et al., 2015). Josefina displays such strategies to counteract losses and changes inherent to the migration and settlement processes. Of interest here is the sense of connection and comfort Josefina describes as a result of creating her own home while reconnecting with her cultural traditions as a way of self-discovery of her own identity.

### **Self-efficacy**

The process of (re)creating a sense of home varies among different working migrants. Jose as a farm worker has developed a high sense of self-efficacy during all the years he has been working on the

farm. Jose appears to believe in his own capacities and actions to produce particular desirable outcomes (Klassen, 2004). He states, “*I do what I have to do for a season, I commit, and then I move [to a different farm]*”. As analysed in Chapter Four, the high labour demand characteristics of the farm, allow Jose to independently navigate his immigration processes, explore new job openings in various farms, and pursue better working conditions each time. He committed to working for a season and then seek out different employment opportunities that provided him with new experiences and knowledge to further his career development. Jose shared his experiences on creating a sense of home under the farm-style employment and accommodation conditions he has been experienced:

*There are farms where you have to share a house, but there are others where you have a house available [just] for you. Generally, I have lived in houses available solely to me. I have had a house with four bedrooms and a huge and completely empty living room. Because I am not going to buy things to decorate. I have never had decoration, I have stuck a few stickers, but nothing that big. So, the accommodation has been great, the truth is I love having space, so I think it is one of the advantages [of working on a farm]. It is beautiful on the farm; they give you a spacious place to live there.*

Seasonal changes to Jose’s location of employment and therefor his temporary accommodation have kept him focused on the tasks and duties he has to perform on each farm. Most Western psychologies are focused on person-centredness skills such as self-efficacy and hardiness, not fully acknowledging the person-environment influences in developing those skills (Schwarz, 2018). In contrast, relational approaches emphasise social isolation and the lack of social support in developing self-efficacy in response (Klassen, 2004). Jose’s experiences have been around the farm working lifestyle, which he reports is an isolated work style with little or minimal relationships with the community. Jose’s instances of experiences with the community were mainly around doing sports. Social activities, such as sports, facilitate the integration of migrants to the community and retain them in the long term (Poulter & Sayers, 2015). Jose has not been able to explore sports activities fully and pursuing residency is linked with his desire to engage in different activities outside the farm. Jose's sense of belonging appears not to be tied with the temporary accommodation provided by the farms he worked for. The temporary terms that migrant workers, such as Jose, are subject to, plus the sense of being disposable and temporary in their employments, contributes to a

low sense of belonging (Basok & George, 2021). Not surprisingly Jose reports that he does not feel that New Zealand is his home yet. He feels that he needs to experience more about New Zealand to identify as a Kiwi. His sense of belonging probably would increase once he gains more experiences as a stable resident and is able to enjoy the community beyond the farm.

## Resilience

Another protective factor developed by many working migrants in this study was resilience. Valery's testimony provides deeper insights into what it means to migrate for working migrants and the learnings gained by having these experiences. Valery, through the selection of her object of reflection, expands on the meaning that her first working experiences had on her migration journey and the sense of empowerment she developed.



Picture 5. Farm

*That photo was on the first farm that I worked on when I just arrived in New Zealand (...) when you got to the top [of the property] you could see the ocean, like spectacular. And I remember a lot that on that farm I worked with three very big men. I am short and for me that feeling of having arrived there, that I was capable of getting there, that I was working in this beautiful place, that was like... I don't know, a feeling of freedom, of empowerment. So, I have a photo in which I am wearing work overalls and in one of those pastures, very pretty.*

*[feeling of empowerment, it is important] because suddenly it's just being by yourself, (...) I felt independent. I had just learned to drive to go to New Zealand, so in the farm was the first time I got in a car, and worked and drove a motorcycle, I drove a tractor, you know? And I felt I was doing it, here on the*

*other side of the world. And having worked shoulder to shoulder with them, because we almost all did the same tasks. And getting the work done was great.*

Valery realised with time that migrating to work on the farm was a lonely but powerful experience for her. She was capable of doing work tasks that often are done by stronger and taller farm workers. Despite her small size, she learned how to drive tractors, do intensive labour tasks, and felt empowered to endure physically demanding work conditions and adverse weather conditions. Valery's resilience as the personal ability to adapt to adversity is recognised as a protective factor from negative appraisals of stressors (Schwarz, 2018). The experience of arriving and enduring the unknown work conditions enhanced her accomplishments and sense of empowerment. Valery expressed that migrating is a hard experience, but she has learnt many things about herself allowing her to gain more confidence in herself. Her migration journey has taught her that she is stronger than she thinks. She has been able to do things that she never thought of doing.

An ecological constructionist perspective on resilience takes into account the relationship between an individual and their environment, framing resilience as unique to each context, rather than an isolated personal trait (Ungar, 2004). Valery's context is important to consider. As a woman from a South American country where opportunities for women in physically demanding farm labour are often limited, it is noteworthy that in New Zealand she was able to work in an environment where women and people of short stature are given a fair chance to be hired for such jobs. In this case, resilience appears to be a trait developed by the specific context of Valery and her negotiations with her work environments to maintain a healthy self-definition (Ungar, 2004). Resilience seems to be a successful negotiation by Valery for healthy resources defined by her.

Focusing solely on resilience at an individual level might lead to blaming working migrants who are not able to overcome obstacles with using their own personal strategies (Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2013). As analysed in Chapter Four, Valery faced numerous obstacles in her employment experiences, facing exploitative relationships, entrapment in unwanted employment, uncertainty about her migrant status, casual and precarious jobs and difficulties for career advancement. Addressing systemic and environmental factors that create contexts of adversity can acknowledge unequal power relations between working migrants and their employment and living conditions (Schwarz, 2018). In general terms, the experience of migration can be both intensely challenging and a confronting personal experience (Van Tonder, 2013). However, understanding resilience as a product of cultural, social, political, and economic factors could have the potential to transform social aspects, making the experience of migration less adverse (Schwarz, 2018).

