

Laboring in Limbo: Migration and (Im)mobilities

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## Abstract

Scholars in the emerging area of mobilities research argue that our contemporary world is increasingly about movement—cross-border flows, intersections, and the squeezing of time and space. However, the scholarship on *immobilities* is less extensive, particularly the obstacles to mobility faced by unauthorized migrants, as well as the constraints of place. This dissertation brings mobilities work into conversation with transnational migration scholarship to ask the following research questions: How do the tensions of mobility and immobility arise for unauthorized temporary migrants and how do they manage them? How do these migrants navigate the spaces of ‘in-betweenness’ that they occupy? What is the role of place in shaping tensions of (im)mobility?

To answer these questions I conducted a multi-sited transnational ethnography of labor migrants who came from Veracruz, Mexico and traveled to Wisconsin to work low-wage jobs on dairy farms. I interviewed a total of 60 migrant workers and eight Wisconsin dairy farmers who employed them, as well as conducted participant-observation on each side of the migration trajectory.

Across four empirical chapters, I show that tensions over mobility have a profound influence on the lives of unauthorized temporary migrant workers. I demonstrate these tensions in four different “moments” of the migrant trajectory: going to *El Norte*, working on the dairy farm, living in a rural Wisconsin community, and traveling home. At each “moment,” migrants endured a different kind of limbo. I refer to these as: *first limbo*, *labor limbo*, *local limbo*, and *return limbo*.

This dissertation provides a framework for understanding the connection between mobility and immobility by uniting transnational migration studies with mobilities research. Additionally, this work identifies the multiple constrained spaces that unauthorized temporary migrants must navigate, and shows how these spaces are shaped by characteristics of place. Finally, this dissertation contributes to contemporary policy debates, highlighting the link between forms of limbo and limitations to the recently proposed immigration reform bill in the U.S. Senate.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction — Living and Laboring in Limbo

### Four Moments

It was Thursday and Pedro Ximetl was to leave for the border that night. I was sitting in the kitchen of his parents' house in a small mountain village in Veracruz, Mexico, visiting with his family. His sisters spoke Nahautl amongst themselves as Pedro rushed around us, busily preparing for his journey. He wouldn't bring much. Pedro had told me weeks before that he only takes a few things with him when he crosses. You need to wear dark clothing, he said, and you cannot carry any electronics with you. Don't even wear a watch, Pedro said, because the shine of the metal could be detected from helicopters above. While Pedro ran an errand downtown, I drank coffee and chatted with his mother as she prepared dinner at the stove. Pedro was leaving his wife and three children behind, and taking a bus from central Veracruz to Matamoros, the northeastern edge of the state of Tamaulipas, just across the border from Brownsville, Texas. From there, he would meet up with a *coyote*, who would take him and other migrants to a less populated part of the border region where they would attempt to cross through the desert, unauthorized, into the U.S. Once safely across, Pedro planned to travel to a dairy farm in Wisconsin, where he worked as a milker in the past. If the farmer had no work for him, he told me that he knew of another farm nearby where he could try his luck.

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On *el otro lado*, the other side, over 1,500 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, I was driving through a rural county of Wisconsin, over gently rolling hills, snow-covered at that time of year but blanketed with green at other times, dotted with silos that stuck up across the landscape, the markers of dairy farms, many of which employed *Veracruzanos*. I was heading to

Grassy Farm to pick up two migrant workers and take them to a shopping mall located over an hour away by car. They wanted to pick up a few things and neither owned a vehicle. Because both workers were unauthorized, they could not obtain drivers' licenses. The police blotter in the local newspaper consistently reported traffic violations by those with Spanish first names and surnames. For these workers, getting a ride meant being able to get needs met in a rural place that lacked public transportation.

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It was a spring day, around ten o'clock in the morning, just after the first milking shift, and I was helping to translate at a large-sized dairy farm in Wisconsin, where a group of *Veracruzanos* from Pedro's village worked in low-wage jobs as milkers and pushers. The sweet smell of calf milk replacer mixed together with the sharp odor of cow manure where I sat in the break room at a dusty table as two migrant workers stood nearby. Like many other migrants working on dairy farms in Wisconsin, these workers lived on the farm property, located as close as 15 feet from the milking parlor where they would spend up to 12 hours a day. They lived in close quarters, all men, in a trailer paid for by the farmer, but factored into the wages workers received. At the meeting, I sat across from the farmer as Hector, a 24 year old milker, told me in a frustrated tone that if their wages were not increased or if the schedule remained inflexible, he would find a job elsewhere. Another worker, Gaspar, leaned against a wall, chiming in on occasion in agreement with Hector. Before turning to the farmer to translate the message, I asked the workers in Spanish, "Do you want me to tell the boss this?" Hector replied with certainty, "Yes, tell him." The farmer looked exasperated, as if he already knew the complaints before I translated them. Nonetheless, the meeting marked a significant point in the escalating tensions

between workers and management on this farm, as Hector and Gaspar tried to gain leverage on the job by threatening to leave. In response, the farmer began to consider changing the schedule.

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Around dinner time, Tomás knocked on the door of the trailer and came in, looking distressed and quiet. I stood up from the table where I was eating with his *compañeros* and greeted him carefully, wanting to tread lightly because I knew what he would say to me when he was ready. A few minutes later, I walked into the living room and sat across from him on the opposite couch. “Julie, my father died last night,” Tomás said matter-of-factly. “I know,” I said, “They told me...It’s so sad. What will you do?” We talked for nearly two hours that night. Tomás had not been home in five years, and although his father’s death was anticipated, he desperately wanted to be at his mother’s side and to grieve with his brothers and sisters. But now, as the only man in the family still working a steady job and sending money home, he explained to me that he felt enormous pressure to stay. No longer having the small income earned from his father’s labor harvesting corn, his mother would be relying on him even more to support the family, particularly to help his younger siblings get through school. Without a Mexican passport he could not get home to Mexico quickly enough to attend the funeral. And more importantly, returning to Mexico would mean giving up his job. Because he was unauthorized, leaving meant risking not being able to cross back into the U.S.

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In each of the four moments above, migrants struggled over mobility. They navigated the restrictive policies of nation-states. They resisted workplace conditions by threatening to leave. They negotiated transportation in a place without transit service. They pushed up against

contradictory gender expectations as they considered returning home. On the one hand, this group of *Veracruzanos* lived in a social world that spanned the boundaries of nation-states. It was transnational. They led their lives in two countries and regularly moved between them. But on the other hand, their social world was bounded by the particularities of place. While the characteristics of place can facilitate mobility, they can also enable constraint or even confinement. This is especially true for populations that are vulnerable due to a tenuous citizenship status. In this dissertation, I take an in-depth look at a population of unauthorized, temporary labor migrants to understand how they manage mobility, constraint, and the effects of place as they move through multiple contexts along the migration trajectory.<sup>1</sup> My essential argument is that unauthorized, temporary migrant workers struggle over mobility in four different spheres of their migration trajectory, and these struggles are shaped by characteristics of place.

By definition, migrants are on the move. Migrants, as opposed to immigrants, are for the most part, temporary. When migrants leave home and arrive at their destination, most do not intend to settle permanently. They traverse spaces and move through sets of social relationships. They plan their lives around migration, with a steady eye on their next journey, whether traveling away from home or back to it. But for all the movement that characterizes this life, migrants who are unauthorized are rendered immobile in various contexts where they live and work. In so many ways, migrants like Pedro, Hector and Tomás, live in limbo, caught in the tension between mobility and immobility.

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<sup>1</sup> Following Harrison and Lloyd (2011), I use the term “unauthorized” versus “undocumented,” to signal that my participants typically had documents they furnished to employers, but that these papers were typically forged or obtained outside the formal economy.

How do unauthorized temporary migrants manage this in-betweenness, this state of limbo? How do the tensions of both stuckness and movement arise to begin with? What is the role of place in shaping these tensions? I found answers to these questions through conducting a multi-sited transnational ethnography of labor migrants who came from a cluster of villages in Veracruz, Mexico and traveled to the same region of Wisconsin to work low-wage jobs on dairy farms. I interviewed a total of 60 migrant workers and eight Wisconsin dairy farmers who employed them. I interviewed and spent time with migrants on each side of the migration trajectory—in their home villages in Mexico and at their workplaces in Wisconsin. I asked migrants how they made the decision to migrate north, to return home, and what facilitated and constrained their movement in various contexts within the migration process. Throughout my fieldwork, I paid special attention to legality and how that shaped mobility at different points. I also placed a particular emphasis on family ties and gender relations to understand how these structured the difficulties that migrants faced over mobility. In the process of answering my research questions, I shed light on the daily realities of a group of people who are relatively new residents of Wisconsin, and about whom we know little.

Migrant workers, particularly those who are unauthorized and traveling a great distance, face a daunting challenge. They take on a set of complex risks to become mobile and stay mobile. In the following chapters, I provide an analysis of the actual movement of unauthorized migrants in the various contexts they must navigate, and I investigate what it means for them to be stuck and constrained along the way.<sup>2</sup> First, I demonstrate that tensions over mobility have a profound influence on the lives of unauthorized temporary workers. Second, in my analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> Mobility is sometimes referred to as ‘everyday mobility’ or ‘spatial mobility’ (e.g., Rogaly 2009) in certain areas of sociology and geography, particularly among urban-focused scholars.

this migrant trajectory I identify multiple kinds of limbo that migrants experience as a result of mobility tensions. In doing so, I contribute a theoretical framework for understanding a particular kind of in-betweenness that unauthorized immigrant populations face—a social space of limbo brought on by constraints to physical movement, constraints shaped by components of place.

In particular, I show how migrants like Pedro, Hector, and Tomás must manage the tensions of mobility at four different “moments”: going to *el norte*, working on the farm, rural community life in the U.S., and traveling home.<sup>3</sup> In each of these moments of the trajectory, migrants faced a different kind of limbo that they must endure. I refer to these as: *first limbo*, *labor limbo*, *local limbo*, and *return limbo*. The particularities of place at each moment were critical to how my participants experienced these limbo spaces. In the subsequent chapters, I trace each moment to identify the distinct components of place and how each forms the contours of the mobility tensions experienced by migrants.

### ***Transnational Migration and In-between Spaces***

A variety of theoretical approaches to understanding migration processes have been advanced, stretching back to the end of the nineteenth century with theories that formed the basis for neoclassical “push-pull” explanations.<sup>4</sup> Over time, scholars have increasingly adopted the perspective that to fully understand migration, we must draw together political, economic, social, historical, and cultural approaches. In the last 25 years, a dominant concern for those studying

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<sup>3</sup> By “moments,” I refer to key places along the trajectory of migrant life. These can be overlapping, in the sense that migrants experience life working on the farm at the same time as they experience life in the rural community of the host society. Yet, by separating each of these, I am better able to draw out the characteristics of place that construct mobility or immobility in that setting.

<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive review, see Castles and Miller (2009).

migration from these various perspectives lies with identifying the different kinds of social spaces occupied by immigrants, particularly those immigrants whose lives involve frequent cross-border ties and who adopt transnational identities. The study of these spaces is encompassed within the transnational migration scholarship, an area that emerged in response to the inadequacy of single-society explanations of migration processes, ones that focused on either the destination society or the origin society (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Vertovec 2004).

The transnational migration literature tends to focus on immigrants who have permanently settled in the destination country, including work that identifies the transnational ties of second generation immigrants (e.g., Smith 2006). By contrast, work in transnational migration studies that examines short-term immigrants is comparatively undeveloped. These populations are not often analyzed using the transnational optic because they are not thought to experience *belonging* in the host society. In fact, some scholars working in this area have developed quite stringent definitions for who can be considered *truly* transnational. But these binary breakdowns do not characterize my approach to transnationalism. Following other scholars, such as those who think of transnationalism as a “continuous variable” (Boccagni 2012), I see the utility of the transnational lens for populations that are short-term or temporary residents of a different country or region, in other words, groups of people who migrate but are not often considered to be *transnational* migrants. My study investigates the social spaces occupied by migrants who are both short-term as well as unauthorized, in the service of contributing to the larger project of identifying varieties of transnational spaces. In my use of the term, *transnational spaces*, I borrow from Gutiérrez and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2008) who define

these as, “interstitial social spaces traversed and occupied by migrants in their sojourns between places of origin and places of destination” (p. 504).

Scholars have developed a number of useful concepts to understand the social spaces occupied by “transmigrants,” a term often used to describe migrant populations (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1995).<sup>5</sup> Here I review a few of these concepts that are most useful to my study. First, Levitt (2001) developed the concept of a “transnational community,” which can include both transmigrants and non-migrants. She focused on a particular type of transnational community that exhibited a high degree of embeddedness on both sides of the border, what she termed a “transnational village,” which constructs and is constructed by political, religious, and civic organizations that stretch across the borders of nation-states. Borrowing from Bourdieu, Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) advanced the notion of a “transnational social field,” as well as highlighted the difference between transnational “ways of being”—practices and social relations—and transnational “ways of belonging”—questions of identity.

Second, Smith (2006) put forth the concept of “transnational life,” outlining the multiple kinds of transnational practices that migrants engage in, showing how political communities form, how gender shapes transnational lives, and how second generation immigrants stay connected to communities across borders. Challenging assumptions of straight-line assimilation, Levitt (2001), Smith (2006), and other scholars have persuasively demonstrated how immigrants can belong to communities in different nation-states at the same time. With one foot in each country, immigrants can be incorporated into the host society while keeping transnational ties to

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<sup>5</sup> In line with Smith (2006), I use the term, migrants, instead of transmigrants, as *migrantes* was a term used by participants to describe themselves. Furthermore, Castles and Miller (2009) caution that, “Temporary labor migrants who sojourn abroad for a few years, send back remittances, communicate with their family at home and visit with them occasionally are not necessarily ‘transmigrants’” (p. 32).

their countries of origin. Moreover, this work has been critical in providing a language for talking about immigrants' social spaces and transnational social ties, something that has become more important with the intensification of globalization processes.

Other work by migration scholars has focused more explicitly on the “in-betweenness” of social spaces occupied by immigrants. The work I am interested in examines the social construction of citizenship status, which has been helpful for my conceptualization of migrant spaces.<sup>6</sup> I find three of these contributions particularly useful to my study. First, the work of Cecilia Menjívar has been quite important in this line of research. In a study of the incorporation experiences of immigrants from Central America in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Phoenix, and San Francisco, Menjívar established how “liminal legality” had profoundly shaped their lives (2006). The legal uncertainty experienced by Salvadorans and Guatemalans as they shifted in and out of Temporary Protected Status found its way into multiple arenas of their lives— family life, religious community, and artistic expression. In outlining liminal legality, Menjívar draws heavily on the concept of “liminality,” made famous by anthropologist, Victor Turner. According to Turner, who borrowed from van Gennep’s framework of rites of passage (1960 [1909]), liminality is what lies between “two relatively fixed or stable conditions” (1967:93). Menjívar, using Coutin (2000) as a guide, applies this concept to the participants in her study, arguing that her participants’ in-between legal status fits with what Turner (1967:96) describes as,

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<sup>6</sup> For a review of work on the social construction of legal status, see Donato and Armenta (2011).

...neither one thing or another; or maybe both; or neither here nor there; or maybe nowhere...at the very least 'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification.

Menjívar argues that although Turner sees these transitional periods as empowering, liminality experienced over the long term can be just the opposite. As I describe later in this chapter, this observation is critical to my understanding of in-betweenness.

Second, Goldring and his colleagues use the term "precarious legal status" to describe the situation of some immigrants in the Canadian context (2009). They demonstrate that there are gradations leading up to full citizenship status, including temporary legal labor migrants as well as any immigrants excluded from public services. In a later publication, Goldring and Landolt (2011) find that migrants who enter Canada with a precarious legal status find themselves "caught in the work-citizenship matrix," which entails precarious employment, even for those who later regularize their legal status, shifting to a secure legal status. Like Menjívar's work, these efforts highlight the importance of non-binary conceptualizations of citizenship and legality, and deliver an important message about the stickiness of legal status across the migrant trajectory.

Finally, a recent article by Roberto Gonzales (2011) on the incorporation of unauthorized immigrant youth in the U.S. contributes an additional angle to the concepts of in-betweenness and legal status. Gonzales's analysis is informed by the work of scholars like Menjívar and others who push us to consider how the uncertainty of legal status affects people's everyday lives, and how immigrants can experience both acceptance and exclusion across various contexts

of their lives. Using interview data from a sample of unauthorized young adults of the 1.5 immigrant generation who grew up in Los Angeles (those who arrived to the U.S. as children), Gonzales found that these youth exhibited considerable frustration when they discovered they could not engage in rites of passage to adulthood due to their legal status. Unable to secure employment, apply for college, or in some cases, obtain a driver's license, they were stuck in "developmental limbo," no longer children but restricted from accessing the privileges associated with being an adult (2011:616). Though Gonzales does not explicitly theorize limbo, his work provides an excellent example of the stuckness that is produced across time for immigrants.

The concepts above form a critical foundation for theorizing the in-between spaces in which immigrants are located. Yet, the few examples I list above do not include a focus on communities of origin to see how these in-between spaces can be charted across the immigrant trajectory. Here I will describe two examples that come closer to doing so. Although their work does not treat processes of international border-crossing, Myerson and colleagues (2010) add to expanded formulations of in-betweenness by including a focus on migrant communities of origin and destination. They examine the negotiation of identities among the enormous "floating population" of rural-urban Chinese labor migrants (2010). This population, having shifted away from a peasant identity, is excluded from full urban membership, leaving them "caught in an awkward middle ground...neither urban nor rural; living in the city, with 'roots' in the countryside; reluctant to leave the city, but unable to genuinely partake in city life" (Bai 2007:59).<sup>7</sup> Castañeda (2012) similarly examines how migrants are "caught" between two different points, but his focus is on how migrant workers and their families end up "living in limbo" due to the "migration-remittances complex" (p. 5). Drawing on data gathered on migrants

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<sup>7</sup> The article by Bai (2007) was in Chinese and translated by Myerson and colleagues (2010).

from Mexico, Morocco, and Algeria, Castañeda concludes that migrants and their families are suspended in a state of economic uncertainty, unable to make long-term financial decisions until they are reunited. These studies show how spaces of in-betweenness and constraint are produced and maintained among labor migrants across distances, from the point of origin to the point of destination.

One last point that requires discussion relates to the geographic focus of work on transnationalism. Some scholars argue that transnational migration studies have ignored migration to rural places (e.g., Andrzejewska et al. 2012). While it is clear that the major works in this interdisciplinary field are urban focused, the emerging literature on new immigrant destinations in the U.S. demands that all migration scholars look at rural areas. In recent years the U.S. has seen a shift in immigrant settlement from more traditional urban gateways, such as New York City and Los Angeles, to places like southeastern states (Marrow 2011), the mountain west (Schmalzbauer 2011) and the rural Midwest. This shift has been especially dramatic for immigrants from Latin America and Mexico. In fact, this geographical shift is so major that some consider it to be “the most significant trend in U.S. population redistribution in the last quarter century” (Lichter and Johnson 2009:497). So, while migration scholars have tended to focus on urban centers, these scholars are increasingly turning their gaze to the countryside (Lichter and Brown 2011). My work fits within this emerging trend, as I take the tools provided by transnational migration scholarship and apply them to rural places.

The geographic shift in immigration also reminds scholars of the dynamic character of migration. That is, we cannot assume that migration will always unfold in expected ways, in which migrants always travel from poor, rural areas and head to the dense urban areas of richer

nations. Capitalism changes shape and becomes more flexible, so it follows that labor migration must change in response. Restructuring occurring across the agro-food economy has resulted in new and intensified labor demands in rural places (Kandel and Parrado 2005). That restructuring paired with the decline of native-born workers available to take the low-wage and physically demanding jobs in these sectors has led to the demand for particular kinds of workers—immigrants—to fill these jobs. When we consider other factors, such as labor market saturation in traditional immigrant gateways (Light 2006), and the loss of construction jobs due to the Great Recession, it follows that we would see the population shifts to rural areas that have been observed.

The literature on new destinations provides migration scholars with an opportunity to take an up-close look at place—what it means theoretically and what it means for the reality of migrants. Places are grounded. They are rooted to histories, tied to landscapes, and tethered to social relationships. Places are also the sites where culture plays out, where culture is created and re-created. As such, places shape the experience of migration. Joining together scholarship on the particularity of place with work on migration could help us better understand the migration processes unfolding in these new settings.

The scholars whose work I have reviewed in this section have made critical contributions to the field of migration studies, as well as the more specific area of transnational migration studies. Through rich ethnographic research, we now understand the meanings behind the transnational ties that migrants develop and maintain, and their role in the ways that immigrants are incorporated into the host society. We have an understanding of the kinds of in-betweenness experienced by migrants and their families as they occupy various social spaces. But there are

questions raised by this literature that remain to be fully answered. What is the role of place in shaping different kinds of transnational spaces and forms of in-betweenness? What is the role of mobility in establishing what is possible for migrants in these transnational spaces, particularly when migrants are unauthorized? Finally, what does “limbo” really mean in theoretical terms, and how might it characterize migrant life in a variety of contexts—in communities of origin as well as destinations, and the different sites embedded on each end? These are the questions I address in this study, building off of the significant contributions of the scholars referenced above.

### ***Mobilities and Place***

In this dissertation I bring the emerging scholarship of mobilities theory into conversation with transnational migration studies, which leads to benefits for both areas. For example, mobilities research has yet to put forth a theoretical framework for understanding the connection between mobility and immobility. My work provides such a framework by drawing on transnational migration. On the other end, the focus on embodied movement and place in mobilities research contributes toward a more comprehensive view of migratory processes in the transnational migration literature. In this section I describe these connections in detail.

For decades now, scholars from multiple disciplines—geography, anthropology and sociology, to name just a few—have dedicated their careers to answering questions about the causes and consequences of migration. These questions are centered, naturally, on the movement of people. But only in recent years have we seen a determined focus on theorizing the movement of bodies, objects, and ideas in a way that does not take this movement for granted (Creswell 2010). As opposed to prior approaches, the starting point in these recent efforts is movement and

what that movement means and represents. Globalization has meant the increasing ability of people, objects, ideas, and capital to move from place to place. Mobility scholars have worked to put that global movement into sociological context. The European sociologist who spearheaded mobility studies, John Urry (2000), argues that because our contemporary world is increasingly about movement—flows, intersections, and the squeezing of time and space—then sociology ought to reframe its orientation to capture this complex mobility. Specifically, he urges sociologists to cast aside the discipline’s organizing concept of “society” and replace it with “post-society,” which entails a focus on “networks, mobilities, and horizontal fluidities” (Urry 2000:3).<sup>8</sup> Here, the topics of study include “corporeal travel, the mobility of objects, virtual travel and imaginative travel, mobilities that pass over the edges of society, through and into the ‘other.’” (Urry 2000:48).

Before delving into how mobility theory can inform transnational migration studies and vice versa, it is critical to define our terms. Drawing from the emerging body of work referred to as mobilities research, or the ‘new mobilities paradigm,’ I define mobility as the meaningful movement of social actors from place to place. Creswell uses a more analytically precise definition of mobility as “the entanglement of movement, representation, and practice” (2010:19). He describes the first as the fact of physical movement, the kind we keep track of in migration studies. Then there is how that movement is represented, for example, through film and art. Finally, there is the practice and experience of movement. For instance, the meaning of movement for individuals. He insists that this three-part conceptualization must be employed to

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<sup>8</sup> Manuel Castells’s concept of the “network society” (1996) as constituting a new variety of capitalism is viewed as a critical development for the launching of mobilities research (e.g., Urry 2000).

properly understand how mobility works. Throughout this dissertation, I draw on all three of Creswell's elements of mobility, although I am less explicit as he is in differentiating these parts.

While mobilities scholarship has done well with outlining various kinds of movement, different representations of movement, and experiences of it, the work on immobilities is less extensive.<sup>9</sup> Only in the last few years have scholars, both from within and outside the area of mobility, begun to consider the significance of immobilities to theoretical formulations of mobility. Turner, for example, takes a hard line against mobility theory's focus on a sociology of an allegedly freely flowing global post-society, insisting instead on an overlooked "immobility regime" that seeks to control populations with increasing regulation (2007:289). This regime, Turner argues, is formed by processes of "enclavement" that take varied forms, such as gated communities, post-9/11 surveillance, and, most relevant to my focus, intensified border enforcement (2007:291). In response, mobilities researchers are starting to attend to criticisms like Turner's. In a recent interview with John Urry (Adey and Bissell 2010), he expounded upon the connection between mobility and immobility:

I'd strongly emphasize that the mobilities of some are always at the expense of others who are always in a sense immobile to facilitate the organizing, orchestrating, servicing of the mobilities of others. So there is always a relationality. So mobilities presuppose the immobilities of other social groups because of power relations.

Similarly, Creswell (2010) contributes a framework for a "politics of mobility," bringing an explicit analysis of power to the conversation. Still missing, however, in these recent

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<sup>9</sup> "Moorings" are identified in this literature as material necessities that enable mobility, such as electric grids and airports (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Urry 2007). While mentioned frequently by some as immobilities, I do not treat these as synonymous in my work.

contributions is a definition for immobility, as well as a theory for how it relates to mobility. Is immobility merely the opposite of mobility? If so, using my definition above, we are inclined to define immobility as the meaningful stillness of social actors. Immobility could also be fixity. It may be stasis, or being bound to place. In a recent formulation, Bell and his colleagues (2010) prefer the term *stabilization* in their discussion of immobility. All of these descriptions seem appropriate for defining immobility. For simplicity, I define immobility as spatial fixity among social actors. Borrowing from Creswell's three-part definition for mobility (2010), I argue that immobility, too, shares the basic ingredients of these three elements. First, there is the lack of movement itself, the fact of an individual's spatial fixity to which I refer. Second is the representation of that spatial fixity, for example, what this fixity means in cultural forms such as literature or paintings. Third is how that spatial fixity is practiced and experienced by people.

Pinning down these definitions involves a certain level of discomfort. That is because it may appear that I am setting up a binary between movement and fixity. You are either in motion or you are not, and one has nothing to do with the other. But in reality, the two are so much in tension with one another that an "either/or" is not an apt framework to describe mobility and immobility. We must have a definition of immobility, but let this not limit our understanding of these processes to binary thinking. Part of what I aim to illustrate in this dissertation are the tensions of immobility and mobility, their shifting and dynamic character, and how they make up an in-between space that migrant workers experience. This is one reason why I favor the term, (im)mobility, or (im)mobilities.<sup>10</sup> Although stylistically not ideal, it conveys these shifting

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<sup>10</sup> Adey (2006), in his discussion of airport terminals, also uses this term, (im)mobilities, to demonstrate the relationality between the two concepts.

understandings and signals the importance of integrating discussions of immobility into mobilities research.

Migration, travel, and tourism are all phenomena related to the movement of people that can be analyzed using a mobility lens. Though identified as a critical area of inquiry in mobilities research, the study of migration has received considerably less attention in this branch of work, as compared to travel and tourism. As I mentioned, this literature has leaned toward examining the lives of those with the privilege to move about with relative ease. Glick-Schiller and Salazar note that within some strands of this work “only the mobility of ‘elite travellers’ was recognized” (2013:186). As such, since its emergence mobilities research has tended to focus on movement through spaces from the “tourist gaze,” with comparatively less material on those who are immobilized in the service of those mobile tourists, or those whose mobility stems from economic desperation. Mobility has clear social meanings and these differ for the Fortune 500 CEO, the middle-class tourist, and the unauthorized immigrant.

Another important point lies in the connection between mobility and empowerment. Just as some early work on transnationalism may have exaggerated the empowering features of cross-border ties, some early mobilities work appeared to equate mobility with empowerment. But since there are a variety of ways that individuals may find themselves to be mobile, this movement itself does not necessarily signal empowered action. By the same token, those who are immobile are not always powerless since “it’s sometimes those with more network capital who are the immobile, who can summon the mobile to wherever they are” (Adey and Bissell 2010:7). Evident by the latter quotation, recent work on mobilities has made this point clear. And, in an introduction to the first issue of the journal, *Mobilities*, Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John

Urry make a point to highlight that there are both “obligatory” and “voluntary” kinds of travel (2006:10). They go further to say that, “There are new places and technologies which enhance the mobility of some peoples and places even as they also heighten the immobility of others, especially as they try to cross borders” (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006:3).

Although migration is not often considered under the mobilities lens, the authors above—John Urry among them—make a direct connection between immobility, borders, and citizenship status in a call for research in this area. In their example, places can make some people more mobile and other people immobile. We can assume here that the policies that construct actors as “legal,” “illegal,” or someplace in between, are tied to places, specifically, the political configurations of those places. These connections between place, migration, mobility, and immobility, thus deserve more attention in this emerging area of scholarship. While the potential to analyze these connections has been identified, mobilities research as a whole would benefit from empirical as well as theoretical contributions toward this end.

There are two specific ways in which mobilities research could benefit from transnational migration scholarship. One is by analyzing the moment in which decisions to migrate are made. The decision to migrate is fraught with tension and an analysis of that tension could help us better understand the relationship between mobility and immobility. Referring to the situation of economically disadvantaged migrants, Waldinger reminds those scholars eager to embrace a post-national vision of inclusion that immigration is “far from the easiest of options” (2010). In their study of the psychological effects of migration on children, community psychologist, Aguilera-Guzmán and her colleagues (2006:126) cite a Mexican journalist who provides a sharp assessment of the situation, “Migration is a cruel manifestation of misery: the need to survive

requires the uprooting and modification of personal, family, community, cultural, linguistic, and religious links” (Maza 1997:40).<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Hochschild (2002:27) critiques the framing of “personal choice” when it comes to migration,

Women choose to migrate for domestic work. But they choose it because economic pressures all but coerce them to. The yawning gap between rich and poor countries is itself a form of coercion, pushing Third World mothers to seek work in the First for lack of options closer to home.

These perspectives of migration thus show what mobilities research stands to gain by taking apart this moment of pre-migration and examining contradictions of mobility and immobility therein. They also serve as a reminder for mobilities scholars that movement does not necessarily imply empowerment.

A second way in which transnational migration scholarship can advance mobilities research lies in the contradictory interests over mobility at the level of the state. Neoliberal trade policies, such as NAFTA, encourage the free flow of capital and goods across borders, while restricting the mobility of workers. This “contradiction of attempting to liberalize trade while at the same time trying to force workers to remain fixed in space” (Fernandez-Kelly and Massey 2007:115-6) is ripe for a mobilities analysis. Engaging with this topic would meet Urry’s recent acknowledgement of a need for a “political economy of mobility” (2010), which was notably absent from earlier iterations of mobilities theory.

Considering the other side, there are fruitful questions and analyses that mobility scholars might bring to conversations about transnational migration, particularly when discussing migration from developing countries, and especially migration when it is unauthorized. We could

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<sup>11</sup> Translated by Aguilera-Guzmán and colleagues (2006:126).

ask, for example, how might mobility be experienced differently among labor migrants versus other groups of immigrants? What is the relationship between mobility and existing structures of power? What are the conditions that inhibit mobility—those factors that do not encourage the movement of people, but rather, constrain it and attempt to rein in unauthorized movements? On the micro level, how does mobility change the daily social interactions that migrants experience?

One might argue that in the questions listed above, we could just as easily swap ‘mobility’ for ‘migration’ and come to the same answers. In other words, why introduce yet another sociological term if it is not necessary? This is a valid concern, and it would be instructive to first establish the distinction between migration and mobility. First, migration is not simply the meaningful movement of people from place to place, which is our working definition of mobility. Migration is the movement of people who intend to take up residence in the host society, whether permanent or quasi-permanent. International migration is the movement of people to a different country with the intention of taking up residence. Migration, then, is about much more than just movement. And mobility is much more than migration. After all, mobilities research includes work on tourism, travel and communication (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006).

The mobility lens offers two clear analytical benefits to the area of migration studies. The first is that it demands an analysis of embodied movement, that is, people’s bodily experiences in motion. When we take this focus and apply it to a population that is defined by their relatively frequent movements, it helps us to see all kinds of different forms of constrained movement, as well as various sites in which migrants experience this constraint. With this lens, we recognize that migrants, particularly unauthorized migrants, may experience restrictions and constraints to

their bodily movement both before and after the “moment” of border-crossing. Further, using the mobility lens allows us to see that migration is not just one moment. It is a process that unfolds across multiple moments and places. Studying how migrants understand and make meaning from their everyday movements—in their communities of origin, in their destination communities, at work and in their temporary homes—gives us a more complex picture of the migration process.

Second, a mobility lens brings place to the foreground. By that I mean that those studying mobilities are more inclined to theorize the social construction of *place* compared to those working in migration studies. Mobilities research tends to draw more on these sorts of place theories to describe the significance of movement in our globalizing world. As such, it engages more with questions of how places are infused with meanings. For instance, the work of French urban sociologist, Henri Lefebvre, and his focus on networks, flows, and space, is often invoked in work on mobilities. And, the work of geographers such as Doreen Massey (2005) and Edward Soja (1996) is also cited in this scholarship to help theorize and specify the meanings of places and spaces, of which there is some debate. In fact, those studying migration processes have emphasized the need for more attention to particular characteristics of places and how they shape the transnational social spaces occupied by immigrants. In their review of transnational migration scholarship, Levitt and Jaworsky (2007:144) observe,

Taken together, spatial scales, the cultural historical particularity of places, and the global nature of what flows through them produce different kinds of transnational social fields... A major research task, then, is to specify the types

and dimensions of different kinds of social fields and their effects on migrant trajectories.

In sum, the conversations over the significance of place and space that tend to occur in mobilities research can be quite useful to migration scholars who are trying to pinpoint the effects of context and place on migration experiences.

To delve a bit further into how scholars have theorized place, and how I will bring these conceptions together with the scholarship on mobilities and migration, it is key to understand place and to parse out its multiple components. Scholars who have theorized place tend to draw on Henri Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) and his formulations of how social space is produced. Mobilities scholar, Tim Creswell, borrows from Lefebvre to define places as simply spaces with meanings attached (2006).<sup>12</sup> Edward Soja, frequently cited by scholars analyzing place, pontificates on the meanings and identifications attached to places (1996). Building off of Soja, Gieryn (2000) informs that, “Places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” (p. 465).

Just as Creswell (2010) identifies three parts to mobility, Gieryn identifies three critical elements of place: geographic location; physical things; and finally, the component that captures other definitions above, places are invested with meaning. As we follow Gieryn a bit farther, he notes that the three components of place are not static. The meanings of a place are interpreted and can be reinterpreted. The physicality of places can shift, that is, the material elements that

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<sup>12</sup> This generally follows the definition of “mobility” provided by Creswell (2006), one of the scholars of the “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006). Creswell goes on to describe three types of mobility: human mobility, representational mobility, and embodied mobility (see Creswell 2006:3-4).

make up a place can change. Some would suggest that locations can shift as well, just as the place of a ship moves across the globe. As these components change, we see that places themselves are dynamic. As Hannam and his colleagues note, “Places are thus not so much fixed but are implicated within complex networks by which ‘hosts, guests, buildings, objects, and machines’ are contingently brought together to produce certain performances in certain places at certain times” (2006:13).

Gieryn and Hannam’s formulations of places and their fluidity give us a starting point for trying to piece together a theoretical model for understanding how places might shape migration processes and vice versa. In this work, I aim to provide some clarity in efforts to understand how places, migration, and mobility are related and how they articulate with one another. In doing so, I draw on contributions in the transnational migration literature, and in particular, efforts to conceptualize the social spaces of in-betweenness that some immigrants occupy.

### *Limbo as a Conceptual Tool*

I use the concept of limbo to describe the transnational social spaces that migrants navigate. First, limbo provides mobility studies with the language to talk about the tensions of mobility and immobility, while shifting the focus toward those with less privilege to be mobile. Second, identifying the different kinds of limbo experienced by migrants brings the importance of mobility and place to the scholarship on transnational migration. There are countless varieties of mobilities and immobilities that migrants encounter. The ways that they manage these have much to do with the extent to which migrants can gain leverage in a constrained situation. Much of this management has to do with place. And, dimensions of power are woven into places—for example, ideas in the community of who belongs and who doesn’t belong, histories of exclusion,

changing economies that leave some struggling, or cultural customs surrounding who leaves and who stays.

Turning to Merriam-Webster for clarity, ‘limbo’ has a few different meanings: an intermediate state or place, a state of confinement, or a region or condition of oblivion or neglect. There is also limbo in the religious sense, as the space where unbaptized but innocent souls are sent. Or, limbo could also be purgatory, that in-between place where the soul is readied for heaven through purification or through punishment.<sup>13</sup> Common to most of these understandings of limbo are the notions of space and place.<sup>14</sup> Limbo is the space in-between two defined spaces; limbo is when you are *en route*, when you have left your point of origin but not yet arrived at your destination. Yet limbo does not imply unidirectionality; you could be sent back to where you came from at any moment. In other words, the space of limbo is not a secure space. With limbo, there is uncertainty and there is insecurity. The insecurity comes with the territory of limbo in its third sense, as a place of neglect. So, those in limbo may often spend their time waiting, either to arrive at a new destination, or to return from whence they came. Being in limbo also implies being stuck or confined, in the second meaning of the word. Those in the place of limbo likely desire a more secure position, but because of circumstances largely out of their control, stuck in limbo is where they remain.

