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Resistance and Resilience: Latinx Migrant Farmworkers in the Northern Borderlands

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RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE:
LATINX MIGRANT FARMWORKERS IN THE NORTHERN BORDERLANDS

A Thesis Presented

by

Jessie Mazar

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

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ABSTRACT

Vermont prides itself on being a national role model in developing innovative models for community-supported, ecologically responsible agricultural practices. However, Vermont's largest sector of agriculture, the dairy industry, has increasingly relied on Latinx¹ migrant farm laborers who face significant challenges. Due to a lack of a year-round agricultural visa program, most farmworkers on Vermont's dairy farms are unable to receive proper documentation. This circumstance has a significant impact on migrant workers, particularly those living and working closer to the border, as those areas fall within federal jurisdiction of US immigration enforcement. In these borderlands, surveillance is intensified and so the pressure to be invisible is heightened. The current availability of agricultural visas is limited to seasonal migrant farmworkers, and because dairy is year-round work, farmworkers in the dairy industry are barred from accessing proper documentation. Increased patrolling along the northern border results in extreme isolation, fear, and the inability to access basic human rights. For migrant workers on Vermont's dairy farms, just taking a trip to the grocery store is to risk deportation.

This thesis examines systemic barriers, complex relationships, and resilient responses of Vermont's farmworkers, drawing upon applied, mixed methods. The first article uses ethnography to examine food access and food sovereignty through *Huertas*, an applied garden project in northern VT. The second article analyzes the methodologies connected to *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*, an applied cartooning project that shares farmworker stories with other migrant farmworkers as a tool to break cycles of isolation and relieve psychological distress. Both projects illustrate resilient responses to the barriers associated with being undocumented along the Northern border.

While the thesis is based on research conducted in Vermont, the significance is broader in scope, and representative of national and international trends. The food system is built upon those who are continually stripped of and denied rights. While this is about Vermont, it is not *only* about Vermont: these stories are symptomatic of a larger structural violence. This thesis situates itself in a multi-scalar context-Vermont, the US, international- in which the stories conveyed are indicative of political and economic systemic obstacles, and the potential for human creativity to subvert and respond to systems of oppression.

¹ I use the term "Latinx" throughout my thesis because it is a gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina and even Latin@. It is pronounced "La-teen-ex". This is a term that has been introduced by the trans/queer community, but is increasingly being adopted by scholars, activists, journalists, and social media. (Ramirez & Blay, 2016)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT PAGE

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INTRODUCTION

When walking down the aisles at a grocery store in Vermont, one does not feel particularly connected to a small village in rural Mexico. In fact, the suggestion seems absurd, in this mostly rural state in the Northeastern United States, on the border with Canada. Rather than considering Mexico, one's shopping list is more likely determined by the price or health benefits of the certain food item and how that will impact one's own life. However, the foods that are available and the means by which they arrive to the grocery aisles in Vermont are connected to economic, historic, and political processes that sustain and are sustained by the globalized food system. Moreover, when grocery shopping in the United States, there is a high probability that the foods available in our grocery aisles are in some form connected to our southern neighbor: Mexico (Barndt, 2008; Friedmann, 1999; Holmes, 2013; National Agricultural Workers Survey, 2009-2010; Patel, 2012). The U.S. industrial food system is reliant on undocumented workers living and working in the U.S. from Mexico and other parts of Central America. However, this connection and reliance is shrouded in brand names and marketing, maintaining distance between the average supermarket shopper and the exploitative, manipulative and oppressive system that goes into its production. Like the air that we breathe, many of these structures are imperceptible to those who are benefitting from the system, including one who is buying food at a Vermont grocery store. There is an intentional distance maintained between consumers- those who are purchasing food at the grocery store- and those who work within the food system. If consumers were regularly witnessing the exploitation, ecological and social impacts of the food system, I believe

there would be a resonant demand for change. However, in order to maintain the efficient and profitable system in place, there is a need for mystification. My thesis seeks to pull back the curtain on one, very important, aspect of the industrial food system: immigration and farm labor.

There are three overarching conclusions from my research. (1) The food system is reliant on undocumented farmworkers; (2) There is a need for systemic change through public policy; and (3) There are small projects working to create spaces of justice and autonomy. In order to understand migration from Latin America to the United States, we must untangle the systems that shape and are shaped by our food system. This thesis examines experiences among migrant farmworkers living and working within the industrial agriculture sector in Vermont. My approach to data collection has largely relied upon ethnographic and community-based methods. The micro-level approach of on-the-ground stories is contextualized within the international political economy of neoliberalism. This multi-scalar approach to understanding migration is captured in the title “Resistance and Resilience”. Resistance refers to the ways in which people react to and challenge the large-scale structural boundaries, such as the political economic conditions of neoliberalism and the systematic exploitation of undocumented farmworkers within the industrial food system. I spend a significant portion of my thesis illuminating the dynamics that govern and dictate the opportunities (or lack thereof) for those who are most impacted by free trade and neoliberalism. In my experience while working on this research some academics have made the argument that neoliberalism is “so passé” or outdated. However, I argue that these policies and the ideology behind them are ever-salient, particularly for those who are compromised and exploited by these

systems. The notion of resilience is captured in the on-the-ground stories and projects that are at the core of both articles. These are stories of resilience through advocacy, well-being, and agency. Resilience is understood within the context of the macro-systems that limit opportunities for undocumented migrant farmworkers working in the U.S. food system.

This thesis seeks to highlight the political and economic dimensions that systemically influence and marginalize humans. It draws connections between economic conditions which drive people to migrate and become farmworkers, thus sustaining and being sustained by the U.S. food system. These economic conditions rationalize why a farmer from rural Mexico will make the dangerous journey across the desert, negotiate the covert network of rides from the southwestern U.S. to the northeast U.S., and seek employment milking cows for 12 hours a day, six to seven days a week. Many of the farmworkers who participated in this research project reflected on their experiences coming from rural livelihoods with a sense of nostalgia. This reflection on having roots in agriculture is often accompanied by the explanation of why they had to migrate to the U.S. and also why they find work in agriculture. In an in-depth interview with Yasmin (who is introduced in article one) when asked if people back home in Mexico still maintain their *milpas* (small plots of land where crops are grown) she reflects, “Yes, there are people who work the fields, but it is not sufficient to support the family”. In a different conversation with Lola, another farmworker from Mexico living in Vermont, she described the difficult decision of staying in *mi tierra, mi hogar* (my land, my home) in Mexico, and suffering, or coming to the U.S. where there is work and opportunity. Lola said that when she was younger the only way that they could buy things back home

[in Mexico] was to bring an armful of corn and beans to the market to trade for oil and other things they needed. But then there was a shift, and vendors at the market no longer accepted bartering and only wanted money. Lola reflected, “How could she have money if there is no work?”. Don Tomás (who is also introduced in article one) expressed a similar dynamic. He said, “I came here to work, in order to improve my house for my children, for my wife.” He said that in his town they planted corn, beans, chiles. He told me, “There, we fought to live”. I asked if he had always worked the lands and he told me, “Yes, I have always worked the land. I have always liked to be a *campesino* (farmer)”. These reflections on the decision to migrate to the U.S. and nostalgia for rural livelihoods reoccur in significant ways throughout the data. It is also same great story playing out all around the world- the replacement of rural livelihoods and indigenous knowledge with more efficient, profitable methods of production. This thesis seeks to understand the historical, political, economic, and social conditions that have caused exploitation and marginalization of undocumented Latinx migrant farmworkers in the U.S. food system.

The literature review is broken down in to five sections, which start broad in geographic and theoretical scope and narrow in on Vermont and the population that my research focuses on. In the first section of the literature review, called “Neoliberal Economic Globalization: The Historical and Social Backdrop” I review the historical rationalization for the current global economy and the theory of neoliberalism. Then, in a section titled, “Trade Liberalization, NAFTA, and the Impact on Rural Livelihoods”, I explain free trade policy specifically between the United States and Mexico, taking an international perspective. Next, in the section “Migrant Labor, Visa Programs, and Contradictions in the United States Food System” I take a national lens and review

scholarship on migrant labor in the U.S. food system and national immigration policy. In the fourth section, “Vermont as a Destination for Migrant Farmworkers and its Unique Challenges”, I review literature that grounds my thesis in the state of Vermont and the Northeastern United States, particularly in terms of the role of migrant farmworkers. Lastly, in the section “Leverage Points, Agency, and Well-being”, I consider the ways in which farmworkers undermine and address the normalized oppression in the food system, creating innovative spaces of resiliency.

In the two articles that follow the comprehensive literature review, I embed my research in Vermont. This research employs ethnographic analysis of the voices of Latinx farmworkers in Vermont and the U.S. food system. Over the four years of working on this research, I witnessed the contradictions and obstacles for undocumented migrant farmworkers within the U.S. food system. The initial contradiction that drew me in to this research was the reality that the people who are producing the food in the U.S are going hungry themselves. But, as I have developed relationships with farmworkers in Vermont, heard stories about working in the U.S. food system, and researched immigration and farm labor, the magnitude of contradiction and oppression has shocked me. These challenges are embedded within the U.S. sociopolitical climate, which legitimizes oppression and endorses exploitation of farmworkers. This climate restricts access to food for the very farmworkers who are producing it. Meanwhile, I have witnessed unprecedented human resilience where those living and working on Vermont’s farms have defined their own needs, accessed the food that they want to be eating, and found a community. I hope that these stories of resistance and resilience among farmworkers express the agency and self-advocacy that I witnessed during my research.

In a sociopolitical climate that dehumanizes undocumented Latinx immigrants, the methodological use of ethnography offers an important, even radical, approach. In this thesis I seek to challenge the power dynamic between myself, as the researcher, and the participants who inform my thesis, by employing narrative technique and deep qualitative analysis. In the first article, I draw upon four years of research looking at food access among farmworkers in Vermont through the lens of a garden project called *Huertas*. In the second article, I examine an applied cartooning project that uses comics as a therapeutic tool. In this project, farmworkers share stories and work with an artist to co-develop a story and comic that is then printed and shared with other farmworkers. Despite the clear contradictions and structural violence embedded within the US industrial food system, this thesis attempts to capture the creativity and agency among farmworkers.

Overall, I seek to demystify an important, and often invisible, sector of the food system: farm labor. I hope to highlight the critical work that is being done by farmworkers, scholars, activists, and community groups to create change and promote justice in the food system. I seek to understand the political, economic, and social structures that impact and influence farmworkers, farm owners, and consumers in the food system. I strive to follow suit of the farmworkers whose stories I share in my thesis- to find hope in the darkest of places and, wherever possible use the privilege and power I have as a researcher to advocate and promote spaces that empower and appreciate the important work of those who are working within the food system.

COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Neoliberal Economic Globalization: The Historical and Social Backdrop

“There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way who nods at them and says, ‘Morning boys, how’s the water?’ The two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over to the other and goes, ‘What the hell is water?’”

In a commencement speech to the 2005 Kenyon graduating class David Foster Wallace opens with this short vignette about the two fish who do not know what water is. I have shared it here, because it accurately begins to explain neoliberal economic globalization. Much like the water in this analogy, neoliberal economic globalization has become such a regular part of lived experience that we often do not notice it. Those of us living and working in the 21st century have become so completely accustomed to the industrial, global food system that it is imperceptible. In this analogy, we are the young fish, unaware of the water that sustains and surrounds us.

Within the U.S. food system, neoliberal economic globalization has determined the foods that we eat, how much they cost, and the livelihoods of the farmers and farmworkers who are producing the food. Neoliberalism is a political economic theory, which prioritizes using the market to solve social problems. Neoliberalism informs policies between nation-states (for example, the U.S. and Mexico) of reducing government intervention, privatizing markets, and reducing tariffs on trade, a process known as deregulation (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism often takes form through “free trade”- a deceptive term when one looks at the impact it has had on autonomy and self-determination of those who are not in positions of power, who have been oppressed and

exploited. In Vermont, this can be the dairy farmer who cannot compete in the market because feed costs are too high, and also the dairy farmworker who accepts long hours because they feel they have no other option for a livelihood and need to support their family back home.

Free trade is based on the theory of 18th Century philosopher, Adam Smith, whose work laid the grounding for the current economic model. He believed that rational self-interest and competition will lead to a self-regulating market, in which equality is achieved and the greatest number of people will prosper (McMichael, 1996). In the 1970's Milton Friedman, a Chicago-based economist developed the neoliberal model based on Smith's theory on capitalism (von Werlhof, 2008). The argument in favor of a neoliberal market system is that the market will self-regulate and in turn be the most efficient allocation of resources (Robbins, 2014). The current global economy is the result of half a century of economic and political reforms based on Friedman's neoliberal model. Economic globalization began to unfold in the post WWII era with the establishment of international institutions including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (originally established as the General agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or GATT). The process of developing neoliberal economic globalization was greatly escalated during the Thatcher/Reagan era in the 1980's (Robbins, 2014). During this time, global powers restructured their economies, and influenced, coerced, and forced many developing countries to do the same (Klein, 2007). A global economy is not entirely bad, it can allow for the spread of ideas and technologies that improve people's lives. However, the course of neoliberal economic globalization has accentuated already existing inequalities and disparities between and

within countries (McMichael, 1996; Polanyi, 1944; Wade, 2003). This can be understood through examining the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico and how neoliberal policies impact the two countries. Again, the theory behind the neoliberal economic model claims that the market is the most efficient way to allocate resources. Thus, with social problems such as disparity, poverty, etc. the neoliberal model suggests that the market will solve them. However, as the leading metric of success in the market economy is marked by financial success and profit, the values that are accentuated are competition and productivity.

Further, the free market of neoliberal globalization is influenced by, if not completely dictated by, colonial legacies (McMichael, 1996). This dynamic causes the “free market” to be unequal, privileging the nation-states who benefitted from colonialism. These nation-states who were the benefactors are often characterized as “first world” or the “global north”, with those who are subjugated called “third world” or the “global south”. This historical inequality complicates Milton Friedman’s model of efficient and fair allocation of resources, because the metaphorical playing field was imbalanced to begin with. As a result, these policies leave some peoples as the beneficiaries and others as the subjugated, further exacerbating structures left in place from colonialism.

In contrast to colonization, however, in neoliberal economic globalization it is the corporations, in addition to nations, that hold power and wealth. Another critical consideration is the emergence of the United States as a global superpower. As a colony of Europe, the forefathers of the United States were benefactors of colonialism, but the development and establishment of the neoliberal global economic system has been

shaped and influenced by the U.S., since the U.S. established global control post WWII. Wade (2003) writes in an article titled *The Invisible Hand of the American Empire* that the United States has a hegemonic control over the neoliberal economic system. Wade suggests that the architecture of the current global economy yields “disproportionate economic benefits to Americans” (pp.1) while deteriorating the autonomy and opportunity of all others. In this argument, the rationalization of free trade by U.S. politicians, businesspeople and citizens is highly convenient. By justifying the neoliberal market economy as a self-regulating, objective entity, there is no guilt or consequence to the enormous disparity in and between nations. This notion is reflected in the opinion many Americans express in terms of immigration policy and general perception of the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico or other parts of Latin America.

This disparity and power dynamic is embedded within the industrial food system. McMichael (2009) argues that development in the form of neoliberal globalization is inherently exploitative and inequitable, particularly from a food systems perspective. The current global food system relies on the market and free trade principles to allocate resources, including food, to solve social problems, which has created disparities (Alkon and Mares, 2012). As previously mentioned, in lieu of nation states having control in colonialism, in neoliberalism where government intervention is discouraged, it is corporations that have taken power. This shift has been facilitated and supported by international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, as they have restructured developing country’s economies, including how food is imported and exported. Andrée et al. (2014) write on the concept of the ‘globalizing food regime’, one that is dominated by corporate control. This globalizing food regime “emphasizes the intensification and

expansion across borders of the industrial model of agriculture based on capital-intensive equipment, energy-intensive inputs of fertilizers, pesticides, water, and seeds, and favoring large-scale production, often oriented towards export markets” (Andrée et al., 2014). This description captures the pervasive, competitive, and influential nature of the global industrial food system, shaped by neoliberal economics. Vandana Shiva (2000) expands on this concept of global food regimes in her book *Stolen Harvest*, writing about the rights to seeds and the way that our economic and political systems have allowed seeds to be owned by large companies.² Understanding the restructuring of economic systems through international trade liberalization and the rise of corporate control allows us to begin to understand the structures in place that dictate and are dictated by the U.S. food system.

These political and economic pressures are connected to my research in Vermont because these global food regimes and the ideology that drives them have displaced small farmers in Mexico, eliminated their livelihood opportunities, and forced them to migrate to the U.S. (as discussed in the next section in this literature review). This ideology has also impacted dairy farmers in Vermont and rationalized the dependence on undocumented Latinx migrant labor (as discussed in section four in this literature review). The ideology of free trade policy is pervasive and permeates the entire food system. However, the implications and ideology of the neoliberal framework have not

² McMichael (2009): Rates of profit for agribusiness have soared; for example, in 2007, Cargill's profits rose 36 percent, ADM's 67 percent, and Bunge's 49 percent, while in the first quarter of 2008, Cargill's net earnings rose 86 percent, ADM's gross profits were up 55 percent, and Bunge's gross profits increased by 189 percent. Fertilizer companies profited also - for example, in 2007 Potash Corporation's profits rose 72 percent, and Mosaic's profits rose 141 percent, while, in the first quarter of 2008, Potash's net income rose 186 percent and Mosaic's net income rose more than 1,200 percent. Meanwhile, seed and agrochemical corporations reported unusual profits for 2007: Monsanto, 44 percent; DuPont, 19 percent; and Syngenta, 28 percent.⁴⁸ Rising prices for inputs like fertilizer, seed, and chemical sprays explains why most small farmers have not benefited from rising food prices. (citing Patel, 2012)

gone unchallenged, and there is a powerful alternative food movement that seeks other options and prioritizes different values.

In response to the global industrial food system, alternative food movements have sprung up. By alternative food movement, I refer to the movement in the United States to produce, purchase, and participate in a system that is localized and rooted in a set of values including environmental stewardship, social justice supporting local economies, and health (Allen et al., 2003). One examples of and alternative food movement is the Slow Food movement, an international organization that focuses on purchasing and preparing food that is local, wholesome, fairly produced, and environmentally sound. Another example of an alternative food movement is food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is: “The right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. It puts those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of the food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” (La Via Campesina 2007). The framework of food sovereignty intentionally positions itself in opposition to neoliberalism, structural racism and violence, and the legacy of colonialism. The movement has been largely driven by the organization la Via Campesina, an international organization that focuses on protecting the livelihoods of small farmers, particularly in the Global South. However, not all alternative food movements are positioned in opposition to neoliberalism (Alkon and Mares, 2012).

At times, alternative food movements in the US rely on the individual and market mechanisms to bring about social change (Guthman, 2008). This places the movements in the same trap of neoliberalism. Alkon and Mares (2012) argue that not all alternative

movements are challenging the parameters and restrictions set in place by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism values competition and dependence on the market to solve social issues. An example on this is in the alternative food movement which encourages consumers to “vote with your dollar”. This slogan encourages individuals to spend money on local, organic, alternative food. However, this message is inherently undemocratic and relies on the free trade market to solve problems (Alkon, 2012). This approach does not inherently value human ingenuity, reciprocity, or compassion, harkening back to Polanyi³'s critiques a century ago. Instead, this approach falls into the neoliberal trap which tells people to trust the market to take care of social problems.

It is paramount to take into consideration alternative food movements and how they do or do not use a neoliberal approach if the end goal is ensuring that the most people have access to healthy, culturally familiar food. This is important because when competition is the value that is encouraged, as seen in neoliberalism, one can justify enduring structures of oppression and exploitation. Not all alternative movements are considering farm labor, oppression, racism, and colonial legacy. This discussion will be further explored in the discussion section of article one, *Seeds Sent from Home: Migrant Farm Worker Gardens, Food Security, and Food Sovereignty in Vermont* which looks at a framework developed by Eric Holt-Giménez (2010), for analyzing food movements. As introduced in this section of the literature review, the neoliberal economic model has become so commonplace, that it is rendered invisible by those who are benefitting from the system. Those who are not benefitting from this system encounter the obstacles and

³ Karl Polanyi, the early 20th Century philosopher and economic historian, proposed a prominent critique of Adam Smith's theory. Polanyi, along with many other social theorists, suggests that the theory of capitalism values the human characteristic of competition, and devalues the human characteristics of collaboration, redistribution, and reciprocity (McMichael, 1996).

structural barriers of neoliberalism, but may not use the same language to explain it. The foundational understanding of the history and rationale for a neoliberal economic model is useful in this thesis to understand many elements of the food system including unauthorized immigration, farm labor, and alternative food movements.

