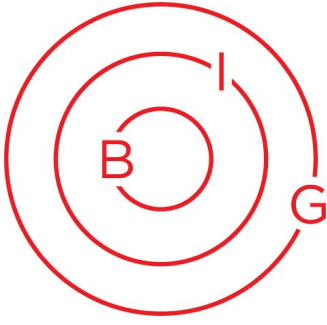




BORDERS IN GLOBALIZATION





Borders in Globalization Research Project 52

Anxieties and Exclusion in the British Garden of Eden: Examining Narratives of Belonging, Work, and Temporary Foreign Labour in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia

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The Okanagan valley is an arid region in the British Columbia interior, famous for its climate, agriculture, and tourist destinations. It is a region with a long history of employing racialized labour throughout its economy. Historically that labour has come from Indigenous, Chinese or Japanese populations, but in recent years the region has made heavy use of workers drawn from states throughout the Global South to augment the region's domestic labour pool. This most recent round of foreign labour migration into the Okanagan has renewed regional anxieties about the presence of racialized bodies in a region of British Columbia known for its disproportionately white population, and illustrated an historical tension between the national borders that enclose the Okanagan, and the cultural borders maintained by its residents. Through archival analysis and key informant interviews, this study illustrates the ways that contemporary anxieties about the presence of foreign labour exists as part of a larger historical pattern of exclusion and xenophobia, and the ways in which the Temporary Foreign Worker program highlights tensions between state and cultural borders.

INTRODUCTION

The Okanagan Valley is a narrow, semi-arid region in the British Columbia interior, stretching from the town of Armstrong-Spallumcheen in the north to the community of Osoyoos in the South. The region includes more than fifteen communities, the largest of which are Vernon in the North, Kelowna in the Central Okanagan, and Penticton in the South. Due to its popularity as a destination region, the population of the Okanagan valley is somewhat variable, but a resident population of around 350,927 is present year-round (Our Okanagan 2013).

The region is increasingly known for wine production, in addition to its already popular reputation as a resort and vacation destination for tourists. This identity is an important one for understanding the increased use of temporary foreign work within the valley, as the service sector – along with the agricultural sector – remains the primary employer of temporary foreign workers.

This study combines an archival analysis of material produced by regional governments, media, and community and business groups with a small number of key informant interviews with regional employers of temporary foreign labour. The aim is here to investigate regional narratives about the use of temporary foreign labour in the region, and to situate it within a broader historical context that illustrates the importance placed on maintaining the cultural borders of the valley in the face of increased ethnic and cultural diversity within the province. The research, while limited in scope, highlights the ways in which contemporary narratives about the use of temporary foreign labour in the Okanagan valley maintains a long historical tradition within the region of drawing on foreign sources of cheap labour while striving to maintain an ethnically homogenous regional culture drawn from western and northern European

immigration. This study also engages with a discourse that illustrates the heightened tensions between regional cultural borders around a valley that has historically been coded a White racial space, and state-level borders governing the flow of globalized labour into the valley.

THE OKANAGAN: THE PRESENT AND PAST

Demographics

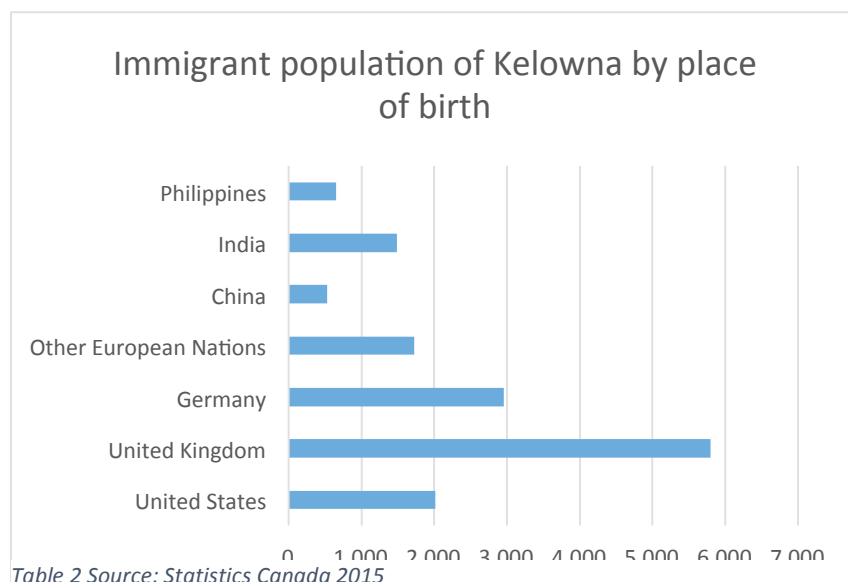
The Okanagan Valley is something of an anomaly when examined in the context of the province of British Columbia. It is culturally, linguistically, and ethnically far more homogenous than the province or other regions of comparable size and population, and is significantly more ethnically homogenous than the provincial average. According to the 2006 Canadian census, British Columbia’s visible minority population accounted for 24.8% of the total provincial population, with more than 86% living within a single metropolitan area: Vancouver (Statistics Canada 2010). The primary points of origin for the majority of these non-white immigrant populations are found in South

Asian and North Asian nations,

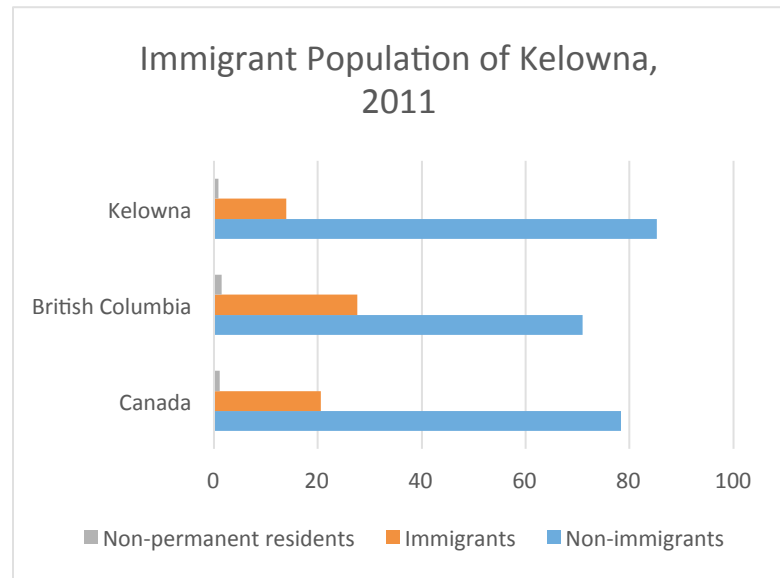
Table 1 Source: Statistics Canada 2011

while smaller immigrant populations arrived in the province from the United Kingdom,

Germany, Ireland and other Western European Nations (Statistics Canada 2011).