In my use of the concept, which overlaps with some of the features above, limbo is a social space. By this I mean that the way I engage with the concept of limbo is beyond physical

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<sup>13</sup> However, purgatory has a kind of certainty to it that does not seem to fit the uncertainty that often characterizes limbo; those in purgatory always go to heaven.

<sup>14</sup> From Cresswell, places are “meaningful segments of space—locations imbued with meaning and power” (2006:3). I agree with Cresswell, and prefer the analytically more specific definition of place that Gieryn provides, which is that a place has location, materiality, and meaning (2000).

spaces that are in-between, such as the geographic place of the borderlands. Rather, defining 'limbo' as a social space encompasses spaces that are abstract, such as Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" (1991 [1983]). In this sense, one can be in a space of limbo and be physically situated in either Veracruz, Wisconsin, or someplace in the geographic in-between. This does not mean, however, that the social space of limbo is not shaped by the particularity of place—spaces with meaning. There are indeed ways in which the characteristics of place—navigability of landscapes, histories, culture, social relations with power differentials—determine the kind of limbo experienced by migrants.

Limbo is a social space characterized by the combination of migrants' experiences of immobility, on the one hand, and mobility, on the other. Being in limbo can mean occupying a social space that is in-between—in-between immobility and mobility—so much so that it is difficult to pull apart whether migrants are, all things considered, more mobile or more immobile at any given moment. But one can also be in limbo if immobility has "won out" to mobility. For example, those detained in U.S. immigration facilities, whether in the border region or not, are rendered immobile in a way that overrides their capacity for mobility. They are in limbo, to be sure, as they wait to know their fate. I am interested in what constructs these points of tension, and how migrants navigate these points, which may vary along the trajectory of migrant life.

Finally, throughout this dissertation I consider how gender shapes the mobilities and immobilities that migrants negotiate. To study a group of men who occupy the social space of limbo without considering how masculinity is constructed and negotiated, how it shapes decision making and structures work opportunities, is to ignore a defining feature of transnational social life. Scholars are increasingly turning their attention to the dynamic and place-based qualities of

gender, focusing on contradictory gender-based expectations in migratory processes and the sources of these expectations (e.g., Cantú 2009; McKay 2007). This work falls in line with intersectional approaches, in which race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship are analyzed together (Crenshaw 1991). Charting different kinds of gendered constraints across the migratory trajectory contributes to this scholarship, particularly in the search for gendered forms of limbo. Additionally, work on new destinations is so recent that there is little scholarship on how, for example, gender is constructed and negotiated among migrants and their employers in rural places. Rather than addressing these intersections of gender and place in a separate chapter, I weave in discussions of the construction of masculinity when they become salient. I draw on Connell's definition of masculinity as, "...simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (1995:71). So, masculinity is about embodiment and about "doing." Masculinities are, in large part, practices, and these practices are enacted through bodies and within structures of gender relations (Connell 1995).

***Context: The Development of a Migrant Labor Force in Wisconsin's Dairy Industry***

The story of immigrant labor on Wisconsin dairy farms begins with structural shifts in the industry, shifts that parallel similar restructuring in other sectors in the U.S. In 2012, there were 11,490 dairy producers in Wisconsin, contributing a total of 27.2 billion pounds of milk annually to the U.S. total of 200 billion pounds. Wisconsin ranks second in the nation in milk production, behind California's 2012 total of 41.8 billion pounds of milk (USDA 2013). While Wisconsin's production of milk in total pounds has been on the rise in recent decades, the number of dairy farms has been shrinking and the average herd size has been increasing (Barham 2007; Harrison,

Lloyd, and O’Kane 2009a).<sup>15</sup> In 2000, Wisconsin dairy farms with over 499 cows contributed a total of nine percent of all milk production in the state, and in 2006 they made up 19 percent (MacDonald et al. 2007). In 1987, herds of over 200 cows made up less than one percent of Wisconsin’s total dairy herds, versus seven percent in 2006 (Barham 2007). Recent changes in the facilities used on dairy farms have occurred as well, evident in the increasing use of parlors and free stall barns. From 1997 to 2002 the proportion of Wisconsin dairy farms with parlors increased from seven percent to 20 percent (Barham, Foltz, and Aldana 2005).

The consolidation pattern among dairy farms holds nationwide, intensifying in the West where larger dairies appeared first (see Gilbert and Wehr 2003), and then penetrating across all dairy producing regions in the country. The concentration of the industry appears to be the result of several factors. Agricultural economists cite both supply side and demand side shifts, including changing consumer tastes for cheese products as well as increasingly available technologies that increase milk production, such as innovations in nutrition and breeding (MacDonald et al. 2007). In addition, economies of scale translate to lower costs for larger operations, which tend to realize profits compared to most small dairies that do not (MacDonald et al. 2007).

Pressures to expand paired with the difficulty of finding local, reliable workers meant that Wisconsin farmers were turning to different solutions for their labor needs. Starting in the late 1990s, Wisconsin dairies began employing immigrant workers in large numbers, most of whom

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout this dissertation I use the terms, small, medium, and large to describe the size of dairies. My classification is different than the USDA’s, but overlaps with the six-category classification used by PATS at UW-Madison. The average herd size in Wisconsin was 71 in 2002, so the PATS breakdown fits better with that average (see Barham, Foltz, and Aldana 2005). Each of my categories represents two PATS classes. The breakdown I use is as follows: small is up to 49 milk cows; medium is between 50 and 99 milk cows; large is 100 milk cows and up. Actual number of livestock per farm varies, as these latter numbers do not include dry cows or calves.

came from Mexico (Harrison, Lloyd, and O’Kane 2009b). The bucolic family farm, operated by farmers, their children, and perhaps a local hired hand or two, had begun to lose its foothold in the landscape of rural Wisconsin with the push toward farm consolidation. With expanding operations and a lack of qualified workers to meet that expansion, farmers were left with one choice—either go out of business or hire immigrant labor. At least, this is how farmers framed the situation when I spoke with them. Hal owned a large-sized operation in Wisconsin, Pine Ridge Dairy, and he explained the labor pressures he faced:

It’s so unnatural for us to hire Mexicans. There’s lots and lots of reasons why we don’t want to...language, culture, how do you access them, there’s all kinds of reasons. And there’s so many reasons why you’d hire locally. You know the families, you know the people, you know who they are, they speak your language, you grew up with them, and stuff like that. So there’s a huge incentive to hiring locally and a huge disincentive to hiring Mexicans. And all of us are hiring Mexicans so you know that we’re pretty desperate.

As Hal notes, hiring Mexican workers on Wisconsin dairies has become a widespread phenomenon. In 2008, an estimated 40% of all hired dairy laborers in Wisconsin, or 5,316 workers, were immigrants (Harrison, Lloyd, and O’Kane 2009a). Survey data indicate that the vast majority of these workers, 89%, come from Mexico (Harrison, Lloyd, and O’Kane 2009b). Though official statistics on the proportion of unauthorized agricultural workers in Wisconsin do not exist, national data indicate that 53% of “hired crop labor force” in 2001 and 2002 were

unauthorized (National Agricultural Workers Survey 2005). Of the migrant workers from Mexico I interviewed, only two out of 60 were authorized immigrants during their time in the U.S.<sup>16</sup> Though bureaucratically burdensome, H2A visas are one option for agricultural employers seeking seasonal workers. But since the labor needs of dairy farmers are year-round, H2A visas are generally not an option for securing temporary authorization (Harrison, Lloyd, and O’Kane 2009b).

Due to the increasing percentage of immigrants in recent years Wisconsin has become known as a “new immigrant destination” state (Massey and Capoferro 2008). In 2011, Wisconsin’s foreign born population was 269,734, representing 4.7 percent of the state population. This figure is considerably larger than the 2000 percentage of 3.6 (larger than the Dennon County percentage in 2000), and nearly double the 1990 percentage of 2.5. Growth in the number of immigrants from 1990 to 2000 was 59.4 percent, but slowed to 39.2 percent from 2000 to 2011 (MPI 2013). In 2008, there were 97,000 foreign-born Hispanics in Wisconsin (Pew 2010), and in 2010, this figure increased to 103,850 (Pew 2012).<sup>17</sup> Given that the shift in dairy labor from native to immigrant workers is believed to have begun in the late 1990s (Harrison, Lloyd, and O’Kane 2009b), it is not unreasonable to suggest that the new immigrant destination status of Wisconsin has likely been fueled, in part, by this relatively new population of dairy workers.

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<sup>16</sup> Two members of a family who I met initially in Wisconsin were able to secure tourist visas with the help of a lawyer after they returned to Mexico. Both had previously worked on dairies in Wisconsin for four years as unauthorized immigrants. Although they were violating the terms of the tourist visa by returning to the U.S. for the purpose of working, they avoided the treacherous passage across the desert. This was quite an unusual circumstance, as other participants expressed astonishment that this could be done. Most importantly, having a tourist visa certainly did not protect against the fear of deportation.

<sup>17</sup> I calculated the number of foreign-born Hispanics for 2010 using the proportions listed by the Pew Hispanic Center (2012) for foreign-born out of total number of Hispanics in Wisconsin (31% of 335,000).

During a visit to a dairy farm in Wisconsin, a sheet of paper posted on the bulletin board in the break room caught my eye. It was titled, “Information about Our Mexican Workers.” Among the items listed was the farmer’s observation that the average Mexican worker stays eight months to three years. From the March 2010 Current Population Survey, of the 10.2 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S., 15% have resided here for less than 5 years and 22% for 5 to 9 years (Taylor et al. 2011). A large majority of the participants in my sample were in this 15% group, and all were drawn to Wisconsin for the purpose of working on dairies (see table 1, appendix). From my observations, the typical Mexican immigrant dairy worker would spend two to four years working in Wisconsin. Many will make a return trip to Wisconsin after a brief period of time in Mexico.

The immigrant labor force on Wisconsin dairies was maintained via “network recruitment,” otherwise known as chain migration, which was similar to patterns established in other low-wage industries, such as meatpacking (Grey 1999), poultry processing (Griffith 1993), and carpet manufacturing (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000). As Tilly observed, individuals and households do not migrate, but rather, “networks migrate.” He described these networks as “sets of people linked by acquaintance, kinship, and work experience” (1990:84). We see this in Cantú’s (1995) study of a food processing plant in Iowa, in which he described that direct recruitment by the plant was relied upon only initially, then social networks among immigrants were used to recruit thereafter.

One dairy farmer in Wisconsin, Rick, described to me his efforts to recruit a Latino worker from Texas using a headhunter in 1998. Rick paid six hundred dollars to the headhunter, plus the air fare for the worker, but after a couple of months he was not happy with the quality of

the work and let him go. That was Rick's first experience hiring a non-local worker. Within a year, a group of *Veracruzanos* knocked on Rick's door. They had been driving around looking for work in the area, and Rick hired all three of them. From that point forward, these migrants and their family members and friends from the village were tied to that region of Wisconsin through network recruitment.

From my observations, the migration network from my study area in Veracruz to the U.S. was heavily masculine. Of the 60 migrants I interviewed in 2010 through 2012, only four were women. This fits with findings by Harrison and colleagues (2009b), which indicated that among the 270 immigrant dairy workers they surveyed across Wisconsin in 2008, close to 80 percent of workers were men. Yet Harrison and colleagues also found that 63 percent of respondents were married, and that the vast majority of these married workers were living in the U.S. with their spouses (2009b). By contrast, only three out of the 26 workers I interviewed in Wisconsin were living with their spouses in the U.S. It is thus likely that men without partners in the U.S. were overrepresented in my sample of immigrant dairy workers.

When I asked Hector, a 24 year old Mexican immigrant who was working on a Wisconsin dairy farm, why it was that more women do not go to the U.S., he told me that they are afraid of crossing the border. Hector told me there are coyotes who will abuse women and because of this danger, they do not go. But we know that women make up an increasing proportion of Mexican migrants heading to the U.S. overall (e.g., Cerrutti and Massey 2001), so we cannot uncritically accept Hector's explanation of the gendered pattern of migration. I personally knew several women who had crossed the border unauthorized, and I *heard* of a few more women who had made the journey. In these instances, women crossed with male

companions and this fits with the findings of other scholars (Donato, Wagner, and Patterson 2004). I did not hear about any stories of women's victimization while crossing, but it was clear after talking with Hector and other participants that gender ideology informs how migrants think about unauthorized migration.

The growth of this new population of immigrant dairy workers in Wisconsin has presented a challenge to local government agencies and advocacy organizations aimed at protecting and serving the needs of migrant workers. Wisconsin has historically been a destination for migrants working as hired laborers in seasonal agricultural production, planting and harvesting vegetables. In the early 1900s, those with European origins made up the majority of this workforce, recruited from cities in the Midwest. Starting in the late 1920s, Spanish-speaking migrants from Texas and Mexico began moving to Wisconsin to work in the fields, and by the 1950s they made up the majority of migrants who moved to Wisconsin for agricultural work (Slesinger and Deller 2003). The Bracero Program, which was expanded throughout the 1950s across the U.S., explains the high numbers of migrant workers in Wisconsin's seasonal agricultural industry during this period of time (Slesinger and Deller 2003).

Compared to other states, Wisconsin enacted legislation relatively early to protect migrant workers, reflecting a historic interest in ensuring a continual labor supply for growers. In 1953 the Migrant Relations Committee was formed by the Governor's Commission of Human Rights, prompted by poor working conditions in the canning industry. The Committee investigated health services and recreational opportunities provided to migrant workers and their families at labor camps across the state (Wisconsin Canners Association 1953). Nearly ten years later, the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor issued a report detailing the vulnerabilities

of migrant farm workers, advocating for special protection and services (Raushenbush 1962).

Today, Wisconsin's migrant labor laws regulate housing and employment for this population. In 2012, the migrant population in Wisconsin was 3,353 (in contrast to the estimated 5,316 immigrant dairy workers in 2008) and included only workers who were employed for up to ten months in seasonal jobs, such as agriculture, horticulture, and food processing (Bureau of Migrant Labor Services 2013, 2012 Migrant Population Report). The definition of 'migrant worker' used by state and federal agencies excludes dairy workers because dairy work is year-round versus seasonal.<sup>18</sup> Although demographic estimates indicate that the population of immigrant dairy workers is larger than the population of migrant (seasonal) workers (Harrison, Lloyd, and O'Kane 2009a), the ways in which state services are structured leaves dairy workers without the formal protections and services that the migrant status affords. The fact that this group of temporary unauthorized workers inhabits such an in-between and uncertain space in terms of how the state categorizes them, makes it all the more critical to understand their living conditions and particular challenges.

On the other side of the border, migration to the U.S. from southeastern states in Mexico has increased in recent years, from two percent of all migration in the 1990s to thirteen percent in recent years (Riosmena and Massey 2012). This change in the distribution of sending areas in Mexico means that migration from the traditional sending region of the country, which includes the states of Jalisco, Zacatecas, and Michoacán, has slowed to less than half of the total migration to the U.S. (Riosmena and Massey 2012). Just as economic restructuring can explain

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<sup>18</sup> Other definitions of 'migrant' differ. For example, the United Nations (2002:11) distinguishes between "long-term migrant" and "short-term migrant." The latter includes those who migrate somewhere for a period of three months to a year, whereas the former includes those who migrate somewhere for at least a year. My occasional use of "short-term migrant" to characterize dairy workers thus does not fit with the U.N.'s definition.

the recent shift in U.S. immigrant destinations, scholars cite the same factor to explain the shift in immigrant origins (e.g., Nevins 2007). Scholars also point to the impact of shocks to the Mexican economy starting in the 1980s (e.g., Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007). These changes especially affected Mexicans in rural places as well as those in the southern region of the country, in which the effects of trade liberalization policies implemented in the 1990s (NAFTA) led to declines in the prices for corn and coffee, translating to losses for small growers (Zepeda, Wise, and Gallagher 2009).

This study profiles a group of labor migrants from this southeastern region, specifically, a group of villages in the state of Veracruz. In their 2008 survey of dairy workers in Wisconsin, Harrison and colleagues found that among Mexican workers, who made up the vast majority of immigrant dairy workers, the most common states of origin were Veracruz and Guanajuato. Together, immigrants from these Mexican states made up 42% of all Mexican dairy workers surveyed in Wisconsin.<sup>19</sup> As such, my study looks at migration from a new origin to a new destination. In the following chapter, I will provide more detail about the context of the sending areas in Veracruz.

### *A Note on Methods*

While a detailed explanation of my methodology can be found in the appendix, here I describe my basic approach to this research.

I relied on qualitative methods to find answers to my research questions about this population of migrant workers. Because my questions centered on daily experiences of constraint

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<sup>19</sup> This detailed information on the most common states, cities and villages sending dairy workers came from unpublished data files obtained from Jill Harrison and colleagues in 2010.

and movement, it was critical for me to collect narratives from migrants, as well as be physically present to take notes on the transnational lives they led. I wanted to understand mobility from the level of the individual. Simultaneously, I sought to locate the origins of constraints on that mobility, and doing so forced me to look beyond the level of the individual to the contextual factors that structure everyday lives. Moving from general contextual factors to the specifics of *place*, I then focused on taking apart the concept of place to understand its role in mobility. The analytical work of connecting individual experiences of mobility with the components of place is thus a central feature of my methodological approach.

In 2010 and 2011, I spent a total of six months in Veracruz, Mexico and conducted interviews there with 34 migrants who had previously worked on Wisconsin dairy farms. In Wisconsin, I interviewed 26 migrants from Veracruz who were working on dairy farms, as well as eight farmers who employed these workers. Most of the Wisconsin fieldwork took place in 2011 and 2012 after returning from Veracruz. My time in the field consisted of participant-observation in both settings, as well as interviews.

### ***Organization of the Dissertation***

Part of what the mobilities lens contributes is an invitation for sociologists to reconsider how we tend to think about travel, time, and space (Callon and Law 2004; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). That is, as researchers collecting data we tend to assume a linear progression of events that happen in places over time, things that proceed from point A to point B, and the mobilities approach begs us to check this assumption. In fact, feminist social scientists have made a similar point, grounded in discussions over methodology and the way researchers tend to go about making sense of participants' narratives (e.g., Riessman 1993). Often researchers try to squeeze

participant narratives into linear forms, more recognizable to the scientific eye, but we lose meaning in the process.

That said, the layout of this dissertation is designed around a seemingly linear migrant trajectory, from the point of leaving, to the point of arriving, and back to leaving again. But I do this in order to better parse out how place shapes migration processes at each moment. I do not mean to argue that each moment necessarily follows the next. This point is particularly important in my conceptualization of *local limbo*, which may be experienced simultaneously with *labor limbo* and *return limbo* in the destination context. On the contrary, I hope it becomes clear that each stage reveals the overlap of time, events, and practices experienced by migrants, pushing against assumptions of a comprehensive linearity to migrants' lives.

In Chapter 2, I focus on migrants' experiences going to *el norte*, highlighting the tensions of (im)mobility they face while waiting to cross the border and the actual crossing. In this moment of *first limbo*, I focus on the place of Xoxotutla and its role in constructing mobility, as well as the place of the borderlands in constructing immobility. Masculinity structures migrants' experiences with mobility, according to cultural norms of the village context that prescribe who leaves and who stays. Chapter 3 is an in-depth look at the moment of working on a dairy farm and the accompanying tensions of *labor limbo* that migrants must manage. For instance, the physical organization of the farm means that migrants' work space is often not so distinct from their home space, and I describe how these characteristics of place intersect with a tenuous legal status. I also show how some migrant workers challenged labor conditions on the farm, attempting to gain leverage by their status as workers in demand, and threatening to become mobile if conditions remained unchanged. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the

different sets of immobilities that workers may face on different kinds of dairy farms. Chapter 4 examines the moment of living in a rural place. I describe dominant constructions of the rural countryside, then center on several intertwining factors that create *local limbo* in this context—the geography of the rural, transportation, the legal landscape, and community interactions. Chapter 5 focuses on the moment of return and the constraints that shape the decision to go home. Specifically, I examine how migrants plan their return to Mexico and how their planned movements can be delayed by restrictive immigration policies that make future trips to *el norte* extremely difficult. I also show how some migrant workers make decisions over mobility by considering future uncertainty and limbo. In Chapter 6, I reflect upon this study in the context of current immigration reform in the U.S.

## Chapter 2: Ready and Waiting to Go to *El Norte*

On a cold autumn morning in 2011, I was wrapping up a weekend stay in a community in Veracruz, a place that many migrants working on Wisconsin dairies call home. The sky was bright blue and the sun was shining, but sharp gusts made it somewhat uncomfortable to be outside. Even in the summer it was chilly in these mountains. This place where I stood, in the village of Xoxotutla, was vulnerable to cold and strong winds that came from the valley nearby.<sup>20</sup> That day I was visiting the home of Pedro Ximetl's sister, Eva. She lived in a concrete house, which I learned was the marker of those with family members who had traveled north and sent money home. Those families could afford to build with cement, which was much more durable and insulated than wood. The house was salmon-colored and Eva lived there with her husband, Rafael, and their two small children. Inside, in place of interior doors, brightly colored pieces of cloth hung in the entrance of each room.

On the same side of the road as Eva's house and across a dirt driveway was Pedro's mother's house, Doña Yamile. That morning, Eva's brother, David, had strung the cord of a telephone from Doña Yamile's house to Eva's house and handed me the receiver, saying only, "*El patrón.*"<sup>21</sup> Sure enough, on the other end of the line was Fred, a dairy farmer from Wisconsin, David and Pedro's former boss. We chatted for a few minutes, each of us

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<sup>20</sup> "Xoxotutla" is a fictional name that I created to protect my participants. It refers to a real village in Veracruz, but I changed some details of the place to avoid its identification. Throughout these chapters, I use pseudonyms for people, farms, and towns. See the appendix for more details on the measures I took to protect the identities of my participants.

<sup>21</sup> *Patrón* was the Spanish word participants used to refer to the dairy farmer who employed them. They did not use *jefe* (boss), likely because *patrón* is defined as an employer as well as an owner. As Harrison and colleagues note (2009b), the historical use of the word in Latin America referred to a powerful plantation owner who had ultimate control over workers' lives.

simultaneously awkward and eager, the way people talk when they have never met but hold something meaningful in common. The family watched me silently as I spoke in English to the man who had employed so many of their relatives. Pedro worked at Fred's farm for a year, and David had worked there for two years. The youngest son in the family, Rocio, had also worked there, and so had Eva's husband. David had recently told me that he wanted to go back to Fred's farm to work, and that as soon as he received a text message from the coyote that it was safe to cross the border, he would be gone. It could be tomorrow or it could be in a month. Either way, he told me, he would be ready. Until then, he would wait.

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The "moment" of going to *el norte* and all the preparation that this moment implies, is full of mobilities and immobilities for those who wish to migrate. To begin with, this moment first involves thinking about going, deciding to go, talking with friends and family in the U.S., acquiring the finances necessary, and communicating with a coyote. These activities are well underway before movement actually occurs. Here the potential for mobility is built up, preparations are made to increase the odds of crossing the border without detection, and also to ensure that a job would be waiting for migrants. Second, once mobility is underway, there are the challenges of staying mobile, that is, getting across the border safely, to the other side of the crossing point. At each of these stages, migrants experience tensions between mobility and immobility. In both stages, they are ready and waiting to go north, but must negotiate (im)mobilities along the way. I show how place shapes these (im)mobilities in each of these stages, demonstrating how migrants operate in a social space of limbo, what I call *first limbo*, as a result of the tensions they experience.

As I detail the phases involved in going north, I pay attention to how masculinity and mobility intersect, indicating, for example, how gender is wrapped up in decisions over migration. In my use of empirical material below, I engage in frequent scene shifts, turning from data I collected in Veracruz to data I collected in Wisconsin.

### ***To Become Mobile***

#### *The Gendered Institutions of Family and Labor Markets*

What I saw in the village of Xoxotutla and its neighboring pueblos and communities resonated with what other scholars have referred to as a culture of migration (Kandel and Massey 2002; Massey 1998 et al.; Mines 1981). Although the phenomenon of emigration from this village to the U.S. was somewhat recent, beginning in the 1980s and becoming more prevalent in the 1990s, according to participants I interviewed and chatted with, it was clear that migration had become a given. It was expected that at some point, most *Xoxotutlanos*, mainly adolescent boys and men, would migrate to *el norte*. Drawing on van Gennep's (1960) *Rites of Passage*, Chavez describes the unauthorized border crossing of Mexican immigrants as a "territorial passage" that signals a critical point in immigrants' lives (Chavez 1992:4).

Villagers told me that if all the *Xoxotutlanos* in the U.S. came home, the town would be double its current size. Despite these dramatic effects on the population, emigration from this area had in some ways ceased to be remarkable. When I first visited Xoxotutla, I went with a clinic worker, Rob, who introduced me to important people in the pueblo—doctors, nurses, political leaders, and shopkeepers. That day, we drove to a community not far from the center of town, where he spoke to a group of villagers on the importance of getting vaccinated and how one should boil water to kill bacteria before ingesting it. The group of about 30 people, mostly

women, with the exception of two older men, gathered in a meeting space, a concrete building with wooden chairs inside. The women wore long skirts and shawls, the traditional feminine clothing of women in the pueblo. Some women held babies, and small children played outside the building, just behind me. Rob had an impressive rapport with the women, using jokes to illustrate his point, and frequently asking, “Si, o no?” after posing different scenarios about health practices. The women laughed and responded in unison to his “yes or no” questions. Then at the end of his talk, he told them that a student was here from the United States, motioning to where I sat on little cement steps in the doorway to the room. He then asked the group, “Do any of you have family in the United States?” For more than a moment, the room was silent. In this moment, I took the silence to mean that no one had relatives in the U.S. But then a woman from the group broke the silence and said, “Casi todo” (*almost all of us*). The moment of silence revealed the difficulties of being an outsider and establishing trust with the families of migrants, and it also revealed the pervasiveness of emigration from this region.

The demographic profile of those migrating for the first time from Mexico to the U.S., as well as that of migrants globally, has shifted in recent decades from the single male migrant to include migrant women. Yet, even before this empirically documented change, feminists in the social sciences worked to bring attention to the historically overlooked experiences of women immigrants, the familial context in which decisions about migration take place, and the critical need for a gendered lens with which to view migration processes (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pedraza 1991).

The number of unauthorized women from Mexico living in the U.S. in 2005 was estimated at 2 million, representing just under 40% of the total unauthorized population from

Mexico (Passel 2006). As far as unauthorized migration (versus those who may have arrived authorized but whose status changed over time), other research indicates that the likelihood of women migrating unauthorized from Mexico to the U.S. has risen in the last few decades (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Even so, patterns of migration within households still proceed with men initiating and with women migrating after male family members (Cerrutti and Massey 2001). As I mentioned in the last chapter, among the 60 migrants I formally interviewed on both sides of the border, just a handful were women. In total, I interviewed, met and heard about only 10 women from Mexico who had worked on dairies in Wisconsin, compared to the numerous male migrants I met in Wisconsin and Veracruz. During my fieldwork, I never heard of a case in which a woman had made the journey unauthorized by herself, without a companion.

Gender constructs the process of migration. From Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003:6), “Gender informs different sets of social relations that organize immigration and social institutions (e.g., family, labor markets) in both immigrants’ place of origin and place of destination.” Following this approach, we see how the process of becoming mobile, situated as it is in the context of the sending community, is deeply gendered. One institution that contributes to this gendered migration is the family, the site in which decisions about migration take place, structuring gender appropriate actions for men and women, and boys and girls (e.g., Dreby 2010; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Another critical social structure is the labor market of the migrant destination, in which the demand for labor is gendered (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; McKay 2007), as well as racialized and nativized, sorting migrants into certain jobs depending on the industry. Women are sought out and encouraged to migrate for certain jobs, for example, in the *maquiladoras* of Mexico (Fernández-Kelly 1983), or the service sector in industrialized

societies of the global north (Sassen-Koob 1984). Because the labor market shapes the process of becoming mobile in these specific ways, we cannot separate this institution from what happens in the community of origin context. In this case, the demand for dairy workers in the *place* of the Upper Midwest and other regions of *el norte*, shapes the premigration stages of the migrant trajectory.

Among the migrants with whom I spoke, migration was framed as an obligation rooted to the familial context. I spoke with Jacob, an earnest 23 year old, on the dairy farm where he had been working as a milker for three years. It was his first trip to the U.S. We sat in a meeting room just off the dairy parlor, where he candidly told me about why he migrated north:

The truth is, the situation is very difficult. We come because, well, in my case, there is little work in the pueblo where we live. You earn little, not enough to support your family, much less pay for schooling for those who want to study. For that reason, it's not the same. Being there, you can imagine the life here. Beautiful. And you think that you'll earn a ton of money, but in reality it's that here, too, you have to work a lot to get money. If you don't work, you don't survive. But in reality, if there is a lot of opportunity for you to work, of course you'll earn more than in Mexico. For that reason, you leave the pueblo, you leave the house. To have a better life, to have a better life for our family. And that's why one leaves to work far away...Because you have kids and in the mountains there isn't enough money to send your kids to school, to support your family, and so you're obligated to look for work on the other side, to come here to work.

Although most of the women I interviewed in this study framed their decision in similar ways, the sense of familial obligation to leave the village and find work to support the family seemed to be heavier for men and adolescent boys. It was expected that men and boys would eventually head to *el norte* to find work, likely on Wisconsin dairy farms, one of the most common destinations for *Xoxotutlanos*. When I asked Hector, 24 years old, about family expectations for men who migrate, he began to tell me about how his situation, as a father with a wife and child in Mexico, differs from that of a young single guy migrating north. What unfolded from his narrative was a set of norms surrounding masculinity and family:

When someone is a young single guy, who are you going to support? You spend your money on what you want. Well, some do and there are some who don't. But, saving money for the day that you go there [to Mexico] and you get married... You don't have to rush around trying to figure out what to do. You've got to have good sense when you are single to save and save to build a house, and when you get married you already have everything in hand to provide a good life to your wife. Yes, that is necessary. Part of life is that you have to work for your family. That is clear.

In other words, migrating as a single man was part of the process of being a good husband in the future, even if migrants were single in the present. In this way, it is clear that the decision to migrate is a gendered decision, built around expectations of masculinity stemming from the

institution of the family in the context of the sending community. In terms of mobility, the standard assumption was that boys and men would become mobile, leaving their pueblo to head to *el norte*, and women and girls would stay behind.

Whereas the network of migrants traveling from Xoxotutla to the dairy farms of Wisconsin was made up of mostly men, I did hear about a considerable number of women from the village who migrated within Mexico to work as maids in large cities. From those in the community I spoke with, this internal migration of village women to Monterrey or Mexico City had a longer history compared to the more recent pattern of migration of the mostly male *Xoxotutlanos* who migrated to the U.S. to work in dairy farms in Wisconsin or construction in North Carolina. These different migration patterns are thus tied to labor markets that are gendered. In a different chapter, I describe how the spaces on most dairy farms are constructed under the assumption of an all-male workforce, and how some farmers were resistant, and at the very least hesitant, to hire female workers. This gendered labor demand, combined with gendered expectations of the family, signals that the process of deciding to be mobile is quite gendered.

### *Deciding in Place*

We see, then, how gendered institutions critical in migration processes come to shape patterns of gendered migration. But how exactly does place fit in with mobility and gender? From Gieryn (2000:474):

Gendered segregations via the geography and architecture of built-places contribute to the subordination and spatialized social control of women, either by

denying access to knowledge and activities crucial for the reproduction of power and privilege or by limiting mobility more generally within places defined as unsafe, physically threatening, or inappropriate.

In this reading, place has everything to do with reinforcing power differences through gendered mobility. Institutions are “emplaced,” attached to geographic locations with particular meanings attached to these locations. But place is not merely a stand-in for institutions, or vice versa.

In Jacob’s narrative above, he explained that, “...in the mountains there isn’t enough money to send your kids to school...” In fact, the Spanish word he used to refer to “mountains” was not “las montañas,” but it was a particular name, one whose meaning connotes mountains, but is used to describe the specific region of villages that includes Xoxotutla and dozens of other pueblos and a great many communities. It is a particular place. It is a geographic location—in the mountains in the Southeastern Mexican state of Veracruz, it is made up of material things—a highway runs through it, crops are harvested in its countryside—and, it is invested with particular meaning—its name makes it a place in this sense and it has cultural significance for those who know it. These three components make this mountainous region a place, using Gieryn’s definition (2000), and the decision to migrate, to be mobile, is constructed by these elements of place.

The geographic characteristics of this region—its steep inclines and peaks, its proximity to an urban city center, and its proximity to the border—have much to do with its history of migration. In fact, it is these geographic features that have historically inhibited the mobility of its inhabitants, who are mostly indigenous. One of the more frequent themes from my interviews

and informal chats with *Xoxotutlanos* and migrants from villages nearby, was the changes that the region had experienced in the last 30 years. For many, the highway that connected villages to each other and to the communities at the base of the mountains, near the closest urban center, was critical to these changes. Roads certainly shape mobility and immobility (e.g., Dalakogou and Harvey 2012), and this was evident in the stories I heard from villagers. Doña Yamile, who was 58 years old at the time of our interview, told me that when she was growing up there were no stores in Xoxotutla, and that her parents would walk to a village in the region that was more populated and had stores. The walk would take the entire day, she said.

Until recently, migration from Mexico's Central-West states, such as Jalisco and Michoacán, had made up over fifty percent of all migration to the U.S. starting in the 1920s, and states in the border region were just behind them. But in recent years, migration from Southeastern states in Mexico, including Veracruz, has been on the rise, and there has been a notable increase in migrants coming from rural communities (Riosmena and Massey 2012). Scholars have argued that the reasons for these shifts can be traced to economic restructuring in Mexico, which affected rural areas in Southern states of the country in particular (Riosmena and Massey 2012). The mountainous region where Xoxotutla is located is considered to be rural and the spaces outside the main center of town were referred to by villagers as *el campo*, the countryside. We see, then, just as other rural studies scholars have found (e.g., Bell et al. 2010; Kasimis et al. 2010), how rurality, a certain kind of place, has shaped mobility. When Jacob referred to the mountainous region of Xoxotutla and the local economy there, he tied his decision to be mobile to place.

*Becoming Mobile: The Process of Mobility, Starting from the Village*

Turning back to my visit with the Ximetl family, it was then, while talking to Fred at Eva's house, when I began to understand how migrants were actually laboring across borders. Their experiences with keeping in touch with family and friends in Wisconsin, organizing to get across the border, saving or borrowing money and communicating with a *coyote*, and sometimes even maintaining ties to employers, all required effort. They required work, and long before the *real* work with paid wages would come. Through these activities, some of them transnational, migrants were also working in a different sense. They were working to resolve the tensions of mobility and immobility.

Among the standard questions I asked migrants was, how much time did you spend planning your trip to the U.S.? I wanted to get a sense of the process of migrating without authorization to understand the conditions for mobility. Did migrants from Xoxotutla go on a whim? Or did migrants spend considerable time preparing? Most told me that they planned for at least a month, gathering together what they needed to become mobile. For many, this meant obtaining a loan, getting in touch with a friend or relative in Wisconsin about work opportunities, and securing a connection to a coyote who would smuggle them across the border. All of these premigration activities took place in the context of their home village, a place that was relatively new at sending migrants to Wisconsin or anywhere in the U.S.

In most cases, getting the money required to travel to *el norte* meant obtaining a loan. The loan could come from a variety of sources—a member of the community in the sending region, a relative or friend from the community working in the U.S., or even a trusted *patrón* on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. There were people in Xoxotutla and surrounding communities, many of them former migrants or family members of those currently in the U.S., who were known to give loans

to those planning to make the journey north. While visiting Huitla, a small community near Xoxotutla, I developed a clear picture of the process of obtaining a loan, which could differ from place to place. Like many other communities in the area, Huitla was not on the paved highway and could only be accessed by way of a rocky dirt road, nearly impossible to use in very wet weather. I stayed in this community for three days with the family of a migrant, Victor, who had worked on a Wisconsin dairy. The first night of my stay, Victor introduced me to his aunt and uncle, Sonya and Bacilio. They agreed to talk with me in the company of Victor and other family members of his about their impressions of migration from Huitla in recent years, as well as their experiences as close relatives of those who had migrated:

J: But how do the people here save the money to cross?

B: They ask for a loan and hock their land or a house or what they can sell.

