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FOREWORD The Symbolic Violence of Primitive Accumulation in the United States

PHILIPPE BOURGOIS

The good doctor tells us, "Eat fresh fruit—lots of it!" You, the reader—the tiny fraction of the world's population that has access to important critical and moving books, like this one by physician anthropologist Seth Holmes, are likely to take this healthy biopower dictate for granted. Most Americans who are not poor have learned to avoid the worst of the cheap, processed, and biologically engineered convenience foods saturated with sugar, salt, and fat (Moss 2013) that the global poor increasingly are condemned to eat because of transnational corporate domination of food markets. A few of the global privileged in the United States who remember reading Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and boycotting grapes in support of Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers movement may be vaguely aware that the delicious, health-giving fruit they worthily devour is produced cheaply by literally breaking the backs, knees, hips, and other overstressed body parts of Latino farmworkers.

Holmes lets us know in no uncertain terms *why* we often fail to recognize the association between our “care of the self” and the suffering imposed on indigenous Mexican farmworkers that has been rendered invisible through the naturalization of racialized hierarchies. He shows us the urgency of recognizing that global assemblages are unequally structured and, although they impose themselves on all of us, they distribute embodied suffering differentially onto structurally vulnerable populations (Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois 2011). The stakes are high: these global inequities damage the body, and they are too often deadly. Holmes shows exactly who gets physically and emotionally hurt, and in what intimate ways, by the effects of racism, international trade policy, the everyday practices that normalize inequality, law enforcement, and disciplinary forms of knowledge. He explores the intellectual, political, practical, and ethical implications of the ideas of Marx, and especially of Bourdieu—not to mention the early Foucault—so that readers cannot continue to misrecognize the relationship between their biopower benefits and the damage inflicted on the bodies and lives of indigenous undocumented workers. In fact, as Holmes documents ethnographically, access to affordable fresh fruit in the United States, and in many of the wealthier parts of the world, is made possible by a symbolic violence that treats racism as a natural state of affairs. More concretely, he shows how this translates into abusive workplace hierarchies, residential segregation, and unhealthy living conditions.

The public secret of the politically imposed suffering of undocumented Latino farmworkers in the United States in the mid-2010s is unconscionably useful: It generates profits for transnational agribusiness and keeps U.S. citizens healthy. The suffering of the Triqui is arguably more useful, more noxious, and more invisible than was the human-engineered environmental disaster that expelled 2.5 million people from the Great Plains during the Great Depression of the 1930s and sent 200,000 “Okies” into migrant farm labor in California, contributing to the great boom in the multibillion dollar California agricultural industry. The Okies, too, were greeted with insults. Store entrances sported signs saying, “Okies and dogs not allowed inside.” Holmes sought out a real live retired Okie, only to find that this elderly, upwardly mobile former

migrant laborer spewed back the same venom that had been directed at him over half a century ago. He tried to convince Holmes that the latest wave of migrant farm laborers, the Triqui Amerindians, were culturally inferior and deserved their poverty. Their phenotype, body size, marriage customs, language, nationality, and even work discipline and exploitability become the pernicious symbolic markers of a racialized ethnicity that assigns them to a toxic occupational location in the global labor force.

The fresh fruit market niche that biopower, symbolic violence, old-fashioned racism, and xenophobic nationalism have rendered profitable and vibrant in the United States is actively enforced through the structural violence of U.S. immigration laws and the details of the Department of Homeland Security’s border and workplace inspection enforcement policies. The political imposition of an “illegal” status on Mexican farmworkers in the United States was provocatively compared by Michael Burawoy in 1976 to the same mechanisms of unequally articulating modes of production (agricultural capitalism with subsistence agriculture) that enabled the mining industry of South Africa to thrive and to subsidize the living and working conditions of South African whites in the second half of the twentieth century through the political and legal enforcement of apartheid and the migrant homelands system. Almost forty years after Burawoy’s critique, U.S. agriculture’s relationship with indigenous rural communities of Mexico continues to institutionalize and, as Holmes demonstrates more subtly, to embody this dynamic. The costs of the reproduction of U.S. agriculture’s labor force (the childhood nurturance and education of the laborers themselves) and their physical degradation (occupational injuries, pesticide poisonings, premature superannuation, and retirement) is displaced onto the home-sending communities. When farmworkers are rendered too sick, from physical exertion and exposure, to continue laboring, most “voluntarily” seek refuge in their rural communities throughout Latin America—but especially Mexico—and increasingly in its indigenous territories. The industry—even the well-intentioned mom-and-pop farm Holmes studied—exposes its workers to massive doses of sprayed carcinogens and imposes on them a choice between hunger and repetitive strain injuries

that too often result in severe lifelong disabilities. When the desperation of the workers becomes excessively visible or costly, Homeland Security conveniently deports them, and they are blacklisted as criminals.

Those seasonal laborers who return home aching and exhausted to their formerly semi-autonomous subsistence farming communities find their remote villages and hamlets devastated by the North American Free Trade Agreement. Sooner rather than later, poverty forces most of them to drag themselves back across the militarized northern border for yet another harvest season of brutal labor. These indigenous communities used to supply local Mexican corn markets, but that valuable source of cash income and subsistence food supply has disappeared. Local markets have been flooded by corporate-grown U.S. corn imports and packaged convenience food that benefit from unequal access to tax subsidies and genetic technologies, because neoliberal practice is inconsistent with its own free-market ideology. This unhealthy, politically imposed structural violence can be thought of as a contemporary form of primitive accumulation akin to the enclosure movement of sixteenth-century England described by Marx as a prime example of the violent birth of "capital . . . dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (Marx 1972: 760). U.S. immigration and labor laws and, more distally, the unequal articulation of modes of production across international borders prevent agricultural laborers from organizing for their rights, or even from complaining about their superexploitation as seasonal laborers. This parasitical crossnational labor management strategy fosters a "conjugated oppression" that melds the experiences of racism and economic exploitation into an embodied symbolic violence.

As a physician anthropologist who has a commitment to being a public intellectual as well as a healer, Holmes has a privileged relationship to understanding and theorizing the embodied experience of conjugated oppression. He provocatively straddles two intellectual professional disciplines and epistemologies that see the world very differently: anthropology, with its productively schizophrenic foundation in the humanities and social sciences, and biomedicine, with its positivist commitment to pursuing statistically significant objective evidence. Holmes understands the body with the eye of a medical practitioner who knows technically

how our organs, cells, and synapses operate. He has valuable practical skills for healing people, and he makes a U.S. doctor's high salary—even if significantly reduced by his being a university professor and primary care physician. Above all, Holmes is a border-crosser who is unambiguously on the side of the poor. He violates the apartheid of class, nationality, ethnicity, occupational status, space, and culture that organize most societies and are especially powerful and unequal in the hyperglobalized United States–Mexico nexus—along with gender, sexuality, normativity, age, and ability. He has the *chutzpah* to put the confrontational habitus of doctors (imposed on him by his rigorous training in medical school as well as his childhood socialization as the son of a doctor who specializes in radiology) to good use by betraying his guild of well-meaning physicians. He reveals from the inside the unintentionally depoliticizing logics of what is one of the most hermetically sealed and self-protected, privileged occupational niches in North America: that of practicing clinicians. In chapter 5, he accompanies his fellow farmworkers to an occupational health clinic to advocate for them, and through this practice-based ethical engagement he is able to open up analytically the operational mechanisms of the basic constitution of symbolic violence, so that naturalized, racist oppression can no longer reproduce itself as an unintended public secret among his colleagues in their clinical practice serving structurally vulnerable patients. At the same time, Holmes always maintains both an analytical and a personal hermeneutics of generosity that transcends Manichean political righteousness and avoids anthropology's cultural relativist and postmodernist pitfalls of failing to see the ugly contradictions and suffering imposed by political-economic, cultural, psychodynamic, and bodily forces. This political theoretical insight reveals why genuinely committed, caring, intelligent clinicians inadvertently blame patients for their own predicaments and remain largely clueless about social-structural inequality. In fact their misrecognition is largely a knowledge-power disciplinary product of all their years of miseducation in science and medical school. As a practicing physician who strives to work on behalf of the poor, Holmes knows what his colleagues contend with, because he too has to enter into unequal hand-to-hand combat with the byzantine insurance reimbursement illogics

that are imposed on overpaid doctors in the United States by a medical system dominated by market forces that cut short patient-physician interactions, limit access to technologies and medication, and narrow the medical gaze. That same theoretically informed generosity allows him to show us how a genuinely nice and ethical family farm owner (whom he met in church) can enforce horrendous conditions on his most vulnerable workers. That farmer, too, is trapped in the same web of unequal global markets that harms the lives of his workers.

Finally, in addition to being an inveterate border-crosser in his intellectual, professional, and private lives, Holmes also proves himself in these pages to be a master artisan adept at the core methodology that makes cultural anthropology so exciting: the participant-observation version of ethnography. By living (and shivering at night) in decrepit farmworker shacks, picking berries for long hours (damaging his own sinews in the process and coughing from pesticide sprays); by accompanying his fellow farmworkers into clinics and advocating for them with physicians; by attending weddings and baptisms; by joining an extended family and migrating with them through California's Central Valley during the off-season in search of temporary, subsistence-level employment (in a journey reminiscent of the Okies'); by volunteering to drive one of the overcrowded cars that travel, in an awkward caravan, carefully below the speed limit to stay under the radar of hostile highway patrol officers; by bathing and camping out with these families in rest areas; by discreetly insisting on staking out a closet to sleep in at night, as a room of his own for the rest of the winter, when the family finally locates a slumlord willing to rent to them; and ultimately, by "going home" with his companions to their inaccessible rural hamlets in Mexico, Holmes conveys the stories of real people the way anthropology—for all its foibles and its more serious elitist sins—can do so well.

I envy those of you who have not yet read the opening chapter of this book. It is beyond gripping. Holmes throws you deep into the Arizona/Sonora desert with his Triqui companions, dodging rattlesnakes, helicopters, armed guards, and all-terrain vehicles. One could not invent a more brutally effective system for culling the best possible self-disciplined laborers if one tried. At the same time, however, Holmes rejects the tradi-

tional anthropological trope of macho heroism and omniscience. Despite his courage and ability to endure hardships, take the risks the poor routinely assume, and stand unashamedly for justice, Holmes is no Indiana Jones. He, like all of us, has his own personal vulnerabilities. He bursts into tears when scolded by authority, locked up in an Arizona detention cell. In revealing this detail of his own subjectivity he provides yet another example of how abusive power operates, gratuitously humiliating its detainees at the most intimate level of the body and the emotions.

Thank you, Seth, for being a public anthropologist and confronting an urgent high-stakes subject. The members of your generation of MD/PhDs have the potential to revolutionize medical anthropology and, more broadly, the social sciences and humanities through their hard work, intelligence, and embodied practical empathy as both critical intellectuals and hard-working healers.

