



Essential but Disposable Labour: Migrant Workers Exploited in Canada

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Episode 1

Title: Denied by design

Sarah Guinta: Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us for this episode of our podcast, which centers the voices of migrant workers here in Canada. My name is Sarah Guinta. I'll be hosting today, and

I am very grateful to be joined by Gabriel Allahdua, who's a former agricultural farm worker, advocate and now author. And Gabriel has been kind enough to join us to talk a little bit about his experiences today on the podcast. And we'd like to open things up by Gabriel reading a poem that he has actually authored on his experiences coming to Canada. Hello and welcome, Gabriel.

Gabriel Allahdua: Hi. Thank you for this great opportunity. My name is Gabriel. I'm a former migrant worker. And being a migrant worker in Canada, I discovered many things. I discovered I'm a god; I discovered I'm an angel; I discovered I'm a slave; discovered I'm half human; I discovered I'm a lab rat.

a God

from my surname, Allahdua, a Muslim name for God;
from my ancestor on my father's side, an indentured
worker from India

an Angel

for my given name, the Angel Gabriel; from Christianity,
a religion imposed on my ancestors; colonization;
they've made me an angel because my labor is used to
create somebody else's heaven

a Slave

like my mother's ancestors, exploited for my labor, far
away from home

a Half Human

denied basic human rights; second-class under
Canadian law

a Lab Rad

in the grand employment experiment. Everything that is
been introduced into the Canadian workplace- short-
term, contract, "flexible" employment- has been tried
on us for 57 years.

What they try on migrant farm workers, they'll try on
you next.

Sarah Guinta: Thank you, Gabriel. That is a very powerful poem. Thank you for sharing it with us. To start things off, I would love to hear a little bit more about yourself and maybe a little bit of your own history, how you join us today.

Gabriel Allahdua: I am from the Caribbean island named St. Lucia. In the Caribbean, after colonization or during colonization, we had many things happening. One of the key things is that agriculture was one of the main activities carried out in the Caribbean islands. And sugar cane was one of the main crops cultivated. Before sugar cane, they had tobacco where they used Indigenous labor to work on those plantations. But the Indigenous people, they were not best suited for that kind of work. So, a lot of them died during that time. In addition to European bringing diseases and so on, sugar cane was a very labor-intensive crop. They went to Africa, bringing Africans to work as slaves on the plantation. After the emancipation in 1838, in the British Western Ilse, with slavery being so barbaric, then freed slaves had an option whether to continue working on the plantation or to go on their own. Because slavery was so barbaric, they left the plantation. So, the plantation owners then had a problem, very little or no workers. So, they then went to Asia to bring in indentured workers. And my father is a descendant of those people.

And in the Caribbean, with movements towards independence post World War II, in the 1950s and so on, there were lots of movements towards independence in the Caribbean. And during that time, in my country, we moved from sugar cane. In my country, with sugar cane, with that crop, you can only harvest that crop once for the year. Imagine having your income once for the year. And then we move from sugar cane to bananas. With bananas, the moment you start harvesting bananas, you can harvest at least twice for the month. Your income is more or less. You have a different cash flow now compared to sugar cane. That was an economic revolution. So, the economy was doing well with that kind of cash flow. It was easy to get employment, lots of opportunities. So, I was benefiting from that. It was easy to get work and so on. And eventually I became self-employed, which was a dream moment for me. To be self-employed, to be control of your time, to be control of your income. That was kind of for freedom for me, right? But just one hurricane. Just one hurricane.

I was doing five different things when I was self-employed. And exactly one year after I became self-employed, one hurricane literally pulled off the carpet. That brought me to the lowest point in my life. And before I talk a little about it, I want to tell you, in the Caribbean, from the 1 June to the 30 November, which is six months, we always live in anticipation, always expecting a hurricane that is why we all know that poem:

June is too soon.
July, stand by.
August is a must.
September, a month to remember.
October is not over.
November, it's all over.

That was so easy to learn in school. But when I experienced that, when I experienced that hurricane, it was a real thing, right? It wasn't a poem. It was reality. And that hurricane, it pulled up the carpet, and it brought me to the lowest point in my life. What is the lowest point in my life? Having a family to support; being unemployed in a country with very little or literally no social safety net. So, I was at the lowest point in my life.

So literally, I was forced to come to Canada because of a hurricane. And I want to tell you, had I come to Canada by choice, I would be a visitor. I would be a tourist. But so many situations, including that hurricane, forced me to come to Canada. So, I was forced to come to Canada.