S: Yes, if they can't secure it, they ask for a loan. Like, my sons that went asked for a loan.

J: From a family that has it?

B: That has it, that has money. But they charge to make it happen.

J: Interest?

B: Yes, interest.

J: And what happens when some guys can't pay? What are the consequences? If a man or woman can't pay, and they don't want to pay, what happens?

B: Here, they demand it from you, or they take something that you have.

S: If they have a written agreement, they take your land.

J: So is everything written on papers?

B: Yes.

J: And how much is the interest, more or less?

B: Well, there are some that charge 20 or 30.

J: Percent? 20 or 30 percent?

S: Yes.

Because those with sufficient funds to invest would not see their money grow in savings accounts with the low dividend rates offered by local banks, they took advantage of the situation in the community—the demand for liquid assets, driven by the increase in emigration from the region in recent years—to lend money at high interest rates. So for those wishing to migrate, the process of becoming mobile included securing a loan, funds that were, in many cases, only available because of the community's status as a relatively new sending region. The region had become richer since *Xoxotutlanos* had begun traveling to *el norte*, and as a result there were more lenders to meet the demand of potential migrants heading north. Interestingly, I heard of government officials in some communities in the area that had put restrictions in place barring the excessive interest rates stipulated by private lenders. But this did not seem to restrict the practices of lenders that Sonya and Bacilio mentioned.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A migrant worker I spoke with in Wisconsin, Jaime, told me that migrants borrow money to cross either from a community member in Xoxotutla or from the U.S., and that the interest rate typically charged is ten percent. I did not ask Pedro Ximetl about interest rates, but he did tell me that he would borrow an amount equivalent to \$1,500 U.S. dollars from a community member in Xoxotutla, and that it would take one month of working in Wisconsin to earn enough to send this amount back to the pueblo to the lender.

An additional facet related to obtaining a loan is that the amount needed to pay smugglers the fee they demanded was shaped by changes in place. It was clear in speaking with villagers, both in Veracruz and the U.S., that these fees were increasing over time. In fact, widespread increases in smugglers' fees have been documented since the late 1980s, which researchers suggest was then exacerbated beginning in the early 1990s, when the Immigration and Naturalization Service began its strategy of intensified border enforcement (Cornelius 2001). Massey and his colleagues note that after border enforcement intensified, with programs such as Operation Blockade in El Paso in 1992, smuggling fees increased rapidly, in part because of the geographic changes in crossing points that necessitated transportation to more distant places (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Thus, this intensification of detection technology and material barriers, such as fences, was a way in which the place of the border region had changed. In this sense, the premigration activity of securing a loan is shaped by changes in place characteristics, albeit, places outside the immediate village context. I take up these border region issues in more detail later in this chapter.

Turning to other premigration activities, for some migrants, the process of becoming mobile meant getting a lead on a job in Wisconsin while they were still living in their villages. By arranging work opportunities in advance with family members or friends who were working on dairy farms—via telephone, email, or text message—some migrants would carry out a transnational job swap. For instance, after working for two years at one dairy farm in Wisconsin, one worker would travel home and another worker, having just arrived from Mexico, would take his place in a coordinated exchange. This strategy of worker replacement was common among the workers I spoke with. When I spoke with Victor, my host in Huitla, he was 24 years old and

had been back in Mexico for one year since working on a large dairy farm near Shrewsbury, Wisconsin. He learned about the job because his uncles were working at the same *ranch*o, and one of these uncles, Sergio, had plans to return to Huitla and told Victor he could take his job as a milker. When Victor was ready to return to Huitla after having worked at the farm for one year, Sergio went back to the same farm to reclaim the position he had given to Victor.

For other migrants, like David Ximatl, communicating with a former *patrón* to find out about potential job opportunities was part of their premigration activities, and thus part of the process of becoming mobile. Victor, too, had been maintaining contact with his former *patrón* since he had returned to Huitla. After I left the community, Victor and I kept in touch via text message for the remainder of my time in Mexico, checking in and saying hello. He knew I would be heading back to the U.S. later that month. The next time I heard from Victor, I was in California for a brief visit with family and friends between leaving Mexico and returning to Wisconsin. I was on the Amtrak train, winding through the agricultural fields of the Central Valley at night, bound for San Francisco, when I received a text message on my U.S. cell phone from Victor. He asked if I had made it safely back to the U.S. and he wanted to know if I could do him a favor. He asked me to call his *patrón* to pass along a message. I said I would. Victor wanted his former employer to call him on his family's land line. While in Huitla, he had told me that he was planning to cross the border in January, a time of year that he said was safer for crossing, when border patrol agents would be too cold to get out of their vehicles. Victor wanted to return to Wisconsin to work for his *patrón*, and he wanted to know if there would be a job for him.

Organizing to be smuggled across the border also forms a part of premigration activities and is a necessary element in the process of becoming mobile. As a researcher trying to collect information, this was one of the fuzziest aspects of the process of getting north.<sup>23</sup> As such, I collected only a few narratives about how one accesses the services of a *coyote* and how migrants can trust this person. David Ximetl was one of the migrants who told me about how the process works. When we met, David was in wait. He was in communication with the coyote who would smuggle him across the border, but conditions in that region were unsafe. David said that once his coyote sent him a text message, telling him conditions were safe for crossing, he would immediately leave Xoxotutla for the border. Arranging for being smuggled was a critical part of becoming mobile, but conditions on the border could render migrants immobile at this premigration stage, waiting in suspension at the tension point of mobility and immobility.

Getting ready to migrate, then, involves a series of premigration activities. Securing money to cross and finding a lead on employment in the U.S. are steps that many migrants take before they migrate. These steps are part of the process of becoming mobile, and each is shaped by characteristics of place. The mobility process, however, is complicated by constraints to mobility that migrants can encounter at this premigration stage. For example, during my discussion with *Huitlanos* about the process of securing a loan, one of Victor's aunts said that her son wanted to return to the U.S., but could not obtain a loan to do so. Similarly, when I spoke with Seferino, a 22 year old who had just returned from milking cows in Wisconsin to his community near Xoxotutla a month before we spoke, he shared complaints with another former

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<sup>23</sup> First, I was careful not to ask migrants about smugglers due to stipulations in the IRB protocol for this research which prohibited me from asking direct questions about citizenship status. Second, it was important for me to create and maintain rapport with members of the village and I felt that as an American researcher, asking questions about a subject I deemed to be sensitive—such as, *how did you find out about this smuggler?*—would threaten the relationship I was attempting to create.

dairy worker who was present that someone in the village was no longer willing to loan money to those wishing to travel north. Regarding job swaps, there are times in which this practice—viewed by scholars as an economic strategy at the household or family level (e.g., Grasmuck and Pessar 1991)—falls through. Some *Xoxotutlanos*, after having arranged their employment at the premigration stage, find themselves arriving in Wisconsin with no job. If migrants cannot cross the border as quickly as they had anticipated, and if the worker currently holding the position available has already returned to Mexico, the position will be filled by a worker who is available. So while obtaining money is required for mobility, to pay a smuggler to get across the border, the practice of getting a lead on employment is not a necessary condition for that mobility. Instead, it is a practice that often—but not always—forms part of the process of becoming mobile during the premigration stage.

Above, I outlined the series of activities that make up the process of becoming mobile, before mobility actually happens. We see how potential migrants going through this process of becoming mobile can come up against immobilities, and how the clashing of the two is a tension that migrants must negotiate as early as this premigration stage. The process of becoming mobile can thus be challenged by obstacles that render migrants immobile, obstacles shaped by the particularities of place, for example, the inability to acquire a loan and the rising cost of smuggler fees. Below, I turn to consider the phase of the migrant trajectory that occurs during border crossing, the tensions of (im)mobility there, and the characteristics of place that shape these tensions.

### *Crossing in Place: From the Border to El Norte*

After the preparations have been completed and only the actual crossing remains, the moment of truth arrives; a successful crossing can only be hoped for, not guaranteed. For undocumented migrants, crossing the border is a territorial passage that marks the transition from one way of life to another.

--Leo Chavez, 1992, p. 5

I had met the Ximetls through a relative of theirs, the owner of a restaurant in the pueblo. After an initial introduction in early August, the second time I visited the house, several days later, Doña Yamile invited me inside to talk. When I met her the week before, I had also briefly met two of her sons, David and Rocio, both of whom told me they had worked on dairies in Wisconsin. What I didn't know at the time was that Doña Yamile had two more sons who had worked on dairies in the same area in Wisconsin, and that her husband, too, had worked on a dairy there. Her son-in-law had as well, plus her brothers and her nephews. Sitting for the first time at the Ximetl kitchen table, I began to learn about this family's history of migration to Wisconsin. And it was during this initial visit, which lasted only an hour and a half, that the Ximetl sons, along with their mother, began to tell me stories of border crossings—their own and others'. The stories came unprompted. I had told the Ximetls I wanted to know about what life was like in Wisconsin, about why they went there, and that I wanted to learn about the pueblo, too. But the stories of life on the dairy flowed into stories of wanting to go back, which flowed into stories of border crossing. It was clear that the unauthorized crossing of the border was critical to migrants' stories about their time in the U.S., and about their experiences with migration generally.

For undocumented migrants, the crossing is, as Chavez (1992) puts it, a phase of transition and liminality. In addition, I see it as a peculiar moment in which migrants are at once mobile yet immobilized. Here I trace the role of place—with its three components of location, materiality, and meaning—in shaping these tensions. All three of these components of place are interrelated, but for the sake of clarity, I try to keep these aspects separate, at least in this initial explanation. In migrants' narratives below, we see how the place of the border has undergone flux and change, in turn shaping migrants' (im)mobilities. Here, I aim to show how migrants deal with these tensions in the moment of crossing, how they manage and negotiate them, and how in doing so they occupy a social space of limbo. In the sense that border enforcement trends have affected the lives of countless undocumented migrants in the same way, not just those of *Veracruzanos*, the narratives below have much in common with other stories of crossing, by different migrants from different populations in Mexico.

### *Materiality of the Border*

I sat in a wooden chair talking with David, who had walked into the kitchen through a side door five minutes after I arrived. He was about my age, with a long and serious face, closely cropped hair, and a thin build. When we met for this first time the week before, he was wearing a gray sweatshirt with the words, *Got Milk?*, on the front in English with a cartoon picture of a cow. He wore the same sweatshirt on this day. A bowl of soup was placed in front of me by one of Doña's teenage daughters. I looked up and Doña said that she hoped I would like it. I thanked her and began to eat while listening to David's account of his life in Wisconsin. About ten minutes later, a man who looked to be in his late 30s walked in and took a seat on the other side of David. He wore a white T-shirt and jeans, and was taller than David and looked fit. Doña

began speaking in Nahautl with him, then turned to me and told me this was her son, Pedro, and that he too had been to Wisconsin.

Together, Pedro and David told me that at that moment, the fee that the coyotes were demanding for crossing was not that expensive, at \$1,500 U.S. dollars. But crossing had become much more difficult, Pedro said. In the past, one could come and go from Xoxotutla with ease, but today things are quite different, he had said. Now there are horses, dogs and cameras monitoring the border and it is much more difficult to get across unnoticed. Pedro said that the increased presence of *narcotraficantes* in the border region means that sometimes migrants are kidnapped when they get to the other side and kept in a house while their family is demanded to pay a ransom. In other words, the materiality of the place of the border has changed, and this plays a big part in migrants' mobility, as well as the meanings ascribed to the border region and the changing geography of crossing points, both of which I explore in more depth below.

The changing material elements of the border region also surfaced in my discussion with other migrants, one of whom was a worker I met in Wisconsin, Jaime. I came to know Jaime through a friend of Hector's. This friend had introduced me to Hector's cousin, who was a co-worker of Jaime's. The two worked at Sparrow's Den, which was located in the same county as Grassy Dairy, about a 40 minute drive away. Jaime and I met in the springtime of 2012, and although we only knew each other for less than two months before he would travel back to Mexico, we formed a close rapport. He introduced me to other migrants and on several occasions we drove around together to different farms in the area. During one of these drives, he told me about the process of crossing, particularly the physical organization of the border. He said that at the border point, at least where he crossed, there was a line of posts with cameras attached. The

coyotes have walkie talkies, and they seem to know the whereabouts of *La Migra* (border patrol). The group waits for *La Migra* to be distracted by another group of migrants crossing. Then, when the cameras are turned the other way, the coyote says, “Cross now!”

The addition of cameras to the border region signals a change in the physicality of this place, shaping the ability of migrants to be mobile while located in the border region. This implementation of specialized technology, along with the doubling of Border Patrol agents (Cornelius 2001), and the increased use of material barriers (Donato et al. 2008), such as fencing, are all physical changes to the place of the border, introduced with the intention of restricting the movement of migrants, in effect, immobilizing them. These efforts began in the early 1990s and are best exemplified by the programs, *Operation Gatekeeper* in San Diego, *Hold the Line* in El Paso, and *Operation Safeguard* in Arizona (e.g., Nevins 2002). Andreas (2000) notes that these enforcement efforts are fueled by “loss of control” narratives, in which advocates of militarized border strategies claim that the state has lost its ability to police its boundaries. And as Andreas critically observes, these “loss of control” stories serve to hide the powerful role of the state in driving these clandestine border flows from the start.

But despite this ramping up of enforcement, the likelihood of migration from Mexico to the U.S. remained the same after these efforts (Massey and Riosmena 2010). In fact, unauthorized migration continued, as enforcement drove migrants to develop more successful strategies to avoid detection, including the shifting of entry points toward more remote geographic regions (Cornelius 2001; Donato and Armenta 2011; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002).

*Treacherous Geographies*

These material strategies of immobilizing undocumented migrants by the former Immigration and Naturalization Service and now the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, and Customs and Border Protection, have shifted the pathways of migrants to geographic locations with fewer material barriers to movement. This became clear to me in Xoxotutla when I spoke with *Veracruzanos* who had crossed the Mexico-U.S. border in earlier years. One of these was Rafael, Pedro's brother-in-law who owned a shoe store in the center of the village. He was 34 and had traveled to the U.S. five times. On his most recent trip to the U.S., he spent a year milking cows near Shrewsbury, Wisconsin. Rafael told me, just as Pedro and numerous other migrants had, that crossing the border used to be much easier. In the 1990s, he crossed the border in Tecate, near Tijuana, and from there he got a ride to San Diego. Another time, he told me, it took only one night to cross. "Como ocho horas?" I had asked. Yes, he had said, about eight hours and they arrived. By contrast, the last time he crossed it took four nights and three days to get across the border and into Arizona. Rafael's changing experiences with crossing fits with the well-documented shift in migration patterns away from populated checkpoints and toward more desolate entry points in the desert (Donato and Armenta 2011; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). While this shift facilitated migrants' mobility—their movement from the place of the borderlands to the place of *el norte*—the geographic characteristics of these more recent entry points led to a different sort of immobility for migrants.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Actually, this sort of immobility is constructed both by geographic as well as physical components of place, if we see objects like rocks, trees, and grass as parts of material elements of places, as Gieryn does (2000).

When I spoke with Pedro Ximetzl a couple of months before his departure for the Mexico-U.S. border, he had told me about the physical toll of crossing the desert. In his life, he had crossed the border three times and spent a total of ten years working in the U.S., first in South Carolina in construction, then in Shrewsbury, Wisconsin milking cows. The last time he crossed, he told me, it took four days, and it was very difficult physically to withstand it. During our conversation, his brother, David, told me he saw a body once while he was crossing the desert with a group of other migrants. “What did you do?” I had asked at the time, somewhat startled by his story, though I knew that the harsh conditions of the desert led to the death of hundreds of migrants per year. Nothing, he had said. They just kept walking.

About a month before Pedro’s planned departure, I conducted an individual interview with him in his house, located just two doors down from his mother’s. He answered the door when I knocked, wearing a T-shirt, jeans, and black workman’s shoes, and we stood talking for a few minutes about whether he had time to chat with me that evening. I was planning to head back down from the pueblo and to my apartment the next morning and I would not be back in Xoxotutla for about a week. He seemed to give in to my indirect persistence, invited me in and offered me a seat. Pedro’s house was nice. It was concrete, ceiling, walls, and floors, and a warm light flooded the small dining area, which held a shiny China cabinet. The walls were painted pink and the television was on. I could see that a couple more rooms extended beyond the dining area. His youngest daughter wore a sparkled purple dress and was getting her hair combed by her mother, while their two other children played nearby.

Sitting on the sofa, with Pedro perched on the arm of the sofa a couple seats away, I began to ask him about his life in Wisconsin and South Carolina. Soon into our conversation, he

told me that he was planning on returning to Wisconsin in a matter of weeks. I asked him what he needed to do to prepare for the journey. In terms of the objects needed to survive walking for such long periods of time in the desert, Pedro told me that he does not bring much. He takes a small backpack, he said, pointing to the size of my purse for comparison, and fills it with a bag of spiced nuts and water. Pedro said he always brings this exact food. As far as clothing, he said it is very important to wear dark clothes to avoid being seen, and to wear appropriate shoes. “Like those?” I asked, pointing to his black sturdy-looking work shoes. “No,” he said, “Boots. You need to wear boots. These shoes are no good because they will tear here and here,” pointing to the seams on his shoes. He told me that there are animals out there in the desert and you must have good shoes on for protection. You cannot wear a watch or bring a cell phone because he suspected that the helicopters can detect signals from the phone, as well as light from the watch.

When I asked Pedro if he would be taking his family with him, he said no, that it was best not to take them, that the trip would be too difficult. He would go alone. And it would just be for a year or a year and a half. Enough time to work to earn sufficient funds to invest in creating a tire business in the pueblo. Besides, he would be able to talk with them on the phone while away. Motioning to the dining area, I asked, “Do your kids know you’re leaving?” “No,” he said, “They don’t know.” He looked over at his three small children, playing marbles on the floor. “Right now, they just want food. They don’t know.”

About one month later, the day came for Pedro to leave. I heard it first from his youngest brother, Rocio. I approached him one evening as he was cutting hair outside behind Doña Yamile’s house. He had wrapped a cut black garbage bag neatly around the collar of his brother’s son, a boy about 12 year old, so that the hair clippings would slide down onto the

ground. The boy, smiling, held a mirror in his hand to monitor the progress of the cut as Rocio slowly moved electric clippers across his scalp. Another nephew sat close by, smiling even bigger and waiting for his turn. We all exchanged hellos, and I watched the haircuts. Pedro arrived a few minutes later, exchanged a quick greeting with me, and talked with Rocio about something briefly, before heading off as quickly as he had come, telling us he was heading downtown. Rocio turned to me and said casually that Pedro was leaving for *el norte* that night. Surprised that the time had gone so fast, I asked him to repeat himself. And yes, Pedro was leaving. I told Rocio that I hoped it would be a safe passage, and that he had my contact information just in case anything happens and he needs to get in touch with me. After all, I told him, I would be back in Wisconsin in a few weeks. I stayed at the Ximetl house visiting and heard the same news about Pedro from David, then I heard it from Doña, and then it was clear to me that it was common knowledge. Pedro was leaving that night at ten o'clock. That evening I stayed in the kitchen, chatting with David about his time in Wisconsin and about Pedro's travel plans. David said that he too would leave for the border as soon as he hears that Pedro crossed safely. Doña Yamile and her daughters were preparing food and chatting. Then I saw Pedro again. He walked quickly into the kitchen and through the dining area. I glanced at him, at his hands, and he was holding my business card, flicking it between his fingers. It was upside down, but I knew it was my card because I caught a fleeting glimpse of the University of Wisconsin logo on the underside.

The next morning, I headed out on foot from my rented room to the Ximetl house. I had not stayed late enough to see Pedro off, and I wanted to stop in to see the family before boarding the bus. Doña Yamile welcomed me inside and she and her oldest son, Anton, told me that Pedro

had left late the night before. I sat at the table, drinking the sweet coffee that Doña had put in front of me, and Anton began telling us about a dream he had had the night before about Pedro. It took me a minute to realize that Anton was telling us about a dream, and not reality. He dreamt that Pedro was trying to cross the border, but he had been caught and sent back to the village. Then Doña jumped in and began telling us that she too had dreamt about Pedro. She dreamt that she had given him a pair of shoes to put on, to cross the desert with, but that Pedro had rejected the shoes, telling her, “No. These shoes won’t last four days and four nights.” The shoes, in other words, would not survive the harsh elements of the desert, the physical wear that the crossing, the treacherous geography, would inflict on them, the threat of immobility that desert conditions bring. Just a few days later, I said goodbye to the Ximetls. I shook David’s hand, thanking him for everything and he said, “I hope you see Pedro there.”

### *The Meaning of the Border*

To take Gieryn’s third component of place, that places are invested with meanings, and to fully explain how the Mexico-U.S. border region is infused with meanings, would be quite a task. A comprehensive account of the historical meanings of the border region would be rather lengthy, and ultimately not very useful. A better way to explicitly address this is to see how, in my discussion of the physicality and geography of the border, meanings are present throughout. Teasing out how migrants understand this place is to cover much of what has been described above. The physical aspects of the border region have changed with intensified enforcement strategies—advanced technology, more personnel, and more material barriers. This intensification has led to a shift in the geography of crossing points. These geographies, located as they are in remote desert terrain, with large stretches of land that must be traversed before

reaching the U.S., are dangerous. The meaning of the border region, then, has much to do with the changing physicality of it as well as the changing geography of it. These place components construct migrants' perceptions of mobility and immobility. They also construct non-migrants' perceptions, evident by Doña Yamile's poignant description of her dream.

Migrants negotiate the tensions of mobility and immobility in the border region by trying to cross undetected—by drawing on their own past experiences, and those of others, waiting to get word from those who had passed successfully, a signal that conditions were safe, and that the coyote could be trusted. All of these were considerations and steps taken to ward against being rendered immobile at the border region. Migrants were managing the contradictions of mobility and immobility, tensions that were shaped by place.

### ***Waiting in Limbo: Mobility in Tension***

In the sections above, I traced two different phases of the “moment” of going to *el norte*. First, deciding to head north and gathering the resources to do so, and second, crossing the border. In each of these, elements of place shapes and constructs mobilities and immobilities for migrants. The tensions of these (im)mobilities come together in a way that leaves migrants in a social space of limbo. The limbo I outline here is wrapped up with mobility. It is the *first limbo* in the migrant trajectory. There are other kinds of limbo that I detail in subsequent chapters. Each kind of limbo I discuss is tied to movement and, in turn, tied to the places that construct mobility or immobility. For instance, David Ximatl, waiting when I met him for word from his coyote that it was safe to pass, then waiting for word from his brother, Pedro, that it was safe to pass, occupied a social space of limbo. Unable to get up and go when he wanted, he was instead rendered immobile by the situation at the border region, whether it was heavy enforcement or

*narcotraficantes*. Other villagers, such as Victor's relative in Huitla, waited for a loan to come through so that they could head north. But despite David occupying this seemingly powerless space, he told me that he was lucky. He had never been apprehended by *La Migra*. Getting caught was, of course, another way in which migrants could end up in limbo.

Numerous migrants I spoke with in Mexico and in Wisconsin told me that they had been arrested by border patrol (*La Migra*) while attempting to cross. Sometimes after being apprehended they would be sent just south of the border. Other times they might be sent all the way back to Veracruz, in the central part of Mexico, 850 miles from the border, where they might wait for word—as David waited—that it was safe to try crossing again. This was the situation with Froylan, a 22 year old who I met in Xoxotutla. He had spent four and a half years working on a dairy farm in western Wisconsin where he was paid six dollars an hour and worked 66 hours a week. He arrived in Wisconsin in 2004, when he was 15 years old, and left in 2008. He told me that just one month prior to our interview, he had tried crossing the border to head for the Upper Midwest to work at a farm in Minnesota with his brother:

It's been about 15 days since I came back. We can't cross. We left here the 24<sup>th</sup> of August for Sonora. We were walking like two nights. Migration [border patrol] caught us. I want to go again in November. I spent about one month, thinking, how to cross the border...My money, \$600 is gone...to go up to that point it's \$600. If you're there in Phoenix, you pay the other half.

Froylan was occupying the transnational in-between. Even though geographically he was living in Veracruz, he was focused on the goal of heading north and attempting to cross the border once more. So, he waited. When I met Froylan he was working as a taxi driver in Xoxotutla, waiting for enough time to elapse so that he would not be sent to jail if he was arrested again at the border. Caught en route to the U.S., he was apprehended in the border zone—the geographic in-betweenness—of the Sonora Desert, but now back at home, he was still experiencing this in-betweenness—through steady communication with his brother in Minnesota, with his reflections of life in Wisconsin, through working as a taxi driver while he waited to cross the border once more.

When we think of the most extreme examples of immigrants in wait, we might think of those detained in immigration deportation centers or in county jails, or worse yet, those migrants who die trying to cross the border unauthorized. Since the crack-down in deportation, in which removals under President Obama increased by 30% compared to pre-2009 levels (Lopez et al. 2011), a booming “detention industry” (Welch 2002) has sprung up in the border region (and beyond), where detention facilities for immigrants abound. Recently there have been media reports of what life is like in these border facilities. In fact, “limbo” is often the word used in several accounts as reporters profile the stories of detained immigrants. One recent news story points to the fact that immigrants can also be detained without spending time in a detention facility. A Washington state newspaper profiled the story of Ana Maria Gutierrez, a Mexican national married to an American citizen and the mother of six American children. Gutierrez was applying for citizenship when an old deportation order surfaced from years prior when she

crossed the border unauthorized. She was under house arrest as she awaited her trial, in “limbo” but at “home” (Smith 2012).<sup>25</sup>

The sense of being in wait while geographically located in the border zone surfaced in stories migrants told me about their own experiences, or those of friends or relatives. For example, a couple of months after I met Hector, who was 24 years old, he told me that his brother and his cousin were heading to Wisconsin from Mexico together and that Hector would have to forego plans to buy something he had been wanting to purchase so that he could pay for his brother’s “pasaje.” This was in winter. Two months later, by springtime, Hector told me that his brother and cousin were still trying to get north, but they were stuck at the border, unable to cross. They had planned to cross using the services of a *coyote*, then travel to Grassy Dairy Farm where Hector would help them find work milking cows. But instead they were in Tamaulipas, just south of Texas, running out of money. One evening over dinner in the trailer where Hector lived with three other workers, he phoned his uncle who lived a few towns over from Grassy Dairy and the two talked about the latest news and what they could do to help.

In this situation, it was Hector’s brother and cousin who occupied a particularly accentuated social space of limbo, in between mobility and immobility while physically located in the border region. They were waiting for a solution to an inexplicable hang-up with the *coyote*, waiting for money to be wired from Hector and his uncle so they could eat, and unwilling

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<sup>25</sup> According to my knowledge, few of the migrant workers I came to know *well* were apprehended and detained in the U.S. during the course of my study, although I heard of many instances in which this had occurred. Most interactions with law enforcement were due to traffic violations, and workers were typically fined without being arrested. However, in the spring of 2012, one participant was arrested on the farm where he worked and taken into custody for reasons which I must keep confidential. He remained incarcerated in a county jail in Wisconsin until early 2013.

to make the return trip to Xoxotutla after spending money on bus fare to get all the way to the border.

The temporal dimension of limbo, being in wait, also featured heavily in the narratives of migrants who were physically located far from the border, whether I was interviewing participants in Wisconsin or in Veracruz. As in Hector's story above, much of these narratives of waiting were about work and citizenship. When I asked about whether he had experienced waiting, Hugo, a 35 year old *Veracruzano*, responded with a resounding, "Yes." As we spoke in a clothing store in Xoxotutla, he told me that as a migrant worker in Wisconsin, he had to wait to see family, wait to get work, and wait to send money home. In fact, as we trace a migrant's trajectory, we trace a waiting trajectory. Migrants in Mexico wait to cross the border so they can find a job in the U.S. which will pay many times over the wages available in their villages. They wait to work. Migrant workers in Wisconsin wait until they have earned enough money to meet their target goal.<sup>26</sup> They wait to stop working. And if their wives and children are not with them, like many in this study, they wait to see their families in Mexico. Their families, in turn, wait to see their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. It could be argued that this waiting among migrants and their families has occurred for centuries. That is, what is new about this phenomenon? The difference is how the militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border, one element of place, has changed the character of waiting.

## ***Conclusion***

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<sup>26</sup> Because this group tended to work in the U.S. for relatively short periods of time, I consider them to be, in most cases, "target earners" (Portes and Bach 1985). However, in a subsequent chapter I describe the factors that result in migrants extending their stay, thus complicating our notion of "temporary workers."

From the time I left Xoxotutla in the fall until I arrived in Wisconsin and began to settle into the life I had set up for myself near Shrewsbury, I was working to find out if Pedro made it. I started by finding the telephone number of the dairy where Pedro had planned to find work, Fred's farm. Since we already "met" over the telephone while I was in Veracruz, it was fairly easy to call up Fred when I was back in Wisconsin and ask him if Pedro arrived. One evening, I dialed the farmer's number. Fred answered and I told him I was back in the U.S. "Did Pedro come by your farm?" I asked fairly quickly into our conversation, eager to answer the question that had been gnawing at me for weeks. "No," Fred said, "Pedro didn't come...But another one came. He goes by Hector." Fred and I chatted for a bit more that night, and we made plans for me to visit the farm in a few weeks' time, when it was most convenient for him.

A few weeks passed and the day for my farm visit came. After some initial trouble finding the place, I eventually drove into the barn area, parked the car, and got out. As I was pulling up, I saw a young guy who looked Latino feeding the calves, walking from hutch to hutch, wearing a hooded sweatshirt. I walked up to him and said hello, then slipped into Spanish and asked him where I could find Fred. The worker told me he was inside, signaling toward a door. As I turned to head for the door he had motioned toward, he asked me if I had been in Xoxotutla. I said yes, and he told me that he saw me there, in a clothing store downtown. I was shocked that he seemed to already know me, that in fact, we had been in the same space together, in a mountain village in Mexico, just weeks earlier. He introduced himself as Hector, and he told me the date that he left the village. It was the same day Pedro left. I asked Hector if he was in the same group as Pedro. Yes, he said. Although we were chatting outside in the cold, I couldn't wait any longer to find out. "What happened to him?" I asked. Hector told me that, in fact,

through a twist of fate, he was the only one from the group to make it across the border. Pedro and the others were apprehended and sent back to Xoxotutla. He turned to open the door to the dairy parlor, and we walked in together.

Using the concept of limbo helps in imagining the worlds that migrants find themselves navigating. The social space of limbo is one of in-between, but it may also convey a sense of confinement, or stuckness. The degree to which limbo is a confined or stuck social space depends on larger forces, for example, the role of the nation-state and labor economies. But limbo does not have to mean confinement all of the time. There are degrees of confinement, and most importantly, there are opportunities for resistance. In this way, the concept of limbo helps us to better understand the movement of power among actors and social institutions; it opens up opportunity for theoretical exploration, rather than constricting it. In the next chapter, I step closer in geographical scope to analyze the social space of limbo on Wisconsin dairy farms, focusing in particular on housing arrangements and conflicts over wages, to bring the tension points of mobility and immobility to the surface.

### Chapter 3: Laboring on Los Ranchos

*...we simply cannot understand the form (or the meanings) of the landscape without attending closely to the relations of labor that were indispensable to its making.*

*--Don Mitchell, 1996, p. 8*

When I first visited Grassy Dairy and introduced myself to Fred and Hector, I was stepping into a completely different set of relationships than the ones I had come to know in Veracruz. That day, and in the months that followed, I arrived at the dairy farm to understand the lives of migrants, as well as their employers—their practices, their relationships, and their experiences in the context of their work environment. Given Hector's recent arrival from Mexico, I was, in a sense, following workers' experiences along the migrant trajectory. Although I had not known him in Xoxotutla, Hector had seen me there, about a month before he left for *el norte*.

When I met him for the first time, standing outside on a Wisconsin farm in the cold winter air by the calf hutches, the intensity in Hector's voice was palpable as he described how events had unfolded at the border just weeks earlier. As he described it, he almost did not make it across. Hector had somehow been separated from the group he was traveling with, the group that included Pedro. While walking through the desert by himself, he came across a different group of travelers and asked to join them, telling them he could not find his *compañeros*. Hector began to walk with the new group in the desert, each of them equipped with *pantuflas*, slippers that do not leave footprints, and at some point, he saw big hills and the dividing line between Mexico and the U.S. Later, after he arrived safely in *el norte*, he heard that Pedro and the others were

apprehended and sent back to the pueblo in Veracruz. As it happened, Hector was the only member of Pedro's group to make it across the border undetected. And now, here he was, feeding calves in rural Wisconsin on a dairy farm over 1,500 miles from the border. Hector had been working at Grassy Dairy for a little over two weeks when we met, and he planned to stay in Wisconsin milking cows for two years.

Hector entered a different "moment" of the migrant trajectory. He went from the process of becoming mobile, a process which was likely underway when he saw me in Xoxotutla, to then being mobile and crossing the border undetected. But although he was on the other side of the border, far to the north of that "treacherous geography" and living in Wisconsin at Grassy Dairy, he faced a range of immobilities.

In this chapter I take apart the place of the dairy farm to show how important characteristics of this place shape migrants' experiences of mobility in this setting. These tensions over mobility come together in the place of the dairy farm to constitute a kind of limbo I refer to as *labor limbo*. As such, this chapter highlights the significance of place, in this case, the workplace, in scholars' attempts to understand the migration trajectory and the various kinds of tensions that unauthorized migrants face along the way. Related, we see in this view how critical mobility is at the site where work happens.

The excerpt above from Don Mitchell's *Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (1996), highlights the role of labor relations in the construction of landscapes. Mitchell contends that the organization of labor "quite literally makes places" (p. 7). I take a similar approach as Mitchell, examining how labor is organized on the dairy farm in order to better understand how it shapes the meaning of the place of the farm. I argue that

understanding the structure of labor in this place reveals some of the factors shaping migrant workers' capacities to be mobile. First, I outline various ways in which work is organized to show how place shapes mobility. I then discuss briefly how mobility is shaped by the legal backdrop, that is, the unauthorized status of workers and the attendant vulnerabilities they experience. The next section of the chapter examines instances of worker resistance to the existing structure of work on the farm, showing how some workers try to gain more control over their mobility in the process of resistance. I briefly consider different degrees of immobilities on farms, then I describe how the mobility of farmers is made possible through workers' immobility. I conclude with a brief discussion of what it means to labor in limbo.

Hector and other workers in the region to whom he introduced me became critical sources of information during my time in Wisconsin. I came to see the pattern of their lives, how often they worked, and how they spent their time when they were not working. Because I was at Grassy Dairy with a certain amount of frequency, I came to know Fred better. The first couple of times I visited, I would leave a message with Fred on his machine, letting him know in advance that I would be stopping by to see the workers. But after these initial visits, I arranged my "drop-ins" with the workers themselves, usually by text message. If I showed up and went straight to the workers' trailer, I might not see Fred at all. If I stopped by the parlor first, I might run into Fred and chat with him for a bit if he had time. This same pattern emerged at several other farms I visited in the region. For instance, some farmers would give me a semi-regular update about what was happening with their workers, both in terms of personal matters as well as conflicts at work. On several occasions, workers called upon me to translate on their behalf, to act as a go-

between to convey messages. In this sense, I developed a deeper understanding of how life unfolded at Grassy Dairy and at a handful of other farms, for workers and management alike.

Typically, I arranged to meet with workers when they got off from their shift. We ate dinner together and watched TV in their trailer, and I gave workers rides on several occasions—to the store or to different farms. Other times, I taught workers English, spreading little notecards on the carpet of the trailer and constructing sentences together. Sometimes, I was present for formal staff meetings or informal staff gatherings. In short, I began to understand the place of the dairy farm, both the work side of life as well as the home side. In the following sections I take this place apart to examine its various components and understand how they give shape to (im)mobility among workers.

In Gieryn's (2000) discussion of the three components of place—location, materiality, and meaning—he stresses that place cannot be reduced to any single component. Rather, all three parts, he insists, must be considered simultaneously. I agree with Gieryn on this point. However, for organizational purposes I have set aside the geographic location of dairy farms—that is, their location in rural areas—to consider this separately in the subsequent chapter on rural new destinations. That is, instead of examining rurality in the present chapter as a geographic component of the place of dairy farms, here I focus on sub-geographies within the place of the dairy farm—that is to say, the location of material things, such as the layout of farm buildings. As in the previous chapter, the meanings of the dairy farm are woven within my discussion of these components.

### ***The Blurring of Work and Home***

#### *Physical Layout*

The physicality of a place—its buildings, the rooms within them, and the objects in those rooms—is part of what constitutes a place. The geographic location makes a place as well, as do its sub-geographies, those various sites within a location. The distances between buildings, the general logic and organization of a space—the relationship between various buildings—also contribute to the construction of a place. Each site within these sub-geographies has meanings attached to it. For instance, the milking parlor is a place where the work of milk production happens. The farmer’s house, as the domicile, is regarded as a home, a place where work also occurs, albeit work often perceived as distinct from the farming operation.