Symbolic violence is a concept from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, indicating the interrelations of social structures of inequalities and perceptions.³⁴ For Bourdieu, the lenses through which we perceive the social world are issued forth from that very world. Because of this, our lenses of perception match the social world from which they are produced. Thus, we come to (mis)recognize the social structures and inequalities inherent to the world as natural. Symbolic violence works through the perceptions of the “dominating” and the “dominated” (in Bourdieu’s words), while it tends to benefit those with more power.³⁵ Each group understands not only itself but also the other to belong naturally in their positions in the social hierarchy. For example, the powerful tend to believe they deserve the successes they have had and that the powerless have brought their problems on themselves.

Structural violence—with its pernicious effects on health—and symbolic violence—with its subtle naturalization of inequalities on the farm, in the clinic, and in the media—form the nexus of violence and suffering through which the phenomenon of migrant labor in North America is produced. This book attempts to make sense of the lives, labor, and suffering of Triqui migrant laborers in Mexico and the United States through these concepts. More broadly, it engages a critically embodied anthropology to confront the ways in which certain classes of people become written off or deemed less human.

THREE Segregation on the Farm

ETHNIC HIERARCHIES AT WORK

THE SKAGIT VALLEY

In fall 2002 I visited northwestern Washington State to explore the possibility of field research with migrant farmworkers in the area. Driving north from Seattle into the Skagit Valley, I was struck by the natural beauty of the landscape. The large Skagit River flows west from the snow-covered peaks of North Cascades National Park to the Pacific Ocean’s Puget Sound, pouring through some of the most scenic vistas in North America. The river is located roughly halfway between Seattle, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia, about an hour and a half drive from each. The valley is made up of berry fields, apple orchards, and the dark green evergreen tree stands common in the rainy Pacific Northwest, with the occasional brightly colored tulip field or brown dirt field lying fallow. Skagit County uneasily links upriver logging towns in the mountains such as Concrete, railroad towns at the base of

the mountains like Burlington, floodplain farming towns including Bow in the flats, coastal upscale villages like La Conner at the mouth of the river, and Native American reservations such as Lumi Island. The area is most famous for its tulip festival every spring, though it also receives many visitors who patronize the Skagit Valley Casino run by the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe as well as take advantage of the area's many hiking trails. When I was a child in eastern Washington, the northwestern part of the state figured in my imagination as a place of idyllic farmland with views of mountain peaks and Puget Sound islands.

As I came to discover during my first visit to Skagit County, most of the agriculture is found in the low, flat floodplain of the Skagit River. This land is protected from the tides of the Puget Sound by a grassy dirt dike some five feet high that gently curves along the meeting of the valley and the bay. The wide dirt path atop the dike has some of the most stunning three-hundred-sixty-degree views I have ever seen. To the west, the sun sets amid the San Juan Islands. The coastal mountains of Washington and British Columbia lie nearby to the north. To the east rises the glacier-covered volcano, Mount Baker, surrounded by several other snowcapped mountains. Large, dilapidated wooden barns peep out from patchwork tulip and berry fields to the south. One might notice as well the exhaust hovering over the ocean near a paper mill in the distance.

The valley is made up of several towns lining Interstate 5, with charming turn-of-the-century brick and wood town centers surrounded by ever-expanding strip malls, apartment buildings, and housing developments. The homes of the local elite boast magnificent views from the wooded hilltops and the coastline at the edges of the valley. Most of the land covered by the uninspiring strip malls was a flower or berry field in the late 1990s or early 2000s. In the valley, one commonly hears heartrending stories of the difficult state of family farming in the United States—stories of neighbor Benson's dairy farm closing after five generations because he could not compete with corporate agribusiness in the Midwest after recent federal policy changes, farmer Johnson's berry fields being shut down after nearly a century due to increasing competition from China and Chile, and orchardist Christensen's shame at selling his land to the developers of

a new Wal-Mart after his family had been growing apples since arriving from Scandinavia. A common bumper sticker in the valley rails against this phenomenon: "Save Skagit Farmland, Pavement Is Forever." The remaining agricultural land is still cultivated by several family farms, relatively small in comparison with much of U.S. agribusiness.

MIGRANT FARMWORKERS IN THE SKAGIT VALLEY

As I came to discover over the course of my fieldwork, the Skagit Valley is an important site in multiple transnational circuits of Mexican farm laborers,¹ including indigenous Triqui and Mixtec people from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. A few thousand migrate here for the tulip-cutting and apple- and berry-picking seasons in the spring and live several months in squatter shacks made of cardboard, plastic sheets, and broken-down cars or in company-owned labor camps, often in close proximity to the multilevel houses of the local upper class that have picturesque views of the valley. The migrant camps look like rusted tin-roofed tool sheds lined up within a few feet of each other or small chicken coops in long rows.² In the labor camp where I came to live, the plywood walls are semicovered by peeling and chipping brown-pink paint. There is no insulation, and the wind blows easily through holes and cracks, especially at night. Each unit is elevated a foot off the ground and has two small windows on one side, some of which are broken and most of which are covered by pieces of old cardboard boxes. The ground around the camps is often deep mud or a dust storm waiting to be triggered by a passing car. During summer days, the rusty tin roofs of the units conduct the sun's heat like an oven, regularly bringing the inside to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. At night, the air is damp and cold, reaching below 32 degrees Fahrenheit during the blueberry season in the fall.

During the first and last phases of my fieldwork, I lived in a 10-by-12-foot unit that the farm calls a *cabina* (cabin) in the middle of the largest labor camp on the farm. It might be more appropriately called a "shack." Normally, a minimum of one family would share a shack of this size. Mine had one old, damp mattress with rust stains from the springs on



Farm labor camp. Photo by Seth M. Holmes.

which it rested, a tiny sink with orange-colored water from separate hot and cold hoses, an old and smelly refrigerator, and a camping-style dual-burner gas stove. The bathrooms and showers were shared in separate, large, plywood buildings with concrete floors. Shacks like these, where thousands of workers and their families live in the county, are most often hidden away from public view, in compounds behind the farm company's tree stands or behind other farm buildings.

THE TANAKA BROTHERS FARM

The Tanaka Brothers Farm is the largest farm in the Skagit Valley, employing some five hundred people in the peak of the picking season, late May through early November. During the winter, employment dwindles to some fifty or so workers. This family farm is owned and run by third-generation Japanese Americans whose parents' generation lost half their land during the internment of the 1940s. The part of the family with

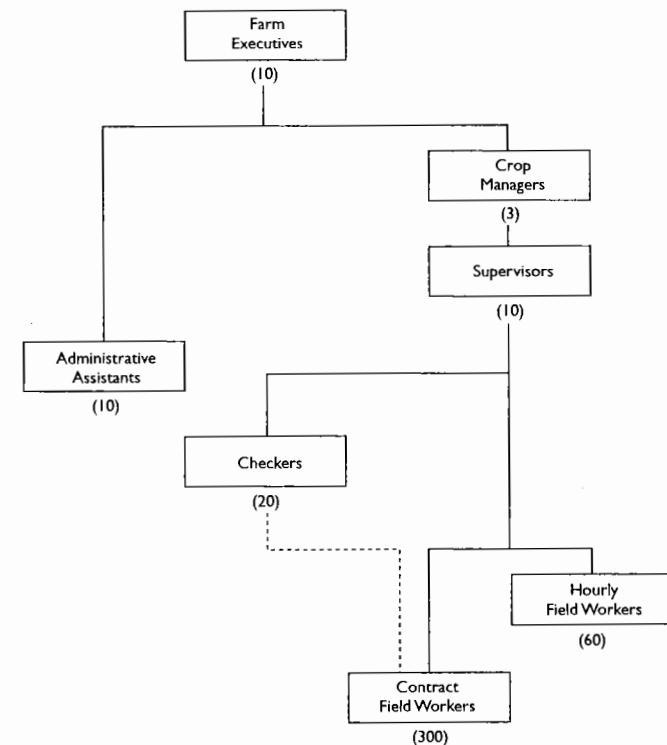
hundreds of acres on Bainbridge Island near Seattle was interned suddenly, and all their land was seized by the government. The part of the family in the Skagit Valley had time to entrust their farm to an Anglo-American family with whom they were friends and thus avoided the same fate. Today the farm is famous for strawberries, many from the "Northwest variety" cultivated by the father of those currently running the farm. The business is vertically integrated, incorporating everything from a plant and seed nursery to fruit and berry production and even a processing plant. However, most of the fruit and berries produced on the farm are sold under the label of larger businesses, from berry companies like Driscoll to dairy companies like Häagen-Dazs. The farm consists of several thousand acres, much of the land visible to the west as one drives Interstate 5 through the valley. The majority of the land is planted with expansive rows of strawberry plants, although significant numbers of fields are dedicated to raspberries and apples, as well as organic and so-called traditional blueberries.

At the base of a forested hill, abutting one of the blueberry fields on rural Christensen Road, lies the largest migrant labor camp on the farm, housing some 250 male and female workers and their families every summer. This camp is made up of plywood shacks with no insulation, no heat, and no wood layer under the tin roof. Immediately above this camp, on Christensen Heights Road, stands a group of five beautiful, relatively large houses partially hidden by trees with floor-to-ceiling windows that capture the panorama of the picturesque valley. The other two labor camps are relatively hidden behind the large, warehouse-sized concrete processing plant and the farm headquarters. The camp closest to the road houses about fifty year-round employees, is insulated and heated, and has a layer of wood under the tin roofs. The other camp, located a few hundred yards from the road, holds almost one hundred workers and their families in the summer. The shacks in this camp have a wood layer under the tin roof and insulation but no heating. Diagonally across from two of the labor camps and the concrete processing plant are the houses of some members of the Tanaka family. The one most visible from the main road is a one-story brick house behind a large white, wooden fence, reminiscent of a small Jeffersonian plantation house. A

public elementary school sits directly across from the main entrance to the smaller two labor camps.

The Tanaka farm advertises itself as “a family business spanning four generations with over 85 years experience in the small fruit industry.” The farm’s stated business goal is to produce high-quality fruit and sell it for profit. This farm specializes in berries with high taste content sold for use in dairy products (ice creams, yogurts, etc.) that use few or no preservatives, artificial flavors, or colors. Their Northwest variety strawberry is red throughout, with an incredible amount of tasty juice and a shelf life of minutes, distinct from the fresh-market “California variety” strawberries sold in grocery stores that are white in the middle with less flavorful juice and a much longer shelf life. Several of the Tanaka farm’s fields produce organic blueberries and are comanaged with and sold under the label of a large organic food producer. On a practical level, employees on the farm plant, grow, harvest, process, package, and sell berries, supporting the explicit goals of the company.

