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Contested Foodways: Pericapitalist Strategies for Care and
World-Making of Mexican Farmworkers in Wisconsin Dairies

By

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Abstract

This thesis studies the lives of Mexican migrant farmworkers in Southwest Wisconsin dairies. Upon migration into the U.S. agricultural system, Mexican migrants face poverty, food insecurity, separation from families, a discriminatory migration system, and a long history of racialized agricultural labor. Despite this, I find that these Mexican farmworkers in Wisconsin negotiate capitalist oppression through the production, preparation, sharing, and consumption of food. By exploring relationships to food, I first reveal the ways that farmworkers contend with the heightening of poverty, scarcity, and precarity of the (post)neoliberal era. Next, I argue that farmworkers create spaces within and beside capitalism that enable the (re)making of worlds, strategies of care, and relationships of solidarity. Finally, I contend that these practices facilitate not just their survival within exploitative systems, but also their ability to flourish. Ultimately, this thesis reveals the unique ways that Mexican migrants in Wisconsin dairies negotiate relationships to food and practices of gardening and cooking in order to make an (often) undocumented, diasporic life livable.

I. Introduction: *Sparks of Pericapitalism amid (Neo)Colonial and Capitalist Wreckage*

Ana didn't think twice when I asked her to film herself preparing a meal. She's an experienced chef from a big cooking family in Veracruz, Mexico, and prioritizes preparing elaborate meals for her family, despite long hours spent milking cows at a Wisconsin dairy farm, while managing her small business making Mexican food for other farmworkers. People who know her rave about her tamales.

She sent me a series of videos of her cooking a large pan of chicken. She had told me before that she often cooks in large quantities to save time. Pulling aluminum foil over the

marinated chicken breasts, she explains that she pokes holes in the aluminum to let a little air out. There's already a lot of moisture in the pan from the tomatoes she used to marinate, and she likes the chicken a little dry, though not too dry. As she describes the perfect texture she is hoping to create, she gestures with her hand in front of the camera, sweeping her fingers over the pan.

In the next video, her hand sweeps across the pan again, this time scattering avocado leaves on top of the chicken. "Unfortunately," she says, "the avocado leaves that you can get in Mexico are a lot fresher. The ones we get here are dry and they don't release the same aroma." She's told me this before — avocado leaves and mole are two of the things she misses most from Mexico that she can't get in Wisconsin. She bought this batch of avocado leaves from the Mexican grocery store 20 minutes from her Wisconsin house, but when she can, she asks her mom to send them, as well as her family's mole, from home. These avocado leaves and homemade mole, she has told me, take a long time to get to her in Wisconsin. But they remind her of home, connect her with her family, and are much fresher than the ones from the local Mexican food store.

Ana is one of the eight farmworkers I spoke to in the course of this project. Like my other interlocutors, she has migrated from a small village in Veracruz, Mexico in order to work at a dairy farm in Wisconsin. Through a virtual ethnography of Mexican-origin dairy workers in southwest Wisconsin, this paper explores the unique ways that farmworkers negotiate relationships to food and practices of gardening and cooking in order to make an often undocumented, diasporic life livable.

Modern Mexican migration, deeply entangled in the afterlives of colonialism and U.S. imperialism (see Ibarra, Carlos, and Torres 2017; Peña et al. 2017), intensified during the late-

20th century structural adjustment period. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in particular, has been credited with the migration of millions of Mexican-origin workers who were forced to leave their hometowns in search of work to support both themselves and their families (Gálvez 2018; Ibarra, Carlos, and Torres 2017; Hing 2010; Portes 2007). Many scholars have documented U.S. agribusiness's cruel welcome of these migrants with racism, wage theft, poor living conditions, dangerous work environments, and other exploitative practices (Méndez, Flores-Haro, and Zucker, 2020; Keller 2019; Menjivar 2015; Hennebry and Preibisch 2012; Ness 2011). Other scholars have located the emotional toll of migration generated by experiences of precarity and liminality, isolation, and separation from families and communities (Garcia 2019; Bastia 2011; Mendola 2010).

In this thesis, I explore the lived experiences of Mexican-origin farmworkers through their relationships with food. Food, thoroughly tied to place, self, and community, serves as a lens on autonomy, resistance, and well-being (Garcia, DuPuis, Mitchell 2017). By studying relationships to food, I first reveal the ways that Mexican farmworkers in Wisconsin dairies experience structural violence, located in systems of surveillance and policing, institutions of citizenship and documentation, vulnerability to their bosses and economic circumstances, and poverty. I describe how farmworkers contend with the stress of poverty, perpetual risk, and systemic oppression by employing strategies of self-making and care, which I locate in the preparation, consumption, and sharing of food.

Drawing from Anna Tsing (2015), I argue that these strategies of survival and livability exist within a pericapitalist domain; the farmworkers' food practices I document operate *beside* and *within* capitalist spaces. These strategies constitute neither resignation nor resistance to oppressive capitalist powers, but instead operate as enlivening strategies of nourishment,

nostalgia, survival, and flourishing. Tsing's pericapitalism acknowledges the difficulty, within a dominant capitalist system, of fully shielding oneself from capitalist forces. Instead, she writes, "pericapitalist spaces are unlikely platforms for a safe defense and recuperation" (2015, 65). For farmworkers, pericapitalist spaces enable the (re)making of worlds, strategies of care, and relationships of solidarity. They facilitate not only survival within exploitative systems, but also the ability to flourish.

Attention to pericapitalist spaces also complicates the oppression-resistance dichotomy that dominates narratives of migrant farmworker experiences in the United States. Instead of engaging this dichotomy, I argue that pericapitalist spaces might be understood as constructive and generative, enabling safe practices of livability. The farmworkers I spoke to certainly respond to the oppressive forces that pervade their lives. However, in our conversations, farmworkers did not conceptualize their actions as resistance, but rather as constructive practices that enable strategies of livability. The collaborative practices that these farmworkers exercise might be better understood as what Monica M. White calls "collective agency" whereby actors "create and enact behavioral options necessary to affect their political future" (2018, 7). By exercising collective agency, farmworkers build bonds and create solidarity networks, which enable them to contest, survive, and even flourish within the circumstances of their political moment. In this thesis, I will illustrate the pericapitalist spaces that farmworkers make and remake as strategies for livability according to their unique circumstances.