Sarah Guinta: Holy smokes. So, thank you for sharing a little bit about your background. Something I did want to ask. Racism is interwoven into the Canadian immigration system, specifically into labor migration programs, among others. So, the majority of the migrant workers who are part of these low wage streams are dominantly from the global south and from the racialized global majority. Can you talk a little bit more about some of these labor migration programs and the racism experience as workers are kind of funneled through them?

Gabriel Allahdua: A couple of things I want to say. The way it is packaged to the Canadian public, it is packaged in such a nice way. It is packaged as buy local. And I love to buy local. When you buy local you're buying freshness. You're supporting the local economy. And buying freshness means more nutritious food, healthier food. The real story, the hidden story, is the hands that really go into the production of your food. The people who are planting it; the people who are caring for the crops. The people are picking it. The people are packaging it; the people who are processing it; the people who are distributing it. And when you go to the restaurants, most of the people who are preparing our foods, they are people of color. As you said, they are all people of color. And that is what COVID did. It exposed the people who are really in the front line, marginalized people. Right. But what is Canada

saying? Canada is saying: “[S]end me people of color, black people. Send me people of color to the sending country. Send me people of color.” That's one.

Number two, Canada is also saying: “send me those people who struggle with English. English is like a second language for them.” And number three, “I love people of color. People who struggle with English, but also send me people who are ignorant about labor issues and human rights issues.” People of color. So, racism is embedded in that language and ignorance about human rights and labor issues. Right? And all of that is happening. Canada is saying come. These are the people I want. Welcome them.

Canada is welcoming us in a climate of fear. Being on the Farm program, my employer controls the employment agency that's booking our flight in and out of Canada. The moment we speak up, we'll be on the next flight. So that threat of deportation keeps us quiet. So, we are forced to become submissive. We are forced to become compliant. And where is that happening? In Canada. What is Canada? On the world stage. Canada portrays itself as a champion for human rights, as a champion for multiculturalism, diversity and so on. But Canada is also known to be a country with a culture of silence. Nobody says nothing. It's by design. The whole system is designed to exploit labor. And that is why I tell you somebody made me an angel because my labor is used to subsidize their lifestyle. Somebody made the heaven on earth and they use it, my labor, to create the heaven.

Sarah Guinta: Absolutely. And I think that that's a particularly powerful point in that there's these layers and tears that not every community is necessarily aware of. And you touched on the policy piece and many folks think there's social support present here in Canada. There're social safety nets, there're consulates for folks that are from other places and have come here to work or to settle. So, they must have connection to support and resources coming from places far away, maybe not here with their families, but that there would be social supports and resources in place to really support these workers who are here through the temporary foreign worker program. Could you talk a little bit more about some of these social supports and policies? Maybe that the average Canadian might be under the impression are here to support workers while they're here. But what is the actual experience and consequences for those workers operating under these systems?

Gabriel Allahdua: On paper, the government says the rights of all workers are protected by law. On paper. But in practice, the laws that are designed to protect workers in Canada, migrant workers, migrant farm workers are excluded from them. Here's some example. Imagine in Ontario, for example, migrant workers are excluded from minimum wage. Minimum, you know, the bare minimum. We are excluded from that. Migrant workers are excluded from overtime pay. We work long, very long hours. We are excluded from overtime pay. Rest period in Ontario, we are excluded from rest periods. Can you imagine that? From sick leave? We are excluded from that. From statutory holiday. Look at that. This month we are in the month of February right now. The great holiday in February, Family Day. Canada is

known to be family oriented. On your best day, on Family Day, this is our worst days in Canada. Our worst day, Mother's Day, Family Day, the great days that we spend with our family, the people we love, we excluded from that. And your best day, Family Day, for example, Mother's Day, these days are worse days because we are separated from a family. And where is that happening in Canada? A culture that prides itself on diversity, on inclusiveness and on multiculturalism, right? We are excluded from those great things, right? Does that make us a human being in Canada?

Another name for migrant worker in Canada is denied. Our name is denied. We are denied the right to vote. The politicians who create those unjust policies, I call it PPP, the three P's, the politicians create those unjust policies that create our poverty. Or our poverty is because of the unjust policies, of the politicians. So, we cannot vote. We cannot vote them out because we are denied the right to vote. We are denied the right to participate in culture and community. We are denied the right to participate in family life. And denied, denied, denied. Denied the right to be protected by ordinary labor standards. So, the same laws that are designed to protect Canadians, we are excluded from them. What does the government say? The same laws that protect workers, all workers are protected by law, on paper. In practice, is that true? The exemptions, is that true? And this is the reality of migrant workers.

