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DIGITAL CONDITIONALITY: MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND THE ALGORITHMIC POLITICS OF BELONGING IN CANADA

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INTRODUCING SARA... THE ASYLUM SEEKER

- ARRIVES IN CANADA, SEEKING ASYLUM
- WAITING (TEMPORALITY)
- TEMPORARY WORK PERMIT, WHILE CLAIM IS BEING REVIEWED
 - CONDITIONALITY
 - PRECARITY
 - UNCERTAINTY

THAT'S THE LEGAL SIDE OF CONDITIONALITY —
RIGHTS THAT DEPEND ON CONTINUOUS WAITING.



WHILE WAITING...

- TRIES TO FIND WORK
 - UPDATES CV, ONLINE PORTALS (I.E. INDEED)
- HER CV IS FLAGGED, REJECTED
 - INCOMPLETE,
 - NO CANADIAN EXPERIENCE,
 - FOREIGN CREDENTIALS OF LACK THEREOF
 - FOREIGN-SOUNDING NAME

SARA HAS THE LEGAL RIGHT TO WORK, BUT THE DIGITAL SYSTEMS THAT GOVERN ACCESS TO WORK DON'T RECOGNIZE HER AS **EMPLOYABLE**

DIGITAL CONDITIONALITY — WHEN BELONGING IS GOVERNED NOT ONLY BY LAW, BUT BY CODE.



HER CLAIM IS ACCEPTED... BUT CONDITIONALITY SURVIVES

A YEAR LATER, SARA RECEIVES GOOD NEWS

- HER REFUGEE CLAIM IS ACCEPTED.
- protected person, can apply for PR.

BUT IN THE LABOUR MARKET, NOTHING
CHANGES.

- SAME FILTERS REJECT HER CREDENTIALS
- SAME PLATFORMS RANK HER LOW
- SAME VISIBILITY METRICS DETERMINE HER
EMPLOYABILITY

LEGAL STATUS HAS CHANGED.
HER DIGITAL STATUS HAS NOT.

CONDITIONALITY SURVIVES THE LAW.



RIGHTS ARE NECESSARY BUT INSUFFICIENT;
THE LABOUR MARKET IS INCREASINGLY GOVERNED BY
ALGORITHMIC VISIBILITY.

EVEN AFTER PR, THE STORY DOESN'T END...

SARA BECOMES A PERMANENT RESIDENT.

But even here, surprise:

- StatScan shows that PR and even citizenship do not guarantee better labour outcomes unless migrants were already performing well before they received those statuses (Picot & Hou, 2025).

A WORLD WHERE EMPLOYABILITY DEPENDS ON:

- DIGITAL VISIBILITY
- CONTINUOUS ACTIVITY
- ALGORITHMS THAT REWARD UNINTERRUPTED AVAILABILITY
- CRITERIA THAT PRIVILEGE LOCAL EXPERIENCE.



SHE CROSSED THE (PHYSICAL AND LEGAL) BORDER,
BUT SHE HAS DIFFICULTY OVERCOMING THE DIGITAL
BORDER



INTERSECTIONAL CONDITIONALITY:

THE LAYERING OF LEGAL PRECARITY, DIGITAL VISIBILITY, RACIALIZATION, AND GENDERED EXPECTATIONS.

INTRODUCING INTERSECTIONAL CONDITIONALITY....

IF SARA IS A RACIALIZED WOMAN...

- Digital systems reward workers who can be always available, always online, always up-to-date
 - intersects with gendered care work.
- Algorithms trained on biased data often rank racialized candidates lower.
- Remote work does not eliminate exclusion — sometimes it amplifies it.



CANADA'S PARADOX

CANADA DESCRIBES ITSELF AS BOTH
HUMANITARIAN AND INNOVATIVE.

But when legal temporariness meets algorithmic
evaluation, inclusion becomes something **migrants must
perform** rather than something they have.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

DIGITAL SYSTEMS ARE MIGRATION SYSTEMS

- Portals and platforms now co-govern belonging.

Rights are not enough without visibility

- We need algorithmic accountability in hiring and immigration processes.

Inclusion must be stable, not continuously earned

- A just system cannot treat belonging as a performance metric.



IF DIGITALIZATION IS HERE TO STAY,
THE QUESTION IS NOT HOW TO OPTIMIZE MIGRANTS
FOR ALGORITHMS,
BUT HOW TO DESIGN SYSTEMS WHERE BELONGING
IS NOT PERPETUALLY CONDITIONAL.

THANK YOU

ARTICLE IN THE
WORKS...

KEEP IN TOUCH:

FIND ME ON LINKEDIN