II. Methodology

This ethnography consists primarily of information learned in an interview series I conducted with eight farmworkers and several of their family members. In determining

methodology, I prioritized depth over quantity. My interview series comprised two to four interviews with each of my eight interlocutors over the course of several months, instead of single interviews with many more farmworkers. I designed the project as such in order to foster the trust and depth with each farmworker that I believe is necessary for intimate conversations about food. While my focus is farmworkers, the inclusion of their families, to varying degrees, has been important to this project, as familial relationships to food significantly contribute to the production and reproduction of individual food relationships (Abarca 2006; Ochs and Taylor 1995) and how they impact how they impact food memory and relationships (see Seremetakis 1996, Sutton 2001). While some interlocutors invited me to speak directly with their family members in Veracruz, others chose to map out their familial relationships themselves by reconstructing memories and describing personalities.

This project also incorporates the work of several feminist ethnographers who have promoted food-centered life histories as a way to understand women's experiences, particular those from historically marginalized, racialized, and/or surveilled communities (Hauck-Lawson 1998; Abarca 2001, 2004, 2006; Counihan 2008; Slocum 2008; Pérez 2017). Carole Counihan writes about the potential for food work to “represent drudgery and oppression but also power and creativity” (2008, 175). And Meredith Abarca's (2006) *charlas culinarias* provide guidance for free-flowing conversations about and around food that acknowledge multiple ways of knowing and being intellectual. I consider this body of work not to replicate a certain methodology — principally, this thesis considers food relationships of all genders — but rather to (1) engage in this rich history of food-centered research, (2) understand how food-centered research illuminates the complex and multiplicitous experiences of heavily stereotyped and

generalized populations, and (3) considers the gendered differences that emerge in the food practices and relationships of my interlocutors.

The final ethnographic component of analysis consisted of photos and videos sent by my interlocutors. Between interviews, I asked farmworkers to take pictures of meals and to film themselves cooking. Writing this thesis during a pandemic made ethnography challenging in many ways, particularly in the inability to sit, watch, smell, taste, and share in the cooking experiences of these farmworkers. Photos and videos, then, allowed me a small step into this world.

I met my interlocutors through those already closely connected to Wisconsin farmworkers: a dairy farmer and farmworker advocate, and a Spanish-English interpreter who works with several farms in Western Wisconsin. I am deeply indebted to these individuals, who are entrenched in and trusted by Wisconsin farmworker communities and who so generously offered to support my relationship-building with potential participants. Given a short timeframe to collect data for this thesis and the importance of trusting relationships to this project, the introductions provided by these individuals were indispensable.

Lastly, I have changed the names and occasionally some minor personal details of my interlocutors in order to protect their identities.

III. Neoliberal Destabilization in Mexico and the Creation of a Precarious Labor Force

Many scholars have attributed the factors that transformed rural Mexican communities in the late 90's and early 2000's to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA went into effect January 1, 1994 with the intention of strengthening the economies of the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The policy operated under the economic doctrine of "comparative

advantage” where each country would specialize in the areas or products that it ostensibly could produce more efficiently than its competitors. In addition to providing economic prosperity, the policy was also intended to “fix the problem” of Mexican migration to the United States: jobs created in the Mexican manufacturing sector under NAFTA provisions would theoretically keep Mexicans at home and thereby diminish the volume of immigration to the United States (Hing 2010; Watson 1996). Almost three decades later, scholars and policymakers alike agree on the tremendous failure of NAFTA to deliver on its promises. While many U.S. elected officials acknowledge its failed promises to the United States economy, NAFTA’s destruction fell hardest on Mexico, and more specifically, on Mexican migrants.

While NAFTA increased trade, it did not result in more jobs. The increase in Mexican manufacturing jobs paled in comparison to the devastation of rural agricultural jobs. Before NAFTA, Mexico had 8.1 million agricultural jobs; by 2006 that number had declined to 6 million (Hing, 2010). Portes writes, “NAFTA reduced the autonomy of the Mexican state to implement national economic initiatives or protect domestic enterprise, turning the county instead into a giant labor reserve for U.S. industry and agriculture” (2007, 76). In other words, the dissolution of the rural Mexican economy and the government’s inability to reconcile it led to a massive increase of Mexican migrants into United States agribusiness.

Portes (2007) describes the towns that experienced the most out-migration as “ghost towns” or “tinsel towns,” referring to towns decorated once a year during the holidays, welcoming the return of many temporary migrants. Many rural towns haven’t experienced out-migration to this extreme, though one-third of Mexican municipalities suffered population loss and many more are sustained only by the temporary migration of male family members (Portes 2007). While the Mexican government anticipated that half a million campesinos would be

displaced before they could be integrated into the new economy— a process that some called “depeasantization”— they did not anticipate, in the following 15 years, that half a million Mexicans *per year* would emigrate to the United States (Gálvez 2018).

Fernando, a long-time migrant farmworker in his 40s with adult children also working with him in Wisconsin dairies, spoke to me about the ways he felt NAFTA’s reverberations. In one of our conversations, we discussed the factors that precipitated his migration. There was not a specific moment where conditions worsened, he explained; instead a slow trickle of changes and shifts made it harder and harder to sustain rural livelihoods in his pueblo. These shifts, he told me, emerged from a variety of factors including increases in the cost of living, decreased markets for agricultural produce, crop failures posed by environmental degradation, and a significant lack of jobs.

The price that rural communities paid for trade liberalization was high, and my interlocutors felt its costs. However, Fernando told me that his children didn’t suffer in the same ways that he did, and another interlocutor, Arturo, told me that the money he sends to his family in Mexico means that they can be more resilient to crop-destroying climate disruptions. That said, they both miss their families in Mexico and yearn to return home. Silvia, another interlocutor, works two jobs and loves them both. She’s close with her boss, who makes sure the school bus knows to stop at her house to bring her two teenage sons to school. She describes her sons’ comfort in Wisconsin and the ways they’re becoming “American” (they don’t like spicy food, she says), but she’s also planning and saving in order to return to Veracruz as soon as she can. My interlocutors reveal that they can hold multiple and sometimes incongruent plans, dreams, desires at once. I explore how, in navigating these plans, dreams, and desires, food

becomes a practice through which they make and remake themselves and their worlds in the face of the traumas wrought by NAFTA and subsequent legislation.

Another farmworker named Antonio, who has made several trips back and forth from Veracruz to the U.S., was in Wisconsin with his wife and young child when we talked. He described the cyclical nature of migration as something passed down through generations; it is now something normal and expected by family members, as well as something the town itself depends on. Everyone he knows has family members in the United States, and if they aren't in the U.S, they are working at the *maquiladoras* on the border, duty-free and tariff-free factories that typically assemble cheap goods for export.

