HANDS THAT SPEAK:

Voices From the Upper Valley Dairy Farms

María Clara de Greiff Lara

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Is a Colombian-Mexican independent award-winning journalist, writer and translator. She received her B.A. in Humanities from the Universidad de las Américas Puebla and her M.A. in Latin American Literature from the Universidad Iberoamericana Golfo Centro.

She has been a collaborator, essayist, and columnist for many newspapers and magazines, including *El Financiero, El Nacional, El Columnista, E-Consulta, Revista de Cine Kinetoscopio,* and *Connexion-W Houston*, among others. She has written prologues for over 15 books from the publishing house, México Soy.

In 2021, she received a Faculty Research Award from The Leslie Center for the Humanities at Dartmouth College and published the book *Hands that Speak: Voices from the Upper Valley Dairy Farms*, a collection of investigative journalism reports and photographs that explore the barriers migrant farm workers face in connecting to their new community. In May 2022, Martin Luther King III gave her the *Holly Fell Sateia Award* for her leadership and commitment to social justice, granted by the Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity at Dartmouth College. In June 2023 she received the Latine & Caribbean Community Advocate Award from the Office of Pluralism and Leadership at Dartmouth. She is the live-in faculty/adviser for La Casa, a Spanish and Portuguese language affinity house at Dartmouth, and a professor for the Spanish and Portuguese Department, as well as for the First-Generation Office (FGO) She is the co-founder of the FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund, an organization conceived to support the urgent needs, livelihoods, and wellbeing of the migrant dairy farmworkers in rural Vermont and New Hampshire. FUERZA was the recipient of the 2024 Student Organization Social Justice Award by the Division of Institutional Diversity and Equity at Dartmouth College.

Maria Clara is now writing her novel "The Third Voice" through episodic publications in the Mexican newspaper *Hipócrita Lector*.

To Frank David Loveland de Greiff, the reason for my existence...

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Photography by ***Jorge Carlos Álvarez Díaz***

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“No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark”

Warsan Shire

CONTENTS

Hands That Speak, A Testament of Love and Strength

I traversed the pages of this book yearning to meet its protagonists. *Hands that Speak: Voices from the Upper Valley Dairy Farms* is not only an excellent journalistic piece, but also a crack in the "migration" discourse, one through which its protagonists' voices emerge.

María Clara De Greiff, Colombian-Mexican journalist and communicator, now a Spanish professor at Dartmouth College and co-founder of FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund, gave herself over to the work of traversing the farms of the Upper Valley. There, hundreds of men and women from Mexico and Central America work tirelessly, contributing to the economic growth of the state of Vermont and that of the United States. *Hands that Speak* contains the testimonies of those who, day by day, give their souls out of love for their families; proud and responsible Mexican men and women who remind us of a pending debt: that we cannot allow people to flee their homeland because there aren't sufficient conditions for a life with dignity.

Most—who left their homes fleeing from violence, poverty, and the lack of opportunities, and then became the invisible fuel of the unstoppable machine of progress—are not the problem, but rather the solution and the reason for the economic success of the countries in which they give themselves to working, paying taxes and living hidden out of fear of racism and discrimination.

Behind “the immigrants” lie the voice of Lizbeth, singing to the calves; the *tres leches* cake of Aurelio, sweetening the evenings; the wisdom of Jazmín’s grandmothers; the anguish of Martin’s father; the cooking of Mariana, Victoria, and Margarita, caressing the palate; the nostalgia of Gabriel; the siblings and cousins of Abel; the optimism of José; the travels of the Paisa, carrying the flavors of their native land.

Hands that Speak: Voices From the Upper Valley Dairy Farms also lays bare one of academia’s pending tasks. Dr. Serafín Ortiz Ortiz, president of the *Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala* (the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala), illustrates it masterfully, “Where there is a university, there must also be the evidence of development; otherwise, the university is without meaning.” This book evidences the concern of Dartmouth College, its students, and its professors over the region’s problems and the College’s duty in becoming not just a center for study, but a center for development, reflection, and transformation. In this book, it is not only the working hands that talk, but also those of the students from FUERZA Farmworkers’ Fund, who offer themselves in support, voluntarily and amicably, assuming the social and human commitment that should characterize every college student.

Yolanda Gudiño Cicero

February 16th, 2022

Mexico City


538

There is No Dream That Willpower Cannot Reach

The starriest sky I ever saw was in Vermont. The same can be said about the greenest mountains, the warmest lakes in the fleeting summer, the most refreshing mint of April, and the whitest snow, so white that it is almost blue. In Vermont, I learned the art of hiking mountains, and looking at the world below from above, of climbing into a kayak and surrendering myself to the silence of its rivers and lakes and the haunting call of the loons, losing my gaze on the red-tailed hawks.

Here, I met the little red foxes that prance playfully, mischievously, and predatorily after the chickens. Here, for the first time outside of a zoo I saw a black bear, which spent two nights in my yard with its two cubs. What a gift to have seen such a unique glimpse of the natural world! Here, I heard for the first time the howling of coyotes during autumn nights, where the cool winter winds make incipient winks. In Vermont, I learned about the variety of apples and of my neighbor's cows which, completely unaware of any notion of borders, would cross into my garden to eat them and then lay calmly and drunkenly on the grass.

In Vermont, I listened to "spring peeper" frogs that seemingly invoke spring with their croaking.

Here, I have taught classes along the White River with a group of students whose feet were submerged in the water. I have savored the organic produce freshly harvested from the earth. I have learned to prepare preserves for the winter, like pickles and jams made from fruits of the forest, and to arrange colorful salads with yellow carrots, orange beets, black radishes, and purple cauliflower. Here, I got to know exotic vegetables such as celeriac, parsnip, spaghetti squash, and ugly tomatoes, formless and extravagant. Not to mention the exquisite homemade maple syrup crafted in the sugar houses of many friends. As a matter of fact, Vermont is the number one producer of maple syrup in the United States.

In Vermont, I have learned of the pride that Vermonters have for their land, for their harvest, for each of the four seasons, for organic food, and for an ecological and sustainable life.

So that commercialism doesn't muddy the pristine landscape, billboards are prohibited. Once a year on Green Up Day, Vermonters go out on the roads and pick up the trash hastily discarded by the occasional rebel. I have learned of the tenacious hands of its inhabitants, and of the arduous work done during the harsh and long winters, almost eternal, very short days of fleeting sunlight. I learned the term "white knuckles" from the tension of having to cling your hands furiously to the steering wheel when faced with the challenge of driving on these curved dirt roads, darker than night, covered to the brim in snow.

I learned that the forest animals come out when night falls, and you have to be extra cautious when driving to avoid hitting them - deer, skunks, raccoons, porcupines, martens, groundhogs, and opossums, among others.