## Social support

Social support in the form of nurturing relationships with employers is seen as a prominent protective factor against some harmful effects of precarious migrant status (Goh & Lopez, 2016). Josefina's work experiences, as described in Chapter Four, reflected supportive employment opportunities and options for career development in her retail job for three and half years. Josefina's employment stability and career adaptability has facilitated her commitment to the company, increased her sense of progress, offered opportunities to strengthen social relationships, and provided her with more agency to develop a sense of home (Ocampo et al., 2022). Supportive work environments are not solely the social support that participants valued and reflected in their emigratory experiences. Rafael identified some additional factors related to social support, that facilitated his settlement processes in the new country:

*One of the things that helped us a lot to adapt was meeting people from many countries. So, it was kind of enriching in that sense. Things that perhaps I would never have seen in my country, having contact with people from Africa, or from different countries. I think that helps; multiculturalism helps a lot to adapt*

When Rafael first arrived in New Zealand, he lived at a hostel in a city centre where many migrants gathered from all over the world. As an international student in an institute learning English, he could also meet more migrants in similar situations. Working migrants who have recently arrived tend to prioritise settling in areas that provide better social support, often from other migrants, rather than solely focusing on labour market opportunities (Maré et al., 2007). Ethnic diverse communities can provide social, economic, and cultural support for migrants, like Rafael, who are adapting to the new country (Bauböck, 2011). At the beginning of his settlement, Rafael received support from other migrants to find a place to live, who would accompany him when talking with potential landlords and supporting him with communicating in English. Eventually, migrants may give more weight to local labour market opportunities when deciding on a settlement location after spending more time in the receiving country (Maré et al., 2007). Rafael's experiences and relationships with many migrants from other countries facilitated his adaptation in New Zealand. Settlement pathways of migrants, influenced also by social support received, will be analysed in the following section.

## **Settlement pathways**

Throughout this chapter, I have examined various social spaces inhabited by working migrant within and beyond their workplaces, as well as protective factors that enabled them to develop agency through the experience of migration and overcome the effects of migrant precarious status and precarious employments. This final section explores the different settlement pathways working migrants in this study have undertaken and the role of employment for them. Employment may not only be utilised to earn a living and be financially sustainable in the new place of living (Standing, 2011). Career development and doing meaningful jobs also contribute to the self-esteem and wellbeing of working migrants (Goh & Lopez, 2016). Social mobility is also a relevant factor interrelated with the employment possibilities and limitations that working migrants face to improve their working conditions (Roy et al., 2021).

Temporary migrant workers' stories in this study demonstrate that employment could be utilised for wider reasons rather than just immediate economic benefits. To broaden the narrow economic perspective, it is critical to consider not only the human agency in this process but also the indirect contextual factors that intervene (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). Analysing the underlying value employment has for working migrants settling in Aotearoa New Zealand may help to clarify the processes and pathways migrants take into settlement. Utilising employment specifically to secure residency pathways was an aspiration for only one working migrant in this study. Obtaining residency status for four participants was not equivalent to long-term permanency in New Zealand. One participant went back to their country of origin for a while and then returned to New Zealand to then settle long-term. One participant thought of living in another country first, before settling in New Zealand. Another two participants stated that they want to live in New Zealand but not “permanently” yet. Participants who did not plan to stay in New Zealand long-term pursued residency because it provided other advantages, mainly gaining more autonomy as social agents.

### **Rafael’s settlement pathway – From student to residency status**

Employment plays a significant role, especially for temporary working migrants, in shaping settlement pathways. Employment opportunities can be utilised to specifically secure residency pathways from early stages of the migration process. Such is the case for Rafael, who is a husband and father in his forties, from South America. Initially, Rafael migrated to New Zealand as an international student studying English, which allowed him to work twenty hours per week. To be able to stay longer and work full-time in New Zealand, Rafael found employment in the construction industry. However, in his home country he happily worked as an emergency health professional, a

career that fulfilled him. As analysed in Chapter Four, Rafael's options to migrate to New Zealand using his emergency healthcare qualification, presented several constraints. Rafael explained his initial aspirations and how he managed to apply for his first Essential Skills visa in the construction industry:

*The moment we decided to leave our country, it was because we were focused, whether in Australia or New Zealand, on staying. We put all the cards on the table from the beginning and we said it is or it is. The focus was always to stay.*

*My student visa was ending at the end of February 2016, which was about 5 months that I had on that visa. So, when I started working in construction I started to see where I was going to hold on, to get a work visa. And that's when, against time, I managed to get from a foreign employer the sponsor. And my visa was going to run out on March 5th, and I applied for the [work] visa two days before it ran out.*

For Rafael staying permanently in New Zealand with his family was a goal from the beginning. Rafael's main driver to migrate was to get out of South America and pursue a better future and quality of life elsewhere. He reflected, regarding his chosen object of reflection in Chapter Four, that giving a better future for his family, especially their daughter, was a main motivation to migrate to Aotearoa New Zealand. Rafael's comments appear to show that the relevant factor driving his family to move to New Zealand extends beyond his own personal motivation to pursue a career or do a specific job. For Rafael, employment was used as an instrument to pursue other goals, and doing a meaningful job did not initially represent a main factor for settlement. He entered the construction industry with an Essential Skills Visa and then transitioned to a Work to Residency Visa in the same industry to achieve his goal of migration. Applying for residency was a stressful experience for Rafael. Rules and requirements were changing constantly for him (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2016; Williams & Mason, 2016). Rafael and his family went through the Work to Residency application process initially and failed. In Rafael's case, it took longer than two years to process his application and that meant that the application expired before he received an outcome. The family lost their migrant status for a short period of time, and Rafael shared some of the consequences of that experience:

*We didn't have health [rights], my daughter couldn't go to school, I couldn't go to work, neither could my wife (...). Then it was very ugly. My wife lost her job because they [her employer] could wait for her for a while, but they didn't give her the possibility of more [time] and she lost her job. Luckily, my boss gave me all the support. In that sense, I take my hat off for how they behaved with me. But it was a horrible experience*

The 'bloating' of the overloaded immigration system (Ruhs, 2003) not only puts pressure on agents and visa processing but also has consequences for migrants hoping to get residency status. Rafael's experience demonstrates how losing temporary status can have devastating consequences for working migrants and their families. The family faced extra financial pressures, together with increased uncertainty about their future. Luckily for them, Rafael's company helped them to get an immigration advisor who supported their application for another Essential Skills visa. After regularising their migration status, they furthermore also benefited from the exceptional Residency 2021 policy described in Chapter One. In this context, Rafael shared what it meant for them to finally gain residency after eight years of living as temporary working migrants in New Zealand:

*...from the moment you have the residence, it's much calmer. It really gives you that breath of relief, that I finally made it...*

Temporariness for migrants often can be subjectively planned, as migrants can plan their migration for a specific period of time, but they can also often change their plans over time, either by extending or shortening their stay (Bauböck, 2011). Additionally, temporality can also be legally prescribed, referring to policies and procedures leaving temporary migrants with limited options to change their status if they want to, in an institutionalised uncertainty (Anderson, 2010; Bauböck, 2011). Appears that Rafael's sense of relief is related with what Robertson (2019) refers to as contingent temporality, defined by dependencies and forms of unpredictability that mediate immigration outcomes and life goals. Such uncertainty seems to be driven by unexpected policy changes, which can present new challenges, altering aspiration and desires of many temporary working migrants, like Rafael. As a consequence of such policies, Rafael and his family lived in an uncertain temporality for more than eight years.