He says that remittances from the U.S. have changed the ways that people cook and eat. "People eat better. You can buy meat, now, and whatever you want. People don't suffer any more because their families are working." Yet, he then told me, "[Farmworkers in the U.S.] keep sending money to sustain their families at home, but they haven't advanced." For the rest of this conversation, he went back and forth between feelings of stagnation and advancement. From his perspective, things are better in many ways. People have more choices about what they eat. Their diets have more variety. But, are their lives really getting better? Antonio seemed to feel a cognitive tension. There was hope in these migration patterns for their potential to produce better, more stable and fulfilling lives, but there was also frustration at the dependency on and inescapability of this cycle.

The ambivalence Antonio felt was echoed by other farmworkers. On the one hand, there is an abundance of farm labor available for Mexicans in the United States, much of which pays in a day, what the same job in Mexico would pay in a week. But, considering the mental, emotional, and physical costs of migration, the precarity of being undocumented, the increasing

pressures to migrate, and the lack of alternative options, this cycle generates feelings ranging from ambivalence to entrapment.

While there is an abundance of agricultural work for Mexicans willing and able to migrate to the United States, paid farming opportunities in the communities they migrated from are few and far between. Farms, for many of my interlocutors' families, no longer produce a sustainable income, however many still keep gardens and even continue to cultivate large plots of agricultural land. Yet these agricultural practices now hold different meanings. Instead of feeding, housing, and clothing the family, these crops *supplement* the families' diets, providing fresh ingredients and allowing families to save money on the cost of food. For some, these gardens have transformed a livelihood to leisure. The food from their own land tastes better, they say. Farmworkers and their family members noted flavor differences between the produce that is shipped from far away, versus the produce that they grow themselves. The meat was fresher, too, I learned — many families raise small numbers of livestock themselves, or they get it from the local butcher who is buying it from somewhere in the community, instead of transporting it from the other side of the country.

While these changing relationships to agricultural cultivation are certainly not universal, they are worthwhile to contemplate. Subsistence agriculture, in many of these migrants' childhoods, was a point of anxiety. Food was scarce and cultivation volatile. Now, these same families are supported by a steady stream of income from migrant workers in the U.S. and the practice of agriculture means something different. In many cases, farming is no longer a center of stress but a source of enjoyment. In the U.S., while many of my interlocutors remembered their childhood food relationships as tense and unsettling, their attitudes towards current

cultivation projects was more often one of nostalgia. They missed the farms and gardens of the present — less so the ones of their childhood.

Subsistence agriculture, in the ways that my interlocutors have experienced it, is challenging, stressful, and precarious. Migration has, in an economic sense, provided the families of migrants a “diversified income,” but perhaps more importantly, it has provided a more reliable source of income. Families can earn a little bit extra — enough to lessen the anxieties about keeping children fed and to increase the pleasures of agricultural cultivation.

Relationships to agricultural practices were not the only thing that changed with the neoliberal restructuring of the 1990s; relationships to food itself also revealed NAFTA-induced shifts. As many scholars have written, eating represents a continuous construction of the self (de Solier 2013; Counihan and Kaplan 1998; Crowther 2013). Food preferences, choices, and sentiments are central to self-definition, and these qualities, as Sidney Mintz writes, speak to how “we perceive ourselves in relation to others” (1985, 4). With each meal my interlocutors determine who they are and what they want. Though, not only do food choices and preferences reveal active constructions of self, they also reveal an individuals’ or communities’ unique economic, social, and political circumstances.

When I asked Arturo, a farmworker in his 30s with several young children back in Mexico, about his favorite childhood foods, he told me, “I didn’t have a favorite food growing up. There weren’t any food preferences. There was what our mom gave us, and what she gave us was all there was.” Describing a dish he said, “my mom would make a salsa with tomatoes... Now it’s made with a blender, but before it was a *molcajete* [mortar and pestle]. She would give us this salsa with tortillas and a cup of coffee. Because there wasn’t much [food]...this [salsa]

was my favorite, because it wasn't a plate of beans or rice. I was happy eating this, because other days I ate a tortilla with salt or beans and nothing else."

Ana, too, echoed this scarcity: "When I was a girl, things were very difficult, so one would eat what there was. Before my mom worked, we would only eat what our animals produced; for example, our chickens. My mom would butcher one to cook and this chicken would stretch for several days. She would make chicken soup and we would eat that in the morning with beans." Ana spoke about the repetition in what she ate — often she would eat this same soup for each meal over the course of several days.

Many of the farmworkers I spoke with indicated a shortage of food in their childhood. A question that I thought banal or perhaps an "ice-breaker" (*what was your favorite food growing up?*) was, for some, confusing or unsettling. And, while many echoed Arturo's "I didn't have a favorite food," pointing towards the repetition in foods eaten and the lack of options, I realized that this did not translate to a lack of childhood food preferences. As Arturo's description of his mother's salsa indicates, he clearly had preferences. They corresponded to food that broke up normal routines; food that had more flavor or spice.

What this repeated statement did indicate, however, was a lack of exceptionality of the conception of "favorite food" that so many American children practice listing after their name and favorite color in Kindergarten get-to-know-you circles. Arturo and others scoffed slightly at the indulgence of this notion of a favorite food and at my ignorance of not immediately understanding its inherent luxury. This subtle misunderstanding challenges assumptions of universal relationships to food, and points to the variability in conception, preference, and lived experiences of food.

In our conversation about favorite foods, Arturo locates changes in himself as well as in the community he grew up in. He told me that, when he was young, “we all had to work a lot to eat. I remember once when it rained and rained. All of the harvest was lost to the water. And, when it was hot, it was the same. It dried out the entire crop. The corn we had planted didn’t produce anything. And so, to eat a plate of beans was to eat well.” This further informs our understanding of food preferences. Arturo reveals that food preferences fell by the wayside because what was most important was eating at all. Yet, he was quick to inform me that now, it’s different. Families he knows aren’t hungry in the same way he was.

