

Damned If You Drive, Damned If You Don't: Meso-level Policy and Im/migrant Farmworker Tactics under a Regime of Immobility

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This article documents the sociospatial dynamics and policies that intensify structural vulnerability among Latin American im/migrant farmworkers in Western/Central New York. Focusing on the production of immobility as a characteristic facet of illegality in this region, we examine geographic, labor, and legal factors that constrain im/migrants' movement outside of the farms where they work and the range of tactics they utilize in response. Our findings indicate that each of the tactics that im/migrant farmworkers use to resolve practical problems of limited mobility simultaneously exacerbate its other detrimental effects. Discussion centers on the importance of meso-level policies that can moderate im/migrant mobility and, consequently, structural vulnerability. We conclude with an argument for research to explore the effects of such meso-level policy changes on im/migrant mobility and precarity and to support advocacy efforts focused at the meso-level scale, especially at the present historical moment when policies related to driver's licenses are changing in many states. Data reported in this article come from ethnographic research conducted in collaboration with a grassroots, farmworker organization that helped lead the successful campaign for driver's license access in New York.

Key words: mobility, illegality, Latin American immigrants, structural vulnerability, meso-level

Although his son's injury happened more than a decade ago, Diego, a Mexican man in his fifties, vividly remembers struggling to get his toddler medical care after the boy cut his forehead severely. As a farmworker who lived on the grounds of the remote dairy where he was employed, Diego was far from the nearest clinic, with no car and few local social connections. As an undocumented immigrant, he was accustomed to hiding from public authorities and felt unsafe calling an ambulance (cf. Sexsmith 2016). Ultimately, he roused an acquaintance who was asleep after the night shift and offered to pay him for a ride to the nearest hospital. "My son recovered, thank God," Diego told us, adding that the incident was one of the reasons he later became involved in advocacy efforts to change driver's license policy in the state of New York.

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In 2019, in part due to pressure from a concerted campaign of more than three years, the New York State legislature passed the aptly named "Green Light" bill, granting access to driver's licenses for all state residents, regardless of immigration status. The law reversed a 2002 policy, designed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorists attacks, that required DMV applicants to supply a social security number. This requirement effectively barred unauthorized immigrants from renewing or obtaining driver's licenses and state ID cards and from registering vehicles. In 2007, an executive order from the Governor's Office announced a policy reversal. But the order was soon retracted after prominent politicians voiced opposition and several rural county clerks threatened noncompliance. Driver's licenses and state ID cards remained inaccessible to undocumented individuals until 2020, when the Green Light law went into effect.

In this article, we explore the lived experience of illegality and severely constrained mobility among Mexican and Guatemalan agricultural workers in rural Western/Central New York during the years immediately preceding implementation of the Green Light law. Drawing on our ethnographic research in the region, we describe (1) the configuration of social and structural barriers that impeded im/migrant farmworkers' local mobility, creating quotidian yet profound hardships, and (2) the range of tactics farmworkers' employed in efforts to overcome these barriers, including discussion of the relative risks associated with each. To explore these issues, we adopt the theoretical lenses

of structural vulnerability (Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois 2011) and the critical phenomenology of illegality (Willen 2019). And we focus in particular on the social production of immobility at the meso-level (i.e., institutions, ideologies, and social processes that are superordinate to individual factors but more discrete, local, and modifiable than macro-structures of racism, xenophobia, and poverty) (Hirsch 2014). Our analysis of the means farmworkers employed in response to “layers of entrapment” (Castañeda 2019) that constrained their movement utilizes de Certeau’s (1984) notion of tactics. For de Certeau, tactics are an art of the weak, forms of practice that allow the disempowered to move creatively within social and structural systems that were designed strategically by the powerful. This framing affords a view of everyday decisions and practical action as quintessentially *tactical*, a “making do” with available resources.

This study contributes to the growing body of work investigating the lived experience of immigrant illegality and how the particularities of place shape these experiences. By illustrating aspects of quotidian life for dairy farmworkers and the ways that spatial/mobility constraints complicate their ability to care for themselves and their families, we make an argument for increased efforts, including both scholarship and advocacy, that will address meso-level policies that curtail im/migrants’ movement within the communities where they live. We argue that freedom of movement is a pressing issue that can be addressed in part through meso-level policy change (Galeucia and Hirsch 2016; Hirsch 2014), our case in point being state-level policy concerning access to drivers’ licenses. While access to licenses will not resolve the multiple forms of precarity that immigrants experience under current labor and immigration regimes, it has the potential to ameliorate some of their pernicious effects. Building on arguments made by engaged anthropologists (Galeucia and Hirsch 2016; Zavella 2016), we conclude that meso-level reform is a tangible way to resolve some sources of structural vulnerability, even while broader systems of oppression remain intractable.