I also learned that most houses are missing a lock on the front door, for as Jason Berard, a proud Vermonter, once told me, "If a thief broke into a house in Vermont, he would surely become depressed." Here, I learned to cut firewood, stack it, and fire up the cast-iron stove to heat the house and save energy. I also learned that snow is not cold - cold are the winters of the soul. I learned to drink hot apple cider with a cinnamon stick to warm my bones, and to sleep many times wearing wool hats and socks.

I learned that Vermont gets its name from these "green mountains," tinged with white during the ruthless and long-lasting winters of pure, indescribable beauty, that embrace skiers from all over the country.

I learned that these green mountains of impetuous topography, which are part of the Appalachian Mountain chain, guard the secrets of the Abenaki, Mohican, and Pocomtuc tribes, and stand as impenetrable walls, behind which is hiding a resilient population of migrants on dairy farms, survivors of the structural violence that expelled them from their home countries. These rugged mountains await them with their beauty and vow of invisibility, of silence, like a symbol of the confinement that perpetuates structural violence turned endemic. I learned that not seeing them is a way of denying their existence, of legitimizing their invisibility, of avoiding becoming uncomfortable, for this lukewarm ignorance makes us colder than the sharpest winters of the northeast.

In Vermont, I learned to taste the variety of the dairy industry's exquisite products—cheeses, butter, ice cream—and of the invisible hands, with stoic and resilient voices, behind them. I learned of labor in the shadows, in oblivion, and of the strength and hardiness of the migrant workers who generate approximately 70% of Vermont's milk production after working more than 72 hours a week. Oftentimes it includes the hands of 14, 15, and 16-year-old migrant children. Without the strength of the migrant workers' hands, the dairy farms in Vermont and the Upper Valley would not survive:

> Dairy farming is the largest agricultural industry in Vermont, producing more than two billion pounds of milk each year. About half of the milk consumed in New England is produced on Vermont farms. Milk, cheese, ice cream, butter, yogurt, and other popular dairy products are made from Vermont's rich milk.[1]

No. It is impossible for the milk industry to sustain itself without the working hands and determination of migrants. However, these hands are condemned to the shadows of invisibility, oblivion, abuse, discrimination, racism, and structural and endemic violence.

[1] https://www.nasda.org/organizations/vermont-agency-of-agriculture-food-markets

The Ethereal Rhetoric of Inclusion

At the same time, while working at Dartmouth College, I have witnessed the disparities in the student population. But I have also learned to have faith in the future after meeting many students and discovering, in their eyes, the desire for social change, awareness, empathy, and a thirst for a different reality. What a daunting task that my words now place on their shoulders!

The rhetorical outbreak of diversity, inclusion, equity, and sustainable justice becomes ethereal and schizophrenic if we close our eyes and surrender ourselves to the lull of our privileges and certainties. Over my many years as a journalist, I have learned that we understand diversity only after we open our eyes wide, observing and discovering. We can then approach and embrace it along the same horizontal line—attentive, without judgment, with respect. This lukewarm ignorance makes us colder than the sharpest winters. I believe it all starts with awareness. Awareness is the key to break up with the invisibility of others.

I learned that the future is not forged alone and that the battle takes place with ideas, voices and words; the only way to change the narrative is by transforming thoughts and ideas with an empathetic gaze. *Hands that Speak: Voices From the Upper Valley Dairy Farms* is born from the restless observation that discerns and discovers the "other," feeling it, as I write in chapter II, in our skin. This book is permeated with empathy and proposes itself as a channel, as an open space to make known the voices, buried in oblivion, of our friends from the dairy farms and their own history, lined with dignity and labor.

In *Hands that Speak: Voices From the Upper Valley Dairy Farms*, three narratives converge. That is to say, the voices of three hands that speak. The first, the personal narrative of migrant dairy farmworkers – their lives, stories, and migratory anxieties. They are the protagonists of this work. The second, the narrative of the FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund organization - with its conception, development, and

hands that speak of building horizontal relationships with our friends on the dairy farms – non-paternalistically, foreign to the legitimization of hierarchies and charity. Lastly, the hands that speak that are presented to us in the photographs of Jorge Carlos Álvarez – a visual narrative in constant motion. The latter merges with the other two without pointing to certainties or specific information for the reader. The photography in this book is a gesture and an invitation for you, dear reader, to abandon your passivity and zones of certainty in order to venture towards bridges that take you to unknown possibilities. Álvarez's visual narrative blurs maps drawn with visual order and disrupts them. He breaks codes, formulas, and trite captions, allowing the viewer to follow the narratives of the dairy farm workers through his powerful images.

How does one photograph a voice? Álvarez faced this challenge and captured the voices of the hands that speak of the friends at the dairy farms, whose identities were necessary to protect. His photography contains an empowering voice. In his own words:

> My photography is a conciliatory proposal to discover humanity behind the gaze and hands. It aims to be an antidote in the presence of fear held towards the modern prejudice surrounding the term "migration." I insist, fear of what? The human being is only one and the planet we inhabit does not belong to us.[2]

These three narratives come together in the book *Hands that Speak: Voices From the Upper Valley Dairy Farms*. The reader who holds this book with their gentle touch and tender gaze will be a witness to the hands that speak of love, dignity, and the resilience of its protagonists, who sow the seed of a dream of social change and for whom there is no dream that willpower cannot reach.

María Clara de Greiff Lara

February 22, 2022

South Strafford, Vermont

[2] http://jorgecarlos.com/look-at-me-in-the-eyes/

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *Migration*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Chapter I

Hands That Speak

The book *Hands that Speak: Voices From the Upper Valley Dairy Farms*, originates from the need to shed light on the stoic backgrounds of the migrants who toil on dairy farms across the Upper Valley region of Vermont and New Hampshire. It also originates from the desire to make their presence and tenacious work visible, to provide a space for their narratives in these lands, lands they have come to in self-exile, escaping from the insatiable monster of poverty, in pursuit of their own understanding of the "American Dream."

Inside Baker-Berry Library at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, one can find José Clemente Orozco's *The Epic of American Civilization*, a mural painted between 1932 and 1934. This artistic gem shares a pictorial narrative full of many scenes and contrasts that invite us to navigate oceans of reflections. The mural casually begins with a panel titled *Migration*. This panel features a group of Indigenous people painted in ochre and blue tones, migrating towards the American continent. Stocky, with hardened faces and sullen gestures, they trudge forward. Their hands stand out. The hands that Orozco painted are powerful hands. They are visibly tense, in nearly closed fists. One individual, with his fists on the ground, is perhaps exhausted in these new lands or is worshipping the New World. The hands portrayed in *Migration* are endowed with tenacity and determination, much like those of the migrant dairy farmworkers in the Upper Valley. They are hands with their own voice, hands that speak, hands of courage that demand the strength of giants.