These farmworkers illustrate how relationships to food respond both to particular political, economic, and social dynamics, as well as individuals’ unique constructions of self. Food, as Peña et al. describe, holds potential to orient and reorient one’s place in the world as “process[es] of negotiating one’s identity and making sense of the world” (2017, xxvi). Particularly helpful is this notion of food as a process, which enables an understanding of the multiple layers in Arturo’s rejection of a childhood favorite food. First, Arturo reveals the lack of variability and choice in his food options growing up — experiences of food scarcity resulting from poverty. Second, he relays a notion of “favorite food” as one of privilege, a relationship that those growing up with abundant food take as a given, but one that Arturo and other farmworkers growing up in scarcity feel excluded from. Lastly, his narrative illustrates how individual identities are crafted by identifications of food preferences and “favorite foods,” though they should be attended to as a continual process rather than a stagnant state or location.

Food preferences change as people move through spatial and temporal moments; as farmworkers migrate and their economic position changes, so do their food preferences. Arturo was identifying himself to me. He is telling me that he lived a childhood marked by food scarcity

with perhaps even an ontological difference in food relationships. But, later on, when he tells me about his favorite foods now, he is indicating a transformation that introduces new perceptions and performances of self.

IV. Capitalist Foodways: Discursive Failings of Neoliberalism, Poverty, and the Disappointment of Industrially-Produced Food

The concept of neoliberalism is used by many scholars to understand and characterize the period of structural adjustment policies in the 1980s and '90s that allowed Western powers to reproduce patterns of colonial domination and control, stifle economic competition from the Global South, and more deeply instill white supremacy (Lewis 2020; Ibarra, Carlos, and Torres 2017; Thomas 2004). Thinking with the term enables connections, for example, between the dissolution of Mexican corn cultivation and the economic devastation caused by the dismantling of Jamaica's banana industry. It facilitates an understanding of the poverty left in the wake of structural adjustment policies and the increase in diet-related diseases posed by the post-NAFTA infiltration of industrially produced food in Mexico (Gálvez 2018).

Amongst my interlocutors in the U.S., I learned about the complex product deliberations stemming from poverty, scarcity, and the relative cost of cheap industrial food: for instance, price and quality are negotiated during biweekly food shops. Many farmworkers choose between the low prices of Walmart and the higher quality of Mexican food stores. They splurge on the sometimes-higher prices of Mexican brands of their youth or resign to buying flour tortillas because the corn tortillas are too disappointing. Ideas of neoliberal self-fashioning (Freeman 2014) are also revealed as deep commitments to personal economic productivity and Berlant's "cruel optimism" (2011) emerges in fantasies of upward mobility despite evidence to the

contrary. These neoliberal “structures of feeling” (Williams 1961; Freedman 2014) can be located within relationships to food. In striving for upward mobility through ambitious saving, high quality food is often the first expenditure sacrificed. Meals are missed or bought as cheaply as possible.

Though, in the sections that follow, I reach beyond the concept of neoliberalism in order to understand how farmworkers navigate their own circumstances through food. NAFTA and general neoliberal restructuring greatly contributed to the political, economic, and social moment that my interlocutors found themselves in. Attending to the implications of NAFTA elucidates how particular social, economic, and political circumstances transform individuals’ relationships to food. In the following sections, however, I reveal how farmworkers transform their own circumstances through food choices and practices.

While the concept of neoliberalism may elucidate how global systems and structures impact the lives of farmworkers, it is less useful in understanding the ways that farmworkers navigate the lived realities of global systems. Neoliberalism doesn’t elucidate, for example, the gardens that farmworkers cultivate in their spare time — in order to save money, but also to avoid tasteless supermarket tomatoes and herbs that have been sitting out so long that they’ve lost their flavor and aroma. Nor does “cruel optimism” or an individual story of self-reliance and actualization emerge in the collective labor invested into these small plots of food with the unspoken expectations that each will tend to the vegetables as they can, and that the produce is to be shared, whether or not individual labor has been contributed. We might understand these practices as a reaction to the poverty, scarcity, and precarity of a (post)neoliberal era, but it doesn’t illustrate *why* particular practices are used or the roles these strategies hold in the

farmworkers' lives. What about collective gardening and cooking is attractive to farmworkers? How do these strategies promote survival, nourishment, or joy?

Food, as opposed to neoliberal affect and policy, proved a richer framework through which to understand the lived experiences of Mexican farmworkers. Food is tangible and material. Each day, farmworkers plan, produce, cook, taste, smell, and share food. As in Abarca's (2006) *charlas culinarias* with working-class Mexican women, food was something that my interlocutors theorized about themselves as they shared their experiences with me. Food, then, was a crucial tool for understanding how my interlocutors navigated their individual circumstances. It revealed practices of survival and livability. And these food practices, I slowly discovered, were thoughtfully and strategically employed in spaces of pericapitalism.

The food and labor produced in these farmworkers' Wisconsin gardens and kitchens never enters the capitalist commodity chain. Vegetables grown in these gardens may encounter commodified food, like corn or rice, in the making of a meal, but they exist only beside capitalism. The labor that produces this food isn't bought or sold, and its fruits are consumed as a gift to the laborer themselves or to family or community members. The labor of cooking, too, produces the gift of a meal. This food and labor operate more like gifts in the Maussian sense, producing relations, reputations, and personal ties (Mauss 1925; Tsing 2015). They, like Tsing's matsutake¹, are instilled with relation-making powers. In the following discussion I reveal the ways that, through the labor of food cultivation and preparation, individuals make and remake themselves, along with their ties to family, community, and place.

¹ In *Mushroom At The End Of The World*, Anna Tsing follows the matsutake commodity chain to understand the relationship between capitalist destruction and collaborative survival within multispecies landscapes. Matsutake's relation-making powers, Tsing argues, enable and facilitate multispecies collaborative survival; a requirement for continuing life on earth.

In attending to food's relation-making powers, I resist classifying the food practices employed by my interlocutors as strict adherence or resistance to capitalist norms. As stated earlier, their practices of cooking and eating are neither capitalist nor competitive. Yet, classifying them as capitalist resistance would be a stretch, and by my judgement, wouldn't be true to my interlocutors' own theorizations (see Trouillot 2003; see also Bonilla 2015; Crosson 2020). I draw from Saba Mahmood's exploration of individual agency not as a practice of resistance to relations of dominance but as "a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (2001, 203). Through this, I explore how food is used in self-making and world-making strategies that enable livability within and beside capitalist powers.