Structural Vulnerability and the Lived Experience of Illegality

The theoretical lens of structural vulnerability highlights how structural and social processes and inequities interact to make certain populations and individuals vulnerable to embodied suffering (Castañeda 2013; McNeil et al. 2015; Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois 2011). Originally developed as a way to study social determinants of health, another advantage of the model is its comprehensive approach to theorizing vulnerability and precarity. According to this approach, vulnerability and precarity are durable and dynamic, the result of concurrent and mutually amplifying processes of political exploitation, economic exploitation, symbolic violence, and subjectivity formation. Since the term was first used (Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois 2011), a growing body of research has identified a wide range of factors that produce structural vulnerability among im/migrants in the United

States (Cartwright 2011; Holmes 2013; Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois 2011; Summers et al. 2015; Zavella 2016) and Europe (Castañeda 2013). For im/migrant farmworkers, some of the most significant contributors to structural vulnerability include unsafe working and living conditions, chronic under- or unemployment, and illegality (Cartwright 2011; Holmes 2013; Horton 2016; Summers et al. 2015).

Scholarship with a focus on the critical phenomenology of illegality illuminates how structural vulnerability is reproduced in immigrant communities by focusing on illegality as a historically-situated, lived experience that varies across both time and space. One thread of this research has documented how the juridical status associated with unauthorized migration emerges from a configuration of sociopolitical processes (De Genova 2002). Others have focused on how illegality produces lifeworlds that are characterized by abjection (e.g., Willen 2007, 2019), the result of confluences among policies, discourses, and social processes. Foremost among these processes are the punitive and entrapping immigration enforcement practices that have characterized the first decades of the twenty-first century. These processes include surveillance measures, increased detention and deportation rates, and cooperation between immigration enforcement and more localized law enforcement agencies. Originally employed in the United States-Mexico borderlands (Castañeda 2019; De León 2015; Gomberg-Muñoz 2017), these processes have now extended to new immigrant destination sites in the United States interior (Bickham-Mendez and Nelson 2016; Coleman and Kocher 2011) and northern border regions (Graybill 2012; Mares 2019). A critical change that has enabled surveillance and detention at ever-further distances from the United States-Mexico border has been the establishment of Secure Communities 287(g) cooperative agreements and other arrangements that facilitate information sharing across agencies and allow local law enforcement to hold individuals in detention on civil immigration grounds (Stuesse and Coleman 2014).

Compounding fears rooted in deportability (De Genova 2002), the social and institutional production of visibility and invisibility keeps undocumented immigrants in the proverbial shadows of the communities where they live, increasing vulnerability and precarity (Bail et al. 2012; Licona and Maldonado 2013). Labor and living conditions of immigrant workers are invisibilized from public view, carried out in spaces like milking parlors and meat packing factories (Licona and Maldonado 2013; Mares 2019) and hidden worker housing (Summers et al. 2015). In public spaces, Latin American immigrants are hypervisibilized, subject to racialization and suspicion by law enforcement and the general public. Scrutiny of immigrants is often stratified, with individuals who have a “phenotypic passport” such as lighter hair or skin and fluent English proficiency receiving less scrutiny than others (Castañeda 2019). Driving, a frequently necessary and quintessentially public activity, increases immigrants’ likelihood of interacting with law enforcement and is particularly fraught with risk (Bickham-Mendez and Nelson 2016; Castañeda 2019; Mares 2019; Stuesse and Coleman 2014).

Ethnographic Context and Methods

United States agriculture depends on the labor of Mexican and Central American farmworkers (Adcock, Anderson, and Rosson 2015; Carroll et al. 2005), including in Western/Central New York, a region characterized by labor-intensive dairy, vegetable, fruit, and tree-nut farms (USDA 2012). Dairy cow and milk producing farms play a particularly important role in the regional economy. Over the last two decades, the labor force on dairy farms has dramatically shifted from United States-born to mostly undocumented, Latin American immigrant men (Keller, Gray, and Harrison 2016; Maloney and Bills 2011; Maloney, Eiholzer, and Ryan 2016). The composition of this group is also changing in light of the need for a stable, year-round labor force (Fox et al. 2017) and increased risks associated with border crossing (De León 2015). Today, there are more women in the industry, mixed-status families being formed in the United States, and families arriving to accompany farmworkers.¹ As a result, Latin American farmworkers in the region are most accurately characterized not as migrants but as long-term residents of the local community who live in a state of perpetual precarity due to their immigration status. We use the term im/migrant to signal the dynamism of these categories.