In the Okanagan this pattern of immigration is inverted, with the largest percentages of immigrants arriving from the United Kingdom (21.0%), Germany (10.7%) and the United States (8.2%), with much smaller numbers arriving from non-white, non-European



nations such as China and India (Statistics Canada 2016; Statistics Canada 2015). According to the estimates provided by the 2011 National Household Survey, less than 8% of the residents of Kelowna belonged to a visible minority group, which is a drastic deviation from the provincial average. Aside from a few scattered attempts to investigate this marked deviation from provincial and national patterns, the City of Kelowna appears to think little of its lack of cultural diversity, as there is nothing in the city’s Official Community Plan to address it. On the contrary, according to the City of Kelowna’s “Kelowna2030 Plan”, the only mention of culture can be found under the heading of “Encourage cultural vibrancy” which directs readers to a single static page that announces the city’s intention to,

Encourage cultural vibrancy and quality of life for residents by supporting cultural initiatives that celebrate Kelowna’s distinctive history, culture, identity, and arts. (City of Kelowna 2016)

Similar patterns can be found throughout the Okanagan Valley more broadly; cultural borders remain in place as the province beyond the region’s mountainous geographic borders continues to diversify ethnically, linguistically, and culturally. These recent trends reflect a longer historical project however, and should not be viewed as a unique modern reaction to an

increasingly globalised and multicultural national mosaic. Instead, an analysis of the settler-colonial experience in the Okanagan Valley reveals that contemporary anxieties about the growth of non-white labour populations (to say nothing of non-white resident population) is better seen as an iteration of a long-standing historical pattern of isolation and exclusion of non-white immigrants and workers by a white majority eager to retain the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the valley.

Labour and the regional economy

Historically, the Okanagan valley's primary economic drivers have been agriculture, forestry and manufacturing (InvestOkanagan 2015), but over the past several decades the focus on agriculture has been eclipsed by a new emphasis on service, retail, and care industries (Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission 2014). In a 2013 labour market analysis, the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (COEDC) estimated that the wholesale and retail trade industry employed 16.7% of the region's workforce, followed by healthcare and social assistance (12.2%), and construction (9.9%) (2014). In each of these industries, unemployment data indicates lower than average unemployment levels, with retail and wholesale trade operating at 4.8% unemployment, and accommodation and food services experiencing an 8.8% unemployment rate (COEDC 2014). While the unemployment rate in food services is higher than in other major sectors of the Okanagan economy, it is also among the most transitory labour pools, with restaurant and accommodation sector employers turning over staff at rates between 66.3% and 80.9% (National Restaurant Association 2014). This is primarily due to the higher than average rates of teenaged employees, many of whom work part-time while attending school (National Restaurant Association 2014). In the Okanagan, intraregional migration also impacts the employment rates in the North Okanagan and South

Okanagan, as young, low-skilled workers leave the regions in favour of taking up residence in the Central Okanagan (COEDC 2014).

The issue of finding low skilled workers to fill jobs in the Okanagan, particularly in service and retail sectors is compounded by a proportionately smaller population of working age residents. The population of the Okanagan valley that is of working age is 63.3%, which is significantly lower than the provincial average of 68.5% (COEDC 2014). There are a number of reasons for this, among them that the Okanagan has long been a destination region for retirees looking to settle down in smaller Okanagan communities to enjoy the mild climate and leisure activities the region is famous for (Senese 2010).

The result of these demographic patterns is a challenging one to employers in the region. On the one hand, as the Okanagan continues to attract tourists and seasonal residents, the demand for service, retail, care services and construction will continue to grow, creating opportunities for new businesses to become established and flourish. On the other hand, the migration of young, low-skilled workers within the valley (and without, as young workers continue to leave the region in pursuit of education and opportunities in larger urban centers), coupled with the precarious and transitory nature of service and retail sectors translates into an unstable and sometimes unreliable labour pool from which to draw new employees. This in part helps to drive demand for temporary foreign labour, as interviews with participants in this study reveal that what employers are looking for most in their staff is reliability and stability. As the study will show, interview participants all seemed to agree that one of the most attractive elements of the temporary foreign worker program was that it allowed them to access a pool of workers who proved to be far less prone to turnover than domestic labour pools. However, the use of labour provided by temporary foreign workers also in some cases placed employers at

odds with the long-standing cultural borders in the Okanagan, which discouraged foreign residency, while nevertheless capitalizing on foreign labour power.

History

In the 19th century, the Okanagan valley was a relatively isolated outpost of the British Empire. Despite its later place in the imperial imagination as the “British Garden of Eden” (Wagner 2008), the land remained difficult to traverse for European settler-colonizers, and its hot, semi-arid conditions seemed out of place in the generally more temperate climate of the Pacific Northwest. Early waves of immigration were therefore limited in size and scope, until the arrival of the work crews for the railways that would link the Okanagan to the rest of the Pacific Northwest and the national rail lines (Williams 2008). Ordinarily the railway crews would be made up of a diverse group of workers, drawn from immigrant populations – primarily Chinese and Indian laborers and indentured servants, but on the stretch of line that would service the growing community of Kelowna, something different was happening. Residents of the region had made it clear to the railway companies that any workers sent to help build the Kettle Valley and Myra Canyon stretches of the line should be made up of workers of European (Williams 2008). As historian Maurice Williams noted in his history of the Myra’s Canyon branch of the Kettle Valley Railways system, the bulk of the labour used in the construction of that segment was drawn from East Coast labour pools of primarily Northern and Eastern European men, rather than from the more close-at-hand pool of Chinese and Indian labour (2008). Anti-Asian racism among white workers and residents of the region was not a unique development in the Okanagan valley, but rather reflective of a near-universal attitude amongst white settler-colonizers (Chang 2009; James 2009). However, while other regions of the province - especially in the coastal

metropolitan areas - gradually opened to non-white immigration, the Okanagan by virtue of its isolation continued to maintain sharp cultural borders aimed at dissuading non-white settlement.