These farmworkers' food relationships suggest that alternatives to capitalism exist within our current world. They illustrate the importance of collectivist relations, fostering communities of care and nourishment. For them, these practices are not intended to dismantle capitalism but to forge ways of living with it. Antonio and his coworkers are unlikely to describe their collective labor in their shared garden as capitalist resistance. Antonio instead describes the motivation behind gardening as a way to avoid the tasteless, costly, and pesticide-ridden supermarket produce. And, when Ana cooks for her family, she is not just reproducing a capitalist workforce, but she is nurturing bonds of care and solidarity with her family and friends. These farmworkers' strategies reveal what it's like to survive, live, and flourish within the wreckage of late-stage capitalism along with the required negotiations of both capitalist and collectivist logic. In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate some of the ways that farmworkers experience the precarity of late-stage capitalism and the pericapitalist spaces of care that allow for its negotiation.

Money, for all of my interlocutors, was stretched thin. Each “quincena” or bi-monthly payday brought competing financial demands, and many interlocutors relayed the challenges they felt prioritizing, for example, the medical expenses for a sick relative in Veracruz and the required pediatric check-up for their children to begin school. Our conversations about food revealed ways that farmworkers negotiated this economic scarcity.

Many farmworkers relayed the time they had spent determining tradeoffs between the price of different brands and their quality — buying in bulk, when possible, for further savings. Ana gave the example of cooking oil: “I buy what’s most economical. Generally, we get a 3-liter box...we look for what is cheapest and we buy that one.” The one she buys is good oil, she told me. After experimenting with taste and cost, she and her family landed on a specific brand that became a staple in her bi-monthly grocery shops. While this was one of the cheapest brands she could buy in Wisconsin, Ana told me, “[the brand] is used in Mexico, too, but it’s more expensive there. Here, we can treat ourselves to the luxury of using this oil.”

Ana isn’t alone in this careful consideration of price versus quality. Price considerations are an endemic part of food-shopping experiences amongst the farmworkers with whom I spoke. Most are here to support their families in Mexico, to save to build houses for themselves when they return, or perhaps start a small business. All made thoughtfully calculated choices about what, where, and when they buy food. While these considerations stemmed from limited economic resources, they were more than careful calculations. Ana considered this particular brand a luxury. She was careful to tell me that, while this brand was *one* of the cheapest it wasn’t *the* cheapest. These choices became ways of negotiating and advocating for improvements in their quality of life, despite limited resources and pressure to save.

For some farmworkers, price becomes something that severely restricts food purchases — forging gaps between what they would like to eat and what they feel they can eat. Such restrictions incentivize the purchase of lower quality and highly processed food. But prices did not limit Ana’s cooking — she navigated cost barriers with exceptional ease and creativity. She’s an experienced and impressive cook; she makes elaborate meals for her son and her husband and sells to other Mexican farmworkers at the farm at which she works. And, she’s creative, too; she often told me about new dishes she would attempt after trying them at a restaurant. So, it isn’t surprising how thoughtfully she chooses her ingredients. What is particularly notable is her effort to maintain intricate cooking practices despite pressures to save in order to return home quickly. While she is economically savvy, she sometimes pays a little bit extra for superior taste, smell, or texture.

Silvia, a farmworker in her late 30s, who has been in the U.S. for 15+ years, misses being able to trade food with her neighbors. In Mexico, if her family didn’t have something they needed, they would trade it with others. This was particularly helpful when you were missing an ingredient for a particular dish, but I also learned from other interlocutors that this could be considered a measure of food security. If one crop failed, for example tomatoes, but another crop did especially well, say squash, one might propose a trade. Some farmworkers mentioned even more extreme examples of mutual aid, such as if a staple crop like corn failed, neighbors would help each other get by throughout the year.

“[Where I lived] your neighbors are a footstep outside of your house,” Silvia told me. However in Wisconsin, she lives almost a mile away from any neighbors, which differentiated her from many of the other farm workers I spoke to. While many other farmworkers lived in shared housing on the farms they worked at, or houses close to other Mexican farmworkers,

Silvia lived in a house about 10 or 15 minutes away from where she, her husband, and her brother work, and the three of them were the only employees on the farm. She was happy with her job — she had a wonderful boss and enjoyed the work — but, at times she felt isolated.

Silvia missed being able to share and trade food with her neighbors, as well as host them and be hosted by them in their homes. In her town in Veracruz, most women spend their days cooking together with their children playing between the houses. She told me, “It’s beautiful to live like that, and perhaps it would be here, too, but we live so far away that it’s not possible.” For Silvia, sharing, trading, and cooking food with the women she lives close to is how she forms community. Through our conversation, I learned that her yearning for neighbors was about the ease that accompanies asking for herbs when you’re out instead of a trip to the store, and more about the experience of living in community. For Silvia, food mediates the making and remaking of community.

It’s not that Silvia never gets to engage in practices of sharing and preparing food in community — she has a small group of friends with whom she gets together regularly. They each bring a dish to share and together, create a meal — this is how she spent Mother’s Day. More so, Silvia misses the quotidian practice of making food with others and the way that this is embedded in community.

For other farmworkers, the quotidian conviviality that food facilitates, was easier to engage in. This, in part, was due to the differences in living situations — most other people I spoke to were far less geographically isolated. While learning to cook was sometimes a rocky endeavor for many of the men who had migrated without their families, many of these farmworkers lived in shared housing. Farmworkers in shared living situations revealed daily moments of mutual support, from sharing grocery costs to sharing gardening labor. Many were

flexible and generous with each other — Antonio told me that they each helped out where they could. For example, someone who had a day off might make a shared meal for those returning from a double shift.

Through food, farmworkers created community and built solidarity. Food as a mediator of commensality, social relations, and care has been a prominent theme in anthropology, propelled by such foundational work like W. R. Smith's (1889) *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* and expanded upon by scholars like Nancy D. Munn (1992), who conveyed the world-making power of Gawan practices of food growing, sharing, and eating. The practices of Mexican farmworkers in Wisconsin dairies further cement the role of food in forming social networks, forging community solidarity, and creating worlds, while also revealing ways that food and food practices shift and evolve based on place, geography, and temporality.

Several farmworkers spoke about the difference in smell between food from their hometowns and food bought in Wisconsin. Tsing writes, “smell, unlike air, is the sign of a presence of another, to which we are already responding. Response takes us somewhere new; we are not quite ourselves anymore— or at least the selves we were, but rather ourselves in encounter with another” (2015, 46). When asked about the differences between food in Veracruz and Wisconsin, smell was the first thing that Antonio identified. He gave me an example of epazote, an aromatic herb used often in Veracruz and other areas of Mexico. “The epazote that I buy in the Mexican food store here doesn't have the same smell that it does in Mexico. It's very different.” This, for Antonio, was both disappointing and disorienting. Upon smelling the epazote, Antonio at once remembered his life in Veracruz and that he wasn't there.