2. Trade liberalization, NAFTA, and the impact on rural livelihoods

“In a world that prefers security to justice, there is a loud applause whenever justice is sacrificed on the altar of security.”
-Eduardo Galeano, 1998

Immigration policy in the United States today focuses on measures to keep undocumented immigrants from entering the country. Contemporary media and presidential candidates for the upcoming 2016 election suggest that we need to focus on reinforcing the borders by extending the wall between the U.S. and Mexico and increasing border patrol. However, missing from this discussion are considerations of why one would leave their community, family and home in Mexico, and risk their lives to be marginalized and criminalized in the United States (Bacon, 2008). In this section I outline some of the economic policies that have uprooted Mexicans and pushed them to seek work elsewhere. This is embedded within the previous section, which explains neoliberalism. The economic, political, and social impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are particularly illustrative of neoliberal economic globalization and relevant to my thesis.

On January 1, 1994 the United States, Mexico, and Canada signed NAFTA, which opened borders between the countries for goods and finance. Twenty-two years since the agreement was put in place, academics, economists, and politicians are still

deciphering the impacts of NAFTA. By removing tariffs on trade and goods, the agreement benefitted the U.S. by providing access to winter fruits and vegetables such as avocados, tomatoes, and strawberries from Mexican producers, where the climate is suited to produce such crops. These exports, in addition to tequila and beer exports to the U.S., benefited Mexico's producers, creating new markets and opportunity (Wise, 2014), but the majority of success stories are of large producers and transnational corporations. These successes are measured in the GDP of Mexico and not in the overall well-being of its citizens. Raj Patel (2012) writes that larger farms in Northern Mexico have done well under the terms of NAFTA; however there have been detrimental impacts on small farmers. Small farmers, particularly those who live further away from the border with the United States, have been devastated by the free trade agreement (Patel, 2012; Bacon, 2014). It is no coincidence that in Vermont, many of the migrant farmworkers are coming from southern Mexico with backgrounds in farming. To understand how small farmers have been impacted by NAFTA, I will use the case study of corn, the staple commodity in the Mexican diet.

Corn was domesticated in southern Mexico, and has been cultivated for thousands of years. The nation's identity and history are intertwined with *maís*, which is what makes it the perfect entity to depict the tragedy of NAFTA. In Mexico, more than any other commodity, corn epitomizes the detrimental impact of free trade between the U.S. and Mexico. The economic and cultural impact of importing tariff-free corn from the United States to Mexico has been well documented (Bacon, 2014; Rellinger, 2010; Wise, 2010). Tim Wise, a researcher at Tufts University, reported in his 2010 study the impact of dumping corn into Mexican markets (Wise, 2010). The WTO defines dumping as

selling a product below the cost of production⁴. In 1996, the U.S. passed a farm bill that significantly altered the amount of support the government offered to U.S. producers of commodities, in particular corn, soybeans, wheat, rice, cotton, beef, pork, and poultry (Wise, 2009). Wise found that between 1996-2005, corn farmers in Mexico experienced loss in dumping margins- \$6.5 billion, an average of \$99 per hectare per year (Wise, 2009). Wise reports that this has led to monopolization and concentrated control of the commodity in the Mexican market. As the Mexican market was flooded by cheap, subsidized American corn, Mexican corn farmers were pushed to find a new means of living. This relationship between NAFTA and migration has been well documented. Relinger (2010) looks at the relationship between U.S. agricultural subsidies and the impacts on rural to urban migration in Mexico. He claims “American corn subsidies are primarily responsible for the rural to urban population shift in Mexico that manifested following the NAFTA deal in 1994.” This population shift is critical in understanding the displacement of rural farmers and the pressure to seek work elsewhere, often in the United States.

Raj Patel raises an important argument in his book *Stuffed and Starved* that the reason that free trade is particularly devastating to poor farmers is because there are no structures in place to re-train or re-skill those who are the most impacted by these policies. He writes:

“Particularly in the Global South trade liberalization has rarely been accompanied by working mechanisms to redistribute its gains for the poor or to provide

⁴ From the WTO website: Dumping is defined in the Agreement on Implementation of Article VI of the GATT 1994 (The Anti-Dumping Agreement) as the introduction of a product into the commerce of another country at less than its normal value.

meaningful work or retraining for those left unemployed by the consequences of market shifts. This is because liberalization is part of a bigger political philosophy- one in which government intervention (even to provide a basic protection for rights) is considered meddlesome and inefficient. This is why, with few exceptions, the era of trade agreements has also been the era of increasing inequality” (p. 59).

The United States, under President Bill Clinton and labor secretary Robert Reich, had promised with NAFTA that benefits for those who lost their livelihoods would include retraining and unemployment, a safety net. However, for many Mexicans, this turned out to be an empty promise (Bacon, 2004)⁵. The Mexican government offered buffer support through the *Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo* (PROCAMPO) to compensate farmers for the negative impacts of NAFTA. This program made a cash transfer to producers of basic staple crops (including maize) on a per hectare basis, with the intent that this support should help them become more efficient (Sadoulet *et al.*, 2001).

However, despite these programs and promises, neoliberalism leaves small farmers and rural communities vulnerable to the fluctuating market prices. This lack of re-skilling or re-training leaves poor, small farmers in Mexico with few opportunities. Further, when NAFTA was initiated, there have been greater impacts that are not represented in economic margins, such as families and communities being disrupted and cultural foodways lost. *Maís* represents a staple food commodity in Mexico, but it also represents an identity and cultural history.

⁵ McMichael (2009) writes about 2006, when world corn prices did rise rapidly, tortilla prices doubled, so that "low-income people found themselves priced out of the tortilla market, and forced into less-nutritious alternatives like white bread and ramen noodles". He writes, " With only two food processors controlling 97 percent of the industrial corn flour market, and the state reducing food subsidies, tortilla riots have become part of the political landscape - spurred by a 10 percent reduction in wages resulting from rural migrants displaced by corn imports" (McMichael, 2009).

Free market theory claims that competition in the market is the best mechanism to solve social issues (Mares and Alkon, 2012; McMichael, 1996). However, in the example of subsidized US corn competing with Mexican farmers, one can understand the unintended consequences of neoliberalism. The playing field is not fair, and the benefactors are large industrial US farms and agribusinesses, and the subjugated are small, often indigenous, farmers (Bacon, 2014; Holmes, 2013; Patel, 2012).

While small farmers in Mexico are pushed out of the market by larger, more “efficient” economic models, they are marginalized both in their own communities and upon arriving to the United States as they seek new forms of livelihood. While NAFTA has opened the border to goods and finance, U.S. policies have simultaneously closed the border to Mexicans seeking work in the United States. Opening the borders to goods and displacing local industry meant that many people sought work in new industries, either in the cities or in the United States (Rellinger, 2010).⁶ There is a history of migration from Mexico to the US, which has been incentivized by policies, such as the Bracero program, to bring in workers for seasonal agricultural work (Bacon, 2008). This program and other policies will be discussed further in the next section of this literature review.

In order to support commerce and the U.S. economy, the border remained largely open until the 1990’s, as policy implementations began to make migrating to the U.S. from Mexico increasingly difficult, which continues to cause the criminalization of

⁶ From Bacon (2014): “NAFTA, however, did not lead to rising incomes and employment in Mexico, and did not decrease the flow of migrants. Instead, it became a source of pressure on Mexicans to migrate. The treaty forced corn grown by Mexican farmers without subsidies to compete in Mexico’s own market with corn from huge U.S. producers, who had been subsidized by the U.S. Agricultural exports to Mexico more than doubled during the NAFTA years, from \$4.6 to \$9.8 billion annually. Corn imports rose from 2,014,000 to 10,330,000 tons from 1992 to 2008. Mexico imported 30,000 tons of pork in 1995, the year NAFTA took effect. By 2010, pork imports, almost all from the U.S., had grown over 25 times, to 811,000 tons. As a result, pork prices received by Mexican producers dropped 56%.”

migrant workers (Bacon, 2008). Beginning in the early 1990's, Operation Gatekeeper was initiated. This endeavor was another Clinton-era measure, which sought to halt unauthorized immigration from Mexico to the U.S. During this time, funding for border patrol and fence construction was allocated by the US government to focus on the border. This operation and other programs were put in place with the distinct goal to "close the border" (Holmes, 2013). The number of border patrol agents doubled in a short time after the passage of NAFTA (Robbins, 2014). President Bush picked up the operations supported by Clinton and increasing surveillance and policing along the border and continuing to build the wall, in the name of safety and defense from terrorism (Chomsky, 2013). The militarization of the border was further escalated after 9/11, with the tightening of all US border security. Two major pieces of legislation passed during this time were called "The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005" and the "Secure Fence Act of 2006" (Koch, 2006; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005). As goods and finance were freely flowing through the border, those displaced by the NAFTA and free trade policies were not permitted to find work in the United States.

The argument for neoliberalism promises the greatest amount of good for the most people, proposing that the market will solve social problems. However, the policies in place do not allow for the freedom of all people or a truly fair and equal market, leaving many victims at the expense of these free trade systems. In the case of NAFTA, neoliberalism has delivered the greatest amount of good for a small group of powerful corporations, individual stakeholders, and industrial food producers. It has not delivered the greatest amount of good when one considers the uprooting and displacement of small,

poor farmers in Mexico, their families, and their communities. As those who are left unemployed by the NAFTA policies seek work elsewhere, the United States food system employs and exploits their desperation, ensuring a source of inexpensive, dispensable labor for the industrial agricultural sector.

Vermont is connected to the consequences of NAFTA and other neoliberal policies that have displaced small farmers in southern Mexico. In Vermont, 49% of Mexican migrant farmworkers are coming from the southern-most state of Chiapas (VMEP 2011). Chiapas is the poorest state in Mexico and home to a large number of indigenous communities. Many migrant workers on Vermont dairy farms come from rural farming backgrounds, where they were left with no perceptible opportunities and migrated to *el norte* to seek a means to support their family. Not only are these displaced farmers from Mexico represented in Vermont, but they are in fact sustaining the dairy industry. The presence of these migrant farmworkers is what sustains Vermont's agricultural economy, implicating the state in the larger neoliberal economy, which speaks to the pervasiveness of neoliberalism.

3. Migrant Labor, Visa Programs, and Contradictions in the United States Food System

"The U.S-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country — a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the halfdead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the

borderlands transgressors, aliens — whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only "legitimate" inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger”
-Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987

Written in 1987, Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* depicts a space in which contested territory is blurred with racial conflict and a clash of identity, a dynamic that has existed for centuries between the U.S. and Mexico. Nearly 20 years after this book was published, tensions at the southern border and politics around immigration have only intensified. Lynn Stephen (2007) writes in her book, *Transborder Lives*, that migrant workers cross more than just national boundaries, but also ethnic, class, cultural, and colonial borders. In this section I will explore demographics and statistics around immigration in the U.S., visa programs, and the polarizing positions that the United States takes in regards to immigration. The wall that is built and continues to be built between the United States and Mexico is tangible and physical, but there are also structural obstacles, invisible walls that are dictating opportunities, identities, and autonomy.

The pressures of neoliberal globalization are pushing small farmers off the land in rural Mexico, a displacement which simultaneously pressures those same communities to integrate into modern, industrial society, requiring greater involvement in the cash/commodity economy (Bacon, 2014; Holmes, 2013; McMichael, 2009; Patel, 2012). This development in Mexico mirrors international trends, again embedding displacement and migration within neoliberal political economics. McMichael (2009) writes about this

trend of what he refers to as ‘peasant dispossession’, which is connected to colonial legacy and neoliberalism. He writes,

“from 1950 to 1997, the world's rural population decreased by some 25 percent, and now 63 percent of the world's urban population dwells in, and on the margins of, sprawling cities of the global South” (p. 58).

In Mexico and Latin America, rural communities are left without a viable income source, forcing many to travel to cities or *el norte* to put in a few years of hard labor in order to send money home to support their family and community.

The United States and Mexico have a long history of circular migration, where men and women have worked seasonal agricultural labor jobs in the US. However, with the impact of free trade agreements displacing small farmers from their land and livelihoods, the question must be raised of whether this is truly voluntary migration. Human geographers look at voluntary migration: in search of better opportunity, versus involuntary migration: forced to leave because of event, either natural disaster or social/political exploitation or upheaval (Holmes, 2013). Holmes explains,

“In much of the mainstream media, migrant workers are seen as deserving their fates, even untimely deaths, because they are understood to have chosen voluntarily to cross the border for their own economic gain. However... the distinction between economic and political migration is often blurry in the context of international policies enforcing neoliberal free markets as well as active repression of indigenous people who seek collective socioeconomic improvement in southern Mexico” (p. 25)

The argument that Holmes suggests is embedded within the conceptual understanding of neoliberalism, and how neoliberalism, in the form of NAFTA and other policies has systematically displaced poor and structurally vulnerable populations. However, there is political weight and morality behind these definitions, which is why they are contested. In many realms surrounding the contemporary perception of immigration, a significant amount of political weight rests in demographics, statistics and terminology.

Statistical and demographic data concerning farmworkers in the United States are contested, which carries political and economic consequence. If a nation or a state admits that there are hundreds of thousands of humans living under their sovereignty, there is a responsibility to provide basic needs. Not knowing the number, or being able to accuse those working and living as illegal, permits a governing body to economically and politically shirk the burden. Language surrounding undocumented people is laden with significance. For example, the term “illegal aliens” is used politically and in the media to describe those who are here without proper documentation. Others use the term “unauthorized” to describe the gap in U.S. policy to supply adequate visas and documentation for the workforce. For my thesis and my own analysis, I will use the term undocumented, because this most precisely explains the dynamic and the struggle these individuals face. Further, this is the term used by undocumented immigrants in the U.S. This is the term used by farmworkers I have interviewed (*sin papeles*). Undocumented is also the term used by activist groups, as expressed in the “Undocumented and Unafraid” movement, and the Immigrant Youth Justice League which declared a “National Coming out of the Shadows Month” in 2013. These groups take a stand for undocumented

Americans and station themselves in opposition to politicians, media, and American citizens who deny their right to be here.

In terms of demographics and statistics, pinpointing a specific number of undocumented Latinx migrant farmworkers is complicated. In 2015, Pew Research Center reported that there are 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S., a number that has remained stable for five years. They also report that:

“Pew Research estimates that, since 2009, there has been an average of about 350,000 new unauthorized immigrants each year. Of these, about 100,000 are Mexican, a much smaller share than in the past. In the years leading up to the Great Recession, Mexicans represented about half of new unauthorized immigrants.” (Passel and Cohn, 2015)

This data however, is not limited to agricultural work. The National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), conducted under the U.S. Department of Labor, has monitored agricultural employment and conditions since 1989. The 2009-2010 survey estimated that the ethnicity of farmworkers was 82% Hispanic, and 74% were born in Mexico. This data reports what many already know, that the food system relies heavily on migrant labor from Mexico and Latin America. The United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (USDA ERS) reports data on all hired farmworkers including field crop workers, nursery workers, livestock workers, farmworker supervisors and hired farm managers. According to the USDA since 2000, the share of hired crop farmworkers (not including dairy or livestock) born in Mexico has fallen from 79% to 68%. The UDSA also reports in a 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS), which divided hired farmworkers into two groups: (1) laborers and field supervisors and (2) hired farm

managers, that about half of all laborers and field supervisors are Hispanic while managers are mostly non-Hispanic whites. To convert some of these statistics into population counts, through the USDA ERS William Kandel reports that in 2006, of the 3 million people working in the agricultural industry, 1 million of them were hired migrant farmworkers.

The definitions of migrant and seasonal farmworkers are also contentious and carry political and economic consequence. On their website the NAWS definition of a migrant worker is one “who traveled a distance of more than 75 miles between two farm jobs or between a farm job and a usual residence during the past year”. The USDA ERS reports that according to this definition three-quarters of crop workers are considered settled. In a NAWS 2007-2009 survey, only 5% classified as the “follow the crop” migrant farmworker, who travels state-to-state to work in seasonal crops. Federally, the NAWS is the only study that ascertains the legal status of noncitizen farmworkers, and the only survey that identifies farmworkers as migrant or settled (USDA ERS). A USDA report in 2012 urged the US congress to recognize the impact of immigration policy on agriculture (Zahniser, Hertz, Dixon, and Rimmer, 2012); Zahniser et al write in this report that,

“The farm labor situation is complicated, however, by the fact that many U.S. farmworkers lack the immigration status needed to work legally in this country. Analysis conducted by Daniel Carroll, Annie Georges, and Russell Saltz using the U.S. Department of Labor's NAWS indicates that over the past 15 years, about half of the hired workers employed in U.S. crop agriculture were unauthorized, with the overwhelming majority of these workers coming from Mexico. Similar

survey-based information on immigration status is not available for workers in livestock and dairy production.” (p. 1)

This is a federal governmental organization acknowledging that *half* of the hired workers are undocumented, and that is only in crop agriculture. The Pew Center for Research reported in 2015 that net migration is currently negative, with more Mexicans leaving the United States than coming⁷. While this data is complicated to collect, report, and understand, the underlying fact is clear: The United States agricultural sector depends on Latinx farmworkers. However, there are limited legal pathways for farmworkers who are supporting the agricultural industry to enter the United States to work.

To a certain degree, the USDA, and likely other parts of the U.S. government, understands that the food system in the U.S. depends on undocumented farmworkers to sustain itself. Dependence on these farmworkers is not new in the U.S. food system, and when discussing legal status, it is critical to recall the historic role of immigrant agricultural workers. The Bracero program allowed for over 4 million guest workers to enter the US between 1942 to 1964 (National Museum of American History). Many of these guest workers were coming from rural, poor parts of Mexico. The Bracero Program was replaced with the H2 Temporary guest worker program; in which H2A visas are for agricultural workers and H2B are for non-agricultural work (NCFH, 2012). Today, the H2A visa program does not provide enough visas for the number of farmworker jobs needed, and for many farmworkers, the only option is to cross the border unauthorized

⁷ “From 2009 to 2014, 1 million Mexicans and their families (including U.S.-born children) left the U.S. for Mexico, according to data from the 2014 Mexican National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (ENADID). U.S. census data for the same period show an estimated 870,000 Mexican nationals left Mexico to come to the U.S., a smaller number than the flow of families from the U.S. to Mexico” (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015).

and find work unauthorized. Employers also rely on this source of labor to stay afloat in the food system, as they are pressured by the same competition of neoliberalism.

Contemporary immigration policy is in a state of disassociation. The political rhetoric is contentious with many schemes to “keep Mexicans out” for example the proposition of expanding and reinforcing the wall along the southern border. However, as demonstrated in the previous paragraph, it is also recognized that our agricultural sector is dependent on this source of labor. There is a common notion that farmworkers are putting a strain on the system and that the system will fall apart with the burden caused by undocumented immigrants (O’Reilly, 2016). However, a 2016 report found that undocumented immigrants contribute significantly to state and local taxes, collectively paying an estimated \$11.64 billion a year (Gee, Gardner, & Wiehe, 2016). The taxes are paid in the form of sales and excise taxes and property taxes, but also in the form of income tax returns. The report states that at least 50 percent of undocumented immigrants file income taxes using Individual Tax Identification Numbers, or have taxes deducted from their paychecks. This matches what is happening in Vermont and New York, where many farmworkers are working under false social security numbers, and therefore are paying taxes without the support most taxpayers are granted from the system (Wolcott-MacCausland, 2014; Maloney & Grusenmeyer, 2005). This information is inconsistent with the contemporary media and popular perception of undocumented immigrants.

Seth Holmes offers a compelling explanation and analysis of this contradictory policy vs. dependency divide in his book *Fresh fruit broken bodies: Migrant farmworkers in the United States*. He writes that,

“The migrant laborer can survive on low wages while contributing to economic production in one context [U.S.] because the family, community and state in the other context [Mexico] provide education, health care, and other services necessary for reproduction. In this way, the host state externalizes the costs of labor force renewal and benefits even further from the phenomenon of labor migration” (p. 13).

What this means is that while legal rights are stripped from undocumented migrant workers, they are providing an essential source of cheap labor. They are systematically denied access to power and resources to advocate for themselves because of legal barriers. Furthermore, the contemporary media message that portrays undocumented farmworkers as strains on the system, allows the American population to justify the human rights violations and injustices being done to them through creating a cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and attitude change. While the average U.S. citizen seems to know that our system is reliant on dispensable, cheap migrant labor, we also do not create political or economic change.

This brings us back to the conceptual framework of neoliberalism, where society believes that the market will solve social problems. This is not a system that logically makes sense if the metrics of success are well-being, collaboration, humanity, or dignity. These mechanisms can only be understood within the metrics laid out by neoliberal economic globalization, in which exploiting migrant workers makes the most sense in terms of making the greatest profit and most efficient production of cheap food.