And when the Europeans came here post World War II, you know what the Canada said? "We cannot deny those workers rights. We cannot tie them to the farm. We cannot do that to them, but we can do people from the global south." What does that say to you? They treat one set of workers that's first class and another- second class.

Sarah Guinta: Yeah, there's two tiers. And to give you just a little bit of a personal narrative from my own experience with this. When I worked on a farm in the Oxbridge area, it was an organic produce farm with ten workers who came season after season from Jamaica. Myself and my other colleague, who's also white and born in Canada, we were there for the labor teacher program. So, we would work as laborers with our colleagues from Jamaica, and then we would hold classes in the evenings for any topic that the guys were interested in, whether it be computers, reading, etc. But I had access to weekends off, I had access to overtime, I had access to workers compensation if I was injured. I had support systems in place, none of which were accessible to my colleagues. And the farmer and employer himself was not particularly proactive about submitting paperwork or ensuring that workers were protected. And so many of the guys I worked with weren't even issued the health cards that they are supposed to be issued under the program. So, there were immediate discrepancies between the way myself and my colleague were treated and the opportunities that we had and that of the workers who had been working in this industry for years had far more experience in seniority than either of us did. Yet they didn't get weekends off. They worked seven days a week, and they had to get permission to sign out a vehicle in order to do basic grocery shopping and to meet the needs of their household. So, this is not something that is hidden away. It is very much a prominent blatant, two tier system that treats folks that come here

from other places very differently and really legislates vulnerability into the workplace. It legislates these vulnerabilities into the day to day lives of workers. And because farms are often so far removed from your average community, that's not always immediately apparent to folks who are buying their produce at the local grocery store. So, one question that I have, that kind of spins off of this, is that labor migration programs perpetuate these inequalities between countries of the Global South and those in the North, such as Canada. Keeping people in the Global South poor will ensure a constant flow of cheap and reliable laborers for the wealthier countries, making them even wealthier at the expense of these workers. So, some examples from your home country region and Canada and how maybe this contributes to these inequalities. From your experience, would you be able to speak to that at all?

Gabriel Allahdua: First of all, I want to say again, our labor is used to subsidize the lifestyle of a few. And as you said, it's legislative. And Canada is continuing to use status as that tool that keeps us vulnerable, that makes us precarious, vulnerable to exploitation, vulnerable to that, right? Here a couple of things. Cheap labor, cheap materials, tax havens, and so on. Where do we get that? Do you get that in the Global North? Never. All of these things are found in the Global South. When you have institutions like the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, these are institutions that create that wide divide, right? The World Bank, the World Trade Organization. They create that wide divide. For example, the Global South are forever tied into debt with the World bank, always in debt. IMF always controls the economy, tells them what to do, and so on. And we are always tied in debt. Always tied in debt. That creates that wide divide. Another important issue in the Global South in addition to that would be in that in the Caribbean we have the three SSS. That's all we have. We don't have a lot of natural resources but the three SSS- the Sea, the Sun, and the Sand. We all depend on tourism. All of this makes us even more vulnerable, right?

And now I'm going back to the issue of status, right? In Canada, if you have status, you have rights. In Canada, if you have status, you know, the immigration vulnerability that I have, if I have status, I am not concerned about being deported or repatriated back to my home country with status. Status takes care of both my labor and immigration vulnerability. If I have status, I'm not concerned about being sent back home. If I have status. If I have status, I have an open work permit. And if I have an open work permit, my employer knows I have an open work permit. So that means that they know I can work if anybody is willing to employ me. So that put pressure on my employer to create conditions that attract me and keep me. But not having status means we are tied to one employer. We are tied to one employer. It puts the burden on us to please our employer. And that is by design. That's not an accident. That's by design. The issue of the continuation of exploitation of people from the Global South to keep that wide divide. Let me put it this way. I am 51 years old, from a child growing up I keep hearing that my country is a developing country. Developing country? Developing for how long? What are we developing? Are we developing or we are dependent? Dependent. Dependent. And look at that. I'm coming to work on a farm to produce food. The same food

that I'm producing in a greenhouse, we can produce it in our own country. But if you watch that documentary, *Life and Debt*, it tells you how the food that we were producing in the Caribbean, that we are no longer able to produce it because of so many reasons. And even though we produce it, we cannot compete with imported food from the Global North, from the developed countries. Right? And that is by design. Right? For countries to depend, anybody who controls their food controls you. That is where power comes in, right? That we have to depend, rely on the developed countries to import food from them. Is that an accident? Or that's by design, right? And in a nutshell, getting a steady supply of cheap labor, disposable labor, that serves well the intentions of developed countries. So, keep us in a difficult situation that ensures that they have a constant pool of cheap labor, disposable labor.