The layout of buildings on many of the dairy farms I visited shaped the mobility of migrant workers, often in contradictory ways. Housed on the farm, workers were all too easily observed and monitored—their mobility hampered—with the trailer standing as a semi-permanent structure where the demarcations of “home” were, supposedly, set up, but not necessarily reinforced or maintained.<sup>27</sup> Because workers living on the farm lived and worked at the same place, the dairy farm, the overlap of these physical locations in itself translated to restricted mobility. In McCandless’s (2010) interviews with twelve migrant dairy workers in Vermont, she found similar themes of immobility and restriction stemming from the layout of the dairy farm.

For Wisconsin migrant workers living off the farm, who had to drive from their living place to their workplace, traversing these spaces could be risky, as unauthorized workers driving without valid driver’s licenses. Being on the roadways so much of the time put these workers at risk of being stopped by local police. Distance, then, between home and work, seemed to shape

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<sup>27</sup> Although workers typically lived in a separate building from their employers, the blurry boundary between work and home here is reminiscent of the houses where immigrant nannies and housekeepers must live and labor (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

the risks of mobility. Of the 26 formal interviews I conducted with migrant workers in Wisconsin, 16 were with workers who lived in housing located on the farm where they were employed. The remaining ten lived in housing located within two miles of their workplace. In some cases, this housing was located on the farmland of a different landowner, but paid for and arranged by the employer. In other cases workers lived in housing located on land owned by their employer, but separate from the dairy operation.

Roughly half of the workers I spoke with lived in trailers. The trailers where I spent time were often run-down and used, purchased by farmers for the purpose of housing their migrant workers. When I met Rafael in Xoxotutla at his clothing store, he had told me about living in a trailer on Grassy Dairy. At the time, I had no way of knowing that I would come to spend quite a lot of time in this trailer where Rafael had lived, eating dinner with workers, watching television, and just generally hanging out—or more aptly, “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998). Being in this space gave me a sense of the rhythm of the work life for these workers, and most importantly, what the reality of being “at home” meant against the reality of being “at work.”

The trailer, though, represented a particular kind of concrete and tangible in-betweenness as a semi-permanent structure on the farm. Laguerre describes a “transitional space” as a type of “minoritized space.” He explains that, “As a geographic site, it is transitional in the sense that its spatial location is selected with no regard for transforming it into a permanent structure” (1999:111). In the sense that trailers are moveable buildings, “mobile” homes, they are viewed as not as fixed and permanently part of the landscape as houses. Laguerre explains further that the intention behind the construction of a space is important and determines its meaning, as well as what kind of space it is. In this case, trailers are acquired by farmers with the intention of

housing unauthorized Mexican workers, usually on the farmers' property. The lack of labor security that farmers experience, not *really* knowing if the supply of workers will be available next year or the year after, the looming threat of immigration enforcement and farm raids in the news, would seem to make trailers an appropriate solution for housing workers. Trailers can be obtained more quickly and cheaply than houses, and they can be sold.

Trailers can also be placed in areas on the property which are more or less desirable to the owners. In this sense, the placement of employer-provided housing seemed to reveal something about who was being housed within. Rarely were trailers located on the outer, roadside part of the property. Most often, they were tucked behind other farm buildings, not visible from the road. In fact, Ziebarth (2006:345) suggests that the location of seasonal worker housing on vegetable processing plants, "out of sight behind the plant," accentuates migrant workers' invisibility in the rural landscape.<sup>28</sup>

The tendency for farmers to provide housing to their employees also reflected a general lack of affordable housing in rural spaces available to rent. During my time interviewing workers in Wisconsin and former workers in Veracruz, I only encountered one migrant worker who was living in rented housing in the community. This was Atreo, and he was living in a recently constructed apartment complex with his American girlfriend and child. He had lived in Wisconsin for ten years, and according to some farmers, he had been "Americanized." Both the farmer he worked for, and a neighbor down the road who knew Atreo well continually expressed surprise that was able to afford living in the apartment. Both had commented that his living

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<sup>28</sup> Related, immigrant housing may also be deemed undesirable by long-time residents. Park and Pellow's (2011) compelling investigation of environmental privilege in Aspen, Colorado revealed deep anti-immigrant attitudes among native-born whites in battles over the "eyesore" trailers where low-income immigrants lived. We can reason that some farmers might feel community pressure to keep run-down looking trailers out of view.

situation there would likely not last long, because the new apartments were viewed as desirable housing, and they assumed that Atreo would not be able to pay the rent. The story was an illustration of the difficulty of obtaining affordable housing that was not in some way attached to their place of employment.

### *Surveillance and Rules*

At a couple of different farms I visited, workers lived in the same building as the milking parlor, just down the hall from the farmers' offices. In these configurations, the line between home and work was particularly blurry. At one of these farms, Bridgeway Dairy, a large-sized farm not too far from Main Street in Shrewsbury, workers lived in a five bedroom apartment, two to a room, in a space that was separated from the rest of the building, the work space, by a door with a large see-through glass pane. At Bridgeway, the routine I developed over the course of a few months was to enter the building from the parking lot, walk past the entrance to the parlor, and make my way to this glass-paned door, the physical partition separating "work" from "home." Through this glass pane, one could see the common space of the apartment—the living room, with a couple of couches, and a view of just a sliver of the kitchen. When I visited, I would typically knock loudly and wait for a worker to come to the door. The door never seemed to be locked, but in the interest of maintaining respect for workers' privacy, I always knocked.

During one of my first visits at Bridgeway, I was in this apartment, sitting on the couch and visiting with workers. That day, I had been in the middle of interviewing one of these workers, a young man named Calixto, when suddenly the glass-paned door opened and a large white man entered the living room space, eyeing me suspiciously. Instinctively, I turned off my recorder with my left hand and shoved it under a notebook while I twisted around to face him.

He walked up to the back of the couch where I sat, looming above me. “Who are you?” he said curtly. I gathered pretty quickly that this was the farmer I had not yet met. Incidentally, this was also the farmer about whom some of the workers complained. I answered quickly, trying to diffuse the potential threat that I posed, and explained that I had met with his business partner, George, a couple of weeks back. “And that’s your vehicle in the back?” he asked. “Yes,” I explained, “I rented it from the university.” He instantly relaxed, introduced himself as Nat, and then we joked for a minute before he turned around and left the apartment.

It is difficult to assert that Nat routinely entered the workers’ apartment without knocking, given that in this specific situation, I posed a threat and urgency may have been required in order to ascertain who I was, driving a university car with state plates, and why I was there. But what was clear is that in the sense that management was keeping an eye on who was coming and going, workers were under a form of surveillance. The overlap of “work” and “home” made it that much easier for Nat to enter workers’ living space unannounced, to identify unfamiliar cars in the lot, to find out who they belonged to, and to confront them.

This particular physical configuration on the farm was an accentuated blurriness of two very different kinds of spaces, and when I sat down to interview Nat’s partner, George, I got a better understanding of how and why this space was set up in this way. George, like the other farmers I interviewed, was a very busy man. In fact, in my dozen or so visits to Bridgeway, I only saw him a couple of times. One day, I spent about 45 minutes chatting with George about the history of his farm and how he began hiring migrant workers. He told me he started hiring Mexican workers about 10 years ago. “I think of it like the military,” he told me. George said that what his workers experience, the time they spend on his farm, is a lot like going to

Afghanistan for three years. Like soldiers who go to war, his workers make the sacrifice to come to the U.S. for the money, for the opportunity to get ahead. Just like in the military, he said, his workers come to work for a few years, then they go back home. As we sat talking, I thought about the space where his workers lived—in fact, this was just down the hall from where George and I were speaking—and I thought about the ground rules they were expected to live by, how the space, in some ways, resembled barracks.<sup>29</sup> What George described was in a sense akin to a total institution (Goffman 1961) for workers—the blurry line between “home” and “work,” and the ground rules he outlined for me of “No women. No drinking. No smoking.”

The organization of work on dairy farms, in which housing was built into wages and wherein multiple male workers were housed together, typically on the same property as their workplace, also meant the construction of heavily masculine spaces on the farm. As I noted in the last chapter, I heard of only a few women from Mexico who worked on dairy farms (Harrison, Lloyd, and O’Kane 2009b), and they tended to be accompanied by a male romantic partner, such as a husband, or a close male relative, such as a brother. At Six Mile Dairy, there were a couple of women who worked in the office in administrative positions on the farm. Noting this, I had asked Henry about whether he hired women milkers:

No. Not with the Hispanics. I did with the Americans...Yeah, that wasn’t good...Yeah, not to be male chauvinist, but those women...one was good but the other one she was...she wanted to be the boss...yep, yep. No, I didn’t mind when she left! [laughs]

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<sup>29</sup> In Chapter 4 I describe how some workers explained feeling “locked up” while living and laboring on Wisconsin dairies. McCandless (2010), in her study of migrant dairy workers in Vermont, draws on Foucault (1979) to describe spaces on the farm as “carceral”.

Henry's explanation frames his gender preference in hiring as a logical managerial decision based on a bad experience. But it was clear that Henry was discriminating based on gender, treating all potential women milkers as domineering, and thus threatening to his business. We might therefore expect Henry to exclude not only American women but also migrant women workers from being considered for milking jobs. In any case, the effects of Henry's gendered hiring practices helped to construct a workplace of majority men, and thus, highly masculine living spaces on the farm.

As I mentioned above, at some farms there were rules surrounding this gendered living space, for example restrictions on allowing women visitors into these spaces. As a woman, I challenged this informal rule when I spent time with workers in their homes, the heavily masculine places of trailers and houses. Even so, I had subconsciously convinced myself early on that the multiple hats I wore—student, English teacher, and researcher—meant that I was exempt from this kind of gendered surveillance on the farm. Yet one afternoon, I was given a harsh reminder of the informal gender rules governing migrant housing. I had just finished up interviewing George, the middle-aged farmer at Bridgeway Dairy, and the two of us were heading down the hallway together after leaving the office. As I began to make my way to the workers' apartment, and George began to make his way toward the parlor, he turned to me and said with a smile, "Just don't get involved with any of them."

The message was clear. In George's eyes, my status as a researcher was not powerful enough, it seemed, to override my status as a (young) woman. Where I stood when he made the comment, located as I was at the threshold of workers' housing, had everything to do with

George's admonishment. It was a place-sensitive caution. I was a young woman about to enter an apartment on George's property where ten migrant men lived. As the home of workers, this was a private space (the blurriness of home and work on this farm notwithstanding), as well as a highly masculine space with management-enforced rules that maintained that space as masculine. These gendered rules and the overall monitoring of space on the farm contributed to the limiting of mobility that workers experienced.

I heard about other types of rules on different farms I visited. Again, the physical layout of those dairy farms in which workers lived in close proximity to where their employers lived seemed to contribute to the monitoring and surveillance experienced by workers. For instance, at one dairy farm that I visited, the employers lived in a house a stone's throw from the trailers where the workers lived, though the two areas were divided by a calf shelter. Whereas at Grassy Dairy, the farmer lived on the next lot over from the trailer, on this farm there was a smaller amount of physical space between the domiciles of employers and workers. This was Cornerstone Dairy, a large-sized farm located the next town over from Shrewsbury, and a farm that I had heard about initially in Xoxotutla while talking with Pedro. This would have been Pedro's second option for finding work, if he had crossed the border undetected. Pedro had told me that if Grassy Dairy had no work for him, he would head to Cornerstone because he knew the boss.

The first time I visited Grassy Dairy and asked Fred if he knew about other farmers I could talk with, he suggested I head to Cornerstone. Other farmers had similarly encouraged me to talk with Ben, the owner of Cornerstone, telling me that he ran a good operation and would be a good person to interview for my study. But among workers, I heard a different story. It seemed

that this *patrón*, Ben, was known in the community of migrant workers for being especially strict with his employees and enforcing particular rules on his farm. Cornerstone employed about ten migrant workers, half of whom hailed from Veracruz. In my first interview with a worker at Cornerstone, Tino, a 25 year-old from Xoxotutla, told me about the various rules workers had to abide by on this farm:

The boss doesn't like it when we wear our hats backwards. He doesn't like us to wear earrings either. I think it's because of one Mexican [in particular]. And he doesn't like us to listen to music loudly in the car...He doesn't like us to drive quickly through the driveway.

One afternoon in late spring, I was visiting with workers at Rockfield, a large-sized dairy operated by four brothers. On my third visit to the farm, I was sitting with Laszio and his brother, Mique, watching television in the trailer where they lived. I told them that I had been teaching an English class at Cornerstone that morning. Laszio said, "Oh, where Tino works?" Yes, I said. Laszio then told me that he himself had worked at Cornerstone for two years, then he exclaimed, "And that *patrón* is racist!" Then he uttered a high-pitched, "Ooohh!" for emphasis, and described that one time he had set down a pail of milk to go grab something else and Ben had yelled at him. The boss then wrote a check to give to Laszio and fired him on the spot. We then began talking about an incident that had occurred at Cornerstone a few years back, a conflict that Ben had had with a different worker. I had heard the story through a different contact a couple of weeks before, and I asked Laszio why Ben didn't seem to like this worker. "Because he smoked

marijuana and the boss didn't like it." Laszio described that he and his brother don't smoke, drink, or do drugs. He then pointed out that Ben at Cornerstone drinks beer, but then prohibits his workers from drinking. "Why?" I had pressed. "Why can he drink, but the workers can't?"

Laszio replied with a tone of reproach, "Because he's the boss! He can do whatever he wants!"

At a couple of dairies I visited, video cameras had been placed in the work spaces of the farms. During an interview with the owner of a large dairy farm, Henry at Six Mile Dairy, I noticed that as we spoke he kept turning to glance at something behind me. Halfway through the interview, an employee came to the open door of the room to ask Henry a question. When I turned around, I noticed that a small television was secured to a wall by the door. It looked like a live feed from the dairy parlor, and I saw the fairly crisp black and white image of a Latino worker bending down to pick up a bucket. After Henry finished talking with his employee, I turned back to him and exclaimed, "I didn't even notice that until now!" He laughed in response and I asked him if most farmers have video cameras:

No, no. Actually, I put that in way back. You can see I can record, if I would like, but I haven't recorded for years. But it is a habit. I do turn it on and when I'm here doing book work or whatever it is, I watch occasionally and I'll catch something that's not quite right. And then we bring it up and the meeting or, that type of stuff.

Although not used commonly, the use of video cameras helped some farmers to monitor their migrant workers. At Henry's farm, with the vast majority of milking positions filled by Mexican

migrant workers, and higher positions at the farm filled by family members or Americans in the rural community (see Harrison and Lloyd 2013), the live video feed of the parlor targets the work performance of one particular group, the group whose comings and goings are already monitored closely on the farm, and the group whose actions are more likely to be criminalized, given their ethnicity and their unauthorized legal status.

### *The Wage Structure: Housing “Built In”*

In Xoxotutla and the other sending villages in Veracruz I visited, those who had migrated to the U.S. framed the appeal of working in Wisconsin in terms of hours and expenses. For those who had worked previously in the construction industry in other states, or heard from relatives and friends who had, the relatively higher number of hours that one could work was viewed as a significant advantage. With the economic downturn, migrants found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet working in construction in states like North Carolina. The second advantage was cost related. There were fewer costs working on dairies in Wisconsin, and although part of this was the lower cost of living in rural versus urban communities, the major reduction in cost came from employer-provided housing. Employer-provided housing was viewed by many migrant workers as financially advantageous, especially considering the obstacles migrant workers face in the private rental market, which could include fees for filing applications, first and last month rent and security deposits (Ziebarth 2006). Not having to pay “la renta” meant that workers could pocket more of their paycheck, thereby sending more home to Mexico, thereby working for a more concentrated period of time in the U.S.

From the employers’ perspective, housing was framed as “built into” the wages that workers received. But it was unclear how this housing benefit was calculated into their wages. It

follows that workers' wages would be higher without the provision of housing by employers. But how much would workers be receiving if housing was not included? This was not transparent.

I learned much about the wage structure from Olivero, Hector's uncle. He worked at a farm within an hour's drive of Grassy Dairy. A talkative man in his late 40s, Olivero had spent two years in Wisconsin working at this farm since his last trip home to Veracruz. But Olivero was not new to life in Wisconsin, nor was he new to this farm. In fact, he made his first trip to Wisconsin back in 2002 and began to work at this farm. When we spoke, it was his third stint in Wisconsin. Like some other older workers I spoke with, he had an extensive history of working in the U.S. over the last couple of decades. Olivero explained to me how the wage structure worked at dairy farms:

Well, the bosses pay the rent, OK, but there they give us a discount. I'm not sure [how much] exactly, but they take it from our hourly wages from work...For example, if I rented at another place, I would be earning ten dollars [an hour], but because the boss pays for the house, he pays me nine. It's like this everywhere. A lot of people must realize this.

Interestingly, other workers framed the wage structure in terms of equity, weighing their situation against those in other situations to conclude that living in employer-owned housing was effectively the same as renting somewhere else. Savana was in her late 20s when we spoke in Wisconsin. She lived with her brother, Zacarís, and her husband, Nelo, in a newly constructed house down the road from the farm where they worked, a medium-sized dairy a couple of hours

from Shrewsbury. They were from Huitla, a community close to Xoxotutla. In fact, I had met Savana's mother in Huitla just a few months prior to meeting Savana in Wisconsin. I showed Savana a picture that I took of her mother, standing in the doorway of Savana's grandmother's home and wearing a gray fleece jacket. "That jacket is from here," she had said enthusiastically, "It's very warm." As I talked with Savana and her family, they told me that they were particularly satisfied with their work arrangement, and mentioned multiple times that their boss was a very good person to work for, and that many Mexicans wanted to work at this farm because he treated his employees so well. In a group interview, I asked Savana, Nelo, and Zacarís if they were satisfied with their wages. Savana replied thoughtfully:

S: Well, it's fine, but it's because the boss gives us housing, gives us a phone, gives us cable TV. Sometimes he pays for expenses for the car we use for work, and so, it's good. It's not a lot, but... we're doing fine. Because other people, they are paid less and they're not given anything.

N: They don't support them.

S: So they might pay them more, but they give us a house. It's identical. It's the same thing. They have to pay for rent, telephone and television, like that.

In any case, it was clear that workers did not view the housing provided to them as "free," but rather embedded, albeit unclearly, into the wages they received. With the knowledge that leaving the job effectively meant leaving their housing situation—since it was rare for workers not to live in employer-provided housing—the fact that it was so difficult to untangle the components

of their wages said something about workers' ability to move from place to place. The blurriness of work and home, wherein home was often located in close proximity to work and that wages incorporated the cost of housing, shaped workers' mobility. One important dimension of this blurriness of work and home was that workers were expected to uncritically accept the conditions of housing provided to them by the farmer.

### *Materiality of the Dairy Farm: Housing Conditions*

The fact that housing was “built into” wages contributed to the difficulty of separating home life from work life. Farmers were both employers and landlords in relation to the same group of people. But during my time in the field, I never heard about lease agreements between farmers and workers. Through a verbal, non-written agreement, housing was considered to be part of the work terms—housing would be provided by the employer—but the conditions of this agreement were not well understood or spelled out. What were the physical conditions of the housing? How much room would each worker have? In other words, what were the obligations of the landlords? The answers to these questions were unclear, and because housing for dairy workers in Wisconsin is not regulated, farmers had large amounts of control over the quality of housing they provided.

Although employer-provided housing reduced workers' costs, this did not mean that workers were satisfied with the housing arrangement or the living conditions. One morning at Grassy Dairy I was chatting with Fred, Hector, and Gaspar, and one of them mentioned a group of workers at a farm nearby. Then the conversation turned to the housing conditions for workers there. Fred explained that he had gone to that farm to pick up another worker with Hector, and saw that workers were living in a tiny basement room. Hector described in an animated fashion

how small the space had been, that it was barely half the size of the break room where we sat chatting, and that three workers had lived there together. Fred concurred on the size, and questioned the safety of the electricity hookup they had down there in that tiny space. While the amount of space allotted to workers at Grassy Dairy was unquestionably larger, given that four to five workers shared a two bedroom trailer, which had a living room and kitchen space, the quality of the housing was not particularly good. Where Hector and Gaspar lived, there was a hole in the kitchen floor, covered up with pieces of duct tape, and I frequently heard the sounds of mice scurrying behind the stove. A couple of months into my visits at Grassy Dairy, the plumbing in the trailer's bathroom stopped working, and workers were forced to use the bathroom off the break room, which was the next room over from the parlor, in order to shower and get cleaned up. Fred's son was supposed to fix the workers' bathroom, but there were complications and weeks went by in which workers had to put up with this arrangement, which served to blur even further the division between work and home.

Valien, a 30 year old man I met in Xoxotutla explained the downsides of employer-provided housing. He spent two months working on a farm in Wisconsin milking cows where he was paid an hourly rate of five dollars and fifteen cents. As part of his employment, housing was included, but the water in the trailer was not safe to drink:

Sometimes there wasn't clean water. Sometimes we bought clean water because the boss wasn't concerned about cleaning out the water tanks, so the water...it was like, oxidized. It smelled like keys. Sometimes we would take it and add chlorine, then use it. But for drinking, we would buy it.

The amount of space allotted to each worker in employer-provided housing was also a concern for some workers. Just as Rafael had described to me the difficulties of sleeping during the day, Conrado, a 34 year old man I spoke with in the neighboring village of Palemón, told me about how difficult it was getting to sleep when he worked on a dairy farm in Minnesota, particularly because he shared a bedroom with two other workers in a trailer with nine workers total. I asked him about what he thought about the housing offered:

I understand that the boss cannot give more, because it's not easy. I wanted to have my own room. What happens sometimes among roommates is that they want to watch television, one is tired and works very late, and so you can't rest during the time you're given...so when you're sharing rooms with a roommate, he is watching television or talking on the phone, so it's not easy. You can't manage your sleeping. You can [only] sleep for two hours, and when you want to go to work your head hurts.

The conditions of housing are part of the place of the dairy farm. The amount of space within the trailer or house dedicated to each worker, the availability of clean water, and the sanitation of the housing are all examples of the physical component—the materiality—of the place of the farm. Just as migrant vegetable workers live in employer-provided labor camps in many states, dairy workers in Wisconsin often reside in housing provided by the farmer, and in these cases, housing was wrapped into the wages that workers received. But unlike migrant vegetable workers in

Wisconsin, there are no state laws regulating the conditions of employer-provided housing for migrant workers on dairy farms, so workers have little power when housing is not satisfactory.<sup>30</sup>

Even as this housing is intended to be “home,” it is clear how interrelated “home” and “work” have become on many of the dairy farms I visited. As we consider the various aspects of the home-work matrix come together, their effects on mobility become clear. For example, the physical layout of many dairy farms that employed migrant workers was organized such that “home” and “work” were quite close in proximity, thus increasing the potential for surveillance. In this sense, we might think of these farms as an example of Foucault’s panoptic institutions (1979). In fact, Mitchell (1996) provides this Foucauldian analysis in his examination of the strategies undertaken in the twentieth century to immobilize, and thus rationalize, migrant workers in California, including the formation of migrant camps under the watchful eye of local authorities. As I note above in the section on surveillance and rules, the monitoring by management that is made easier due to the physical layout of “home” and “work,” increases the scrutiny of a group of workers that already faces scrutiny beyond the gates of the farm, due to their criminalization based on ethnic difference and assumptions of “illegality.”

### ***“Los Turnos” and the Time Clock***

A different facet of the organization of work on dairy farms was the structure of milking shifts, which presented constraints on workers’ mobility at times. I first developed an understanding of this structure and how it worked at Grassy Dairy during my stay in Xoxotutla. One villager in particular, Rafael, gave me a detailed picture of his schedule on the farm when he worked there.

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<sup>30</sup> Of course, even in the vegetable crop and vegetable processing industries in which housing conditions on labor camps are regulated, language barriers and fears of being fired and/or deported often mean that sub-standard conditions are not reported (Smith-Nonini 1999, cited by Benson 2008).

Rafael was Pedro Ximetl's brother-in-law and owned a clothing store toward the end of the main street in town. When I met him initially, I had plans to interview Pedro's older brother, Anton, who owned the store next door to Rafael. Anton seemed to be running late for our meeting, and Rafael struck up conversation with me. He was in his mid-30s, fairly tall, similar in height and build to Pedro, and had a long face with a strong jaw. He had short gelled hair and wore jeans with a trendy zip-up sweatshirt. After we had been chatting for a few minutes in the entrance space of his store, Rafael asked if I wanted to sit and wait for Anton. He grabbed a little wooden chair, placed it against the wall against a display of shoes, and asked where I was from. When I answered, he said, animated, "I know Wisconsin! Where in Wisconsin are you from?" Rafael then told me that he had worked on a farm there five years before—the same farm, it turns out, where Pedro and his brothers had worked. That morning, Rafael and I chatted for nearly two hours, and I began to get a sense of what his life was like in Wisconsin.

Rafael worked at Grassy Dairy for one year and worked 12 hours every day. There were two *turnos* (milking shifts), he told me, from three o'clock until nine o'clock in the morning, then again from three o'clock until nine o'clock in the evenings. Every fifteen days he was paid \$1,000, and in response to my question about time off, he told me that there were no days off. There were three workers, he explained, and the boss told them that they could handle the work required. They put up with it, he described, but it was very hard work. Rafael told me that during apple season, he and his coworkers would pick apples for three hours a day in between milking shifts. At this time of year, then, Rafael was working 15 hours a day on a farm with two milking shifts, and factoring in two hours a day for showering, food preparation and eating, these workers were sleeping no more than five hours at a time in the evenings, and if they were lucky, perhaps

two hours during the day.<sup>31</sup> But sleeping during the day was quite difficult for Rafael, as well as for other workers with whom I spoke. When he wasn't working at the apple orchard, Rafael would nap for four hours between milking shifts, but he couldn't ever sleep well in the daylight hours. Sitting in the entry way of his clothing store, I asked Rafael why he came back to Mexico. "You have to work hard in the U.S.," he told me. "There was almost never any free time." Workers were *encerrados*, he told me, closed in for most of the day. When he was not working, he only had time to eat and sleep. He was *solito*—lonely—as well as bored from the constant routine, and physically exhausted after each day. Even so, when I asked Rafael if he would do it again, if he ever thought about heading back to *El Norte* to work for another stint, he said that yes, he would go, but the one thing holding him back was that he had a business to run.

Among some migrant workers who labored on Wisconsin dairy farms in the 1990s or early 2000s, the organization of work on the farm that they had experienced had changed between that time and the time we spoke. These workers told me about changes in the shift structures on some dairies, moving from two milking shifts to three, as well as the development of "days off." Above, Rafael described that there were two milking shifts at Grassy Dairy when he worked there, but that now there were three shifts. When I spoke with Fred and his business partner, Gus, in a formal interview they told me that they had hired migrant workers when they decided to expand their operation. Other farmers told me a similar story. They wanted to expand their operation, or they already had expanded, and found that they could not find reliable American employees who would work for the wages they could offer, so they began hiring migrant workers to see if they could find a reliable source of labor in that pool. Moving from milking twice a day to three times a day often accompanied the transition to a bigger operation.

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<sup>31</sup> This does not include leisure time or shopping for groceries.

Hiring more workers often meant reducing each worker's overall load, and at times allowing for the possibility of "days off," or reduced hour work days, every week or every pay period. Pedro's father, for example, described to me his life living and working on a dairy in Wisconsin in the 1990s, where there were no days off. And Rafael remarked that although there were no days off when he worked at Grassy Dairy, workers now are given days off. Of course, when I arrived at Grassy Dairy and learned about the structure of work there, I found that "days off" meant that workers only worked one milking shift—about six hours—versus two. Nonetheless, it seemed as though some employers had started off with a more rigorous working schedule for migrant workers, then over time more opportunities developed for reduced work days for employees, whether intentional or not, through the hiring of additional workers.

After talking with Rafael in his clothing store in Xoxotutla, and after interviewing other migrants who had worked with *las vacas* in Wisconsin, I had a better understanding of how milk shifts were organized on dairy farms. At some farms, the milking took place across two shifts, or *turnos*, and at others, across three. At Grassy Dairy, for example, where cows were milked three times a day, there were two sets of workers—one team for the early morning shift and the other for the evening shift. The third shift was in the middle of the day, and each team of workers would trade milking that shift. Every other day, then, each set of workers would milk two shifts. As I mentioned, the "off" days were considered to be those in which workers milked one shift only. At Grassy Dairy, Hector and Gaspar milked the three o'clock in the morning shift, and the other pair of workers, Luciano and his coworker, also from Xoxotutla, milked the early evening shift. A fifth worker fed calves and helped out on the farm as needed. This fifth position was considered to be undesirable because of the relatively few hours available to clock. When I met

Hector, he was the fifth worker, in charge of feeding calves. But after one of the milkers left unexpectedly about two months after Hector arrived, Hector became a milker.

The employee time clock, a material component of the place of the dairy farm, was located in the break room at Grassy Dairy. It was a black rectangular box with an opening for workers to slide their card in and have it stamped with the time, which was displayed digitally in glowing blue numbers on the front of the box. In the late morning at Grassy Dairy, workers would tiredly shuffle into the break room from the trailer to begin the second milking shift of the day. They grabbed their timecards from a plastic rack on the wall, fed them into the box to be punched, as a lazy crunching sound emitted from the machine signaling that the card had been stamped. As a piece of technology that sought to track workers' movements, the time clock, just as it is used in other workplace settings, could be read as another form of surveillance on farms.

But more important to the subsequent sections of this chapter, the time clock was frequently the centerpiece of workplace tensions at the farms I visited, and was rife with meaning. At a large-sized farm I visited with roughly ten employees, the first order of business at a staff meeting I attended focused on the time clock. Someone had been caught punching in for other people. The farm manager warned the workers that anyone doing this again "will not have a job." The translator who was present communicated the message to the workers slowly and carefully, to convey the seriousness of the message. At a different farm I visited, an American worker's time card was missing. The farmer facilitating the meeting said that it is important that this does not happen again, and that even if workers do not like someone, it is not acceptable to take their card. The time clock and its personalized time cards were physical elements of the

built environment at the dairy farm, and often imbued with power because they were material representations of the work put in on the job and the size of one's paycheck.

At Grassy Dairy, the time clock was a physical representation of the immobility of shift schedules. The workers who clocked in and out during the evening shift, from six o'clock to eleven o'clock or midnight, tended not to labor under the eyes of management when they inserted their cards into the machine. But those workers who milked the early morning shift were nearly always under the eyes of management when they clocked out at the end of their shift. That difference was just one of the sources of conflict at Grassy Dairy that related to the organization of work, tensions that I explore in a subsequent section.

To conclude this section, the structure of *los turnos* was a major part of how work was organized on dairy farms. The degree to which milking shifts were immobilizing depended on how flexible the workers viewed this work structure. I address this at a later point. Below, I analyze in brief the omnipresent backdrop of "illegality" to consider its intersections with immobilities on the farm before I turn to moments of resistance among workers.

### ***"Illegality" and How Mobility in Mexico Shaped Immobility on the Farm***

When Nat hurriedly entered the apartment at Bridgeway to find out who I was and why I was there, it was a clear indication of the legal backdrop that shapes both on-farm and off-farm interactions between workers and employers, but also in my case, visitors. A few different farmers told me that they were initially alarmed when they saw my vehicle because it had state plates, those out of the ordinary red plates with white lettering that simply read at the top, State Owned, and at the bottom, Wisconsin. In the next chapter, I focus in depth on the anxieties of employers and the immobilities that workers face at the community level due to what scholars

term, “the specter of immigration enforcement” or “the gaze of surveillance” (Harrison and Lloyd 2013; Stephen 2004). Here, I want to briefly describe how this legal backdrop shaped workers’ attempts at resistance before I turn to instances of this resistance.

During my third visit to see the Ximetls, Doña Yamile described to me that a farmer in Wisconsin had treated one of her sons poorly. That day, I had stopped in to say hello to the Ximetls and Doña was the only one home. She had been steaming corn on the cob outside to sell, explaining that ever since her husband left her, she has had to make money on the side in order to get by. She offered me an ear of corn on a stick, and before she handed the *elote* to me, covered it with mayonnaise, then sprinkled it with crumbly cheese. I sat across from her at a wooden table in the entry way of her house as we talked. What happened to her son was that he had asked for a raise while he was working on a dairy farm in Wisconsin and the farmer had fired him. From there, her son went to North Carolina to work in construction, but the job did not pay much, Doña said, and he had an even harder time there than in Wisconsin. Doña went on to say that during her phone conversations with David, when he was working at Grassy Dairy, she would encourage him to ask the boss for a raise. But every time, David would say no, he did not want to ask. According to Doña, David was afraid that if he asked for a raise, he would be asked to leave, just as his brother had been fired from a different farm. Doña told me that she did not think David was being paid enough for the work that he was doing, and that furthermore, he was not sleeping well because he worked the night shift and had a hard time falling asleep in the middle of the day.

Mobilities in one moment along the migrant trajectory shape immobilities in another moment. The fear that Doña Yamile described to me of losing one’s job for simply asking for a

raise exemplifies how being “illegal” constructs the immobility of wage structures, whereby workers’ past experiences on the migrant trajectory in Mexico and in the borderlands—preparing to become mobile and being mobile—come to shape their experiences working. That is, being employed in order to send remittances and pay off debts—to avoid, for example, your land from being taken if a loan was secured through a contract—is of the utmost importance. As Harrison and Lloyd note, “the sacrifices and harrowing journeys” (2011:376) that migrants must endure as they cross into the U.S. unauthorized, are built into the ways in which they view the often tedious work of milking. In other words, the financial and physical risks associated with becoming mobile come to shape how workers see the immobilities they are confronted with in the workplace.

There were a few stories I gathered from current and former dairy workers about times when they were forced to *escape* from a farm, or other workplace, because they were being treated poorly, *and* the employer had threatened to call the police and/or immigration enforcement. These stories told to me described incidents that had unfolded in various states across the U.S., sometimes quite far from Wisconsin. But I argue that these narratives, wherever and whenever they were told to other migrants, helped to construct a climate of fear that generally discouraged workers from speaking out. Word of immigration enforcement raids contributed in the same way. The legal backdrop was, in other words, part of the *place* of the dairy farm as well, not just embedded in the greater community. After all, there were clear reasons why the labor of unauthorized Hispanic workers was viewed as preferable by employers. As Harrison and Lloyd note about the population of migrant dairy workers in Wisconsin, their

“deportability” helps to construct “the economically and politically ‘ideal’ migrant” who is at once “compliant” and invisible (2012:366).

The organization of work on the dairy farm—the physical layout, the housing conditions, the shift structure, and the surveillance—constructs various kinds of immobilities for migrant workers. But what makes these immobilities particularly powerful is the legal landscape on which they are built, which in itself is a characteristic of place. Legality and illegality are constructed out of place, predicated on being “here” in the United States without authorization, and justified by the need to control flows of people across regions. That the migrant workers I spoke with were unauthorized meant that they were particularly vulnerable to workplace abuse and discouraged from challenging the existing structure of work on the farm for fear of losing their job, or being deported. Yet although this backdrop of “illegality” shaped the lives of workers so profoundly, both on the farm as well as off the farm, the structure of work did not go uncontested. Now I turn to instances of resistance among migrant workers to show the nuances of (im)mobilities on the farm.

### ***Worker Resistance: Contesting Immobility, Reshaping Place***

...the meaning or value of the same place is labile—flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested.

--Gieryn (2000:465)

The immobilities that workers faced on dairy farms in Wisconsin presented formidable barriers to their movement, and in the subsequent chapter I address other barriers to movement at the

community level, beyond the farm gate. That these barriers existed on the farm did not mean that workers passively accepted these immobilities. In fact, contradictory to expectations of a monolithic, compliant and silent workforce of unauthorized employees, I observed quite a few examples of worker resistance. I argue that through engaging in this resistance, these workers were contesting the *place* of the farm to change the meanings of that place. One way that workers resisted the organization of labor on the farm was through threatening to leave. Drawing on their potential to be mobile—or as Kauffman (2002) would say, their *motility*—workers were attempting to gain control over their mobility on the farm.

#### *Taking Control of Mobility: Leaving*

Hector had talked about leaving Grassy Dairy early on. About a month and a half after he arrived at the farm, I was sitting in the living room of the trailer chatting. Gaspar had been talking with me about the differences between working in Xoxotutla in the mountains compared to working in more urban places, like Monterrey and Mexico City. Somehow, the topic of bonuses came up and Hector, who had been talking on his cell phone in the other room and had just finished, entered the conversation. He began telling us that his uncle wanted him to come work on the farm where he works. Hector said they pay bonuses there, one hundred dollars every month to compensate for the taxes that are taken out of their paychecks. I asked Hector about the location of the farm, and he gave me the name of the town. “What is your uncle’s name?” I asked. Hector told me it was Olivero. I had exclaimed, “Ahh! I know him. Well, I don’t know him, but I saw him at that farm the day before yesterday.”