The analysis we present in this article is part of a larger ethnographic study of health and advocacy among im/migrant farmworkers in Western/Central New York, most of whom work in the dairy industry. Since 2016, we have been involved in regional immigrant rights activism, working in collaboration with *Alianza Agrícola* (Agricultural Alliance), a farmworker-led organization that focused first on advocating for driver's license legislation in New York and has now shifted to helping immigrants take advantage of driver's license access while minimizing the risks of immigration detention that can result from doing so. In the tradition of engaged research, we designed and carried out our study in dialogue with Alianza. Our research prioritization of issues related to driving and driver's license access came at their request. Our involvement with the organization has included assistance with grant writing; note-taking and interpretation; providing rides and accompanying workers to rallies, legislative visits, and advocacy-related activities; as well as attending family and community celebrations.

We have conducted participant observation with Alianza for over three years. From 2017-2018, we also conducted and audio recorded semi-structured interviews with twenty-two farmworkers and farmworker spouses, the majority of whom worked in dairy and were Alianza members. The interview design included subsets of questions concerning transportation/mobility and health/well-being/health care access. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, lasted two to three hours, and were sometimes conducted over two sessions.² Separately, we conducted thirty semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews that lasted thirty to sixty minutes and were conducted in English with individuals who work directly with immigrant farmworkers in the region, either in

immigrant or labor advocacy, social services, or health care. We conducted key informant interviews with two dairy farmers who employ Latin American im/migrant staff. The design of this research aligns with calls for collaborative research with directly-affected groups and for engaged listening to those who work directly with immigrants (Willen, Mulligan, and Castañeda 2011).

To analyze our dataset of fieldnotes and interview transcripts, together we developed a set of codes concerning driving, transportation, and the consequences and repercussions related to lack of transportation. We created a codebook with examples and guidelines for applying the codes and trained undergraduate research assistants to double code the dataset using Atlas.ti. One of us (MAM) supervised the coding process. We each reviewed the coding results and together identified the findings reported here. The study protocol was approved by the SUNY Geneseo Institutional Review Board.

The Production of Immigrant Farmworker Immobility

As McNeil and colleagues (2015:172) have noted, "severe mobility restriction" resulting from poverty and geographic isolation is a direct contributor to structural vulnerability.³ In this section, we closely examine the ways such factors intersect with immigration enforcement and driver's license policy, two policy domains that are associated with health disparities facing Latinos and Latin American immigrants (Philbin et al. 2018).⁴ Before describing how these policies are enacted in Western/Central New York, we describe the sociospatial dimensions of local geography and labor that complicate farmworkers' ability to get around in daily life. Several farmworkers' experiences illustrate how local characteristics and meso-level policies and practices converge in exploitation/discrimination and symbolic violence that keep them restricted to the spaces where they work.

Labor, Geography, Environment, and Public Transportation Dynamics

"Apart from my co-workers, you are the first human being I've seen in a month," Hugo observed one evening when I (JRG) picked him up for an Alianza meeting. I scanned the horizon in all directions from the farmhouse where Hugo, a Mexican immigrant, and his co-workers lived and realized his remark was not surprising. The only other building in sight was an enormous, recently constructed barn that housed hundreds if not thousands of livestock. Not even the nearest road was visible from these workers' daily vantage point.⁵

One of the most consistent challenges that farmworkers experienced in daily life was the geographic isolation of the farms where they worked and lived. All of the farmworkers we interviewed lived in employer-provided housing, with few exceptions, on farm grounds. Some lived in trailer homes that were purchased explicitly for housing farm personnel. In other cases, workers lived in old farmhouses with either

family members or multiple co-workers.⁶ When asked about daily and weekly routines, more than one of our research participants responded simply, “I go from the house, to work, and back to the house.” For most, this back and forth happened entirely on the grounds of the farm. Some interviewees reported taking walks, playing soccer, or riding bicycles when weather permitted, but during much of the year, sub-freezing temperatures and accumulated snow made these activities impossible, confining workers literally inside their housing when they were not working.