4. Vermont as a destination for migrant farmworkers and its unique challenges



Figure 1: Excerpt from *Painful to Remember*. p. 14 Story by Jose, Artwork by Marek Bennet

Dairy is an essential part of Vermont's agricultural economy, accounting for approximately 70% of the state's agricultural sales (Vermont Dairy Promotion Council, 2015). Vermont has increasingly become a destination for Latinx migrant farmworkers as dairy work is an appealing job opportunity because of the year-round employment that it can offer. Simultaneously, dairy farm owners and employers in Vermont are in a compromised position as they have been pressured to become larger and produce more milk and their margins become smaller (Parsons, n.d.). In 2015, dairy farmers received \$16.50 per hundredweight and the cost of production was between \$16-\$20 (Zind, 2015). However, in 2016, the price of milk dropped to the \$14 per hundredweight range, meaning farmers were making less than the cost of production (Mansfield, 2016)⁸. Despite margin protection programs, this fluctuation makes it incredibly challenging to

⁸ "From the same article: "Farmers in Vermont say the low prices are caused by shifts in international trade. The president of Russia imposed a trade embargo on the European Union, leading to a glut of milk in the European Union. China is also demanding less milk from the United States, according to Bloomberg." (Mansfield, 2016)

stay afloat in the industry. As farms have grown and the nature of the work has changed, finding labor has increasingly been a challenge. As a result, these two unlikely populations, Vermont's dairy farmers and Latinx migrant workers have come together to sustain the iconic dairy industry. As described in the previous section, demographic data associated with the farmworker population is challenging to collect because of the transience of the population as well as the fact that many of the farmworkers are specifically trying to *not* be counted, as they are undocumented.

There are an estimated 1,000-1,200 farmworkers in Vermont and 95% work on dairy farms (Wolcott-MacClausland & Shea, 2014). As discussed earlier, the H2A visa program is the only mechanism for migrant farmworkers to legally work within the United States agricultural sector. However, these are only available to seasonal employment, and given that the nature of dairy work is that it is year round, this makes migrant farmworkers on Vermont's dairy farms ineligible for an agricultural work visa.

The demographics and statistics covered by NAWS, USDA CPS, and the ERS, are not comprehensive, because they only cover crop workers, and therefore exclude livestock and dairy. Research shows that nationally immigrant workers have increasingly been employed by dairy farms (Baker & Chappelle, 2012; Jenkins et al, 2009; Maloney & Grusenmeyer, 2005; Susanto et al, 2010). A 2009 report by Rosson et al. found that 62% of the nation's milk supply comes from farms using immigrant labor. The same report found that eliminating immigrant labor in dairy farms would reduce US economic output by \$22 billion (Rosson et al., 2009). A report looking at dairy in New York State shows that since 2000, Hispanic workers have been increasingly employed (Maloney & Grusenmeyer, 2005). Maloney & Grusenmeyer report that hiring Hispanic dairy workers

is still a relatively new practice, as 72% of the employers reported that they hired their first Hispanic employee since January 2000. Mirroring trends that have been reported in New York state's dairy industry, Vermont has also seen an increase in migrant farmworkers on dairy farms- between 2000-2010 Vermont's Latinx population grew 24 times faster than its overall population (Baker & Chappelle, 2014). While the migrant farmworker population is small in comparison to traditional migration destinations such as Florida or California, the dairy industry in Vermont is increasingly dependent on these workers to sustain the industry, and for migrant farmworkers, dairy work has a lot to offer that seasonal jobs cannot, including year-round work and higher wages.

In the narrative of the Vermont's picturesque rural working landscape the undocumented Latinx farmworker population is largely invisible (McCandless, 2010). However, farmworkers in rural Vermont are hyper-visible when they are out in public setting, for example buying groceries or going to a doctor's appointment (Mares et al, 2013, McCandless, 2010). Racial profiling continues to be a major issue among Vermont's Latinx migrant farmworkers. Vermont is the 2nd whitest state in the United States. Maine tops the nation with 96.9% of its population described as white, while 96.7% of Vermont and 96% of New Hampshire are white, according to the census. Due to Vermont's geographic proximity to the Canadian border, the racialized climate, and majority white population, Latinx migrant farmworkers in Vermont's dairy sector are experiencing high levels of isolation and anxiety (Shea, 2009), particularly the closer one lives to the northern border (Wolcott-MacCausland, 2014). Studies on the experiences of farmworkers in Vermont demonstrate a unique set of challenges, including barriers to health access, food access, and communication barriers with bosses and coworkers, and

ongoing racial profiling (Baker & Chappelle, 2012; Mares et al 2013; Shea, 2009; Wolcott-MacCausland, 2014). These challenges are particularly unique to farmworkers in Vermont where there is a relatively low number of farmworkers, creating a gap in resources available.

Vermont in the early 2000s was in a state of transition and apprehension, as a border state with an increasing dependence of undocumented farmworkers, U.S. policy began to crack down on unauthorized immigration. Vermont shares its northern border with Canada, and the region 100-miles south of the U.S.-Canada border falls under federal jurisdiction. The timing of farmworkers arriving to Vermont in the late 1990's and early 2000's coincides with a period of anti-immigration legislation and a massive shift in the way the country protected its borders in the wake of 9/11. After 2001, the number of border patrol agents doubled, northern border patrol employees were sent to the U.S.-Mexican border to be trained, the northern border was militarized with increased surveillance. Peter Andreas (2005) calls this transition the "Mexicanization" of the US-Canadian border.

Up until the past five years, it was protocol for Vermont state police to call border patrol any time they interacted with anyone they suspected "might be in the country illegally." Because of Vermont's lack of racial diversity, this hyper-visibility for farmworkers placed them at risk any time they were in the community, particularly closer to the border. A series of high-profile instances, particularly the detention of farmworker Danilo Lopez in 2012, caused migrant farmworkers in Vermont to organize and form an advocacy organization called the Vermont Migrant Worker Solidarity Project, which was later renamed Migrant Justice. A series of successful campaigns pressured Vermont

legislators to pass laws that acknowledge and support the rights of farmworkers. In 2012, Migrant Justice launched a campaign for bias-free policing in which Vermont police and state troopers cannot “automatically assume that people who appear to be Latino should have their immigration status checked, unless they’re found engaging in criminal behavior” (Gram, 2014). The next campaign victory for Migrant Justice was a 2013 bill that extends access to driver’s license and identification regardless of documentation status (Migrant Justice, 2013). These advancements in human rights for farmworkers have been significant, yet farmworkers in Vermont continue to experience challenges because of the border with Canada, and the subsequent federal jurisdiction and heightened surveillance.

Vermont might seem at first an unlikely location to study as an example of neoliberalism, colonial legacy, and racism as it pertains to migration and the food system. With the picturesque rolling green hills and quaint towns, the state feels quite removed from the realm of free trade agreements and an economy based on competition. This speaks to how pervasive neoliberalism is. Political and economic systems rationalize humans risking their lives, leaving their families and communities in rural, southern Mexico, and spending thousands of dollar to travel thousands of miles to the Northeast corner of the United States. Neoliberalism also rationalizes a 7th generation dairy farmer from Vermont navigating the language barrier and cultural dissonance with a Mexican employee and risking the large fine if they are caught employing undocumented immigrants. It is critical, in this context, to understand the historical and economic currents that have shaped the landscape that we are all navigating, in order to begin to identify leverage points to create change (Meadows, 1999).

5. Leverage Points, Agency, and Well-being

“To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.”
—bell hooks, 2003

This literature review seeks to explain the conceptual framework and larger political, economic, and cultural systems that impact migrant farmworkers. Through identifying these powerful systems, we can begin to make sense of the stories and experiences that I share in this thesis. Some of these stories are about difficult situations—the obstacles of living on a national border when you do not have proper documentation—but I hope that there is a clear message of hope and agency. Agency, as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “the capacity, condition, or state of exerting power”. This thesis is titled *Resistance and Resilience*. In my research, I have been continuously impressed by the creative and innovative ways that Latinx migrant farmworkers exert agency, in spite of the larger political, economic, and cultural systems that oppress and exploit their vulnerability. The core of my thesis looks for places of resilience, where farmworkers have created these spaces of agency.

Donella Meadows wrote an important paper in 1999 called *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*. A leverage point is a place within a complex system where a small shift can produce big changes (Meadows, 1999). A system can be anything from an ecosystem to a business, and Donella Meadows suggests the framework to being able to create changes within those systems. In the article, Meadows explains that the development of these leverage points was in a conversation looking at “the new global trade regime”, which I have written about as neoliberalism in this thesis. For my studies

in Food Systems, these leverage points have been useful in understanding systems analysis and change. In the article, Meadows has developed a list of twelve leverage points ranking from twelve to one (one being the most powerful):

12. Constants, parameters, numbers (such as subsidies, taxes, standards).
11. The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks, relative to their flows.
10. The structure of material stocks and flows (such as transport networks, population age structures).
9. The lengths of delays, relative to the rate of system change.
8. The strength of negative feedback loops, relative to the impacts they are trying to correct against.
7. The gain around driving positive feedback loops.
6. The structure of information flows (who does and does not have access to information).
5. The rules of the system (such as incentives, punishments, constraints).
4. The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure.
3. The goals of the system.
2. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system — its goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters — arises.
1. The power to transcend paradigms.

As you can see, the first (most powerful) leverage point is “the power to transcend paradigms”. In understanding how a system functions, there are several levels at which leverage can be attained and change created. The political economic system of neoliberalism is an example of a system. More specifically, we can use the example of the food system within the neoliberal political economy. By understanding, and picking apart the system, as this literature review and thesis attempt to do, we can seek to create change. Food sovereignty is a new paradigm. This paradigm is constructed in opposition to the values of neoliberalism. Food Sovereignty works at multiple levels of change and addresses several of Meadow’s leverage points. The ultimate goal is to transcend the paradigm of neoliberalism in the food system and replace it with that of food sovereignty.

This framework is useful in my research in Vermont, which seeks to create change and advocate for the rights of undocumented farmworkers whose stories and experiences have driven this research. By breaking the patterns and notions that have been created in how undocumented immigrants are perceived, perhaps greater change will be possible. Further, by understanding the systems at play, we can begin to situate alternative movements and projects such the applied garden project *Huertas* on the spectrum of leverage points. In this way, individual projects that seem insignificant in the greater system, are actually working in solidarity with a greater paradigm shift.

Embedded within systems analysis of the food system and my research is the concept of agency. Mainstream discussions often portray political and economically disadvantaged communities as lacking agency and self-determination (Mares, 2010). My thesis research draws upon the work of Mares (2010) whose dissertation research looked at food access among Latinx migrants in Seattle, WA. Mares' study examines how "immigrant individuals and families inhabiting the margins of U.S. society seek to exercise their agency through developing survival strategies to protect their wellbeing and how this agency is reshaped and constrained." (Mares, 2010). The concept of agency is situated within a broader discourse of structural violence, which constrains agency. Similar to the dissertation research of Mares, I hope to understand the ways in which Latinx migrant farmworkers navigate through oppressive systems to meet food needs, sustain a cultural identity, and maintain a community while "they simultaneously contribute to, resist, and sometimes, seek to remain invisible from the state" (Mares, 2010). This thesis attempts to knit together these concepts of agency, well-being and leverage points through the following two articles. These articles illuminate spaces of

resistance and resilience among undocumented farmworkers in Vermont, and where possible, seek to highlight leverage points and agency.

ARTICLE ONE: Seeds Sent from Home: Migrant Farm Worker Gardens, Food Security, and Food Sovereignty in Vermont

Book target: Food Insecurity in a Globalized World
(Out of Middlebury Conference: Food Insecurity in a Globalized World, hosted by Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs)

Abstract

Vermont prides itself on being a national role model in developing innovative models for community-supported, ecologically responsible agricultural practices. Meanwhile, the dairy industry—Vermont’s largest agricultural sector—has increasingly relied on Latinx migrant farmworkers. Many of these workers are unable to access basic rights, including nutritious, fresh, and culturally relevant food. This article examines systemic barriers, complex relationships, and resilient responses in the food system by investigating food access strategies and food security among Vermont’s Latinx farmworkers. *Huertas*—an ongoing gardening and community food access project—enables farmworkers living and working on Vermont dairy farms to install and cultivate gardens, with the goal of increasing access to fresh, culturally familiar food. This article analyzes data from field notes, participant observation, the USDA household food security survey module, and in-depth interviews with farmworkers and service-providers. Most of this data was collected through involvement with *Huertas* and seeks to explore the complicated negotiations and barriers farmworkers encounter when trying to access, cook, and gather around food.

Introduction: Conducting Food Research in the Northern Borderlands

I was surprised as I walked through the garden with Tomás in August of 2014 to learn that he had a variety of *epazote* that I had not yet seen in Vermont. I asked where he found the seeds for this traditional culinary herb and he told me that someone from his village in Mexico sent these seeds to him in the mail. Tomás and I were standing behind the trailer where he lived with two other Mexicans, next to the farm where they were employed. Opposite the trailer across the dirt road, the corn was at full height, and there was the lingering, almost sweet, smell of manure in the air. We were in the northwestern

part of the Green Mountain State- dairy country. Tomás launched into a story about how they were the same seeds that he grew in his village when he was younger; there were no cars in his village, because there was not a road. You had to walk for 12 hours, he told me, to get to a main road where they would catch a bus to get to the nearest municipality. And so, they grew all their own food and raised their own animals. I was reminded, as I often am in this line of work and research, about how far Tomás was from home.

As I reflect on that sunny day in August, I am reminded of the bitter reality, that Tomás, and other farmworkers in his position are regarded as illegal by the United States, because they lack proper documentation to justify their work here. The garden that he was growing in Vermont was a small space of autonomy, but it was not going to change the fact that Tomás could not drive himself to the store, because he would be risking deportation. As year-round employees in dairy work, migrant farmworkers do not qualify for temporary H2A work visas used in seasonal agricultural work, such as picking apples and other crops (Wolcott-MacClausland & Shea, 2014). This position puts migrant farmworkers like Tomás who are living and working in Vermont in a compromised and vulnerable position any time they are in a public space, and at times, even when they are home or at work.

The objective of this article is to humanize the experiences of undocumented migrant farmworkers in Vermont, while simultaneously and explicitly illuminating the structural violence and oppression that impacts migrant farmworkers nationally. To do so, I will first contextualize Vermont as a destination for migrant farmworkers and situate *Huertas*, the applied gardening project, within the industrial dairy landscape. Second, I will present the conceptual framework I employ concerning neoliberalism and structural

violence in the food system. This framework is essential to understanding both migrant farmworkers in Vermont and the larger United States food system, which depends heavily on a constant supply on immigration from countries south of its border. Third, I will offer a discussion and analysis of my food research in northern Vermont within two approaches to understanding food access: food sovereignty and food security. These approaches, situated within the broader conceptual framework, offer insight into both the contradictions of the food system and spaces of human creativity and resilience.

Over the course of four and a half years I have co-coordinated *Huertas*, conducted ethnographic research, and studied migration among Latinx farmworkers in Vermont. In this time, I have been equally struck by the frustrating systemic barriers that limit the freedom and opportunity of migrants, as I have been by the resilient responses that germinate in the most unlikely of spaces. In this article, I argue that the decision to migrate is embedded in a historical legacy of labor exploitation in the US food system and the current political economy of neoliberalism. Despite these pressures, my research in Vermont has underscored that migrant farmworkers and their families navigate structural oppression and vulnerability, often with striking resilience and creativity. Yes, there are powerful and coercive economic and political mechanisms that pose barriers to basic needs for migrant farmworkers. However, I was surprised by one of the most significant findings of my fieldwork: while Latinx migrant farmworkers in Vermont certainly are impacted by neoliberal globalization and free trade policy, they also have agency over their food and cultural identities. To paint migrant farmworkers in Vermont as exclusively victims of a repressive system would be to dehumanize and deprive them

of the dignity, hospitality, and stewardship that I have experienced and witnessed over many years of applied research.

Methods

This article is based upon more than four years of community-based research looking at food access among Latinx farmworkers in Vermont, conducted in collaboration with Dr. Teresa Mares of the anthropology department at the University of Vermont. This research was approved by the University of Vermont's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB process ensures the informed consent of human subjects in all UVM-sponsored research projects. Confidentiality of all research participants has been maintained throughout the project and all names used in this article are pseudonyms. This article draws principally upon ethnographic fieldwork, which included over 400 hours of participant observation and analysis of 61 pages of typed field notes. I draw upon 26 in-depth interviews, with farmworkers (n=17) and community stakeholders (n=9) conducted by Dr. Mares and/or myself over the past two years. To analyze these interviews, Dr Mares and I conducted a preliminary round of hand-coding on the translated interview transcripts by reading through the interviews and marking themes and concepts that seemed to be repetitive and/or related to our research questions. Next, we met to discuss our hand coding, and to ensure intercoder reliability. To develop a code book we divided our codes into major codes and minor codes, and grouped related themes. For example, a major code might be "Migration and Citizenship" and the subcodes are "Migration Experience", "Citizenship", "Motivation for Migration", "US-Mexico border", "Border", and "Border Patrol". Once we developed a code book, I

loaded all of the transcripts into ATLAS.ti and read through them again, re-coding based on the code book we had developed. The ATLAS.ti software is a computer program used for qualitative data analysis. It is useful because you are able to easily change codes and/or groupings, easily organize quotations based on themes, and export the data to another person who is using the software. In addition to the interviews conducted by Dr Mares and/or myself, I analyzed 15 interview transcripts conducted in 2006 through the Vermont Folklife Center for an exhibit called the Golden Cage Project, which includes interviews with dairy farm owners and migrant farmworkers. These interviews provide temporal perspective, providing a window into some of the perceptions and experiences of farmworkers and farm employers in Vermont a decade ago. Finally, Dr. Mares and I conducted 100 of the USDA Household Food Security Survey Modules (HFSSM) within migrant households. While we feel that the survey instrument is unable to capture the full picture of food security and food access (which will be discussed in detail later), it is important to have this baseline data, and to be able to draw comparisons with national data. The majority of our ethnographic fieldwork has been done via the applied gardening project, *Huertas*, which connected me to Tomás and other migrant farmworkers whose stories I share in this article. Through these stories, I strive to convey human ingenuity while also recognizing and identifying the policies and paradigms that regulate and limit human autonomy. The experiences of Latinx migrant farmworkers in Vermont is embedded within historic influences and neoliberal constraints. Some of these constraints are unique to Vermont, whereas larger cultural perceptions and policies have national and international underpinnings and influence.

Migrant Farmworkers (In)visibility in Vermont's Working Landscape

The dairy industry in Vermont mirrors national and international trends of neoliberal economic reform leading to consolidation and industrialization in the food system, as well as a dependence on undocumented migrant labor. In 2014 there were 868 dairy farms in Vermont, a striking decrease from the 10,637 dairies in 1953 (Albers, 2000; Vermont Agency of Agriculture, 2014). Despite this shrinking number of dairy farms, milk production has been at record high. A 2015 report from the Vermont Dairy Promotion Council called *Milk Matters*⁹ boasts that 132,000 cows produced 2.6 billion pounds of milk in 2012, about 300 million gallons. According to an article in The Burlington Free Press, Vermont has 75% fewer dairy farms and 30% fewer cows than in 1975, but milk production has increased by 30% (Woolf, 2016). Dairy has been, and continues to be, an essential part of Vermont's agricultural economy, accounting for approximately 70% of the state's agricultural sales (Vermont Dairy Promotion Council, 2015), making Vermont the most dairy-dependent state in the nation (Kessel and Bolduc 2008). This milk production, partnered with the rural, quaint, idyllic brand of Vermont, supplies socially and environmentally conscious companies such as Ben & Jerry's and Cabot. The Green Mountain State has an identity built off of rolling hills and red barns- a working landscape that families have tended for generations. Missing from this narrative of the quaint Vermont landscape, however, is the presence and reliance on undocumented laborers from Mexico and other parts of Latin America.

⁹ Also, while the report featured photos of jersey cows, red barns, and white farmer families and cheese makers, with the exception of one photograph of two smiling employees, and one of them appears to maybe be of Hispanic decent. It neglects to include photographs of Latinx farmworkers or mention anything about trends in the labor market.

The invisibility of Vermont's migrant farmworkers from the image of the working landscape of Vermont is no accident. This reality demands that farmworkers from Mexico and other regions of Latin America, who are working in and sustaining the dairy industry in Vermont, remain invisible from the general public. However, being a Spanish-speaking person of color in the second whitest state in the U.S. means that when Latinx farmworkers are out in the community in rural Vermont, they are hyper-visible (Mares, 2013; McCandless, 2010; Shea, 2009). This culminates in a dynamic that McCandless (2010) describes as a carceral landscape. This dynamic of Vermont feeling like a jail for undocumented migrants has been articulated by farmworkers who I have met through *Huertas* as well. The term that has come up many times in my work and research that capture McCandless' description of Vermont as a carceral landscape is *encerrado*, which translates to "locked in", "enclosed", or "penned up". This word has been used when I ask farmworkers what it is like to be working and living in Vermont, or when I ask what the challenges are to accessing food or going to the grocery store.