If you allow me to fast forward a little bit to climate change. If there's an increase in temperature, and in any increase in temperature, who will benefit from that? An increase in temperature? You know, what does that mean? It gives Canada a wider window to produce food. An increase in temperature would mean destruction for the Global South. The destruction for the Global South means that there would always be a pool of dependent people, disposable people, because there's always more hurricanes, more severe storms, disposable people. And these people, they'll rely on the North, the developed countries, for food. So, whose interest does an increase in temperature serve? The same politics, the same people who create global warming and climate change. So, it's a win for the developed countries and it's always the people in the Global South who pay the price, right?

Sarah Guinta: And I think that really hits the nail on the head. That's such an important piece because it insulates and continues to keep those that maybe reside in the Global North in this bubble, that everything is okay, that things are okay, that, oh, it's warmer in the Fall, it's warmer into November, so it's okay. My garden is lasting longer than it normally would. I can plant earlier in the spring because our winters are shorter. Yet the destruction that this creates in other places in the world is really deepening. These dependencies and these vulnerabilities. And then you had brought up the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, who is often run by powers representing the Global North and then creating the economic criteria in which loans will be lent to the Global South and under which terms those countries then must be indebted to oftentimes the global north and how they're paying down that debt in the ways in which they're structuring their economy, oftentimes to benefit others. When we're talking about this kind of myth that is being created in Canada, and being created, I say that very loosely, because this has been something created over many decades. The myth of Canada is a country where rights and freedoms for everyone are present, including migrant workers is really false. It's not real. So, can we also make a connection with colonialism and how Indigenous peoples are treated here in Canada? Is there anything that you would want to touch on or speak to within that realm?

Gabriel Allahdua: Yeah, for sure. The exploitation of migrant workers it is hidden from society in so many ways. We are made invisible in so many ways, right? One, every time I arrived in Canada, it's always under the cover of darkness. Every time I left the farm, it was always under cover of darkness. So that is one way that we were made invisible. Number two, we live on the farm. We are the farmer's property. We're not integrated into society, so nobody sees us, right? Language makes us invisible. English is a second language to most of us, right? So, it makes us invisible on the farms. What do you say? Private property, no trespassing. Right? So basically, we are cut off, right? So, it is a secret that is kept away, and that's by design, and in Canadian law. What does the Canadian law say? We are denied. Denied. Denied the right to participate in family, denied the right to be protected. So that is by design. So, we are made invisible in so many ways. And this perpetuate, this serves well the purpose of Canada when it serves well the people who are in control; the people who control the government; the people who lobby the government to maintain the status quo; the people who profit from this system, it serves their purpose very well but the people who exploited. It is by design that they are made invisible. In terms of the Indigenous people, okay, what I can say, some people see the world as a place that supplies us with all our basic things our food, our clothing, our shelter. Some people see the world as that place that when we hand it to our children, when our children, the next generation come in, that they'll get it to be a better place, easy place. That their food, it will be easier to get food, easier to get the clothing, easier, a better place. But other people say, if I can get my food, my clothing, shelter, if I can get more things, I'll grab it. I want all of it, right? And everywhere those people landed, everywhere those people landed, what did we see? Colonialism. What did we see? Genocide. What did we see? Barbaric slavery. And in Canada, what did we see? The Chinese railroad workers. What did we see? Exploitation of the Chinese. What did we see? The 60s scoop. What did we see? The Residential schools. What did we see? The homeless children. And now the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, are continuation of exploitation. Now, if you look at the Indigenous people, for example, there are lots of stories I didn't even know that there were lots of stories that show that Indigenous labor was used to produce food, right? And in an exploitative way. In an exploitative way, right. They've tried that. Indigenous labor. And we're not even talking about the stolen lands. That's a separate issue. Right? But their labor was used. And if you look at the story of residential schools, they call in on you and they call in on me to do 94 actions; 94 calls to action to make right those injustices. That tells you not two, not four, not six, not ten, not 20 calls to action but 94 calls to action to make right those injustices. What does that tell you about the depth of the injustices that these people enjoyed? Right? And this is simply at the hands of the same people or their descendants who continue that same legacy of colonialism and exploitation. So that tells you those people, the attitude, the people, the exploiters, I call it an association of exploiters. Those people who exploit, it is a legal program. It has a full blessing of government and their interest is to exploit and grab as much as possible and not concern. In fact, the goal is profit. Profit is given priority over life. From our experience, profit is given more priority. Profit is the only thing that's

important to them and not our life, not our health. In fact, that is where the question is. That is where the question is. Are we human beings in their eyes or are we seen as economic units? And profit, everything they see is profit. Profit. Everything else but profit. Everything at the expense of profit. Everything.