A review of bus systems in the region revealed that public transportation circulated primarily in urban centers and served rural populations mostly by connecting town centers to larger cities. The design of the public transportation infrastructure meant rural residents were largely reliant on driving to reach even local destinations. Scholars studying transportation in urban settings have described “transit deserts” (Jiao and Dillivan 2013) where transportation needs outstrip available public transport services. The label applies equally well to the rural districts of Western/Central New York. Service providers in the region reported that public transportation from rural towns into the cities where they provided services was sporadic and inconvenient, where it existed at all, requiring that patients arrive early in the morning and wait until late in the day for return transportation, making it difficult for patients to attend medical appointments without missing an entire day of work.

The major health care networks in the region that provided migrant-specific services mostly addressed the dearth of transportation resources with mobile clinics that visited farms on an annual or semi-annual basis or by providing individualized patient transportation to appointments at their clinics. Transportation services were generally organized through the same departments where interpretation was handled and were dependent on grant funding. Interviewees at these agencies reported that the lack of convenient and affordable transportation options in the region was among the chief barriers to farmworkers accessing and utilizing their services.

Immigration Enforcement, Polimigra, and Driver’s License Policy

Much of Western/Central New York is located less than 100 miles from the United States-Canada border, where United States Border Patrol has authority to circulate, set up checkpoints, question, and detain people suspected of entering the country without authorization.⁷ ICE raids and arrests have occurred on numerous farms in the region, and Border Patrol agents routinely patrol interstate bus depots. According to the farmworkers we interviewed, however, the greatest risk of entanglement with immigration officials came from interactions with municipal, county, or state law enforcement officers when workers left farm grounds for ordinary daily business such as going to work or the grocery store. Although New York does not have immigration-focused omnibus laws like Arizona’s S.B. 1070 (Hardy et al. 2012; Toomey et al.

2014) or Georgia’s H.B. 87 (Stuesse and Coleman 2014), which enable law enforcement officers to request immigration documents during routine policing, there have been multiple well-documented instances of individual officers contacting Border Patrol during their interactions with people, often during traffic stops for moving violations (Graybill 2012). This kind of collaboration between police and immigration authorities was colloquially referred to by labor and immigrant rights advocates in the region as *polimigra*.

The perception among farmworkers was that *polimigra* cooperation was pervasive. As Adalina, a Guatemalan farmworker and mother told us, “We are in a state where the police stop you and right away call immigration, so it’s a distrust for all of us because that’s the first thing they do.” In one case that we witnessed directly, for example, two Guatemalan women whose husbands worked at a local dairy were on their way to church one evening with their children when they were stopped by a municipal police officer for exceeding a 30 MPH village speed limit. When the woman who was driving could not produce a driver’s license, the officer called Border Patrol. Immigration agents arrived and detained everyone in the car. All were released within twenty-four hours and able to return home, but at the time of our writing, the women’s cases were still being processed in court, with the families facing the specter of the women’s possible deportation and separation from their spouses and United States citizen children.

In 2017, largely in response to xenophobic rhetoric and increased immigration enforcement efforts at the federal level, the New York State Attorney General issued a report (Schneiderman 2017) and the Governor issued executive orders (e.g., Cuomo 2018a, 2018b; EO 170 and 170.1) that were directed at curbing immigration enforcement activities in the state. These efforts were limited in scope, however, and did not establish consequences for cases of non-compliance. Protocols and attitudinal stances toward immigrants continued to vary across individual agencies, which each had their own ethos and procedures in place. In the wake of the incident where the Guatemalan women and children were detained on their way to church, for example, the relevant local police department reviewed and modified departmental policy concerning cooperation with immigration authorities. The policy review was motivated by local public outcry from residents who were galvanized into action by the highly publicized detention, and the policy revision was directed at restoring the faith of local residents in the goodwill of the police department. The revised policy appeared to assuage local anger over the detention but in effect did little to guarantee that similar cooperation incidents would not happen in the future, as it preserved the right of individual officers to act on their own discretion.

Farmworkers in our study did not actively distinguish between federal immigration enforcement and local *polimigra*. They viewed them, rather, as parts of an overarching anti-immigrant “climate of hostility” (Galeucia and Hirsch 2016) that threatened their presence in the local community, state, and nation more broadly. The inaccessibility of driver’s

licenses and recalcitrance of lawmakers to change driver's license policy were taken as further evidence that immigrants were viewed as undeserving of the resources and privileges that were granted to everyone else as a matter of course. In meetings with policymakers and community groups, members of the Green Light campaign invariably asserted to their audiences that they were "workers, not criminals" who wanted only to sustain themselves and their families. They reiterated that for them, driver's licenses were a necessity for survival.