Though there had long been tiny populations of non-white, non-Indigenous settlers in the region, their presence was generally merely tolerated by their white neighbours, and as a result these small non-white communities remained isolated from the rest of the growing Okanagan region (Roy 1990). Often racial tensions simmered just beneath the surface, waiting for almost any excuse to erupt into the open (Roy 1990). As an example, in 1941, just days after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour, a delegation from the small community of roughly 330 Japanese-Canadians living near Kelowna, brought a petition to the city of Kelowna affirming their loyalty to Canada and the Crown (Roy 1990). This show of loyalty had little effect on the majority of Kelowna's residents however, who promptly demanded the removal of the Japanese – and any other populations deemed disloyal to the Crown. By the end of January 1942, the city of Kelowna had petitioned the government in Ottawa to prevent anyone of Japanese descent from owning or renting land, or entering share-cropping arrangements in the valley, and if any interned Japanese were to be sent to the Okanagan, they should only be allowed out of their camps in order to provide labour to road crews and orchards in the valley – and only under the strictest police supervision (Roy 1990). The subtext of such demands were clear: non-white, “foreign” labour could be utilized in the Okanagan, but residency would not be encouraged – or

welcomed; once hostilities concluded and the internment of Japanese Canadians ended, few families opted to return to the region (Willmott 1969).

By the end of the second world war, immigrants – particularly those from China and Japan – found the Okanagan to be an unwelcoming place and most decided to move on to friendlier regions. According to some research, by the early 1960s, there were barely 60 Chinese residents living in Kelowna, a city of more than 12,000 by this time (Willmott 1969), and their primary occupations included low-skilled trades such as washing and cooking services. Such a

tiny number of Chinese residents was a marked drop from the estimated 15% of the city’s population that was Chinese in 1909 (Moore 2010), and illustrates the sharp downward trend in non-white residency in the region in the years following the end of World War II. The decline in non-white residency and the growing racialized

division of labour at mid-century can be seen as a reflection of a specific historical

and cultural trend in the valley; the Okanagan was never meant to be a site of multicultural “melting” for either the earlier settlers or their descendants but rather a site where white, Anglo-Canadian citizens could rediscover or recreate an ethnically homogenous enclave in a world prone to multicultural blending (Bennett 1998). This identity was central to many of the early promotional attempts by businesses to attract new immigrants into the region: here was a place where British pioneers could engage in the “aristocratic flavour” of fruit farming in a sheltered,

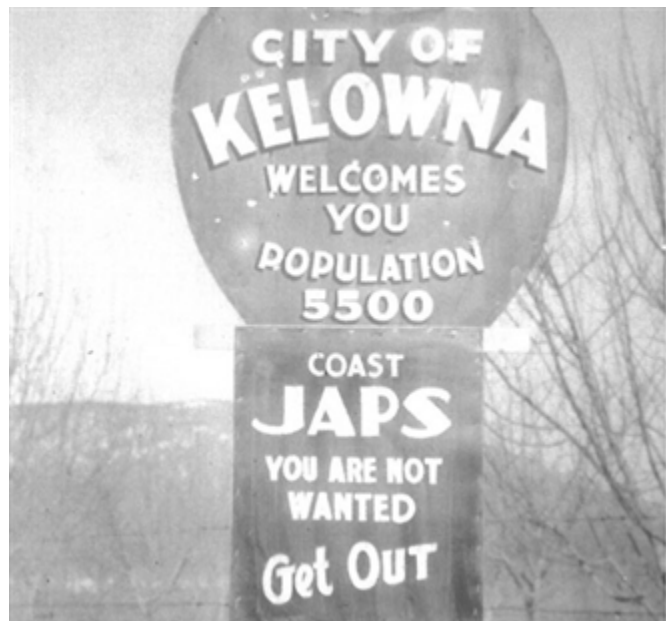


Figure 1. World War II era "Welcome to Kelowna" sign. Kelowna Museum Archives, 2015, Kelowna, British Columbia

British haven that fulfilled the expectations of upper-class, idealized notions of rural living (Bennett 1998). From its origins in late 19th and early 20th century information and recruitment pamphlets to the region's rebranding efforts in the neo-liberal late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Okanagan valley has maintained an image of itself as a white, Anglophone paradise in contrast to the more multicultural trends of the surrounding regions.

Throughout much of the 20th Century, the Okanagan remained geographically isolated from the rest of the province. Until the early 21st Century, the primary corridor through the region – Highway 97 – was largely single-lane each direction, until much-needed expansion projects opened it up to two and three-lane traffic in the mid 2000s. The highway connected to the Trans-Canada highway at the northern tip of the valley, just outside the small city of Salmon Arm, and to the smaller Highway 3 in the south; Highway 97 also crosses the border with the United States and continues south as Route 97. Where both Highway 3 and the Trans-Canada highway cut through mountain ranges, the roads would often narrow to a single lane of traffic either way and during the winter months could often become impassible for hours or even days due to severe weather and avalanches. At the southern tip of the region, where the Okanagan valley transects the US border, there has historically been a thriving cross-border economy as local Canadian residents would make frequent day-trips across the border to access many of the cheaper goods found in US communities like Oroville.

For much of the mid-20th Century, the region also sported a small number of tiny, unpaved regional airports, until the early 1970s when the City of Kelowna expanded their airport to include a paved runway and an air traffic control tower. The expansion of the airport helped to fuel economic development in the region, and this development was helped first in the late 1980s with the opening of the newly upgraded Coquihalla Highway (Highway 5) and later by the

construction of Highway 97C, the Okanagan/Coquihalla Connector in 1990. These two highway projects, totalling more than \$1 billion, allowed commuters from the lower mainland to bypass the lengthy trips along the northern and southern highways in favour of a direct high-altitude highway that could deliver them into the heart of the valley (McNeill 1990). The result was explosive: whereas historically the growth rate of the city of Kelowna sat at around 2.6%, in the early 1990s the population growth rate exceeded 6%, marking the city as one of the fastest growing cities in Canada (City of Kelowna 2009). Subsequent expansions of the Kelowna airport – including the construction of an international terminal in 1991 – helped fuel this rapid growth (Turpin 2008).

The growth of the region's population was matched by the steady growth of its service and retail, tourism, and agricultural sectors – particularly the region's vineyards and wineries – which in turn demanded increasing numbers of workers, primarily low-skilled ones. Traditionally, where adequate labour could not be drawn from the region's resident labour pool, agricultural workers were drawn from transient populations of seasonal workers (often referred to as “pickers”, among other, more derogatory names), many of whom arrived in the region each summer from Quebec (Couture 2009). Despite their status as Canadian citizens, these seasonal workers were often treated poorly by the region's resident population. Often referred to as “Frenchies”, the transient, primarily French-speaking population were often housed – if they were housed at all – in out-of-town work camps that were themselves subject to close, often negative scrutiny, a state of affairs that continues to this day (Couture 2009; City of Osoyoos 2016). This pattern of exclusion and isolation is not surprising, when viewed with an eye to historical context of the region, rooted as it was in idealized notions of Imperial country living. Indeed, this pattern of exclusion and hostility towards outside labour forces should be expected,

given the region's historical treatment of non-white and non-Anglophone settlers and workers. As an example of the sort of treatment French-Canadian fruit pickers could expect in the region, in a 2007 edition of the WestJet in-flight Magazine *UP!*, blogger and author Jodie McKague describes the "... young and transient wing of Quebec's work force..." as one might describe animals in a nature documentary:

Like Carnies on the summer circuit, the French Fruit Picker travels between orchards and communal campgrounds by hitchhiking in clusters or squeezing more bodies into a VW van than a clown troupe... They literally feast on the fruits of their labour, grubbing out on apples, peaches and cherries (and the odd tofu burger) chased with bottles of Maudite. Effective budgeting is paramount for this species, so hard-earned dollars aren't wasted on basic necessities such as shelter, clothing or food – except when nursing a case of the munchies." (McKague 2007).