The absence of a year-round visa option eliminates the opportunity for dairy farmers to hire seasonal migrant workers, thus forcing employers to look the other way when hiring migrant workers, accepting false social security cards and pleading ignorance. The proximity to the Canadian border puts not only farmworkers at risk of deportation, but also puts their employers at risk, further enforcing the need for farmworkers to remain on farm, out of sight (McCandless, 2010). This pressure is heightened the closer one is to the border because this region is under heightened surveillance. Farm owners will go out of their way to ensure that employees remain invisible- buying groceries and running errands for their employees. Tomás, who loved

preparing elaborate meals for visitors and his housemates, had to rely on his boss or other community members to go to the store and bring him groceries. I recall one time I received a phone call from Tomás, where he excitedly reported that he had gotten a ride to Burlington, a small city an hour south of where he worked and lived, where he went to a large supermarket and purchased enough groceries to last two months. This opportunity was rare, because to be out in public, particularly in the northern county where he lived and worked, could jeopardize his livelihood. This isolation marks a harsh existence for Tomás and other farmworkers and their families living and working in the northern borderlands. While they are dedicated to producing the food bought and sold in the grocery stores, they are barred from entering those very stores to purchase food for themselves. This was in a large part the motivation for *Huertas*, the garden project. By planting gardens where farmworkers are *encerrado*, they are able to access fresh vegetables and herbs at their own will, and not rely on someone else to buy them groceries.

“Food is a gift of the earth”: Gardening in the shadows

As I write this in the summer of 2016, there is still dirt under my fingernails from planting this season’s gardens alongside farmworkers near the border of Vermont and Canada. In my academic research the concept of fieldwork has taken a more literal meaning, as the majority of my participant observation has taken place through my involvement in an applied gardening project called *Huertas* (*Huertas* meaning kitchen garden in Spanish). This gardening project germinated in response to the variety of pressures on undocumented farmworkers in northern Vermont: pressure to be invisible,

fear of border patrol, and lack of mobility. The garden project offers a small reprieve where migrant farmworkers can access fresh vegetables and herbs that remind them of home. Through connecting farmworkers with volunteers, materials, and the permission from the dairy owners to plant these gardens, *Huertas* aims to address the disparities in access to nutritious food, while simultaneously bridging the barriers of isolation and social inequalities.

I first became involved in *Huertas* in spring 2012. I began as an intern, two years after Naomi Wolcott-MacCausland, a migrant health promoter with UVM Extension and now coordinator of *Huertas*, recognized that there was need for access to fresh, culturally familiar vegetables and herbs among the farmworkers with whom she was working. In 2010, Naomi helped to establish small kitchen gardens on 8 farms, and reached 24 participants and kids. In the first two years, extra starts were donated by greenhouses after the season had already begun. By 2012, Naomi connected with Dr. Teresa Mares, and they hired me to assist in a concerted effort to survey all interested farmworkers before March, so that they would not be receiving leftover starts, but rather specific plants, and in numbers that they desired. This initial season forged the collaborative effort between Naomi, Teresa, and myself. In 2012, we planted on 21 farms, and reached 82 participants and kids.

Over the next few years, the program grew significantly and in the 2015 season, *Huertas* planted gardens on 43 farms, reaching 120 participants and kids. The program also distributed 1,800 seed packets and plant starts. We were able to offer a selection of 94 varieties of vegetables, herbs, and flowers, including 11 varieties of chilies and culturally familiar herbs such as *epazote*, *papalo*, *hierbabuena*, rue, lemongrass,

chepiche, chamomile, and aloe plants (for use indoors). Our fall 2015 feedback surveys revealed that households with kitchen gardens reported an increase in the amount of fresh food eaten, the variety of food eaten, and the amount of time spent outside. Participants identified many positive aspects of having a kitchen garden, including the variety of fresh vegetables available, the variety of peppers available, and the time spent outside. The success of *Huertas* and participants' interest in planting gardens in the northern borderlands is in part due to the major barriers and obstacles that undocumented farmworkers experience in Vermont.

Each fall *Huertas* coordinates a “food day”- a harvest festival and celebration- where farmworkers and community members who support them gather for a rare moment of conviviality. The “food day” has been hosted in a quintessential, small dairy farm/homestead, with beautiful gardens, chickens weaving in and out of the shrubs, and a small pond. The house is old and has a sense of being lived in, a comfort. There is an open kitchen with a long wooden table, where all participants bring their garden's surplus- bowls of tomatillos, hot chilies, onions, and always the giant zucchinis that were harvested a few days too late. There is typically Mexican music playing, conversations in Spanish, and laughter as the produce is prepared into salsa to be canned, pizza to be eaten, or zucchini bread. On these days, *Huertas* participants negotiate their busy work schedules and coordinate rides with community volunteers to gather. Farmworkers who have family here, or have children, bring the whole family. Participants often remark that it is reviving to see their kids speaking Spanish with other children. The first time that I drove someone to a “food day”, they commented that they had not left the farm for two and a half years. In 2013, as a community member drove farmworkers home from a

“food day”, bellies full and canned salsa in hand, we were inconsolably reminded of why these days are a rarity. As they were driving back to the dairy farm where the participants live and work, they were targeted and pulled over by border patrol. The passengers were asked if they had identification and were subsequently arrested. This jarring experience forced us all to question and reflect on what the work is that we are doing and why we are doing it.

As I reconcile the shattering end to the 2013 “food day” with the interviews and literature on farmworkers in the US food system, I am reminded of the true magnitude of the challenges and obstacles confronting these workers. *Huertas* creates spaces of resiliency and hope, but these are sheathed in the harsh boundaries and limitations placed on being a person who is undocumented. In an in-depth interview with Tomás in 2014, when asked what he liked about Vermont he told me:

“Well, here my favorite is my work, no more than this. And beyond that, I like to plant tomatoes, chilies, radish, squash, this is not to sell products, it is just for the home... I like when people come to visit, to feed them. It is not a business. This food, it is a gift of the earth, for everyone. It is not meant to be a business.”

Here, Tomás eloquently captures the paradoxical nature of *Huertas* within the context and constraints of the industrial food system in the United States. These qualities of reciprocity, generosity, community and stewardship, are illuminated in the reasons why Tomás enjoyed planting a garden. His personal philosophy on food was that it should inherently be something that is shared. Coming from a small village in Mexico, Tomás had a vast amount of knowledge about food production. His garden often fed not only him and his housemates, but he was infamous for filling up any visitor’s car with

produce. The farm owners of the dairy that he worked on once remarked in March that they were still eating the butternut squash that he had given them in August of the previous season. There is a clear discrepancy between his personal philosophy on food being a gift of the earth, and the rationale of the U.S. industrial food system, that has been his source of livelihood for most of his life.

Over the years of knowing Tomás, he told me stories of his time living and working in different parts of the United States- including tales of harvesting lettuce in Yuma, Arizona, running from police dogs in the fields, working in restaurants in Los Angeles, travelling to work in the back of 18-wheeler refrigerated trucks, and harvesting sugar beets in Idaho. At 62 years old, Tomás had an extensive resume, having worked with a variety of crops all across the United States over his forty years of circular migration. He had been in Vermont for twelve years, at the time of the interview, and on that specific dairy for seven years. A few months after the interview with Tomás, he was interrogated by border patrol after his housemate was spotted going to the grocery store with their employer. He was home resting in between shifts, when border patrol knocked on the door. This is one of the greatest fears expressed by many farmworkers in Vermont.

Tomás spent a year waiting for a court date in Boston, where he was granted a delay of deportation for one year. He would joke and say that he was able to go to the store now, because he had his papers- the court summons. He and his housemates were (somewhat ironically) able to move through public space with a bit more confidence. This form of documentation acknowledged his presence in Vermont, giving a certain form of validation. During this time he planted a garden, worked on the farm, and prepared elaborate meals of *comida Mexicana*, which he enjoyed with all guests visiting

his home. After the year of deliberation about the workers, the family who owned the farm ultimately decided to sell the herd for financial reasons. Tomás is now home, in Mexico.

Tomás' departure was a loss for the *Huertas* community. He was incomprehensibly optimistic and dedicated to his work, garden, and community, despite the lifelong marginalization and trials he had faced working as an undocumented farmworker. However, even in his departure, there was something to be gleaned. It taught me that *Huertas* is and needs to be a flexible project. The migrant population is highly transient, while a garden is rooted in one place. Some of *Huertas* participants have been on the same farm for many years, while others a few months. After Tomás left, his housemate, Ernesto, became the caretaker of the garden space. When Tomás was on the farm, Ernesto did not seem to participate in maintaining the garden, and I assumed that he was not interested. However, Ernesto now maintains and cultivates an abundant garden, in the same space that Tomás cultivated for years. *Huertas* shifts with the demand and needs of the population in connection with who is here and where they move.

Conceptual framework: Structural violence, neoliberalism, and the US Food System

In order to understand the discrepancy between the viewpoints of Tomás in his garden with that of the US industrial food system, it is crucial to understand the conceptual framework of neoliberalism and some historical and political background. Tomás' philosophy is that food is a gift of the earth and meant to be shared, a system based on generosity and reciprocity. Meanwhile the US industrial food system functions in a market-based globalized commodity market, which is based on the values of

competition and productivity. The US industrial food system treats Tomas and other undocumented farmworkers' bodies and time as cogs in an efficient, profit-seeking machine. In this section, I work to briefly parse out the political, historical and economic framework that governs the current model of food production. This framework and background allow us to understand the systems that justify the harsh treatment of farmworkers, and the political and social pressures that criminalize Tomás after 40 years of contribution and labor.

The US industrial food system benefits from and perpetuates historical systems of oppression and exploitation, particularly against people of color (Guel, A., Pirog, R. & Wimbaugh, T., 2016). Structural racism in the food system is built upon the legacy of colonialism- based on subjugation, commodity production and extraction, and the notion of power (Kepkiewicz et al., 2015). These notions were particularly connected to skin color, as the colonizers were often people of European decent, with lighter skin color. Colonizers used extreme violence and exploitation to claim this power- dominating and slaughtering native peoples, as well as through enslaving Africans who often brought with them tremendous agricultural knowledge. The centuries following colonialism have perpetuated the association of whiteness with power. The plantation structure of food/commodity production relied on slave labor and extreme systems of oppression, opening up a system of export markets, finance, and the elongation of supply chains. Colonial power structures of oppression and racism remain as columns that support the modern U.S. food system, and continue to have global consequence.

The modern food system supports and is supported by the economic framework of neoliberalism, or neoliberal capitalism. It is driven by the theory that without government

intervention, markets will self-regulate, solve social problems and most efficiently allocate resources (Alkon and Mares, 2012; Harvey, 2008; McMichael, 1996; Robbins, 2014; von Werlhof, 2008). The framework believes that competition will ensure the most efficient delivery of all human needs. In terms of the food system and neoliberalism, the dominant approach has been to produce more food for less money, leading to large-scale production and minimizing the cost of inputs. As nation states and governments have relinquished regulatory power in this economic framework, corporations have usurped the power. In particular, Andrée et al. (2014) write about globalizing food regime, which is dominated by corporate control. In this regime, large-scale industrial production and export markets are favored. However, colonial legacies and the pre-existing inequality, left over from structures of racism and oppression, have led to exacerbated disparities in and between nation states. Further, these legacies of colonialism manifest in terms of who has power within corporations, and which nation-states they benefit- often the U.S. and global north. This historical understanding is crucial because it begins to denaturalize the rationalization behind exploitation and immigration in the current U.S. food system.

The framework of neoliberalism is reproduced through free trade agreements, which are treaties between nation states that decrease government intervention in the market economy by removing tariffs and encouraging the flow of goods and finance. Pertaining to my research, the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico is particularly important in understanding the relationship between neoliberalism, the food system, and immigration. NAFTA has embodied the trends of power accumulation towards corporations and large-scale producers and has also followed the trend that perpetuates the disadvantaged

communities, who have not benefitted from the economic frameworks of colonialism, capitalism, or neoliberalism. Those disadvantaged have repeatedly been indigenous communities and often people of color. Neoliberalism has been particularly devastating for small farmers and rural communities in the Global South, because they cannot compete with the global market, industrial food production, and subsidized commodities (Andrée et al., 2014; Patel, 2012). NAFTA has exacerbated the disparity between (and within) Mexico, the US, and Canada, particularly within the food system. Larger, more efficient producers push small farmers in Mexico out of the market, and these small farmers become economically marginalized in their own communities. As a result, many Mexicans are left with no economic opportunity and decide to migrate to *el norte* to seek work (Rellinger, 2010).

There is a long history of migration from Mexico to the US, which has been incentivized by policies, such as the Bracero program, to bring in workers for seasonal agriculture work (Bacon, 2008). The Bracero Program was replaced with the H2 Temporary guest worker program; in which H2A visas are for agricultural workers and H2B are for non-agricultural work (NCFH, 2012). To support commerce and the U.S. economy, the border remained largely open until the 1990's. However, shifts in policy, contemporary media portrayals, and concerns around national safety since the late 1990s have dramatically shifted the opportunity for Mexicans and people from other parts of Latin America to find work in the U.S.

A series of policies sought to close the border to undocumented immigrants, despite the fact that the H2A visa program does not provide enough visas for the number of farmworker jobs needed. For many farmworkers, the only option is to cross the border

unauthorized and find work. Beginning in the early 1990's, then-President Bill Clinton initiated Operation Gatekeeper, allocating funding toward border patrol and fence construction on the US-Mexican border. This operation and other programs were put in place in order to "close the border" (Holmes, 2013). The number of border patrol agents doubled in a short time after the passage of NAFTA (Robbins, 2014). Another major factor in the militarization of the border was 9/11, which further escalated militarization on all US borders. President Bush picked up the operations supported by Clinton escalating surveillance and policing along the border, and continuing to build the wall, in the name of safety and defense from terrorism (Chomsky, 2013). Two major pieces of legislation passed during this time were called "The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005" and the "Secure Fence Act of 2006" (Koch, 2006; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005). As goods and finance were freely flowing through the border, those displaced by the NAFTA and free trade policies were not permitted to find work in the United States. As these policy implementations began to make migrating to the U.S. from Mexico increasingly difficult, contemporary media and political discourse and policy further outlawed undocumented migrants. This hostility has caused and continues to cause the presence of migrant workers to be criminalized (Bacon, 2008). Despite the increased risk, migrant workers continue to seek work in the U.S. out of economic desperation.

In the beginning of my involvement with the migrant farmworker population I often asked, why would an immigrant leave their community, family, and home in Mexico, risk their lives, pay a few thousand dollars crossing the border, navigate their way across the U.S., all to be marginalized and criminalized in Vermont? I hope to

illuminate the point that the decision to migrate is embedded in the historical legacy of labor exploitation in the U.S. food system and the current political economy of neoliberalism. Further, along with others who have written about immigration, I challenge the notion that voluntary migration is entirely a choice, as it is understood to be a decision to create a better life for oneself. In the context of neoliberalism, particularly as it impacts the food system, many migrants are left with no other choice of livelihood and so they are forced to move to find work (Bacon, 2008; Holmes, 2013; Rellinger 2010). Vermont mirrors this tendency as more than half of migrant farmworkers are coming from Chiapas, the southern-most and poorest state in Mexico with a high portion of indigenous and land-based communities (Wolcott-MacClausland & Shea, 2014). David Bacon (2008) articulates the reality behind free trade policy and the decision to leave home to find work elsewhere quite simply when he wrote,

“In Latin America, economic reforms promoted by U.S. government through trade agreements and international financial institutions displace workers, from miners to coffee pickers, who join a huge flood of labor moving north. When displaced workers arrive in the United States, they become an indispensable part of the workforce, whether they are undocumented or labor under work visas in conditions of virtual servitude. Displacement is creating a mobile workforce, an army of available workers that has become an integral part of the U.S. economy”.

(p. 67)

In the logic of neoliberal capitalism, the displacement of rural farmers and indigenous communities is a side effect that must occur. This rationalizes the movement of rural

communities to cities (or from southern Mexico to Northwest Vermont) in search of an opportunity to make a living.

The current political economic structure of neoliberalism values competition, efficiency and consumption, with the principle metric of success being measured in profit. As suggested in the early 1900's by Karl Polanyi, the framework of capitalism (the foundation for neoliberalism) values the human characteristic of competition, and devalues the human characteristics of collaboration, redistribution, and reciprocity (McMichael, 1996). I add to this claim, and suggest that neoliberalism also devalues generosity, culture, community, and stewardship, unless they are reframed at commodities that can be consumed. In this system, where so many components of humanity are de-valued, there is a tremendous amount of vulnerability, as those who are not in power are left unprotected. This explanation is helpful in reflecting upon the discrepancy between the philosophy of Tomás and that which underlies the US industrial food system. The economic systems in rural land-based communities value reciprocity and generosity, as a way of allocating resources. Coming from a rural, small village in Mexico, Tomás carries with him a culture that sees the non-monetary, reciprocal value of generosity and hospitality.

As I reflect on the hundreds of human moments I have had through my work- whether it is being invited to a 3-year-old's birthday party where I hear the excited shouts when a piñata bursts and candy is dispensed, or being fed a meal of tamales, and served until my stomach is so full I can not eat another- it is hard to rationalize the contemporary media and political rhetoric and policy considering "illegal" immigrants. The deeper I go in understanding the complex networks and structures that sustain the U.S. food system,

the more I recognize the convenience of these contradictions. To understand this dynamic, I draw upon the work of Seth Holmes (2013), and his book *Fresh Fruit Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. He writes that,

“The migrant laborer can survive on low wages while contributing to economic production in one context [U.S.] because the family, community and state in the other context [Mexico] provide education, health care, and other services necessary for reproduction. In this way, the host state externalizes the costs of labor force renewal and benefits even further from the phenomenon of labor migration” (pp. 13).

What this means is that while legal rights are stripped from undocumented migrant workers, they are providing an essential source of cheap labor. They are systematically denied access to health care, education, etc. which are services that citizens receive in belonging to the nation-state. They are denied power and resources to advocate for themselves because of legal barriers. Furthermore, the contemporary media message that portrays undocumented farmworkers as strains on the system allows the U.S. population to justify the human rights violations and injustices being done to migrant farmworkers.

To understand this mistreatment and exploitation, I draw upon the concept of structural violence. The concept of structural violence was introduced to me by my advisor, Dr. Mares, and has been useful in wrapping my head around the exploitation of undocumented farmworkers in the U.S. food system. This concept is linked to the previously introduced notion of structural racism, as the two cannot and should not be understood in isolation, and both are critical in understanding the treatment of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. The concept of structural violence is used in

discourse pertaining to social inequalities that permeate everyday life and have impact primarily on the poor (Farmer, 2005; Holmes, 2013; Mares, 2010; Scheper-Hughes, 1992). Paul Farmer (2005) describes structural violence as a

“...broad rubric that includes a host of offenses against human dignity: extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities ranging from racism to gender inequality, and the more spectacular forms of violence that are uncontestedly human rights abuses, some of them punishment for efforts to escape structural violence” (p. 8)

Citing Farmer, Mares (2010) writes “in Farmer’s view, human suffering is structured by historic and economic factors that conspire to constrain agency.” Structural violence is a concept used to uncover connections between exploitation, oppression, and social inequality¹⁰. It explains the ways in which violence can be normalized to the point of invisibility or naturalized to be unrecognizable (Scheper-Hughes, 2005). Holmes writes that structural violence tends to benefit those who have power, drawing from Bourdieu’s conceptualization of social structures and inequality. The physical effects of structural violence on those who are more vulnerable are tangible. Structural violence treats the body of a farmworker as a replaceable commodity and diverts responsibility for the health and well being of the farmworker, particularly when undocumented. Structural violence was a pillar in colonialism as it is today in neoliberalism. Structural violence is produced and reproduced in the framework of neoliberalism, because our society and political economy believe that the market will solve social problems, and because competition drives the need for cheaper more efficient production.

¹⁰ Ethnographers: see Paul Farmer, 1992, 1997, 1999, 2005; Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Theorists: Pierre Bourdieu, 1997, Friedrich Engels, 1958; Bourgois, 2003, 1995; Klinenberg, 1999; Galtung 1969

Vermont might seem an unsuspecting location to study neoliberalism, colonial legacies, and racism as they pertain to migration and the food system. With the picturesque rolling green hills and quaint towns, the state feels quite removed from the realm of free trade agreements and an economy based on competition. This speaks to how pervasive neoliberalism is. Political and economic systems rationalize humans leaving their families and communities in rural, southern Mexico and risking their lives to work in the Northeast corner of the United States. Neoliberalism also rationalizes a 7th generation dairy farmer from Vermont navigating language barriers and cultural dissonance with a Mexican employee; risking the \$30,000 fine if they are caught employing undocumented immigrants. Vermont dairy farm owners and Latinx migrant farmworkers are interdependent. McCandless (2010) discusses this interdependence as “mutual exploitation”, in that both the employee and the employer are negotiating their own needs because of the dire circumstances. While there are clear cases of farmworkers who are vulnerable blatantly being taken advantage of, the overwhelming majority of employers are also in positions of vulnerability. Understanding this dynamic helps us to demystify the phenomenon of undocumented migration, but further complicates the situation as well. In this context, there are no clear “bad guys”, and no simple solutions. Neoliberal policies that rely on the market to deliver human needs have in turn pressured farmworkers *and* farm owners to compromise their own needs in order to make a livelihood. These circumstances of “mutual exploitation” occur in the form of reduction in payment or long work schedules, but also in terms of daily experience. Farmworkers are pressured to remain invisible because they are undocumented, and therefore being in public poses a risk for both employer and employee. Inequitable food access among

farmworkers in Northern Vermont is demonstrative of the deep injustice within the food system and brings to question the values and motives, which drive the current political economic system.