Legally, long-term 'resident' migration can be distinguished from temporary migration only retrospectively, after specific residency regulatory processes come into effect (Bauböck, 2011). Temporary migrants become "residents" after their applications are approved. Such processes can take a long time and during this time migrants are unable to make plans even though they might have been in the receiving country for a long time, producing a sense of stagnation (Robertson, 2019). It seems possible to see long-term 'temporary' migration differently when migrants have lived in a receiving country for long periods of time, despite their temporary legal status. Such migrants can be seen as 'temporary' but their living experiences reflect a more permanent settlement, as shown by Rafael. It appears that migrants could improve their wellbeing, hence their contribution to the receiving country, if their presence were more recognised and less uncertain.

During the eight-year period, Rafael and his family were unable to make future plans and imagine a future in New Zealand. Until 2022, when they were granted residency, the family lived trapped in the present due to their enforced temporariness (Anderson, 2010). For example, they made the decision not to have more children, even though they wanted them because they were uncertain about their future. Even with the prolonged periods of uncertainty, their motivation to stay permanently in New Zealand prevailed. Despite not fully considering what that might look like, Rafael reported feeling optimistic and hopeful about the future as a result of their residency status. He did not rule out going back to study. His wife could also study something in the future, but for the moment Rafael reported that they were enjoying the breath of relief and the calmness of a more 'permanent' residency life.

### **Josefina and Simon's settlement pathways - Working holiday visa (WHV) holders**

In the following paragraphs, I will examine the case of Josefina and Simon, who each came to New Zealand with the Working Holiday visa scheme, however, they followed different settlement pathways. They both were qualified professionals in their home countries and were initiating their careers over there, however, they both decided to travel to New Zealand with the Working Holiday visa (WHV). The WHV is specifically set up for young people to travel and work for up to twelve months in New Zealand (Searle, McLeod, & Stichbury, 2015). In the case of Simon, he was in his thirties and was a qualified IT professional. He travelled from Central America to New Zealand to live the working holiday experience, initially just for one year. He shared his initial thoughts on why he chose to migrate to New Zealand:

*My country of origin only had two options [of working holiday visas] at that time, Canada and New Zealand. And friends had already come to New Zealand and they told me it was good, and that is the reason I came that first year.*

Simon was able to travel around the country and have the possibility to work to earn some income, thanks to the Working Holiday Visa (WHV). To promote cultural exchange, and enable migrants to undertake incidental work while they travel, 38 countries have signed WHV agreements with New Zealand (Searle, McLeod, & Stichbury, 2015). It is noteworthy that the Work and Holiday visa attainment process has undergone several policy changes in recent decades. These changes include increasing the age range to be able to apply, lessening restrictions on work periods for a determinate employer, and allowing more countries to participate in the scheme. As a result, the visa has transformed from a cultural exchange programme into a low-skill worker-provider scheme (Wright et al., 2022). The expectation is that these migrants would take temporary seasonal employment in horticulture, agriculture and other seasonal industries and supply labour for these industries experience workforce shortages (Wright et al., 2022).

Simon was able to sustain himself financially in New Zealand through his various roles in the hospitality industry. Employment also permitted him to develop new skills and expand his creativity through cooking. At the end of his Working Holiday Visa, Simon was working as a Chef in a restaurant and received an employment offer to apply for the Essential Skills Visa and stay longer in New Zealand. The Essential Skills visa bonded him to his employer, shaping Simon's pathway as a working migrant. Simon shared his experience transitioning from the WHV to his first Essential Skills visa, sharing what he liked about his cooking job:

*I did various hospitality jobs [during the WHV]. Then I stayed cooking. That's where they offered me to stay and cook. I like cooking, it was something to do with my hands, it's something where I could express myself, and I decided to stay a little longer cooking. Then after 5 years, I didn't like cooking that much and I wanted to start getting out of the industry [but I could not].*

Simon lived on a working holiday visa for one year and then he had two Essential Skills Visas for two years each in the hospitality industry. Some qualified migrants may find employment in their professional careers, especially if they have some kind of connection to horticultural or agricultural

industries (Poulter & Sayers, 2015). However, many qualified working migrants with working holidays set themselves up to work in different employment fields, such as hospitality, which concentrates a third of all working migrants working in this field (Searle, McLeod, & Stichbury, 2015). Simon's cooking job was critical to maintaining his initial intentions to stay in the country. Applying for residency became a priority to Simon as it would enable him to return to his original IT career. Simon shared in a simple but meaningful sentence what did it mean for him apply for residency:

*[residency allows you to regain] freedom over you, that is, you have control over yourself and what you do.*

After five years of being in New Zealand Simon applied for residency in 2018, in part to allow him to stay longer but also because he was looking for more autonomy with his working conditions. There is an intricate relationship between immigration/citizen status and employment opportunities for migrants, where more autonomy appears to impact on job quality and being able to attain less precarious employment opportunities (Goldring & Landolt, 2012). Simon met the conditions of working experiences and/or qualifications as a Chef, which were the main requirements at the time he applied. The English language proficiency and income threshold were, luckily for Simon, requirements that appeared later in time. Simon was the only participant in my study who applied through the points system and he reported that he had no issues, presumably because the requirements were less demanding in his particular case. The waiting time during this period was not a significant issue either.

In contrast, Josefina, who also started her migration journey with a WHV, took a different migration pathway. Josefina shared her initial thoughts about the main motivations for her to apply to the Working Holiday Visa Scheme and migrate to New Zealand:

*What I wanted, and as I always expressed it, I wanted to go on a trip. I really didn't think much about it. I didn't have a master plan or anything like that. I was super naïve and innocent when I made the decision (...) The working holiday visa was not so popular, and no one knew where New Zealand was. It was like an adventure.*

Before moving to New Zealand, Josefina was a middle-class, qualified single woman in her thirties. She was living with her family, recently graduated, and starting to work as a graphic designer in her country of origin. At that point in her life, she said that she wanted to *'leave her comfort zone, live an adventure, and start to live on her own terms, away from her family's rules'*. She was also wanting to improve her English language skills, as she faced some work challenges due to not being able to communicate with foreign English-speaking clients. The Working Holiday scheme fitted perfectly with Josefina's intentions, as provided opportunities to experience leisure, temporary casual work, and cross-cultural experiences (Searle, McLeod, & Stichbury, 2015). Employment opportunities in New Zealand not only appeared to provide a financial role for Josefina but also exposed her to new social experiences and allowed her to improve her English language.