The appearance of this "species" isn't difficult to imagine – in fact one does not even need to try, as the description comes with a stylized image of the worker as a dirty, dreadlocked and emaciated worker with brown skin, skinny from lack of food (except when their fondness of smoking weed drives them to "grub out" on whatever fruits are close by). It is a caricature rooted in middle-class stereotypes of "hippies" and "bohemians", and it depicts these Canadian citizens as not merely an Other, but an Other of a different species entirely. This treatment is positively glowing however, when compared to the climate faced by more recent outside labour – most notably Mexican workers brought in under the temporary agricultural worker program. As Couture states, quoting an investigator from the Francophone Federation of British Columbia who was asked about the experiences of Mexican workers in the valley, "It's the worst racism I've ever seen. It is institutionalized at every level of the community. The hostility and tension are incredible. The local people are just choking on hate" (Couture 2009).

Despite this attitude, the Okanagan valley continues to make extensive use of foreign labour in its agricultural sector, bringing in temporary foreign workers under the auspices of the

Temporary Workers Program to provide a stable core of labour in industries prone to high labour turnover. Between 2004 and 2009 the number of foreign workers – drawn primarily from Latin America – rose from just over 400 to over 3000 (Tomic Trumper & Aguiar 2011). According to some reports, the living and working conditions faced by some of these workers are appalling. In a report published by the magazine *The Tyee*, Tom Sandborn tells the story of two Guatemalan men who worked in the region before leaving due to abhorrent living conditions (Sandborn 2012). According to the two men they and 42 other workers were housed in a metal-sided warehouse with two tiny bathrooms and a single stove and sink that served as a kitchen (Sandborn 2012). The conditions were made even more brutal by the region’s hot climate; in summer months in the central and southern Okanagan, it is not uncommon for temperatures to rise above 33C (and in rare cases above 38C). While reports of such abuses continue to find their way to regional media outlets, coverage of foreign workers is often one-sided (Aguiar McKinnon & Sookraj 2010).

Negative or hostile scrutiny is not limited to agricultural workers in the region. In 2007, a contingent of Jamaican students and twenty-six temporary foreign workers also from Jamaica arrived in the Okanagan. The students were part of a recruitment initiative by a number of regional partners, while the workers had been hired to help complete work on the William R. Bennett Bridge, a floating four-lane structure connecting Kelowna and West Kelowna. In response to their arrival, the local media printed stories and articles in which the workers were depicted as “just in time” labour that had arrived to help with the bridge construction, and who would return to Jamaica once the job was done (Aguiar McKinnon & Sookraj 2010). But the media went a step further in their coverage of the newsworthy event of the arrival of twenty-six Jamaican workers to a city of over 150,000 residents by commenting on the “obvious” concerns

local residents had about their arrival, such as increases in crime and drug use, and other “social problems” (Aguiar McKinnon & Sookraj 2010). In an article for the Kelowna Capital News, reporter Adrian Nieoczym assured the paper’s readers that all incoming Jamaican workers would be subject to criminal background checks and medical exams (Nieoczym 2007), identifying perhaps the anxieties of the *Capital News*’ readers about the arrival of a group of black, foreign men to their city. As researchers Aguiar, McKinnon and Sookraj have identified in their examination of this event, the anxieties present in the region concerning the nature, duration, and potential threats posed by the Jamaicans’ stay illustrated the continuing nature of the Okanagan valley as one that has been racialized as a white space (2010). This assertion is borne out by the demographic evidence. Of the total population of British Columbia, roughly 27% are members of visible minority groups. Of the total population of the Okanagan valley, only 5% is comprised of visible minorities (OurOkanagan 2013), which is a significant deviation from the provincial average.

METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the impact of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program’s impact on regional narratives of immigration, this study drew on three primary categories of material: reports commissioned by business and commercial interests in the Okanagan valley for the purposes of attracting investment and brick-and-mortar business to the region; studies and papers commissioned by the cities in the region designed to answer specific questions about demographic changes in the population as well as the labour force of the region, and key informant interviews conducted in the fall of 2015 with members of the Okanagan business community who have made use of foreign workers over the past decade. In this study, participants were asked a series of open-ended, semi-structured questions designed to elicit from

them rich, detailed narratives about their industries, their occupations and positions, and their experiences with the Temporary Foreign Worker program in the Okanagan. Of the three key participants in this study, two were white – one male and one female – and held positions of seniority in businesses located within the hospitality and tourism sector, while the other is a visible minority male whose position is that of an owner/operator of a business within the service sector. In the past twenty-four months, these three participants have employed or continue to employ between forty to sixty employees who are in Canada under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, temporary work visas, or working holiday visas.

Archival Analysis

Over the course of the study, 14 documents, including the aforementioned reports, studies, and policy papers were examined totalling more than 540 pages, as well as 17 news articles, representing the bulk of the news reports and commentaries relating to the subject of foreign labour in the Okanagan were examined. In addition, more than 350 news story comments and examples of community feedback were analysed using a semiotic analysis. Through the use of a sender-message-receiver model of written communication (Anderson Dewhirst & Ling 2006; Cullum-Swan & Manning 1994; Ivanov & Bradbury 1978), documents were analyzed in order to identify key signs encoded within the text designed to convey specific understandings about the nature of the demographics of the Okanagan and its labour force.

Emerging out of communication theory, sender-message-receiver models are a way of ascertaining “who says what to whom and to what effect” (Anderson Dewhirst & Ling 2006), with an emphasis on the ways in which “senders”, those charged with developing and disseminating a message, encode their message into words and symbols that will be received by their audience and retain the same basic meaning (Anderson Dewhirst & Ling 2006). In this

sense, the message being transmitted and received carries within it a symbolic meaning that may be quite different than its literal one. For example, when discussing the issue of immigration, two messages with identical scripts may have radically different *meanings*, depending on whether the images of immigrants used depict smiling or frowning faces. Similarly, the linking of two concepts or signs can be seen as normative – the linking of things that *ought* to be linked – and therefore the message might not merely be descriptive, but prescriptive as well. If, for example, a city wished to produce an information pamphlet outlining all of the features that make it an attractive place to settle, and the brochure, once produced, features white bodies to the exclusion of any other, a reader might interpret the absence of non-white bodies as part of the sales package.