Tactics for Living with Constrained Mobility

Given the immobilizing and isolating effects of farm labor, the local geography and climate of Western/Central New York, the lack of public transportation in the region, fear related to immigration enforcement, and the inaccessibility of driver's licenses, farmworkers relied on a varied range of tactics in order to meet their basic needs, move around in the community, and access services when needed. In this section, we describe these tactics and what farmworkers perceived to be the affordances, limitations, and risks of each. Examination of these tactics revealed that, ironically, their utilization often worsened the detrimental effects of constrained mobility, exacerbating structural vulnerability even as the tactics served to resolve discrete practical problems.

Some of our participants reported that their employers or family members of their employers provided rides for them occasionally (cf. Sexsmith 2016). Most noted that their employers had or would provide transportation in the case of a workplace accident that required medical care. On some farms, employers provided transportation between worker housing and distant work sites, either driving staff to work themselves or paying a local person for daily transportation services.

Most of the participants in our study relied for the most part on paying drivers in the informal economy, *raiteros*⁸, for nearly all of their routine and acute transportation needs. Local raiteros were legal residents or citizens who provided driving services to immigrants for a fee. When immigrant farmworkers needed to leave the farm, they solicited and made arrangements for a ride by calling or exchanging text messages with a local raitero. Information about local raiteros was circulated by word of mouth among co-workers, and it was common for raiteros to have long-standing connections with the staff at one or more farms in a given town or district.

Farmworkers perceived that local raiteros had a diverse range of motivations for engaging in this work. According to interviewees, raiteros were primarily concerned with earning supplemental income. Others were motivated by a sense of solidarity or compassion for immigrants. Many farmworkers knew one or two trusted local raiteros whose rates were predictable. When familiar raiteros were unavailable, however, farmworkers struggled to find an alternative driver and were more likely to experience exploitation. This was the case for Jorge, a Mexican dairy farmworker in his thirties, who recounted a time when he was charged much more than he anticipated:

There are two people who work [as raiteros] in this area. One is a woman who is seventy years old. She is a person who is very good to us. She takes us [to the supermarket] and we give her twenty or ten dollars. For her, that's a help, as she is elderly. The other person has always cared a lot about Mexicans. He charges per mile. From the house where I live to [town] he charges \$25-\$30 roundtrip. But one time they were [both] busy. I needed to go to the store because I had no food. I asked around and got the name of a lady. I called and asked how much she would charge. "How long will you take? That's no problem," she says. "Where are you?" she says. And she took us. We went. Afterward we got Chinese food, and the others [co-workers] had asked me to bring them [takeout] food. When we got back, I asked her, "How much?" She charged me \$120 for three hours. She tells us that to go to Walmart was \$50, but since we went to Chinese, "I'm charging \$50 more." I told her, "Fine." And since we stopped by Burger King, another \$20. So I had to pay her.

For farmworkers whose hourly rate starts at minimum wage, payments to raiteros are a consistent, draining expense. Each time they need to go grocery shopping, send remittances to family, or otherwise travel off the farms where they live, workers must weigh these needs against the availability of funds for a ride and find an available driver.

Raitero unavailability and cost significantly complicated farmworkers' abilities to handle urgent and unexpected needs such as accessing medical care in cases of illness or injury. Even when farmworkers had established relationships with local raiteros, they noted that the cost of paying for rides was burdensome. Diego, whose emergency with his toddler son was discussed at the beginning of the article, explained:

Sometimes, when you don't have someone to take you, a ride, it becomes a problem. Sometimes you have to ask an American, or even the boss. He has given [co-workers] a ride.... There are others that charge just to go to the clinic \$40 or \$50 dollars for a 10-15 minute car drive.

Another dairy farmworker, Rafael, reported similar prices:

To go to the doctor, for that we also have to find someone who will take us, but as I was saying, there's almost nobody, or the cost is really expensive. With just going to [nearby town] they charge \$50, to get to [another town] it's \$40. To [city] they charge you like \$60, \$70. It's a lot of money what they charge just to drive a little way. ... For my family it's a lot.

Another parent, Adalina, whose youngest child was in elementary school, remembered an occasion when she was unable to get medical care for her son due to lack of transportation. She said, "When my son was little he got really, really sick on me. He was really bad off, and the truth is that I couldn't find transportation to take him to the doctor." Rides in cases of emergency can cost even more than is routinely charged to go to the same destination. When we asked one vegetable worker and mother how much a raitero charged for a ride to the hospital, she answered, "It depends. If you are going in an emergency, \$100." For a normal appointment,

she reported a cost of \$50, suggesting that rides requested on short notice cost substantially more.