Josefina applied for her first Essential Skills visa as an extension of her Work and Holiday retail job. Employment was seen as a fun and fulfilling experience that became a growth experience for her, as referred to in Chapter Four. Then she started a relationship with a New Zealand citizen, which allowed her to apply for a partnership visa. The partnership visa, gave Josefina some autonomy to leave the retail employment at some point and find new work opportunities. In her case, her employment was not that critical to gaining stay and employment rights. Residency was also experienced as a continuation of the commitment to her relationship, rather than to pursue a more autonomous status. Josefina described when the transition of a more-so-citizen-experience happened to her:

*I feel like the change [of sense of belonging] was more with that work visa than with the residency. The residency consolidated certain things, but the process after the working holiday was the most intense in terms of feeling more part of here [NZ].*

Essential Skills visas issued for more than two years granted working migrants' resident entitlement in the healthcare system (Immigration New Zealand, 2023). For Josefina, this change in her life seemed more impactful than the agency gained in the labour market by the residency visa. A sense of belonging is often intimately connected with the negotiation of home and the sense of identity of migrants, which can be shaped in something tangible (Liu, 2014). It appears that gaining more participation through the right to health care provided Josefina with a more meaningful connection to New Zealand. Initially, Josefina did not have any intention to stay permanently in New Zealand. Josefina applied for residency while she was in her first long-term relationship with a New Zealand

citizen. However, her decision to live permanently in New Zealand was something that had been evolving over a number of years. She shared how her life has been concerning her relationships and her decision on which country she wanted to live in:

*I had a partner here [in NZ], which was the reason I stayed, we had a relationship for five and a half years, but that relationship ended and after it ended, I returned to my country of origin, that is, we broke up while we were at my country of origin. Some time passed and I felt that my country of origin was not working out for me, I was not feeling comfortable and I wanted to return to New Zealand again. I came back to New Zealand single and after a couple of years I was paired up again with a Kiwi and he is my current partner.*

Residency for Josefina was never a primary goal, and it was apparent that it did not determine her decisions and was not something that she thought about it too much. Her decision to live and settle in New Zealand was also not linear (Robertson, 2019). She changed her mind and returned to her country of origin even though she was already a New Zealand resident. After a while, she decided to come back and settle in New Zealand again. Partnership with a New Zealand citizen played an important role for Josefina, both for wanting to move back to her country of origin and for wanting to move back to New Zealand again. This participant's accounts reflect how motivations change with time and circumstances and how employment is not a sole or continuous driver. Additionally, a distinction is made between residency and permanency in New Zealand.

### **Valery and Jose's settlement pathways - Essential Skills visa holders**

Having discussed different settlement pathways for working migrants holding initially Student or Working Holiday visas and the value employment had, I will now consider the case of Valery and Jose, who migrated to New Zealand with Essential Skills visas issued from their home countries. Valery and Jose, both in their thirties, immigrated from South America with agricultural qualifications and a desire to learn more about the New Zealand dairy system. However, different work experiences were shaping their motivations to apply for residency and then deciding to settle more permanently in New Zealand. First, Valery shared her initial motivation to come to New Zealand:

*We [me and my partner] have studied the New Zealand agriculture system, which has always been a top model in dairy production, so initially we wanted to get to know the system, learning how the whole production system was managed here, that was the initial thing.*

Valery's preliminary plan was to come to New Zealand with her partner and work for one or two years, and thus the move was initially intended to be temporary. Valery was granted an Essential Skills visa in a dairy farm which bound her to work for her employer for one season. After she finished her employment, towards the end of the first year, she came back to her country of origin, and then applied for a second season to work on another dairy farm in New Zealand. The second trip was also made with her partner. Being bound with an employer and experiencing difficult employment conditions shaped Valery's migration pathway.

After trying to file a welfare animal complaint in her last employment (see Chapter Four), and leaving that employment in precarious conditions, Valery applied for a Partnership visa. She held work entitlements without restrictions, which allowed her to explore different seasonal jobs, possibilities that were absent holding an Essential Skills visa. She worked in a bakery, produce control factory, orchards, fruit packing factory and aged-care facilities. Valery shared her experience working for a fruit packing factory exemplifying the experiences she had to endure in low-paid, low skilled demanding temporary jobs:

*When you work in a factory, it seems to me that they exploit you. It's difficult because the workdays are 11 hours long, and you're standing there (...) and they put the machines extremely quickly.*

*I once had a problem there, because someone stopped the machine and [we] said we can't take it anymore, we are not robots (...) We told him [the manager] that it was too fast, that it was impossible. And he [the manager] said no, that the machine was at normal speed. And one tells him, but how is that going to be the normal speed? I'm the one standing here all day. And no, they basically don't care about that. The packing factory tries as hard as they can to make more work for you, that is, up to the limit or more.*

Valery has had a series of precarious employment experiences in the last three years. She has worked in insecure, low-skilled jobs that have been demanding and poorly paid, such as the factory job above described (Vosko, 2010). Precarious employment can also be characterised by a lack of employee control or power over employment processes and working arrangements, which often hinders the ability to maintain the wellbeing of workers (Tucker, 2002). Valery tried, unsuccessfully, to change her working conditions, nonetheless, her conditions were regulated by the management department, and she reported that despite the number of sick workers, and employees' complaints, nothing changed, which is another characteristic of precarious employment (Breznik, 2023). Valery was constrained by her financial pressures, but because she had open work entitlements due to her partnership visa, she was able to leave unwanted employments, and that is why she had several different types of jobs. Her qualifications were not utilised as the types of job she wanted for career development required greater English proficiency (see Chapter Four).

Valery was ready to return to her home country due to the insecurity and precarious nature of her employment experiences when the COVID pandemic happened. The worsening economic conditions in her home country made her consider the possibility of seeking a more permanent arrangement outside of her country. She then decided to apply for residency in New Zealand, as she met almost every requirement. She was a qualified agro-industrial professional and had relevant work experience, however her English language proficiency did not meet the necessary criteria. Achieving the required grade in the English test was the main barrier for her. She was planning to study English and prepare for the English test when the exceptional Residency 2021 policy appeared as an option. Since applying for residency, Valery has been able to think more about her future in New Zealand and make new plans for her career development (Anderson, 2010, Hodgetts et al., 2017). Residency not only can provide her with more autonomy and the ability to stay in New Zealand without relying on a partner, but it can also open up more educational opportunities for her.