In another of Orozco's panels, *Modern Industrial Man*, the ideal modern worker is displayed, wearing a scally cap, sporting white gloves, and resting comfortably in front of a construction site. His prominent hands hold a book. Those familiar with Orozco's work will have certainly noted that one of his *leitmotifs* is "hands." Orozco held a fascination and obsession in painting them, detailing them with expression, emotion, denunciation, subversion, and voice. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the artist lost his left hand at the age of 19 after an unfortunate accident with gunpowder, which resulted in its amputation. The hands in Orozco's work have their own voices that speak.

In the book *La Mano Siniestra de José Clemente Orozco* (2015), author Ernesto Lumbreras describes Orozco's hand as "the first brain recorded in the evolution of man" and the endowment of life itself as a "curious and persevering" extremity. Lumbreras emphasizes that the human brain "is not found in the cranial cavity, but rather in those two five-pointed stars of the upper extremities." In a subsequent essay, Lumbreras points to the hand as a "facilitator of thought and language, visible in its labor activities" and ends the quote poetically by saying that the hand "at the discretion of the

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *Modern Industrial Man*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

worker, follows orders 'from above.'" Anaxagoras used to say that "man is intelligent because he has hands."

This image of a relaxed worker, depicted by Orozco at rest, wearing a scally cap, holding a book between his prominent, white-gloved hands, sitting with his back towards the construction site, peers out and strikes me as a utopian fresco, almost surreal; abysmally distant from the hands of the migrant dairy farmworkers in the Upper Valley, only a short distance from Dartmouth's campus. This modern worker from the mural, with the right to rest and education. I insist that it's nearly hallucinatory, surreal. A worker that becomes a worker in other fields: an intellectual, self-taught and cultured, a revolutionary in thought, distanced from the slavery of physical labor. Orozco represents this *Modern Industrial Man* not like a worker debased by the excess of labor, but like a worker who reconciles with and exalts the humanist-socialist ideology. It is an image that brutally contrasts with the reality of the working migrants found across the dairy farms in the Upper Valley.

In the essay "Heidegger's Hand," French philosopher Jacques Derrida analyzes and talks about hands and invites us to deepen our understanding of them. With regard to that, he notes,

> The hand must be thought. But the hand cannot be thought as a thing, a being, even less as an object. The hand thinks before being thought; it is thought, a thought, a thinking, *en pensée*.[3]

Derrida, in the same article, emphasizes that Heidegger signals that the hand's essence in a human being as not merely an "organ for gripping."

> Man's hand then will be a thing apart, not as a separable organ, but because it is different, dissimilar (verschieden) from all prehensile organs (paws, claws, talons); man's hand is far from these in an infinite way (unendlich) through the abyss of its being. This abyss is speech and thought. Quote, 'Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have the hand.'[4]

[3] https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/43419/Heidegger%27s%20Hand_Derrida%20Transcript_by%20Albe%20Harlow_for%20Cornell.pdf?sequence=5.

Apes have gripping organs that they utilize to take or hold, but they do not have hands. Apes simply manipulate things, appropriate them, and become owners of the objects. To Heidegger, stripping apes of hands excuses them from thinking, for hands are supplies of thought:

> The hands of man are thoughts within thought. Man's hand is thought ever since thought, but thought is thought ever since speaking or language. The hand, then, thinks, (Rivera, 2011-2012, p. 385)

For Heidegger, the hand is not only oriented for taking, grabbing, or holding. Further still, the hand of man conceives and comprehends, exceeding the essence of being a mere gripping organ. "All hands' work rests in thought," he says. The hand writes and therefore speaks. The hands of apes, unlike those of man, only take, apprehend, grasp, and manipulate things without establishing a relationship with them. Heidegger links the act of thinking with a body part, the hand; "thinking is a handwork, a work of the hand."

The hand of man is a visualization of the capacity to think. There is no thought without it. We only think when we speak, so the hand becomes human, it somehow gains humanity. Hence the title of this book, *Hands that Speak*. The hands of the migrant farmworkers in dairy farms across the Upper Valley speak of perseverance, courage, tireless effort and survival.

In my long conversations with our migrant friends from the dairy farms, I asked what their hands mean to them. The word "labor" is found in almost all of their responses.

Hands that Speak attempts to shine light on the arduous labor carried out by the tireless hands of the migrants living on dairy farms, and as well as on their lives and stories in these northern lands of excruciating winters. This book is only one channel for the narratives of the men and women whose hands generate approximately 70% of the dairy production economy in Vermont. This book is born from many conversations with them, in an effort to procure space for their voices, and relinquish them, even if just a little, from the isolation shouldered due to their exile.

[4] https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/43419/Heidegger%27s%20Hand_Derrida%20Transcript_by%20Albe%20Harlow_for%20Cornell.pdf?sequence=5.

The Story of Lizbeth and Her Hands That Bring Forth

For Lizbeth, who is 30 years old and comes from Martínez de la Torre, Veracruz, her hands are determination, family, community, effort, performance, creativity, stability, and support; “My hands are dedication and labor, a tool for us,” she says.

Lizbeth arrived in Vermont five years ago to join her husband who had been working at the same dairy farm for ten years. Three years ago, she became pregnant and had a baby. In order for Lizbeth to continue working and sending money to Mexico, she had to hire a babysitter.

> My husband and I decided to send our baby to Mexico, with my mother, as soon as he was one year old, so that she could take care of him, and I could work. My mom is happy with my child. I sent her money to fix the bathroom in her house and remodel her kitchen. We are almost done building our house. I came through Monterrey taking a bus; everything had been prearranged with the *coyote* [a person who smuggles immigrants across the border]. My husband borrowed $10,000 from his employer to pay for my trip. They crossed me over through the Rio Grande and through Laredo and McAllen, Texas. There were four of us - I was the only woman. In McAllen, we walked twelve hours at night, and as I passed the chain link fence I fell down and injured my left leg. I was in a lot of pain, but I didn’t stop. I was in different houses. They would feed us there. One time, a man told me, ‘Lock yourself in this room and do not go out at all, do not open the door to anyone unless they are a woman.’ He told me this because there were many people around us who were getting high on crack. I was very weak and tired. It took me fifteen days to get to Vermont and my husband nine months to pay the loan.

Lizbeth knows no limits to work. The word “rest” doesn’t exist in her personal dictionary. Her workday begins at 3:00 a.m. Even in the ruthless cold of Vermont, she wakes up to go clean the stables and take the temperatures of the calves, on milking days. She comments:

> Poor creatures; they suffer so much and cry for their mothers. There are times when they become so depressed that they refuse to eat. I have to remove my gloves in the cold in order to coax them into drinking the milk. I like cows a lot. When the mother is separated from her calves, she becomes threatening and kicks around so much that you end up crying. They don’t know what’s going on, and it’s not their fault. The hardest aspect of my job is having to clean the troughs the cows eat from. We use acids to clean them, and sometimes I carelessly forget to put on my gloves. My hands end up hurting badly, but I keep working. Every time the boss sees me, he says ‘I love you, Liz.’ in the past, he would also give me a hug. It’s because he sees me singing to the cows and calves often; they like hearing me sing. Last week I worked nearly 78 hours, but because I’m still paying off my hospital bills from childbirth, a lot of money is discounted from my weekly check. I like Vermont. The people are really nice. I like the lakes. I feel loved and respected here on the farm. (Lizbeth, interview, September 30, 2020)

Lizbeth’s workday ends around noon or 1:00 p.m., but she then spends many afternoons cleaning homes around the farm to earn some extra money. On Tuesdays, she cooks and sells Mexican food. Lizbeth is like a pinwheel in the wind – she doesn’t stop. She is always smiling. She reminds me of a quote by Mother Teresa of Calcutta: “I cannot stop working. I’ll have all eternity to rest.”