Though, for Antonio, this epazote also alerted him to the ubiquity of industrially processed foods in Wisconsin. He told me, “everything that comes here arrives very processed,

from far away and filled with chemicals. I think that this is what takes away the flavor and smell. In my pueblo, it's all natural, there aren't these chemicals." Smell, for Antonio, facilitated an engagement with the failings of the industrial food system.

Ana also connected her experiences with low-quality ingredients to a highly commodified food system, which she explained through the example of avocado leaves. The leaves she found in Wisconsin were drier, with less taste and aroma than those from Veracruz. However, she attributed this case not to chemicals or processing, but to being past their point of freshness. Food travels farther and longer in much of the United States, whereas, in her hometown, much of the food she ate came from her or her neighbors' backyards.

Sometimes farmworkers, like Antonio, told me they just went without particular ingredients whose taste or smell was compromised due to industrial processing. However, sometimes they found alternatives. Ana asked her mother to send her avocado leaves that were growing in their backyard — these leaves avoided commodification altogether, and felt like a precious enhancement to Ana's meals. This, of course, wasn't possible for all food and for all farmworkers, who instead found alternative ways of contending with the poor quality of industrially produced food; one of which was gardening.

V. Pericapitalist Spaces: Gardens, Kitchens, and Communities of Care

When I asked Antonio if it was possible to find food here in Wisconsin that tasted as it did at home, he told me that yes, it was possible. Though he, along with other farmworkers, had to grow it themselves. The farm he works at produces purely dairy; they don't produce other food products. However, years ago, before Antonio arrived, another farmworker who, according to Antonio "liked to cultivate plants" started a garden. He bought seeds, asked to use his boss's

tractor to plow some ground, spread some of the cow manure as fertilizer, and started planting. This farm has since been kept up by other farmworkers. Even though they work long days, they share the work between them, each checking in regularly to water, weed, or harvest. The garden produces enough that those who tend it don't have to buy produce, though, Antonio told me, even if someone who doesn't tend it wants food, there is plenty: "Anyone can eat from this garden. We never run out." And, importantly to Antonio this produce has "almost the same flavor" as what is used at home.

Antonio points to a solidarity between him and other farmworkers that manifests in these gardens through the production of food. Other scholars have illustrated how solidarity networks are exercised in the protection against vulnerability, the facilitation of mobility, and attention to individual and collective well-being. Peña et al. trace several instances of this work, one of which explores urban gardeners in San Jose, California who use home garden networks to share resources and gain mutual support (2017, xxiii). In the cultivation of food, they produce and reproduce community. Through the labor of gardening, Antonio and his coworkers strengthen their collective bonds, which is at once a strategy for surviving and for flourishing.

Ana, similarly to Antonio, grows her own food for better flavor, taste, and quality. Though, the financial savings also played a significant role for her. At the grocery store in the past, even though she would prefer to buy organic eggs, she would just buy whatever was cheapest. Now, she has chickens. She told me, "it helps us a lot to have chickens. We have seven hens and every day we get seven eggs. Now, we don't buy eggs." These eggs, she told me, taste even better than the organic eggs she has tried from the supermarket. Substitutions like this allow her to save just a little more each week.

Ana especially likes to grow different kinds of tomatoes and chiles, but grows all sorts of food that she now no longer has to buy. It keeps her extraordinarily busy. When I asked her when she finds time to grow food, she said, “in the morning my husband comes home [from the night shift] at 9 or 10am, depending. I am waiting with breakfast, we eat, and then we go to the garden.” The time they spend in the garden each day varies — sometimes an hour, sometimes more. Sometimes Ana returns later in the day to check on the plants, prune leaves, or harvest food. Often, they’re tired, but Ana enjoys it, she tells me. And, having fresh food and saving money each week makes it especially worth it. By cultivating food that she doesn’t need to buy, Ana quickens the return home.

One may look towards Monica M. White’s *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (2018) to understand the collective well-being that farmworkers produce through their shared labor in these gardens. In *Freedom Farmers*, White challenges dominant narratives of agriculture as a site of Black oppression and exploitation and reconceptualizes farming as a practice of resistance and self-reliance. White contests and expands James Scott and Benedict Kerkvliet’s (1987) “everyday strategies of resistance,” arguing that the study of quotidian resistance neglects activities that are not disruptive, but rather constructive. As I have argued previously, the strategies that I witnessed farmworkers engage in could be better understood as constructive rather than as a form of resistance. The farmworkers I spoke to did not theorize their behavior as resistance, but rather something generative and productive. Instead of resistance, the collaborative labor that these farmworkers exercise might exemplify what White calls “collective agency” whereby actors “create and enact behavioral options necessary to affect their political future” (2018, 7). In these gardens, farmworkers build

bonds and create solidarity networks, which enable them to survive, contest, and flourish within the circumstances of their political moment.

I'd also like to consider the generative work of Ana and Antonio's gardens as the creation of a pericapitalist space, outside of but beside capitalism. It allows us to see the ways that pericapitalist spaces can be both a form of resistance to capitalism's incentivization of cheap, low-quality, industrially-produced food while also supporting and strengthening capitalist labor. These gardens both provide for higher-quality food and decrease dependence on an industrial food system, while also making the lives of farmworkers more livable. Farmworkers with gardens spoke about the ways that gardens made their lives more enjoyable and fulfilling. They worked through worries and stress in the garden, spoke about the improvements to their health that gardens facilitated, and the sense of community and/or self-fulfillment that gardens offered. The existence of a pericapitalist garden may allow them to work harder, stay longer, and experience more fulfillment working within the U.S. industrial farm system. These collectivist practices support their participation within this system, but they also support their overall well-being.

The women I spoke with deftly engaged with theorizations about their own self-making through cooking, as the following conversation with Ana will reveal. Cooking, for them, was a way of exercising their individuality and agency. It is highly personal, but often practiced collectively, or to contribute to a collective. Meredith E. Abarca's (2006) *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working-Class Mexican and Mexican American Women* reveals ways that women "season" their sense of self through quotidian cooking practices that emit memory, emotions, and histories. Seasoning, she tells us, is highly personalized and socially charged. Abarca theorizes the kitchen, for her Mexican and Mexican American interlocutors, as a

woman's space rather than her place — a space of ownership, self-making, and care. The farmworkers I spoke to exercise a similar sense of agency and control through cooking, yet while the kitchen was a space women garnered control, it was also a space of private contention with one's circumstances.