That's such an important point. And we talk about profit and we talk about the terms used to describe migrant workers coming here. Low skilled labor, low income labor. Yet if all of that labor were to disappear, what would happen to Canadian industry if migrant workers from the global south were not here to fill those roles each year? Well, that's a lesson we learned during the pandemic. The borders been closed. During the pandemic, we found unemployment so high. I thought Canadians would go to the farm to produce their food because a period of crisis, right? Stay at home, stay at home. Are we not forced to think about our food supply? Stay at home, stay at home. Are we not forced to think about how reliable our food supply is? But even during a period of crisis, Canadians still do not want to produce the food? Why? The conditions are not right. The conditions are not right. Is it surprising that right now we have no more migrant workers in Canada because during the pandemic, we got a promotion? We are now called essential workers. No more migrant workers. Essential. But that is a very deceptive promotion because the politicians use nice words- essential workers. The country cannot run without essential workers. But where are the actions? Where are the policies? Where are the things to show that we are treated fairly as essential workers? During the pandemic, all the people who are considered to be frontline workers, they got hazard pay. Migrant workers never got hazard pay. And that is what the pandemic did. It highlighted that the people on the frontline are people of color. It highlighted that people who were on the front lines are people who do all the dirty work. And that's what the pandemic did. It exposed Canada's dirty secret. Right? And that the same rules and safety protocols did not apply. No one was allowed to fly. No one was allowed to travel. No one was allowed to live outside of their home with other people outside of their household. Yet migrant workers were exposed to travel on planes and to get here they were shipped off to remote farms where they were living predominantly in poor conditions, in congregate living with other people, and they were getting sick. And when workers got sick, they were then put into isolation with no social supports or safety net, in hotels and surrounding area, which then created more tension with local communities who were also concerned about safety and COVID protocols. So many of the standards that I think many Canadians will remember from the height of COVID really didn't apply to migrant workers. And yet they assumed all of the risk. All of the risk. If you take quarantine, for example, lots of workers were quarantined in hotels. Yes, and even on the farm. If you see the kind of photos that the workers send me during quarantine... They were provided with meals. But to provide somebody with a meal is important, very important. However, in a lot of instances, the workers were not provided with culturally appropriate food. Now, to serve a Caribbean worker with a ripe banana, but we think it was a cake. I can't remember the name of those cakes, whatever it is called. Right. Pastries. Right. That's not a Caribbean breakfast. They were

not culturally appropriate. Now, what does that say? Are you dealing with a human being or are you dealing with disposable people? You understand? And they do not have a saying. That's right. Also, on a lot of farms, the workers were forced into signing, agreeing not to leave the farm to access decent food, to access culturally appropriate food. And it was more than power. It was an overreach of power on the part of farmers. And the government did nothing about that. Only now the government is saying nobody should control your free time. In practice, is that really true?

Again, there's no recourse for workers. Right. That is why I call it political football. Yeah. The farm program is a federal program. A federal program. Meaning it's done across Canada. But look at that. The labor laws are provincial laws, and they're not standard. Right. Each province controls their own health care and their own labor laws. Right? To be exempted from this from the provincial level, the municipal, they control the housing. Right? So, to have a federal program, and they do not have control over the provincial labor laws and provincial health issues and so on. What is that? I call it political football. When you go to the federal government, they said, that's a provincial issue. They say, that's a federal issue. They have us running all over the place to make it worse. When you tell Canadians about those issues, some of the Canadians, they're so accustomed to that myth: "Oh, they live like kings in their country." Right? And they're not aware about that. In my home country no news is good news. People don't hear about these issues in Canada. In my home country, no news is good. So, when I came to Canada, I came to no news. But the truth is no news is not good news in Canada. Because no news has been suppressed in Canada. There's so many lies, so many things, right?

The other interesting thing is the five Ds. In Canada when I tell my story, some people will **D**eny it does not exist. Denying it is a game in Canada. Some people, they'll **D**erail the conversation. Some people, they will derail the conversation. In my own words, that's by design. Everything is by design. It's by design to make us invisible.

Sarah Guinta: Well, let's talk about how workers are kind of organizing now and some of the campaigns that they're working with, especially for advocates like yourself. So, workers are organizing and resisting, as well as building the social power of workers while here. The resistance movement and some changes that have been accomplished thus far, could you shed some light on what those changes might be? What accomplishments such as the status for all campaign that you mentioned? Would you be able to share more about the work that you do, the work that other workers that are kind of organizing and what the road ahead looks like?