On a subtler level, the structure of farmwork inheres an intimate and complex segregation, a “conjugated oppression.”³ Philippe Bourgois coins this term in his analysis of a Central American banana plantation to show that ethnicity and class work together to produce an oppression experientially and materially different from that produced by either alone. After my first few weeks living in a migrant camp and picking berries, I began to notice the intricate structuring of labor on the farm into a complicated hierarchy. In the case of contemporary U.S. agriculture, the primary fault lines of power tend to fall along categories of race, class, and citizenship. The structure of labor on the Tanaka farm is both determined by the asymmetries in society at large—specifically around race, class, and citizenship—and reinforces those larger inequalities. The complex of farm labor involves several hundred workers occupying many distinct positions, from owner to receptionist, field manager to tractor driver, berry checker to berry picker. People on the farm often described the hierarchy in vertical metaphors, speaking of those “above” or “below” them, of “overseeing” or of being “at the bottom.” Responsibilities, anxieties, privileges, and experiences of time differ from the top to the bottom of this labor organization. The symbolic vertical



Labor hierarchy on the farm. Solid lines denote direct oversight; dotted lines, less formal oversight.

metaphor also corresponds to hiddenness and visibility, with those at the top most visible from outside the farm and those at the bottom most hidden. In congruence with the vertical metaphors used by those on the farm, the remainder of this chapter uncovers the social stratification of farm labor, moving from “the top” to “the bottom.”

FARM EXECUTIVES

Today the third generation of Tanaka brothers makes up the majority of the farm’s executives; the rest are Anglo-American professionals brought

in from other agricultural businesses. They worry primarily about farm survival in a bleak landscape of competition in the midst of increasing corporate agribusiness, expanding urban boundaries, and unequal economic globalization.

Over the course of my fieldwork, many of my friends and family who visited me in the labor camp quickly blamed the farm management for the poor living and working conditions of berry pickers. They automatically assumed that the growers could easily rectify the situation. This supposition is supported by other writings on farmworkers, many of which describe the details of pickers' lives but leave out the experiences of the growers.⁴ The fact that the perspectives of farm management are generally overlooked inadvertently encourages the assumption that growers may be wealthy, selfish, or unconcerned.

The stark reality and precarious future of the farm serve as reminders that the situation is more complex. The corporatization of U.S. agriculture and the growth of international free markets squeeze growers such that they cannot easily imagine increasing the pay of the pickers or improving the labor camps without bankrupting the farm. In other words, many of the most powerful inputs into the suffering of farmworkers are structural, not willed by individual agents. In this case, structural violence is enacted by market rule and later channeled by international and domestic racism, classism, sexism, and anti-immigrant prejudice.⁵ However, structural violence is not just a simple, unidirectional phenomenon; rather, macro social and economic structures produce vulnerability⁶ at every level of the farm hierarchy.

The structural nature of the labor hierarchy comes into further relief when the hopes and values of the growers are considered. The Tanaka farm executives are ethical, good people who want the best for themselves, their workers, and their local community. They want to live comfortably, treat their workers well, and leave a legacy for their children and grandchildren. They have a vision of a good society that includes family farming as well as opportunities for social advancement for all people. Several of them are involved in local nonprofits working toward such hopes for society. At different points during my fieldwork, several of them wanted my opinions on how the labor camps could be improved

for the workers. After the picker strike described in chapter 6 in which explicit racist treatment of the pickers in the fields was brought to light, the growers were visibly surprised and upset. They promptly instructed the crop managers to pass along the message that all workers are to be treated with respect. Of course, the executives share some complicity with the unfair system, and some are more actively racist and xenophobic than others. Overall, however, perhaps instead of blaming the growers, it is more appropriate to understand them as human beings doing the best they can in the midst of an unequal and harsh system.

The current farm president, John Tanaka, now in his fifties, is the second oldest of the brothers. He grew up on the farm and upon graduating from college joined the military. After serving as an army officer for twenty-six years, John returned to the farm and became its president. He has the quick speech patterns and erect posture one might expect of a military officer, as well as the ability to maneuver conversations through controversial issues one might expect of a political leader. As president, one of his roles is to help promote a positive view of the farm in the local community. Toward this goal, he heads a nonprofit organization to protect farmland, meets regularly with several community groups, and recently ran for the County Council. His primary role, however, is to oversee all the operations of the farm in such a way as to ensure profitability.

I met John Tanaka on my first trip to the Skagit Valley, as I was looking into the possibility of doing full-time field research with Triqui migrant workers in the area. After flying to Seattle, I drove north on Interstate 5 and arrived in the beautiful agricultural valley at the current home of my childhood neighbor. This woman, now in her early thirties, grew up next door to me in eastern Washington and attended the same junior high, high school, and church. Her first job after graduating from college and seminary was as pastor of a small Methodist church in Skagit County. During the week I stayed with her and her husband, she told me that the main farm with Triqui migrant laborers was the Tanaka Brothers Farm. On Sunday I attended her church service, during which she introduced me to John Tanaka and his wife and let John know that I was interested in doing anthropological fieldwork in the area related to migrant

laborers, ethnic relations, and health. He and his wife were friendly, and he seemed intrigued by the idea. The next day, I met him at 5:30 in the morning in his office at the farm to discuss the possibility of my living in the farm labor camp where most of the Triqui families lived and picking berries over the course of the summer. John indicated that he would be interested to learn more about the indigenous Oaxacan migrant workers, as he had only relatively recently been made aware of the distinction between "regular" Mexicans (as most people in the area referred to mestizo Mexicans) and indigenous Mexicans. We kept in touch over the remainder of the spring, and I moved into the labor camp in early June.

John's work schedule is influenced by weather, the growth rate of plants, the meetings of community groups, the hours of berry markets, and the current state of the farm's workforce. He begins his workdays usually before 6:00 A.M., takes a break in the middle of the day to work out at a nearby gym or eat lunch with his wife, and comes back to work until the late afternoon. He works seven days a week on the farm, except during the winter, when he works at the affiliated plant nursery in California. He explained to me that in California farms are required to pay overtime if anyone works more than six days a week. In Washington there is no such regulation. Most of John's time is spent indoors behind his desk, though he also visits the fields from time to time to see how things are going and to make his presence known. He explained to me that the farmworkers liked seeing him when he visited the fields. His daily worries orbit around such things as profitability, with its many inputs related to weather, bird activity, market price, and labor crew retention. Over several conversations, John told me about the difficulties of attempting to manage all the variables playing into the business side of the farm. Sitting behind his desk in his private office in the trailer that functions as the headquarters of the farm, John elaborated on some of the difficulties of running a family farm: "It's different than other businesses, where you grow a business and then sell out or reach a certain profit level that you're comfortable with. In our business, we grow it for the next generation. Which means that when I retire, you know, I can't pull dollars out of the company, because it would leave the next generation with a big gap. We know that, and that's what we focus on."

During my second summer in the Skagit Valley, John agreed to a conversation with several interested area residents organized by a local nonprofit working with migrant laborers. The conversation took place in a conference room on the second floor of the farm's processing plant that had a large window overlooking the assembly-line workers in yellow rubber aprons and hairnet caps. John took questions from the primarily white audience of twenty-some people, and the answers were translated into Spanish for the two Spanish-speaking area residents who attended. Here, he responded to questions about the main issues faced by the farm.

John: The challenge for us at a management level is to maintain our fair share of the market. . . . The difference is that in South Carolina, they have federal minimum wages, \$5.75 an hour. In Washington, I'm paying a picker \$7.16, the state minimum wage, competing in the same market. That's a huge difference, huge difference.

I would say the largest challenge . . . is probably offshore competition. For example, China: they could take a strawberry and bring it to San Francisco and deliver it to a restaurant cheaper than we can. And a lot cheaper to Japan. We pay \$7.16 an hour. In most countries that we're talking about here, China or Chile or wherever, they don't pay that a day!

Now, the other side . . . is a labor issue. That's the next—probably the largest issue that faces agriculture today. Right now, we feel comfortable—today—with the labor forces that we have and that we believe are available to us. But, as we look into the future, I think that's going to be a problem. What we're looking at is either we have to find a way to do what we do today with machines. Or we've got to find the right kind of labor market that will keep providing us that labor force that we're going to need to harvest our crops.

It's a multidimensional issue. What happens is that the first generation comes over and they're willing to work in the fields. But the next generation, they're schooled here, and they don't quite see the same passion for the fields.

Female area resident: Fourteen dollars an hour putting up drywall starts to look good [laughs].

John: Given education and other opportunities, they do other things, which is fine. I don't have any problem—I mean, our family did the same thing. I go back into the forties and we've seen Canadian Indians;

we've seen the Hispanics, not out of Mexico, but inside of eastern Washington and Oregon, California, Texas. That was the first part. And then we saw the Cambodians, the Vietnamese. Then we started to see the migration of the Hispanics out of Mexico. And then they went further. They went out of the state of Oaxaca, where a lot of them come from today. What you see is that same generational trend: the first generation works in the fields, a lot of them stay with you; the next generation, fewer of them stay with you, and more of them are educated and do other things. It's my belief that once any particular group of people go through a three-generation move, they'll no longer be in agriculture. Unless they own the farm and are running it themselves.

John recognizes that the living and working conditions of pickers are so undesirable that each group will move out of this position as quickly as possible. The pickers come from the most vulnerable populations at any given time. As each group advances socially and economically, a more exploited and oppressed group takes its place. Over the course of my fieldwork, the children of Triqui migrants have been learning English in school and hoping to find other kinds of work, though there have been very few options available to them thus far, due largely to the prejudice and ethnic hierarchies that exist in the United States. In one sense, this narrative of ethnic succession functions to justify the plight of the group currently at the bottom of the hierarchy. That is, it appears to foster the sense that it is all right that certain categories of people are suffering under poor living and working conditions at present because other groups have had to endure these conditions in the past. Some people begin to perceive this as a natural, evolutionary story.

John's younger brother, Rob Tanaka, is responsible for the direct agricultural production of the farm. Rob is a tall, bearded man with a kind, gentle personality. He plans everything from planting to harvest and oversees those in charge of each crop. His office is located in a small house in the middle of the berry fields, several miles from the main offices. He spends most of his time in this office, although he works also via laptop in the small lounge of the main office building and visits the fields often. Over several conversations in the small lounge in the main office building, Rob described to me his anxieties related to his work. His

primary concerns related directly to farming—weather, insects and birds, soil quality, labor—though he was concerned also with competition and the survival of the farm.

Seth: What things could cause the most problems?

Rob: For us, it's labor. We can grow the best crop there is, but if we don't have the people to harvest, we're pretty well sunk. Also weather. There's flooding, freezing. A frost kills the growing buds, so you can lose anywhere from 5 to 40 percent of your crop. And regulations somewhat. Regulatory issues which change your practice usually pick the edge off, and it goes to someone else.