Valery's plans are for a longer settlement, but that does not mean she necessarily wants to stay in the country permanently. She shared her view on her longer-term settlement in New Zealand:

*In the long term yes [I would like to live in NZ], especially when I have children, I think it would be nice that they grow here. Without children and before forty-five years old I don't see myself established here long term, no.*

At the time of the last interview, Valery was in her home country, and she still had not decided when to return to New Zealand. Yet, she stated that when she comes back, she wants to go to a big city that would give her more employment options but also better connection to the community. She is in her thirties, has career development plans and still sees New Zealand as an opportunity to stay and work but perhaps not to permanently settle. She claims that New Zealand would be a good place to raise children and then she might consider moving permanently. Valery's accounts demonstrate how having residency status is not necessarily equivalent to wanting to live permanently for working migrants. Attitudes and actions that on the surface may appear contradictory, such as applying to residency but not wanting to live 'permanently' in New Zealand, might be subtle calibrations to adjust to the long-lasting temporal scenario that Valery lived for more than eight years (Tazreiter, 2019). Valery's expression of ambivalence may be reflecting the effect of experiencing such uncertainty about her future for long periods and the lack of space to actually think about the future.

Similar to Valery, Jose arrived in New Zealand with an Essential Skills visa to work on a certain farm. His preliminary plans were mostly for him to focus on his career development. However, for Jose, other elements such as gaining financial stability and expanding his vision in a internationally leading industry, influenced the value that employment held for him. He shared what were his initial aspirations:

*Well, I travelled in 2014, and I just graduated from the University. I started my working life in my country of origin in a good company, but with some job instability, with respect to the fact that they were giving me monthly contracts and I did not make ends meet without knowing what would happen to the next one. [That was] my first income as a professional. That was my life. But suddenly the opportunity arose to expand my vision and leave my country of origin. So, that economic aspect along with going out and exploring motivated me to start looking for a way out [of my home country].*

Jose was utilising his employment to gain more knowledge about the New Zealand dairy system, working with ruminants, and developing his career in this field. He acknowledged that he was interested in getting out of South America for financial advancement, but also wanted to explore and expand his vision. It seems that Jose was seeking upward class mobility, which appeared to

include financial advancement and career development. However, social mobility for temporary migrants is contingent on their social agency and capability to negotiate social capital gains and losses (Roy et al., 2021). To achieve his goals of career development and advancing his potential earnings, he worked hard in a difficult industry. Jose's employment conditions at the farm were demanding but still manageable for him. Jose, within the Essential Skills visa restrictions, was able to pursue different employment opportunities, doing the same job on different farms, providing him options for improvement of employment conditions each time. However, after several seasons, Jose wanted to explore other careers, and other opportunities, develop other skills, or do a career specialisation in a different area within the same industry, such as becoming a salesman in the farm industry.

Although it was not an initial priority for Jose, after the pandemic, the opportunity of the residency 2021 policy arose and he applied and was benefited from the policy change. Due to limitations within his Essential skills, applying for residency became a good option for Jose. He talked about the importance of a career change after he had been in the same type of job for more than eight years. He liked what he did, but he had other interests too. Jose described what it meant for him to get residency status in New Zealand:

*It will change me from heaven to earth. This is going to be a huge change and I am really looking forward to it (...) This [farm work] is a lifestyle and I have been doing it for a long time and I need a change. I like cows, I like what I do, I am not ungrateful for what the dairy has given me. Because of the dairy I am in this country and in a certain way I like to contribute and do a good job, which is I can contribute to this community. In that sense, I am grateful to the dairy, but I need a change.*

Pursuing expanding his career and exploring different employment options were prominent factors in pursuing residency for Jose. However, Jose appeared to also want more. Jose seems to be prepared to work hard to achieve his goals, but he seems somewhat disappointed that so far, his hard work has not translated into enough of an improvement in his financial status (Skilling & Tregidga, 2019). Social positions can vary in different social environments (Roy et al., 2021), and presumably Jose's class position as a professional could become enhanced when he gains residency, as he can have more agency to move around employments and professional fields. At the same time, Jose can experience downward mobility if he settles for work environments unknown or unfamiliar to him, which can position him in a lower position to start with. At the same time, Jose

can lose his advantages of getting affordable work-provided accommodation and saving travel expenses if he moves out from the farm lifestyle, as described earlier in this chapter. Jose's sense of agency is a prominent factor but social mobility is a multidimensional process that especially in migrants varies within the social context. Other factors such as the disadvantages in the labour market for migrants or lack of workers' protections (see Chapter Four) could also contribute to stagnate social mobility.

Jose reported that he never aimed to settle permanently in New Zealand. Nonetheless, residency opportunities do have the potential to help him achieve his goals, as gaining more agency as a working migrant could favour his objectives (Groutsis, 2022). However, it is also probable that if other offers arise for him, maybe in a different country, Jose might be prepared to move, if his prospects might be better elsewhere (Basok & George, 2021). Permanent settlement was absent in his account of his future aspirations. He was, since receiving residency status, only just starting to plan for the future and had the intention to perhaps live between both countries and become a transnational migrant (Bhatia & Ram, 2009).

The participants in this study have shown they are more than just workers. The realities of living as a temporary migrant encompass broader social spaces, such as experiences in housing, and the health system. At the same time work/life balance and the rising cost of living in New Zealand appears to be also key factors affecting migrants and their families. Through varied experiences, participants appeared to be able to develop more agency to overcome some of the difficulties they encountered because of their precarious migrant status. Resilience, self-efficacy and developing a sense of home were resources developed by them that appeared to facilitate their settlement in New Zealand. The stories of the participants, despite sharing similar characteristics, have shown that the trajectories of working migrants are highly context-dependent. They do not follow a linear or predictable sequence. Even so, all migrants in this study pursued residency with the intention of gaining more autonomy as social agents living in New Zealand. The majority of working migrants in this study did not have the intention of living permanently in New Zealand, however, due to the restrictions imposed by their precarious migrant status they seem to be forced to apply for residency, just to be able to gain more autonomy, especially in the labour market. In the final chapter, I will review key considerations of this study and provide some future research recommendations.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

Working migrants are more than just individuals performing labour activities in a foreign country. Immigration policies in New Zealand, however, have been designed to extract the economic benefit from migrants looking to work in New Zealand and have limited their rights to participate in society (Terruhn & Cassim, 2023). In many countries, the implementation of a neoliberal economic model that prioritizes market-driven globalization and a decrease in government regulations, has led to the rise of a global precariat group (Standing, 2011). Working migrants, constituting a segment of this global precariat, have been individuals facing ongoing instability, occupying precarious positions in the workforce, where they are frequently viewed as commodities rather than human beings with the entitlement to social protection (Paret & Gleeson, 2016; Standing, 2014b). Working migrants' experiences in New Zealand, reported in my study, have been diverse, complex and multidimensional, and not all of them negative. Nonetheless, in this study, I have demonstrated a number of common threads of precarity through their experiences. Working migrants living and settling in New Zealand shared a precarious migrant status defined by their ongoing temporariness and restricted movement in the labour market. Consequently, all temporary working migrants in this study reported a loss of power, autonomy and social status as migrants. All participants in this study expressed a desire to transition away from their temporal, uncertain and precarious status, to lead lives characterised by greater agency. This means that these working migrants wanted to have the capacity to shape their lives, capitalise on opportunities or even open up new possibilities for themselves and their families with more autonomy (Triandafyllidou, 2019).