Interviews

Interviews with key participants were conducted over the course of two weeks in late October, 2015. Respondents were contacted through their publically available information, and were initially contacted through emailed requests for participation. Participants who responded to the initial email and who agreed to take part in the study were then emailed a formal letter of invitation, and subsequent interview times and dates were arranged.

Participants were invited to set the tone of the interview first by selecting an interview site where they felt most comfortable. For two of the participants, these venues turned out to be offices in the central Okanagan while for the other, the site for the interview was in a food court overlooking their business in a local shopping mall. The interviews were conducted using a short list of open-ended questions designed to elicit richly detailed narratives from the participants and were each approximately ninety minutes long. While generally open and relaxed with the interviewer, the participants were explicit in their desire to remain anonymous.

The interviews themselves were designed to encourage the participants to construct a personal narrative of their experiences in their respective industries, as well as their experiences with – and perceptions of – the Temporary Foreign Worker program (Bruner 1991). The decision to use this style of interview over a more formal style using directed, structured questions and responses was based on two recognitions. First, the nature of this study situates it in the qualitative realm of sociological research, which means that while the acquisition of quantitative data such as exact employee counts, terms and lengths of employment and related demographic information is important, the primary focus of this research was to draw out participant's subjective impressions of the program. Second, the study makes use of a semiotic analysis of the written components of the research, and a narrative-style of interview complements this approach. Personal narratives contain a wealth of meaning that can be analyzed in a similar way to written material; the words, pauses, framings and subject-positionality within a participant's narrative contain a wealth of culturally significant signs and signifiers (Bruner 1991).

Narrative inquiry is also important as a methodological tool in a study such as this because it recognizes that any responses given during an interview are examples of the interaction between a person's subject position and the broader social discourse they are embedded in. This 'interpretive interactionism' reveals the ways in which a participant's personal narrative is a response to – and an interaction with – the social and cultural cues present not only within the interview space, but within the broader social discourse in which such interviews belong (Denzin 2001).

In order to ensure that what was being said in the interview space was as close to how the participant intended their answer to convey their meaning, the interviewer would repeat back the participant's answers to them as they understood it, and ask the participant if they agreed with

the interpretation. If they did not, then they were encouraged to reword their response, or expand on it in whatever way they saw fit. This question-response-reiterate-clarify model of interview allowed both the interviewer and participant to feel their positions were being made as clear as possible. This model was also adopted in order to facilitate the construction of a level of rapport and trust between participant and interviewer; the participant could, through listening and responding to the ways the interviewer articulated the participant's answer, indicate that they understood not just the words but the intentions of the person speaking them.

FINDINGS

Written material – academic or otherwise – that has attempted to assess the impact of foreign labour or immigration in the Okanagan is difficult to come by. There are few scholars who have spent time studying demographic patterns in the valley with an eye to examining the flows of immigration and settlement, but that has changed in recent years. With the recognition of the Okanagan as an international destination for tourists from all over the world, and with a growing desire to market the region's economy to an increasingly international audience, various business and commercial organizations in the region have commissioned labour market analyses and informational pamphlets designed to highlight the attractiveness of the Okanagan in general – and Kelowna in particular – to investors in the United States and Europe.

Civic organizations have also become more involved in understanding the shifts in population within the region as well, and in particular the City of Kelowna was interested – briefly, during the period when the city was administrated by the left-leaning government of Sharon Shepherd – in understanding the reasons for Kelowna's current, disproportionately white population. To that end, the city commissioned a series of investigations into the regional attitudes around race, ethnicity and immigration that was compiled into a report entitled *The*

Changing Face of Kelowna: Are We Ready? This report served as the basis for a series of attempts to create a more open and inclusive space for immigrants within the Okanagan. The report detailed a community with divided feelings about the growth of non-white residency in the region, and a municipal government seemingly ill-equipped to provide the resources needed to facilitate the integration of non-white, non-Anglophone immigrants into community life (Steyn 2008).

An analysis of news stories and community discussions indicated that while the region certainly contains its share of support and welcoming services for non-white, non-Anglophone immigrants and temporary foreign workers, more often than not the opinions expressed through news and discussions tended to cast temporary foreign workers, and non-white immigrants more broadly, as vectors of threat or risk. There appeared to be a significant degree of concern about the impact that “foreigners” would have on the region’s culture and identity, and while some commenters seemed receptive to the idea of “allowing” small numbers of non-white immigrants into the region, their presence was seen in terms of their potential to exoticize the region. In many cases, the position taken by commenters and news stories alike painted the presence of foreign workers in shades of uncertainty and “concern” about the potential risks they posed to community safety or health.

Finally, interviews with key informants revealed that while there was a noticeable tension between non-white workers and the predominantly white customer base, the central point of tension for employers of temporary foreign workers was between themselves and the government agencies tasked with overseeing the program. In each of the interviews, participants acknowledged that the industries they were a part of had become completely dependant on the use of temporary foreign labour, but that the program itself was so prone to political

manipulation in response to public outcry, that it should be dismantled and rebuilt completely or, in the words of one participant “burnt to the ground and rebuilt”.

DISCUSSION: ANXIETIES, ANTAGONISM AND EXCLUSION

The findings that emerged from the analysis of written materials and interview transcripts could be clustered into three broad social narratives. For many people living within the region, the presence of workers brought in under the Temporary Foreign Worker program represented a source of anxiety – quite intense in some cases – where the workers themselves were seen as the harbingers of a future in the region of job loss and employment uncertainty. Interviews with participants revealed examples of residents approaching them in their places of work to question – and to sometimes demand to know – why the companies were choosing to employ foreign labour over domestic workers. Temporary Foreign Workers were discussed in local media in terms of “influxes”, “swarms”, or “invasions”, while employers were frequently called on to reassure residents that the workers would not pose any danger or risk to the public by their presence. Despite these reassurances however, popular commentary – particularly comments to the local media through letters to the editors or online comments – often invoked narratives of threat, risk, and worry over the presence of non-Canadian and non-white temporary workers in the region. This last point is important, as interviews with one individual whose organization frequently relied on white temporary foreign workers, revealed that they rarely had to contend with accusations of relying on foreigners in their operations, while interviews with an individual whose foreign workers were overwhelmingly racialized revealed that such accusations were commonplace.

This research also revealed a long, almost unbroken continuity of exclusionary practice and sentiment within the region where non-white labour was desired, but non-white residents

were not. From the late 19th century until the mid 2010s, the Okanagan – and Kelowna in particular – have maintained an almost xenophobic attitude towards non-white settlers and immigrants. This attitude can help to explain the disproportionately small minority population in the region, as minority immigrants have on more than one occasion remarked on the chilly reception to their arrival in the region.