Hector explained to us that working with Olivero, he could start at six dollars and fifty cents an hour, and after six months he would get more. He and Gaspar debated the pros and cons,

talking in detail as they compared the wages. Gaspar said that at Grassy Dairy the wages were around seven dollars an hour, and that they do not get bonuses. I clarified, “After a year, you don’t get a little more?” No, they had said. Hector, who had wandered into the kitchen, walked back into the living room toward the couch where I sat next to Gaspar and asked me, smiling, “What is your opinion? What should I do?” I hesitated to come up with an answer, and then I told him that I did not really know.

I first heard that there were conflicts among workers at Grassy Dairy when I was in Xoxotutla. David, Pedro’s brother, told me that one of the workers there was bossing around the others, one of which was his brother-in-law. In fact, David asked me, as we sat at the table in his mother’s house, if I could call the farm and talk with the employer to try to resolve the tension. From Mexico, I sent an email to a mutual contact familiar with intervening in these situations and asked this person to check in with the owners. By the time I arrived at Grassy Dairy in Wisconsin for the first time, I was thus already aware that conflict had been occurring. In a meeting with my contact, I learned that the conflict had been resolved and a farm visit to mediate had not been necessary. But this was not the case.

Early on in my visits to the farm Hector began telling me about the tensions. Hector and Gaspar would frequently tell me during my visits about frustrations they were having with the other workers, the two that milked the evening shift. They told me on several occasions that these workers did not work as hard as they did. One afternoon, I was driving with Hector to a neighboring farm where he planned to introduce me to other workers. We chatted on the way, and Hector began telling me about conflict he was having with Luciano. He said the problem he had with him was that he was not doing the work as well as it needed to be done. Hector told me

that when he himself had first arrived at Grassy Dairy, he would clean *con fuerza* (with strength), washing the parlor thoroughly to make sure the job was done. But Luciano was getting angry with Hector and Gaspar, telling them they were taking away too many hours. Hector said their jobs were the same, but that Luciano had been at Grassy Dairy for four years and Hector suspected he was growing weary of the work. Hector concluded that he did not like Luciano's behavior and that he was going to confront him because he did not want to work under those circumstances.

From that point forward, each time I visited with Hector and Gaspar, the conversation would turn toward their frustrations with the other workers, once these others were out of earshot. The two had a mental list of their complaints that they would share with me regularly. It seemed as though Hector and Gaspar were becoming increasingly exasperated with Luciano and his coworker, and they were particularly upset with the existing organization of shifts on the farm. One day, after months of this unrest, Gaspar asked me if I would translate their concerns to Fred. Hector told me he had reached the point at which he was considering leaving if things did not change. We picked a time for me to come by to ensure that Fred would be available to talk.

I pulled up at Grassy Dairy at about nine o'clock in the morning, got out of my vehicle and walked up to the door leading to the break room. I pulled open the door and the now familiar sweet smell of calf milk replacer mixed together with the sharp odor of cow manure greeted me. The *patrón* and one team of workers were gathered inside. Fred greeted me right away and offered me a cup of coffee. The workers had just finished their early morning shift, and Gaspar stood eating a piece of toast. I headed to the sink to grab a mug as I asked Fred how he was

doing. Hector was seated at the table and after I poured myself a cup of coffee, I took a seat at the table to his left. Hector asked me in Spanish what I had been up to. I responded, in Spanish, that I had been to a neighboring town, interviewing workers at a dairy there. Fred asked, in English, if I had taught English classes the day before. As was typical at Grassy Dairy, I tried, with mixed results, to manage the friendly conversation in both languages in a way that facilitated the participation of everyone, without leaving someone alienated.

When Fred stood from the table and was readying himself to move on to the tasks for the day, I said that the guys wanted to tell him some things. “What things?” he said, sounding somewhat alarmed. I explained that they had not been happy lately about the job, and that they wanted to tell Fred about some of their specific issues. Fred called his business partner, Gus, into the break room so that he could hear as well. The other workers were asleep in the trailer, so it was a desirable time to talk to the management. Hector and Gaspar took turns explaining to me, in Spanish, their frustrations, and I would stop them to translate their complaints to the others. Gus’s son, a man in his late 20s, who worked in a higher position on the farm, was in the room listening too.

Gaspar leaned against the counter, describing how because the other team works the evening shift, the bosses are not there to check their work and they are not compelled to do as good of a job as Gaspar and Hector. Then he described the different tasks he must complete during his shift that the other team does not. Gaspar described in an exasperated tone that he must find the cows that need oxytocin injections and he helps with the injection process, whereas the other team of workers do not do this extra work. Hector and Gaspar also regularly check cows to see if they are in heat, whereas the other team not only does not check, but they

furthermore do not know *how* to check. Gaspar insisted that the other team really ought to have these skills since they have worked at Grassy for over three years, whereas he has worked there for just a little over a year. After I translated these complaints, Gus responded by telling me that cows typically go into heat between one o'clock and seven o'clock in the morning, and that this happens to coincide with the early morning shift that Hector and Gaspar work every day. Fred added that injections tend to happen in the morning, leaving Hector and Gaspar, once again, stuck with the job of assisting.

Both of the workers wanted a change, either increased wages or more flexibility in the scheduling. Gaspar had argued that because he and Hector do more specialized tasks, on top of the typical milking tasks, they should be compensated for that. Gus responded discouragingly about the pay issue, explaining that the workers get the same hourly wage across the board. When I described this to Hector it surprised him since he suspected that the other team's paychecks were larger, and that this was a reflection of a wage disparity. Fred then noted that Hector and Gaspar actually get quite a few perks due to the current schedule that the other guys do not, such as breakfast in the mornings, as well as closer relationships with management. Gus added that he feels bad at times because he has gotten to know Hector and Gaspar much better than the other team. Gus never sees the other team and he said that while it is advantageous for Gus and Fred to have milkers in the evening since they have their evenings free to get away and catch a movie in town, it means they rarely see Luciano and his coworker.

Another concern that the workers raised was the difficulty of beginning their shift at three o'clock in the morning. They wanted to have the option of taking the evening shift on occasion. Fred then said that he hated to mention it, but that now that all the workers have cell phones and

laptops, he worries that often they are distracted in the trailer and that they are not getting to bed as early as they ought to. He smiled at Gaspar and said, "Right?" Gaspar laughed in response. But, Fred said next, they always show up on time. He noted that the reason why Hector and Gaspar worked the late shift was that when David had worked at Grassy Dairy, he had worked the late shift with his brother, and when Gaspar came, he too worked the late shift, and then later on, Hector joined Gaspar. According to Fred, David had preferred working this shift because he liked to get the work finished early. But I realized when I checked my fieldnotes that what David's mother had told me in Xoxotutla about his experience was different. David, too, struggled with the schedule, and like Gaspar and Hector, he too wanted a raise but was too afraid to ask.

Hector shifted to other concerns, and described how he himself does not work one hundred percent all of the time, but that he always tries to do the work well, that he tries to do a good job. He said in a frustrated tone that if something did not change, he would find work elsewhere. "Do you want me to tell the bosses this?" I asked Hector carefully. "Yes, tell them." Gus and Fred appeared to be somewhat weary of the complaints, but then they suggested that they would be open to considering a change in scheduling, and talked about hiring a translator to have a formal meeting with a hired translator. Both Gus and Fred then described in clear terms how much they appreciated both teams of workers, and that they especially appreciated that Hector and Gaspar were always on time, that they did good work and that they wanted them to stay. Fred looked across the table at Hector and said loudly and sentimentally, in English "No go, Hector!"

The meeting lasted for about an hour. Fred and Gus were certainly willing to hear the workers' grievances, and although they stressed that they were not promising anything, they seemed open to making steps to address the concerns in the future. Hector had successfully passed along the message that if the *patrónes* wanted to keep him on, they ought to consider altering the organization of labor on the farm. Given how much the owners valued this team's work, and particularly Hector's contributions, I knew it was a weighty bargaining chip. I had seen Fred stressed over labor availability in the past. Over the duration of four a half months, two workers had left—a milker and a calf feeder—and one milker was planning to leave within a couple of months. Though workers offered different explanations to Fred as to why they were leaving, the management knew that these workers were not leaving to return to Mexico, but rather, to find jobs elsewhere. Workers told me they were heading to farms with higher wages or better housing. Out of a regular workforce of five, Fred was always concerned during these moments of turnover about how the work would get done, and he told me that lately, immigrant workers were not as easy to come by as in the past.<sup>32</sup>

Using mobility as a form of resistance was a practice I observed or heard about through different workers' narratives. Whether it was framed to the management as part of an ultimatum, as in Hector's case, or whether it was employed by workers as an alternative to confronting management about their concerns, mobility was used as resistance. Back in Xoxotutla, I had

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<sup>32</sup> Fred's perception of the lack of available immigrant workers to hire was interesting because when I interviewed workers they told me that currently there were so many Mexicans in the region compared to previous years. Some workers, but not all, made a direct connection between this rising population and the relative difficulty of finding work. These contradictions made it difficult for me to assess whether the supply of available immigrant workers was greater than the available jobs on dairies, particularly when some workers told me that a few farmers they heard about were demanding "real" documents (foreclosing those employment opportunities), as well as when I learned of some relatives engaging in job-sharing (Laszlo and his son, for example).

heard stories of “bad bosses,” dairy farmers who were, according to their former employees, abusing their workers or treating them unfairly. In the summer of 2005, Hugo, 35 years old when we spoke, had spent time working at a dairy farm in Wisconsin. “We didn’t speak any English,” he said. Hugo explained that when the *patrón* asked for something to be done, “Sometimes we would do something else, and that bothered him.” The hourly wage was four dollars, and workers had to pay for all of their expenses, including rent, telephone, and water. They could not stand it and after one week of work, they fled.

A few workers I spoke with described leaving a dairy farm as a way of protesting the treatment of other workers by management. Laszlo, the man who had told me about his experience being fired from Cornerstone Dairy, told me about a couple of other farms where farmers treated Mexicans poorly. “Like where?” I had asked. Laszlo told me about a farm I had visited a couple of weeks before, a very small dairy that employs only one migrant worker. Laszlo said that the farmer there is not a good guy, and he knew this because he had worked there and only stayed for three days. He explained that the boss would yell, “Fucking Mexicans!” and kick things. Laszlo could not stand it, so he left. He reflected that after he left, a very young worker was hired. He said, sentimentally, that this worker was just a child, having never worked in the U.S. before, and expressed how unfortunate it was that this young kid had to work for such a mean guy. He then described working at a large-sized dairy in the area, where someone had run into a post with a vehicle on the property. The farmer there had accused someone else of hitting the post, and because Laszlo did not like seeing someone else being treated badly, he left. He concluded with a powerful statement, “We do not have papers, but we have human rights! I will not put up with abuse.”

While it may be debatable whether Laszio's actions qualify as resistance, since he left without confronting the owners, the way *he* made meaning of his abrupt departure centered on rejecting the organization of work on this farm. When we examine vulnerable populations with so little, if any, formal leverage in the workplace, it is especially critical to locate these everyday moments that workers themselves frame as empowering. In the case of Hector and Gaspar, this was not resistance in the sense of collective organized resistance among workers. But nonetheless, it was a bold, confrontational attempt at furthering their interests as workers. They even brought in a third party (me) to make sure their claims were communicated fully. Hector and Gaspar knew how much Fred valued stable, consistent, reliable (and cheap) labor. They attempted to use this as leverage in a strategy to improve their livelihood.

During my last visit to the Shrewsbury region, I learned about an overt attempt by owners to keep workers immobile through the wage system. Mac at Sparrow's Den told me that George at Bridgeway Dairy called him up once to talk about the supply of immigrant workers in the area, and George proposed that all farmers offer their immigrant workers hourly wages at \$6.25. George reasoned that this way their workers "won't go hopping around." I said to Mac, "But that's not what's happening. Is it because farmers don't all talk to each other or know each other?" Mac said, smiling, "No, it's because farmers are independent. They like to do their own thing!"

Mobility, then, was used by workers as a way of protesting the organization of work on the farm. Whether complaints centered on schedules, wages, or the treatment of workers, the grievances were rooted in the arrangement of work on the farm, the dominant understanding of what work meant at the *place* of the farm. Mobility was thus often initiated due to contestations

over place. Working in a context in which constraints to mobility were deemed excessive, some workers would threaten to be mobile in order to gain leverage. In addition to these contestations, there were other kinds of struggles at the dairy farm over place that I observed among workers, and I describe these below.

*Other Forms of Resistance: How Do You Say, “It’s Not My Fault”?*

Just as the schedule of shifts organizes labor at work and supplies meaning to that work, so too does the primary language of a workplace. We communicate in *place*, and the ways in which we impart meaning to a place are shaped by language. If we are not familiar with the language of a place, that place can be made to seem inaccessible and the social world within it impenetrable. My days spending time with workers on the farm were filled with the back-and-forth navigation between two languages. For workers, my visits meant the navigation of three languages, from English with farmers, to Spanish with me, to Nahuatl with their fellow workers and friends. At Grassy Dairy, I chatted frequently with Fred and his workers in the break room, where all three languages were spoken in the same place. But the language with the most currency on *los ranchos*, even those that employed translators to visit regularly, was English. Fred did not speak Spanish, and he and other Americans working on the farm addressed Hector and his coworkers in English. With the exception of Atreo, who was in his late 20s, had lived in Wisconsin for over 10 years, and had an American girlfriend, the verbal responses of migrant workers to questions Fred posed were very short, frequently “yes” or “no.”

Nearly all of the workers I spoke with, those who were living in Wisconsin as well as those in Veracruz, discussed the difficulties of understanding how to perform the work on dairy

farms, due to the language barrier. I asked Hector's uncle, Olivero, if he had trouble with understanding English when he arrived in Wisconsin:

Yes, yes, always. With everyone who arrives, they always have problems with the language. That's how it is with everyone...Sometimes when we are interested in something on the job, we have to pay very close attention. What is that? What does the *patrón* want? And sometimes we never understand. But, with the signals we can understand it... But yes, it's very difficult...With the time [I've been here], I haven't learned much. But yes, I understand them, what my *patrones* say to me. I try to hear so that I can do better.

Being able to speak English was viewed by workers as tremendously valuable, not only for being able to communicate with the *patrón* about work matters, but also for protecting yourself from the manipulation of workers with a good command of the language. Valien, a 30 year old man who had worked at a dairy farm in Wisconsin for a few months about five years prior, told me about some of the conflict he had with a coworker from Ciudad Juarez on the farm. Valien and I sat inside a clothing store in Xoxotutla, just inside the doorway from the food stand he owned, as he told me about his experience. This worker told Valien that the farmer had told him that Valien was putting in too many hours at work, and that this was bothering the *patrón*. Valien thought it was strange since the *patrón* would often commend him on his work, telling him he was doing a good job. Valien tended to the calves, prepared food for the cows, took care of the pigs as well as the chickens, and the farmer would always tell him he was doing a great job. So, Valien asked

the *patrón*, “But why does that worker tell me that you say I work too much?” The *patrón* told Valien that he had not told the worker anything. From that day forward, Valien spoke directly to the *patron* in his communications with him.

By my count, less than half of the farms I visited employed a translator. This estimation, however, is complicated by the fact that at times I was recruiting new participants through the help of a translator who was employed by a number of farms in Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota. On these farms, the translator would schedule monthly or biweekly visits, in which a space was provided for both farmers and workers to communicate about specific issues. Farmers typically kept a running list of concerns to address at these meetings. All migrant workers were expected to attend these meetings, and at each meeting I attended, the farmers had asked the workers, by way of the translator, if they had specific issues they wanted to address. It was an imperfect system because the translator could not be on site all of the time, so communicating a complex directive, complaint, or question would need to be saved until the next meeting. Nonetheless, there was at least a dedicated time carved out in the schedule for workers to bring a complaint to the attention of the management, and have that concern communicated clearly. At farms where translators were not employed, and where the management did not speak Spanish and workers did not speak English, there was no formal space provided with the necessary tools to communicate concerns.

Throughout the winter and spring of 2012, I taught English classes at various dairy farms in the Shrewsbury area and beyond. My intention was to give back to the workers who I interviewed, to give them something that they would find useful and valuable. If I was teaching English at a dairy farm for the first time, I began by asking workers about the different English

words and topics they would like to learn. Most of the topics revolved around work on the farm. “How do you say, ‘The cow fell down?’” Or, “How do you say, ‘This cow is sick?’” My lessons involved creating scripts for various scenarios that could unfold or had unfolded on the farm.

One afternoon at Bridgeway, I had been reviewing these scenarios, centered on cows and milking, when a young worker who could not have been more than 21 years old, asked, “Maestra, how do you say, ‘It’s not my fault?’” The other workers voiced approval; they too wanted to know how to convey this message in English. I then took them through a scenario, writing the sentences in both Spanish and English in black marker on my dry-erase board that leaned against the wall of their apartment. We joked as I took them through various scenarios, in which we cleared the name of the accused while placing the blame on someone else. Then a different worker asked, “How do you say, ‘I want a raise’?” His coworkers laughed at this question while I enthusiastically wrote the English translation in large black letters on the board. Some workers with notepads and pencils wrote down the translations that I provided. We joked together that the next day, every worker would be asking the *patrón* for a raise.

While it may be complicated to see workers’ eagerness to learn the English vocabulary of the dairy farm as resistance—unless of course it could be documented that employers actively worked to prevent their employees from learning English, of which I did not find evidence—the moment that workers began to ask about how to say, “It’s not my fault,” or “I want a raise,” they were challenging the prevailing structure of work on the farm. Whether or not workers actually wrote down the translation and delivered these messages to management did not signal the difference between resistance or compliance. Rather, we can read workers’ *attempts* at learning the language of worker agency as resistance itself. In the sense that these English translations

were deemed necessary and important to workers, it was clear that workers had felt powerless in situations on the farm in which they had been unfairly blamed, or felt they deserved higher wages.

In fact, a few weeks after I taught the lesson, “It’s not my fault,” a worker named Donaldo at Bridgeway told me about a time in which he was blamed for puncturing a tire on the bobcat. He said that one of the American employees who he thinks is racist had kept getting flat tires on the bobcat and began blaming Donaldo. He seemed very distressed that he was being blamed, and described that this employee regularly tells the farmer that Mexican employees are behaving incompetently, when in reality it is not the case. Donaldo told me that he was considering leaving Bridgeway to work in a town nearby where his uncle was making ten dollars an hour and only working eight hours a day.

It thus follows that having the language skills to stand up for themselves in these situations would empower workers to challenge the existing structure of work on the farm, and thus challenge the meaning of the place of the farm. Learning enough English to be able to convey the message that if unsatisfactory conditions did not improve, they would find work elsewhere, would mean resistance through the threat of mobility, as Hector had done. But of course, different farms had various ways of organizing work, which translated, in some cases, to different types and degrees of immobilities faced by workers.

### *Different Sets of Immobilities*

The organization of work at Grassy Dairy was not necessarily the norm. At other farms, workers’ shifts changed such that the night shifts were distributed across all workers, or, workers could select their preferences and adjust their schedules. That type of flexibility seemed to occur more

on larger farms, where there were at least eight to ten migrant workers to do all the milking and other jobs on the farm. In this sense, the desirability of work that offered more control over one's schedule, could be read as a desire for increased mobility—a desire to break from a schedule deemed to be immobilizing. In this sense, then, not all of the farms I visited presented workers with the same sets of immobilities. On these latter farms, farmers drew up schedules which seemed to be more flexible and shifting.

When Hector went from feeding calves to milking, the job change was facilitated by the departure of a milker who had been paired with Gaspar for the early morning shift. Estévan was nineteen years old and he was Hector's cousin. I only met him once or twice before he left. It was my second visit to Grassy Dairy when Fred told me, exasperated, that Estévan had not showed up for his early morning shift. As Fred and I sat in the break room chatting in the late morning, discussing the matter, Estévan suddenly walked in and punched his time card to begin working the mid-day shift. Fred looked at me, eyebrows raised, then called out to him as he walked toward the parlor, asking him in a stern tone if he was planning on working. Estévan looked down, smiling, and nodded, yes. Fred asked him why he had not worked the earlier shift, and Estévan shrugged and gave no answer. The next day, I stopped in again, and Fred was asking the other workers about Estévan. Again, he had skipped his morning shift and Fred asked where he had gone, and if his belongings were still in the trailer. Hector and Gaspar claimed they knew nothing about it, only that he had said he was leaving to work someplace else.

A couple of months later, I caught up with Estévan, who happened to be working at Six Mile Dairy, a farm I had just begun visiting in the spring. He asked me how things were going at Grassy Dairy, then he began to explain why he left. Estévan said that all the workers but Gaspar

were basically his cousins, and that David from Xoxotutla was his cousin's husband. It was David's departure from Grassy Dairy that prompted Estévan to begin working there. He had been working at a different dairy farm when David told him he was heading back to Mexico and his job was opening up. (When I met David, he told me he had been in Mexico for about a month, meaning that Estévan's total time at Grassy Dairy was roughly six months). The reason why he left Grassy Dairy was because he wanted to give Hector the chance to have a job milking, since feeding calves was not allowing Hector the opportunity to put in many hours. Then he began telling me about the organization of shifts at Six Mile, in which every month the schedules shift. Similar to Grassy Dairy, workers milk two shifts every other day, and on the "off" days they work one shift. But the difference is that each month, each person's schedule working *los turnos* changes. He then asked me why Fred does not do it this way at Grassy Dairy. I told him I did not know. Estévan then asked me if I had talked to Fred directly about this, introducing the idea to the management of changing the schedule.

At Six Mile, there were roughly ten migrant workers, and it appeared as though this relatively large workforce translated to increased flexibility for scheduling. Presented with a more flexible schedule, it follows that workers were less hemmed in by the immobility of *los turnos*. At other farms, however, workers had to push for mobility within this area of work organization, like Hector and Gaspar. On the other hand, as I mentioned in a different section above, there were immobilities of a different sort at Six Mile, in which workers were monitored by Henry using video surveillance. There were, then, different kinds of immobilities on dairy farms, and different degrees of immobilities.

*Relational (Im)mobilities on the Farm*

From the employer's perspective, the changing structure of work on dairy farms—namely that migrant workers were now responsible for the majority, or all, of the milking—translated to increased mobility for farmers. In my interviews with eight farmers on dairies that employed migrant workers from Veracruz, it was clear that employing migrant workers had changed their ability to get away from the farm, and more specifically, from the milking parlor. Farmers expressed the increased freedom they experienced in being able to attend community events, such as the local fair and high school basketball games, as well as the freedom to step outside of the parlor and devote their daily schedule to management concerns rather than milking. Rick, a fourth generation dairy farmer, described some of the changes that had occurred in his life after hiring migrant workers from Mexico:

This is like a broken record for me, but, pre hiring Hispanic employees, my turnover rate was terrible. And the bottom line is the job isn't a job that probably carries a lot of distinction or...I mean, milking cows is a hard dirty job...and so our turnover rate was high and it was frustrating because I had to manage that employee base because I was constantly trying to shuffle a schedule around so that there were people to milk. When I started employing these people...from the get-go I never had to worry about, is someone going to show up for the milking shift? So my life has changed in that it's given me so much more security and freedom to do other things on a management perspective that I probably didn't have time to do otherwise. So, that's one thing that has changed my life greatly.

When I reviewed work on mobilities in Chapter 1, I noted some recent efforts to describe the power inequalities of mobility. In this vein, John Urry argued that, "...there must be people and objects that stay in certain relationalities of flexibility and inflexibility in order that other peoples and objects can be contingently on the move" (2007:146). We see, then, how the owners of dairy farms are able to move more freely by relying on the immobility of workers. As Gus had noted above, not having to milk in the evenings translated to more freedom to leave the farm and catch a movie. In this sense, employers could increase their mobility because they could rely on a stable workforce.

Employers also saved time by not having to train employees as much as they had when they hired American workers, thus freeing up their schedules to devote to other management duties or off-farm activities. Rick explained how training unfolded:

R: I don't teach them. They teach each other. That's the beauty. I don't have to train. I just tell them to come a couple of weeks before they're ready to work and, they just mirror the other guys, and, transitions are good.

J: Was that different from Americans? When you hired Americans, were you teaching?

R: Probably. Because we did communicate I'd probably put it on my shoulders to train. But, now like I said, someone leaves and another person shows up, the transition is quite transparent.

In this sense, the language barrier could be framed as an advantage to farmers looking to save time on employee training. George at Bridgeway described a similar process about communicating ground rules. I had asked him if he has to inform new employees about the ground rules and what he expects of them. No, he had said. They tell each other what the rules are and it is understood. In fact, he never has to new workers about the rules because “they just know” that they are not supposed to do those things. Recruitment, too, was no longer a time-intensive activity, since migrant workers on dairy farms typically filled their own positions, although variations on how this was carried out from farm to farm. Mac was a farmer in his early fifties who employed three migrant workers on his large-sized operation, all from Xoxotutla. He described to me, astounded, how smooth employee transitions could be, in the sense that one worker would leave and the new worker would crawl right into his bed, perhaps, he noted, without changing the sheets. It was seamless. Recruitment and transitions required little intervention by farmers.

We can link this relationality of (im)mobility to relationality on other—intersectional—axes, such as race, ethnicity, class and masculinity. In their interviews with Wisconsin dairy farmers who employed migrant workers, Harrison and Lloyd (2013) found that these employers were able to better meet expectations of a professional middle class white rural masculine identity by stepping away from the physically arduous work of milking. Through occupational segregation, farmers had organized a workforce of unauthorized ethnic minorities to fulfill the less desirable duties on the farm, making more desirable and higher paid positions available to native family and friends (2013). Thus, upward *social mobility* was clearly shaped relationally, whereby management could not occupy these higher up positions without the unauthorized

workers occupying the low-wage milker and pusher positions. Just as workers' social mobility is affected by how employers organize labor, so too is workers' physical mobility, that is, their ability to move from place to place both on and off the farm. Mobility as well as social mobility are certainly hampered by promotional decisions that disadvantage them time after time.

Relationality, then, in which hegemonic masculinity or class identity is constructed against marginalized masculinities or class positions (Connell 1995), comes to bear on (im)mobilities as well. An employer's mobility is made possible through the immobility of an employee. But, the legal status of these employees and the isolation of rural areas combine to make this relationality of mobility particularly noteworthy.

### ***Conclusion***

When Hector and Gaspar called upon me to translate their concerns to the management at Grassy Dairy, they were resisting the way work was organized on the farm. They were attempting to reshape the *place* of the dairy farm—the way work was organized and the meaning of that work. By telling Fred and Gus that they would find work at another farm if conditions did not improve, Hector and Gaspar were making a bold move. Like David Ximetzl, Hector and Gaspar found themselves in limbo—caught between an inflexible work schedule in which they felt they were being unfairly compensated, and the knowledge that the painfully difficult steps they had taken to get to the U.S. meant that they had to earn as much as they could while there. This particular sort of limbo, then, was *labor limbo*. But the difference between David and his fellow workers was that Hector and Gaspar attempted to resist the conditions of *labor limbo* in order to wrest more control in the workplace.

In this chapter I outlined various kinds of critical immobilities that workers face on the dairy farm, showing how these are constructed by *place* characteristics of the farm—location, materiality, and meaning. But, as I noted at different points above, I have put off discussing the *rural* context of dairy farms. In the next chapter, I examine that location in detail to illustrate the particular immobilities and mobilities constructed by that place, which come together to shape migrant workers' experiences on the community level.

#### **Chapter 4: Living in Limbo in a Rural New Destination**

Shrewsbury is a sleepy town with a population of around 1,500 residents, nestled in the rolling hills of rural Wisconsin. The most activity on any given day takes place at the local gas station. Cars pass slowly through town and stop for fuel. The lazy traffic flows either north in the direction of the highway, or south toward more farmland and other small towns like Shrewsbury. There are several businesses downtown—a barber shop, a bank, a couple of small restaurants, a bar, and a grocery store. Up the road is the public library and a couple of antique shops.

Stepping off the dairy farms in the region where I spoke Spanish and visited with migrant workers, and entering the social milieu of Shrewsbury was quite a disjuncture. The separation between these worlds was stark. As I spent more time in town, drinking coffee at Georgia's Café and dining at Henry's Supper Club, the lines of demarcation between migrants' lives on the farm and the community life of Shrewsbury seemed to sharpen. One of the first indications of this separation became apparent to me on a visit to the public library in town. After having breakfast at Georgia's one Saturday morning, I stopped by the library to see if they had internet access. I walked into the small building and was greeted by a middle-aged woman behind the desk. She was chatting enthusiastically with another woman. They seemed to be catching up, talking about local news and high school sporting events. Farther back, there was a man about the same age sitting in an upholstered chair reading a newspaper, but other than that the place was empty. There were a few rows of bookshelves in the center of the room and a couple of desktop computers along the wall. Toward the back was a children's section, but no children there.

I managed to get the attention of the librarian and asked her about internet access. We began to get acquainted, and I told the two women that I was a graduate student interested in

learning more about dairy farms and labor needs. The women were quite friendly and interested in my project. Curious about the services at the library, I asked if there were any Spanish language materials available to borrow. Shaking her head, the librarian told me that there is not a large enough population of Spanish speakers in the region to justify adding these materials. After I asked if any Spanish speaking locals come into the library, she told me that one man comes in occasionally with his little boy to check out books, and that the boy speaks English but the father seems to struggle with it. The women then gave me directions to a larger town about twenty miles away with a library that would have these resources because of their comparatively larger Hispanic population. The man who had been reading his newspaper had been listening to our conversation, and he stood up to draw me a map to get to this town, as the women chimed in with navigational details.

What was striking about this encounter at the library was that at that point in time I had met nearly 20 migrant workers from Mexico living on farms in the Shrewsbury area. I would meet many more during the course of my fieldwork. This population was certainly “there” in Shrewsbury, for I had seen and interacted with them. My experience at the library became even more striking when, a few months later, I reviewed the latest statistics on changes in Hispanic populations across the U.S. by county. Dennon County, where Shrewsbury was located, had experienced a tremendous growth in their Hispanic population from 2000 to 2010. In fact, it was listed among the top counties in the U.S. to experience such a high growth rate in recent years (APL 2011; Pew 2012).<sup>33</sup> How could it be that these local residents were so unaware of this population? What accounted for this mismatch between life on these dairies and life in town?

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<sup>33</sup> Data were retrieved from the Pew Hispanic Center (2012) state databases on Hispanic demographics. I am withholding the full citation to obscure the name of the actual “Dennon County” for confidentiality.

How could these Mexican workers be “there” in a rural place, but not *really* “there,” that is, not recognized as part of the rural community? Given this mismatch, I examine how the various characteristics of this rural *place* constrain the mobility of workers, and help to construct a particular version of limbo we see in this context.

The confluence of four different place-related factors constructed the *local limbo* that migrants experienced in this “moment” of living in a rural place: geography of rurality, materiality in the form of transportation, legal landscape, and community interactions. I describe each of these in turn. But first I examine the dominant cultural meanings of Shrewsbury and how these contribute to a particular imagined ideal of the Wisconsin countryside, one in which migrant workers are made invisible.

### ***Dominant Meanings of the Countryside: Constructions of a Rural Idyll***

Shrewsbury and several other small farm towns made up the Dennon County. In the mid-nineteenth century, the European immigrants who settled in this region were mostly farmers of Scandinavian origins, followed in numbers by German and Polish farmers. The town of Shrewsbury has a history of Norwegian settlers dating back to its founding and incorporation.<sup>34</sup> Across the twentieth century, short-term agricultural labor migration to Wisconsin peaked in the 1950s, in part due to the Bracero Program (Slesinger and Deller 2003). Recent data from a ten year period starting in the mid-1990s show that seasonal agricultural migrant workers in Dennon County during this time were few and far between, falling in the category of zero to 50 of such workers annually in the state (Wisconsin Bureau of Migrant, Refugee, and Labor Services 2006).

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<sup>34</sup> This is detailed county information that I retrieved from the Wisconsin Historical Society’s online collection of county histories in Wisconsin (WHS 2013). Full citation withheld for confidentiality.

In 2000, Dennon County, like the vast majority of other counties in the state at that time, fell in the lowest category (zero to 2.9 percent) for the proportion of foreign born by total county population (MPI 2004), with Hispanics (including foreign-born and natives) making up one percent of the county's population, which itself represented tremendous growth compared to 1990 levels (Pew 2012). We get a clearer picture of the racial and ethnic diversity in the county by looking at the proportion of white non-Hispanic residents, which in 2000 was in the upper part of the 95 to 100 percent range. By 2010, this proportion had declined to the lower 90s (U.S. Census Bureau n.d.). In terms of demographics, what we see, then, from this limited information painted in broad strokes, is a county with a low population density, a distant history of immigration before 1990, a high proportion of non-Hispanic whites, and a whole lot of population change in the last twenty years or so, and particularly since 2000 (APL 2011). This is critical information to consider when we think about the local context of this new immigrant destination.

The town of Dennon, the county seat, is over 25 miles south of Shrewsbury. Given the distance to Dennon, the community life in Shrewsbury centered on local happenings in town and in two neighboring villages. High school sports, church, and the occasional holiday festival in the next town over, Bishop, dominated local life. Several local residents who I came to know well described to me that being involved with high school sports was critical to inclusion in the community. If you did not have kids to connect you to these events, then it was very difficult to have a social life in Shrewsbury. As one local put it, the community does not know how to interact with you, or what to think of you, unless you are deeply involved with local sports. If you do not attend church or sports events, your chances of a social life are greatly diminished.

Taking the lead of Bishop, which had historically profited greatly from tourism due to its amenities—a state park, scenic landscape and recreational opportunities—Shrewsbury seemed to be going through a process of branding. Bishop was no doubt a vacation spot, and with my frequent trips to the area, I noted that a popular restaurant in town with scenic views changed the prices on their menu from winter to summer to reflect the flow of tourists. Locals warned me about this boosting of prices in Bishop during the spring and summer months, and encouraged me to head to the affordable supper club in Shrewsbury for meals. Ten miles down the road from Bishop, Shrewsbury was less convenient for tourists, but with its relatively close proximity to Bishop’s amenities, as well as its own fruit orchards and antique shops, Shrewsbury was making efforts to capitalize on tourism in the region. Small businesses in Shrewsbury were beginning to frame their services to draw in a certain demographic. One of the first businesses to do so was the Art Barn, which opened in the early 2000s. The Art Barn was old dairy farm that had been converted into a store featuring locally made crafts and highlighting the attractive rural character of the region. They catered primarily to tourists arriving to visit local fruit orchards and to see the changing of the leaves.

Georgia’s Café, which opened its doors for business a few years before I arrived in Shrewsbury, also exemplified this push to attract a different kind of customer. With the exception of a couple of restaurants in the tourist spot of Bishop, Georgia’s was the only establishment in the region that I knew of to serve coffee roasted in Wisconsin and that boasted seasonal ingredients on their menu. The ambience at Georgia’s was also quite different compared to other local restaurants or supper clubs. Located in a historic building on Main Street, the space had wood floors and high ceilings, and catered to middle-class locals and tourists looking for a

quaint place to dine, those who could afford to spend a bit more to enjoy local fare with added value. In recent years, a summer farmer's market had sprung up on Main Street, and at Georgia's Café one could pick up a flyer about upcoming family-friendly bicycle tours that would wind through local fruit orchards. These were events sponsored by the Shrewsbury Chamber of Commerce, whose stated goals included increasing tourism, encouraging economic development, and finally, fostering the beauty of the Shrewsbury area for the good of its citizens.

The question is, then, to what extent are these efforts of beautification geared toward *all* groups living in Shrewsbury? Who is left out of the town's vision to benefit its citizens? In other words, who is excluded in this rendering of an attractive portrait of a rural town?

Work by Don Mitchell and other geographers is useful in conceptualizing what, and who, is excluded from representations of landscapes, and what that exclusion serves to do. Writing about California, Mitchell noted that the "California Dream...is impossible without a certain haze that closes off perspective, that hides the struggle that goes into making landscape" (1996:14). Reviewing the work of Daniels and Cosgrove (1988), Mitchell describes the utility of landscape for representational analysis, and the view of landscape as, specifically, "a certain kind of representation of place and social life that seeks to order social relations by making all that is uncomfortable or unaesthetic to the owners of property (or more generally to the bourgeoisie) invisible or 'natural,' especially at times of great social change" (1996:26). McCandless, in her study of migrant workers on Vermont dairy farms, draws on Mitchell to show how bucolic images of Vermont life exclude certain laboring bodies (2010).