Immigration policies in New Zealand have focused on promoting temporary migrant working activities and rights, but policies have also increased their control over access to a more permanent integration into the country (Arkilic & Sardelic, 2023; Terruhn, 2023). Rapidly changing immigration policies in New Zealand have been negatively impacting working migrants' ability to settle permanently in the country. Participants in this study have shown they attempted to make plans and make life decisions based on the requirements and (im)possibilities given by immigration policies to pursue their next steps. For instance, Rafael and his wife decided to not have more children, even when they wanted to because their migrant status was too uncertain. When immigration policy changes are constant and rapid, participants appear to experience a stagnated present, with a suspension of fundamental life decisions and also everyday life decisions (Robertson, 2019), adding extra pressure to their settlement experiences. Applications that granted temporary work visas were fast-tracked efficiently for my participants and presented no issues when migrants were highly skilled or had their qualifications recognised. When working migrants had unrecognised

qualifications or performed lower-skill jobs and wanted to pursue more permanent status, they faced major difficulties in the immigration system. Participants dealt with difficulties due to complex requirements, procedures, and limited access to information from Immigration New Zealand. Long processing times affected their settlement objectives, as employment was crucial to being able to opt for residency. Employment changes or losses could affect their residency possibilities, making it harder to obtain resident status.

Tying working migrants to a single employer and having to rely on that employer to apply for further visas or to remain legally in the country, has been shown to be one of the main sources of vulnerability that increases the risk of exploitation (Choudry & Hlatshwayo, 2022; Collins & Stringer, 2019). If we consider the experiences of working migrants in this study, we can see that work exploitation experiences are varied and that not all migrants face extreme exploitation. This does not mean that exploitative working conditions were absent. For example, Jose arrived in Aotearoa to work on a farm, straight from his country of origin, to find out that his working roster consisted of 18 days of continuous work on a farm, with only 3 days off. Or the case of Rafael, when working in the construction industry, his employer to comply with immigration requirements, paid him an agreed hourly rate, but in reality, Rafael was being paid by output, meaning that he had to accept earning less or risk getting fired and losing his visa entitlements. Or Simon, being tied to his employer, who was paid less than his non-migrant coworkers in similar positions. Yet Simon could not say he was not going to put up with unfair or exhausting working conditions and simply leave. These experiences are all forms of migrant worker abuse.

Untying working migrants to a single employer could support migrant workers to gain more autonomy and power in the labour market. When businesses have greater bargaining power than employees to negotiate conditions often businesses can set wages below competitive levels (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). Workers and employers with similar bargaining power to negotiate employment conditions can create incentives to raise wages for migrants but also for local workers. Increasing migrant mobility in the labour market is likely to lead to better labour market and productivity outcomes (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). At the same time, labour mobility for migrants could benefit the receiving community who would benefit from the full potential of what working migrants could offer to the community. When cheap migrant labour becomes scarcer, the labour market would also presumably become fairer for New Zealanders too, since businesses would have to improve working conditions for all workers to attract them and fill the workplace shortages.

In New Zealand, migrant workers have a degree of protection against labour issues through a combination of public policy, monitoring, and enforcement with varying degrees of effectiveness

(Anderson & Tipples, 2014). The experiences of working migrants in this study have shown significant conflicting consequences in accessing justice, and when approaching the Labour Department, as their right to stay in the country has depended on the employer. Fear of losing working rights or deportation have been the main barriers to reporting exploitation (Stringer, 2016; Anderson & Kenner, 2019). This study has also shown that non-English speaker migrant workers often faced additional difficulties, as engaging in mediation processes or reporting abusive practices became harder when they had to express themselves in a different language. Additionally, the experiences of working migrants in this study have shown that the Labour Department was not visible in New Zealand to them, and that the norm for workplace negotiations were that these should be experienced as 'casual' and 'relaxed'. Despite existing sanctions and penalties, there appears to be a lack of will and capacity to investigate breaches effectively and enforce regulations (Zhang et al., 2022). Participants' accounts on this matter reflected Zhang et al. (2022) and demonstrated the complete lack of acknowledgement of the issue of imbalanced power relations between temporary working migrants and their employers.

A business based on a model that relies solely on extracting the economic benefits from working migrants is problematic and likely to restrict a migrant worker's growth possibilities. Working migrants in this study have indicated that they wanted to do meaningful jobs, use their varied skills and contribute to the receiving community. It seems that only viewing work from an economic perspective is often insufficient. Despite some commonly imposed restrictions and limited rights, not all experiences of working migrants were negative. Some of my participants were able to enjoy their work experiences, have career development opportunities, develop meaningful social connections, and/or strengthen their social capital. Josefina's experiences reflect these positive employment relations (see Chapter Four). Working migrants in this study less affected by their precarious status and financial instability, such as Josefina, appear to have had more opportunities to develop activities interwoven with the creation of culture, identity, memory and place. Cooking activities allowed migrants, such as Josefina, to connect with family traditions and at the same time enhance their sense of home in the new place of living (Graham, 2016). Such activities counteracted losses and changes inherent to the migration processes. In this sense, providing better working conditions seems to have had a positive effect beyond the workplace, allowing workers to enjoy activities outside their work, such as food making, to strengthen their sense of home and belonging. Developing more agency through reconstructing a sense of home, or developing resilience or self-efficacy in adverse situations, developed a sense of empowerment and facilitated settlement. However, the development of these protective factors did not prevent precarious situations happening. Instead of focusing on developing individual strategies, viewed in mainstream

psychology, a community psychology approach addresses the environmental conditions that could decrease the precarity, so that people do not need to rely solely on personal strategies to adapt to adverse conditions (Riemer et al., 2020).