Finally, interviews with key participants revealed a troubled and antagonistic relationship between employers who use the Temporary Foreign Workers program, and the government agencies – and in some cases particular agents – who run the program. In each interview, participants described examples of hostility and an unwillingness to help on the part of government agents driven, in the opinion of the participants by blowback experienced as a result of a number of scandals associated with the program. For the participants, they were caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place: their sectors had become effectively addicted to the program, while at the same time, were largely at the whim of contradictory federal program management that recognized the need to expand the program, while caught in a loop of knee-jerk moratoriums and freezes due to public disapproval. When asked what changes they would like to see happen to the program, every participant responded with some variation of “burn it to the ground and rebuild something better”.

Anxieties

For many residents of the Okanagan, immigration (in this case, immigration to the region of ethnic or visible minorities) is viewed with ambivalence, for the most part. Rather than being seen as a benefit to the region, or as a resource that can be incorporated into the portfolio of the Okanagan, immigrants are instead viewed as burdens on municipal resources – or even as a vector for lower property values (Steyn 2008). The prevailing opinion in the region appears to be

that immigrants – especially those from non-European nations – need to assimilate, to take on the cultural signifiers of whiteness, in order to be accepted, including the adoption of regional recreational activities in place of more traditional cultural events. Several promotional booklets and reports on the region detail the many regional festivals, events, and celebrations, and include smaller festivals such as the Penticton Elvis festival and the Vernon Cowboy and Wild West Festival, but make no mention of Diwali celebrations or the Osoyoos Festival of the Grape which features heavy involvement of the region’s Portuguese community. This illustrates the ways in which the Okanagan has been coded a white racialized space (Aguilar Tomic & Trumper 2005). It is precisely because the region has been coded white that the presence of minority labour has long been a source of anxiety in the region and this anxiety has translated into open concern at the presence of workers who may one day attempt to relocate to the region.

In an article discussing the arrival of Temporary Foreign Workers into the region from Jamaica, the contractor involved in the project was explicit that any worker who “causes trouble” (which is measured by their having to be spoken to one or two times) will be sent home immediately because, as the contractor explains “... we don’t want that to spread.” (Nieoczym, 2007). Some residents seemed supportive of the arrival of Jamaican workers to the region, feeling that such a “sprinkling” of Jamaicans would “add colour” to the region (*Kelowna Daily Courier*, 2009), but for many others, the existence of foreign workers who were here with the possibility of citizenship was a source of heightened concern. According to one resident who had been interviewed for a project on multiculturalism in Kelowna, the presence of minorities in their neighbourhood would likely cause property values to drop, as minority residents would not properly care for their properties (like white people do)(Steyn 2008).

Residents of the region also vocalized a common fear that foreign workers were coming to take their jobs. According to Kay, one of the participants in this study,

... I think there's a real, you know, nationalistic – you know 'this is Canada and we need to protect Canada' – and 'these people are stealing our jobs'... I think that's people's opinions. I don't know, maybe you could tell some people some [of the worker's] stories and change their minds... I have no idea.

After discussing the nature of his relationship with the Temporary Foreign Worker program in a bit more detail, Kay, a small business owner and first-generation Chinese-Canadian, circled back to the reactions some of his businesses clientele had to the presence of minority – in this case Philipino workers – in his business,

You know, the program has really created a sort of irrational... really super-sensitive group of people who – I have customers, long time customers coming over [to me] and whispering 'you don't hire any of those temporary workers – foreign workers – do you?' It's as if they see these workers as some kind of parasite or something.

Kay's impersonation of this group of people indicated his belief that these folks were afraid of – or even disgusted by – the possibility that Kay's workers may not be Canadians. Throughout the interview, whenever Kay impersonated this group, his voice would raise and become more nasal, as though the people he was impersonating were holding their nose while speaking, and his eyes would grow hard. It was clear that their opinions frustrated him; his workers were, in his words, hard-working, law-abiding people who simply wanted to earn a living for themselves and for them to be treated so poorly by the Canadians they dealt with made him angry. When asked if people might have a different perspective on his workers if they were a part of a different industry, Kay responded by highlighting what was in his view a more salient difference saying,

I think if you take out the fact that these workers are primarily south-east Asian, I think it changes everything. Yeah, I think when you see the ski hills' workers [another industry that makes extensive use of foreign temporary workers] as being primarily Australian... and quite honestly as white, I think it changes things, because I don't hear the same criticisms that I hear [about his industry and workers].

For Kay, the addition of foreign workers into his business carried with it the attendant stigma of the foreign Other as a job stealer, as a vector of risk. Wherever the interview touched on questions of ethnicity or of citizenship (Kay mentioned that he would sometimes attempt to sponsor foreign employees' applications for permanent residence if they were here on a program other than the Temporary Foreign Workers program), Kay's narrative would invariably include themes of anxieties on the part of his clientele. In his view, Kay's use of the Temporary Foreign Workers program was inextricable from narratives of ethnicity and racialization; in a region as ethnically homogenous as the Okanagan, the arrival of new, minority faces was an oft-remarked upon phenomenon.

This point was made immediately clear at the end of the interview, when I left Kay and crossed the food court to buy some food for myself. As I stood in line at a Chinese food outlet, I was inadvertently drawn into a display of the sorts of anxieties this study was investigating. A white man appearing in his late fifties began loudly berating one of the workers behind the counter after she apparently failed to correctly hear his order. He demanded that she "learn to speak English" if she was going to come to this country. The man then declared that she was emblematic of the problem with "all of these foreign worker types" in the region: they came in and took jobs that they couldn't do properly instead of leaving them for Canadians. Throughout the exchange, no one intervened to stop him; when he looked to me to validate his opinions I, a white man in my mid-thirties, shrugged and looked away. By doing so I was helping to foster the chilly climate (Steyn 2008) many racialized individuals experienced upon their arrival in the valley. In this case, part of the performance of whiteness in the Okanagan was to be silent in the face of aggressive displays of xenophobia, and I played my part well.

Not all experiences in the Okanagan reflected this sort of animosity when it came to interacting with temporary foreign workers. In fact, according to some employers, the addition of foreign workers enhanced the “multicultural” atmosphere of the workplace, to the benefit of everyone – customer and worker alike.

Mike, a manager in a large hospitality-tourism organization sat across from me in a well-lit, comfortable meeting space, tucked into an alcove on the second level of a satellite office his organization operates in Kelowna. A soft-spoken, pleasant man in his late thirties, Mike found little in my questions about racial tensions and the Temporary Foreign Workers program that related to his own experiences. In fact, it was his opinion that his customers and coworkers benefited from the inclusion of foreign workers who were, in his estimation, over-qualified for the work they were doing for him.