Gabriel Allahdua: Our problem is political. The cause of our problem is political and the solution is political. It's not the farmers, it's not the consumers, it's not the Canadian public. It is the politicians who create those unjust laws and unjust policies. Right? What would help to take care the most is status? Status is a two-edged sword, you see? When you obtain status,

you think of Tylenol. When you obtain, you think of Advil. Our Advil, our Tylenol is status. Status in Canada is a two-edged sword. Our status, it takes care of our immigration vulnerabilities. Our status, it takes care of my labor vulnerabilities. Right? So, status is our call. Anything other than that is a Band-Aid, right? A Band-Aid. We have lots, lots, lots of Band-Aids along the way. Let me give you one example. Right now, I'm working on a project, a government funded project. And the project is to empower, they call it to empower workers, to let them know about their rights. The fact that the government has allocated millions of dollars to educate workers about their rights, the few rights, the fact that they've allocated millions of dollars is an admission that there's a problem. It's an admission. To get the government to admit that is a victory for us. However, it does not address the root cause of the problem. Right? Another important victory for us is, right now the government has in place an open work permit for vulnerable workers program. Again, that is admitting that there's vulnerability. But however, it is on the surface. You know what the government says: "Oh, workers can apply for open work permit." That's what they say on surface. But in truth and in fact, it is a real punishment for people who speak up. It's a real punishment. But however, to get that tool there, it is an admission that there is problem with the program, right? So, again, these are Band-Aid, Band-Aid. Band-Aid, right? There are lots of Band-Aid solutions. But to get to the root of it, that is our aim. And to get to the root of it, a lot of workers are speaking up, right? And that brings hope. A lot of Canadians are more concerned. You see, the more Canadians move towards the city, the more disconnected they are. The further we move away from the land, the more disconnected we are from food. But because of COVID and so many issues, more Canadians are questioning where's my food coming from? Are those people respecting the soil, respecting the environment, respecting workers? More, increasingly, more Canadians are being concerned. And that makes the future feel bright. That makes the future feel promising. The fact that I'm invited to do class presentations at universities, churches, unions, that makes the future feels bright. Because in the past, the unions were really far removed. They did not want to be associated with migrant workers because what happened is the unions, what the unions wanted when there's a strike, which is for better conditions, they do not want the employers to go in a pool of cheap labor, disposable labor. A pool of migrant workers, right? Right? Now, we migrant workers, we come to Canada to do nonunionized work so the unions were happy with that. They do nonunionized work, so they are far away from us. Right? However, if you take the federal government that's in office right now, when they won elections the previous election, they wanted a platform of real change. Real change, right. I was so happy. Real change. But when they got into office what is the song that they sing into the public? The new reality. And what's the new reality? Short term employment. And these are things that they've tried on us. That is why in my poem I tell you, I'm a lab rat. These are things that they've tried on us. Remember S? S stands for seasonal. We have seasonality. They say T stands for temporary. These are things that they've tried on us and they're bringing it out to mainstream employment. So, the unions are now aware that our issues are related to their issues. So now they're embracing us because they realize that an injury to one is an injury to all. That makes

the future bright. The unions are working with us. All in all, more workers are becoming aware that they've been exploited. More workers are aware that a better life is possible. More workers are aware that being tied to employers does not solve their problem. More workers are aware that during COVID their living situation did not help them. More workers are aware that exploitation is their reality. More workers are aware that both their living and working conditions in Canada is below standard. And more workers are aware that a better tomorrow is possible. And they realize that if we are working together we can make it happen. And that is the reality. That's why it feels bright, I feel happy and optimistic think about tomorrow.

Sarah Guinta: That's amazing. And you can't help but share some of your optimism when you hear your story and listen to you speak. I'm very curious as to what was the turning point for you as you went through this program. You said you were forced to come from the Caribbean after the hurricane. You obviously left your family at home to join the program. But I'd like to know what was the turning point for you as a worker going through this program? When did you start to take steps towards advocating for you, your community, your colleagues? What was that turning point for you? What steps did you take?