Turning to literature in the interdisciplinary area of rural studies, much of which is the work of European scholars, we see that the depictions of rurality sketched out above, in my

description of Shrewsbury as well as Mitchell's take on the California Dream, are constructions of the "rural idyll" at work. They conjure up the rural in its supposedly ideal form, those associations of the rural-urban binary identified by Raymond Williams' (1973) classic cultural analysis of rurality, *The Country and the City*. They are what Michael Bell refers to as "second rural" (2007), made up of the transportable meanings of rurality, in this case, as pure and uncontaminated. As David Bell notes, bits of the rural idyll can be found in advertising, vacation packages, film and even on your dinner plate. The rural idyll communicates purity, authenticity and cleanliness, and it is framed in these terms by the "bourgeois imaginary" (D. Bell 2006; Stewart 1996). Here, the rural idyll is produced in the urban setting by white-collar professionals looking for a tourist destination outside of the city, or perhaps for a second home in the countryside. David Bell informs that "it should be no surprise to find that the rural idyll is actually an exclusive and exclusionary place...the exclusions are, moreover, symbolic as well as material" (2006:151).

Taking up the theme of the exclusionary elements of the rural idyll, scholars have recently worked on highlighting the existence of those "rural others" (Cloke and Little 1997; Philo 1992) or the "rural abject" (D. Bell 2006), whose presence threatens the purity of the constructed rural idyll. Important contributions to this area have recently centered on sexual minorities in the rural landscape, such as Gray's recent monograph on rural queer youth (2009).<sup>35</sup> Yet different groups of "rural others," such as migrant workers, are not frequently

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<sup>35</sup> Gray's (2009) ethnography centers on new media and visibility of rural queer youth, while challenging the heavy urban focus of queer studies. For a recent review of scholarship on sexuality and rural places—including sexual minorities—see Keller and Bell's chapter, "Rolling in the Hay: The Rural as Sexual Space" in *Rural America in a Globalizing World: Problems and Prospects for the 2010s*, edited by Conner Bailey, Leif Jensen and Elizabeth Ransom (forthcoming, West Virginia University Press).

discussed in the rural idyll literature, and seldom do studies of migration make use of the symbolic power of the rural idyll.<sup>36</sup>

For Mitchell, he lamented the hard turn toward ultra-representational readings of landscape that gave short shrift to materiality. He instead proposed a middle ground approach that contributes to both the “new cultural turn” in geography as well as more “morphological” approaches. Returning to the definition of place by Gieryn (2000), he insisted that if we want to understand the sociology of place, then the meaning of a place—which we can think of as including the image and representation of place—cannot be divorced from its geographic location and its material elements. We see that the two scholars are proposing similar approaches. For this work, then, linking the representation of the rural place of Shrewsbury to the lived realities of migrant workers—“rural others”—is critical if we wish to understand how this population can be simultaneously “there” but not “there” in the rural community. Seeing this connection is important for understanding how workers experience *local limbo* in this setting, and how that limbo is shaped by mobility as well as visibility.

In fact, the portrait of Shrewsbury’s rural landscape that is constructed for tourists—pamphlets of scenic bike rides, winery tours, and leisurely apple picking—bears little resemblance to the realities of living and working as a migrant laborer in Wisconsin. I examine this reality by first focusing on the geography of this place.

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<sup>36</sup> Although, Kathleen Fennelly discusses “rural nostalgia” in her chapter, “Prejudice Toward Immigrants in the Midwest” (2008), and Schmalzbauer addresses gendered perspectives on the rural idyll among Mexican migrants in Montana (2009; 2011).

### *Geography of the Rural: The Shrewsbury Region*

For two winter months, I lived approximately an hour by car from Shrewsbury. Driving on this route, there were a few different ridges to crawl along before arriving to Shrewsbury. At each high point, you could see the far and wide view of the landscape, the snow covered hills, patches of forest here and there, and the little clusters of dairy farms. It was picturesque.

Migrant workers saw the Wisconsin countryside as beautiful, and remarked on this frequently, whether reflecting from Veracruz or talking with them in the dairy state. Wisconsin was described as *tranquilo*—quiet, peaceful—and *bonito*—beautiful. Much of these assessments of the Wisconsin countryside as attractive have to do with its rural character. Especially for those who had worked in urban settlements such as Los Angeles, which were often described as overpopulated in general, and in particular, with “too many” Mexicans or in some cases, “too many” African Americans, Wisconsin was viewed as quiet, crime-free, and peaceful.

But the flip side of the beauty of the countryside was isolation. Because of the rural character of life in Wisconsin, migrant workers found themselves geographically far from grocery stores, clinics, or other farms. Grassy Dairy was five miles from Shrewsbury’s Main Street, two miles from a gas station, and fifteen miles to the affordable grocery store where workers shopped. If you did not have a vehicle, getting off the farm required getting rides. Back in Xoxotutla, Pedro had told me about a bilingual American in Shrewsbury who helped the Mexican workers, offering them rides for a small fee. Pedro had explained what a help this was, considering he did not have a vehicle and that it was too far to get to the grocery store on foot from Grassy Dairy. The considerable distance between dairy farms and grocery stores was quite common for the farms I visited. Some farms were more isolated than Grassy Dairy, which was

comparatively more centrally located than most dairies. For instance, Six Mile Dairy was located 12 miles from the nearest gas station, surrounded by narrow winding roads and forest.

Conrad's story below about working on a dairy farm in Wisconsin highlights the isolation he experienced, which for him was largely defined by a sense of not knowing where you are geographically. Conrad was 32 years old and a father of two small children. We spoke at his kitchen table in the next village over from Xoxotutla:

I arrived there with a cousin who is working there, continues to work there, but the boss wasn't good. It was very different there. He didn't have good communication with the Mexicans and I was working there for 20 days. And he only gave me food. He didn't pay me... I have this friend, the husband of my sister-in-law...He arrived first in Minnesota and he spoke with me and he said 'pshhh, work with me!' and "my boss is a good worker/person." After 20 days...I was scared, right? I don't know anyone. The person that brought me was my cousin but in 20 days they didn't pay me...I decided, yes, I said [to the friend], you can come for me. The day after they asked me for the address because no one knew where I was...[it was] the boss of the farm, he came [later] with my friend, and he says, look up the address in the newspapers/the mail... and give me the number of the house and we will come. The boss came, and no one found out... We left there about 7 or 8 at night and we arrived at 1 in the morning....He's a good boss. He invited the two of us for hamburgers. And, yes, they're very good

bosses, because the first week—half-week—since I arrived, in one week they paid me.

In this story Conrad didn't know where he was geographically. He was dropped off at a farm in Wisconsin in a foreign country, couldn't speak English and the only person he knew was his cousin. He was stuck in a job with a boss who had not paid him for three weeks. Later, he told me this boss had been rude and demanding. Only with the aid of his friend and his friend's boss, was he able to leave the farm. But first he had to search through the mail to find the address so they could determine his whereabouts. Confinement in this sense means the language barriers, the vulnerability and the lack of control that some immigrants experience in the rural and often isolated region where dairy farms are located.

The isolation that many migrant workers face was telling in one conversation I had with Alonso at Bridgeway Farm. We had been talking about the best and worst parts of living in Wisconsin, and I had asked him if there were other negative aspects about life there, apart from being apart from his family. "Well no," he said at first, then a moment later he changed his mind, "Well yes, because we don't have the freedom to leave and everything... We have problems with the police." Then we talked about the risks associated with leaving the house and driving in cars. I asked him, "So, if you were in Mexico, is it different, for example, those times when you want to leave the house?" Alonso replied, "Yes, yes. You can leave, you can eat with your friends, you can go have fun for a little while. Yes, it's very different." Trying to get a sense of how Alonso spent his time in Wisconsin when he was not working, I asked him what he did for fun. "Sometimes we leave," he said, "but with a little fear. One or two times a month. We almost

never leave.” He told me that he did not own a vehicle. In their study of Mexican migrant dairy workers in Wisconsin, Harrison and Lloyd (2011) reported similar findings of workers confined to their homes.

In a rural place, life without a vehicle is especially isolating. In this case, the closest gas station to the farm where Alonso lived was over 10 miles away, and the super market was even farther. Walking was no option. The lack of transportation and acute sense of isolation that resulted is described similarly by Schmalzbauer in her study of Mexican immigrants living in rural Montana (2009). Rural areas are places that have low density populations, and this defining feature of the landscape constrains mobility.

This relationship between lack of car ownership and isolation was driven home to me in an interview with Pedro Ximel’s father in Xoxotutla. Yurico Ximel was 56 years old and owned a car repair shop toward the edge of downtown Xoxotutla. One afternoon, he took time off from working to sit down with me and tell me about his experiences in Wisconsin. I sat in front of an open door facing a small balcony where he stood. He leaned against the railing in the sun, looking out at the green valley below, dotted with houses. Yurico described to me the monotony of his life working on a dairy farm for two and a half years: “From my job to my room, nothing else...from my job to my room. I was enclosed every day.”

“Why didn’t you leave?” I inquired. Yurico responded emphatically, “Because I didn’t have anything to leave with! I didn’t have a car, or anything!” He explained further, “Because if I left, my money would be gone. If you go out, to have fun, to go to a party...I’m not saving anything. That is why I suffered.” Yurico pointed to his pet parakeet in a cage on his balcony, “I

was closed in like this little bird. Just like that. To save money.” He then said with a tone of resolve, “But yes, I withstood it.”

Talking with Laszlo and Mique, two brothers who worked at Rockfield Dairy in Wisconsin, I got a better sense of the confinement that Yurico described to me back in Xoxotutla. Laszlo said that life is very difficult because there is no time for anything. They work three shifts at the dairy—late morning, evening and late night—they sleep and eat in between, and there is no time for other activities. He said, animated, “Somos como vaquitos encerrados!” In English, “We are like locked up little cows.” Laszlo explained that they do not drive very much because they do not want to attract the attention of the police. Once every two weeks, they leave to get groceries and sometimes have a meal at a fast food restaurant. Otherwise, they stay on the farm.

These stories of isolation and confinement were especially striking because of the village context that was immediately available to me as a comparison to these narratives. In the village of Xoxotutla in the mountains of Veracruz, there appeared to be ample opportunities for social time. Men, women and children congregated and chatted in *el centro*, the downtown space where the municipal palace and the cathedral were located. Men often stood in a group outside of a local *cantina*, and women often waited at the corner for the bus to take them to a nearby village or the populated city at the base of the mountains. The food carts were popular gathering spaces in the morning for teachers and government officials. Boys played basketball at the cement courtyard. A restaurant in town, with its large flat screen TV for watching soccer games and American films dubbed in Spanish, was a very popular destination for groups of young men, but also families and single men passing through.

The Evangelical church was within walking distance from *el centro* and was the center of social life among its parishioners. The corner store with several telephones was a popular hangout space, where locals—women dressed in indigenous clothing and men in jeans or slacks—would buy credit for their cell phones, pay for photocopies, call relatives on the landline, or just stop in to buy a soda and chat with the owners. A string of clothing and shoe stores were frequented by locals and those living in distant *comunidades*, while the owners would stand outside and chat about local happenings. Who had left for *el norte* most recently? Did they find that teenager who went missing while crossing *la frontera*? As they would chat, a few cars and trucks would slowly roll through the main road every few minutes. Several of my participants there owned vehicles and often gave me rides. Being privy to these scenes, these slices of a vibrant community life, made stories of isolation in Wisconsin that much more palpable.

Examining rurality means an examination of the “geographic peripheral” (Lobao 1996). It means analyzes places with low population densities. And, it is clear that the geography of this rural place contributed to the constrained mobility of migrants. The location of dairy farms in rural places, those places characterized by a low population density, means something specific about migrant workers’ lives. It means living farther away from neighbors, grocery stores, gas stations, and other farms. It means dependence on vehicles to get to these places. The geography of a place is thus intertwined with the materiality of a place—the objects, like cars, that make up a place. These work together to construct the local limbo that migrant workers faced.

### ***Materiality of the Rural: Cars***

Cars, then, were critical to the mobility of workers living in a rural place. If workers did not own vehicles themselves, it was important to have a friend, typically another migrant worker, who

had a vehicle to provide rides. Trips to the grocery store were usually taken as a group every pay period—fifteen days, or, *quincena*—and workers living together would divide the cost of food among themselves, typically chipping in for gas.

A little more than one third of the 26 workers I interviewed in *el norte* owned vehicles. Buying a car was described to me as the second or third goal that migrants would typically work toward. First was buying the materials and the lot for one's house, and next was either saving for furniture and appliances for the house, saving money to set up a business at home, or buying a car. Laszlo explained this order of target earning to me as we chatted in the trailer where he lived with his brother, Mique. The television murmured in the background as Laszlo told me that he encouraged his son to come to the U.S. because it would give him the chance to get ahead. He and his son were job-sharing when I met them, each working part-time. The first thing you want to save for is a house, he explained, because once you have that, you only have to buy food and clothes to get by. Then after the house, maybe you can buy a *carrito* (car) or a business. Similarly, one evening while having dinner with Hector and Gaspar, Hector had said that for him, all he needs in life to be happy is a job and maybe a *carrito* to drive. Beyond that, Hector said, he did not care about money.

Buying a car while in the U.S. to take down to Mexico was quite a common occurrence among migrant workers. Participants told me that cars were actually much more expensive in Mexico, whereas in *el norte*, you could get a used car at a fairly good price. There were more affordable cars to choose from and they were perceived as better quality vehicles than those in Mexico. Considering that workers were quite isolated and separated from the larger rural community, how were they able to obtain vehicles? In Shrewsbury, it was through the assistance

of Stuart, the translator who lived close by, who facilitated the purchase of cars for dozens of workers. For each transaction, he charged a fee. Some employers, for example Rick, a fourth generation farmer, would facilitate these purchases for workers without charging a fee. Other employers made it clear that they would not help their employees in this way.

Getting the car from the U.S. to Mexico was a bit complicated. Diego and other workers had explained to me that they could easily be targeted by thieves if they were driving a car from the border to Veracruz, especially if it was loaded down with merchandise, as was frequently the case—appliances, furniture, and electronics piled in the bed of a truck, covered with a tarp, and tied down with ropes and bungee cords. As a result, some migrants looked for other options. In fact, there was a woman who lived in Xoxotutla who made a business of transporting cars from the U.S. to the village. A Xoxotutlano working in *el norte* would pay this woman a sum of money to drive the vehicle they purchased in the U.S. across the border from wherever the worker was living all the way to the village in Veracruz. This woman was mentioned to me frequently by migrant workers I met because she was a white American who had married a Xoxotutlano.<sup>37</sup> Workers explained to me that she could cross the border with ease because she was American. A couple of workers suggested that I, too, could get involved in this lucrative business, transporting cars across the border for a fee.

Traveling long distances, whether heading south to the border or other destinations, was considered risky. The day I met Gaspar and Hector at Grassy Dairy, they asked if I would be able to take them to the Mexican consulate in Minnesota to obtain passports. Having a Mexican passport, they explained, would enable them to fly home in a hurry if there was an emergency in

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<sup>37</sup> Meeting me, whether in Xoxotutla or Wisconsin, often prompted migrants to ask if I had met the other “Americana,” the woman who was married to a Xoxotutlano and who transported cars.

Mexico. The workers framed their proposal by explaining the advantages I had as an American and as a licensed driver. Plus, I had a vehicle, which neither of them owned.

I had a similar sense of the perceived risk of long-distance traveling in the U.S. when I spoke with Jaime at Sparrow's Den. Jaime had been telling me that it was risky to take a Greyhound bus from Arizona all the way up to Wisconsin because he had heard that "La Migra" frequently check identification on the bus. But, he explained that once you get to Wisconsin, it is "tranquilo." That is to say, for Jaime "tranquilo" means reduced immigration enforcement. It is only when you go *afuera* (outside and beyond the state) that it can be difficult, he said. So, it seemed as though for workers, being mobile outside of the state, versus inside, carried a comparatively higher level of risk, particularly as drivers without a license. There seemed, then, to be degrees of perceived risk among migrant workers when it came to mobility, tied to distances and place.

Whereas driving long distances was often perceived as risky, many of the workers I interviewed regularly drove around the countryside and small towns of Dennon County and beyond, particularly those who owned vehicles. The Wisconsin countryside was so often described as peaceful and quiet, especially compared to urban destinations, but this did not necessarily mean that workers felt safe when they left the farm. Alonso's narrative on confinement in the section above certainly confirms his perceived heightened risks of driving locally. It appeared that workers' assessment of the risks of driving locally were shaped, at least in part, by the opinions of their employers on the issue and the warnings they conveyed. And, the views of driving locally among both workers and employers were shaped by the local legal

landscape, that is, aspects of the *place* of Dennon County. I dig into these connections below, starting first with employers' views of the legal landscape.

### ***The Legal Landscape***

#### *A Climate of Fear for Employers*

On a crisp spring day, Diego, who worked at Bridgeway Farm, offered to introduce me to a worker from Xoxotutla in a neighboring town. This worker was Olivero's son and I had actually met him once before. He was Hector's cousin and came by the trailer one afternoon when I was visiting. When I interviewed his father, I had asked if he thought his son, Adulio, would be interested in talking with me. Olivero had said, yes, of course, and he gave me directions to the farm where Adulio worked, as well as his cell phone number. But the region was particularly confusing and Adulio and I kept missing one others' text messages, since reception was sometimes poor. Diego knew that I had been having trouble finding Adulio, and so one morning we found ourselves driving in a university vehicle with state plates on winding roads in the countryside in search of Olivero's son. By that point I taught a couple of classes at Bridgeway and was starting to get to know Diego better. He was a solidly built guy in his late 30s, with a wide face and a silver tooth that gleamed when he smiled. As we whizzed by green fields and sailed up and down the rolling hills, Diego peppered me with questions and made jokes, pausing to give me instructions on where I ought to turn.

We pulled up to the farm in the late morning, and Diego told me where I should park the vehicle since I was a little unsure. As we were getting out of the car, Diego mentioned to me that he knew the farmer at this dairy, Mac, because he had worked there for a short time before Bridgeway. We walked toward an open barn where two men were standing just beyond a group

of cows, watching us approach. One of the men was Adulio, and it took me a minute to recognize him because he had cut his hair since I saw him last. He wore a torn sweatshirt and muddy jeans tucked into rubber boots. Standing beside him looked to be his boss, Mac, a tall white guy in his mid-fifties, wearing a baseball hat and a long sleeved plaid shirt and jeans. What struck me, walking up to them, was the serious expressions on their faces. As we got closer, the cows scurried away from us. We stepped carefully through the mud, approaching the gate that enclosed the two men. Once through the gate, Diego reached out to shake hands with the *patrón* and the two exchanged a friendly greeting. It was my turn to introduce myself. I looked up to meet Mac's hard gaze and was immediately regretting that I asked Diego to bring me here.

I spat out an introduction to Mac as quickly as I could, hoping to disarm him. I told him that I was a graduate student from Madison doing a project on migrant workers, that I had been down to Veracruz and lived there for six months. I could hear my voice shaking as I spoke. I found myself trying to sound convincing, then stumbling over words in my haste to get them out. I had not expected this. Assuming that Adulio would have informed his boss about who I was—that I knew Hector and his father, and now Diego—I thought that I would not be meeting this employer “cold.” But here I was, pulling up in a black sedan with state plates, approaching Mac on his farm, wanting to ask his workers questions. And there was Mac, looking so stern, holding what looked like a cattle syringe close to his chest, the latter of which felt in some way defensive, perfectly complementing his guarded stance. Meanwhile, Diego and Adulio stood farther back, not at all privy to this exchange, chatting in Nahuatl and joking with each other. I longed to be on that side of the fence.

“And you’re going to write a report of all this?” he asked flatly, still trying to understand who I was and what I was doing on his farm. “Well, yes,” I said, explaining quickly how I keep my sources confidential and that I use pseudonyms in place of real names and places. Somehow these precautions did not sound convincing to me as I rehearsed them out loud. In this moment, they did not seem nearly extreme enough to assuage Mac. I was incredibly uncomfortable and nervous, and my eyes started to well up a little in the heat of this unexpected confrontation.

Shifting to a different strategy, unconvinced that Mac trusted who I said I was, I began to tell him that I knew Adulio’s father. He perked up, then asked a pointed question, “And where is he?” But I did not respond immediately. I had to pause, wrestling in that moment over a rule I followed in the field—that I would not utter the names of farmers who hired undocumented workers, until they mentioned them first. When speaking with farmers, I was always intentionally vague about which farms I was visiting and where exactly I was heading. On the other hand, in this instance I had to gain Mac’s trust. “Well,” I relented, “He’s over at Hal Jansen’s.”

Mac, speaking slowly in a quiet tone, said, “You know this is our livelihood out here.” He told me that he had heard of things happening, of offices being looked through, of people having to pay a quarter of a million dollars in fines. He asked me, what would he do if he lost these guys today? Where would they go? And what would happen to him? Mac seemed angry, intruded upon.

He then asked me, “What will we do?” It was a vague question, but I knew what he meant. It was the big question on all dairy farmers’ minds. How do we solve this legal problem? “Um...” I replied, “I don’t know.” I looked past Mac into the distance, toward a hillside where

the trees were getting greener with the touch of spring, as I wondered why I could not give him a better answer. “I don’t know,” I said again, “But something has to change. I’m coming from the academic world, and we feel that something has to change to allow these workers to be here legally. That’s where I’m coming from.”

Mac told me that he nearly had a heart attack when I pulled in with my state vehicle. But he explained that once I got out of the car, he was skeptical that I was coming to shut him down. After all, Mac had reasoned to himself, she looks pretty young, and she is by herself. He had heard about black SUVs filled with government agents, and this picture did not fit. Furthermore, it was a Saturday, and he suspected that raids would not happen on the weekend.

“Do I get to sue you if I have a heart attack?” he asked in a tone with only a *hint* of a good-natured ribbing. I followed suit and went along with his mixture of humor and gravity, relieved that the tension had been at least partly diffused, “Yes, yes, you could definitely sue me.”

Mac’s demeanor gradually softened as we continued to talk. He admitted that asking the whereabouts of Olivero was a test. I was glad that I had passed. We talked for nearly an hour that morning. As we chatted, a friend of his walked up and Mac immediately called out to him, “This lady tried to kill me! Rolling up with these state plates!” Mac reached over to the red state plate on the back of the sedan I drove, pulling up the corner slightly and snapping it back to demonstrate to his friend what caused his fear.

From that day on, I made a habit of stopping by Mac’s farm and visiting with the workers when I was in the area. Often I would track down Mac to say hello, calling his cell phone or stopping by the office, and our hellos would evolve into hour-long conversations about his

thoughts on immigration policy, labor shortages, and the sacrifices that immigrants make to come to Wisconsin.

Among dairy farmers who hired migrant workers, Mac was certainly not alone in feeling fearful and vulnerable. A couple of months before I met Mac, I interviewed Olivero's employer, Hal, who owned Pine Ridge Dairy in the next county over from Dennon. I asked him if he sensed that farmers faced a climate of fear. "Yep, yes. That's the number one thing on their minds," he had said vehemently. "And um, we try to imagine here what would happen. It's not a good. It's not something you want to think about." I asked Hal if he had heard of any raids that happened in the state. He explained,

Well, occasionally there'll be somebody to come and try to get somebody. I have a friend that twice this has happened where, three or four dark colored SUVs with shaded windows come driving in the yard. They drive in the yard and then the sheriff's deputies come with four wheelers and they come in and they demand to see somebody.

In fact, the prevalence of workplace raids has increased in recent years as part of an overall shift in the strategies of immigration policing in the U.S. (Coleman 2007). But Hal explained that this was not a raid. He described that the farmer he knew was employing about 20 Mexican workers,

And they only took one. The one that they wanted...They didn't ask about the rest, or talk about the rest or anything like that. So the wholesale raids don't

happen very often on farms. Usually there's some kind of underlying thing to cause that. It's usually not just a straight thing. There was a couple—there was one in Minnesota, there was one in Iowa...uh...one in South Dakota.

Nevertheless, it was understood that the vast majority of dairy farmers employing migrant workers try to keep a low profile. “Why do most farmers stay low?” I asked Hal. He explained this tendency,

Well it makes a lot of sense because you don't want to draw attention to yourself so that somebody's going to come from ICE and check you out and check out your employees, and you lose your employees and you go out of business...And so there's lots of incentive not to. So nobody does. A few more now than used to, but still, they're pretty, most, 90% of them are very, very, very quiet.

This climate of fear was certainly evident in the way farmers communicated with me. With nearly all of my initial interactions with farmers, they “said” without “saying.” Mac had said that he heard of “things happening,” of “offices being looked through.” He told me that one time he “got a letter,” meaning, he received a letter from social security indicating a mismatch between the worker's name and the social security number provided. Mac was saying without saying. It was a cautionary measure. And in response, I had to be careful in the way that I interacted with farmers. To some extent, we were both engaged in a dance—they trying to determine how much I knew, and me trying to slide into their pattern of saying without saying, to reassure them without speaking too directly as to be threatening. Once they found out that I had been to

Veracruz, they knew that I knew their workers were undocumented. On my end, all I could do was attempt to reassure them that this information would be kept confidential.

How did this climate of fear perceived by employers connect with workplace warnings over cars and mobility? To fully understand, I turn to examine local law enforcement efforts in Dennon County and surrounding areas.

### *Local Law Enforcement and the Criminalization of Migrant Workers*

As we spoke in his mother's kitchen in Xoxotutla, David told me that his former employer in Shrewsbury, Fred, did not like it when their Mexican employees drove vehicles into town because they could be arrested and sent to jail. Unable to secure drivers' licenses as unauthorized immigrants, Mexicans were forced to drive without licenses in order to get to work (if they weren't living on the farm), get groceries, go to a clinic, or any other purpose that necessitated leaving the farm. Participants mentioned numerous times that this was not how things used to be. Previously they could obtain driver's licenses easily and that only in recent years has the Department of Motor Vehicles required proof of citizenship before issuing licenses.

Jaime from Sparrow's Den described to me some of the difficulties of not having a driver's license. He illustrated to me the relative ease with which someone with a valid license moves around:

Riding with someone who's driving, who has permission, there is no problem. If he makes a mistake, he's got his license with him, there is no problem. They ask for it, he gives it to them.

Jaime said that in the past he had proper identification, but that he no longer has it. With identification, he explained, you can go to the bank, you can open an account and save money. But without it, life is a bit difficult. It turns out, this issue is not just about restricting unauthorized workers from the privileges of driving. It is about restricting them from the privilege of moving around in other ways, too. Being unauthorized in the United States often means you cannot provide legitimate identification. This is a distinct way in which these workers are made to be “others,” while the dairy industry profits by their labor.

Interestingly, some employers told me about informal agreements they had forged with local law enforcement to discourage the police from pulling over workers. We could read this as a benevolent gesture, but it soon becomes clear that these actions are in the self-interest of farmers, to protect their operation. And, even these employers established rules for their workers about when they could drive. Henry owned a large-sized dairy farm and employed 10 migrant workers from Mexico. He explained,

Well, it's a little bit of an advantage because my nephew is one of the police officers in town, and so, we've had many conversations with him and you know...that some of them, they don't have licenses or anything like that but if they go into a...Kwik Trip and buy some pop or something like that, and most time they go to town, they get it and then they come back home and that's where they always get stopped. And so...we've had to sit down and discuss it with the guys saying you know, you have every right to go...but they would do it at bizarre times. You go down there after midnight or you know late at night, I said hey, just don't do that. Because you kind of bring attention to yourself.

“Wow,” I responded, “So you think it helps having your nephew...” Henry interjected:

Oh yeah, yeah. And we also had a talk with the other police officers too and I think they all sat down and said you know, unless they’re really doing something terrible, the guys are just coming down getting this and coming back out, let’s kind of overlook it. And I don’t disagree, when they get to a point that, sometimes I’ve got to bring them back down to earth. The longer they’ve been here the more Americanized, I say, that they get. And so then I think well you do have to kind of abide by the American rules, too. So don’t do these things that you just think you can get away with either. So having those open discussions with them and then being honest with them makes a world of difference.

I pressed Henry a bit to encourage him to define what he meant by, “Americanized,” a term he used three times in our interview. But he never pinned it down for me. His narrative, however, suggests he was lamenting what he viewed as the gradual loss of the “Mexican work ethic,” or the resistance among some to be, what Waldinger and Lichter (2003:40) term, “willing subordinates.”

In the previous chapter I described the surveillance of workers that occurs, particularly with the physical arrangement of the farm, in which worker housing is on site. But here we have a different kind of surveillance, as described by Henry, as well as David, in which employers place restrictions on workers during their off-site, non-working time. For migrant workers, then, driving on the roads presented a double risk—migrants risked being insubordinate at work, and they risked arrest by the police. Facing the possibility of arrest intensified the climate of fear for undocumented workers, raising the specter of immigration enforcement and increasing their

“deportability” (De Genova 2005; Harrison and Lloyd 2011). The result of this fear was that many workers limited their time spent on main roads, rendered immobile and confined to their house, which tended to be located on their employers’ property.

The legal landscape that I have described here as helping to construct a state of limbo for migrant workers would be described by some scholars as a form of *structural violence*. Described by medical anthropologist Paul Farmer as “violence exerted systematically,” studies in this vein reveal the social inequalities and suffering wrought by the “social machinery of oppression” (2004:307). A similar definition is behind the concept of “everyday violence” (Scheper-Hughes 1992). And, Abrego and Menjivar (2012) apply the concept to immigration policy in their formulation of “legal violence”:

...the legal violence lens exposes the contradictions on which the formulation and implementation of immigration law rests: the various laws at federal, state, and local levels today seek to punish the behaviors of undocumented immigrants but at the same time push them to spaces outside the law. This dual contradictory goal makes immigrants simultaneously accountable to the law but also excludes them from legal protections or rights, or in Chavez’s (2008) conceptualization, it forces them to live in the nation but not be perceived as part of the nation.

In these formulations of structural violence, we recognize parts of *local limbo* and how the legal landscape gives shape to that limbo, particularly in the contradiction described by Abrego,

Menjívar, and Chavez. In the next section I tease out the element of being “part of” a destination community, how it articulates with exclusion, and how this tension helps construct *local limbo*.

### ***Community Interactions***

#### ***Belonging***

I asked migrant workers during interviews if they felt that they were part of the community in Wisconsin, that is to say, if they felt like they were members of the community there. The responses were mixed and quite nuanced. One worker who was 20 years old, Calixto, told me that yes, he felt that he was part of the community. But when I followed up this question by asking about whether he talks with Americans in the region, he said no, he does not. “Why?” I had asked him. He said, “Because, it’s that all of our time is spent here. We don’t leave.” In response I asked, “And how often do you leave the house?” He said, “When we have our day off, that’s it.” Another worker, Alonso, who was a few years older responded to the question about community, “Yes, well, if one has gotten used to it, they are a part of the community here. So yes, I think so.” But, similar to Calixto, later this worker described how infrequently he leaves the house. I realized that for migrants, ‘community’ may have been interpreted as the community of workers and employers on the farm.

For others, however, belonging to any sort of community in Wisconsin did not seem feasible. This was how Pedro’s older brother framed the issue. The oldest of Doña Yamile’s children, Anton was 35 years old and was raising two small children with his wife in Xoxotutla. Anton explained that ten years ago, he had worked at Bridgeway Dairy for a year and three months. He was paid three hundred dollars every two weeks, and described the *patrón*, George, as a very good boss, stressing that he would go back to Wisconsin to work for George if he

could. I asked Anton if he felt like he was part of the community in Shrewsbury when he lived there:

No. Because there you don't have identification, you are without papers. Here if someone asks me for my identification and papers I can give it to them and I can say I am from here. But there, no. I can't say that I am from there, so no, I'm not a member of the community. Sometimes there's a cousin working over there, another family member working on the other side. It's different than here. It's like you. You're not a member of this community because you aren't from here. You are from there.

With his hands, Anton was gesturing to show that in Wisconsin there might be a family member working on a farm in one region and other working on a distant farm, but that having this family in the area did not constitute 'community' as it was experienced in Xoxotutla. There may be family members and friends from the village across the Wisconsin landscape, but it is not the same as being home with your family, together in the *pueblo*. As we chatted in Anton's store, talking about his experiences in *el norte*, me jotting down his comments in my notebook, him leaning against a display case filled with stacks of clothes, he drew a parallel between my being in Xoxotutla and him being in Wisconsin. I was not a member of the community in Xoxotutla, and nor was Anton a member of the community in Shrewsbury. He implied that had he possessed legal authorization, perhaps then he could be considered a member of the community.

But it was also clear that Anton had a very strict definition of community—that is, you only truly belong to a community if you are *from that place*.

Diego, 38 years old, had been working at Bridgeway Dairy for four years in total, with a one year stint in Xoxotutla in between. We met initially through Hector and we built a rapport fairly quickly. Diego had worked for several years in South Carolina, working first in a restaurant and later in a shop that sold beach gear. During his time on the east coast, he acquired significant language skills and unlike my interactions with other workers, most of our conversations were a combination of English and Spanish. In a formal interview, he gave me his perspective on the community question. He answered with an affirmative ‘yes’ when I asked him if he felt as though he was part of the community in Wisconsin. Pushing for more detail, I asked Diego, “In what way?” He responded in Spanish:

Umm, because we live here, and we drive on the highways or we buy groceries and we are from here because we are also human. And for that reason I feel that I am part of the community here. And because we have to cooperate with the traffic laws. We have to respect the traffic lights and the laws here. We have to abide by the laws in this community here in [Shrewsbury] more than anything. So, we are cooperating with them because if we don’t cooperate or if we don’t respect the laws that the police enforce then we are not part of the community.

Diego then told me that he and his fellow migrant workers needed to adapt to the laws here in Wisconsin or else they would be viewed as not respecting the rules in place. I told him that his

response was interesting because many workers tell me that they are from Mexico and that this means they do not feel part of the community in Wisconsin. He responded emphatically:

No, I do! I do! Because yes, we have to respect the laws around here. Because one ought to be the kind of person who respects the law, the people, including the animals and the environment. Yes, for example, don't throw trash or don't burn things where you shouldn't. With the boss's permission, if we do something [against the law] then we do it, but if not, then I am part of the community.

Diego's response framed the concern in a way that highlighted commonalities between migrant workers and the other residents of Shrewsbury. Migrant workers, too, lived in Shrewsbury and because of this fact they ought to be considered as part of the community. But membership, Diego argued, was contingent on following the rules. If migrant workers respected the laws of the community, then they could lay claim to membership. Yet there were so many ways in which migrant workers could not help violating the laws of the host society. By driving without licenses, for example, workers were violating the law. Nonetheless, what Diego was articulating was a redefinition of what "respecting the laws" means. From Diego's perspective, respecting the laws of the host society appeared to mean respecting them as much as possible *given* the constraints of living and working as an unauthorized migrant. Through Diego's narrative, a picture emerges of a sort of *transnational citizenship* (e.g., Fox 2005; Ong 1999), in which being a citizen means more than formal, legal membership. Rather, belonging to the community is

contingent on following the norms and embracing the values of the host society, as much as possible, given the legal constraints.<sup>38</sup>

What do we do with these varied and complex answers? What factors shape whether migrant workers feel included or excluded from the *community* of the host society? Above all, we might ask why this should matter. The majority of my participants could be considered “target earners,” sojourners whose time in *el norte* was limited. Most of the migrants I spoke with did not plan to stay in Wisconsin for the long term.<sup>39</sup> But migrants’ planned time away from Mexico sometimes did not align with their actual time away. As I will describe in the next chapter, knowing that coming back to the U.S. would be difficult, migrants conveyed that they must take advantage of their time in *el norte*, delaying their return if necessary. This translates into more migrant workers staying longer in the receiving community (Reyes et al. 2002), and this matters if we want to understand how immigrants fare in a receiving community when they are residents for a period of several years or more.

For example, staying longer would imply a greater need for services and social support. The extent to which immigrants feel welcomed and supported, and the degree to which they can

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<sup>38</sup> I should note here that for the vast majority of migrant workers I interviewed, taxes were withheld from their paychecks. Several workers expressed the desire to file for a tax refund, but I was not aware of anyone in my sample who had done so. Nonetheless, a translator in the region informed me that the practice has become more common recently and that many workers have received refunds after meeting with tax experts and obtaining an individual taxpayer identification number. This issue is important in a discussion of belonging since paying taxes is strongly associated with claims to citizenship in American discourse. The thousands of dollars in taxes paid to the U.S. government by participants in my study counters popular arguments that unauthorized immigrants are a drain on our economy.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison and Lloyd (2011) reported that the immigrant migrant dairy workers in Wisconsin they surveyed had been in the U.S. for an average of 7.5 years, and had worked on the current farm that employed them for 2.8 years. By contrast, the sample of workers I interviewed had, on average, been in the U.S. for a shorter period of time. The longest period of time in the U.S. was an average of 3.9 years among those I interviewed in Wisconsin and 3.0 years among those I interviewed in Veracruz (see Table 1).

access institutional structures, is a significant topic of concern for migration scholars studying incorporation (Marrow 2008; Massey 2008). In other words, when we look at the process of settling and becoming part of the community, the context of reception matters.