Food access strategies in the northern borderlands

A few weeks after the interview with Tomás, I visited Lourdes who lived *on* the border of the United States and Canada, in an apartment attached to the milking parlor. We walked to her garden through the milking parlor to the dairy barn, her daughter holding my hand as we stepped over piles of manure. The smell in the barn was powerful; hundreds of cows pass through twice daily to reach the milking parlor. We stepped out into the sun and I laughed, because every time I went to visit her garden, there was a new development- new walls for the raised garden beds, a picnic table, a little umbrella for her daughter to sit under. This time I saw that her garden has doubled in size; there was a huge plot of unfamiliar squash growing, which I had never seen before. When I asked where the seeds came from, I was told once again, that it was a variety from home that family members had sent in the mail. Lourdes had to plant her garden in a discreet corner between the barn and the silos of grain, where the farm owner felt that she would not be at risk of being seen by the border patrol.

Lourdes had been harassed by border patrol, to the point where she was unable to go to prenatal appointments. This vigilance, racial profiling, and surveillance in regions near the US-Canada border exemplify the concept of structural violence. Being unable to go to the doctor has a tangible impact on physical well-being, but the isolation and deprivation of community also has an impact on stress, anxiety, and overall emotional

health. McCandless (2010) articulates some of the ways in which enclosure and invisibility are enforced, “Given workers’ illegal presence, these prison-like conditions are maintained through self-policing, as well as employer gatekeeping, and through the specter of primarily roadside enforcement by police or border patrol agents.” (p. 146) This mirrors the polarity of the national approach to undocumented immigrants, which recognizes that there is a dependency on their labor in the US food system, but maintains their criminal status in public space.

Lourdes and other farmworkers, who live and work in Northern Vermont, face the constraints of their close proximity to the U.S.-Canada border, including higher levels of surveillance. The region 100-miles south of the U.S.-Canada border falls under federal jurisdiction. Vermont is 157 miles long, north to south, and so, this zone includes 90% of Vermont residents. However, the 25-mile region along the border is called “primary operating domain”, where the presence of border patrol and enforcement is higher (ACLU Vermont, 2013). After 9/11, the number of border patrol agents doubled, northern border patrol employees were sent to the US-Mexican border to be trained, the northern border was militarized, and surveillance was increased. Peter Andreas (2005) calls this transition the “Mexicanization” of the U.S.-Canadian border. This increased militarization along the border causes extreme isolation for Latinx migrant farmworkers, like Lourdes, forcing them to remain invisible, particularly the closer they live to the U.S.-Canada border. This has had an impact on the ways in which farmworkers are able to (or unable to) access food.

In northern Vermont, food access strategies for farmworkers are dictated by a fear of being in public spaces. Data found in the USDA food security surveys that Dr. Mares

and I conducted (n=100) found that in central Vermont's Addison county, 15.7% of farmworkers are food insecure (n=51), while among those living in Northern Vermont's Franklin county (which falls in the "primary operating domain") 18.2% were found to be food insecure (n=33). This discrepancy speaks to the challenge of accessing food, particularly in the northern border regions. Farm owners, who also live in fear of border patrol, encourage farmworkers not to be in public spaces, and commonly do the grocery shopping for their employees. Typically, at least one farmworker in a household is literate in Spanish and will write out a grocery list, and a farm owner or manager will buy groceries every fifteen days or two weeks (McCandless, 2010). A 2010 survey by Naomi Wolcott-MacClausland through UVM Extension found that in border counties 96.2% of migrant farmworkers rely on someone else to go to the store for them (Wolcott-MacClausland, 2010). UVM Extension developed a bilingual food list that assists farmworkers in communicating what they want to the person going to the store for them. Particularly in border regions, farmworkers rely on the farm owner, manager, or someone else to buy the groceries for them. Challenges with this system include barriers in language and literacy, a lack of knowledge about what foods are available, and limited choice in fresh, culturally specific foods.

I recall one of the first times that I visited Lourdes, as we sat in plastic chairs in the kitchen, she offered me *chicharones* (fried pork skins, a popular Mexican snack) and *Valentina* (a particular brand of hot sauce from Mexico). I was surprised to see this snack, which is popular in Mexico, but the brands and ingredients are nearly impossible to find in Vermont's grocery stores. Over time, I began noticing more products- *guajillo* chili peppers, or *pan dulce* (sweet bread)- and started asking about where they were

coming from. Since then, I have learned about third party food deliverers, who drive from farm to farm on a weekly basis selling Mexican food products. Farmworkers tell me that these food vendors are driving from Boston, New York, and New Jersey, to sell to farmworkers on rural dairy farms in northern Vermont. In May 2016, while visiting Lourdes and her new baby, one of the food vendors came by. Excited to see the operation, I peeked over her shoulder as she looked through the shelves stocked with dried goods and familiar brands of *Bimbo* and *Sabritas*. There were two chest freezers filled with prepared foods such as *tortillas*, *tamales*, and *taquitos*. The trailer was discreet from the outside, but on the inside it was a sanctuary of difficult to find Mexican food products. I mentioned that I was looking for a good tortilla press, and the food vendor said that he had one left. He climbed to the back of the mobile *tienda* (store) and found a good, heavy iron *prensa* (press). These mobile *tiendas* fill a major gap in northern Vermont in food access for farmworkers to culturally appropriate foods. In our in-depth interviews with farmworkers, they have said that the foods are sometimes more expensive, often depending on who they are buying from. According to our interviews, the prices seem to fluctuate and they expect the mobile *tiendas* to arrive every 15 days. In some cases, the farmworkers will make a phone call to ask for a delivery, and other times they will show up with a trailer, similar to the one which I bought my *prensa*. Some of the vendors are from the U.S. while others are Latinx immigrants.

Another food access strategy for undocumented farmworkers is ironically US-government support. Farmworker families who have given birth to their children in the United States are able to access a small number of federally funded food access programs. The two programs that families who were interviewed and surveyed reported

utilizing were Women, Infants, Children (WIC) and the free school lunch program. Out of 17 farmworker interviews, 7 talked about accessing WIC, after giving birth in the U.S. In our interviews, people say that they were able to get milk, eggs, beans, peanut butter, and cereal. Participants said that this food helped a lot, but they were not able to choose what food was delivered to them. Often, these resources are shared with all members of the family, to stretch them as far as possible. This was right at the time when WIC was transitioning from at-home delivery to a voucher system, Vermont being the last state to make this transition. The benefit of the voucher system, is that it allows for more choice.

In a stakeholder interview in 2015, a WIC employee in a border county said that they were continuing home-delivery with farmworkers in the community, because they did not have transportation, were encouraged by their employers not to leave the farm, and they did not go to the WIC office, because the office at the time was right next to immigration. The mothers qualify for WIC, because their children are citizens of the U.S. but they are still criminalized for being here. Further, in the same stakeholder interview, the WIC employee said that border patrol has followed her on home-deliveries, parked behind her, and taken down her license plate information. While WIC and the school lunch programs are forms of immediate support for farmworker families, they are only applicable for those who have had children in the U.S.

Through in-depth interviews and four and a half years in the field, I have gleaned that farmworkers rely on multiple avenues to access food. This creative and dispersed provisioning emerges out of necessity. In addition to the grocery lists, mobile *tiendas*, and federal programs, *Huertas* offers an important opportunity to access familiar and fresh food. In interviews with farmworkers along the northern border, *Huertas* is an

important source of food, but also community and connection to home. *Huertas* has been successful in ameliorating a sliver of the stress of isolation that farmworkers experience. The following section explores some of these challenges and illuminates the feedback from participants about what the garden project means for them.

Huertas: Challenges and Successes

Fernando has participated in *Huertas* since its conception in 2010. He is a single father living and working in Franklin County, his son is just starting high school. He has calloused hands and a very warm smile, wrinkles crease at the corners of his eyes. Like many other farmworkers in Vermont, he is from Chiapas, the southern-most and poorest state in Mexico. He is 53 years-old, and has lived and worked in other parts of the United States. He started working in the U.S. in 2001, and moved around quite a bit, all of the time with his young son. They arrived to Georgia, then moved to Florida, where they spent a year, then moved back to Georgia. They moved on to New York where they worked in a camp, but the work was seasonal, so they returned to Georgia. Then they moved to Virginia, and finally they were in Kentucky. Each one of these moves from one state to another has a story of it's own. He said that is was tough in Kentucky because the work was not consistent- he would work cutting tobacco, and then picking up trash on the highway. He had to pay rent, water, electricity, and so it was a struggle. At the time of the interview, they had been in Vermont for six years. Fernando said that Vermont was the best situation for him and his son, he explained:

“Here I work every day and all year, it’s nice. I have a permanent job here. It’s good because my son tells me, dad I want a pair of shoes, so I tell him to put it on

the list. And sometimes he asks me for a shirt of a certain color and I say ok, my son. So, I have to work, I don't want to say no because I cannot pay."

In an in-depth interview with Fernando regarding food access, he said:

"Having a *huerta* here I'm saving money. I'm saving when I get tomatoes, everything that I plant - the onions, tomatoes, *chiles*, all of it that I sow, so then I don't have to buy it at the store, so there I am saving money. And also I am also cultivating it, everything is so fresh, in the time that it is good, in the summer, and it's really nice to know I will have it from the plant and I bring it in and cook it"

Fernando also spoke about the importance of teaching his son to prepare food from his culture. To share tortillas and cilantro is to remember where they are from. This feedback about *Huertas* was common in my interviews with farmworkers. The aspect of saving money is important, but access to fresh, culturally relevant produce is even more so.

Often when asked what the difference between food in Vermont and food in Mexico is like, interviewees responded that everything in the U.S. is frozen. As discussed earlier, many farmworkers in Vermont have come from rural backgrounds in Mexico or Guatemala, and so they are accustomed to fresh food. Even those who are not from a pastoral background are used to going to markets and purchasing meat and produce that is fresh. One of the reasons that participants maintain a garden in Vermont is to satisfy the need for fresh food.

Another long-time gardener with *Huertas* is Yasmin. The first time I met Yasmin was in February of 2012, when I was doing initial surveys with *Huertas* gardeners. It was in the middle of a snowstorm and I had to walk down the long driveway to the trailer where she was living with her husband, two sons, and newborn baby. She was kind and

endearing, encouraging me to come and visit. I have now known Yasmin through a move to a new farm and trailer, and another pregnancy and arrival of a baby boy. She and her husband are outliers because they have visas that allow them to feel safer moving about in the community. They have a car and both have a license, so they are able to do their own grocery shopping. In an interview with Yasmin, she said that having a garden is important for their family because they are able to save money, but also because there is not fresh food at the store. Yasmin said:

“Because we have the garden, there are fresher vegetables: fresher tomatoes, all of the food is more fresh. And during the winter, well what we find at the grocery store is mostly refrigerated or in the cooler and sometimes we do not find the same things as what we plant.”

Along the northern border, fresh food, culturally familiar herbs and vegetables, and accessibility are challenges related to food as identified by farmworkers. *Huertas* is successful in the short term alleviation of these gaps in food access.

While the feedback about the garden project has been very positive, there are fundamental obstacles. The first inherent obstacle is that the growing season in Vermont is so short, the gardens can only provide about three months of fresh produce. While there are participants who are drying herbs, freezing produce, and canning salsa, the overall impact is minimized because of the seasonal limitation. The second obstacle is structural, and returns to the larger conceptual framework. The gardens are not going to create systemic change that is needed to provide the dignity or human rights that undocumented Latinx migrant farmworkers are being deprived of. *Huertas* is a small reprieve from some of the structural barriers that farmworkers face in accessing food in

northern Vermont, but does not change the fact that they are unable to go to the grocery store themselves or be a visible part of the community.

Lourdes, who was introduced earlier, is among a very small number of farmworkers who live directly on the border of the U.S. and Canada. This presents an array of challenges with the proximity of border patrol. She has two children, both whom were born in Vermont. Her oldest daughter began kindergarten in 2016. Due to lack of proper visa documentation, Lourdes could not wait for the school bus with her daughter or attend parent-teacher conferences to learn about her daughter's experience. Lourdes could not go to the grocery store, and relied on the boss to go to the store to buy her family's groceries every two weeks, or for the mobile *tienda* to come by. As previously mentioned, she had to plant her garden in a hidden corner of the farm, not visible from the street. When asked about why she likes to have a garden, Lourdes said:

“Now I go outside and listen to the birds sing. I feel more free, like I'm in the fields in my village. The memories of what it was like there come back.”

Huertas offers a reprieve- the opportunity to access fresh, culturally familiar food- but it does not resolve the overarching structure that denies Lourdes dignity and autonomy.

Discussion: Two Approaches to Understanding Food Access, Production, and Distribution: Food Security and Food Sovereignty

By sharing the narratives of Tomás, Lourdes, Fernando, and Yasmin a larger image begins to emerge of farmworkers in the northern regions of Vermont. This is an image of cultural perseverance and nostalgia through food, of the importance of family, and of the endurance of generosity and reciprocity. These stories offer insight into the

lives of individuals, and in doing so illuminate larger challenges and innovative solutions to food access in Vermont. They demonstrate the tenacity and longing of these individuals to maintain their own cultural food, while working within the US industrial food system. For Tomás, preparing a meal of *comida Mexicana* is a way to develop community and express his belief that “food is a gift of the earth”. For Lourdes, the *huerta* gives her a moment to be outside and remember the way it feels to be home. Meanwhile, these narratives also demonstrate the negotiations, barriers, and challenges that migrants face on a daily basis. Some of these barriers are physical, living in isolation and the inability to be out in the community, but also there are others that are more subtle. These negotiations require compromise, including the difficult choices having to do with personal well-being and cultural identity. Fernando expressed that sometimes when he prepares a more traditional meal of tortillas, beans and chilies, his son says he does not want it and instead prepares himself a sandwich. This minute decision, occurring repetitively, leads to a fissure between father and son, between home and identity, split between two countries. On the other hand, there are examples of food preserving cultural identity and allowing Latinx migrant farmworker parents to share this with their children. For example, in the interview with Yasmin, we asked what her sons thought about the food at the school and she laughed and responded, “They always tell me, “*ahhh se faltan las tortillas*” [They are missing the tortillas]”. Overall, these narratives confirm the deep complexities of the food system, immigration, and cultural identity. To better understand these relationships, I will explore two approaches to understanding food access: food security and food sovereignty.

Food security is commonly defined by the USDA as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle” (Coleman-Jensen et al, 2015). The current tool for measuring food (in)security is the USDA Household food security survey module (HFSSM). The HFSSM is a standardized, rapid questionnaire that goes up to 16 questions, which ask whether a household has enough money to meet their food needs. Since the development of the Spanish-language version of the HFSSM by Harrison et al (2002), research has shown that Latinx immigrant farm worker communities are experiencing levels of food insecurity significantly higher than the national average (Borre et al., 2010; Kilanowski & Moore, 2010; Quandt et al., 2004; Sano et al., 2010; Weigel et al., 2007; Wirth et al., 2007). These research studies have focused on seasonal workers and in states that have longer histories of hiring Latinx migrant farmworkers. These studies showed that farmworkers experience food insecurity between 3 and 4 times the current national average (Mares et al., 2013). This means that according to previous researchers, 45-82% of farmworker households were food insecure, with a disproportionate number reporting “very low food security” (Borre et al., 2010; Kilanowski & Moore, 2010; Weigel et al., 2007; Wirth et al., 2007). In Vermont, there had been no published research on food (in)security among Latinx migrant farm worker populations prior to our work.

After years of ethnographic research and participant observation, Dr. Mares and I knew that Vermont had unique challenges to food access because of isolation, border proximity, and busy work schedules. As we embarked on the study to determine baseline food security through the HFSSM, which was used in these other studies, we expected to see the results of farmworkers in Vermont to reflect the disproportionately high levels of

food insecurity. We also had the expectation that the survey module may not capture the lived reality of food access. We observed over years of working with farmworkers that having enough money, which is the main indicator in the survey module, was not generally the main barrier to accessing food. The rapid 16-question survey only asks if a household has enough money to access healthy nutritious food, and does not record other barriers such as transportation or busy work schedule. Therefore, we paired the surveys with in-depth interviews and ethnographic methods, as to understand some of the complexity in accessing food, particularly in border regions.

After completing the HFSSM (n=100) the results showed that of the farmworkers on Vermont's dairies, 18% were classified as food insecure, which does not parallel with other studies. As I attempt to reconcile the differences in this data, there are a few answers that emerge. First, dairy work is desirable employment for farmworkers because of the stability it can offer. In-depth interviews with farmworkers in Vermont who have worked other seasonal jobs around the U.S., such as Tomás and Fernando, affirm that dairy work is preferred to other migrant jobs, because the work is year-round and offers a higher wage than most seasonal migrant work. Also, they are often given housing, which is a major issue for a lot of seasonal labor jobs. This data was further supported after my meeting with Mary Jo Dudley, Director of the Cornell Farmworkers Program, who works with farmworkers in dairy work as well as seasonal vegetable and fruit, and livestock industries. Mary Jo Dudley conveyed that in a state where there is a large population of migrant farmworkers across many agricultural sectors, dairy work is the most stable and often sought after by migrant farm workers. Because Vermont has such a small population of farmworkers, most of whom are working in dairy, this is likely to be a

contributing factor in the relatively low percentage of farmworkers experiencing food insecurity.

However, the fact that migrant farmworkers in Vermont are experiencing relatively average food security levels according to the HFSSM, while our qualitative data shows that they are experiencing unique obstacles in this non-traditional destination, indicates that there is a need to examine the metrics and indicators being used to measure food access. This mismatch in quantitative and qualitative data comes back to the HFSSM itself. Often, when conducting the questionnaire, respondents said that yes, they have enough money to buy the food that they need, however they are unable to go to the store because they are afraid of *la migra* or they do not have transportation or the work schedule is so busy. The survey module cannot capture this feedback, because it only asks about having enough money. For example, in the HFSSM, Lourdes was recorded as having high food security. Yet, as previously discussed, we know that Lourdes is unable to leave the barn apartment where she lived with her husband, two children, and other workers. The survey instrument focuses on economic barriers to food access, but excludes other barriers, including a lack of reliable transportation, busy work schedules, and a fear of border patrol.

Further, the module classifies a “household” as those who are living together under one roof. However, in the case of migrant farmworkers, the household is not restricted to the physical space where they are living while providing labor in exchange for income. In the case of many farmworkers we have surveyed, they lived together with other workers, but they were also supporting households back home. And so, while they may have enough money to purchase food for themselves, they are often sending large

portions of their income to Mexico to support medical, food, housing, and education expenses for their spouses, children, parents and extended family. Within the “household” (as classified by the HFSSM on the dairy farm in Vermont) there are often three or four young, single men who are living together, but do not necessarily share money, food, or resources with one another. The HFSSM is unable to capture the complexity of these household structures, which are often elongated geographically in the case of transnational immigration.

There is a clear mismatch between the survey instrument developed to measure food security and these lived experiences. While Lourdes has enough money to purchase food, she is unable to access it on her own terms. The notion that the only barrier to food access is money maintains the dominant paradigm of neoliberalism that the market will solve social problems. If you are classified as food insecure, and therefore do not have the money to buy food, then there are institutions that can step in and offer assistance. Raj Patel offers insight into the shortcomings of food security by discussing the paradigm which views food as a commodity versus food as a right (Patel, 2012). In an interview in *Politics and Culture*, Patel eloquently sums up the predicament. He states,

“No one disputes the importance of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to lead a healthy life, the key work here is ‘access’. Under food security, the question of power never comes up- as long as access is guaranteed under some system or other, there’s no problem. The trouble, however, is this: you can be food secure under a dictatorship. You can be food secure in prison. You can be food secure, in other words, and never have a say about what it is that you’re provided, nor the manner in which it comes to you.” (Stoneman, 2009)

This predicament is represented in the discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative data that we have collected in this research. While a farmworker may be food secure, according to the HFSSM, they are experiencing major barriers to accessing adequate food.

In contrast to food security, food sovereignty places the question of power at the forefront. Food sovereignty has been suggested as a decolonizing and more holistic approach to understanding food access, production, and distribution. Food sovereignty is: “The right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. It puts those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of the food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” (La Via Campesina 2007). The framework of food sovereignty intentionally positions itself in opposition to neoliberalism, structural racism and violence, and the legacy of colonialism. Food sovereignty takes many forms, scales, and approaches, but tends to highlight the ways that neoliberalism and free trade policies undermine and displace small farmers (Alkon and Mares, 2011). The line between food security and food sovereignty is distinguished by the question of power. But, this line can be a bit blurry when looking at food access initiatives, such as *Huertas*.