As an alternative to the recurring problems of relying on raiteros, some of our interviewees had purchased cars of their own. Owning a car provided multiple benefits, not least of which were flexibility and autonomy. Most of our interviewees reported working twelve-hour shifts and having only one day off every one to two weeks, leaving little time for them to procure food, socialize, or seek medical care. Individuals with cars pointed out that driving was the only way to ensure they could reliably get off the farms when they needed to. Natalia, a mother to high school age children, noted many benefits to having a car, “Well, to sustain ourselves, to buy food, all that one needs—what one needs for the week or half-month or for the month. Or also to go to the doctor. Yes, to buy a car and drive it to go to the doctor when you need to is a big advantage.” Perhaps as importantly, having a car alleviated social isolation. Being able to participate in sports and visit siblings, cousins, or friends who worked on other farms were among the benefits that people cherished about the autonomy of owning a car. Some people associated their decision to buy a car with having children; they needed to shop more frequently and later wanted to provide their children with opportunities for socializing and participation in extra-curricular activities.

While there were multiple benefits to owning and driving a vehicle, it was a tactic with well-known, serious risks. Interviewees reported asking citizen or legal resident acquaintances to register and contract insurance for cars they had bought. Entering into this kind of informal agreement limited im/migrants’ ability to prove their ownership of a vehicle, and we heard of several instances in which unscrupulous individuals had registered and subsequently stolen vehicles from the im/migrants who had purchased them.

Another risk associated with owning and driving a vehicle was the possibility of being stopped without a driver’s license. Several of our interviewees who had cars considered driving to be a risky but unavoidable necessity. Leandro, a father of three, recalled being pulled over for making a wide turn. “We were lucky,” he reported, “the officer wasn’t racist” and didn’t call Border Patrol. Another parent, Chuy, recalled being stopped for a broken taillight while en route with his family to buy diapers and infant formula. When Chuy was unable to show a driver’s license, the officer issued a ticket, had the car impounded, and let the family find a ride home. Chuy believed the officer did so because he saw that Chuy had a wife and child who depended on him. A year after sharing this incident with us, Chuy was pulled over in a different town, and the officer turned him over to Border Patrol authorities. Chuy and other participants acknowledged the risks they took when driving without a license but felt compelled to drive out of necessity. Aware that their inability to present a valid driver’s license if they were pulled over vastly increased their risk of being detained and deported, interviewees indicated that driving without a license or riding with an unlicensed driver in order to fulfill basic needs paradoxically increased

their fear, anxiety, and stress (Galeucia and Hirsch 2016; Hacker et al. 2011; Hardy et al. 2012; Hendricks 2014).

A final tactic that was used by some im/migrant farmworkers in response to the practical problems of sociospatial confinement was, ironically, to minimize the occasions when they left the farm. Some perceived that the safest tactic available was to remain on the farm at all times. Maciel, a thirty-year-old Guatemalan dairy farmworker explained, “Some do not even want to go out or buy food. . . . They do not want to leave, they are very afraid. They say, ‘Oh, they are going to stop us on the road. . . . they will take us.’” A few workers told us that they had begun paying for a raitero to deliver groceries to them in lieu of doing their own shopping. Others had begun paying the spouse of a fellow farmworker to prepare meals for them on a weekly basis, reducing the number of trips they needed to make off the farm but increasing the amount they spent on food and basic necessities. These tactics enabled farmworkers to minimize exposure to the risks associated with driving without a license and being visible in public spaces, but these measures simultaneously exacerbated their social isolation on the farms. As other scholars have noted (Galeucia and Hirsch 2016), the lack of social activities and outlets can exacerbate im/migrant farmworkers’ feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression. And as Maciel concluded, “The situation we are living, that we can’t go places where everyone goes, this is the worst sorrow that one feels.”

Perhaps most dangerously, some interviewees noted that when they were sick and unable to get transportation off the farm, they continued working and resorted to self-care measures using whatever means they had available to them. One Mexican interviewee who had worked in the dairy industry for over a decade recalled working through a case of the flu by saying, “I wanted to go to the doctor, but. . . my ride wasn’t here, and I had to endure it with pills.” And another interviewee, a Guatemalan dairy worker, reported taking bovine veterinary medications out of desperation to treat a painful infection and inflammation in his mouth, saying, “I couldn’t go to the doctor. No one wanted to take me because it was snowing a lot. . . . And so I had to wait at home. One day I even took pills that we give the cows to take away my pain.” These farmworkers’ testimonies suggest that when they are unable to travel to access resources and care, they resorted to working while very ill, increasing the likelihood of workplace injuries and death, and to risky and even dangerous self-care actions.