It's also urban growth. There will be battles for preserving farming if that's what one wants. If we plan on trying to farm and hand it down, and all of a sudden here's all these buildings being built, we'd go, "Oh, wait a minute, I thought we were going to continue farming for another hundred years in the valley." Wherever the border of growth is, the guy on the other side of the fence is just waiting to sell because it's all economics. I understand that. Would you rather have two hundred bucks or two hundred thousand? How can farming compete with that? Especially now, as the processors move out and production is going offshore where it's cheaper.

Costs are up on everything, pricing's pretty much stayed the same. In the old days, those were all separate companies: the plant nursery, the farmer, the processor, the broker. Now, we're making it all in-house, and we hope this'll help us survive.

There are a lot of worries I have about expanding. Any time we decide to do something bigger, it's like, "Wow, you want to take this headache and make it bigger? Are you sure?" [*Chuckles*] And we're trying to look to the future for our kids and the next generation and the future of the community. . . .

Right now, the growing crop is blueberries, which gained popularity through a pretty good marketing campaign. Health benefits of blueberries have really taken off in the last ten years. If it wasn't for that, I think we'd be hurting.

Seth: Some of your blueberries are organic, right? The ones by labor camp 2?

Rob: Yeah. That's just to spread the risks out. We lowered our risk for debt, but then the return isn't as great either. Hopefully, it would be stable instead of doing this [*moves his hands up and down*]. And if we

dump everything else, it would provide steady income, just like buying a pretty conservative mutual fund versus speculating on a tech stock. Look at it like we're creating a portfolio of crops. Some have more risk than others; it's the same thing. For example, apples—we were planning on taking 20 acres out this year, but it looks like we're going to make some money on it, so . . .

Seth: Probably not [*chuckles*].

Rob: Yeah.

In another conversation, Rob told me about a recent meeting of the farm executives regarding becoming a "great company" or a "level five company." He explained that every time he heard the word *great* all he could see in the discussion was profitability to shareholders. He recounted getting angry and saying, "We already are a great company, and if this is what being a great company means, then I want to be a good company." He described his frustration with the farm becoming more corporate and more bureaucratic. He liked it more when it was a small, family business, and he "didn't have to go through all these hoops to write a check." Later, he explained his goals with relation to the pickers: "Fair and consistent is what we're going for. Without one of those, you don't have a leg to stand on. I hope we keep in touch with our community, both migrant and stationary. I hope they view me as a fair person." Rob Tanaka is in a double bind, needing to expand operations to compete on the market while attempting to "keep in touch" with the pickers and resist the farm becoming another impersonal corporate agribusiness.

Tom, another of the executives, a lean white man in his late forties, was brought in by the Tanaka family to help the farm compete on the international small fruit market. He has an office in the trailer with the other executive offices, although he has taken more care to decorate it than the others, proudly displaying a colorful painting of Chinese workers picking strawberries in China—one of the very places against which he is competing. Previously, Tom was in charge of processing and marketing for a large Mexican strawberry producer. At the Tanaka farm, his job starts before sunrise, when he calls his competitors and potential buyers in Poland, China, and Chile. Later in the day, he can take breaks

to meet friends or eat out. He attempts daily to find a competitive advantage by buying fruit from other farms to process and then sell. Over the course of several months, Tom described to me the stark competitive disadvantages of the farm in domestic and global terms.

Tom: In Oregon, Washington, you have Totem [variety of strawberry]. Let's call it the Northwest variety. In California, the big one right now is Camarosa. California is for the preserve and fresh market. That's where they make the big bucks. Preserves, fillings, juice concentrates, like Pop-Tarts, jellies, anytime you get strawberry as a sweetener, food science-related stuff. This is my enemy, food science. They're taking a not very flavorful strawberry—you've tasted the Camarosa. It's not very flavorful. It's white in the center. It dissolves pretty easily if you cook it down. What they do is add sugar, sweeteners, and coloring agents to stretch that strawberry out. So you're taking a very cheap strawberry, adding things to it, and stretching it out. So when you taste a Pop-Tart, you're tasting something sweet that might be reminiscent of a strawberry. Northwest variety is for dairy. The market I go after is yogurt and ice cream because the strawberry itself in its natural form has to carry the product. Northwest is red throughout. So, Häagen-Dazs, for example, if you look at the ice cream, you're going to see vanilla, cream, sugar, strawberry. If you buy one from California, you're going to find emulsifiers; there could be twenty of them.

Seth: Why isn't Northwest more fresh market?

Tom: Because you can't ship them across the street; you can hardly get them to Seattle. You see how they arrive at our own plant, juice dripping off. California, I ship them from Oxnard forty hours, and they arrive in better condition than when we see our own fruit in the plant here. Camarosa is a dream to run; they're like potatoes; they're rock hard. I compete primarily with Poland because their variety is closest to what we're doing up here. If Poland has a short crop, I've moved products to France for Häagen-Dazs Europe. Chile and China have more a California type. Last year, they introduced Totem into China, so that's our next major threat.

I think the competitive disadvantages we have aren't just Northwest versus California. I think the U.S. strawberry industry as a whole has problems. We're forced to do total traceability back to the farm to make sure we're not overspraying. Whereas in China, they don't do that.

I'm not an optimist on the future of the Northwest strawberry. It's expensive. For example, if you talk to a grower here, they'll tell you they

want fifty cents a pound in the field. I can buy finished product landed here from China, grade A frozen Camarosa, for probably forty cents a pound. That's why they're paying R&D [research and development] people eighty thousand bucks a year to make it stretch. It comes down to economics. So, I'm just hanging on to a totally shrinking customer base. A half-million-pound buyer walked away earlier this year. They went to Chile. I can't blame them; it's just the way it is. I just hope Häagen-Dazs keeps buying.

The farm executives profiled above are anxious to ensure the survival of the farm for future generations despite the bleak agricultural and economic trends. They work long days, worrying about many variables only partially within their control and attempting to run an ethical business that treats its workers well. They have some degree of control over their schedules. They take breaks when they choose to eat or work out, talk on the phone, or meet with a friend. They have relative financial security and comfortable, quiet houses with private indoor bathrooms and kitchens, insulation, and heating. In addition, they have private indoor offices with phones and computers as well as employees working "under them" (as they put it).

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS

Most of the administrative assistants are white, along with a few Latina U.S. citizens. All are female. They work seated at desks in open spaces without privacy. They are in charge of reception, interacting with both local white residents and businesspeople as well as with Mexican farmworkers.

Sally is the year-round front desk receptionist. She is a lean white woman, approximately forty years old, often with a smile on her face. She grew up in the same town in which the farm is located and lives with her husband and children in a relatively small house. The reception desk used to face away from the front counter such that anyone entering approached the receptionist's back. Sally tries to treat the workers well, and turning the desk around when she first arrived was one step in this

direction. She helped arrange loans for the Mexican farmworkers one year when the picking date was moved back and the workers were living out of their cars, waiting without money or food. Crew bosses and farm executives occasionally reprimand her for being too nice to the workers. She has been told to be "more curt" and "quick," "less friendly." At times, she feels disrespected by the people "above her" (as she states), treated like a "peon." She complained to me that they often give her advice on her work and give her jobs to do without the common courtesies of "please" or "thank you."

Samantha is a white bilingual administrative assistant in her mid-fifties who was hired two summers before to help work with Spanish-speaking employees. Before working here, she was a travel agent specializing in Spain and Latin America. She lives alone on a small plot of land several miles from the farm with a few of her own farm animals. Her desk is located in the hallway between the main entrance and the private offices of the executives. She first became aware of the difference between "regular Mexicans" (as she stated) and indigenous Mexicans during her first year on the Tanaka farm. Over the course of our interactions, she described indigenous Mexicans from Oaxaca as "dirty" and "simple" and told me such things as "they don't know how to use bank accounts."

Maria is thirty years old, a bilingual Latina from Texas. Her great-grandparents moved to the United States from Mexico. She lives in the year-round labor camp with heating and insulation that is located closest to the farm headquarters. She works several positions from May through November, sometimes at the front desk with Sally, sometimes in the portable unit where pickers can ask questions and pick up mail in the afternoon. On Fridays, she works in the wooden shed where paychecks are passed out to workers as they wait in a long line. Her first summers on the farm, including the summer she was pregnant, she picked berries and worked with a hoe. After four years of working with the hoe, she was moved up to desk work due largely to her ability to speak English fluently. Like Samantha, she first met indigenous Mexican people while working on the farm. She explained her work to me while we sat in the portable unit, occasionally interrupted by a picker seeking his or her mail.

I'm pretty easy to get along with. I guess that's why I've been in the office for five years. I try to help these people—like a guy just came about his tickets [papers marking how much he picked]. I can get in trouble if I do anything with those tickets, because it's not my job. But I tend to do it because I understand them. I started out like they did; I started out at the bottom.

This season was wild and busy. Last week I worked 108 hours. Then trying to get answers to [the pickers]; sometimes you try asking for answers and you get all this runaround. One of the Tanakas is really helpful. If I have a problem, I go to him right away. He tends to listen, and he's pretty understanding.

The administrative assistants are responsible for completing tasks for the farm executives, providing a cheerful face to those outside the farm, and managing sternly those within. They work six or seven days a week indoors at desks without privacy and frequently answer phone calls that distract them from their other tasks. They worry about the moods and opinions of their bosses. They are paid minimum wage without overtime, since agriculture falls outside U.S. overtime labor laws.⁷ They have lunch breaks and can take breaks to use the bathroom as long as there is not someone needing direct help at that moment.

CROP MANAGERS

The crop managers are in charge of all the details involved in the efficient production of a specific crop, from plowing to planting, pruning to spraying, picking to delivery to the processing plant. They have private offices in the field house amid the blueberry and strawberry fields close to the largest labor camp on rural Christensen Road, although they spend a fair amount of time walking through the fields overseeing. During harvest, they begin by 5:00 A.M. seven days a week and finish in the early evening. They can take a break when they choose, to eat, run errands, or go home. The crop managers worry about the availability of machinery, the effects of weather on the crops, and the docility of their labor force. They have some control over how much the pickers are

paid, and they have several field bosses below them enforcing their directions.

