



Julie C. Keller: Milking in the shadows: migrants and mobility in America's dairyland

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Julie C. Keller's *Milking in the Shadows* analyzes how the tensions between mobility and immobility shape the experiences of the immigrants so central to the contemporary American dairy industry. Using a multi-sited ethnographic approach following a group of migrant dairy workers from their home communities in Veracruz, Mexico to their workplaces in the dairy regions of the Upper Midwest, Keller offers insight into how migrant laborers manage shifting legal risks, economic negotiations, and long separations from family back home. Drawing from interviews and observations, *Milking in the Shadows* elevates the voices of Mexican migrant workers and provides a valuable analysis of transnational migration.

Keller first introduces us to the migrants of Veracruz in the book's introduction, situating their economic decisions to move within the contexts of the shifting labor system on dairy farms and the new immigration patterns of the 1990s and early 2000s. She aptly frames her project through key theories of mobility, arguing that "paradoxes of mobility lie at the heart of the migrant labor regime." She identifies these paradoxes of mobility "in the formation, regulation, and persistence of the migrant labor regime" (p. 5). Keller closes the chapter with a brief synopsis of the methodology used throughout the research, which is further detailed in the Appendix.

The book's first three substantive chapters trace both push and pull factors responsible for this mobility. Chapter 2 provides a readable and thorough summary of the technological, political, and economic contexts that propelled dairy

industries in Wisconsin and Minnesota to increasingly use migrant labor in the 20th and early 21st century. Chapter 3 shifts the readers' attention to the migrants themselves. Using gripping ethnographic description, Keller articulates the challenges that Veracruz job-seekers face as they search for employment in the United States, accrue cash or secure a loan to pay for transportation to their northern workplace, and identify a coyote, or human smuggler, to assist them in the dangerous border crossing. These pre-migration experiences are often understudied in migrant agricultural laborer research. Chapter 4 considers the pre- and post-migration transformations of the home region responsible for sending dairy workers to *el norte*, or 'the north.' Providing a fascinating history of how the "migration chain," as one of her interviewees dubs it, between Veracruz and the Midwest began, this chapter sheds light on how local economic pressures in a sending community 'pushes' residents towards migration.

Chapter 5 moves with migrants across the Mexican-American border. While the author does not physically wade the Rio Grande herself, Keller still captures migrant laborers' experiences with human smugglers, bodily risk, and frightening or frustrating interactions with immigration officials through sensitive and moving interview narratives. In Chapter 6, we rejoin Keller and the migrant workers in Wisconsin, where Hector, a repeat interviewee who recently completed the harrowing border crossing, describes a process of mobility that is at once mundane and dramatic. Keller contrasts her own journey back to Wisconsin from Veracruz via an airplane and passport control to Hector's movement by foot and truck. Keller then pivots to describe migrants' everyday experiences of immobility and risk in their destination—Wisconsin's dairy industry. Without personal vehicles or driver's licenses, in fear of local law enforcement and immigration police, and concerned about language barriers, Hector and his colleagues who cross the border illegally

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transition from significant mobility to quite literally being trapped on their farm workplaces. Chapter 7 places migrants' experiences within the largely white farming community in which these workers live. Laborers' undocumented status and physical immobility keeps these key members of the agricultural economy "milking in the shadows" and largely invisible to Fairview, Wisconsin's rural communality. Chapter 8 follows migrants back to Mexico—both physically and in their hopes and dreams—to explore the challenges of living far from home. Through several extended stories of familial tensions offered by her interviewees, Keller movingly illustrates how increased security at the border and shifting political discourse can delay promised returns home and place both migrants and their families in what she terms "return limbo." Children in Veracruz grow up without their parents, and important events—weddings, births, and deaths—are missed by migrants who fear to cross back into Mexico in case they are detained in the process.

In the book's conclusion, Keller reminds readers that migrants are always first and foremost humans, embedded in families and communities who long for their return. She places the tender, humane, and risky experiences of her now-familiar Mexican interviewees—many of whom readers will have grown attached to across the arc of the book—in the context of circumstances beyond their control, such as shifting economic policies, politicized border enforcement practices, and the tenuous economics of the dairy industry itself. This thought-provoking book's only weakness was a muting of Keller's own profound interpretative voice. Throughout the book, much more could have been made of her contributions to under-studied experiences of migrant farmworker experiences across place, culture, and time and throughout the transnational immigration process.

Milking in the Shadows is an apt text for teaching on immigration, labor studies, rural sociology, and race and ethnicity. The historical and political segments that were well placed throughout the book helps the reader digest the research and positions the work more broadly, allowing for anyone to find this book useful even with little or no prior knowledge of migration, labor, or farming. Individual chapters could be drawn out to use in specific courses as well. For example, Chapter 2 would be fitting for rural studies or sociology of agriculture courses, Chapters 3 and 5 might be useful for a course on immigration and border studies, and the introductory chapter and the methods appendix could be used in a qualitative methods course as an exemplar for multi-sited ethnography. In sum, Keller provides us with an immensely readable book capturing valuable insights into the tensions between mobility and immobility, home and work, and risk and reward as experienced by key laborers in today's dairy industry.

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