Discussion

In this article, we have explored multiple intersecting sociospatial dimensions of the lived experience of illegality for Mexican and Guatemalan im/migrant farmworkers and their families in Western/Central New York and the tactics they used to mitigate the practical challenges associated with life under a regime of immobility. Our findings suggest that their confinement is simultaneously a social and a legal achievement—the coalescence of fear, lack of resources, and a continuous reproduction of immigrant marginality that can be traced to both

material and symbolic processes, including local geography, labor exploitation, public transportation infrastructure, driver's license policies, and law enforcement practices.

We find it helpful to consider im/migrants' actions in response to constrained mobility as a set of *tactics* that "do not obey the law of the place" (de Certeau 1984:29) but nevertheless provide a means of getting by that "make[s] use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers" (de Certeau 1984:37). Im/migrant farmworkers in rural New York utilize resources that are available to them—especially drivers and cars—tactically, in ways that are unanticipated, unauthorized, and even illegalized. By utilizing drivers and cars in these tactical, unauthorized ways, farmworkers creatively disrupt the prevailing social order that treats immigrants as undeserving, bereft of rights to be or move in the communities where they live and work. Simultaneously, however, the tactics they use to survive within a climate of hostility, invisibilization, and immobilization also produce undesired effects that exacerbate their structural vulnerability.

In order to secure basic necessities, socialize in the communities where they live, and access health care and other services, the farmworkers in our study resorted to three key tactics. The most common involved paying informal economy drivers for rides. Raitero services, however, were unreliable and expensive. Ride costs strained family budgets, and raitero unavailability precipitated dangerous and frightening crises in cases of injury and sickness. Among farmworkers who had lived and worked in the region for longer periods, it was common to resort to driving. This strategy afforded autonomy but elevated risks, as farmworkers were obliged to drive without the security of official vehicle ownership or driver's licenses. Parents in particular emphasized that family life and subsistence required their driving, even while it exponentially increased their chances of being detained, deported, and separated from their spouses and children. In light of the costs and risks associated with driving and using raiteros, some farmworkers reported that they minimized or even eliminated trips off the farms altogether. While this tactic of avoidance was arguably safe, farmworkers associated it with sadness, isolation, and the reduction of life to bare survival.

By focusing on the production of immobility and its consequences for our participants' daily lives and well-being, we have aimed to contribute to two threads of research. First, aligning with structural vulnerability approaches, we have identified "sources and effects of social inequality that can be ameliorated with political will and appropriate allocations of resources, technology and legislative oversight" (Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois 2011:350). Second, our findings contribute to scholarship documenting the sociospatial dimensions that shape the lived experience of illegality and, in particular "how the subjective and objective consequences of illegality are embodied" (Willen, Mulligan, and Castañeda 2011:339). Our study findings demonstrate how meso-level, especially state-level, policies and practices—including driver's license policy and protocols concerning the practice of *polimigra*—arrest

these farmworkers' physical movement in geographic spaces, entrap them in the physical locations where their labor is needed, and curtail their autonomy. These processes inhibit their ability to provide for their basic needs (Mares 2019; Potochnick, Chen, Perreira 2017), participate meaningfully in relationships and community life (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2017; Mora et al. 2014), and access health care (Hacker et al. 2012; Hacker et al. 2011; Hardy et al. 2012; Toomey et al. 2014; White et al. 2014).

The advantage of focusing on meso-level variables is that interventions at this scale have the potential to ameliorate immigrant vulnerability "without requiring wholesale transformation of systems of economic and gender inequity" (Galeucia and Hirsch 2016:800). Our findings suggest that while the vast efforts for federal-level immigration reform are tremendously important, changes to meso-level policies and practices, especially state driver's license policies, state/local immigration cooperation practices, and investments in rural-urban public transportation infrastructure may be of greater importance for alleviating immobility and improving im/migrant families' quality of life, health, and sense of stability in the short term.