Notions of time and space were highlighted by the working migrants in this study. Temporality and permanency were not lived as dichotomous experiences by my participants. The time my participants spent in New Zealand was often lived as contingent, rather than linear. Events happening in their home countries, world pandemics, economic factors and personal aspirations, as well as changing immigration policies have all been factors that appear to intervene in how long a working migrant stays in a receiving country. Nevertheless, it seems that immigration policies are based on this unrealistic and dualistic perspective of categorising migrants as temporary or more permanent, which often does not reflect the realities of working migrants' intention of settlement. The (un)likelihood of working migrants to be transited from temporary status to permanent status given by immigration policies, with no options in between temporariness or permanency, created the unwanted effect that many migrants were forced to apply for residency, because there were no other options for them to gain more agency in society and the labour market and less uncertainty to live a sustainable life.

Working migrants often settled in New Zealand with their 'hands tied', as is reflected in the stories of the participants in this study. These participants often encountered limitations to developing more social agency and the lack of certain rights, due to immigration policies regulating their status. Experiences of working migrants in this thesis has demonstrated that migrants can experience more restricted agency and autonomy or 'tightness' in certain social spaces, but that they can also experience more self-determination or 'loosening' in others. Residency status has been associated with the 'untying of hands' for working migrants, as participants in this study did not have any other formal/regulatory resources to gain more autonomy. However, it appears that gaining residency did not guarantee that working migrants no longer faced challenges. Participants in this study, after gaining residency, experienced several disadvantages in the labour market, such as lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, lack of English language proficiency restricting full participation in the labour market and lack of recognition of overseas work experience. Work/life balance and the high cost of living in New Zealand were also factors that seemed to cause hardship for workers in precarious, low-wage, flexible and uncertain employments. Consequently, from a broader policy perspective, it is not that sustainable to expect the residency for working migrants to function as the sole measure for them to acquire more social agency amongst working migrants. For example, in the space of employment, there appears to be a need to strengthen working rights, improve working conditions, increase autonomy of migrants to leave unwanted or exploitative

employment, but also seems to be an increasing need for institutional mechanisms to regulate, monitor and sanction bad working practices (New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, 2013). Even if all of this was achieved, it is likely that this would not be sufficient. Unions can have a relevant role in helping collective representation and action for workers to strengthen their rights and help to build a less precarious life. Experiences of participation in collective organisations, such as labour unions or community organisations, were absent from the participants' accounts in this study, even though this can be an effective strategy for addressing precarity (Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Future research could address factors influencing participation of migrant workers in such collective organisations. Also issues such as racism, discrimination, and respect for diversity and cultural differences are other issues that immigration policies and New Zealand as a receiving country could address, towards building a more equitable, and multicultural society.

Immigration has been lived by my participants as an experience that exposes people to change and losses. Nonetheless, immigration also has the potential to entail growth and to shape empowered social agents that can contribute to the growth of the country and a sustainable relationship with the entire community. Work was experienced by my participants as more than just an economic dimension of their lives. Work entailed for them the possibility to grow, find meaning, contributing to the community, exploring different sets of skills, in different moments of life, and exploring possibilities to change. Working migrants can contribute to the community as more than economic units. A manaakitanga treaty-based immigration system captures the notion of mutual care and respect for people, honouring one another, and protecting the environment (Kukutai & Rata, 2017). Additionally, suggestions to develop a Government Policy Statement for immigration to reflect Te Tiriti and Māori aspirations can be incorporated (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2022a). If indigenous knowledges are included in national conversations around immigration, it seems possible to address the economic needs of the country together with reaching collective broader benefits for all people and communities that inhabit Aotearoa (Wynyard, 2023).

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1: Immigration historical timeline



# Immigration historical timeline

Please fill in the following timeline including a recollection of visas granted and occupations you had since arriving in NZ. You are invited to add any relevant information or historical events that you feel are important to you in your own migration journey. You could add columns above to add years in the template or delete years that are not relevant to you. Participants details are for internal use only, and will not be shared outside of this research.

## Participant Details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship status:

Country of origin: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of arrival to NZ: \_\_\_\_\_

Region/City:   
Languages spoken:



	Type of Visa	Jobs
(Start on the year of arrival)		

2010	Example: Working Holiday Visa	Hospitality (front of house), vineyard worker, babysitting
2011		
2012		
2015		
2016		
2019		
2020		
2022		
2023		

Looking back to your historic timeline, how would you characterize your settlement experience in NZ? Could you briefly identify some resources that help you and some barriers?

Please write bullet points of topics we could discuss in more detail in the initial interview.

Write your answer here:

Please return this questionnaire before \_\_\_\_\_ to  
migration.research.waikato@gmail.com

## **Appendix 2: Interview agenda**

These questions are intended to be used as prompts only. Topics relevant to the research will be covered, and an open and flexible discussion will be facilitated. It may be necessary to ask clarifying questions in order to broaden or deepen the discussion.

Reviewing the timeline with participants will be the starting point of the conversation.

### **1. Pull factors**

- A decision to migrate is always accompanied by a story. Why did you choose to come to this country/community instead of another?

### **2. Settlement experiences**

- How was the transition from being a new migrant, a working migrant and then a long term (resident) migrant?
- Going beyond individual experiences of adjustment, or your personal ability to adapt to a new community, what elements in your experience played an important role to settle and feel comfortable in NZ? When it came to settling in, what resources, persons, or experiences was most helpful?
- What have been your biggest challenges? What are the major challenges faced by migrants in your experience?
- How does the experience of settlement in NZ change once residency is granted? What benefits, resources, or differences did you feel once you got granted residency?
- In your opinion, what are the most important two or three things that people could be supported with when coming to a new community in NZ?

### **3. Labour Market**

- Tell me about your experiences in the labour market? How has it been to work in NZ?
- When it comes to finding a job, how has it been for you? What do you think about the opportunities the labour market offers to migrant workers?
- How has it been to find a job that matches your skills? Do you have any previous work experience gained in a different country? How has it been to transfer or get recognition for it in NZ? Do you have any qualifications or training gained outside of NZ? How has it been to get that recognised in NZ?
- What are the working conditions for migrants like in your opinion (or in your experience)? This could include equal and fair treatment, promotions, working hours, work environment, legal rights, flexibility, relationship with management, relationship with co-workers, among others
- What have been some of the benefits in the labour market for being an immigrant? Have you ever felt discriminated or undervalued because of your ethnicity or any other aspect of your cultural background and identity?

### **4. Immigration policies**

- In what ways have immigration policies impacted your settlement experience? This could include rules set for working migrants, the latest changes in policies, support/lack of support from government institutions to participation (health care, housing, etc).
- How has your experience with Immigration NZ been? This could include procedures, access to information, fair treatment, costs associated, among others
- Where do you think there is room for improvement?