Eric Holt-Giménez offers a “Food Regime-Food Movement Matrix” for determining where an initiative falls within the larger architecture of food systems change (Holt-Giménez, 2010). Below, you can see in Figure 2, this matrix offers a dichotomy between the “Corporate Food Regime” and the “Food Movements” approaches to solving issues of food access. The “Corporate Food Regime” is defined by a neoliberal/reformist

political paradigm, and lean on international institutions and government intervention.

The “Food Movements” approach is defined by the political paradigms of progressive/radical. This dichotomy matches Patel’s analysis of understanding “food as a commodity” versus “food as a right”.

	Corporate Food Regime		Food Movements	
<i>Politics</i>	Neoliberal	Reformist	Progressive	Radical
<i>Discourse</i>	<i>Food Enterprise</i>	<i>Food Security</i>	<i>Food Justice</i>	<i>Food Sovereignty</i>
<i>Main Institutions</i>	International Finance Corporation (World Bank); IMF, WTO; USDA (Vilsak); Global Food Security Bill; Green Revolution; Millennium Challenge; Heritage Foundation; Chicago Global Council; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Feed the Future Campaign	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank); FAO; UN Commission on Sustainable Development; USDA (Meerigan); mainstream fair trade; some Slow Food Movement; some Food Policy Councils; most food banks & food aid programs	Alternative fair trade and many Slow Food chapters; many organizations in the Community Food Security Movement; CSAs; many Food Policy Councils and youth food and justice movements; many farmworker and labor organizations	Via Campesina, International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty; Global March for Women; many food justice and rights-based movements
<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Corporate</i>	<i>Development</i>	<i>Empowerment</i>	<i>Entitlement</i>
<i>Model</i>	Overproduction; corporate concentration; unregulated markets and monopolies; monocultures (including organic); GMOs; agrofuels; mass global consumption of industrial food; phasing out of peasant and family agriculture and local retail	Mainstreaming/certification of niche markets (e.g. organic, fair, local, sustainable); maintaining northern agricultural subsidies; “sustainable” roundtables for agrofuels, soy, forest products, etc.; market-led land reform	Agroecologically produced local food; investment in underserved communities; new business models and community benefit packages for production, processing, and retail; better wages for ag. workers; solidarity economies; land & food access	Dismantle corporate agrifoods monopoly power; parity; redistributive land reform; community rights to water and seed; regionally based food systems; democratization of food system; sustainable livelihoods; protection from dumping/overproduction; revival of agroecologically managed peasant agriculture to distribute wealth and cool the planet; regulated markets and supply
<i>Approach to the food crisis</i>	Increased industrial production; unregulated corporate monopolies; land grabs; expansion of GMOs; public-private partnerships; liberal markets; international sourced food aid	Same as neoliberal but with increased medium farmer production and some locally sourced food aid; more agricultural aid but tied to GMOs and “bio-fortified/climate-resistant” crops	Right to food; better safety nets; sustainably produced, locally-sourced food; agroecologically based agricultural development	Human right to food sovereignty; locally sourced, sustainably produced, culturally appropriate, democratically controlled focus on UN/FAO negotiations
<i>Guiding Document</i>	World Bank 2009 Development Report	World Bank 2009 Development Report	International Assessment on Agriculture Science Technology and Development	Peoples’ Comprehensive Framework for Action to Eradicate Hunger

Figure 2: (Holt-Giménez, 2010). Food Regime-Food Movement Matrix, Used with permission from Food First

This matrix is critical in analyzing systems-change movements. The “Food Movements” approach is often made up of local, small-scale, community-based projects. This macro-analysis of how these movements are working in solidarity, offers a stark contrast to the “Corporate Food Regime” approach. This matrix is useful in sorting through the data that we have collected related to food access and food security in Vermont, and where *Huertas* fits in to the discussion. In its political orientation, *Huertas* falls within the Food Movements approach. *Huertas* attempts to address issues of power and agency by providing participants with the specific seeds and starts that they want to grow. *Huertas* also allows for greater autonomy by creating a space where farmworkers are able to cultivate and access fresh and culturally familiar foods.

In her book, *Paradise Transplanted: Migration and the Making of California’s Gardens*, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) writes on migrant community gardening initiatives, “Here they experience the restorative power of being in a garden that looks, feels, and smells like their original homelands, literally rooting their communities and culture in this part of the earth. But these are not simply gardens of nostalgia, for the gardens and sharing of information here enable community members to innovate versatile solutions to pressing problems.” (p. 119)

She writes that gardens are spaces of both recreation and re-creation of migrant workers’ homelands. Other researchers and authors have documented the micro and macro scale impact that gardens play in the identity and autonomy of immigrants. Patricia Hynes (1996) articulated this concept in her book *A Patch of Eden: America’s Inner-City Gardeners*. Hynes gathered qualitative interviews of urban, community garden spaces, and argued for the multiple forms of value that these spaces offered. In her book, *The*

Earth Knows My Name: Food, Culture, and Sustainability in the Gardens of Ethnic Americans Patricia Klindienst (2006) illustrated transnational networks of migration and food through case studies that displayed the role of gardens as a spaces of identity and meaning. Klindienst argued that immigrant gardens tell stories of resistance to cultural assimilation. This notion that the garden can be a space of autonomy and community fits within the progressive/radical approach to making systems-change. Through our interviews and participant observation, Latinx migrant farmworkers in northern Vermont use the gardens, planted through *Huertas*, as way to remain connected to their culture, while living and working far away from home. However, while *Huertas* aligns with the values of food sovereignty, there are deep complications that we have had to navigate as the project has developed.

The concept of food sovereignty is complicated by the confines of working with undocumented migrants. Sovereignty is based within the notion of jurisdiction and power, often held and maintained by a government or institution. As laid out in the conceptual framework, however, neoliberalism has been pervasive in challenging the sovereignty and autonomy of people who live within nation-states. Neoliberalism within the food system has promoted the Corporate Food Regime, which maintains a top-down approach to change and maintains the historical and on-going power structures of colonialism and capitalism. This is the genius of the food sovereignty movement- the act of people re-claiming this notion of power and autonomy. But, is planting gardens with migrant farmworkers who are denied citizenship by the sovereign nation in which they live and work really an act of radical opposition?

Huertas, as a project that seeks to promote autonomy and food access, is therefore also functioning within the confines of neoliberalism. *Huertas* is not an activist organization. The project focuses on promoting access to fresh, culturally familiar vegetables and herbs, but does so within the shadows, and so not explicitly challenging the invisibility of undocumented migrant farmworkers. McCandless (2010) writes,

“Federal legal structures encourage a network of beneficiaries (i.e. farmers) and supporters (e.g. health and social service providers) to participate in and reinforce workers’ invisibility. By doing so, all these actors maintain the appearance of the landscape uninterrupted, as Mitchell (1996) argues, by difference. Undocumented workers’ invisibility is facilitated by the enclosed, disciplined character of modern dairy agriculture in Vermont. Because it operates by funneling inputs produced in open fields through barns and milking parlors, work done by fully clandestine Mexican farmworkers, as well as their more visible and mobile citizen coworkers, has a landscape impact while being done largely from within enclosed spaces.” (p. 145)

Huertas is in a sense sustaining invisibility among farmworkers, by working within the confines of federal jurisdiction and current political authority, which criminalizes undocumented farmworkers. The garden project is not explicitly trying to change the macro-scale structures which are impacting farmworkers in the United States. *Huertas* is not dismantling the structures that sustain the industrial agrifood system. For this reason, I would situate the garden project within the progressive/food justice column in the matrix developed by Holt-Giménez. *Huertas* does alleviate some of the distress caused by isolation and barriers to food access among Latinx farmworkers in Vermont. In the

approach to the food crisis, *Huertas*, is promoting the notion that food is a right and empowering and enabling individuals to grow the food that they want to be eating.

Conclusion and Further Research

Huertas is one of the many creative avenues in which farmworkers living and working in the northern borderlands procure food. Despite the structural obstacles, Tomás, Lourdes, Fernando, and Yasmin are *sembrando* [planting] seeds that bring a *cosecha* [harvest] each season that nourishes them and their family, fresh vegetables and herbs that remind them of home. In this article I have illuminated the political and economic architecture that oppresses and exploits undocumented farmworkers nationally. I contextualized the dairy industry in Vermont and the unique challenges that farmworkers experience while working and living in this Northern border state. In this research it has become evident that the major obstacles in the daily lived experience for farmworkers in Vermont are border proximity and lacking a year-round visa option. The dairy industry in Vermont, and the U.S. food system as a whole, relies on the labor of undocumented farmworkers. The food system will not be sustainable or just until the people who are working within it are acknowledged and treated with dignity. Vermont prides itself on being a national role model in developing innovative models for community-supported, ecologically responsible agricultural practices. By promoting justice for migrant farmworkers and working in solidarity with other organizations, perhaps Vermont has the potential to create systemic change.

Further research that would contribute to the work of the food justice and food sovereignty movement would be to document the work of Migrant Justice. This

Vermont-based, worker-led organization is creating structural change and influencing policy in Vermont. For the past two years, Migrant Justice has been working on a campaign called “Milk with Dignity” that attempts to create change further up the food supply chain by asking companies, such as Ben & Jerry’s, who purchase milk from Vermont’s dairy farms to pay a higher premium for milk that comes from farms that follow a code of conduct that support farmworkers. This work is having an impact by raising awareness and increasing visibility of farmworkers in Vermont, while not polarizing dairy farmers, who for the most part are in compromised and vulnerable positions as well.

This recommendation raises the question of the role of activist research, which is distinct from the research that has directed my thesis. The data collection for this article has been conducted through relationships made through *Huertas* and University of Vermont Extension. One could argue that documenting the work of Migrant Justice would fall into the category of activist research or activist anthropology. The access to the field and access to people may be different than that accessed through UVM Extension. As in all research, and particularly when working with human subjects, there is an element of subjectivity. Our role as researchers impacts our surroundings and those who participate in the project. However, in order to fully capture the landscape and lived experience of farmworkers in Vermont, illuminating the role of Migrant Justice is relevant and necessary.

ARTICLE TWO: Rendering Visible the Experiences of Latinx Migrant Farmworkers Through Comics

Possible journal targets:
Journal of Medical Humanities
Visual Anthropology
EnthoGRAPHIC series

Abstract

This article looks at an applied cartooning project that seeks to address health and well-being among Latinx farmworkers through the use of comics. The project, *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*, uses storytelling and illustration as a tool to alleviate stress and other mental and emotional issues among undocumented farmworkers living and working on dairy farms in the state of Vermont. The cartoons that are coming out of this ongoing project will be used as a tool, distributed to farmworkers, with the hope of breaking cycles of isolation and relieving psychological distress. This article will provide an overview of the project and situate *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* within recent scholarship. The major areas of discourse relevant to this project are: looking at comics as a therapeutic tool known as “graphic medicine”, using comics as educational tools within the food justice movement, and emergent scholarship that employs comics as an anthropological method.

Introduction

Graphic novels and comics have developed into a diverse genre that conveys powerful stories which benefit the storyteller, artist, and reader. The use of comics as a literary form spans disciplines and topics and offers new, innovative ways of conveying and interpreting the lived human experience. Comics are an effective form of storytelling because they are simple and concise. This genre can include graphic history, graphic journalism, graphic medicine, as well as graphic memoir, autobiography, and narrative. They are being utilized as an effective therapeutic tool by a diverse range of people including medical professionals, activist groups, academics, and even the U.S. military. Contemporary research supports the notion that comics can be an effective therapeutic

tool, because they create what Ian Williams (2011) explains as the empathetic bond, connecting the reader to the storyteller (Czerwiec & Huang, 2014; Green & Myers, 2010; Williams, 2011). Recently, a new field of comics scholarship has emerged, which uses comics as an ethnographic tool (Brackenbury, 2016).

This article analyzes an applied comics project based in the state of Vermont called *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* that collects, illustrates, and shares stories from Latinx migrant farmworkers who are living and working within the U.S. food system. Many of these farmworkers suffer mental health impacts of separation from home, personal and cultural isolation, work related stresses, and other challenges of living in rural Vermont. Below, figure 3 illustrates some of the motivations to migrate and challenges experienced through an excerpt of one of the project's comics.



Figure 3: Excerpts from *Juana's Story*. p. 1 Art by Michael Tonn

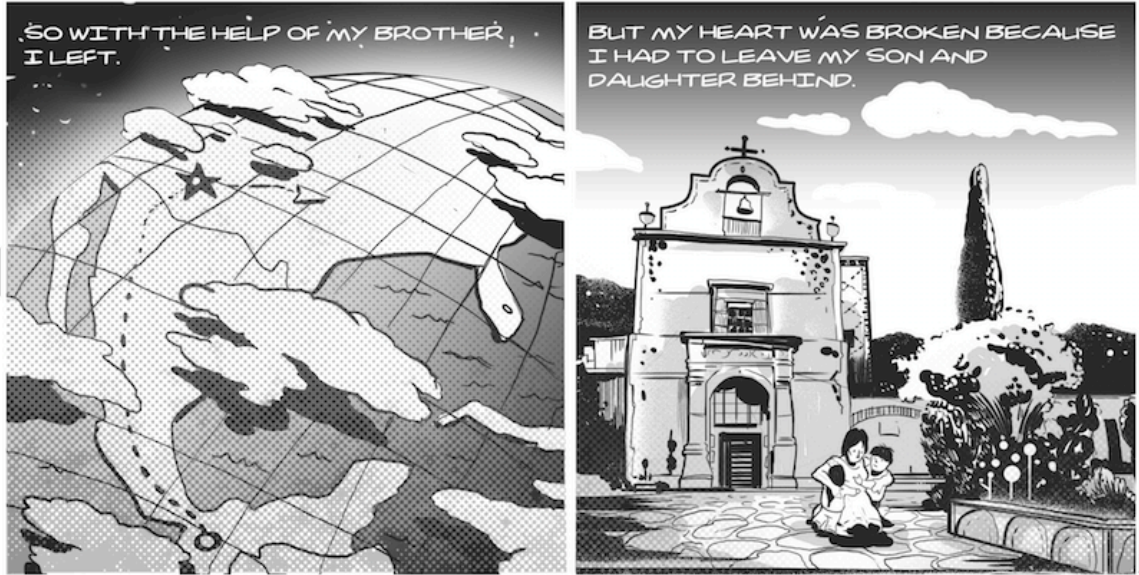


Figure 3: Excerpts from *Juana's Story*. p. 1 Art by Michael Tonn

The comics produced through the project have illuminated some of the unique obstacles experienced by Latinx migrant farmworkers in Vermont, but also speak to larger issues of immigration, poverty, and the food system. The stories shared in the comics often go beyond obstacles farmworkers face and share the ways they overcame those obstacles. In this way, the comics both acknowledge the difficulty farmworkers experience, but also highlight hope and resiliency. This article supports the comic project's thesis which states that having the opportunity to tell one's story, and hearing stories that reflect one's own experience, can be an important form of therapy and healing.

First, I make this argument by situating *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* within scholarship and contemporary work that uses comics as therapeutic tools called "Graphic Medicine". The literature review also examines the historical use of cartoons in Latin American history as forms of political satire. Lastly, the literature review examines the use of comics within the farm labor movement as a tool for

education and advocacy. The literature review is important because *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* is an ongoing project, and therefore has the potential to learn from research and perhaps strategically adapt or change where possible. As a member of the coordinating team, I hope to share insights from this literature review, and the expanded annotated bibliography, with the coordinating group. With the foundation provided by the literature review, I provide an overview of *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*, which includes the origin of the project, and the methods of creating the comics. As I shift into the analysis of the project, I discuss the use of comics as an anthropological method and where the project fits into emergent research and scholarship that is considering the use of graphic novels and comics as part of this method.

The use of comics, and visual methods in general, offers an innovative approach to ethnographic analysis that has the potential to address the power dynamic between researcher and participants/subjects. Further, I believe that visual methods present a new approach to doing research within the food system. The University of Vermont Food System's graduate program advises that in order to navigate the complex challenges posed within the food system, we must be able to work across disciplines and sectors. To solve the "wicked problems" of the food system, students are encouraged to engage in mixed methods research and to be engaged in the community. Food systems research should be adaptable, creative, and cognizant of the larger social, political, environmental, and economic systems at work. This article considers how the use of visual methods as an approach can present a promising method within food systems research through the applied comics project, *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*.

Literature Review: Graphic Medicine, Political Satire, and Food Justice

Comics have been typecasted as children's literature, evoking an image of superheroes and action stories. While superhero comics are still a cornerstone of graphic storytelling, the genre has transcended the entertainment category to take a new form. Comics are now being used to discuss pressing issues, to record history, and as a powerful form of memoir and autobiography¹¹. Comics are beginning to be a recognized method within academic scholarship and there have been an increasing number of publications and conferences on the subject. *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* is producing comics that capture and convey the barriers and tribulations experienced by migrant farmworkers, from experiences of domestic violence to the trauma of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. In this literature review, I will contextualize *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* within other applied comics and visual storytelling work, in order to better understand the potential of the project. First, I will look at work that uses comics as a therapeutic tool, called "graphic medicine". Then, I will write about the use of comics in the farm labor movement, comics within Latinx culture, and the history of using satirical cartoons. An overview of this literature within the comics genre will illuminate the work of *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* and provide the foundation to situate and analyze the project. Further the existing literature will be helpful

¹¹ For further reading in the graphic journalism/history/memoir genres: Blaufarb, R. & Clarke, L.: *Inhuman Traffick: The International Struggle against the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Graphic History* (2014).; Bechdel, A.: *Fun home: A family tragicomic* (2007); Delisle, G.: *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea* (2007), *Burma Chronicles* (2010) *Shenzhen: A Travelogue from China* (2012); Jerusalem: *Chronicles from the Holy City* (2015); Getz, T.R. & Clarke, L.: *Abina and the important men* (2012); Gloeckner, P. *The diary of a teenage girl* (2002); Hawke, E. & Ruth, G. *Indeh: A story of the Apache wars* (2016); Hedges, C. & Sacco, J. *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (2014); Kirshner, M. & MacKinnon, J.B. & Shoebridge, P. & Simons, M. *I Live Here* (2008); Mizuki, S. *Showa: A history of Japan* (2013); Robbins, Trina ed. *The Complete Wimmen's Commix* (2016); Sacco, J. *Palestine* (2001), *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995* (2002); Satrapi, M. *Perspolis* (2007); Schechter, R. & Clarker, L. *Mendoza the Jew* (2013); Stassen, J.P. *Deogratias: A tale of Rwanda* (2006); Spiegelman, A. *Maus* (1996); Wallman, S. *So Below: A comic about land* (2016). And really this is just a sampling. There are even more if one gets into travelogues, art-based history and memoir, etc.

for the discussion section in considering how the use of visual methods as an ethnographic approach can present a promising method within food systems research.

In the past decade, comics have increasingly been utilized as a therapeutic tool. The outlets for these comics, increasingly referred to as “Graphic Medicine” (Williams & Czerwiec et al., 2015) have varied, but the main intent is to create a tool that is cathartic for the storyteller, artist, and reader. Examples of comics used as therapeutic tools range from normalizing mental health struggles through comics on social media (Morse, 2016; Better, Drawn) to supporting veterans returning from war who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Axe, 2011; Shilling, 2015). At the forefront of graphic medicine scholarship are Ian Williams and MK Czerwiec. Together, they manage the website GraphicMedicine.org, which Ian Williams started in 2007. Graphic Medicine builds upon the concept of “narrative medicine” (Charon, 2006). Narrative medicine is based on the practice among medical professionals who affirm the experience of the patient and encourage self-reflection for both patients, their families, and the medical practitioner themselves (Czerwiec & Huang, 2014). Graphic medicine employs this concept, but transforms these often non-fiction stories into comics, to promote healing, understanding, and connection. Green & Myers (2010) introduce the notion of “graphic pathologies,” arguing that graphic stories have an important role in the medical field. They write, “Recently, a distinctive sub-genre of graphic stories that we call graphic pathologies— illness narratives in graphic form—has emerged to fill a niche for patients and doctors.” Building upon this work, MK Czerwiec (2014), also known as the “Comic Nurse”, writes about the role of comics in supporting people who are going through having a family member in hospice. She also argues that comics are helpful for the

person who is sharing their experience, those who are reading the comic, but also for health care providers, who read these and can be enlightened in the window they provide into their patients and family member's experiences. The author reflects:

“If a medical professional can, via the many benefits of the comic form, develop an empathic bond with a character, and imagine himself or herself in relation to the position of patient or family member, perhaps the insight provided by this mirroring in the text can serve as a newfound coping skill in stressful situations.” (p. 18)

This suggests that comics can be beneficial as an educational tool beyond the process of telling and creating the story. “Graphic medicine” is particularly relevant to *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* because it provides several areas of potential benefit.