For Ana, cooking was something she felt good doing — it connected her to herself and to her family, both in Wisconsin and Veracruz. However, parts of the process were sometimes unsettling. Even though she was skilled at navigating the cost of food, it was at times stressful. She described feeling pulled between the desire to purchase better-tasting food — for herself and for her husband and son — and her desire to save.

Ana hasn't seen her family in Mexico in twelve years. She misses them desperately, but they also depend on her income. So, in order to feel comfortable leaving, she needs to save as much as possible, while still supporting her family in Wisconsin and sending money to Veracruz. Yet, Ana has an eight-year-old child and raising him in Wisconsin has made the decision to return home even more challenging. Ana is concerned about how he will adjust to living in Mexico. "The dilemma is that here, [my husband and I] don't feel very well-adjusted [to Wisconsin]... if we had brought [our son] to Mexico when he was younger it wouldn't have mattered; he would have adjusted. But as he gets older, he is more and more accustomed to living here." For this reason, she hasn't had any more children. Ana told me that her son wants to go to Mexico and meet his grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, but she has to explain to him that, if they go, it means they can't come back. She and her husband are undocumented—another reason, she says, that she has never felt comfortable living here.

Ana is worried her parents will get sick. If they do, though, maybe it's better that she's here, in Wisconsin. She could pay for their care a lot more easily than if she were working in

Mexico. But, she is also worried about missing the end of their lives. She wants to see them and spend time with them as they get older. And, she wants her son to be able to spend time with them also.

She's waiting, now. She's thinking, planning, and trying to save as much money as she can. She hopes they'll go back in two or three years, but it's hard, she says, managing this predicament and the accompanying fear and stress. Sometimes she's especially upset and sometimes she can't sleep. But she's also busy. Work and spending time with her son distract her. And normally, she says, "I don't even have time to think."

When she's really missing home, she cooks — particularly mole. "Mole reminds me most of Mexico," she told me. "My mom sends me mole paste. To cook it, I heat the paste on the stove with a little oil. I boil chicken, and then add it in along with some chicken broth." It's easy, this way, she told me. Her mom makes incredible mole, and she does, too, but it's time and labor-intensive. You need a lot of ingredients, and it can take days. The Mexican food store sells a name-brand mole paste in jars, but it's far from the same. Ana's delight in being able to cook with her mom's own mole is audible in her voice.

For Ana, cooking is a distraction from the stress of living between Wisconsin and Veracruz. It's sometimes hard for her to feel present in Wisconsin, but cooking helps. It's something she enjoys and is also exceptional at. It's a way for her to care for and connect with herself and her family. Right now, she's struggling with the uncertainty of her future — so much is out of her hands and she has a lot of people to care for. She can, however, plan the meals that she cooks and they're a manageable, daily way that she can provide care for the people around her. Cooking, of course, doesn't erase Ana's worries, but it does help her navigate them.

To Ana and the other female farmworkers I spoke to, cooking in Wisconsin meant something different than for my male interlocutors, even those with families. Feminist food scholars like Carole Counihan have explored these different relationships. Counihan (2013) illustrates how women can challenge subordination and exercise agency through inviting what Chela Sandoval (1991) terms “differential consciousness.” Counihan defines differential consciousness as “a key strategy used by dominated peoples to survive demeaning and disempowering structures and ideology... it is the ability to acknowledge and operate within those structures and ideologies but at the same time generate alternative beliefs and tactics that resist domination” (2013, 175). I would hesitate to describe my interlocutors as “dominated peoples” as I learned of the significant amount of agency they exercise. However, the people (of all genders) I spoke with certainly experienced disempowering structures and ideology — from the destruction and rural re-organization imparted by neoliberal policy, to the operation of patriarchy in the home and workplace. What is particularly useful in Counihan’s analysis is her idea of performances “within yet beyond” dominant beliefs about women’s food roles. In this next section, I consider how my female interlocutors function “within yet beyond” dominant beliefs of both gender *and* capitalism.

In the regions of Veracruz from which the farmworkers migrated, gender strongly determined who cooked and managed the household, and who pursued paid labor outside of the home. Exceptions mostly presented themselves within families whose livelihoods came primarily from their own farms — women participated in agricultural labor; however, they still did the vast majority of the cooking. Many male farmworkers arrived in Wisconsin without knowing how to cook. They learned from their coworkers and roommates, or called their wives, sisters, and mothers. At first, they cooked as simply as possible, and several relied heavily on

frozen or easily-prepared foods early on. Even after learning to cook, food, for many of my male interlocutors', was often something that they tried to engage with as efficiently as possible. Not all meals were prepared hurriedly, but many were. Cooking, for them, was a new and unfamiliar practice of self-making, as well as a sometimes-uncomfortable disruption of normative gender roles.

While perhaps constrained by gendered pressures to take on the majority of household cooking, the women I spoke with produced a differential consciousness by producing food that connected and united them with other women in their lives — their mothers, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers. They operated “within” traditional gender norms by taking on the majority of cooking, but operated “beyond” them by using these acts to cement bonds and solidarity networks with other women in their lives.

The three women I spoke to were in Wisconsin with their husbands and children. Each cared for her family members through their cooking — one woman told me about the three different meals she often makes at one mealtime: one for herself, one for her husband, and one for her children, each tailored to their specific preferences (spice level and “American-ness,” primarily). The female farmworkers were deft and skilled cooks — while there were moments when they were tired and they didn't want to cook, it was something that felt comfortable and familiar to them, and allowed for them to care for themselves and their families. Therefore, they contributed to the reproduction of labor “within” a capitalist system, yet reconceptualized this labor reproduction as an act of care “beyond” capitalist infiltration.

For Ana, cooking is a project of world-making. She operates within the norms of the existing world, though pushing beyond these norms by practicing forms of self-making and care that transcend gender norms or hegemonic conceptions of capitalist “progress.” The work that

Ana engages in between milking shifts, some might classify as “reproductive labor,” though it can be better understood through the framework of assemblages, which Anna Tsing defines as “performance[s] of livability” (2015, 158). Assemblages allow us to see processes of multi-species and non-living ways of world-making. These assemblages can be located between Ana and the food she cooks. These interactions don’t just illustrate labor reproduction, but instead are sites to engage practices of livability. Cooking allows us to see more than Ana’s suffering — it allows us to see her construction of a pericapitalist space where she performs her strategies of survival, living, and flourishing.