Lizbeth appears to be working to fill the void left by the nostalgia of her son, a void that even 80 hours of work a week cannot seem to fill.

Photo by **Gabriel Onate**

Dartmouth alum and co-founder of FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund

The Story of Aurelio and His Hands That Speak

Aurelio's hands, native to Veracruz, are hands of firmness and determination. He has been in the United States for 13 years, 12 of which have been working and living on the same dairy farm. This farm milks over a thousand cows a day. Work shifts are 12 hours long. Aurelio is affectionately called "*maestro,*" being the veteran of the farm and knowing every detail pertaining to the milking station's matters. Aurelio is a man of kind-hearted hands. He is, to put it one way, gentle waters. His hands are endowed with the patience to teach newcomers all of the juggling tricks of survival in the inhospitable climate of Vermont, as well as how to care for their bodies. The art of baking is also his. On the many occasions I have visited him on the farm, including on his only day off, his hands are always restless: washing clothes, cooking, completing chores, and preparing the most delicious pastries, such as cornbread and carrot cake, to share with the other workers. Baking is one of his passions. The best *tres leches* cake I have ever had in my life came from the hands of Aurelio.

Aurelio's hands sweeten the exhausting workdays of his friends on the farm. They are hands that speak of progress as a result of sacrifice. Of his three children in Mexico, two have graduated from university. The third child is finishing senior year of high school. For Aurelio, providing a home and education for his children has made everything worth it.

Aurelio comments that on the farm where he lives, he has worked shifts adding up to 80 hours a week:

> But that is why we came here, to work. The United States gives us that opportunity and possibility for progress. The first step for me was to buy my own plot of land and construct a house back in Mexico. I am from Veracruz, and I crossed through Chihuahua. It took

> me over a month. My group consisted of nine men and one woman. During the day, we couldn't advance much due to the high temperatures, and because everyone was more visible. Crossing the Arizona desert is the most difficult. There are scorpions, coyotes, and rattlesnakes. We spent three full days walking and avoiding the helicopters by hiding in the brush, where we would find all the animals – that was the real danger. We ran out of water. We only carried eight gallons total. Water is worth gold. It was here that I understood its worth. Water is gold. We crossed with caps and camouflage clothing. The woman in our group sprained her foot, so we had to carry her. In the end, she didn't make it across. (Aurelio, interview, October 5, 2020)

For Aurelio, the biggest sacrifice has been the inability to be with his family. He also deals with "the pressure with which we live, of losing our freedom. We live in constant fear." For him, his hands have a working voice: "For me they are perseverance, work, and providing education for my children."

Aurelio remains in Vermont, while Lizbeth has returned to Mexico and is once again reunited with her son.

Fear, as will be seen in the next chapter, is also a *leitmotif*, a constant one in the accounts shared by the migrant friends I have spoken with.

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *Departure of Quetzalcóatl*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Chapter II

Fear, a Second Skin

"He has heart who knows fear,
but vanquishes it; who sees the abyss, but with pride.
He who sees the abyss, but with eagle's eyes;
he who with eagle's talons grasps the abyss: he has courage."
Nietzsche

This German philosopher's aphorism leads me to think of the fear that takes hold of the migrant, spits them out of their homeland, pulls them, pushes them, plunges them into the void, becoming in the process their most faithful companion, their second skin: one that will not abandon them in any instant of their migratory odyssey. For fear grabs hold of the migrant like a barnacle, nourishing them with every breath. This fear accompanies the migrant in atrocious exile. Fear becomes a second skin. Life and death are its essences, coercing the expatriate to charge at life after fleeing from their land. The migrant flees, terrified, from their homeland out of fear of being devoured by hunger, violence, poverty, and slow deaths. That is the structural violence that has imprisoned them.

For whoever emigrates fear has embedded in them like a tick, and it is unforgiving. The exiled are survivors. They survive the disgraces, the circumstances, the abysses; they survive the fear that inhabits them, it becomes the second skin that ignites them and keeps them aware.

In the stories of the diaspora, the fear of hunger, poverty, violence, and ignorance condemns them to flee, to escape, all in search of the promised "American Dream" that is nothing more than a fallacy, an illusion. As such, that fear, that second skin, clings to the bottomless abyss of which Nietzsche speaks, like a constant reminder, like a weapon of resilience. Fear is like an impulse of life and death and of stillness and movement.

In exile, the American promise welcomes them with open arms of xenophobia, racism, discrimination, vulnerability, marginality, and exploitation. Fear, that second skin, then persists: as fear of the land, of the geography, of the unknown, of the language... of the color of skin itself, of the enemy at home. Fear as illness and remedy, as death and survival. Fear as a juxtaposed duality, as asylum and neglect, visibility and invisibility.

Fear and its fissures are the migrants' shadow, their voice, their extremities, their constant sense of alertness. Fear is that life raft in an ocean of agitated waters. Fear and mobility become an indissoluble unity in the lives of those who emigrate. They try to survive by rooting their resilience to all the emerging violence, to their forced migration. Fear is stripped of its many meanings and becomes an ally, a modus vivendi, of agonizing respiration.

As a result, fear becomes normalized, and it always makes an appearance in the conversations held with the migrant farmworkers of the Upper Valley. In the words of Jazmín, a migrant from Guerrero, "the fear is so much that it draws the strength out of you;" or in the words of

Aurelio, “with or without coronavirus, fear is part of our daily life; that is our truth wherever we go;” or in the words of Martín “you are locked up here, always caged with fear.” In the words of Paco “fear is our most faithful companion, I live in fear of immigration officers trapping me, and that my struggle to achieve my dreams will end. I am afraid to meet people who do not understand the effort it takes for me to be here. I am afraid to speak and people realizing that I do not belong to this land, but my biggest fear is not knowing when should I make the decision to return home and end these fears that have accompanied me since I left home.”

Fear is the jail confining the migrant dairy farm workers. Fear is both a motivator and paralyzer, the tension between two opposites, like in the poem *Home*, written by Somali-British poet Warsan Shire: “no one leaves home unless / home is the mouth of a shark.” The young activist, writer, and teacher traces the internal maps of exile and fear with her words:

Home

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won’t let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it’s not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn’t be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms

under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach
of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied.