First, is the concept that sharing one's story is, in itself, a therapeutic process (Czerwiec & Huang, 2014). Williams writes on the process of creating a graphic memoir and the catharsis that the authors and storytellers experience as they share their stories. He writes that storytelling and healing have historically been conduits for healing. He writes,

“For the reader, graphic fiction can function as a portal into the individual experience of illness, laid out in the unique combination of words and text. There is so much non-propositional information packed into a comic, that the medium lends itself to very powerful narrative, creating empathetic bonds between the author and the reader” (p. 354)

Here, again, is the notion of the “empathetic bond” (Williams, 2011), a second benefit of *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*, that is supported within the research of “graphic medicine”. As the comics are completed within *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most*

Costly Journey they are printed in booklets and distributed to other farmworkers. They will also be made available to the general public online in a PDF format, so that they can be used as an educational tool. In the same way that Czerwiec (2014) writes about the benefit for medical practitioners reading the comics, the comics of migrant farmworker stories have the potential to create a greater social shift in the ways that the general public understand immigration and labor within the U.S. food system. Often immigration is understood and communicated through demographics and statistics that sometimes depersonalize the individuals who are living and working in the U.S. Through comics, the empathetic bond may negate this dehumanization by bringing to life the people who are telling the stories.

El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey is not the first project of this kind. In 2014, the Food Chain Workers Alliance¹² published a comic book called the *Food Chain Avengers* (Dye & DeLeon, 2014). This comic book draws from lived experiences of workers in the U.S. industrial food system. The five main characters of the book represent sectors of the food chain: production, processing, distribution, retail, and food service. The comic book is about uniting to create change- a modern day superhero tale. The book is being promoted as a tool for advocacy and education. In an interview with Civil Eats, Diana Robinson, FCWA's Campaign and Education Coordinator, explains why they chose the format of a comic book:

¹² The Food Chain Workers Alliance is a coalition of worker-based organizations whose members plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food, organizing to improve wages and working conditions for all workers along the food chain. The Alliance works together to build a more sustainable food system that respects workers' rights, based on the principles of social, environmental and racial justice, in which everyone has access to healthy and affordable food. (<http://foodchainworkers.org/>)

“The comic book idea came out of one of our yearly workers’ exchanges.

Members thought it would be a great way to do popular education and to educate youth. *Food Chain Avengers* will be available to download digitally in English, Spanish, and Mandarin. The comic book is based on testimonies and stories of [actual] workers, even though the characters are fictional. I think it gives food workers hope that they can come together and change the food system.” (pg. 1)

The *Food Chain Avengers* is effective in pulling back the curtain on an element of the food system that is often (and intentionally) kept invisible. There is an intentional distance maintained between consumers and those who work within the food system. If consumers were regularly witnessing the exploitation, ecological and social impacts of the food system, there would be a resonant demand for change. However, in order to maintain the efficient and profitable system in place, there is an intentional separation. *Food Chain Avengers* is a creative and innovative initiative which humanizes migrant workers and advocated for positive change.

Comics, graphic novels and cartoons have a legacy in Latin America (as well as other places) of advocacy and social critique. This legacy harkens back to José Guadalupe Posada, who used printmaking and engraving satirical and political cartoons in Mexico in the late 1800’s. Posada is perhaps most famous for his *Calaveras*- skeletons and skulls- that were often dressed in fancy clothing, critiquing the bourgeois upper class in Mexico (Congdon & Hallmark, 2002). Posada inspired and influenced many political/satirical cartoonists in Mexico, such as Abel Quezada, whose work began in the 1940’s as his cartoons ridiculed the ruling political party and illuminated corruption and suspicious activity that impacted Mexicans (Maldonado, 2012). In the 1960’s Eduardo

del Río, “Rius”, initiated the “didactic comic book”, a genre that moved political cartoons into comic strips (Maldonado, 2012). These artists contributed to a developing genre and form of social commentary in Mexico and Latin America. Recently, Bruce Campbell (2009) published *¡Viva la historieta! : Mexican comics, NAFTA, and the politics of globalization*, which is about graphic narratives that were created after the passage of NAFTA. These historical and contemporary works by Mexican cartoonists and artists speak to the cultural significance of comics as an effective medium, which is particularly relevant to *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*.

The Comics Project: Overview, Themes and Methods

El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey was initiated Julia Doucet, RN, who helps to run the Open Door Clinic, a health clinic that serves people who are underinsured or uninsured and need medical attention. Many patients at the clinic are migrant farmworkers, with most coming from Addison County. Julia observed that many farmworkers were suffering from stomachaches and headaches, yet after running tests, these symptoms did not have any clear cause. After seeing this repeatedly, she began to suspect that these symptoms were indicative of anxiety, loneliness, and depression caused by extremely high levels of stress. In her work in the medical field, Julia had caught wind of projects that used comics as a therapeutic tool, and she thought that perhaps this could be a good medium to support farmworkers living and working in Vermont.

Migrant farmworkers in the state of Vermont experience a unique set of barriers and challenges. In addition to experiencing trauma from crossing the border and arriving at their current employment, many farmworkers suffer extreme isolation while living and

working in Vermont. There are an estimated 1,000-1,200 farmworkers in Vermont and 95% work on dairy farms (Wolcott-MacClausland & Shea, 2014). Dairy work is year-round, and so, migrant farmworkers do not qualify for temporary H2A work visas used in seasonal agricultural work, such as picking apples and other crops (Wolcott-MacClausland & Shea, 2014). Vermont is unique because it is the 2nd whitest state in the U.S and it has a relatively low number of Latinx farmworkers. Further, Vermont shares its northern border with Canada, and so the chance of undocumented farmworkers being identified is heightened. This position puts migrant farmworkers who are living and working in Vermont in a compromised and vulnerable position any time they are in a public space. As a result, farmworkers are pressured by their own fear of deportation as well as from their employers, to remain invisible (Mares et al, 2013; McCandless, 2010).

In some states, lacking proper documentation may not hinder day-to-day life to the same degree, but in Vermont, when undocumented Latinx farmworkers are out in public space they become hyper-visible. This pressures farmworkers in Vermont to remain in the shadows of the milking parlor and their housing, which is usually located on the dairy farm, and to be invisible from the picturesque rolling hills and red barns that characterize the Green Mountain State. Understandably, this dynamic of being invisible from the working landscape, yet hyper-visible when in public space causes high levels of fear and anxiety. This fear and anxiety is compounded by isolation and living in a foreign country thousands of miles away from your friends and family. Julia knew of these stresses that farmworkers were experiencing, and was beginning to observe the physical implications in the form of headaches and stomachaches, as well as depression and mental health issues. *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* sprung from the

observation that these physical ailments are symptomatic of a greater suffering that is occurring. Julia spearheaded the comics project, in hopes that comic books might be able to address some of these issues that farmworkers are facing and to help them adjust to life in Vermont.

While in the waiting room of the clinic in 2015, Julia connected with Anthropologist, Dr Teresa Mares, who was at the time conducting surveys for her research looking at food access among Latinx migrant farmworkers. As a cultural anthropologist, one of the main forms of her research is through participant observation and field notes. During a visit to conduct surveys, Dr Mares had written down a short story that one of the farmworkers who she had surveyed told her. Julia used this story for the first comic produced, called *A New Type of Work*. Julia connected with Tillie Walden, a young artist at the Center for Cartoon Studies, who drew the first comic. Tillie worked from a short transcript to make an 8-page comic based on the story told by Delmar, the farmworker who Teresa met in the waiting room at Open Door Clinic.

A New Type of Work was the spark that started the collaborative project *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*. Julia and Teresa connected with the Vermont Folklife Center Co-Director' Andy Kolovos whose personal interest in comics combined with his professional experience as an archivist made for a great advocate and future coordinator for the project. Naomi Wolcott-MacCausland, who coordinates a health outreach program for migrant farmworkers in Vermont, was brought on board to help with developing themes for the comics. Her participation and insight has been critical in developing the project and constantly re-iterating the mission of the project. Lastly, Marek Bennet was brought in to the organizing team. Marek is a comics artist and

educator based in New Hampshire, who runs a comic workshop and has devoted much of his career and energy to comics, community, and social justice. I became involved in spring 2015 as a research assistant with Teresa and began collecting stories and transcribing/translating the recorded stories. Since then, I have attended all of the strategic planning meetings and played a coordinator role. Together, this coordinating team has driven *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*.

As a collaborative team we developed themes that would be important to target as we developed booklets intended for mental health support. These themes were spearheaded by Naomi and Julia, who have both had the most contact with farmworkers, particularly concerning physical symptoms and mental health issues, in their work providing medical care. Together, we developed a list of situational and contextual themes:

- Isolation/loneliness/disempowerment/motivation to migrate
- Aggression/violence
- Separation from family
- Men with wives in home country
- Women with kids in home country
- Reuniting with kids after years apart
- Lack of community/freedom/mobility in VT
- Relationships: Friendships/Romantic interests
- Language barriers
- Lack of transportation
- Sense of responsibility- feeling like an ATM for friends and family back Home, which leads to working maximum hours
- Interpersonal relationships
 - Employee-employer
 - Interfamilial
 - Co-workers
- Cultural outlets/pressures/differences
- Different weather
- Lack of culturally familiar food
- Different ways of communication/interacting

- Cyclical nature of migration, motivation to migrate, wanting to max hours
- Exhaustion/poor nutrition, which leads to being run down/stressed/anxious

This list was accompanied by our desire to include coping mechanisms that have been observed, which included alcohol, prostitution, TV/music, internet, soccer, license/drivers permit, the role of Migrant Justice, community integration, outreach, and friendships with co-workers and employees. Some of these coping mechanism are healthy, while others are less optimal. The initial goal was to make farmworkers suffering in isolation feel less alone. These themes and coping mechanism represent reoccurring experiences and strategies among farmworkers as observed by the health providers.

In an ideal scenario, the method of collecting the stories and developing the comics is as collaborative as possible, though, there have been several different approaches thus far. Because we are working with very different people, with a language barrier and often some level of geographical distance, there are inherent challenges. As a collaborative team, we decided that the ideal process incorporates (1) the story being recorded and transcribed, (2) the artist sketches up the story in comic form, (3) the comic sketch is run by the story teller for changes and feedback, ideally in this step the artist meets the story teller, if they were not present at the interview/story telling time, (4) the artist incorporates the feedback from the storyteller and develops a more polished version, (5) the final draft is run by the story teller again, (6) the final comic is printed in Spanish in booklet form to be distributed to farmworkers, and (7) the comic is translated to English and made into a PDF form available to the public online. This is the ideal situation, although it is not always what happens. In the example of Juana's story from the introduction, this story was collected by a health promoter working in Northern

Vermont. The health promoter brought the artist along for the interviews, and brought several versions of the comic as it was in progress. The themes addressed were focused on the struggle of being torn between Mexico and Vermont, as Juana had children in both countries.

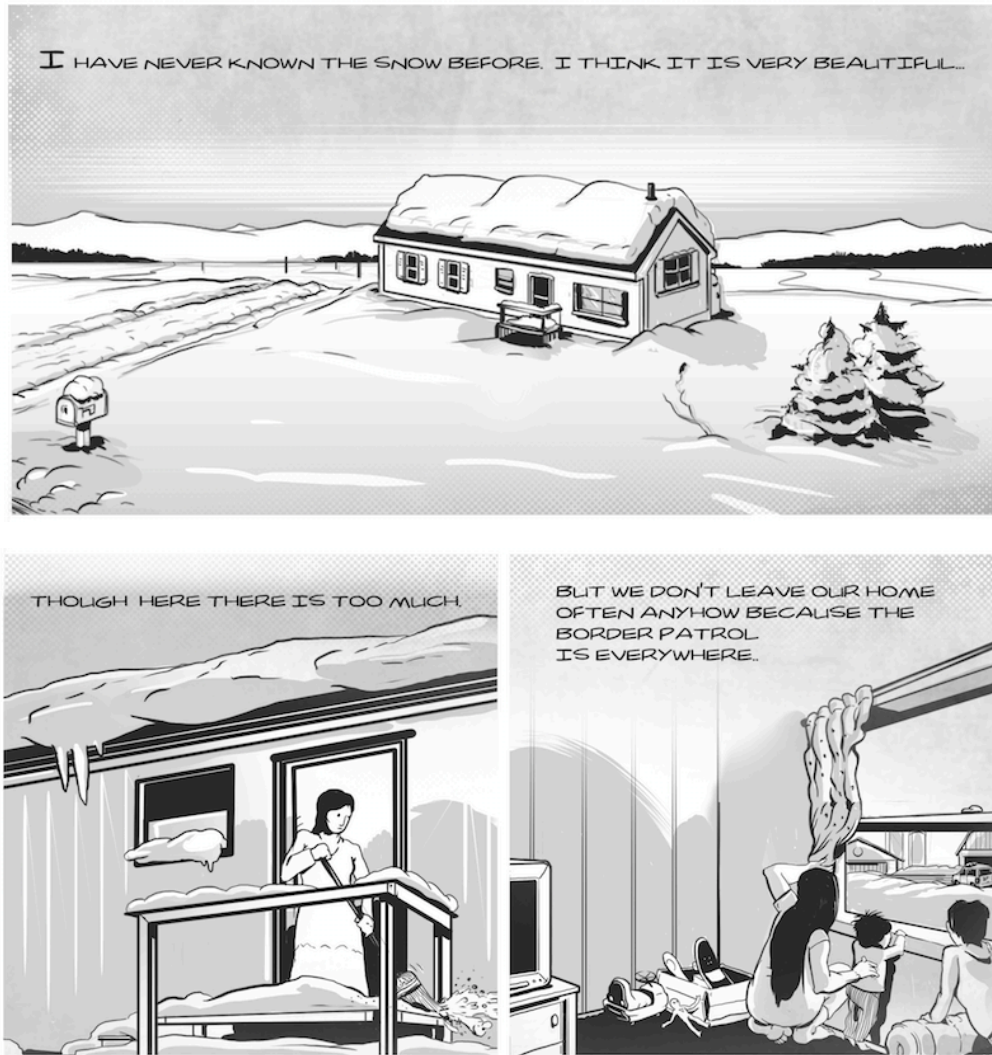


Figure 4: Excerpts from *Juana's Story*. p. 5. Artwork by Michael Tonn

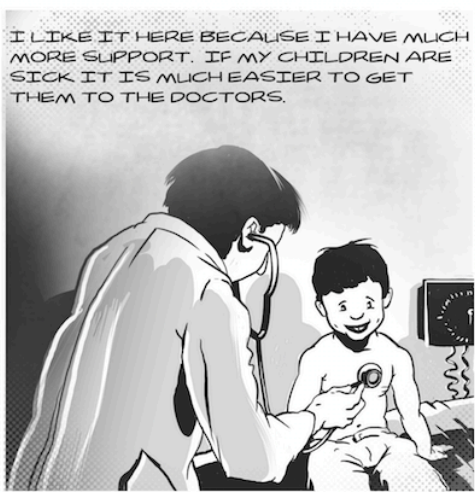
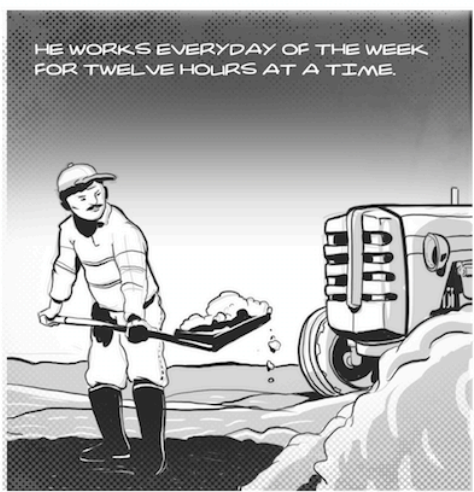
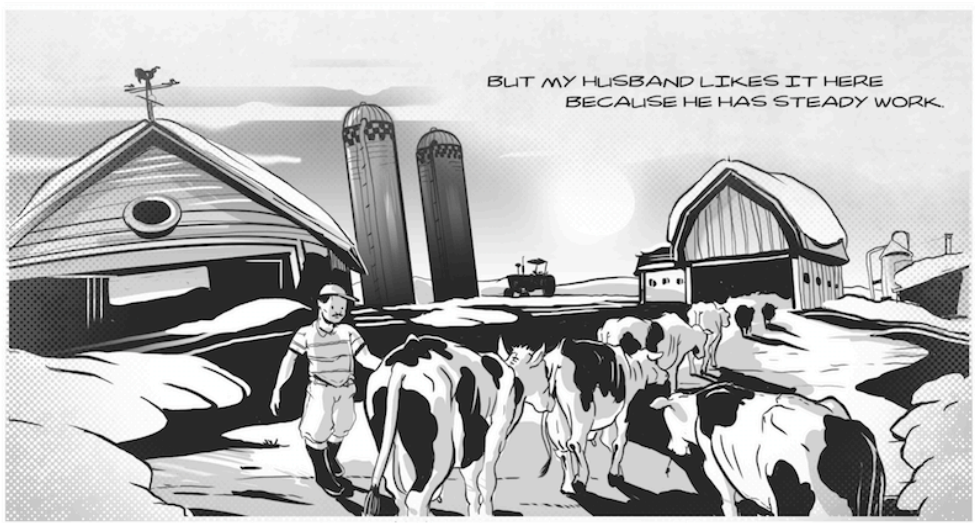


Figure 5: Excerpts from *Juana's Story*. p. 6-7. Artwork by Michael Tonn

Juana's Story ends with the frame, "So, my heart will be forever split between two places". However, as the artist, Michael Tonn, was finishing this comic, a tragedy struck Juana and her family. Her husband, who was 32, died in his sleep while resting after a shift from work in November 2015. Completely traumatized emotionally, Juana had to organize the funeral and figure out the costly and complicated logistics of transporting his body back to Mexico. In late December, she returned to Chiapas with her two young sons. Before she departed, the health promoter shared with her the complete comic, and Juana replied that there is another chapter, now, to add to her story.

This is an extreme case of a challenge faced in attempting to make the comic creation process as collaborative as possible. Other barriers include geographic distance—for example, Marek and Tillie have both illustrated comics based off of interview transcripts without meeting the story teller. As of August 2016, there are 17 stories in the process or completed. Of these stories, five have reached the final stage of being printed in English and released to the public, which leaves 12 comics in-progress. As this is an on-going process, we have the opportunity to prioritize the collaborative creation as much as possible. In the preliminary analysis that follows, I place some of the completed comics into conversation with one another by pulling themes that are emerging in the completed comics. In the discussion section, I discuss the emerging field of study looking at comics as a method in the ethnographic toolkit that can be used in anthropology and food systems research. I will consider how *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* may or may not fit into this scholarship.

Encerrado: Preliminary Analysis of El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey

Because the comics project is still ongoing, there is limited analysis on the comics themselves. Beyond strategic planning within the collaborative group to identify which themes are missing from the initial list of goals, we have not collectively analyzed the comics. Early on, as we were collecting interviews and handing over full transcripts to the artists, the coordinating team found that the artists tended to focus on the experience of migrating from the U.S. to Mexico, as that was the most dramatic part of the story. But a handful of comics about migration did not necessarily meet the goal of the project, which is to highlight experiences and coping mechanisms here in Vermont. And so, the process shifted to working with the artist to highlight certain parts of the story to better fit into the broader project. For the purpose of this article, I explore a potential avenue to analyzing these comics, to draw out re-occurring themes and consider how these themes may fit into the next section looking at comics as a method of data collection.

To analyze the comics, I used four completed, and two near-completed comics: *Juana's Story: A Heart Divided in Two, Where the Birds Sing, A New Type of Work, Painful to Remember, The First Love of Every Woman Should be Self Love, and drafts of Something Inside and You Suffer to Come*. Using a code book that was already being used on a larger research project on food access among farmworkers, for which I am a co-researcher, I conducted preliminary hand-coding on the comics. Codes are themes that we use to analyze in-depth interview transcripts and field notes. The codes inform the larger claims of the research as they allow for themes to emerge and prioritize the lived experience and story of research participants. After hand-coding, I uploaded the comics into ATLAS.ti, a computer software program used for qualitative data analysis. I went

through each comic and coded again. For example, one code that is used on this research project is “Rural Livelihood”, referring to farmworkers who come from a farming background or whose family works the land. In the preliminary analysis of *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* “rural livelihood” came up in two of the comics, as seen below in figure 6-7.



Figure 6: Excerpt from *New Type of Work*. p. 8. Artwork by Tillie Walden



Figure 7: Excerpt from *Juana's Story*. p. 1. Artwork by Michael Tonn

While this is a preliminary analysis, because the comics are still in progress, the process of coding can be useful. Coding allows for themes to emerge, which can teach us about farmworker experiences in their own words. This project seeks to address mental health, stress, and anxiety among farmworkers. By coding the comics, potential causes of stress and anxiety may emerge. By looking for repetition in the codes that emerge, then we can better understand mental illness, and direct the project accordingly. If the overall goal is to promote well-being, then there needs to be a foundational understanding at what is impeding well-being.