Jeff is a thirty-year-old white man who recently finished a degree in agricultural marketing at a university in California. He manages blueberries and raspberries. Jeff told me about his job as we rode together in his extended white pickup, two large dogs in the back. We drove to an agriculture store and bought large concrete drains for the blueberry fields and to Costco to buy tri-tip steaks for him to take to a potluck at his church. He explained several simultaneous tasks in the raspberry fields to help me understand the many things a crop manager has to oversee at once. The thing that causes him the most anxiety is having numerous bosses on a family farm without a strict chain of command. He also worries about weather and harvest crews. "It is what it is," he told me. "Sometimes people walk out, and sometimes people pick. It's kind of like the weather; you can't really predict it and you don't really have control over it, but usually it ends up working out all right." He went on, "We make the prices fair, so if the crew walks out [on strike], we just say, 'Hey, we'll be here tomorrow,' and that's the way it is. They can come back if they want." He told me that all the people who work on the raspberry machines are Latinos from Texas, whereas those picking blueberries are "O-hacan" (Oaxacan), although he also told me that he cannot really tell the difference. That week, Jeff was in the midst of budgeting for the following year, trying to predict the crop yield. Each year he predicts based on bud count: for each fruit bud in the fall, he expects seven berries the following summer, although a freeze could make the fruit smaller or kill the buds altogether.

Scott is a tall, thin, middle-aged white man who came to the Tanaka farm from a larger apple orchard in eastern Washington. He manages the strawberry and apple crops. He spoke with me in his private office in the field house as well as in the fields as I picked strawberries and he walked around talking with people and occasionally eating berries. He explained to me the number of workers on the farm—approximately five hundred in summer and fifty in winter—and what is done in the different seasons. His primary worries relate to managing the labor force, "which is sometimes pretty overwhelming." The following interview took place after a brief strawberry picker strike late in the summer.

Seth: What things worry you as crop manager?

Scott: Numerous [laughing]. Damn near changes daily. Once we get closer to strawberry harvest, the big push is to see the camps start to fill up, "Am I going to get enough pickers?" The concern's not really that I have too many, it's always, will I get enough? Once I see that we have 300 guys living in the camps, then that starts to ease down a little bit. I can pick strawberries with 300 guys, but 350's a lot nicer. You get up to 400, then you're concerned about getting too many guys. Now, they're only getting to come out and work four hours a day. You get 400 guys, and you go through the field pretty quick. So we try to keep it between 350 and 400, which gives everybody a good day's work. They can go out and make decent enough money and feel they got a good day's work. They've made their wages and get plenty of rest for the next day. If strawberries goes well, the other crops just kind of fall into place.

But, we couldn't do it without the people that come and do it for us. The [strike] we had this year was a big deal. It was a worry. Since I've worked here, I've gotten to know some of the Tanakas. They want to treat everybody right. That's a big push for them. So when that kind of thing happens, they've really stepped back to take a look at exactly what's going on. You'll almost always find a Tanaka out in the field. They're still real hands-on.

Seth: That's different from other farms you've seen?

Scott: Oh yeah. The farm I ran in eastern Washington had 150 acres. I'd only see the guy who owned it twice a year. It was a big change to come over here and the guy that owns the farm is out there working on the site. I think it's good for morale all the way around. That's just Tanakas' work ethic. They're—they're real hands-on people. If you're out there working 14 hours, 7 days a week, so are they, and usually they're working more than anybody else. You'll see John coming in at 3:00 in the morning, and he might be there until 7:00, 8:00, 9:00 at night. Daylight to dark, it's just the nature of farming.

There's a lot of talk today about immigration and the border and stuff like that. They end up spending a whole lot of money to get up here to work. I think we should tell the politicians, even if it's not popular or whatever, there's a lot of need that they have to work here. That's a given.

After I turned off my tape recorder, Scott asked about my interest in crossing the border with some of the Triqui workers. First he told me I

should get permission from the federal government. Later he changed his mind and said that the problem with that would be that they would ask for all my information about where I crossed. He was afraid the government would then shut down that route, "and we wouldn't have any workers anymore." He explained that 90 percent of the pickers were probably undocumented.

The profiles of the crop managers bring into focus the practical attempts by the management to run a good, ethical farm in the midst of difficult conditions. In addition, Scott is clearly concerned about the direct effects of immigration and border policies on his labor force. Like many farmers I interviewed, he knows that the current structure of U.S. farming would be impossible without undocumented Latin American migrant workers.

SUPERVISORS

Several supervisors, often called crew bosses, work under each crop manager. They are each in charge of a crew of approximately ten to twenty pickers. They walk through the rows, inspecting and telling workers to pick faster without leaving too many berries behind, allowing too many leaves into their berry buckets, or picking too many pounds of berries per bucket. The crew bosses are constantly under the supervision of the crop managers, although they can take short bathroom breaks, and they often carry on lighthearted conversations with coworkers. Most of the crew bosses are U.S. Latinos, with a few white U.S. citizens, a few mestizo Mexicans, and one indigenous Mixtec Oaxacan. Most crew bosses live in the insulated, year-round labor camp. The crew bosses of the "Mexican crews" (as they are called) work outside all day, walking and supervising, giving directions and reprimands. The one field boss of the local white crew has her own private office in the main building of the farm, though she spends time regularly in the fields supervising. Some of the crew bosses treat the indigenous pickers with respect; others call them explicitly derogatory and racist names. The crew boss most often accused by pickers of such racist treatment has a daughter, Barbara, who also works as a crew boss.

Barbara is a bilingual Latina from Texas in her early twenties who has worked the harvest at the farm for eleven years. She attends community college in Texas every spring and hopes to become a history teacher. She gets upset that other crew bosses call Oaxacan people "pinche Oaxaco" (damn Oaxacan) or "indio estúpido" (stupid Indian). During one conversation, she explained to me that the Oaxacans are afraid to complain or demand better working conditions because they do not want to lose their jobs. She described a farm policy stating that if one crew boss fires a picker, they can never be hired by anyone else on the farm. She told me, "It's unfair. I think there should be checks and balances. This isn't a dictatorship." Her family learned English in Texas as well as in the farm-sponsored English classes each night after work. The farm executives intend for these classes to be open to anyone on the farm. Others on the farm believe that the courses are open to all workers except pickers. This unofficial, yet effective exclusion of pickers from the English classes inadvertently shores up segregation on the farm.

Mateo is a twenty-nine-year-old Mixtec father of two young children. He has worked on the Tanaka farm for twelve years and has taken the farm's English classes for five years. His family had enough money to allow him to finish high school in Oaxaca before emigrating. He is fluent in his native language, Mixteco Alto, and Spanish and is the only Oaxacan person on the farm who speaks English. He is also the only Oaxacan with a job other than picker. He oversees pickers in the strawberry and blueberry harvests. He hopes to continue studying English and to be promoted on the farm until he can "work with the mind instead of the body [*trabajar con la mente en vez del cuerpo*]." Mateo worries about the pregnant women in his crew picking long, hard days in close contact with pesticide-covered plants. During one interview, he explained that many give birth prematurely due to the difficulty of their work. He also worries about the low pay of the pickers. The pay for strawberries has gone up only a few cents per pound in the past decade, and the pay for blueberries has gone down in the past several years.

Barbara and Mateo expressed their desire to treat workers well, even though the structures within which they work are, as they say, "unfair."

Some of the crew bosses who were rumored to be more blatantly racist were not interested in being interviewed by me. Mateo's position as the only Oaxacan crew boss indicates the importance of having the resources to be able to study Spanish and English in order to have social and occupational mobility.

Shelly is a relatively short white woman in her early forties. She started working on the local picking crew when she was seven years old. After college, she came back to work on the farm as an administrative assistant, then married Rob Tanaka, and now is the supervisor for the local white teenage crews and checkers. She sees the local crew as serving the purposes of inculcating the value of agriculture in local families and teaching white teenagers to respect diversity. Of course, the perceptions and outlooks of the white pickers and checkers are more complicated, as discussed below. In her office, Shelly told me that she missed the days when mestizo Mexicans, whom she called "traditional Mexicans," made up the majority of pickers on the farm. On another occasion, she told me she was "fed up" with the Oaxacan pickers and described them as "more dirty," "less respectful," less work-, family-, and community-oriented.

As I came to learn over the course of my fieldwork, I could not take interethnic perceptions and descriptions at face value. Of course, in a literal sense, the indigenous Mexicans were dirtier than their mestizo counterparts, simply because they worked picking strawberries bent over in the dirt, as opposed to the mestizos, who worked seated on raspberry machines or walking through the fields as crew bosses.⁸ I never saw or heard of any disrespectful actions on the part of indigenous workers. However, the language barrier made this difficult to know. Shelly did not speak any Triqui or Mixteco and spoke poor Spanish, while the Oaxacan pickers did not speak English and many of them did not speak fluent Spanish. The idea that the Oaxacans were less work-oriented was directly contradicted by some of the crew bosses of Triqui pickers, who explained that the latter were displacing mestizo and Mixtec pickers on the farm because they worked so hard and fast. Given the fact that the Triqui pickers usually migrated as entire families and I attended numerous Triqui family baptism and birthday parties in the camps,

while mestizos tended to migrate solo, leaving their families in Mexico, Shelly's understanding of Oaxacans as less family- and community-oriented appeared to me a misperception. Instead, it appears that the physical dirt from the labor of the indigenous pickers had become symbolically linked with their character,⁹ and at the same time the limited possibility of relationships between Shelly and the indigenous workers because of the language barriers had become symbolically projected as assumed character flaws onto the indigenous pickers themselves.¹⁰ In addition to bringing into relief the "de facto apartheid" on the farm,¹¹ the profiles of the supervisors exemplify the range of responses to ethnic and class difference within an exploitative system.

CHECKERS

Local white teenagers punch the beginning and ending times as well as the weights of each bucket of berries brought in on each picker's daily work tickets. The first day I picked berries, I arrived at 5:10 A.M., but the checker marked me as arriving at 5:30. Each day I picked, I was marked as arriving at or after—never before—the time I started picking. Later that summer, one of the supervisors explained to me that each morning the supervisors tell the checkers one specific time to mark on all the cards. He considered this standardization simply a measure to make the process easier for the supervisors and checkers. However, as a picker, I experienced this standardization as unfair. Also, at the end of the day the checkers were told a certain time to mark on the cards, often before most of the pickers finished working. During the day, the checkers try to make sure the berries brought in are ripe without being rotten or having leaves attached. They sit or stand in the shade of overhead umbrellas or in the sunshine as they talk and laugh with each other. They speak English with an occasional Spanish word to the pickers. Some occasionally hurl English expletives—and perhaps even a berry—at the pickers, who are often old enough to be their parents. Some speak of the Mexican pickers as "grease heads" and joke about them driving low-riders, although I

never saw a single low-rider in any of the labor camp or berry field parking lots. The following tape-recorded field note excerpt describes the checking stations during one of my first days picking.