Gabriel Allahdua: It was a journey. But the significant things, I would say the significant things are: one, unlike you that have two legs, I have three legs. What does that mean? My mother is of African descent, and people of African descent carry the slavery leg. So, I carry one leg of slavery. My father is of Indian descent, indentured workers. And I carry that indentured workers leg, right? So, slavery. I carry one leg of slavery, one leg of indentured worker, right? Both form of exploitation, exploitative labor. And now I am in Canada taking part in another form of exploitative labor. So, my mother, so my father, and now the son, and then my children. When will that stop? That was an important, a personal thing for me, right? That is one. Number two, in Canada, on the world stage, what does Canada say on the world stage? In my home country, red and white means love. The red and white in Canada's flag means love. Canada goes to the United Nations and tells the United Nations that the same rights and privileges that my citizens enjoy, I'll extend them to refugees. Canada goes to China and tells China, improve your human rights records. On the world stage, Canada portrays itself as one thing. And in practice, Canada quietly perpetuates difficult working and living conditions. Will I be expected to just watch? Or will I be a player and change it? And these things, these things, those aren't just policies. These are human made stuff, right? And human made stuff can be changed. And the turning point for me, I went to a garage sale. I thought I went to a garage sale, but so happened it became I call it my windfall. I developed a friendship with the person who had the garage sale. He gave me a used radio cassette player. And one morning in 2014, I heard an immigration lawyer. In 2014, Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister. He had an unjust policy, that was called 'the four in-four out' rule. And what does that mean? Workers who are with a two-year contract, a different program than the agricultural seasonal workers. Those workers, when they come to Canada, they come for two years. So, Harper

was saying, if you spend four years in Canada, go home and spend four years before you can qualify to come back to Canada. So that was in 2014. So, there was an immigration lawyer on the radio. I told myself, if she was good enough to be on the radio, I was good enough. And that radio that somebody gave me from a garage sale, that was that turning point for me. Because at that point in my life, that was the key. The radio cassette player was that key that opened the door for me to become a permanent resident, which gave me that right. And all my vulnerabilities, literally, it helped me to take care of my vulnerabilities and it empowered me to speak up. So, a garage sale really was that thing that really tipped the balance. And another bad thing happened in my first year in 2012. A sad story. Something happened, an accident happened in Kitchener. The first year I came up, ten migrant workers died in a car crash. For people to die, for migrant workers to die in Canada? I said I came here to better my life and workers are dying. And I'm saying, for the first time, I had to associate death with the program. Right? But anyway, that bad thing, ten workers dying from Peru and so on, that was a really sad moment. A group, and for the first time I ever met that group, they had a vigil for those workers in Kitchener. I got invited to that. And that's the first time I heard about a group of people that were fighting for migrant workers- justice for migrant workers, Justicia. That's the first time I got to know about them. And it's because of that sad, difficult accident, that bad thing that happened, helped me to connect with those people. So that was another important turning point for me to know that there were some people who were fighting for those without voice, for those without power, things that were really important turning points in my life.

Sarah Guinta: Thank you for sharing that. And I think you touched on a really important piece there on several fronts. First of all, sharing your own personal kind of history and the generational impacts that this has had for you personally. But also how at every single stage, those within positions of power really and at various levels of government have avoided accountability. Every step that's taken is to avoid or sidestep accountability, to put a Band-Aid solution on what is a very deeply rooted problem. And I think a lot of Canadians certainly end up not only caught up in this myth or this narrative that various levels of government are trying to spin in order to make some of these programs sound more positive than they really are, as well as the treatment that's actually being endured by workers. But you have to ask when will it change? When is it going to stop? How are real long-term impacts are going to be made? And oftentimes you'll hear Canadians say, I don't want to get too involved in politics. I try to stay out of politics. It's just not my thing. But when you talk about climate, when you talk about colonization, truth and reconciliation, as well as the impact and experience of workers coming here through racist immigration laws and then enduring racist labor laws that are perpetuating exploitation, nobody can afford to not get involved. Nobody can afford to not have a moment where they say, actually, no, I want to advocate. I want to be involved. I want to be informed and understand what's going on because I too have a duty to make my community better. And I really have to say I think you are very much a leader and example of what that looks like. And I don't know that that's necessarily the message that you're trying

to say to every Canadian, but I think that's certainly one that's coming across in our conversation today that you can't afford to not be involved, you can't afford to not be informed.

Gabriel Allahdua: Our issues are related to food. I am fighting what I want. I want nothing more, nothing less than a Canadian food system that's healthy, that is sustainable and that is just. That's what I want. And now, isn't that peace of mind because the food that you eat, the food that we eat, it can be the safest form of our medicine. The food that we eat can also be the slowest form of our poison. Are you concerned about your food? And that is what I want. A food system that's healthy, that's sustainable and just. And one of the first political book that I read was about three boys from Italy that dropped out of school. They were taught to read and write by a priest. They said those are fond of being comfortable and fortunate. They stayed out of politics. They wanted nothing to change. How can you say you love the children of the poor who are marked by unjust laws and not change, not fight for better law? How can you do that? And what do they say? People have said those same things in different way. Silence is concerned. Doing nothing is doing something. Doing nothing means that you support the system as it is. And supporting the system as it is means that you supporting an unjust food system, an exploitative food system. And that's an important thing in Canada. What did I learn in school? Whether you go to Europe, Africa, wherever our basic necessities are food, clothing, shelter in Canada, food is not a basic human right. Food is a commodity. It's a profit-making thing. Profit comes before people. If all the food that's produced in Canada is allowed to go to the market, the real cost of food will be within everybody's reach. But Canada has a supply management. Supply management. And what is the purpose to control the supply? The purpose is to ensure everybody get food. Or is it to ensure that everybody, the producers, make a profit? Think about it.