Policy inattention towards marginalized groups needs to be considered alongside policies that directly discriminate against them (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2017). Even though New York state does not have any omnibus immigration laws and has made inroads to create sanctuary spaces (Cuomo 2018a, 2018b), the lack of policies or protocols in place to prevent the practice of *polimigra* at the state, county, and local levels, coupled with xenophobic and nativist discourses present in the media, create a climate of hostility that limits the mobility of Latin American im/migrant farmworkers. Policies that can ameliorate climates of hostility, such as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's (2018a) Executive Order 170, which "prohibits state agencies or officers from inquiring about or disclosing an individual's immigration status" and the subsequent amendment (170.1), which proclaims that "civil arrests by federal immigration authorities may only be executed within state facilities when accompanied by a judicial warrant" (Cuomo 2018b) are imperative. In order for these sorts of orders and policies to be effective, it is also important that they include means of enforcement.

As Philbin and colleagues (2018:35) have argued, "Access to driver's licenses represents a critical and rapidly-changing area of immigration-related policy."⁹ In thirteen states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, individuals do not need to present evidence of authorized residency to obtain a driver's license. Participants in our study were unanimous in the belief that access to driver's licenses would materially improve their lives. While this access will not protect im/migrants from the enforcement efforts of ICE or Border Patrol (Mares 2019), it will provide benefits and some assurances for interacting with municipal, county, and state law enforcement. With driver's licenses, im/migrants will gain the autonomy and safety that is associated with driving legally and will be able to verify their identity more easily. Passage

of the Green Light law in New York in 2019 coincided with passage of the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act, which increased some labor protections for farmworkers. Workers now must be paid overtime for work exceeding sixty hours in a week and are guaranteed at least one consecutive twenty-four hour period of rest each week. These legislative changes were lauded as victories for immigrants in New York and provide an exceedingly important opportunity for research documenting both implementation processes and their impact on im/migrant farmworkers. Access to driver's licenses may reduce fear of polimigra and fear-induced distress (Hacker et al. 2011) and has the potential to decrease polimigra initiated detentions during routine traffic stops (Guzmán and Medeiros 2019). Like municipal identification cards, driver's licenses may also improve immigrants' use of social services, financial stability, and community and social involvement, effects that moderate vulnerability to physical and mental health problems (Galeucia and Hirsch 2016; Hendricks 2014; Mitnik, Halpern-Finnerty, and Vidal 2008). These will be important outcomes to monitor in future research.

In this article, we have advanced an argument in support of research and meso-level advocacy concerning policies that either limit or facilitate the mobility of unauthorized im/migrants and, as a result, moderate their structural vulnerability. We have also illuminated some of the reasons why the issue of driver's license access became a centerpiece of im/migrant rights activism in New York between 2016-2019. Across the United States, progress toward increasing access to driver's licenses will likely require the concerted efforts of directly-affected communities and civic organizations that recognize the deleterious effects of immobility on public health and community well-being. As these issues are debated in more communities, and as driver's license policies change, it will be important for applied and engaged anthropologists to document these processes and shed light on their impact in immigrant communities.

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Notes

¹New York State Education Department data demonstrate that between 2012 and 2016 there was a 1 to 3 percent increase in Latino student enrollment in our study counties (NYSED 2018), one sign of these demographic trends.

²In order to protect the vulnerable population of our study, we used oral rather than written consent, did not audio-record personal identifying information, did not inquire about immigration status, and omitted personal and farm names from interview transcripts.

³In the case of McNeil et al.'s (2015) study, severe mobility restriction prevented addicted individuals from accessing methadone and antiretroviral therapies due to inability to travel to pharmacies, even in areas with public transportation.

⁴The policy domains that Philbin and colleagues identified are: immigration and enforcement-related omnibus laws, labor/employment regulations, education, health care, driver's licenses, and social services.

⁵In a study of farmworker labor camps in North Carolina, Summers and colleagues (2015) found that more than one-third were hidden. Invisibility of farmworker residences increases incidences of substandard housing and risk of theft and makes it difficult for service providers and advocates to find farmworkers.

⁶We have heard of one farm where farmworker lodging was situated in a loft above a milking parlor.

⁷Our interviews with labor and immigration advocates indicate a documented pattern of Border Patrol presence at regional bus depots, where officers approach passengers and inquire about immigration status. This risk of encountering Border Patrol was so well-known that farmworkers did not consider intercity bus travel as an option that was available to them.

⁸The term *raitero* also refers to drivers who are part of larger interstate migration and labor trafficking networks.

⁹Philbin and colleagues (2018:6) assert, and we agree, that "laws and policies reflect cultural values. At the same time, however, recent research also suggests that laws and policies shape social/cultural norms, including attitudes toward stigmatized groups (Kreitzer et al. 2014). We therefore need to understand how both policies and attitudes affect the health of Latinos."

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