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough.

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out

they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.

i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown

save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in
your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i don't know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here (Shire, 2018)

The irony is brutal. Exact. Home is depicted as "the mouth of a shark", as a place that "you only leave when they won't let you stay." Fear is the language of the diaspora. The uprooting and the horror are all common experiences shared by migrants such as Jazmín, one of many who fled "home", in search of that "anywhere, safer than here" in Warsan Shire's poem.

“My hands are part of the support of the women who raised me”: The Story of Jazmín

Jazmín is from Atlixtac, a town located in southern Guerrero, six hours from Acapulco. Like so many, Jazmín fled to the United States to escape poverty. She grew up hearing stories of other townsfolk who had “gone to the other side.” At the age of 15, she was already a mother. She needed to provide for her son, so she made the decision to emigrate. She left her four-year-old child in the care of her grandmother and great-grandmother.

She came to the United States at the age of 19, fleeing from her motherland because hunger and fear pained her too much:

> I decided to come here because I had no support from anyone. I could not bear going so hungry anymore. Growing up, I always heard the older folks saying that one could earn well in the United States and that working there one could build a house for oneself and their family. I knew a close friend who had been in New York and I asked her for help. At the time it cost me $5,000, in addition to the $300 I collected to get a bus from Guerrero to the border.
>
> I left at the end of January 2013 and arrived in North Carolina a week later. We crossed through Nogales. Five people left my town, including my close friend and my cousin, who was the only man. We stayed in a motel situated on the border for two nights. Then we were left on the banks of the Rio Grande. There, we remained on the shore all night and finally crossed on inner tubes at early dawn, before 5:00 a.m. We walked so much. All night. At one point we started walking towards a store, but we never made it because we were chased by immigration. There were about 36 of us total in our first attempt to cross over, but only eight managed to do so. We had to jump past two checkpoints. I don’t know where the others scattered. Immigration did not manage to catch everyone, but they did grab my close friend and a girl that accompanied us. I

> remember jumping two checkpoints. It's so much fear that it draws the strength out of you. I wanted to reach North Carolina where my mother was working. She was the one who loaned me the money. I was able to achieve all this because of a woman who was giving us directions; she was the *pollera* [a person who smuggles immigrants across the border]. She was waiting for us in Texas and gave us a lift all the way to North Carolina."

Jazmín continued to narrate all the misfortunes she endured in order to get to New Hampshire, where she currently lives and works on a dairy farm and creamery. Jazmín bottles gallons of milk, puts the lids on them, and places the bottles on the racks. She works approximately 70 hours a week, sometimes more. She also has two milking shifts every Sunday and rests only on Saturdays. I asked her what her hands meant to her:

> I had never heard this question before, but they are almost everything to me. I work thanks to my hands. My hands are for hugging my son, my grandmothers, the whole family. I can't see myself without my hands. My hands are part of the support system of the women who raised me. My mother left when I was three years old, and my grandmother and great-grandmother watched over me. Through my hands, I look out for them now. I came to work with my mom in North Carolina, but they didn't want to give me a job because they saw me as too young. I was desperate. I had heard from other farmworkers in Vermont and New Hampshire that there was work there, so I came. Here I learned to milk and worked 12-hour shifts. I didn't like it because there were no breaks to eat. I was very sad, and the men I lived with were unpleasant. Then, another friend helped me come to New Hampshire to the ranch where I now work. I've been here for nearly seven and a half years. I am very happy. I live in a house where I am the only woman, but we all have our own rooms and we all work a lot. All the time… (Jazmín, interview, November 2, 2020)

Jazmín does not yet have a set date to return home, but every day she prepares to be reunited with her son.

On the Journey, the Challenges, and the Fear: Martín's Story

In his poem *When the Sky Splits Open*, Edgar Morales, a Dartmouth graduate and recipient of the 2023 Aliki Perroti and Seth Frank Most Promising Young Poet Award, masterfully illustrates the migrants' journey; running thirsty in the desert, abandoned by fate, at the mercy of misfortune and fear. The speaker's cry for their mother under the dying mesquite tree depicts a profound sense of helplessness and vulnerability juxtaposed against the harshness of the desert, underscoring the fragility of migrants and emphasizing their emotional and cathartic journey.

When the Sky Splits Open

in the Sonoran Desert, coyotes
me that you're thirsty and so we
some water. Bottles filled with
my body. Above you, a
bright blue slices through
the zipper on your pants.
mesquite, you cry for your
Desert, when the sky splits
It rains quicksilver tears
howl at an empty moon. You tell
stop, near the carretera, to drink
bright yellow piss rattle against
helicopter painted blood red and
the sky. And the stars unravel like
Huddled beneath a dying
mother. In the Sonoran
open it weeps.
stolen from our bodies.[5]

(Morales, 2023)

When the Sky Splits Open is another one of the many shrieks emitted from the cracks of a civilization being ripped apart. The poem grapples with the idea of rupture and breaking open in a vast and unforgiving place: the dessert. The most barren and inhospitable landscape that creates a backdrop of desolation and isolation. *When the Sky Splits Open* resonates with the journeys of global migrants, throughout all of history, cursed by structural and systemic violence and mercilessly displaced from their homelands. The poem portrays vivid and raw scenes of human dimension of those who never return home. This was the journey for Martín, a native of Martínez de la Torre, Veracruz. For him, his hands mean "happiness, strength, responsibility. My hands are my future and that of my family. My hands signify the hope of having a better life."

"There wasn't enough money, and insecurity swept in from all angles. That's why I left." Martín came to the United States 10 years ago because he wanted to see his family happy. Tired of working "very hard for nothing," he wanted to show his people that a future could be built in a better way, as he put in his own words: "I wanted to show them that if you want something different, you have to do something different."

Starting at the age of 12, Martín helped his father in his butcher shop, and he remembers a time during his childhood when things weren't as bad:

We had food and housing. Everything was good until I finished both middle and high school, when I began to understand my dad's role. I worked with him full-time. At that age, you only ask for things without knowing what it entails to provide for the family. I was too young to understand all the responsibilities that my dad had. I began to understand the numbers and great responsibility my dad had in making progress for all of us, things I had never thought about when I was a kid. I would see my dad in a lot of anguish. I knew that he had some very large debts. He never mentioned it to me, but he didn't sleep. I decided to drop out of school to help him. In my family, we were really close. I knew his problems. It only kept getting worse. That was one of the reasons why I decided to emigrate.

I had an uncle on the other side, so I told my dad, 'I'm going to the United States, and when I get there, I'll help you.' I was 16 years old. He listened to me and looked at me. He didn't believe me. Every day I thought, 'How will I do this?', until one day I spoke with my cousin, and he told me everything was ready. I told my dad, 'I'm going,' and he became very sad. The business wasn't the same anymore: things were worsening. There simply wasn't enough money. I had three younger siblings. Ever since I was little, I liked to work, to have a little bit of money and be able to save it up. I was always thinking about the needs and problems of my family. Insecurity came from all angles. We were scared.