There were different stations where you could have your berries weighed. The first station I went to had three checkers, and they were slow. They weren't mean and they weren't really nice, just kind of slow and disorganized, which was frustrating, because they were taking away my time to get pounds [of berries]. And I might not get the minimum weight for the day because they were slow. On top of that, even though my berries weighed 28 pounds, I was marked for 26. The next place I went to weigh my berries, there was somebody teaching someone else how to do it: "If you see more than ten green stems when you look at the berries, take them out. Throw out the bad berries. You've got to look through the berries that are underneath, too, because sometimes they try to hide the bad berries." I was thinking to myself, "You don't have time to try to hide anything. You just go; you do it as fast as you can!" The next place I went, there was a girl and the one Chicano guy. The Chicano guy didn't talk. He just moved berries back and forth, and the girl was weighing really fast; I liked how fast they were. The next place I went, they seemed kind of rude to people—throwing berries out in a disrespectful way. They were throwing berries out, looking at people and telling them "No!" without speaking Spanish enough to explain what they meant by "No," and just refusing to weigh the bucket of berries.

During my second summer on the farm, a white female college student came up to me and said, "So, I hear you're writing a book." Laura grew up in the area and worked assigning pickers to rows and checking ID badges. She was studying Spanish in college in Seattle and enjoyed talking with and learning about the pickers. She was frustrated with the way her supervisor, Shelly, dealt with the pickers. Laura explained, "One day we were walking back to the cars, one girl was talking to one of the pickers, practicing her Spanish. I don't know if they were even talking to each other, but Shelly said something to her like she didn't want her to talk to pickers. It's like she doesn't trust them. She gets frazzled a lot. I was surprised, like, 'Why didn't she want you to talk to them?'"



A white teenage checker with Mexican pickers. Photo by Seth M. Holmes.

Although the farm management—including Shelly, who supervises the white picking and checking crews—sees the employment of white teenage checkers as developing positive values toward agriculture and diversity in the valley, checkers learn also that they deserve to have power over Mexicans, even those old enough to be their parents or grandparents. The teenagers are paid minimum wage while being allowed to talk and sit most of the time; the pickers have to kneel constantly and work as fast as possible in order to keep their jobs. The white checkers are given power over how many pounds are marked for the pickers, and I observed more often than not that checkers marked less weight on the cards than the scale displayed. Numerous times over the course of my fieldwork, I observed supervisors telling checkers that the laborers should not pick more than thirty pounds of berries per bucket. Supervisors indicated that more weight would damage the berries. In addition, they indicated that the pickers would try to “get away with” putting more berries per bucket because they were “lazy.” Of course, there was no way for me to estimate precisely how much the berries in

my bucket would weigh. And I experienced picking strawberries as anything but lazy. The checkers are also allowed to treat the pickers as people who do not deserve equal respect. This serves to further develop the lenses through which symbolic violence, the naturalization of inequality, is effected.¹² In addition, Laura pointed out that the farm’s management sometimes works directly to keep labor positions and ethnicities segregated.

FIELD WORKERS PAID PER HOUR

Several small groups of field workers are paid minimum hourly wage. All live in the labor camps with wood under the tin roofs but no heat or insulation. They work seven days a week from approximately 5:00 in the morning until the early evening. Approximately one dozen men, mostly mestizo Mexicans along with a few Mixtec Oaxacans, drive tractors back and forth between the fields and the processing plant. The tractors carry stacks of berry containers several feet high, and the drivers are exposed to direct sun or rain all day. In addition, small groups of mostly mestizo Mexican men and women, and a handful of Mixtecs, work in other capacities, from tying off the new raspberry growth to covering blueberry bushes with plastic, from spraying chemical or concentrated vinegar (for organic fields) pesticides to using hoes between rows of plants.

Thirty-some raspberry pickers work twelve to eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, for approximately one month. Two or three people work on each raspberry harvester, which is approximately one story high, bright yellow, and shaped like an upside-down “U” tall enough for the row of raspberry bushes to pass beneath its middle. The machine shakes the bushes such that the ripe berries fall onto a conveyor belt and then onto a crate. One worker drives the machine; the others move the full berry crates and remove bad berries and leaves. They are all seated and have minimal shade from umbrellas attached to the machine. All the raspberry pickers are Latinos from Texas; most are relatives of the raspberry crew boss.

FIELD WORKERS PAID BY WEIGHT

"The White Crew"

Pickers are the only group not paid by the hour. Instead, they are paid a certain amount per pound of fruit harvested. The white teenage pickers are paid fourteen cents per pound of berries, but because they are under sixteen years old they have no minimum wage and therefore no minimum weight to meet each day. They live in the relatively comfortable houses of their parents. They work bent over six days a week, though they have no time pressure and take frequent breaks. Often I observed their parents helping pick into their buckets for part of the day. They are treated well and cheerfully by their supervisor, Shelly. Some of them hope to be promoted to the level of checker; others decide not to do manual labor and stop working at the farm at the end of the season. They complain of knee and hip pain, as well as not getting to spend time playing with their friends. The knee and hip pain is temporary because these workers not only take breaks from bending but also pick only a few summers at most.

There were fundamental differences between the work of the teenage white pickers and that of the Mexican pickers, including, importantly, the fact that white pickers do not have a minimum weight to pick each day in order to keep their job, are allowed to work at their own pace and take breaks, and work a few summers at most. Despite these crucial differences, several white area residents and friends of mine responded to my description of my research with migrant berry pickers by saying that they "know what it's like" because they picked on a white teen crew when they were growing up. Several of them even went on to conclude, "It's not that bad, really."

"The Mexican Crew"

Like the white teenage crew, the Mexican pickers are not paid by the hour. Instead they are called "contract workers" and are paid a certain amount per unit of fruit harvested. Most live in the camp farthest from farm headquarters, which has no heat or insulation and no wood under the tin roof. Each day, they are told a minimum amount of fruit they must pick. The

crop manager calculates the minimum to make sure that each picker brings in more than enough to be worth paying them at least the legal state minimum wage. If they pick less on two occasions, they are fired and kicked out of the camp. The first contract picker I met, a Triqui man named Abelino, explained, "The hourly jobs, the salaried jobs are better because you can count on how much you will make. But they don't give those jobs to us."

Approximately twenty-five people, mostly mestizos with a few Mixtec and Triqui men, pick apples. The field boss, Abby, explained to me that picking apples is the hardest job on the farm. Apple pickers work five to ten hours a day, seven days a week, carrying a heavy bag of apples over their shoulders. They repeatedly climb up and down ladders to reach the apples. This job is sought after because it is known to be the highest-paid picking position.

However, the majority of pickers—350 to 400—work in the strawberry fields for one month, followed by three months in the blueberry fields. Other than a few Mixtecs, they are almost all Triqui men, women, and teenagers (agricultural workers can legally be fourteen or older). Most Triqui pickers come with other family members, and most hail from the same village, San Miguel, in the mountains of Oaxaca. The official contract pay for strawberry pickers is 14 cents per pound of strawberries. This means that pickers must bring in fifty-one pounds of deleafed strawberries every hour because the farm is required to pay Washington State minimum wage—\$7.16 at the time. In order to meet this minimum, pickers take few or no breaks from 5:00 A.M. until the afternoon when that field is completed. Nonetheless, they are reprimanded by some crew bosses and called *perros* (dogs), *burros*, *Oaxacos* (a derogatory mispronunciation of "Oaxacans"). Many do not eat or drink anything before work so they do not have to take time to use the bathroom. They work as hard and fast as they can, arms flying in the air as they kneel in the dirt, picking and running with their buckets of berries to the checkers. Although they are referred to as contract workers, this is misleading. On a few instances, the pay per unit was changed by the crop managers without warning or opportunity for negotiation.

Strawberry pickers work simultaneously with both hands in order to make the minimum. They pop the green stem and leaves off of each



Marcelina picking strawberries, wearing bandanas to protect herself from the sun.
Photo by Seth M. Holmes.

strawberry and do their best to avoid the green and the rotten berries. During my fieldwork, I picked once or twice a week and experienced gastritis, headaches, and knee, back, and hip pain for days afterward. I wrote in a field note after picking, "It honestly felt like pure torture." Triqui pickers work seven days a week, rain or shine, without a day off until the last strawberry is processed. Occupying the bottom of the ethnic-labor hierarchy, Triqui pickers bear an unequal share of health problems, from idiopathic back and knee pains to slipped vertebral disks, from type 2 diabetes to premature births and developmental malformations.¹³ The brief profiles below highlight the economic and physical hardships of the pickers on the farm and on the U.S.-Mexico border, touching on the importance of language, ethnicity, and education in the organization of the farm labor hierarchy.

Marcelina is a twenty-eight-year-old Triqui mother of two. She is a cousin of Samuel (introduced in chapter 1), grew up in San Miguel, and is one of the other people with whom I would share a slum apartment in

Central California in the winter. Every summer, a local Skagit Valley non-profit organizes a seminar on migrant farm labor. The seminar involves a visit to a farm and labor camp as well as several brief presentations and live interviews with people from all aspects of migrant labor, from pickers to growers, Border Patrol agents to social workers. Most of the attendees are white, middle-class adults who live in the area, along with a handful of mestizo and indigenous Mexican farmworkers. Late in my first summer of fieldwork, Marcelina was invited to speak at the seminar about her experiences migrating and picking. Shyly, she approached the translator, holding her one-year-old daughter, and spoke in Spanish, her second language.

Good afternoon. I am Marcelina. I come here to the United States to work. A man left me with two children. I wanted to come here to make money, but no. I don't even make enough to send to Oaxaca to my mom who is taking care of my son. Sometimes the strawberry goes poorly, your back hurts, and you don't make anything.

I am sorry; I don't speak Spanish well. Pure Triqui. *[Chuckles]* Pure Triqui.

It's very difficult here. The farm camp manager doesn't want to give a room to a single woman. So I am living with this family over here *[pointing to a Triqui family of five in the audience]*. One gains nothing here, nothing to survive. Besides that, I have a daughter here with me, and I don't make anything to give her. Working and working. Nothing. I've been here four years and nothing.

It's very difficult for a person here. I came to make money, like I thought, "Here on the other side *[of the border]* there is money and good money," but no. We're not able to make enough to survive.

And then sometimes *[the checkers]* steal pounds. Sometimes rotten berries make it into the bucket—"Eat that one!" they say, throwing it into your face. They don't work well. And there are hardly any good berries this time of year, pure rotten ones.

This is not good. You don't make enough even to eat. I have two children, and it is very ugly here, very ugly to work in the field. That's how it is. Sometimes you want to speak up, but no. You can't speak to them.

After speaking about the difficulties of farmwork in Washington State, Marcelina was asked to talk about the migration process in general. She continued:

There in Oaxaca, we don't have work. There are no jobs there. Only the men work sometimes, but since there are many children in my family, the men didn't make money for me and my son. That's why I wanted to come here, to make money, but no—no—no. You don't make anything here; you don't have anything to survive. I wanted to work, to move ahead [*salir adelante*] with my children, to take them ahead [*salir adelante*].

I have been here four years without seeing my son.