*Racially Marked, Criminally Marked*

As I interviewed Diego in the living room of the apartment where he lived with nine other workers, he introduced the topic of racism before I had a chance to ask about it directly. He had been talking about the challenges Mexicans face at home in their villages:

The problems that we have there...economically, Mexico is poor, and every day the prices are going up, so it's your world where almost, how do I put it, we fight a lot in order to live. And here, well, working, you have a little more of everything, but here, too, we suffer because...the work that we do is a little underpaid, it's very cheap, and the racism practiced by the majority of the Americans, one could say...But, well, you have to face all of that.

I asked Diego, while we were on the topic, if he had experiences with racism. He interrupted before I finished asking the question to say, "Oh yes! Yes, yes, lots." Then he began to tell me a story that had unfolded at work in which one of the American managers at Bridgeway actively did not like the Mexican workers there, and in particular, one person who Diego viewed as a very good worker. But Diego concluded that you have to put up with instance such as this in the U.S. "Why?" I had asked. He responded:

Mmm, well, you can't issue a report. Sometimes he [the manager] gets mad at us, and we're about to get into an argument, but you can't call 9-1-1 because you're not legal here. So, they have the upper hand, they are...they get preference, you don't. And because they speak English, they speak it very quickly, because it's their language not ours. So, you have to stay on like that.

In the last chapter, I described this vulnerability that migrant workers faced in the farm context, and how workers are made immobile by their unauthorized status. We see this process unfold in Diego's story above, in which workers have to put up with acts of racism—they “have to stay on” and remain in that powerless position if they want to keep their job. But how were acts of racism perceived and navigated when migrants were off the farm? Toward the end of each interview, after I had gathered a basic understanding of how and why migrants had come to find themselves working on dairy farms in Wisconsin, I asked them if they had ever experienced instances of racism or discrimination. Some workers who had traveled to different parts of the U.S. explained that in those states they had experienced racism, but that in Wisconsin they had not. Talking in his store front in Xoxotutla, Rafael told me, “It's very calm there in Wisconsin. There aren't many confrontational people.”

But despite the perceived context of Wisconsin as “tranquilo” and “calmada,” workers readily shared with me some of the unpleasant experiences that they had had in the local community, experiences that they felt were structured by racism. There was a group of workers who lived in a trailer in the county adjacent to Dennon who described to me various instances of racism that they had experienced. This group was not from the Xoxotutla area, but hailed from a different cluster of villages a bus ride away from the apartment I rented in Veracruz. In fact, I

had met these workers because I had stayed with their family members on a few different occasions during my first visit to Veracruz in 2010.

The house where I stayed was owned by the Hierra family, who were believed to have been the first migrants from that particular village to work on Wisconsin dairies. At the family's house in Veracruz, there was a refrigerator covered with identical magnets sporting the Wisconsin license plate logo along with the tagline, "Got Milk? America's Dairyland." On the wall of the kitchen was a clock in the shape of a dairy cow. We could see these as souvenirs, pleasant reminders of workers' time spent milking cows in *el norte*. Perhaps they were an homage to the industry that had afforded them the opportunity to have a refrigerator, a television, and a spacious three bedroom house. But the assumption that these souvenirs signaled a happy and easy life in Wisconsin was surely too simplistic of an interpretation. When I left the Hierra family to return to the U.S., I agreed to take with me dried peppers, a container of homemade chili paste, a sack of coffee, and a loving note written by the mother of one of the workers in Wisconsin. Weeks later when I was able to deliver the package to rural Wisconsin, I introduced myself to the workers there. One of the few female milkers I spoke with was Esmeralda. She was 21 years old and was living with her uncle and two other workers when we met. In an interview that took place a couple of months after I met her, I asked Esmeralda if she felt like she was part of the community where she lived in Wisconsin. She explained:

I don't think so, because even though there are many Mexicans, there are Americans who do not like us. So, yes, there is a community where some people

do not want the Mexicans, the others cannot join them. So, I don't think so. We are more independent.

When I asked Esmeralda about how comfortable she was talking with Americans in town, she described that, "Some people are good people, but some are not. I think that people who act good are good. I can talk to them. But others, I don't talk to." When I interviewed Esmeralda's uncle, Osvaldo, he told me that he felt like he was part of the community in Wisconsin, but that he simultaneously felt as though his presence was not wanted or welcomed by some in the community. I asked him to elaborate:

Because many people that sometimes...for example, you are a friend. There are others who come up to you and say insults. For example, here in Shady Acres there is a woman who, when she sees a Mexican, begins to do this. [Sticks up his middle finger]. It's like she does not want Mexicans.

Hostile interactions with locals did not appear to be common occurrences, but nonetheless, the number of workers I spoke with who were able to describe incidents of racism was not insignificant. Esmeralda's brother, Ray, who I met in Veracruz, described to me that he felt that police in Shady Acres were racist. He told me a time in which he was pulled over and ticketed because he had forgotten to put on his seat belt. The police officer issued a ticket, ordering him to pay \$120, and informed Ray that his license would be suspended for one year. Ray felt this was an injustice and he was pretty sure that the fine was much less, around ten dollars. In fact,

Ray was correct. On the Wisconsin Department of Transportation website, the fine for breaking the Seat Belt Law was ten dollars (WDT 2009).<sup>40</sup> Ray suspected racial motivations behind the treatment he received.

Finally, one way in which I observed how migrant workers were criminally and racially marked was by flipping through the newspaper. There was a weekly paper for Dennon County, available for free at gas stations and restaurants. The paper highlighted community news, sports, and upcoming local events. In the middle of the newspaper was a crime blotter that listed recent crimes in the local area, the names of alleged perpetrators, as well as appearances at the county courthouse. One of the places where you could pick up a free copy of the Dennon County Gazette was at Georgia's Café. Over the months I spent visiting Shrewsbury, I became a frequent customer at Georgia's and I got to know the owners quite well. Sarah was a server there, the daughter of the owner, and she started to keep copies of the Gazette for me because she knew I wanted them for my research. Sarah and I built a close rapport and I was able to ask her about perceptions of migrant workers in Shrewsbury. She had told me once that her "crazy" grandmother who lived down the road made a point of circling all of the Spanish surnames listed in police blotter of each issue of the Gazette.

"Why?" I asked Sarah one day. "I don't know!" she said, somewhat embarrassed. "I guess to say, 'Look at these illegal aliens.'"

I met Sarah's grandmother once when she came into Georgia's Café to say hello to her granddaughter. She was a friendly elderly lady, and seemed no different from the other locals I met in town. Of course, I cannot argue that locals apart from Sarah's grandmother exhibited the

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<sup>40</sup> Ray's license had been issued before 2007 when Wisconsin began implementing the 2005 federal REAL ID Act, which created new standards for state-issued driver's licenses and identification cards.

same nativist attitudes she did. But through this example it was clear how powerful the Gazette was as a site of tension, and as evidence of community division and inequality. That is, the relegation of Mexican immigrants to the crime blotter section of the Gazette, and their lack of representation in other sections of the publication, signaled multiple things—the criminalization of those with Spanish surnames, and the exclusion of this minority group from the “real” community of Shrewsbury.

### *Conclusion*

After a spring day of driving from farm to farm, I was famished. I pulled up outside the hot spot in Bishop, the restaurant with the scenic view and the inflated prices. It was always a favorite among tourists. But on weekends and holidays, it was a popular destination for locals and tourists alike. The place was conveniently located across the street from my hotel, and they usually offered at least a couple of affordably priced items, so I got out of the car and went in. The restaurant was packed and very loud. Every table was taken, but I was able to get a seat at the counter, facing the huge window that looked out onto the picturesque scenery. Though I had visited the restaurant many times in the past, I had never seen it as loud and as bustling with people as I did on this early evening. After I was seated, the server handed me a menu, informing me that they had specials for Cinco de Mayo, including margaritas and chicken fajitas. I looked up and noticed that the place was covered in decorations—red, white and green crepe paper. At the tables around me, many people were sipping the featured margaritas. A folk musician would be playing a concert that night, and they had drink specials until late. The server took my order and rushed away. I craned my head to survey the crowd. No Latinos in sight.

Cinco de Mayo is a celebration of Mexican culture. Not typically observed in Mexico, it is widely recognized in the U.S. as a holiday that embraces Mexican history, food, music, and dance. Cinco de Mayo is thought to signal acceptance and inclusion of those with Mexican heritage. Leaving the farm gates after talking with Mexican migrant workers about their criminalization, their lack of freedom, and their experiences with racism, and arriving at the local Cinco de Mayo celebration to see no Latinos, was distressing. But I was not surprised. These were two different worlds. Tourists would take in the bucolic scenery, sipping celebratory margaritas, unaware of the Mexican migrant population living in the shadows of this community, and how their mobility was constrained in so many ways. As for the locals, clinking glasses on Cinco de Mayo, this was life as usual. It was unclear to me how much the average resident in Shrewsbury knew about who milked the cows in their community. As was typical, the topic of conversation among locals at the restaurant was athletics. Which high school team was traveling where for what tournament and against which rivals?

Through the din of the chattering, my mind shifted to the starkly different questions that villagers in Xoxotutla asked when they got together. Which *muchacho* was still missing in the desert? Who was no longer sending money? And who had just arrived home after all that time milking cows in *el norte*?

## **Chapter 5: Going Home – Delayed Departures, Families in Wait, and the Difficulties of Returning**

A few days before Christmas, two of the workers at Grassy Dairy, Hector and Gaspar, invited me to eat dinner with them at their home one evening. As we were finishing up our meal at the kitchen table, there was a loud knock at the door and a young and jovial guy walked into the trailer and greeted us. He looked like he couldn't have been older than 18 years old, but he told me later that he was 25. He introduced himself as Tomás, and began chatting with Hector and Gaspar in Nahautl, joking with them as he amusingly began to use a discarded old treadmill which sat in the corner of the room. Curious if the treadmill was functioning, I turned to Tomás, motioned to the machine and asked, "Does it work?" Hector returned, with a quick delivery, "The machine or the guy?" before erupting into a hearty, "Ahh ha ha!!" From then on, I noticed that when Tomás came to visit, the mood was consistently playful and light. Perhaps that was why it was particularly difficult to see Tomás when we found out a few months later that his father died.

Wisconsin was heading into spring when I knocked on the door of the trailer at Grassy Dairy. I had visited with Hector and Gaspar in their trailer more than a dozen times at that point, and at the time I had been leaning on Hector to ask Tomás for an interview with me. The week before, Tomás agreed to be interviewed for my study and although he lived on a dairy farm close by, he asked if we could meet at Grassy Dairy instead. Hector answered the door, smiling as usual, and invited me in. He and Gaspar were eating dinner, tuna salad with tortillas, and invited me to join them. When I declined, Hector insisted. I sat with them at the table and helped myself to a taquito. As I crunched down on the cigar-shaped tortilla, Hector told me abruptly that Tomás's father in Mexico died yesterday, and that perhaps Tomás would not be up for talking.

The conversation ended there, as Hector needed to make a phone call. About fifteen minutes later when Hector and Gaspar had finished dinner, Tomás knocked on the door and came in. He was quiet and looked distressed. I greeted him, wanting to tread lightly. I walked into the living room and sat across from him on the opposite couch. “Julie,” he said, “My father died last night.” “I know,” I said, “They told me...It’s so sad. What will you do?”

That night, we talked for nearly two hours. Tomás had been working on dairies in Wisconsin for five years. He had not been home to Mexico during that time. The family was anticipating his father’s death, but of course he was clearly shaken by the circumstances. He desperately wanted to support his mother during this stressful time, and he wanted to chance to grieve with his brothers and sisters. But Tomás did not have a Mexican passport. This meant that he was prohibited from traveling by plane. If he made the journey by car, he would not arrive to Xoxotutla in time for his father’s funeral. Most importantly, returning to Mexico would mean giving up his job. Because he was undocumented, leaving meant risking not being able to cross back into the U.S.<sup>41</sup> Tomás was now the only man in the family working in the U.S. and sending money home. As such, he explained to me that he was under incredible pressure to stay. His father’s contribution to the family’s income from his work in the countryside, although meager, was now non-existent. This meant Tomás’s mother would be relying on him more than ever to put his little brothers and sisters through school. Even though he felt it was his duty to go home for his father’s burial, he knew that staying was the right thing to do for the family. As the only

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<sup>41</sup> Tomás’s older brother, who was also undocumented but had a Mexican passport, drove all night with his American girlfriend to the airport in Chicago, and had already arrived to their village in Veracruz. On the way to Chicago, Tomás’s brother was pulled over by the police and ticketed for driving without a license.

person able to seriously contribute to the family's finances, going home was actually not a feasible option.

After speaking with dozens of migrants on both sides of the border, it was clear that these workers experienced a distinct kind of limbo that was deeply tied to the return trip home. This limbo came about due to limitations over migrants' mobility from Wisconsin back to their villages in Mexico. It is a difficult space to inhabit—this *return limbo*. Why do migrant workers make the decisions they make about returning home? What pieces of which places help to construct the limitations of this *return limbo*? How do workers navigate this kind of limbo? What happens when migrants actually return home? That is, what kinds of strains do they encounter there? In this chapter I tackle these questions in three different sections: delayed departures; familial strain; and coming home. Each of these sections describes the implications of this return limbo. To occupy this space of uncertainty means putting off the departure time. It means families suspended in wait. And, it can mean the prospect of feeling stuck when migrants eventually do come home.

The way in which I have organized the chapters of this dissertation means that each “moment” is tied to a place along the trajectory, whether it be the place of Xoxotutla, the place of the dairy farm, or the place of rural Wisconsin. But it is more difficult to identify a single place that has the most bearing on the particular kind of limbo I address in this chapter. That said, we know that the constraints that carry the most weight in this version of limbo are the U.S. immigration policies that make coming and going so painfully difficult for migrant workers. From Tomás, we learned that even boarding a plane to go home in an emergency is impossible for those who do not have the correct identification. The *place*, then, that has such a profound

influence on migrants' decisions to go home, is really the place of *el norte*, as general as that sounds. It is the immigration policies of the U.S. which keep migrants suspended in this state of limbo. But if we dig deeper into the uncertainty that characterizes the departure date, we see that there are actually pieces of multiple places that work together with the immigration policies of *el norte* to constitute that uncertainty.

### ***Uncertainty and Delayed Departures***

A common part of the definition of limbo, as the term is commonly used, is uncertainty. What will happen? When will it happen? How will it happen? If we are limbo, we typically do not have answers to these questions. In the case of undocumented migrants considering their return trip home, it was quite common to have indefinite answers to the question, 'When will you return home?' Most of the information I obtained on the topic of trip duration uncertainty was collected in Wisconsin. In Xoxotutla, I asked migrants about their time in Wisconsin, specifically, how long they had planned to stay in the U.S. versus how long they had actually stayed. Although some in Xoxotutla could describe a mismatch between the two periods of time, it was far easier to capture the kind of uncertainty that characterizes the temporality of the return trip by interviewing migrants who were currently living in Wisconsin. It appeared to be easier to access uncertainty as workers were experiencing it in the moment, rather than asking them to reflect upon it months or years later.

When I interviewed Olivero, Hector's uncle, he gave me a detailed explanation of this uncertainty. Olivero, at 49 years old, had years of experience traveling back and forth from Mexico to *el norte*. He had worked in California and Oregon in the 1990s, and in 2002 he made

his first trip to Wisconsin. In response to my question about the length of his stay in Wisconsin, he responded,

The length of time...sometimes we don't know exactly. When one of my family members becomes sick, or some other thing—it would have to be very urgent—I would have to go, even if I had only been here a little while. But if everything over there is okay, I continue working. And when the time comes that I don't want to work anymore, I tell the boss, 'Okay, I'm going now.'

For Olivero, the departure time was thus only definite when there was a crisis at home in Mexico, a crisis grave enough to warrant returning. Barring an emergency at home, Olivero continued working, uninterrupted. When we consider temporality and those who travel, at first glance it is difficult to understand that someone may not have a planned departure date, or that the tentative departure date suggested could be a range with substantial time in between, for example, the planned trip length that I heard frequently of “two or three years.”

There is an assumption we might make about those who are mobile so much of the time that they know the timing of their next move, and that they have an itinerary. But the kind of uncertainty that Olivero and other migrants described to me is a reminder of the lack of control that some populations have over their mobility. Though the mobilities literature leans toward analyzing the traveler who moves effortlessly through time and space, whether by cruise ship or private jet, this same literature, such as the work of Hannam and his colleagues (2006), helps us to recognize that travel can happen in non-linear and unexpected ways. For instance, when we

consider what it means to have a *delayed departure*, we think of the inconvenient extra hour, perhaps two, tacked onto our wait at the airport. In the most extreme cases, it might mean a weather-related delay that requires a hotel stay for a night in an airport hotel in an unfamiliar city. But these are delayed departures in the context of set itineraries that were established in advance, arrangements made by those with a relative amount of *certainty* and *privilege*. If we consider travel and movement in non-linear patterns, or in particularly uncertain conditions, we are able to better understand the circumstances that these migrant workers face.

In Chapter 2, on heading to *el norte*, I described how the migration experience has changed over time in response to changes in places. For example, the intensified enforcement that has occurred at certain points along the Mexico-U.S. border has resulted in the shift of the geography of border crossing to more desolate areas. Because of the hardening of the border, I described that an extended waiting period often characterized migrants' journey north. But this waiting does not necessarily subside once across. Border enforcement has changed the temporal point of entry for undocumented migrants as much as it has changed the geographic point of entry. Returning to one of the narratives from a migrant worker that I included in that chapter, Constantino had said that in the U.S. he had waited to find work, he waited to get paid, and he waited to see his family.

Just as with waiting in Mexico, this waiting in *el norte* is deeply tied to citizenship concerns. The target amount that migrants envision for themselves (enough, in order of importance, to build a house, to buy a car and to invest in starting a business) is often shifting. And, this moving target appears to be shaped by the consideration that once they leave it will be difficult to cross back. The result is that short-term migrants stay longer, wanting to make the

most of their time in the U.S. labor market. This finding has been documented in other work (Donato and Armenta 2011; Reyes, Johnson and Swearingen 2002). In Xoxotutla, Pedro Ximetl explained the phenomenon in detail. He told me that since it is very hard for migrants to return to the U.S., many stay in the U.S. Then he described the increased enforcement at the border, that it has become harder and harder to cross for everyone, given the horses, dogs and cameras that patrol the area.

The story of Gregorio exemplifies the moving target and the resulting delayed departure. Gregorio was 35 years old, single, and childless, and was working at a large dairy farm in western Wisconsin when we talked in October 2010. He had been in the U.S. for nine continuous years, without returning to Mexico to visit. When I asked him when he was planning to return, he said, “Well, I need more time here in Wisconsin to do what I thought I would while I was in Mexico. And once I have it, I’ll think about going back....I am away from my family and so, I need to see them.” He told me that he planned to make the return trip to Mexico in May of 2011. The next time I saw him I was in Wisconsin in December of 2011 after I returned from my second stint of fieldwork in Mexico. I was surprised to see him, and I asked him why he had not yet returned. He was still working at the same dairy farm and he explained to me that he had not yet reached his goal. Though most immigrant dairy workers I spoke with had not been in the U.S. for as long as Gregorio (continuously, without returning in between), many framed their choice to stay this same way. For immigrant workers, earning enough money to reach their goal often meant staying longer than planned. It is clear how this kind of transnational waiting is the result of larger forces that structure the lives of temporary undocumented immigrants, in this

case, a militarized border which has made it increasingly difficult to cross unauthorized. Staying longer means waiting.

Although at first glance, the answer, “We don’t know,” appears to signal that one manages their life on a day-to-day basis, without concern for the future. But this uncertainty over the time of departure is actually uncertainty that is constructed *because of* future plans and future status. Putting off the decision to leave means anticipating a future state of uncertainty—the lack of assurance that one can cross the border again safely and without being detected. The situation that migrant workers find themselves in when they are in return limbo is thus based, in part, on the limbo I described in “Going to El Norte.” Additionally, the knowledge that the smuggling fee has been on the rise adds an additional layer of pressure leading migrants to “take advantage” of their time in the U.S., and delay their return. The decision that migrant workers make to delay their departure is thus informed by pieces of places, which construct other forms of limbo along the migrant trajectory. By delaying their departure, migrants are managing an anticipated form of limbo which they would experience in Mexico.

In a group interview I conducted with three workers in Wisconsin—a woman, her husband, and her brother—they described to me the appeal of staying to earn more to meet a shifting target. I asked, “When will you know you are ready to go back to Mexico?” The husband, Nelo, replied, “We don’t think of it like that.” “No?” I asked, looking for an explanation. Savana, his wife, elaborated, “Sometimes someone will say, ‘It’s been three years and I’m going back to Mexico.’ But, if we arrived three years ago, and we don’t have plans, we make more plans to keep getting ahead here.” I asked Savana about what kinds of things they add to their list of goals. Her husband described the common desire of saving for a car. The

Savana chimed in, “You get used to it. Here, we are already used to it...right now there is work.” She described, laughing, “You get used to the pay days! And you get there to Mexico and it’s pure spending, as they say, because there is no work there.”

For Nelo and Savana, I got the sense that it was perhaps a bit easier to manage the uncertainty around the departure date since their two small children lived with them in Wisconsin. But this was an unusual set up for migrant workers who were parents. Most of the parents with whom I spoke did not live with their children or spouses in the U.S., and thus had to endure long periods of time without face-to-face contact.<sup>42</sup> In the next section, I describe this familial separation in detail as a second and intertwined effect of *return limbo*.

### ***Families in Wait***

Hector and Gaspar looked exhausted. I was driving them back to the farm where they worked. We had just made a trip to the closest shopping mall, located about an hour’s drive away, to look for a cell phone cover for Gaspar and some items for Hector. In the rear view mirror I could see that Gaspar was nodding off. Hector looked quite sleepy, but he was still awake. He pulled out his cell phone and made a phone call. I heard a woman answer on the other end, and they began speaking in Nahautl. I asked him quietly if it was his wife in Mexico. When he said yes, I asked him to please say hello for me. He then said through the phone that *la muchacha* (the girl) sends her regards, then he put his cell phone on speaker and a woman’s voice expanded into the small space of the car. “*La guera?* (The white girl?),” she asked. “Yes,” Hector confirmed, and then told her I was the one she had seen in Rafael’s clothing store in downtown Xoxotutla. “Thank

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<sup>42</sup> By contrast, Harrison and her colleagues (2009b) found that the migrant dairy workers they surveyed tended to live with their children in the U.S. This difference in our samples suggests the need for further investigation.

you so much!” she said to me on speaker phone, agreeing to send my regards on to Rafael the next time she sees him.

Meanwhile, the noise from our conversation had awoken Gaspar in the back seat and he smiled at the exchange taking place. Hector then asked his wife to put his son on the phone. A little voice came on next and we all listened quietly. “Did you go to school today?” Hector asked. “Yes,” the voice said. Hector then asked his son other questions about his day with a slow and soothing tone. After giving brief, monosyllabic answers, the boy then told Hector that he had to go. Hector laughed and asked, “Why? You don’t have to go!” The little voice responded, “When are you coming?” “Ohhh,” Hector replied, drawing out his words, “Not for a long time.” Hector’s wife then came on the line again and he told her he would call back in a couple of hours. After they hung up, Hector told me his son was four years old.

It would in fact be a long time before Hector’s son saw his father. After all, Hector, a 24-year old who was born and raised in Xoxotutla, had just left home two months previously. He planned to stay in Wisconsin for two years working on dairies. During a formal interview, I asked Hector, just as I asked other migrants, “When will you know you are ready to return to Mexico?” Hector was a devout Evangelical Christian and he told me he would be ready to return once he had enough money saved to buy some equipment that his church needed in Xoxotutla. At this writing, Hector is still in Wisconsin working at Grassy Dairy.

This was life as usual for migrants. Physically demanding work that made them exhausted. Prolonged separation from family. No brief visits to Mexico while working in *el norte*. What connected migrants to their families at home were regular phone calls, and sometimes text messages. For contemporary unauthorized migrants, these are the byproducts of

going to *el norte*. The question that Hector's little boy raised—*when are you coming home?*—was a difficult one for migrants and their families. The question gets right to the heart of what return limbo means. For families, it means a kind of extended and uncertain cross-border waiting on both ends.<sup>43</sup>

Although I focus primarily on the viewpoint of the migrant worker in this study, at times I witnessed familial interactions, such as the phone conversation between Hector and his son, and I also interviewed a handful of family members in Xoxotutla about how they managed the separation. In terms of immobility, the family members of those left behind in sending villages may be among the most immobile. The handful of mothers and wives I spoke with described a sense of transnational waiting—first, waiting for their children to call to tell them they had crossed safely, and then, waiting for their children or partners to return from the U.S.

Early on during my time in Veracruz, I developed an acute understanding of the emotional pain of migration that families endure. On my second visit to the Ximetl home in Xoxotutla, Doña Yamile described to me, weeping, that a couple of years ago, her youngest son fell down in the desert, hit his head, and was bleeding. She said that a couple of women helped him obtain medical attention. A deeply religious woman, Doña Yamile described to me that the *senoras* were like helpers from God, and that helpers of God are everywhere and thankfully they were there to aid her son. She continued to weep and talked about how difficult it is when your children are so far away and you have to simply trust in God that they will come home healthy.

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<sup>43</sup> This same kind of familial strain is the subject of Joanna Dreby's compelling ethnography of transnational families, *Divided by Borders*. Dreby shows how migration's "unmet expectations" lead to familial tension, particularly between parents and children (2010). We also see evidence of the emotional suffering that transnational families endure in the work of Parreñas (2005), Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) and Arlie Hochschild (2002), who use terms like, the "global care chain," "transnational mothering," and "global heart transplant."

Doña told me that she sends them off healthy and she prays that they come home healthy because lots of bad things can happen there, she said. Accidents can happen, she said, such as drunk people driving recklessly. Another time when I came to visit, Doña Yamile reflected upon how much easier life would be for their family if her children had visas. That way, she explained, they could come and go as they wanted and they would not have to suffer so much, risking their lives to cross the desert.

Visas for Doña Yamile's children would also mean waiting less time to see her sons. She explained to me, in the company of her sons, that time passes slowly for her while her sons are in the U.S. For her, two years goes by very slowly because all she is doing is waiting for her children to come home. As we spoke, her son Pedro interjected and said that for him, two years flies by in the U.S. He said that the work makes the time pass quickly. In each of these descriptions we see how the experience of time is different across borders. Just as Dreby distinguishes between "migrant time" and "child time" (2010), here too we see differences between "migrant time" and "family time."

The difference between having one's loved ones home versus being separated from them means that one's time is fundamentally different—both in terms of how much time seems to have passed, as well as what you do with that time. Leon was a 31 year-old who owned a small business selling street food from a cart in Xoxotutla. He had spent several months in Wisconsin working at a dairy farm five years earlier. During an interview with Leon and his wife, Chela, I asked them if it was difficult being apart from one another. Chela explained that right now she is not thinking about him, but when he was in *el norte* she would easily begin to worry. She felt

lonely. Chela and Leon spoke every week on the phone, but it was not the same as being together in person, she explained.

These narratives highlight the emotional suffering that families endure as they wait for an uncertain period of time for their loved ones to return home. How do migrants respond to their families in wait? Migrants frame the situation as a mutual sacrifice. I asked Olivero what his family thinks about his time in the U.S., and he explained the situation in the following way:

The trip is far, and it's a lot of money. And for them, the work is not easy, so it's better that they wait for me there. Yes, one of my grandchildren wants me [to return]. Yes I miss him very much, but what can we do? I miss them too. But, the reason is work...So, everything is for the money, because we want to have a house. We have to have that. And they have to accept that...And they know well that we have to return. That's what they hope for, that we return...late, yes, but that we return.

Olivero describes a picture of simultaneous, mutual sacrifice. The suffering is inevitable for economic stability. What could migrants do in order to have more control in this situation of *return limbo*? For some, gaining more power over the situation meant working more hours. At least this was the explanation given to me by Leon. He told me that Americans can get by financially working for a half day. "But for us," he explained, "the time that we are going to be there...we are far away from our family for years. And then, to put in only two or three hours a

day? It doesn't work for us. And so sometimes we put in ten hours a day. That way we can earn seven or eight hundred dollars a week. That works better for us.”

At Rockfield Dairy, Laszio and Mique, who were brothers, described their situation in similar terms. Laszio's son had recently begun working at Mac's farm, Sparrow's Den, to replace a worker there who left suddenly. One afternoon I stopped by Rockfield to visit with Laszio and Mique. I asked Laszio if his son's absence meant that the farmer at Rockfield would be hiring a third worker to replace him. But Laszio and Mique said they would not prefer a third worker. With two, Laszio explained, each person earns more money, and that way, they can return to Mexico sooner.

Leon, Laszio and Mique were thus doing what they could to overcome the constraints of *return limbo*, to gain more control over their mobility to resolve an uncertain situation. Leon explicitly framed his decision to put in more hours at work in terms of family considerations, an attempt to ease the familial strains that emerge as an effect of the migration process that he and his loved ones must endure.

### ***Coming Home***

Part of the uncertainty behind *return limbo* is working in Wisconsin and envisioning life in the village without work, and picturing, as Nelo and Savana did, their savings depleted over time. In Xoxotutla I spoke with quite a few migrants who were fresh from working in Wisconsin, and I was able to capture their feelings of coming home and what that meant to them. Most expressed contentment and happiness to be reunited with their families. But at the same time, quite a few migrants expressed difficulty re-adjusting to the pace of village life.

In the middle of the summer, I met Isaiah in the next village over from Xoxotutla. He was a fit, 29 year old with a small frame, short hair that was gelled back, and a neatly trimmed goatee. Isaiah had only been back in his village for a month when we met. He had been working at Six Mile Dairy for four years. Isaiah had graduated from high school. He was single and did not have children. With the money he earned milking cows, he and his family started a business selling tortillas. The day we met, he and his teenaged cousin took me with them on a quick errand to drop off tortillas for a customer. Afterward, we stood talking at a lookout point. I took out my camera and snapped a photo of the valley below, two pines at either side framing the green gentle slopes below, dotted with trees and tiny houses. "It's beautiful," I said.

"Yes," Isaiah agreed. "The only downside is that there are no jobs here." He explained that the local economy had improved in recent years, and that they were beginning to build a consumer base for their tortillas business. Nonetheless, he said, it has been difficult getting used to the slow pace of life in the village. For example, the tortilla business, he explained, only advances *poco a poco* (little by little). Many people do not prefer their machine-made tortillas because they are accustomed to the handmade variety. Above all, only people who can afford it will buy their variety. But the alternative to staying in the village was leaving to go north, and Isaiah explained he did not want to go back to the U.S. He said that migrating north is dangerous and costly. He paid three thousand dollars to be smuggled. Besides, Isaiah had other plans. He wanted to go to law school in Mexico and was taking the steps toward this goal.

But four months later when I was back in Wisconsin, an American translator who was in close contact with Isaiah told me that he wanted to come back to *el norte* as soon as possible. I was initially surprised upon hearing this, since Isaiah seemed resolute about pursuing a career in

law. But then I remembered how dissatisfied he had been after only one month of being at home. A couple months after I heard the news about Isaiah, I had the chance to visit Six Mile Dairy, a large operation, and interview his former employer, Henry. We spoke about his process of finding competent workers, and Henry said, “Boy, if I had a bunch of Isaiahs! That’d be perfect!” Later on in our interview, Henry mentioned Isaiah again and said, “I would hire Isaiah in a moment. I know...somebody would have to go but, most of them realize that. Because...I can’t afford to create a position, so somebody may have to disappear.” Although Henry could not speak Spanish, his nephew was nearly fluent and kept in touch with Isaiah through email and Facebook. Surely the message had been delivered that Isaiah would be more than welcome at Six Mile if he chose to return to *el norte*.

Toward the end of my stay in Xoxotutla, Victor, who lived in Huitla, invited me to stay with his family for a few days and meet people in his community who had worked on Wisconsin dairies. One crisp fall evening, he drove me around in his pick-up truck to different neighborhoods, in search of friends and family who might be available to talk. We pulled up to the bottom of a hill, scrambled up the side and headed for a dark, wooden house. Some members of the family were still awake, and Victor did his best to convince Faustino, a friend of his, to come outside and talk with us. After much back-and-forth, Faustino agreed to a chat. He was 27 years old and had returned to his community outside of Huitla three months earlier after over four years away from home working on dairy farms in *el norte*. He had worked at four different farms in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. I asked Faustino how he was adjusting to life back in Mexico.

“I don’t like it,” he said, “It’s a little bit difficult right now.” He told me that in Mexico there is no work, and you spend more than you make. One could travel to Mexico City to work in construction, but it is very tough work and it pays the equivalent of only one hundred and twenty dollars a week. In Wisconsin he was earning \$1,200 every two weeks and working sixty-five hours per week. “It’s not the same as there,” he said throughout our interview, comparing his life in Mexico to his life in *el norte*. One difference he noted was transportation, “There, it’s from the door to the car, whereas here you are walking everywhere.” The road that led to Faustino’s house was unpaved and very rocky. In fact, in this community the paved road was three miles out.

I asked Faustino why he returned. “My son is here and I had to come back.” He explained that his son kept asking over the phone, just as Hector’s son had, “When are you coming? When are you coming?” When Faustino left, his son was three months old. Now, his son was turning five years old in just a couple of months. “Is it better now that you are home? Since you can see your son and be with him?” “Yes,” Faustino agreed, “It’s better. It’s better.” Nevertheless, the plan was to finish building a house in his village, then Faustino would get back to Wisconsin as quickly as possible.

For some, the direct experience of working on Wisconsin dairies, earning a biweekly paycheck and sending remittances back, made coming home and being home difficult to endure. In other words, the place of the dairy farm and all that it meant to migrant workers contributed to the sense of *stuckness* they experienced in the village context. Why be home in Mexico, watching your savings disappear, when you could be back in Wisconsin earning more money?

### ***Conclusion***

Going home means reuniting with family, the freedom to leave the house, the liberty to socialize, to walk the streets as a citizen, knowing that one is legally permitted to simply be. Yet it also means watching your savings deplete. For some of the migrants I interviewed, it means growing a business, little by little. For others, it may mean working in the fields or in construction after the money has run out. In either case, it means no longer earning a paycheck every fifteen days that would take 100 days of steady work in the fields to earn.

Migrant workers explained to me that if a crisis occurred back home in Mexico, they would leave *el norte* immediately. As Olivero had said, no matter how little time he might have had in *el norte*, if there was an emergency at home, he would quit his job and leave. But for Tomás, the decision was not so simple. Of course, his duty as a son was to be home burying his father. But his other duty was to continue working in *el norte*, and help the family stay afloat financially. The heart-wrenching situation that Tomás faced was a particularly accentuated kind of *return limbo*. Tomás faced a double-bind. And if we analyze the pieces of this double bind to understand which parts cut the deepest, we see that the restrictive immigration policies of *el norte* are critical to maintaining this painful tension.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion – The Politics of Living and Laboring in Limbo**

Nine months after I left the field, I received a phone call from Mac. I had not spoken with him since I moved from Wisconsin. In December, I sent him a Christmas card wishing him well, and included a small address in Spanish to his workers—Adulio, Vicente (Laszlo's son), and a third whom I met just before I left, Ramiro. Mac was calling to check in on me and see how I was doing. I gave him an update, then asked him how things were going on his end. Mac said they had so much rain lately that the fields were far too wet to start planting. He shifted gears and told me he wanted to let me know what was happening with his workers. Adulio had gone back to Mexico three months ago, Mac said. He knew it was coming, as Adulio had given him plenty of warning. He had planned to return in October, but told Mac he would stay until February to help with dehorning calves. Unlike most of the other workers in my study, Adulio was not a milker. He was trained by Mac to work with calves and sick cows, as well as to take care of other farm work outside of the milking parlor. As promised, Adulio stayed until February, then loaded up the truck he had bought and fixed up in Wisconsin, and left for Mexico.

When Adulio left, Mac's business partner, Brian, had said, "Well, we'll just get another one." But Mac had protested, "Think about all that training required. One month of training. Then what if Adulio comes back?" Indeed, Adulio promised he would not be in Mexico for long. "How do we let go of that new guy after all that investment?" Mac decided they would cover the extra work themselves and wait to see if Adulio would return.