[5] Morales, E. (2023) 'Una discusión de la poesía contemporánea escrita en Puebla.' *Hipócrita Lector*, 'La Canalla Literaria' Cultural Supplement. March 30, 2023. p.14

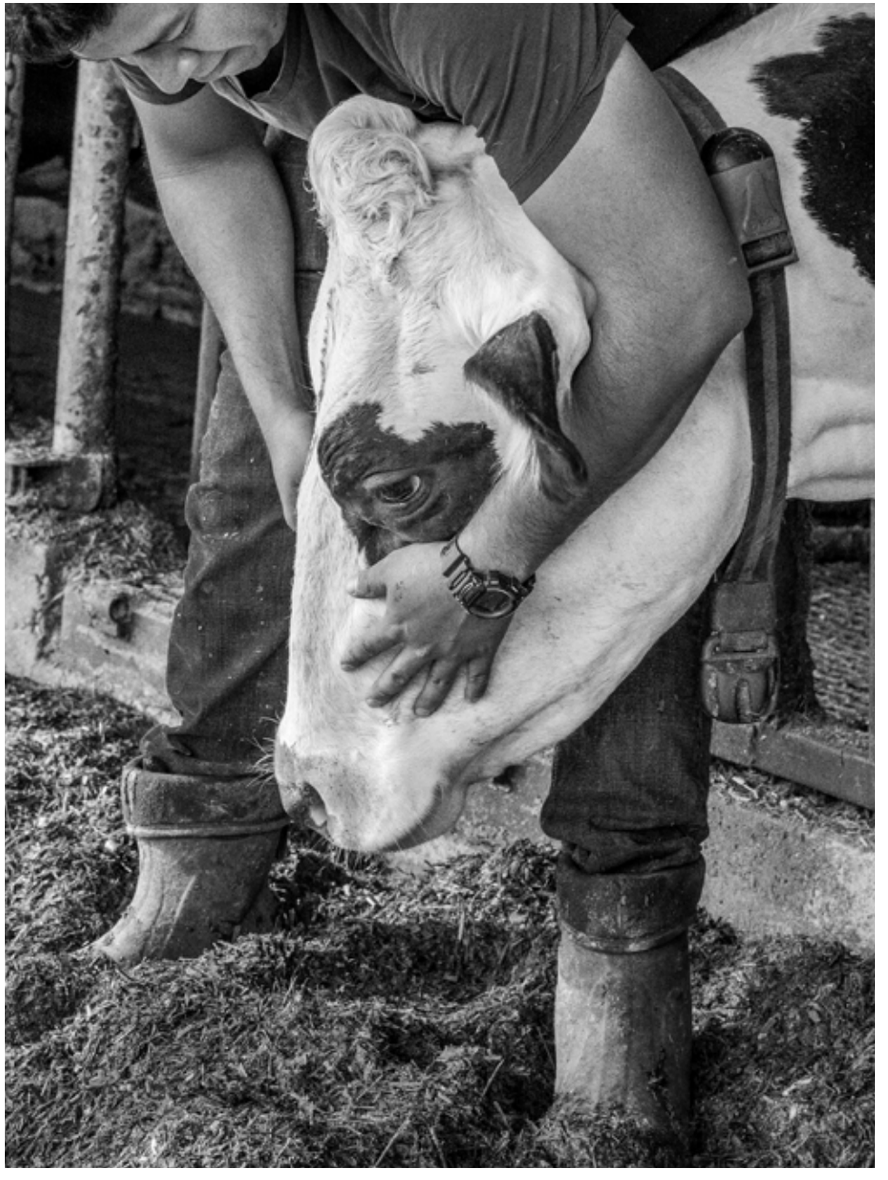
My older brother helped me throughout the entire journey. He had me taken to Tezitutlán, and he helped me reach Altar Sonora. I said goodbye to my parents, telling them it was time. I remember the lump in my throat. It was my first time trying to cross. You don't think about it until you're there. You don't know what it takes. The entire trip, I was full of mixed emotions. I left everything and didn't know what was coming, what was going to happen. I was moved only by the fact that it was my future, and I was going to work hard for it.

I arrived at Altar Sonora, and things were ugly there. I was in a house with thugs, people that got high all day, and people armed with guns. I was very afraid. I had come alone. I didn't come with anyone. I remember the stories they would tell us: take water and rub garlic on yourself to avoid getting bit by snakes…everything begins to discourage you, but you're already there with no alternative. Seven days went by, and they took us to a mountain peak on the border three hours away. I believe it was Phoenix, Arizona. We were all strangers to each other. The only thing we had in common was the desire to work hard. I saw it all: young men that returned passed out and dehydrated. I would say 'my luck doesn't have to be like that.' The little cabin where we stayed was called *Las Garitas*. From there we could see where immigration passed through. They were just waiting for us. I was there five days. It was a group of five of us from Veracruz. We crossed feeling both happy and scared; feelings that are difficult to explain. We were each given a 40-

kilogram backpack to make it through the desert. Many people die from dehydration, so we took a lot of water. We walked a lot in very high temperatures. One young man that was with me got a nosebleed… things weren't going well. The guide went with us, we were hurting and exhausted. We got lost in a trench full of rocks. Immigration was nearby. We ran. Everything felt like it was in slow motion. But for me, first and foremost I was thinking about my family. I had to make it.

Martín talks in detail about how he couldn't cross the first time. They captured him. He was alone in the desert. In his own words, "it was better that they caught me because otherwise I'd be dead." And so, it was. Like an action movie, with a helicopter and plenty of shouting. A horrific scene. Martín recounts:

I remember that the immigration pigs arrived, and we were drenched in sweat. They wouldn't turn on the air conditioning. We weren't able to breathe. We arrived at a jail close to Tucson, Arizona. I was there five days that I'll never forget, enclosed in a room with 70 other people. You can't sleep, so there's plenty of time to think. I didn't know if it was day or night. There was a TV in the middle showing stories of all the tragedies of abandoned migrants in the desert. It was real sad. I heard heartbreaking stories. One day I was asked if I wanted to fight my case. What was I going to get of that? I arrived back in Mexico on a plane. Handcuffed. I had never been on a plane. They brought me back. Five days without a shower. My dream was finished. From



TAPO [the biggest bus station in Mexico City] all the way to my town, I was crying. Suddenly it had all come crashing down. I arrived in my town, Martínez de la Torre, penniless. I reached my parents' house around 4:00 in the morning. I knocked on the door. I went upstairs and fell asleep.

Martín did not give up, and over the course of two months he planned his second attempt. He had a godfather that supported him and loaned him 40,000 Mexican pesos to cross. This time was different because he had a cousin in the group crossing over. The day arrived. Martín said goodbye to his parents, and it has been more than ten years since he last saw them.