Sarah Guinta: So, I do want to turn to you personally and maybe some of your personal plans for the future and what you're working on now when it comes to your career, your family. I don't know if you initially thought that your road to Canada would lead to a life of activism and being an author and community organizer, but here we are. So, I'd love to hear more about kind of your plans for the future and what's kind of happening now and down the road for you.

Gabriel Allahdua: Personally, I'll be happy if I could enter every home in Canada to tell them to share my story. In my home country, I took part in what we call a census, like a population and housing census, where you go house to house. I wish I could do that in Canada, go to every home and share my story. But that is difficult. I don't know how many homes look, look, there's so many homes in Canada. Plus, look, they're planning to build a million plus more homes, right? So that's a difficult task. However, sharing my story is an important thing. That is why every opportunity I get like this one here, I always think of the thousands of workers who do not have this opportunity to share their story. And that is one of the reasons why I'm so grateful for Edward Dunsworth, who helped me to publish my story. And sharing

my story and the stories of other migrant workers is one way of reaching the many homes, the many consumers, the many voters in Canada to let them know that the story that have been kept away from them. Right?

I'm hoping that my story will reach far and wide. I'm hoping that my story will be translated in other languages so that the Spanish migrant workers, migrant workers from other countries would be able to read it and be empowered, inspired and empowered to write their story, to share their story. Because even when I go to the universities, do you know what the students keep telling me? We keep reading it, but when they hear it from me, it's different. Right? And that is what I want, that more workers will share the story because we cannot bring change if we don't talk about it. And I'm hoping that this book, by sharing my story, this story, this story that more people, more workers would be inspired to share theirs and create that momentum. Create that momentum that will build pressure to create change. Because what the politicians are saying, that's not an issue in my riding. Right? So, we need more people to become aware. To become aware. To become aware so that they will push the politicians to take action. That is another thing that's important to me is to share my story in such a way that it would push people to take action. Right? That's important. Share my story is one thing, but to share it at a level where people can feel I won't say compelled, but feel inspired to take action. Another thing I'm hoping to do is by sharing my story, some people use their creative energy, whatever talent that they are, to use their skills, their talent to do things like documentaries, artwork, poetry, whatever song, create more awareness and push people to take action. So, because it's a people power thing, right? The more people will become aware, the more people take action. The more the momentum, the stronger the force to create a better society. Because at the end of the day, we are all human beings. We all deserve to live a life of hope and not a life of fear. And if everybody's living a life of hope, isn't that better for the society? Isn't that possible? Isn't that doable? Of course, it's doable. Of course, it's possible. And everyone benefits, right? Everyone benefits.

The war going in Ukraine. It's millions and millions and millions and billions of dollars. Yes. For when it comes to social justice, the government always have an issue. Always have an issue. And social justice doesn't cost much. Social justice is possible. It does not cost much, and it is doable. It is human made, and it can be achieved. It is human made.

Sarah Guinta: So, your book is entitled *Harvesting Freedom, the Life of a Migrant Worker in Canada*. It's out March 7 of this year, 2023. Correct. And where will people be able to find your book? Get your book?

Gabriel Allahdua: Would you believe me, right now, people who've preordered the book, they're already receiving it from the link that I have, it's *Between the Lines*. According to the link, you can put in your postal code, and you can see the bookstores that are near you. You can order it through the bookstores that are nearest that are near your location.

Sarah Guinta: Wonderful. Fantastic. Thank you so much, Gabriel, for sharing some of your experience, your stories, for sharing your expertise with us. It has been a wonderful conversation. And I have a feeling that this is the kind of advocacy and dialogue that is really needed to shine a very needed light on this issue, but also cut to the heart of what the real root causes of so many of these challenges are and bring into the light how we can work together to start to address them. And I think that that's the biggest piece right here, is having that conversation and ensuring that folks are informed and how to help.

Gabriel Allahdua: Generally, Canada is known to be a country for culture of silence, and this opportunity helps us to break that silence. And by talking about it, we can do something. Thank you.

Sarah Guinta: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Gabriel.