Continuing his story, Mac explained to me on the phone that about two months after Adulio's departure, his father came by the farm to talk with Mac. His father was Olivero, the 49-year-old I had interviewed and had come to know fairly well. He was the worker who Mac had

used to “test” me when we first met. Olivero stopped by to ask Mac for a loan on behalf of Adulio. Not home for more than two months, it seemed Adulio was already set to return. Olivero said he would need \$2,000 (U.S.) to get back up to the farm. Of course, Olivero was saying without saying. Mac told me he knew what the money was for; Adulio needed it to be smuggled across the border. Mac asked me about his giving money to Adulio, knowing he would likely spend it on a smuggler. “Isn’t that illegal?” he asked me.

As surprised and worried as Mac sounded on the phone with me at the prospect of this exchange, this was not an unfamiliar situation for him. Mac had loaned this amount of money to Adulio in the past under similar circumstances. In fact, he told me about this when we first met, and Adulio confirmed it in an interview with me. Adulio had gone to Mexico and come back before. And, a year earlier Mac had asked me, “Would you let someone borrow a couple thousand dollars to come up here from Mexico? If you weren’t a student and if you had the money, would you do it?”

Thinking it over, I had told Mac, “Yeah, I might.” Mac had responded intensely, “Well sorry little lady, you’re going to jail! It’s the same thing as robbing the store on the corner! It’s illegal! You’re a criminal!”

Even though Mac had loaned money before, it was clear that these arrangements never ceased to amaze him, or better put, scare him. Loaning money was a sudden and undeniable reminder of how his employees physically get to Wisconsin from Mexico, how they become and stay mobile. Moreover, Mac was a direct participant in making it all happen. He was providing the cash, money that ostensibly was going to Adulio, but in actuality was going into the pockets

of a *coyote*. Mac wondered if he could ever be held accountable. I knew it was a scary thought for him. Even so, the person shouldered with the most risk in this exchange was certainly Adulio.

Mac told me that after they talked about the loan, Olivero called Adulio in Mexico on his cell phone and handed the phone over to Mac. Adulio, who had picked up a considerable amount of English during his time working for Mac, asked, “What are you doing?”

Mac answered, “I just got finished with the work at the farm.” Noting the time of day, Adulio had, teasingly, admonished Mac over the phone, “You should have been done with that before now!” After all, Adulio had been doing the chores that Mac had just completed every day for years. He knew exactly how much time each task took to finish. Adulio then asked Mac how the calves were doing, expressing genuine concern for them. Then Adulio said to Mac, “You know that group of calves that still needs castrating?” Mac said, “Yeah?”

Adulio continued, “You don’t have to do that next group of calves. When I come up, I’ll dehorn and castrate those. Don’t worry about that.”

The comment was striking. It was a statement of competence. It was a message of reassurance. Of course, Adulio’s promise to *take care of business* depended on getting to Wisconsin. The statement was thus about mobility. If we ignore for a moment the social location of the speaker, Adulio’s comment sounds like something a person would say who had a stake in the business—someone with a certain amount of authority. It sounds like a person who is on equal footing with the other. Or, perhaps even a superior.

But then we consider Adulio’s position—an unauthorized migrant worker at home in Mexico, planning his trip to be smuggled across the desert, where thousands in the last decade have died, succumbing to dehydration or hypothermia (Rose 2012), in order to work again on

Mac's farm. He was immobilized by border enforcement and restrictive immigration policies. Adulio had formed a professional relationship with his American employer, forged over the course of five years. Mac had come to trust Adulio, and Adulio had come to trust Mac. But Adulio was stuck in limbo. Would he cross the desert undetected? Would he cross the desert safely? So much uncertainty. But there was only confidence, loyalty, and reassurance in Adulio's voice, as well as an unmistakable message about his commitment to work, and by extension, masculine competence. What Adulio was really saying to Mac *seemed* to be, "Loan me the \$2,000 and you won't regret it. I'll walk four days through the desert to get your calves dehorned. Don't worry about me. I'll be there." There was something so dreadfully wrong with this picture. And Mac knew it.

Mac expressed his disbelief that Adulio would be so preoccupied about the calves, so intent on carrying out the duties of his job, given his precarious situation. Mac was right to be taken aback. In fact, he was one of the few farmers with whom I spoke who was, at least in conversations with me, deeply concerned about how economic desperation drives migrants to leave their families behind and make such a far and risky journey, and how current immigration policy makes that journey so incredibly difficult. It was rare to have a conversation with Mac in which he would not compare my life to his workers' lives to illustrate the starkly different world they inhabit. The day we met, he explained that one of his workers was eighteen years old when he hired him. Mac followed this with, "What were you doing when you were eighteen?" I stopped to think. "Umm, I was a freshman in college, living in the dorms." Mac then sketched out the following hypothetical situation, "Now imagine that at eighteen years old you had to

move to Siberia, learn a whole different language, and work all day long.” He wanted to illustrate by way of comparison just how much these workers sacrifice to come to his farm.

Though Mac had never been to the villages that his workers called home, he asked his employees questions about their lives. He wanted to understand their world. Of course he was implicated in their treacherous journey north, particularly when he provided the funds to make that journey possible. But, contrary to other farmers I met during the course of this work, Mac openly described struggling with his role, often reflecting on the broken nature of the immigrant labor system and the forces that led to the acute suffering of his workers.

That afternoon on the phone with Mac, I asked him, “But why didn’t Adulio stay? With this reform going through, won’t he soon be eligible for a *W visa*?” Just a week before our phone call, the Senate’s so-called “Gang of Eight” came to an agreement on their proposal for comprehensive immigration reform. If it passed through Congress, it would be the first overhaul of our immigration system in over 25 years. The bill, titled the 2013 Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act, would allow for a certain number of temporary work visas to be granted per year for immigrants employed in low-skilled jobs, and the visas would be portable. That is, unlike the current H2A and H2B visas, workers would not be tied to a particular employer who sponsors them (Sumption and Papademetriou 2013).

Mac said that last he heard, if the bill proposed in Congress passed there would only be 100,000 of these *W visas* available for immigrant agricultural workers. I suddenly got his point.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The bill proposes 112,333 *W visas* per year for “nonimmigrant agricultural workers” within the first five years of the law’s enactment, and the H-2A visa program would be eliminated (NCSL 2013). After five years, the Secretary of Agriculture could increase or decrease this amount, based on certain factors. As of this writing, over three hundred amendments to the bill have been proposed (Finnegan 2013). The

“Think about it,” he said. “Divide that by 50. That’s two thousand. Then by county. We have over 70 counties in Wisconsin. Think of how many that is per county. That’s nothing.”

By his logic, only twenty-something visas would be granted per county. That number could not accommodate the labor needs of dairy farmers, never mind the demand for low-skill immigrant labor in other agricultural industries. With the mandatory electronic verification programs proposed to Congress, known as E-Verify, which all employers will eventually be required to implement, one wonders: who will be milking these cows? <sup>45</sup>

After my talk with Mac, when I reviewed the relevant parts of the 844-page proposed immigration bill, the answer to this question became clear. In fact, there would be two distinct categories of legal authorization for agricultural workers: *Blue Card* status and *W Visa* status. The former is for agricultural workers currently in the U.S., and the latter is for *potential* workers who are foreign nationals residing outside of the U.S. Workers would be eligible for Blue Card status if they “performed agricultural employment in the United States for not fewer than 575 hours or 100 work days during the 2-year period ending on December 31, 2012” (S. 744, 2013:153). Moreover, the bill specifies that both categories would include agricultural work that is not seasonal, specifically including dairy on the list. Contrary to what Mac and I thought, this

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number of W visas will thus continue to be negotiated, along with the hotly debated aim of further intensifying border security before immigrants can apply for authorization.

<sup>45</sup> On a federal level, E-Verify is currently a voluntary program, with the exception of federal contractors. Twenty states have enacted laws mandating the use of E-Verify for public and/or private employees, as of November 2012. Of these states, Arizona currently requires all employers to use the system. Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee have enacted laws to phase in the required use of E-Verify for most employers. The E-Verify system draws on millions of records from databases of the Social Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security to check the information entered on an employee’s I-9 form (NCSL 2012). The proposed immigration reform legislation includes a special provision for agriculture; these employers would have up to four years from the implementation of the legislation to comply with E-Verify rules (SLC 2013).

appears to be a good start to finding a solution to the legal dilemmas that farmers and migrant workers face.

Comprehensive immigration reform has been the rallying cry for immigrant advocates and migration scholars for years now. In the concluding paragraphs of countless monographs and edited volumes on immigration by sociologists, we see the adamant calls for reform. In the last two sentences of Douglas Massey's, *New Faces in New Places* (2008) he argues powerfully that,

One thing is crystal clear: undocumented status constitutes an unprecedented barrier to immigrant integration. Removing this barrier is an essential first step in giving the new immigrants a fighting chance of realizing the American Dream.

And some farmers—those willing to step into public view—have joined in alongside scholars and activists to demand serious reforms to the system so that they can more easily hire and keep (cheap) labor. The attitudes of Wisconsin dairy farmers who have not stepped into the public arena have recently been captured in a 2010 survey administered by the state (WI, DATCP 2010). Thirty six percent of the dairy farmers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'Farmers need a foreign guest worker program that allows immigrants to work legally on farms.' When findings were broken down by herd size, 68 percent of farmers on operations between 200 and 499 milk cows, and 85 percent of farmers on operations with 500 milk cows or more, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (WI, DATCP 2010). The critical question is whether the proposed legislation in Congress—with its program of Blue Cards and W Visas—will benefit the migrant dairy workers employed by these farmers.

I started this dissertation with the story of Pedro Ximatl and his efforts to get to *el norte*. Pedro was rendered immobile, intending to head north to work on a Wisconsin dairy, but stuck in an in-between space, unable to get across the border unauthorized. The characteristics of the place of Xoxotutla—geography, materiality, and meaning—came together to determine his mobility. And the characteristics of the borderlands came together to inhibit it. Pedro was in limbo, a space of in-betweenness that I argue is fundamentally tied to both mobility and place. The limbo he faced in this phase of the migration process was a *first limbo*, a version that kept him suspended in uncertainty in Veracruz.

Pushing along on the migrant trajectory, the next moment I investigated was life on the dairy farm. The physical layout of the farm, the meaning of the wage structure, and the surveillance of some employers came together to construct a space of limbo for migrant workers, one in which, among other things, work and home were inextricably connected. This was a different kind of in-betweenness—a distinct *labor limbo* that centered on the site of the workplace and the experience of work. I found that some workers used the threat of mobility to challenge the organization of labor at one farm, attempting to gain more control in the limbo they faced. I also found evidence for different sets of immobilities on dairy farms, which varied by the perceived flexibility of the milking shifts. I then considered in-depth the relationality of mobility and immobility, using the example of employers who experienced a greater degree of mobility due to their reliance on the immobility of migrant workers.

In the third moment of the migrant trajectory, I took apart the place of rural Wisconsin, the geographic location of the dairy farms I visited, to identify what the place of Shrewsbury meant for both migrant workers and native residents alike. I identified a third kind of limbo—

*local limbo*— that workers experienced in relation to their *being*, but not really *belonging*, in a rural community. Finally, I examined the moment of return migration. I found that the delayed departures, familial strain, and the experience of being home in Mexico were the effects of yet another kind of limbo, *return limbo*. The tension that constructed (im)mobilities of *return limbo* were partly built on other kinds of limbo in the migration trajectory. Limbos, in other words, are relational.

For mobilities literature, the framework of limbo that I have laid out here, using multi-sited research on a migration network of unauthorized workers, is a stark reminder that for many populations, mobility does not come easily. In light of the astonishing effects of advances in transportation and technology in our globalized world, we are tempted to conclude that movement has become easier for all. However, unauthorized migrants struggle over mobility at multiple points along their journey, and this struggle looks different in various contexts. The characteristics of place—location, objects, and meanings—make up the contours of these spaces of tension, these forms of limbo. Turning to the transnational migration scholarship, my focus on limbo is a demand for a critical look at mobility and what it can offer to the study of im/migrant communities. On the flip side, transnational migration studies is a promising field for untangling some of the lingering puzzles that emerging work on mobilities leaves us to solve, such as developing a framework for understanding the relationship between mobility and immobility, and how these tensions are constructed. My framework emphasizes the role of places in shaping mobility, contributing to the emerging subarea within the migration literature that takes a hard look at *places* and what they mean.

This work also contributes to our understanding of masculinities and transnational migration. By taking apart the pieces of *place*, we can better understand specific gendered meanings behind them. We are better able to identify which gendered parts lead to enhanced mobility for some, and relative immobility for others. From this position, we can identify multiple masculinities along the migrant trajectory, and pinpoint relationality among them, for example, how subordinate masculinities serve to prop up dominant masculinities. Although my work does not engage deeply with this topic, articulating masculinities in this way leaves us better poised to uncover gendered forms of limbo in the context of transnational migration.

Looking across the migrant trajectory, it is clear that *Xoxotutlanos* and others from impoverished communities are compelled by economic vulnerabilities to be mobile from the start. As many workers told me, “It is out of necessity that we go. Not for fun.” Upon arriving to the U.S., the ability to be mobile is again constrained, at work and in the community. And then, going home represents yet another set of heart-wrenching difficulties and constraints on movement. From a human rights perspective, the critical goal here appears to be: mobility when one *wants* to be mobile. That is, the goal ought to be the right to mobility. But of course, the dominant way in which we tie rights to people is through citizenship (e.g., Goldring and Landolt 2011). Will legalization be the panacea to these dilemmas over movement faced by unauthorized migrant workers? For the workers who *qualify* for these work programs, to what extent will they continue to live and labor in limbo, even as they are temporarily authorized?

A program that provides authorization is certainly a step in the right direction toward minimizing the mobility constraints faced by unauthorized migrant workers. According to the proposed bill, temporary work visas will bring more regulation to the industries that currently

rely heavily on the work of unauthorized immigrants. For instance, agricultural employers who wish to employ those with *W visas* must register with the USDA, provide worker housing (which would, presumably, be regulated), and transportation. Workers with these visas would have “equal labor protections” with authorized agricultural workers, and a minimum-wage would be required with yearly increases (NCSL 2013:11). With temporary authorization, visa-holders could obtain driver’s licenses and move around more freely. Above all, workers with visas would no longer have to live and labor under the constant threat of deportation. The legal landscape of Dennon County would change, and with it, the *meaning* of mobility for migrant workers would change as well.

But there is evidence to suggest that comprehensive immigration reform will not be a cure-all for the limbo(s) that migrant workers face, even if they obtain temporary visas. For instance, in his study of the employment histories of immigrants in Toronto with a precarious legal status, Goldring finds that, contrary to expectations, migrants who succeeded in regularizing their legal status still faced significant “job precarity” (2011). We might do well to examine countries like Canada and Australia which have expanded temporary legalization in recent years to understand the full range of effects of this policy change on migrant populations.

Second, in terms of community belonging, it would be naïve to suggest that temporary authorization will significantly alter the social exclusion I described in Shrewsbury and the surrounding area in Chapter 4. Lionel Cantú’s study of Latino food processing workers in “Midtown,” Iowa (1995:404) provides a vivid example:

While Midtown sells itself as "the town of shining hospitality," one's sense of welcome depends upon one's social location. Dave Conley, a young businessman and member of city council, describes Midtown as a place: *Where you can walk down the street and know everybody you see or at least know that they belong here or don't belong here.*

However, this environment is interpreted differently by Martin Gamboa, a Chicano newcomer in his early 20s: *The town is very small, and they know where we are... So we are a bit limited because the gringo knows what we do, where we are, who we are with, what time we enter, and what time we leave.*

Cantú concludes that Martin, though he is American, experiences this community in a drastically different way compared to Dave. As a Latino, he is marked in this place of "Midtown." In other words, places matter when it comes to feeling like one is part of a community. And, changing one's legal status may not change community *reception*, or alter one's fundamental sense of *belonging*.

Moreover, we ought to consider the plight of those unauthorized migrant workers who are currently working in agriculture, but who are excluded from the eligibility requirements outlined for Blue Card status. More recent arrivals would not qualify for authorization, so where does this leave them? Limbo is an apt description. And, returning to the story at the start of this chapter, what will happen to Adulio? As the immigration debate continues in Washington, migrant workers continue to struggle over mobility. Even if the legislation is passed speedily, no pathway of authorization will be available until the U.S. government has deemed the southern

border secure. Much more uncertainty thus lies ahead. It is disquieting to consider all the lives that hang in the balance, and heartbreaking to consider all the lives already lost.

While complete relief from the tensions of (im)mobility is perhaps unrealistic, we can hope that what immigration reform will bring—to those eligible for authorized status—is a lessening of the pain and struggles of living and laboring in limbo. Stepping back from my view of migrant workers to look at the lives of all unauthorized immigrants in the U.S., millions stand to benefit from the impending immigration legislation. At the same time, we ought to be particularly attentive to *all* forms of limbo that might be created by this policy change. Just as with Blue Card status, other cutoff dates determine other kinds of eligibility. In the final week of penning the remaining details of the proposed bill, senators came to an agreement on the cutoff date for immigrants eligible for the decade-plus long pathway toward citizenship. After much debate, they agreed that immigrants who entered the country before December 31, 2011 would be eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship. The executive director of America's Voice, an immigrant advocacy group, responded (Parker 2013):

We understand the need for a cutoff date, but it should be 2013, not 2011. The goal of the legislation is to transform a broken immigration system into a legal one. Leaving a few hundred thousand immigrants in limbo is contrary to that goal.

If immigration reform means yet another drawing of boundaries between those deserving of U.S. citizenship versus those not, we see how new forms of limbo are on the verge of being produced.

From a sociological perspective, understanding how these exclusions work and how they create constraints to mobility in people's everyday lives is critical.

### **Appendix: Methodology— Capturing Limbo**

Given my focus on the in-betweenness, constraint and tensions that migrants faced over their movement, it was critical for me to document the various kinds of immobilities they encountered in the places where they lived and worked. A multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus 1995) allowed me to capture the daily experiences of migrants across the migration trajectory. A specific benefit of this design was that being in Mexico gave me the chance to interview migrants who wanted to return to the U.S. but were unable to cross the border or did not have the funds to be smuggled. Through examining the micro-level experiences of migrants for the effects of larger forces on their lives, I generally followed Burawoy's research approach of linking the macro with the micro, which "takes the social situation as the point of empirical examination and works with given general concepts and laws about states, economies, legal orders, and the like to understand how those micro situations are shaped by wider structures" (Burawoy 1991:282). This methodology enabled me to see how the components of place worked together to structure mobility and thus construct the spaces of limbo in which migrants found themselves.

Of course, this study does not directly capture experiences along the *total* spatial trajectory of migration. I interviewed migrants at home and at their destination, but I did not have the opportunity or the means to interview migrants or conduct fieldwork in the places in-between home and Wisconsin, or for that matter locations in the U.S. where they had previously worked. For this information I relied upon the narratives migrants provided on the journey from Veracruz to the border, crossing the borderlands, experiences in other states and making their way up to Wisconsin.

### *People and Places*

I conducted a total of 60 interviews with current and former migrant dairy workers. Roughly half of these, 34, were conducted in Veracruz, Mexico with those who had previously worked on Wisconsin dairy farms. These interviews were conducted in a cluster of villages which were known for sending migrants to Wisconsin. I also interviewed 12 health professionals, teachers, relatives, and politicians who lived in, or had intimate knowledge of, these migrant sending communities for background knowledge. In addition, I spoke informally with perhaps 30 additional migrants, relatives, and professionals in the region about migration issues. In Veracruz, I did not live in the villages I visited, but rather traveled frequently to this region by bus and spent the night in a rented room. My fieldwork consisted of interviewing and spending time with migrants and their families, as well as getting a feel for the pace of life in the villages, particularly the town of “Xoxotutla.” Participant-observation also allowed me to observe household dynamics, although the fact that I could not understand Nahuatl was quite limiting in this regard. Being present, however, allowed me to talk with mothers and wives about their family member’s time away and how they managed the separation. When possible, I used my recorder to document these interactions. Otherwise, I wrote detailed fieldnotes as soon as I returned to my rented room.

I made two trips to Veracruz. My first trip in 2010 was for a period of six weeks, and I returned for my second trip in 2011 to live in the same region for five months. To illustrate my own cross-border movements, I will share an example of my interactions with one particular group of workers. My first meeting with dairy workers took place in Wisconsin in April of 2010.

I stayed with these workers for a few days in their home in Veracruz later that summer in July. When I returned to Mexico the next year in August, I stayed with these workers again for a few days at their home, and a few months later when I returned to the U.S., I saw these workers back in Wisconsin where they had returned to work again at the same farm.

In Wisconsin, I lived for two months in a city within an hour's drive from the dairy farms I visited. When teaching commitments prevented me from living in the area any longer, I drove to the region when time allowed and spent two or three nights at a local motel. I made 13 of these trips. In total, I interviewed 26 migrants in Wisconsin working on dairy farms.<sup>46</sup> These workers were from the region of Veracruz I had visited, the majority of them hailing from Xoxotutla. The workers I interviewed in Wisconsin came from 14 different farms, and as such, my sample includes workers from the same farm in some instances.

Most of the interviews I conducted with workers took place in their homes. It was very important to me that my formal interviews with workers were private, with no chance of their boss overhearing what was said. The fact that most employers did not understand Spanish—particularly as it was spoken by their employees—provided a layer of insulation in my general communications with workers as I moved about on the farm. That said, the majority of the time I spent with workers was in their homes, places where farmers typically did not visit.

As it often happens while conducting fieldwork, I came to know some participants better than others, and most of the participant-observing I conducted in Wisconsin took place with eight workers from four different farms. I chatted with these participants, taught them English,

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<sup>46</sup> A handful of these workers were employed on farms in a region of Minnesota which was geographically close to Shrewsbury. However, throughout the dissertation I refer generally to Wisconsin because this was my primary field site in the U.S. There was much overlap in the labor force in these parts of each state, with workers switching from western Wisconsin farms to eastern Minnesota farms and viceversa.

watched television and sometimes ate meals. My goal was to observe their routines and to understand how they lived and the pace of their lives. Sometimes I left the farm with these workers to drive into town for food, or to drive to a different farm to visit with other workers.

There were other individuals I interviewed in Wisconsin to better understand the lives of migrant workers living there. In Veracruz, it became clear to me that the relationships between workers and their employers were important to my question about how the dairy farm shapes the movements of workers. When I began my fieldwork in Wisconsin, I set out to include a group of employers in my study. In total, I interviewed eight farmers. Seven were both owners and *principal farm operators* (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012), that is, those in charge of the day to day, ongoing operations on the farm. One was a farm manager whose main responsibilities included overseeing the hired staff. To collect background information about the lives of workers I also interviewed eight professionals who worked closely with migrant employees from Mexico. These included an immigrant attorney, a registered nurse, a translator and a doctor. In addition to the individuals with whom I conducted formal interviews, I chatted informally with approximately a dozen migrant workers in Wisconsin, and some of their insights are incorporated into my findings.

On the farm, I engaged in “deep hanging out,” chatting with both workers and employers whenever I could. In her study of immigrant parents and children, Dreby (2010) describes her approach as a “domestic ethnography,” since so much of her research took place in the homes of families. By contrast, given that the location of migrant housing in Wisconsin straddled the home-work line, and since I often spent time in break rooms and milk parlors, my study is both a domestic and a work ethnography.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours and I conducted all interviews in Spanish. Most interviews were digitally recorded; some participants appeared to be uncomfortable with the use of the recorder—either they told me or through non-verbal cues it was clear they preferred not to be recorded, even after I assured them that no one but me would be listening to the recording— and I took detailed notes in these cases. I used an interview protocol made up of a list of detailed questions on several topics including, but not limited to, each person’s migration history, memories of life in Wisconsin, future plans for returning to the U.S. or Mexico, and sense of belonging to the community. Since I wanted to understand the tensions of living in Veracruz and living in Wisconsin, many of my questions were place-specific in that sense. Interviews were semi-structured and I encouraged participants to diverge from the set questions to elaborate on points they made.

I analyzed my findings concurrently with data collection. In the field, I wrote weekly analytic memos (Charmaz 2001) that articulated themes I was encountering in my research and connected them to theoretical issues. As collected more data, I refined and modified the themes I identified, moving back and forth between empirical evidence and theory in a “retroduction” fashion (Katz 1983). I transcribed my interviews and audio notes, and I used NVivo 9 to code for some of the dominant themes I had previously identified through the memoing process.

### ***Gaining Entrée and Trust***

Migrant dairy workers in Wisconsin tended to engage in circular migration. Evident from my example above, workers would cross the border unauthorized, get a ride to Wisconsin by way of a ride-share system facilitated at the border, work at one or more farms for a period of years, regularly send remittances home, then return to Mexico for a period of time before possibly

planning a return trip. This population was thus relatively mobile, which was one reason why studying this group presented a bit of a methodological challenge. For instance, on a few different occasions, I made plans to meet with a worker in Wisconsin only to find out later that he had left suddenly for Mexico. Thus, the same uncertainty over length of stay in *el norte* that I discuss in Chapter 5 had direct implications on data collection. That said, because migrant dairy workers are not as mobile as seasonal agricultural workers, I faced a comparatively easier task of finding workers than other scholars. For example, in their review of methodological approaches to studying migrant workers, Okada, Richards and Slesinger (1982) noted the dilemmas inherent in studying this population,

For social scientists as well as for public policy overseers and social service workers, migrants present an enigmatic case particularly because of their erratic and often unpredictable movement; locating and keeping track of them involves considerable effort by persons interested in their movement.

While the mobility of migrants proved not to be a significant challenge for me in this work, the legal status of the population I studied meant that I had a considerable methodological problem on my hands. My chief concerns were establishing trust and protecting workers. Emerson notes that the logistics of “getting on in the field,” and tackling problems of gaining entrée and trust “reveal critical substantive and theoretically relevant features of the setting under study” (2001:114). This was certainly applicable to my experiences in the field, in which my social location as a white American woman immediately marked me as an “outsider,” and as a potential

threat to migrants, their families, and employers. Of course, this fact said something about the people whose lives I wanted to understand. I wanted information about migrant workers, most of whom were undocumented, and that fact alone made conducting this study difficult and complicated at times. In Mexico, there was the potential for mistrust on the part of villagers with family and friends in *el norte*, who may have been unwilling to talk with me for fear of their loved ones being deported if I told immigration enforcement. Of course, in Wisconsin that potential for mistrust was heightened and I had to be especially cognizant of how I was perceived by workers and employers.

In Veracruz, I was an outsider in a host of ways. Apart from the white American woman who transported cars but who was rarely in town, I was the only *gringo/a* in the villages I visited and people frequently referred to me as *la guera* (the white girl). Language differences also stood in the way of connecting with the population I studied. Although I spoke Spanish, most villagers spoke with each other in a combination of Spanish and Nahuatl. In general, however, I found that most villagers were quite friendly and curious about my presence in their town, and opened up after I told them I was a student.

It was fortunate that I conducted much of my fieldwork in the order I did—first Veracruz, then Wisconsin. Given that I wished to interview undocumented workers in the U.S., supplying direct knowledge of the people and places in their hometown was invaluable. In fact, Rafael in Xoxotutla had advised on me how I ought to go about recruiting dairy workers in Wisconsin. He suggested I write down all the names of the villages I had visited and show them the list, establishing trust that way. As it happened, being able to tell workers that I had been to their hometown and showing them photos of the village and local happenings was a tremendous help

in building rapport. In fact, quite a few connections to individuals arose over the course of my fieldwork in Wisconsin that I could easily trace to my time in Veracruz, for example, a moment with Gaspar at Grassy Dairy when I discovered that I had interviewed Gaspar's father in Xoxotutla.

In another case, I was visiting the home of a group of workers in Wisconsin whose family I had stayed with in Veracruz. The young man who answered the door invited me in, and after sitting and chatting for nearly an hour, he said, "Don't you recognize me?" He was the boyfriend of the teenaged daughter in the family, with whom I had spent considerable time during my stay in the village. I had attended her graduation party, and I was even featured in a video from the event, which was sent from Veracruz to this same trailer so that family members could see it. I was so shocked to see him and I realized it was because I had not expected him to be in Wisconsin. He had worked in a restaurant in Cancún for most of the year and when we spoke in Veracruz he never conveyed interest in coming to the U.S. to work with his girlfriend's uncle. It was an illustration of how migration happens—via access to migration networks. As a researcher, I had an up-close and personal view of one particular network, the connections of which were so dense that it often left me astonished.

While the order of my fieldwork was critical, my connection to an American who was very familiar with these workers and the communities in Veracruz where they come from was absolutely essential. My initial connections to migrants in Wisconsin and Veracruz were facilitated by way of this contact. Using her expertise and her reputation as a friend and advocate to this population, I was able to gain the level of trust required to carry out this study. From this initial contact, I found additional participants through snowball sampling, limiting my focus to

individuals who were working or had worked on Wisconsin dairy farms and who were from the area of Veracruz I visited.

Protecting the confidentiality of participants was critical and I was careful to remind workers of my efforts to do this throughout the study. I did not write down the full names or addresses of workers, employers or farms, and I was very clear that I was a student and not a representative of the government. As I discussed in Chapter 4, I had some considerably awkward conversations with employers as I attempted to maintain confidentiality for farmers as well as farmworkers. Due to stipulations in the IRB protocol, I did not ask direct questions about workers' citizenship status. However, in every case this status was revealed to me over the course of interviewing and interacting with participants. The information was such a crucial part of migrants' stories that it came out without my having to ask about it. Before I interviewed Diego, for example, I was telling him about what his participation would entail and my efforts to keep his information confidential. I told him, "For example, I will not ask you *how* you came to the U.S., but I will instead ask *why* you came..." He interjected, "Why not?" Then he shouted, smiling, "We walked!"

It was thus clear that "illegality" gave meaning to migrants' experiences while in the U.S., and of course, getting to *el norte* in the first place. With his response, Diego *demand*ed recognition of that fact, which in itself challenges narratives that portray undocumented im/migrants as *only* powerless victims. Because of the potentially devastating effects of revealing the identities of undocumented workers and their employers, my job was (and still is) to be as careful as possible to keep my participants' identities private during the course of this project and beyond. Throughout this dissertation I have used pseudonyms for workers, farmers,

farm names, towns and counties. While both “Xoxotutla” and “Shrewsbury” are fictional names, they refer to real places. I have altered geographic details about each place to conceal their whereabouts, and in some cases I have changed certain identifying characteristics of migrants and farmers for their protection.

### *Reflexivity and Negotiating Identity*

There are numerous ways in which my identity shaped the way I went about collecting data. The primary concern for me was my sexual identity. Doing this research as a queer woman was not exactly easy. For me, it was a glaring issue, one that presented itself in nearly every encounter I had in the field, with Veracruzanos and Americans alike. As these encounters added up, I was reminded of the contextual and dynamic process of “coming out.” That is to say, the fact that the trip out of the closet is not just one discreet event; as other scholars have noted, “coming out” is ongoing (e.g., Valentine, Skelton, and Butler 2003). When one is in a context in which they are meeting new people on a daily basis, that fact is consistently thrown into relief. Working in rural communities in Mexico amplified this fact, adding a layer of complication and difficulty.

Looking over recent work on international migration in which researchers take stock of how they are perceived in the field, there seems to be little doubt that heterosexuality helps. When researchers in opposite-gender relationships share the details of their personal lives with participants, even introducing their significant others and children, rapport is reinforced and relationships in the field are deepened (Dreby 2010, Schmalzbauer 2009, Smith 2006). The relational and familial source of that deepening is openly acknowledged by researchers and included in their notes on reflexivity. The heterosexual privilege, however, tends to be

overlooked. When I began this research in 2010, I made a conscious decision to stay closeted in the field. I decided I would be as evasive as I could and see if I could still create the rapport that I desperately needed to establish with migrants, their families, and their employers. I felt that in doing so, I could at least remove one potential area for mistrust or distance among participants.

When asked about my relationship status, which happened frequently, I initially told participants that I was *soltera* (single). I did not have much time for relationships, I told participants, and that once I finished my studies, I would consider it. This seemed to be a satisfactory answer during my time in Mexico, although participants were still perplexed about how, at 30 years old, I could still be single. But I found that once I returned to Wisconsin, it was apparent that I needed to ditch my status as *soltera*. I had received a few awkward phone calls from a couple of workers and one farmer, and I found that I had to confront my own naïveté with respect to heterosexual advances. For instance, I had to recognize that an invitation to have dinner alone with a married male farmer at a small town bar was most certainly not a good idea. I had to have a way of minimizing the occurrence of these propositions. I decided, together with my partner, that I would be able to move more freely as a researcher if I acquired a *novio*. So I invented one. My partner, Sabra, became *Simón*, and I began to tell my participants that I was now in a serious relationship with a man.

Though I had seemingly found a solution to my dilemma in the field, what felt to me like going back into the closet was not an easy process. I had been out for 15 years and I suddenly found myself envying researchers in opposite-gender relationships who could genuinely share their personal lives with their participants. It wasn't that I longed to divulge intimate details of my life, a practice which I consider to be potentially damaging behavior for a researcher. But

rather, I could see that a researcher's ability to form trust with participants is often based on a tacit acknowledgement of shared commonalities. I was in a context in which commonalities between myself and my participants were quite absent. I am a white, middle-class, American queer woman with an advanced degree. Most of my participants had not studied past middle school. In the U.S., they were undocumented and held low-wage jobs. Considering, as critical social scientists do, the social locations of the researcher and the researched (e.g., Sprague 2005), the power differential was striking. So when migrants reached across these social boundaries to joke about romance and women, perhaps their attempts at minimizing the power gap, at reasserting control through displays of masculinity, I was typically quick to participate, complicit in the game.

For instance, the first time I met Gaspar, he was washing buckets at Grassy Dairy and he immediately asked me if I was single. Yes, I had said at the time. "You don't want to get married?" he said incredulously, looking up at me from his washing. "No, I don't have time," I said. "But what if I bring an engagement ring next time I see you? Then you would have to say yes!" he had said enthusiastically, laughing with Hector. I laughed at his joke, telling him, with a pretend horrified tone, "No! I don't want to!" The interaction, though it lasted perhaps ten seconds, set a precedent for future exchanges with Gaspar. He knew we could joke together about romance, and he knew that I knew he meant no harm by it. This was one of the go-to sources of commonality—relationships and (heterosexual) romantic attraction.

Yet beneath the veneer of jokes and ribbing, I was uneasy with my decision not to come out over the course of the study. I struggled with the lie I had told. Participants told me about the intimate details of their lives while I lied about my own. But when I think back on all of the

conversations I had with Veracruzanos and farmers, my gut tells me that I could not have done this research as an openly queer woman. And I rationalized that if participants found out about my sexuality, yes, perhaps it would sting them that I had been dishonest, that I had not shared my true self, but I reasoned that my lie did not make them more vulnerable or emotionally harm them.

One afternoon, I was able to get a glimpse of two of my participants' perspectives on sexual minorities under the safe cover of my faux heterosexuality. I was at the mall with Hector and Gaspar when they asked me about my roommate. I was renting a room in a nearby town in a house owned by a queer woman. They asked, giggling, if I would introduce her to them. I told them that she did not like men that way and that she had a girlfriend. "She's a lesbian? That's gross." Gaspar said sharply. Hector said under his breath, "To each his own."

I pushed a bit with Gaspar, "Yes, she's a lesbian. It's not against the law." He replied, "Yes, but it's against the law of God." Hector stuck to his opinion about not judging others. Growing more confident, I told them that for me, I do not think it is right when people abuse those who do not have rights.

"Like us!" Gaspar chimed in. Surprised by the comment, I turned suddenly and looked at both of them, saying affirmatively, "Yes. Exactly."

It felt like an important moment. Gaspar saw the parallel. Perhaps with more time in the field I could have told participants the truth, and perhaps I would have been pleasantly surprised by some reactions or some changes of heart. But at the same time, the spread of such news could have seriously compromised the relationships I built, both in Wisconsin and Veracruz.

Additionally, coming out would feel too much like privileging my stories over theirs. And I very much wanted to hear their stories.

Table 1. Characteristics of Migrant Dairy Workers (N=60)

	Wisconsin (n=26)	Veracruz (n=34)
<b>Education</b>		
Junior high school or less	76.5%	55.0%
Some high school	11.8	0
High school graduate	11.8	25.0
Postsecondary	0	20.0
<b>Children</b>		
Yes	60.9%	83.3%
No	39.1	16.7
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	92.3%	91.2%
Female	7.7	8.8
Hourly wage (avg.)	\$7.90	---
Age (avg.)	28.3	34.5
Length of longest period in U.S. (avg.)	3.0	3.9

*Notes.* The descriptive statistics presented are based on different sample sizes due to missing data. I report whether or not participants had children instead of marital status since quite a few participants had children with long-term partners but did not marry due to the cost of weddings. The educational attainment categories correspond with the educational system in Mexico, in which “secundaria” (junior high) encompasses grades 7-9 and “preparatoria” (high school) is grades 10-12. No mean is presented for hourly wages for participants in Veracruz because many did not report earnings in terms of hourly wages versus participants I interviewed in Wisconsin.

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