On this occasion we crossed through Reynosa. The whole territory was claimed [by organized crime], and we needed a password to cross through the state. They stopped us at the terminal, and we had to give the password and say whom we were with. I was 18 years old. Everything looked sad. We crossed through the river. Many folks didn't know how to swim. The process of getting here to New Hampshire took 25 days. The guide was high, and he made a mistake along the way. We had to turn back so he could get the accurate location. Without food. Only a bottle of water. Immigration nabbed some of us, but my cousin and I managed to cross. Out of the 16 trying to cross, only 10 of us made it. We ran out of water, arrived behind a factory, and hid there. We were taken to a safe house in McAllen, Texas, where we spent four days. But the worst was yet to come: the second leg of the trip, five days in the desert with a bottle of water and no food.

I remember that there were three girls. We left the house and piled into a truck. When the truck opened, it was night and there was a barbed wire fence, and we only had 10 minutes to get out and jump the fence. I threw myself up; others caught me and helped me down the other side. We started off towards the mountain. We were told that we were going to be walking for five days. That trip was the hardest. There was a girl from Guadalajara with us who was in pain. She began to vomit blood. I will never forget the shrieks she made. We walked at night. She was really sick. The guides were keeping track of the time and were worried that we wouldn't make it. They gave us some Gatorades. At 2:00 in the morning, one guide decided to leave the girl in a spot nearby that immigration officials patrolled. It was horrible listening to the howling of the coyotes. I haven't forgotten. The girl was screaming. I never heard a woman scream like that. They carried her and left her near the road so that immigration would take her. We took out our Gatorades and left her with eight of them. A Honduran boy went back and said that he was going to stay with her, but the little shit rejoined us later, having taken all the Gatorades from the girl. The guide was so mad that he pierced the boy's four-liter water bottle and beat him up… (Martín, interview, January 4, 2021)

Martín goes on to narrate how the guide returned to give all the drinks back to the girl. These memories follow him to the present. They didn't pass through the second checkpoint until the fourth night. The crossing seemed to take forever, and as they were jumping fences, the shadows of "La migra" faded from view. They drank water from livestock troughs to combat the heat. "There wasn't any air, and though we had bottles, we didn't have water," remembers Martín. On the seventh day, they reached a road where they were finally picked up.

Martín is a man of big hands, firm will and iron persistence. He is tall in stature and in conviction. With his prominent hands, he drives the tractors on the farms, controls the milking operation and transports the cows from one place to another. On the farm where he works, there are approximately 550 cows. Upon arriving, he aimed to learn the language and used every available opportunity to do so. Martín is a man of composure that has educated himself in the schools of exile. He is a man with the dream to pursue a college education, to return to his loved ones, to celebrate life again. While he works to fulfill his dreams, he is a leader in the farm community, supporting and giving advice, offering rides to those who need them, visiting other farms to distribute winter clothing. This has been his life experience these past 10 years. Martín, standing at 6'2,'' is a tough guy who is not beaten by the Upper Valley winters, nor the challenges of life; always upright, with the pride that comes from the satisfaction of doing what needs to be done.

In his book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, author Octavio Paz writes about the difference between North Americans and Mexicans:

> The North Americans are credulous and we are believers; they love fairy tales and detective stories and we love myths and legends. The Mexican tells lies because he delights in fantasy, or because he is desperate, or because he wants to rise above the sordid facts of his life; the North American does not tell lies, but he substitutes social truth for the real truth, which is always disagreeable. We get drunk in order to confess; they get drunk in order to forget. They are optimists and we are nihilists - except that our nihilism is not intellectual but instinctive, and therefore irrefutable. We are suspicious and they are trusting. We are sorrowful and sarcastic and they are happy and full of jokes. North Americans want to understand and we want to contemplate. They are activists and we are quietists; we enjoy our wounds and they enjoy their inventions. They believe in hygiene, health, work and contentment, but perhaps they have never experienced true joy, which is an intoxication, a whirlwind. In the hubbub of a fiesta night our voices explode into brilliant lights, and life and death mingle together, while their vitality becomes a fixed smile that denies old age and death but that changes life to motionless stone. (Paz, 1961, p.31-32)

This is the joy that radiates in Martín when he paints his dream of returning to Mexico.


SEPTEMBER 2021
28 Tuesday
1033 Extend

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *Departure of Quetzalcóatl*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Chapter III

Migration: Hands, Voices, Glimpses, and Hearts

Within the cycle of activities throughout *Understanding Social Justice: Approaching and Embracing Diversity*, organized in 2019 by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Dartmouth College's La Casa, Mexican producer and director Tonatiuh Ramírez Rocha, creator of Bendita Productions,[6] was a guest lecturer who presented a series of mini-documentaries he made on these topics.

In his opening speech, "When Superman Became Mexican," Ramírez Rocha referenced an interview with Mexican singer and songwriter Juan Gabriel, who said that "the best-known migrant in the world is Superman." The filmmaker made an analogy and emphasized the following: "This superhero came to this country without a passport, visa, or work permit; furthermore, he even came from another planet, making him an extraterrestrial being. He could harshly be labeled as an 'illegal alien.' With this description and migratory status, Superman could have a lot in common with the average Mexican in this country." ("Mexican singer Juan Gabriel," 2006)

Ramírez Rocha later commented that in DC's Action Comic series issue 987, this superhero is seen defending undocumented workers; specifically, "he gets in the way of a volley of bullets and with his body of steel covers and deflects the shots made by a presumed white supremacist, who felt his job was being stolen and displaced by these migrants. Superman saves their lives." (Valenzuela, 2017)

Ramírez Rocha returns to the real, earthly world with his assertive rhetoric and tells us that in the tangible world "these types of superheroes do not exist. However, in the physical plane of our planet, we count on heroes, people who do extraordinary things that require a lot of courage... through them we have an opportunity to see the value of their work and the qualities of their character as well as the causes they defend; they are the true Supermen and Superwomen of flesh and blood." (Ramírez, R., personal communication, 2019) This is something we witness as fact in his mini-documentary, *Las Patronas,*[7] which is about a group of women from the town of Guadalupe, (located in Amatlán de los Reyes Veracruz), who in 2021 completed their 25th year of preparing and tossing food and water to migrants who ride on the train dubbed *La Bestia* ("The Beast").