## **5. Treaty of Waitangi/relationship between Māori community and migrants**

- How has Māori culture and language influenced New Zealand's culture? In your opinion, how much influence does Māori culture and language have in New Zealand's culture?
- Have you had opportunities to see or experience Māori culture somehow?
- What does biculturalism mean to you and how it relates to migrant workers?
- How as a migrant do you get to know that the Treaty exists? How are migrants introduced to the Treaty framework/information? How does this funding document influence government decisions or policies, especially regarding migrants?
- What can be done to support your understanding of the treaty?
- What can be done to support the relationship between Māori and migrant communities?

## **6. Final thoughts / conclusion**

- If someone you knew was planning on coming to this country/community, what would you tell them to expect?
- Is there anything you would like to add that has not been asked?
- What are your aspirations for the future, dreams or hopes?

# UNPACKING MIGRANT SETTLEMENT IN NZ



## PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!



This research seeks to understand migrant settlement in New Zealand identifying what helps migrants to settle, but also the barriers.

I would like to hear your stories about your settlement from arriving as a newcomer to holding a working visa to becoming a long-term migrant.

We are looking for **working migrants** that:

- have been in NZ *at least 8 years*
- have been the main applicant on their Essential Skills or Work to Residence visas 
- and are willing to share their settlement experiences in the NZ context 

**I AM  
CONI MEDEL**



I am the principal researcher of this project, a migrant worker who came from Chile 12 years ago.

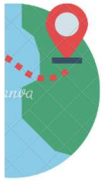
Now, I am a student at the University of Waikato doing a Masters in Community Psychology. My work is focused on social justice, diversity, community participation, empowerment, and social change.

 **CONTACT US!**

[migration.research.waikato@gmail.com](mailto:migration.research.waikato@gmail.com)



## WHAT KIND OF PARTICIPATION IS REQUIRED?



### CONSTRUCTING A TIMELINE

Completing a brief immigration historical timeline template as a way to recall significant events on your migration journey (visas granted, occupations).



### TWO INTERVIEWS

One on one interviews with me, to talk about your experience as a migrant worker, reviewing your history, highlights, struggles and anything you feel relevant to share.



### OBJECT(S) OF REFLECTION

You will be invited to bring to the second interview a significant object that represents your migration experience in New Zealand and has meaning for you.



### IS MY PERSONAL INFO GOING TO BE SHARED?

The information shared will be used for research purpose only.

All information you provided is confidential and your identity will be protected.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE, CONTACT US!**

[migration.research.waikato@gmail.com](mailto:migration.research.waikato@gmail.com)

## Appendix 4: Information sheet - Participants



### ***Understanding Working Migrant Settlement experiences in New Zealand from a Community Psychology perspective***

Kia Ora,

My name is Coni Medel. I am conducting research on working migrants' settlement experiences in New Zealand, as part of a Master of Community Psychology at the University of Waikato. I am particularly interested in migrants' transitions from the working visa category to permanent residency. Given that this transition usually takes some time, I would like to speak to migrants who have been residing in New Zealand for at least the last 8 years about their current experiences, but also about their migration journey from temporary worker to residency.

#### **Could I be a part of this research?**

This research is focused on a specific group of migrants – workers whose employment has enabled them to be and stay in New Zealand. So, if you are a **migrant worker** who has been in NZ for *at least 8 years*, you are invited to take part in this research. This includes having been the main applicant on your Essential Skills or Work to Residence visas regardless of having been a holder of other types of visas or your current visa situation. I would like to speak with migrants who have had the experience of being a temporary worker in NZ.

#### **What type of participation is required?**

As a participant, you will be invited to take part in two interviews either in your own home, by Zoom or at an agreed location that you feel comfortable. Interviews may take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded, with your permission. Prior to interview 1, you will be invited to fill out a short immigration timeline, so that I have an overview of your migration history in NZ. If you agree to a second interview, then you have the option to bring an object that is of significance and reminiscent of your migration experiences in NZ. This could take the form of everyday items, cultural artefacts, a piece of art, pictures, a family antique, souvenirs, gifts, or any significant object to you. Objects can be useful for sharing experiences, and the purpose is to have a discussion about how this object(s) symbolises aspects of your migration experiences. The object/s will not be kept for the research, but may be photographed with your permission.

#### **Will my privacy be protected?**

It will be my highest priority to protect your privacy. No information and findings will be presented in a manner that identifies you as a source. All information you provide in an interview is confidential and your name will not be used unless indicated by yourself. You could choose a

pseudonym (fake name) or I could assign you one if you prefer and anonymize some of your identifiable information in order to protect your identity. Interview sessions will be audio-taped with your consent and will be transcribed for research purposes.

### **Use of data**

The collected data will be used to complete this thesis research. It is anticipated that the data will also be used in peer-reviewed publications and/or seminar/conference presentations.

### **What are my rights as a participant?**

You have the right to among other things to:

- refuse to answer any particular question.
- ask any further questions about the study that occurs to you during your participation.
- withdraw your material and participation at any time up to two weeks after the last interview.
- receive an opportunity to edit and comment on your interview summary transcript
- be given access to a summary of the findings from the study, when it is concluded.

### **How can I become a participant?**

If you would like to participate in this research, you can contact me by email and we will arrange a time to meet that suits you. Before we begin, you will need to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the interviews. I will send you a timeline template for you to complete before the first interview. It would be helpful if you could send this back to me at least two days before the interview.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more, please write to me at:

Coni Medel

[migration.research.waikato@gmail.com](mailto:migration.research.waikato@gmail.com)

School of Psychology. The University of Waikato

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact my supervisor:

Ottilie Stolte: [ottilie.stolte@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ottilie.stolte@waikato.ac.nz)

## Appendix 5: Consent form – Participants

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO  
FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### Understanding Working Migrant Settlement Experiences in New Zealand

Name of the participant: \_\_\_\_\_

- I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project.
- Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation.
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw my participation up to two weeks after the second interview. In this event, any information traceable to me will be withdrawn from the research.
- I understand that I can choose not to answer certain questions. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and I can stop the interview or ask to turn off the recording device at any time.
- I agree to fill the immigration timeline with my best recollection of events and bring an object of significance to the second interview.
- I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet.
- I understand that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings.

<b>Please complete the following checklist. Tick [X] the appropriate box for each point.</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I agree to be recorded in the interviews.		
I wish to view the transcript of my interviews.		
I wish to receive a copy of the findings.		

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact  
Details: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact  
Details: \_\_\_\_\_