In California, there is no work, just pruning, and you don't make any money because of the same thing, we don't know Spanish, and that is because we don't have enough money to study. Parents have to suffer in order to send their children to school, buy food and school uniforms. I have lots of sisters back there, studying, but I couldn't study. There are many children who don't go to school because they lack money. I had to leave Oaxaca so I wouldn't suffer from hunger. I hoped I would make enough to send back to support my sisters in school. I had to give up school myself.

One of the Triqui families who welcomed me most into their lives was that of Samuel, his wife, Leticia, and their four-year-old son. As described earlier, after moving from the farm in Washington to Madera, California, I shared a three-bedroom, one-bath slum apartment with Samuel, Leticia, and their son; Marcelina and her daughter; Samuel's sister and her son; Samuel's brother, his wife, and his daughter; and two other families of four. One night in the farm labor camp, while we watched a Jet Li action movie with the sound turned down and drank blue Kool Aid, Samuel described in Spanish their lives as migrant farmworkers.

Samuel: Here with Tanaka, we don't have to pay rent, but they don't pay us much. They pay 14 cents a pound. And they take out taxes, federal taxes, social security. They pay \$20 a day.

... They don't pay fairly. If a person has 34 pounds of strawberries, 4 pounds are stolen because the checker marks only 30. It is not just. That is what bothers people most. People work a lot. They suffer. Humans suffer.

It is easy for them, but for us it is not.

In the blueberries, they steal an ounce from the little boxes and that is why the people can't move ahead [*salir adelante*]. We pick a lot of fruit, and we don't make money.

The people don't say anything. They are afraid of speaking, because the farm will fire them. We want to say things to them, but we can't because we don't have papers. Sometimes the bosses are really mean, and they'll deport you. Sometimes, when one of us says something, they point to the police, and the police can do something to us. That's why people are silent.

Seth: How much do you make each year?

Samuel: One person makes \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year. We are not asking to be rich. We don't come here to be rich. Yes, it's very little. They say the boss doesn't want us to earn money, and I ask myself, "Why?"

Some supervisors explain how we are going to pick or what we're supposed to do, but other supervisors are bad people or have bad tempers and don't explain well what we do or what we pick. They even scream at us, using words you should not say. If you treat people badly, they're not going to work calmly or happily. And if we tell the boss, he might not believe us. They scream at us and call us "dumb donkeys" or "dogs." It's very ugly how they treat us.

One of Marcelina and Samuel's cousins, Joaquin, nicknamed "Gordo" or "Lobo," also lived in the slum apartment in Central California. Late in the first summer of my fieldwork, Joaquin's 1990 Aerostar minivan broke down. Most of my Triqui companions had bought old American minivans because they often cost less than \$500 and could carry several people to and from the fields, the grocery store, and the local church, which gave away free food on Tuesday evenings. I stood with several of Joaquin's Triqui friends as we took turns watching and helping work on his car. At one point, the conversation turned to work, and Joaquin elaborated on the stresses and contradictions of picking.

The supervisors say they'll take away our IDs and fire us if we don't pick the minimum. They tell us we're dropping too many berries, we have to go slow so we don't drop so much. When we go slowly, we don't reach [the minimum] and "Go faster!" They tell us, "You don't know how to work," "Indian, you don't know!" We already know how to work and why the berries drop. If we go slowly, we can't make any money and we get in trouble. If we hurry up, we drop berries and they come and castigate us. "Dumb donkey!" "Dog!" We are afraid.

The first day I picked, the only people who were as slow as I was were two Latinas from Southern California and one Latino who commuted from a suburb of Seattle. After the first week, the two Latinas began picking into the same bucket in order to make the minimum and keep one paycheck. The second week, I no longer saw the man from Seattle. I asked a supervisor where he had gone, assuming he had decided the work was too difficult and given up. She told me that the farm made a deal with him that if he could make it through a week picking, they would give him a job paid hourly in the processing plant. He has been "one of the hardest workers" in the plant since then. I then inquired about why the indigenous Mexicans could not get processing plant jobs. The supervisor replied, "People who live in the migrant camps cannot have those jobs; they can only pick." She considered it a farm policy without any need for explanation.

Thus marginalization begets marginalization. The indigenous Mexicans live in the migrant camps because they do not have the resources to rent apartments in town. Because they live in the camps, they are given only the worst jobs on the farm. Unofficial farm policies and practices subtly reinforce labor and ethnic hierarchies. The position of the Triqui workers, at the bottom of the hierarchy, is multiply determined by poverty, education level, language, citizenship status, and ethnicity. In addition, these factors produce each other. For example, a family's poverty cuts short an individual's education, which limits one's ability to learn Spanish (much less English), which limits one's ability to leave the bottom rung of labor and housing. Poverty, at the same time, is determined in part by the institutional racism at work against Triqui people in the first place. Segregation on the farm is the result of a complex system of feedback and feed-forward loops organized around these multiple nodes of inequality.

OUT OF PLACE

In many ways—ethnicity, education, citizenship, social class—I did not take the appropriate position in the labor hierarchy. For the purposes of my research, I picked berries regularly alongside the Triqui people and lived in the labor camp that housed the majority of Triqui families. Our

labor camp was the farthest from the farm headquarters on rural Christensen Road, and each shack was made of plywood walls and a tin roof. When I first met one of the white families who lived directly above the labor camp on Christensen Heights Road, they explained to me that the Mexican migrants partied so hard and drank so much that they could hear horns honking each morning around 4:00. However, like my Triqui neighbors in the camp, I was awakened each morning by the honking of the vans arriving before dawn to pick up the children enrolled in a local daycare before both parents left to pick. During blueberry harvest in the fall, when the vans arrived after sunrise, we were awakened instead by cold rain inside our shacks as the tin roofs, on which our breath had condensed and frozen overnight, were thawed by the morning sun. In fact, I observed relatively little drinking in the camp. When a Triqui family threw a baptism or birthday party, tacos, soda, and beer would be served, Mexican *norteño* and *chilena* music would be played, and a few people would dance. On these occasions, one or two people, always men, would become intoxicated. Most people drank no or very little alcohol.

Although I worked and lived in the same conditions as the Triqui migrants, the farm executives treated me as someone out of place, giving me special permission to keep my job and my shack even though I was never able to pick the minimum. At times they even treated me as a superior due to my social and cultural capital, asking me for advice related to the future of labor relations and housing on the farm. Crop managers, field bosses, and checkers treated me as a sort of jester, respected entertainment. They often joked with me, laughing and using rhetorical questions like, "Are you still glad you chose to pick?" As they walked through the fields, they regularly stopped where I was and talked with me, picking into my buckets to help me keep up, something they did not do regularly for other pickers.

On the other hand, the other pickers interacted with me with a mixture of respect and suspicion. For example, there were the rumors that I was a spy for the police or a drug smuggler looking for cover. When I first moved into the camp, many Triqui people wondered why a *gabacho* would live there and pick berries. Some people complained that I "pick[ed] really slowly"; "He always comes behind," they would say. In

a conversation late in my first summer on the farm, Samuel complained about the problems in his hometown due to lack of resources. He said they need a strong mayor. I asked him if he would be mayor someday, and he replied, "No. You need to have some education and some money and some ideas. You will be president of San Miguel, Set', and you can do a lot of good! We need a water pump and paved roads. You could set up a pharmacy and build a house and marry a Triqui woman [laughing]."

During my first few months living and working among the Triqui people, I noticed that even the children in the camp seemed to recognize the farm segregation. Given that the adults in the camps were suspicious of me, I spent a fair amount of time in the beginning of my fieldwork playing with the children. After asking many sets of children where they were from and which languages they spoke, I found that all the children who came to visit me were Triqui. None of the Mixtec or mestizo children ever came to my shack. Apparently, the children recognized (or were explicitly instructed by their parents)¹⁴ that I was positioned in a Triqui location in the farm hierarchy and responded to me accordingly.

Near the end of my research, Samuel told me, "Right now we and you are the same; we are poor. But later you will be rich and live in a luxury house [*casa de lujo*]." I explained that I did not want a luxury house but rather a simple little house. Samuel replied, looking me in the eyes, "But you will have a bathroom on the inside, right?"

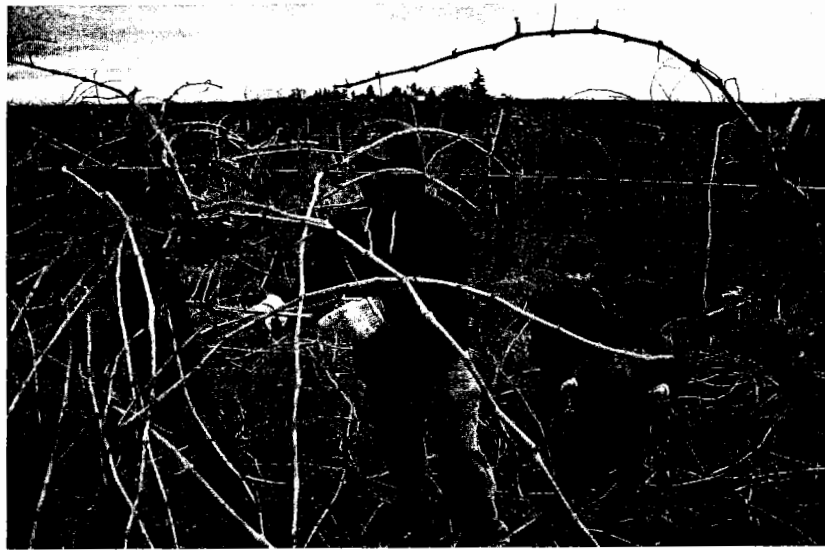
CALIFORNIA

At the end of the berry season in the Skagit Valley, after living on the Tanaka farm for almost five months, I was invited to drive south to California with Samuel and his extended family. His youngest cousin, Juan, did not yet have a driver's license, was not accustomed to driving on freeways, and needed someone to drive his recently purchased used Ford Taurus. Juan was sixteen years old and single. He had come to the United States from San Miguel for the first time at the beginning of the berry season several months earlier. After our last day picking, Juan and I loaded up his car, and I drove the Ford Taurus in a caravan along with

six Aerostar minivans. We drove directly, below the speed limit and through the night, from northwestern Washington to Central California, stopping for short bathroom and meal breaks at rest stops along the way. We ate homemade tacos and cilantro salads we had brought with us. At the rest stops, we napped, joked around with the children, who were energetic from being cooped up in the cars, and reminisced about moments when different people were scared we might be pulled over by a police car.