... The vast majority of them [people brought over on holiday visas, and through the temporary foreign worker program] are vastly overqualified. I mean, in our [customer service areas], we’ve had Rhodes Scholars, MBAs, and lawyers... they inject a lot of experience – life experience – to the job.

Mike paused briefly before continuing to develop his thought,

I guess from a customer service standpoint, a customer experience standpoint... it becomes a much better experience, if you follow me... I guess you could say that it’s almost a ‘multicultural’ kind of environment you know, but everyone’s also like-minded, you know?

It is revealing that Mike’s experiences with the “multicultural” dimension of working with foreign labour emerges from a part of the Okanagan service and tourism industries where the majority of foreign workers are drawn from Commonwealth or European nations. In the industry to which Mike belongs, the majority of the temporary workers brought in to the Okanagan are from Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the United Kingdom; they are predominantly white and English-speaking, rendering them almost invisible against the ethnically homogenous

background of the Okanagan valley. They are ‘exotic’ or ‘multicultural’, but only in the sense that they are white people from distant, white states. Despite their accents, this category of foreign worker is firmly enmeshed in the cultural signs of whiteness; they share similar religious beliefs and cultural attitudes with people in the Okanagan; they dress in the same styles of clothing, play the same sports, and respond in similar ways to cultural cues.

Like Mike, Jay also works in the hospitality and tourism sector of the Okanagan economy, and like Mike, Jay works with a cohort of foreign workers that are drawn largely from white, affluent nations in Europe or descended from European settler-colonizers. Her experiences largely echoed those of Mike, and she pointed out that when it came to the required skillsets of the workers they were looking for, attitude and personality counted for a great deal in the selection process. As Jay stated,

... We’re not really asking them – we’re not putting them in difficult positions but they’re going to be interacting with our guests all the time. We want to know that they’re always going to have good interactions with our guests.

Jay also stressed that fluency in English is a key requisite for any positions they are looking to fill, meaning that unlike some other industries in the region, it was not feasible to draw foreign workers from non-European or non-Western nations. This of course overlooks the fact that list of nations where English is the official language includes Jamaica, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua, Botswana, and Fiji.

This discrepancy can be somewhat resolved by reconceptualising the Okanagan as not merely a geographic location, but as a site of the *commodification of geography*. The Okanagan is not merely a space on a map; it is a brand and an idea, a place for consumption and to be consumed. “The Okanagan” is a performance of place, one bound in imaginaries: first in aristocratic romanticizing about rural living in the 19th century, and now as a pristine, white

destination for middle-class adventurers eager to seek out thrills and excitement – and beauty – in a place that is geographically different from home, but culturally familiar. By maintaining a labour force – even a foreign one – that is ethnically and culturally “compatible” with the host culture, organizations in the region are able to be fully integrated into the cultural brand of the region, while those industries whose workers are drawn from across Asia, the Caribbean or Latin America must strive to keep their labour force as removed from the white population as possible. When these minority groups do make their presence known, they elicit strong and negative pushback from the region’s inhabitants.

Employer/State Antagonism

While their experiences with cultural anxieties and reactions to the racialized makeup of their workforces could not be more different, Jay, Kay, and Mike are in complete agreement regarding their perceptions of the Temporary Foreign Worker program itself. All three participants felt that their relationship with the program – and with Ottawa more generally – was one of antagonism and acrimony. Mike, speaking in tones of increasing exasperation, says

It’s totally antagonistic. Like, I’ll send in my information and I’ll point them to the [company’s] website [where the company details its job listings and requirements], and they’ll just say ‘oh, well we don’t look at websites’... and then they’ll turn down our application because we didn’t list our job postings... and you can’t talk to anyone about these issues, because the only time you can talk to them is if they call you first; you can’t call anyone – you get sent straight to voice mail and someone might get back to you. I called one time and left a message saying that I had a question about my application and two days later I get a call back from someone, sounding a bit angry saying ‘I hear you have questions?’ Uh, yeah, I do!

Mike wasn’t alone in his frustration. When asked about his relationship with the TFW program Kay, equally frustrated, lamented the extreme difficulties – financial and otherwise – that the program placed on him and other employers. In one anecdote, Kay discussed the difficulties in

obtaining an LMO (Labour Market Opinion) stating that at first, the government wanted to charge \$100 for an LMO, then (in response to negative attention in the media), LMOs spiked in price to \$1000 before falling in price, after an apparently arbitrary amount of time to below \$1000. In his view, “these weren’t informed changes, they were reactionary changes, and now they’re finally clamping down – so they say, but I’ve never been visited by any regulators or inspectors.” Kay finished on this topic by saying,

As a legitimate user of this program, as someone who follows all the rules and does everything I’m supposed to do, I still feel like it’s us [employers] against them [Services Canada and the managers of the TFW Program]. But it’s not like this with every branch of the program... the part that deals with LMOs is clearly out to protect the Canadian labour market, but the provincial nominee program is totally different.

Mike, Kay and Jay were all in agreement about the current nature of the labour market in the Okanagan as one that has fundamentally come to depend on foreign temporary labour, as in their view, it was those workers who formed the backbone of their long-term business strategies. In Kay’s case, the problem he found when it came to hiring was that no one wanted to work in businesses like his. Service industry work is hard, and work in restaurants can be even harder. Workers invest long hours working in hot, uncomfortable environments and in Kay’s view, very few Canadians seemed to want to spend more than a few weeks or months working there before moving on to something better. With temporary foreign workers on the other hand, he had workers who were guaranteed not to quit; he could invest labour hours in training them and those hours would not be wasted the minute the worker found a better job elsewhere.

In Jay’s case, the same attitude was present: temporary workers could come into the industry to work for the six to seven months required of them (as Jay’s industry was seasonal in nature) and could go home at the end whereas finding domestic workers willing to become involved in seasonal labour markets was more difficult. This meant that temporary workers could

be hired to form a labour backbone that could then be augmented with part-time workers drawn from domestic labour pools.

The antagonisms present in the relationship between employers in the Okanagan and the managers of the Temporary Foreign Workers program in Ottawa can be viewed as a manifestation of a competing interests between the federal government and business owners in an increasingly globalized borderland. The rapid changes – and moratoria – that had been imposed on the Temporary Foreign Worker program by the Conservative federal government of the day are examples of the state exerting its control over questions of citizenship and sovereignty; in response to negative attention and increased anxieties about foreign workers stealing jobs “meant” for Canadians, the federal government responded by directly intervening in the market forces of regional economies that relied on access to large numbers of temporary foreign workers.