The ATLAS.ti software allowed me to easily go between comics based on the reoccurring themes and put the stories into conversation with one another. Another code that comes up frequently is “encerrado/isolation”. This code indicates the experience in Vermont when farmworkers express the unique challenge of feeling trapped and locked in. Often the code “encerrado” is associated with the code “fear” and “border patrol”. Below are frames extracted from separate comics that I coded “encerrado/isolation”.



Figure 8: Excerpt from *New Type of Work*. p. 6. Art by Tillie



Figure 9: Excerpt from draft of *What's Inside*. Art by Marek Bennet.
 Translation: "More like fear, scared of going to the store. Without enough driving experience to get a license."



Figure 10: Excerpt from *Juana's Story*. p. 5. Art by Michael Tonn



Figure 11: Excerpt from *The first love....* p. 4. Art by Iona Fox



Figure 12: Excerpt from *Where the Birds Sing*. p. 1. Art by Tillie Walden

The reoccurring theme speaks to prevalence of “*encerrado*/isolation” and also some of the challenges it may present, for example going to the store or going outside into the fresh air. Using coding and analysis as an ongoing process of creating the comics can also tell us if the themes that were determined early on should be adjusted or tweaked at all.

This form of analysis could allow for the stories and comics to tell a greater story. In coding the comics we see what may present a promising tool for conducting research. The iterative process of taking the comic to the story teller to receive feedback allows the participant to co-construct the story that is being told. However, if this comics project were being evaluated as research, the development of themes and selecting specific people to share select parts of their story may impact the comparative and positivist approach to conducting research. In research, we would want a more random sample and have consistency in the interview questions, so as to be able to consider the comics as data. In the next section, I discuss the ways in which *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* does and does not align with the methodological approach of ethnography.

Discussion: Is *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* True Ethnography?

A new field of study among scholars is looking at how comics might present a promising method in anthropological research. In this section, I am particularly interested in starting the discussion of whether or not comics can present a useful method in conducting ethnographic work in cultural anthropology. Ethnography is both the process and product of cultural anthropology. It is the result of long term field work and it centers participant observation as a central method of data collection. The goal of the

ethnography is to capture the lived experience of daily life and to develop theory that can bridge macro concepts with the lived experience. For example, the lived experience of farmworkers in Vermont who reflect upon rural livelihoods and the inability to make a living in Mexico speaks to the macro concept of the international political economy of neoliberalism. Ethnography is community-based research, guided by lived experiences of the study participants and the researcher's observations. Field research is a key component of understanding the social world and systemic influences on people's every day lived experiences (Bailey, 2006). Contemporary ethnography offers opportunities for new ways of conducting research that challenges the lines traditionally drawn between the researcher and those who are being studied. D. Soyini Madison (2005), author of *Critical Ethnography*, writes about the essential role of the researcher understanding his or her own positionality, engagement, theory, and method in developing a meaningful research project. Madison writes,

“What does it mean for the critical ethnographer to ‘resist domestication’? It means that she will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her, to make accessible- to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of- the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach”(p. 5).

Madison challenges the researcher to be self-reflective and consider the power dynamic embedded in conducting ethnographic research. There have been many evolutions of ethnographic fieldwork. New and innovative methods have challenged researchers to consider subjectivity and bias that they may be inserting into the data they collect through fieldwork, and offer ways to navigate power discrepancy and positionality.

Visual ethnography is an approach to conducting fieldwork that employs the use of photography, video, and new media. In the book *Doing Visual Ethnography* (2013), Sarah Pink writes that anthropology experienced “a crisis through which positivist arguments and realist approaches to knowledge, truth and objectivity, were challenged” (pp 3). This crisis called for anthropologists to be self-reflexive and encouraged the researchers to acknowledge and identify their own subjectivities. At this time, other methods of data collection were considered, and the “ethnographic toolkit” was expanded. Also at this time, visual methods began to be considered a valid form of data collection, and even promised the potential to dismantle the power dynamic inherent to anthropological research, and other disciplines that conduct research on human populations. Pink writes, “When ethnographers produce photographs or video, these images, as well as the experience of producing and discussing them, become part of their ethnographic research” (pp 1). Visual ethnography is about the process as well as the product. For the past three decades, visual methods have transcended the discipline of anthropology and have been accepted and utilized across disciplines. Visual methods include photography, video, and media, and have adapted and evolved with shifts in technology. Just using visual methods, such as camera, video, or other media, one does not inherently challenge the power dynamic between the researcher and participant, in fact it may risk ethical boundaries when not conducted correctly. But when employed with an intentional approach, as Sarah Pink suggests, it has the potential to allow for a more participatory, collaborative, and engaged form of data collection. Further, visual methods of doing research can be a decolonizing or feminist approach, because they include research participants in the process of creating and collecting the data. Visual

ethnographic methods attempt to navigate the extractive nature of research by including and collaborating with participants. As of 2016, there is limited research looking at the role of comics as a visual method or ethnography.

As described earlier, the ideal method for producing comics in *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* is a collaborative and participatory process. The comics are developed in stages where the story teller is able to provide feedback and correct to comic as it is being developed. If we consider these methods as ethnographic, there is a unique participatory element, that a written account may not elicit. In most ethnographic work, the researcher is taking their own observations and perceptions and recording them through written field notes. Sharing a comic with a participant in ethnographic research makes the research and its data more accessible. The imagery and visual representation is engaging in a way that a written transcript may not be, thus eliciting and creating more space for feedback from the participant. This process of collaborating on developing a comic has the potential to provoke a more participatory and applied outcome. This is important, particularly in decolonizing and feminist research that seeks to address the power dynamics of conducting research.

The use of comics in anthropology is an emergent field of scholarship and an examination of this work is helpful in sorting out whether or not *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* may be considered ethnographic work. Comics have been used as a tool for teaching ethnography (Campbell Galman, 2007; Nye, 2015) and as a method of taking field notes (Ramos, 2004; Ingold, 2011; Taussig 2011; Caussey, 2015). There is also emergent scholarship that is looking at graphic anthropology and the ethnographic comic as tools for reporting research (Bartoszko, Birgette Leseth & Ponomarew, 2011;

O’Sullivan & Kozinets, 2013). Anne Brackenbury is a contributor to the Upteaching Culture blog and is also Executive Editor for University of Toronto Press. She wrote a post January 19, 2016 titled ‘2016: Trends in Teaching, Publishing, and Anthropology’. She writes about the importance of 2015 in expanding the use of comics in academia. In 2015, there was an ongoing blog series called Graphic Adventures in Anthropology¹³ and the year ended with a new series ethnoGRAPHIC¹⁴ being announced by University of Toronto Press. In 2015, the Centre for Imaginative Ethnography’s ran a series called Comics and the Anthropological Imagination. Brackenbury writes in their blog:

“These aren’t your kid’s superhero comics. Anthropological comics promise to embrace the medium not just to reach a broader audience, but to address some of the discipline’s ongoing challenges vis-a-vis collaboration, representation, and narrative experimentation. Remember, you heard it here first.”

Beyond the work of Anne Brackenbury and the contributing authors and artists from the blog series, *Graphic Adventure in Anthropology* there has been scarce scholarship working to include graphic novels and comics within the field of anthropology. Andrew Dicks (2015) published an article in *Visual Anthropology* titled “Stories From Below: Subject-generated Comics” that looks at the role of grassroots comics as an effective method. This article is structured as a case study in South Africa that seeks to challenge

¹³ The Graphic Adventure in Anthropology included using comics and drawing as a method in the field, the potential of using comics as a teaching technique, and exploring ethical questions of representation and comic stereotypes and how they are or are not being communicated across cultures. From the blog post, below is a full list of the contributors:

Andrew Causey: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method
Stacy Leigh Pigg: Learning Graphic Novels from an Artist’s Perspective
Sherine Hamdy & Mona Damluji: Reflecting on Arab Comics: 90 Years of Visual Culture
Coleman Nye: Teaching Comics in a Medical Anthropology & Humanities Class
Gillian Crowther: Fieldwork Cartoons Revisited
Juliet McMullin: Comics in the Community
Nick Sousanis: Unflattening Scholarship with Comics

¹⁴ The ethnoGRAPHIC series pioneering academic research using graphic novels and comics in anthropology. This series was announced in April 2015 and they will be publishing authors through the University of Toronto Press on themes related to graphic ethnography. <http://www.utpteachingculture.com/announcing-ethnographic-a-new-series/>

top-down development theories through comics. O'Sullivan, S. & Kozinets, R. (2013) posted an article titled, "The Ethnographic Comic: A creative Structure for Analysis Inference and Reporting" which explored the use of comics within anthropology as a tool in taking field notes and 'writing' up one's ethnography. In this article, they outline how to make an ethnographic comic book. They argue that the use of comics is effective in triangulating the researchers data, concluding,

"These works reflect a constant tension between liberating techniques and the desire to report objectively on the Others' culture. The ethnographic comic book strikes an elegant balance, between the desire to provide resonance, emotion, and a sense of vividness of the Others' culture and the necessity of portraying the culture in manner that offers a reality as loyal as possible to the context under investigation" (pp 8).

They continue to suggest that the ethnographic comic needs to be considered in addition to theory, and that this approach should be researched further. On one hand, this analysis is helpful for *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* because it situates comics within the academic discipline. However, the process of creating the ethnographic comic as suggested by O'Sullivan, S. & Kozinets is centered around the researcher's observations and creation, as opposed to the collaborative process that *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* strives for. While the authors encourage the researcher to consider the culture that is being documented, they do not incorporate a participatory element in creating the comic.

In addition to being an effective method of data collection, challenging the positivist critique and providing opportunities for participatory methods, comics may be

an effective tool for reporting findings. Revisiting the work of Czerwiec & Huang (2014), who write about the role of comics in the medical field, the ethnographic comic may provide deeper insight for readers. Czerwiec & Huang write:

As Martha Nussbaum (1992) has argued, literature creates a space for us to test and cultivate our moral imaginations, allowing us to develop more nuanced appreciation for our own moral capacities as well as that of others. Comics have a unique power, more so for many readers than text alone, to create an empathetic bond between reader and creator.” (pp 18)

This notion of the empathetic bond may be promising for the delivery and final product of the ethnography, further supporting the argument for including comics as a method. *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* is not structured as an ethnographic comic, but does present a promising tool in the overall ethnographic toolkit. By utilizing the comics based upon true stories of migrant farmworkers in an ethnographic study, the insight and final product can be triangulated with other methods from the ethnographic toolkit of cultural anthropology, such as participant observation and in depth interviews.

Conclusion

Visual ethnography offers an opportunity for researchers to include participants in the process of collecting and generating data. As of now, comics are not explicitly a method of creating a visual ethnography. However, the objectives and outcomes of applied comics and visual methods have significant similarities and potential for association. *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* on its own is not true ethnography, but rather toes the line between therapeutic tool, graphic autobiography, and

ethnography. There is a limit to the comprehensiveness of the project's ability to capture the full narrative. The process of selecting which themes to focus on and the collaborative group cherry-picking which parts of the story to focus on limits the depth and emergent nature that ethnography emphasizes. The sampling for the participants was not random, and the stories were, to a certain extent, crafted. This selection process was non-scientific and could be considered biased, as the members of the collaborative team already knew the participant's stories. However, this is effective for the project, as the intended audience is not academics, but farmworkers themselves. The goal of the project is to provide mental health support based on the concept that having the opportunity to tell one's story, and hearing stories that reflect one's own experience, can be an important form of therapy and healing. The fact that those involved in the project have long term experience in the field, and relationships with the participants, addresses some of the ethical questions that come up. The collaborative team did not helicopter in and develop this project without a foundation of knowledge and participant observation, but rather developed themes based on lived experience and observation.

Nevertheless, there is great potential for projects such as *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* to generate innovative and insightful data in an ethnographic project and in food systems scholarship. I believe there is a need for further research in the area of ethnographic comics. The O'Sullivan, S. & Kozinets version is visually difficult to absorb, incorporating both photos, theory and narrative. It lacks the participatory approach that *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* uses in the creation of the comic. This approach is critical if the goal is to challenge to power dynamic present in conducting research.

As more comics are completed through *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* a full analysis could be done of the project. Insights from these comics may inform the collaborating group and general public on the causes of stress and anxiety for farmworkers. If the overall goal is to promote well-being, then we should prioritize the voices and stories of farmworkers themselves. Ongoing research looking at farmworkers in the state of Vermont, could utilize the comics produced through *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* as an insightful and legitimate source of data to triangulate with other data. Further research or work could utilize the comics in a focus group setting where farmworkers use the comics to generate conversation about mental health. This could further promote well-being among farmworkers and identify new coping mechanisms.

The comics render visible the experiences and stories of farmworkers in Vermont who are forced to be invisible. The comics from *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* can be used to educate and advocate for farmworker rights. In the final process of converting the final version of the *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* comics into PDF format, translating, and making them available online, the project seeks to share the stories to a wider audience. The comics can be used in classrooms, by advocacy groups, and in public presentations. This form of advocacy and education seeks to create systemic change, believing that creating attitude change will then encourage policy change. The *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey* comics capture the lived reality of migrant farmworkers in a compelling and concise format that has the potential to be used to educate and advocate for farmworker rights.

Lastly, in considering further research, I suggest that comics as a tool for data collection could be promising in food systems research. Food systems scholarship seeks to understand the complex relationships that are related to food in order to navigate social, political, economic, and environmental networks that govern and influence the food system. UVM's Graduate Program in Food Systems promotes that it “cultivates students to be adaptable problem solvers and systems thinkers. Our program prepares students to address some of the most challenging problems of contemporary food system”. Food systems research spans across disciplines and employs qualitative and quantitative research methods. There is opportunity to work on applied research that disseminates the findings in the community. Much like conducting ethnographic research, the process and product of food systems research are not inherently participatory or challenging of power dynamics embedded within research. However, as an innovative new field, food systems researchers have the opportunity, and perhaps even the obligation, to challenge the power dynamic of conducting research. I return to the quotation from Madison (2005) who so eloquently states, the critical ethnographer must “use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her, to make accessible- to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of- the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach” (p. 6). Beyond the importance of the subject matter that a food systems scholar may choose to research, the method of conducting the research is equally important. Including visual ethnography in the toolkit of possible methods of food systems scholarship allows for deeper insight and innovative research. The final product of visual methods is more easily accessible and ready to disseminate, thus having a greater impact beyond academia.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

After four and a half years of conducting research with farmworkers in Vermont, I am still often perplexed by the complexity of the situations I find myself in. There are three overarching conclusions from my research. (1) The food system is reliant on undocumented farmworkers; (2) There is a need for systemic change through public policy; and (3) There are small projects working to create spaces of justice and autonomy. These three points do not exist in isolation from one another. Through attitude change there is greater potential for policy change. Small initiatives, such as *Huertas* and *El Viaje Más Caro/The Most Costly Journey*, are places where agency and well-being among Latinx migrant farmworkers can be fostered. These initiatives represent resilient responses to political and economic exploitation in the food system. This thesis seeks to untangle and demystify the political and economic systems which systematically strip farmworkers in the U.S. industrial food system. However, I admit that this work is ongoing and there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done. There is no distinct “bad guy” or evil corporation, as there is no silver bullet that will solve the problems. The work to understand labor and the food system, structural racism, and political and economic neoliberalism is complicated and non-linear. I have been consistently reminded of this complexity as I have conducted my research, broadened my understanding through the literature review, and condensed the data and the stories shared with me into two articles of this thesis.

On July 14, 2016, as I was working on writing up this thesis, I had to take a break to say goodbye to Lourdes. Lourdes, whose narrative was introduced in the first article,

had decided to finally return to Mexico with her two children. As previously mentioned, Lourdes lived *on* the border with Canada, and very rarely left the farm. However, on this day she was in the small city of Burlington, where I live, for a little going away celebration. Lourdes and her family were at Pizza Putt, an arcade/pizza restaurant/indoor mini golf combo. They were having a farewell meal with the family who own the farm where her husband has worked for ten years. Teresa picked me up in the middle of a summer downpour. Once we arrived to Pizza Putt we wove through the chaos of flashing lights and excited children running around, trailing lines of arcade tickets, until we found the restaurant. There, we found Lourdes, her husband and two children- the baby who is about seven months and her six-year-old daughter who I first met when she was just two. They were with two other families, that farm owner, his wife, and teenage children had driven them down to Burlington for this going away party. They made space for us at the table, which was covered in paper plates with leftover crust, and the kind of soda cups that you can refill as many times as you would like at the machine. The walls in the room were painted with Winnie the Pooh and the Little Mermaid, as old American hits played on the sound system. I thought to myself about how strangely American this scene was.

We chatted in a combination of Spanish and English. The wife of the farm owner said that they have never picked up Spanish, even though they are around it every day. They joked that they have actually gotten worse at English from communicating with the workers who managed to learn English. She said that when her husband would come home they will say “How is work?” “Work is good.” etc., simplified English in the way that their employees communicate. Her husband asked how I learned Spanish and I told them that I learned in Mexico, when I lived in Oaxaca as a student. He asked what

Mexico was like, if there was a lot of poverty. I replied that poverty was more apparent, with people begging on the street, but not what you might think. He said, "I bet they are going to be the elite when they go back." He said that Lourdes and her husband have built three houses back home. He joked that he wants to move to Mexico and work for Lourdes. In my research I have much more interaction with farmworkers than the farm owners, and I found this was an interesting insight into his perceptions of where the farmworkers he employs are coming from. They have known each other for ten years, but the depth of their relationship is limited by the language barrier.

The husband and wife who own the dairy farm both said many times that they felt as if Lourdes is family. They lamented that Lourdes' kids have to go, and mention that they had offered to adopt the kids (though, I am not sure if they meant it or not). They said it is such a shame that they cannot be "legitimate", that they deserve more. They said that if they were here for good, and going to school, that they would build them a proper space to live in, so that they would not have to live in the barn. He (the farm owner/husband) went on about how these workers are what keep the food system going. He said, "Go to any slaughter house, fruit orchard, distribution center, restaurant, these are the people that keep it going. We would fall apart without them". Lourdes said (jokingly, sort of) that it was a good time to get out, before the next election cycle. She said better to leave now before Trump comes around to get rid of all the Mexicans.

The family and Lourdes' husband and the kids went to play some arcade games and we stayed with Lourdes and the baby. She breastfed and we chatted about her trip ahead. She told us, laughing, that she had four suitcases. She said that the next day she would get a ride around 1:00pm, they (Lourdes, her daughter and her baby son) would

drive to New York City where they had a flight out at 1:00 am on Aeromexico, direct to Mexico City. Then there would be a *primo* [cousin] who lives in Mexico City and would pick them up. Then, they would catch to a bus to Guerrero (capital), about 4 hours, and then a bus to their village, another 4 hours. This is the same village where Tomás is from and returned to after living in Vermont. She pulled out her phone and showed us photos of her family on Facebook. She had not seen any of them in 8 years. As we said goodbye, I felt a combination of sadness, but also excitement. Lourdes will be able to go for a walk whenever she feels, eat the food she loves, speak Spanish, and communicate easily. She will finally be free, after her eight years in Vermont.

Over the past four and a half years I have witnessed and listened to the many contradictions and obstacles that undocumented farmworkers experience living and working in Vermont. In this thesis, I attempt to untangle some of the systems and networks that justify exploitation of labor in the food system, through the conceptual frameworks of the political economy, free trade and neoliberalism, and the concept of structural racism and violence. Immigration and the food system are impacted by policies, but ultimately are made up of complex networks and relationships. Often, people will point fingers at the culprit of exploitation or suffering. This tendency to allocate blame occurs from both liberal activist groups and conservative political organizations. But ultimately everyone who eats is implicated in a food system.

In the U.S., and globally, the food systems from which consumers are procuring their food are connected to large-scale, industrial production, processing and distribution networks. These food systems and networks are not just or sustainable if they do not take into account the overall well-being of those who work to support them. The U.S.

industrial food system is reliant on undocumented farmworkers working in the U.S. from Mexico and other parts of Central America. This thesis illuminates some of the obstacles and challenges that Latinx migrant farmworkers experience while working and living in the state of Vermont. In the process of conducting my research I have had many humbling experiences, like the going away party at Pizza Putt, during which I am reminded that for the most part, the complex networks and relationships of the food system are made up of well-intentioned people. To create significant change to the system, there needs to be people working at multiple levels, much like Meadows suggests in her article about leverage points. This thesis seeks to demystify some of the economic and political conditions that rationalize exploitation in the food system, but to also illuminate the innovative ways that those who are marginalized re-claim agency. It is through both resistance and resilience that we can create meaningful and significant changes in the food system.

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