VI. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have endeavored to illustrate the ways that farmworkers experience late 20th-century neoliberal shifts as they emerge in practices of eating, cooking, farming, gardening, world-making, and care. I have argued that these practices exist within a pericapitalist domain *within* and *beside* capitalism and that farmworkers’ strategies of world-making and care within these spaces enable their survival of late-stage capitalism and U.S. imperialism, though also facilitate their flourishing. I show that these farmworkers are not just surviving — they are working each day to care for themselves, their families, and their communities. Through food, they make and remake worlds, and pericapitalist spaces are crucial to this world-making. Echoing Tsing (2015), pericapitalist spaces are places of refuge. Escaping capitalism’s full forces is crucial to both surviving and living within capitalist systems, and it is through forging pericapitalist spaces that farmworkers negotiate a livable precarity.

The focus of this project diverges from much of the literature that attends to the experiences of migrant agricultural workers in the U.S, which centers experiences of workplace

exploitation, such as wage-theft (i.e. Galemba 2020; Horton 2016), dangerous working conditions (i.e. Sangaramoorthy 2019; Saxton and Stuesse 2018), dilapidated living environments (i.e. Holmes 2014; Benson 2014), and the marginalization and disciplining of bodies (i.e. Keller 2019; Ordóñez 2016; Sanchez 2013). While work that underscores systemic and racialized injustice in our agriculture labor force is urgent and deeply important, this project takes the approach of understanding collective strategies for survival and flourishing, as opposed to further exposing violence faced by my interlocutors. This is because these stories of survival and flourishing are the stories I heard. It was not narratives of oppression that dominated our conversations about food, but rather strategies for care, world-making, and solidarity. In the remaining paragraphs I unravel why this might be the case.

I met each of my interlocutors through the translator/coordinator of a farmworker translation non-profit. This translator has been deeply entrenched within farmworker communities for years and holds close relationships with the farmworkers I spoke to, as well as several farmers in the region. Thus, many of the farms that employed my interlocutors had requested her translation services, meaning that they made some effort to communicate with and understand those who they employed. It also means they were comfortable with someone who positioned herself as a farmworker advocate entering their farms, viewing working and housing facilities, and witnessing the working conditions of employees. It was therefore less likely (though certainly not impossible) for me to hear about egregious cases of worker exploitation.

Additionally, workplace exploitation was not my primary focus of research. In approaching this project, I hoped to understand the lived experiences of farmworkers through their relationships to food. This is not to say that documenting human rights violations in the U.S. agricultural system is not fundamentally urgent and important — quite the opposite.

However, what I learned and began to understand in my conversations were the strategies of care, survival, and flourishing that enabled livability.

Finally, the stories that my interlocutors told about themselves were not stories of workplace exploitation. They instead were stories of perseverance despite hardship, stories of the care they practiced within their families and communities, and of the spaces they created that enabled them to flourish. What I heard over and over was that people wanted, sometimes urgently, to return home to Veracruz, but that they had figured out methods of living that felt fulfilling to them for the time being. Many of the exploitative violence that my interlocutors faced was located in their necessity to leave Veracruz in the first place — in their inability to create fulfilling, sustainable, and nourishing lives in the place they called home.

As I was thinking through some of these questions, I asked the translator/coordinator, who had known many of these individuals for 8+ years and who had helped me meet my interlocutors, if these farmworkers had experienced workplace exploitation. If, perhaps, this was more prevalent in the megadairies, or amongst seasonal laborers in guestworker programs. The translator/coordinator told me that several of my interlocutors had, in fact, experienced workplace exploitation in the form of wage theft; another couple had been unable to take time off work for the entire eight years they had been working.

Even though I asked my interlocutors, rather directly, about their experiences with their bosses and in their workplace, none of these experiences were relayed to me. I understand this, in part, as what Audra Simpson might call “refusal” (2014). In our conversations, knowing I would be compiling their experiences into my master’s thesis, my interlocutors refused to allow stories of exploitation or workplace violence to dominate their personal narratives. Likely I, as a student-researcher, was not the person with whom they wanted to unravel these experiences, my

master's thesis was not the place they wanted these stories shared, and these experiences of exploitation were not how they chose to represent themselves.

I mention my interlocutors' encounters with workplace exploitation now to illustrate that these farmworkers are not immune from the oppressive forces that dominate migrants' experiences of United States industrial agriculture, and to address the relations of power that shaped our research relationships. I follow Savannah Shange's lead in understanding refusal as "part of the shape [of our method], rather than an aberration" (2019, 121). Refusal instead becomes a place of rich understanding of the asymmetrical power dynamics between myself and my interlocutors and provides a meditation on the stories that make up these farmworkers' senses of selves. Refusal, according to Simpson, allows us to account for and understand histories of surveillance, colonial encounter, and extractive research embedded within anthropological relationships.

John Jackson challenges the assumption that anthropologists can and should know everything and argues that Gertzian thickness² is an impossibility. Jackson's "thin description" instead is a form of "nonknowing that disentangles the ethnographer's will to know everything from a disconnected will to disclose everything" (2013, 158). Refusal, then, highlights "the asymmetrical power relations that inform the research and writing," in this case, of farmworkers' lives and politics (Simpson 2014, 105).

Not only does refusal helps us understand the power dynamics that undergird my relationship with farmworkers as well as the ways farmworkers want to be seen, but it has also facilitated focus on a vital, and less-studied aspect of farmworkers' lives — their strategies of

² Analytical approach that requires a multi-layered analysis of cultural symbols and signs; a detailed account of which puts social relationships and patterns in context. See Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

collective care and world-making. In this thesis, I have endeavored to show the ways that farmworkers experience structural violence — that which is posed by capitalist and neoliberal powers as well as those embedded in the researcher-researched dynamic. This refusal allows us to see that while farmworkers experience daily forms of institutional- or individually-rooted violence, they are creating spaces and telling stories about their collective survival. This understanding allows for a movement against a resistance-oppression or victim-agent dichotomy, enabling instead the understanding of how resistance and oppression coexist and how victims can exercise agency. The stakes of this are to disrupt mainstream narratives that reduce farmworking populations to one piece of their experience, and to illustrate the complex ways in which structural violence is experienced and contested.

This project also reveals that non-capitalist and pericapitalist strategies do not exist solely in a future utopia, but are strategies that are used now in order to contest, survive, and thrive among the violence of neoliberal capitalism. Farmworkers, through cooking and gardening, are not creating new spaces that might inform a future utopia, but instead reveal that collective strategies are currently and presently being made and remade, as places of safety, refuge, and solidarity.

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