This intervention can be seen as a method by which the state manages questions of who can be considered citizens in the Canadian state: if citizens are identified with labour, as they are under neoliberal conceptions of citizenship (Bloemraad, Korteweg & Yudakul 2008), then foreign workers engaged in labour in the Canadian economy are in practice engaged in performing an act of citizenship. By engaging in arbitrary manipulations of the rules of the Temporary Foreign Worker program, alternatively making it easier or more difficult for foreign workers to enter the Canadian market, the Canadian state is signalling to observers the precariousness of temporary foreign work; temporary foreign workers may engage in the acts of citizenship, but they remain isolated from the pathways that would allow them to apply for Canadian citizenship and thus become eligible for integration into the region’s cultural landscape. A similar pattern emerges in analyses of the use of visa restriction and re-regulation

by states to curtail migration and labour mobility, as doing so reifies state control of flows of goods, services and bodies across borders, both within and without (Neumayer 2006; Meyers 2000).

Continuity of Exclusion

More than a century after early settler-colonizers branded the region the “British Garden of Eden”, residents of the Okanagan are still struggling to maintain its status as a hinterland haven of Imperial Britain. Rather than being a unique phenomenon in the history of the region, the growth of the use of temporary foreign workers in the Okanagan can instead be seen as the most recent iteration of the practice of utilizing foreign labour while denying those who engage in it a chance at taking their place in the region’s cultural mosaic. Throughout the history of the region, racialized and immigrant populations were employed as labourers in the economy, but were isolated from the region’s culture – if they were allowed to participate at all (Depner & Teixeira 2012; Aguiar McKinnon & Sookraj 2010). Like Indigenous, Chinese and Japanese labour cohorts before them, the temporary foreign workers of the 21st Century are employed throughout the Okanagan market but their presence is always transitory; their labour power is used for a finite period before they are sent back to where they came from, to be replaced with a new cohort of racialized labour who will repeat the pattern of working as invisible labour – invisible that is, until some event or scandal draws the region’s attentions to them and they are once again forced to shoulder the burden of white anxieties and fears of racialized bodies labouring in Eden.

A tale of two borderlands

If the topography of the Okanagan Valley is enmeshed in a process of *geographic commodification*, then the tensions present between Ottawa's desire to facilitate the use of temporary foreign workers into the region and the region's citizens' attempts to marginalize them can be seen as a struggle to control the shape that commodification takes. In many cases the borders between states cut through pre-existing cultural geographies (Szcepanski 1998), and when this happens the resultant dissonance between state and cultural borders becomes a site of tension (Lowe & Stansfield 2007; Ahmadzadeh & Stansfield 2010). In the case of the Okanagan, this tension emerges as the region's residents struggle to retain the white coding of the geographic and cultural spaces of the valley against the increasingly multicultural nature of federal and provincial economic policies. The narrative of the Okanagan valley remains one of geographic consumption; middle and upper-class Canadians and Americans (and increasingly rich travellers from across Asia) are welcome to visit the valley, to partake of what it has to offer, and then, ultimately, to leave. White residents are, in this narrative, the stewards of Eden; they keep it pristine and safe (for white enjoyment), while only cautiously adding a "sprinkling" of non-white bodies, "for colour". If any more than a sprinkling is added, if the "face" of the valley darkens too much, then the Okanagan as a geographic and cultural commodity is lost.

This narrative is appropriately apocalyptic, given the historical description of the place, but it also helps to strengthen the tension which exists between federal-level attempts to regulate labour and business in the Okanagan, and regional attempts to maintain the ethnic homogeneity of the Valley; struggles along the borders of a commodified imaginary. In essence, the Okanagan Valley is caught up in a debate that persists because the debaters are speaking in different languages: the federal government speaking in terms of regional development and international political economy, while the regional municipalities and residents speak in terms of cultural

narrative and values, rooted in a sense of shared cultural identity (Hardwick & Mansfield 2009). These regional narratives depict a cultural borderland that mirrors those seen around immigrant and ethnic enclaves in larger urban centres, where racialized residents – citizens or otherwise – form culturally distinct pockets of difference within a larger White or Anglophone culture (Myles & Hou 2004). In this case, the Okanagan as a White-coded and White racialized space has become a site of resistance by its residents to maintain its distinct ethnic character in the face of a rapidly diversifying provincial and national population. To revisit the Kelowna2030 Plan in this context then, is to see it as an attempt to freeze the Okanagan Valley in amber and preserve it's “unique history, culture, and identity” against the forces of globalization that seek to change it.

SUMMARY

Temporary foreign labour in the Okanagan valley, while a relatively new phenomenon in the region's labour market, continues a long historical tradition of exploiting foreign sources of labour for low-skilled, physically-demanding work. Additionally, the region's history of using temporary or transitory foreign work has been coupled with a practice of exclusion; outsider or racialized foreign bodies are desirable as menial or low-skill labour, but outsiders who enter the Okanagan labour market can expect to face an insular, even xenophobic regional culture that draws sharp distinctions between those who “belong” in the region, and those who do not. That distinction is drawn along racialized and linguistic lines and is maintained in the face of an increasingly multicultural and ethnically diverse provincial population. Despite this ethnic diversification at the provincial level, the Okanagan valley remains disproportionately white, a fact not lost on social researchers and policy makers within the region who have pointed out that

the region features an openly “chilly” climate for newcomers and a distinct preference for Anglo-European immigration over migrations from other regions.

Despite the region’s low desire for non-white immigration, the Okanagan nevertheless makes heavy use of temporary foreign workers in its agricultural, service and tourism sectors, and does so in ways that highlight the racialized nature of low-skilled labour in the Okanagan labour market; racialized foreign bodies are used in agriculture and service sectors (primarily as short-order “line” cooks, dishwashers and cleaning staff) while white bodies are used prominently in spaces of middle-class leisure in tourist and service industries (where they are employed as servers, hosts, and bartenders). These racialized divisions of labour reflect regional anxieties about the presence of non-white Others within the valley, and connect contemporary programs of employing temporary foreign work with historical patterns of employing non-white transient populations in the region’s low-skill labour forces.

Finally, the relationship between regional employers of temporary foreign workers and the program’s management in Ottawa and related field offices is, in the eyes of some of the employers involved, an acrimonious one. Whereas the employers see temporary foreign workers as critical – even necessary – components of their long-term business models, there is a sense that federal program management sees the temporary foreign worker program as a potential political liability. As a result, federal policy regarding the program is reactionary and often arbitrary, leaving the businesses that make use of the program vulnerable to the rapidly shifting winds of public opinion and national political strategy. This tension is illustrative of a disagreement between regional narratives regarding belonging, culture and citizenship, and federal policy embedded in neoliberal patterns of migrant labour flows that sees the desires of regional agents subordinated to state-level economic policy.

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