Once we arrived in Madera, California, it took a week to find a landlord with an open apartment who would rent to Mexican migrants with no credit history. During this week, we washed in the bathrooms of city parks before they were locked at dusk, and we tried to find safe places to sleep in our cars. One night, we parked and slept in our cars near a Triqui friend's rental house so that the children could use the bathroom in the middle of the night if needed. However, we were woken up by a white neighbor woman yelling in the middle of the night, forcing us to drive away because she did not want us sleeping in front of her house. Each day, we drove up and down the streets looking for housing. Several times in the first few days, we found relatively comfortable, large apartments for rent but were turned down because of my companions' lack of credit history. As time wore on, we learned to look for apartments that were poorly advertised, with handwritten "For Rent" signs in the windows. These were more likely to be dirty, smelly apartments in bad repair, but they were also more likely to take us seriously as renters. After eight days, we found the three-bedroom, one-bathroom slum apartment that nineteen of us—most of Samuel and Juan's extended family, including four young children—shared for the winter. Each week, we went to the Mexican flea market in town where we saw other Triqui friends from San Miguel who had been on the Tanaka farm. We regularly looked for work, occasionally doing short stints pruning grapevines.

The general features of the ethnic-labor hierarchy in California agriculture was the same as that in Washington, although the specifics differed. White people still had the best jobs, followed by U.S. Latinos, then mestizo Mexicans, and finally indigenous Mexicans and a few Central Americans. Most California farms worked through contractors,



Samuel pruning with children in a California vineyard. Photo by Seth M. Holmes.

without making each individual picker an employee of the farm or having any record of their employment. These farms paid their contractor a lump sum for getting a particular field pruned or picked. The contractor, then, paid each worker a certain amount per vine pruned. During the five months I lived and worked in the Central Valley of California, my companions and I were consistently paid less than minimum wage. On top of that, most contractors prohibited driving oneself or walking to the field. We had to get a ride from the "ride-giver" (*raitero*), almost always a relative of the contractor, for \$5 to \$7 a day. In the end, we were paid close to \$10 for a five-hour workday and a commute of up to two hours each way. In addition, most farms in California did not provide housing, so that some of our salaries went to pay the rent for our slum apartment. And the state of California did not provide childcare for farmworkers like Washington did. Thus one parent gave up his or her paycheck to stay home with the children, or the parents paid \$10 to an unofficial childcare program in a nearby slum

apartment, or the parents took the children to the vineyard with them while they pruned.

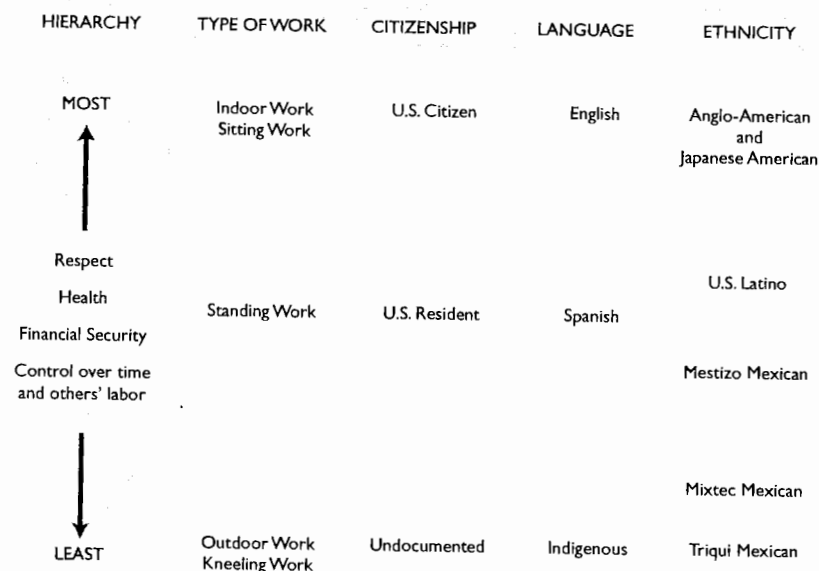
The Triqui pickers also reported more explicit racism in California, specifically from Latinos who were U.S. citizens. Though the general shape of the social hierarchy remained the same, the specifics of the everyday lives of the Triqui people in California were worse in several respects. Despite my numerous attempts, most contractors in California would not consider letting me work. I attribute this partly to their recognition that I did not fit in that position in the hierarchy and partly to their fear that the poor and unfair working conditions might be exposed.

HIERARCHIES AT WORK

Responsibilities, stressors, and privileges differ from the top to the bottom of the labor hierarchy described ethnographically above. The workers at every level of the ladder worry about factors over which they have little control. Everyone on the Tanaka farm is structurally vulnerable,¹⁵ although the characteristics and depth of vulnerability change depending on one's position within the labor structure. For example, opportunities decrease and anxieties accumulate as one moves down the pecking order. Those at the top worry about market competition and the weather. The middle managers worry about these factors and about how they are treated by their bosses. The pickers worry about picking enough to make the minimum weight so as to avoid losing their jobs and their housing. The higher one is positioned in the structure, the more control one has over time. The executives and managers can take breaks as they see fit. The administrative assistants and checkers can choose to take short breaks, given their supervisors' consent or absence. The field workers can take breaks only infrequently if they are willing to sacrifice pay, and even then they may be reprimanded. The lower one is located in the hierarchy, the less one is paid and the more structurally vulnerable one is. The executives and managers are relatively financially secure and have comfortable homes. The administrative staff and checkers are paid

minimum wage and live as members of the rural working class in less comfortable housing. The pickers are paid piecemeal and live in poor conditions in the labor camp shacks. They are always aware that they are at risk of losing even this poor housing. Among the pickers, those in strawberries and blueberries make less money and are more likely to miss the minimum weight and be fired than those in apples. Although everyone on the farm works for and is paid by the same business, they do not share power or vulnerability evenly. The pay and working conditions of the pickers function as variables semicontrollable by the farm executives as partial buffers between market changes and the viability of the rest of the farm.

The ethnic-labor hierarchy seen here—white and Asian American U.S. citizen, Latino U.S. citizen or resident, undocumented mestizo Mexican, undocumented indigenous Mexican—is common in much of North American farming. The relative status of Triqui people below Mixtecs can be understood via a pecking order of perceived indigeneity. Many farmworkers and managers told me that the Triqui are more purely indigenous than other groups because Triqui is still their primary language and “they are more simple.” Here, ethnicity serves as a camouflage for a social Darwinist perception of indigeneity versus civilization. The Anglo- and Japanese Americans inhabit the pole of civilization. The Triqui are positioned as the opposite: indigenous peasants, savages, simple children. The more civilized one is perceived to be, the better one’s job. At the same time, the better one’s job, the more “civilized” one is permitted (and perceived) to be. This hierarchy of civilization also correlates roughly with citizenship, from U.S. citizen to U.S. resident, Mexican citizen to undocumented Mexican immigrant. Yet this is only a small piece of the global hierarchy. The continuum of structural vulnerability can be understood as a zoom lens, moving through many such hierarchies. When the continuum is seen from farthest away, it becomes clear that the local family farm owners are relatively low on the global corporate agribusiness hierarchy. When looked at more closely, we see the hierarchy on this particular farm. In addition, perceptions of ethnicity change as the zoom lens is moved in and out. As mentioned above, many of the farm executives



Conceptual diagram of hierarchies on the farm.

(as well as area residents) considered all migrant farmworkers “Mexican,” whereas those in closer contact with the farmworkers came to distinguish between “regular Mexicans” and “Oaxacans,” and those working in the fields themselves often differentiated among mestizo, Triqui, and Mixtec people.¹⁶

Laboring bodies are organized by ethnicity and citizenship into superimposed hierarchies of labor, respect, and suffering. The overdetermination of the adverse lot of the indigenous Mexican migrant berry picker fits Bourgeois’s concept “conjugated oppression.”¹⁷ On the Tanaka farm, class, race, and citizenship conspire to deny Triqui workers respect and deprive them of physical and mental health.

While class, race, and citizenship form the primary fault lines of power on the farm, gender hierarchies become visible when considering the individuals who appear to be out of place. The only people promoted above the position accorded their race and citizenship are male (e.g.,

Mateo, the only indigenous person promoted to supervisor). During my fieldwork, females were never promoted above their expected race-citizenship location in the hierarchy. In addition, this gender hierarchy is reinforced by education and language differences. Due to the assumed role dichotomy in San Miguel and in the United States between the private, domestic sphere for women and the public sphere for men, women have fewer opportunities for education. Most of the Triqui women in San Miguel have not moved beyond primary school because they are expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities. Thus many of the women do not speak more than a few words of Spanish. In contrast, most Triqui men finish secondary school in San Miguel and speak Spanish fluently. In addition, Triqui men in the United States are more likely than Triqui women to leave the home to work, thus offering further opportunities to perfect their Spanish and begin to learn English.¹⁸

As made clear by the ethnographic data above, this segregation is not conscious or willed on the part of the farm owners. Much the opposite. These inequalities are driven by larger structural forces as well as the anxieties they produce. The farm can be seen as a sort of "gray zone," related in some ways to that described by Primo Levi in the lagers of the Holocaust.¹⁹ Levi's gray zone involved such severe conditions that any prisoner seeking his or her own survival was inherently complicit with a system of violence against others. Levi encouraged the use of his analysis, drawn from a horrific and violent setting, to understand everyday situations such as "a big industrial factory."²⁰ Similarly, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois argue that wartime direct political violence and peacetime structural and symbolic violence mirror and produce one another through a violence continuum.²¹ In the multilayered gray zone of contemporary U.S. agriculture, even ethical growers, in their fight for survival, are forced by an increasingly harsh market to participate in a system of labor that perpetuates suffering. This gray zone is seen most clearly when workers seek to impress their superiors in order to move up the ranks, for example, checkers cheating pickers out of pounds or minutes due to pressure from above.

At the same time, there are hints of "bad faith" on the farm, more with certain supervisors than others. The phrase "bad faith" was introduced

by Jean-Paul Sartre to describe the ways in which individuals knowingly deceive themselves in order to avoid acknowledging realities disturbing to them.²² Scheper-Hughes builds on this concept to indicate ways in which communities collectively engage in self-deception in the face of poverty and suffering.²³ She uses the concept of "collective bad faith" to analyze the practice in northeastern Brazil of giving tranquilizers to malnourished and starving children. Such collective bad faith is visible in the Skagit Valley when white area residents tell me they know what it is like for Mexican migrants to pick berries because they picked one summer as a child, despite the clearly and significantly different living and working conditions of the white teenage crews and the Mexican crews. Collective bad faith is visible also when indigenous languages are falsely demoted to "dialects," and impressively efficient, technical pickers are categorized as "unskilled."²⁴ Such forms of collective bad faith are fostered by official and unofficial policies and practices, such as barring pickers from farm English classes. It is further enabled by the spatial separation, layers of bureaucracy, and linguistic barriers shielding the growers from the more explicit mistreatment of the berry pickers. Collective bad faith is allowed to continue beyond the borders of the farm by the general hiddenness of migrant farmworkers. This is especially worrisome when seen in the perceptions and practices of those in service professions, such as the health care providers introduced in the following chapters.