[6] https://www.facebook.com/Bendita.Productions/
[7] https://youtu.be/z4CmxA106cw

The video features Norma Romero, the great matriarch who is the founder of the NGO, "*Las Patronas,*" as well as her courageous team of skillful hands. These tireless hands prepare food 365 days a year in order to provide relief to migrants on their journey to the United States aboard *La Bestia*. The hands of *las patronas* are providers of life and hope. Hands endowed with love and generosity. Hands that give with all their heart. Hands that speak. As Ramírez Rocha appropriately points out in his speech, "one is made by the cause he defends." Just as the hands of *Las Patronas* give life, sustenance, and hope, Ramírez Rocha's visual art is the hand holding the camera and catching a glimpse of the initiatives spearheaded by real-life Superwomen. Ramírez Rocha's visual narrative brings to light the worthy work of the hands of *Las Patronas*. In the producer's own words "these videos contain other voices and perspectives on migration; they are primarily meant to build bridges of understanding rather than walls that separate us." (Ramirez, R., 2019)

Many of the migrants who come to North America have used *La Bestia* as a mode of transportation. Others use different routes in their wandering, though no less harsh. But for the most part, those that make it to the Upper Valley are employed on dairy farms. Through intense hours of labor, averaging 75 hours a week, their hands give life, sustenance, and encouragement to families in Mexico and Central America, as much as to those from these northern lands of untamed winters.

Mural in Guadalupe, Veracruz. Las Patronas NGO.
Photo by **Tonatiuh Ramírez**

“I can’t give myself the luxury of resting,” the Story of Mariana

Mariana comes from the community of María de la Torre, Veracruz. She arrived to the Upper Valley three years ago. Mariana works every day except Monday in a local restaurant washing dishes from 11:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. Weather permitting, her spring workday begins at 6:00 a.m. on the farm near her home before she leaves for her second job.

For Mariana, her hands “mean everything,” she says: “they are the things we use to work with, without them we are nothing. And now more than ever, when I’m suffering from tendonitis in my right hand, I appreciate what they mean, because I can’t give myself the luxury of resting and losing my job.”

> It took me twenty days to get here. I was able to make it through on the third attempt. There were six of us crossing and I was the only woman. When we were about to cross the Rio Grande, between Reynosa, Mexico, and MacAllen, TX, one of the men told me to take off my clothes because I couldn’t cross with them on. I left my panties on, took off my bra, and left my blouse on. I don’t know how to swim very well, but they pulled us across the river on inner tubes, while we carried bikes above our heads. We crossed at 12:30 a.m., and once on the other side, I had to undress in front of the men and put on the sportswear they had given me to ride the bicycle. I became horribly sick. I had a very high fever, and we stayed in the hills until around five in the morning. I was shivering with cold, and one of the men hugged me. I was able to sleep for two hours, but I was very anxious about the man touching me or following me after crossing. The next day there was a path to a golf course ten meters away and we went out on our bikes pretending to be out on a ride with our sportswear. I was super sick, and I wanted to pass out. We rode our bikes for two hours until we reached a Walmart where we were picked up and taken to someone’s house. I was very sick and spent seven days there.

> I called my brother so he could send me money to buy medicine. After that, I had to pass through a checkpoint and some *gringas* put me in the trunk of their Mini Cooper. They told me not to make any noise, gave me three water bottles, and continually updated me as we neared the checkpoint. They put things on top of me in the trunk where I was tucked away, like skates and toys and luggage, and they kept telling me, 'there's only about a kilometer left, don't breathe because the dogs can smell sweat.' I simply prayed and 40 minutes after passing through the checkpoint, they allowed me to ride up in front with them. I had made it! (Mariana, interview, October 12, 2020)

Nowadays, Mariana, with her tireless hands, works in three different locations. She continues her work at the local restaurant, works 25 hours a week at the dairy farm, and cooks on Tuesdays. Just like *Las Patronas*, she prepares and distributes Mexican food and products at six different farms as a way to alleviate. hunger and nostalgia for home Mariana is an inexhaustible worker with the personality and spice of a *jarocho* (someone who is quick-tempered). She never stops. She's always happy and enthusiastic with a splendid smile. She doesn't give up. Mariana and her hands are the essence of care.


OFF
OFF

“Poverty chased me out of my town,” the Story of Gladys

In the heart of Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom, in Orleans County, there are several dairy farms, forgotten by the hands of all the gods, in the middle of nowhere, where all you hear and feel is the icy wind that viciously pummels the inhabitants of the area.

Keren Valenzuela, a Dartmouth College graduate and co-founder of the FUERZA Farmworkers’ Fund, Ella Chapman, a University of Maine graduate with a passion for agriculture and social justice, and this writer went to tour a couple of these farms up north during a peak in the pandemic and the unremitting cold of February. The reason for this trip to such isolated towns, less than 30 kilometers from the Canadian border, was to distribute boxes of winter clothing, deliver Mexican food products, and meet the workers of these farms.

On the first farm we visited, there were eight workers, seven from Mexico and one from Guatemala. Gladys, originally from Las Margaritas, Chiapas, came out to meet us. The merciless cold hit us furiously, especially since this farm was located on a plain. The farm was small, with no more than 800 milking cows, and was covered to the brim with snow and enormous, piercing icicles held up by the gabled roof like a prison of crystals.

On the second farm, there were nine workers, five of whom were working, and the others were resting. We were not able to talk to any them.

In two trailers located just three meters away from the first farm’s milking parlor, there were eight workers, Gladys being the only woman. She invited us inside her trailer, with two bedrooms shared among five workers (and there are still those who believe that poverty is nonexistent in this

country). One look at these soulless, dark and poorly-insulated trailers where hardship screams and becomes an extension of the workspace – another room for confinement, isolation, cold, and darkness. In addition, there is no transportation and they face the constant fear of being picked up by Border Patrol.

> I am from Las Margaritas, Chiapas, which is more or less close to the border with Guatemala. There are eight siblings in my family: three men and five women. I am the youngest. Poverty chased me out of my town; coming here was the only option to support my family. My dream is there in Mexico, with a roof to call my own, a plot of land. My dream is there. My dream is not to depend on anyone and achieve everything with my hands. I am here for my children. It's not easy, but you have to keep fighting.

Two and a half years ago Gladys arrived in this ghost town of cold and cows. She was filled with humility and joy by our visit. She told us that since her arrival at this farm she had not gone out anywhere. I was surprised to learn that Gladys did not know the name of the farm she was working at, nor even the name of the town: "I don't know the name of the farm. The routine here is from work to home, then into this trailer where we live. We don't go out as a precaution, since we are very close to the border and the police are always around. We can't risk it. We are only in this country for a while and we can't take any chances. We are locked up here." As if on purpose, to be disoriented to this place means not putting down any roots here.

When asked what her hands mean to her, Gladys said:

> My hands have a lot of meaning. Thanks to my hands I can achieve what I want because I have to work and fight with a lot of effort. It is thanks to our hands that we can achieve what we want. What would we be without our hands? Although it is not much, it does give us enough to support our families... When I lived in Mexico, I dedicated myself to being a housewife, and

> I did not have a permanent job. I used to work in the fields, planting corn and beans, clearing the fields of maize. We had chickens. That's how we spent our lives there.

On these lands of dreadful winters, Gladys spoke about her first winter:

> Well, my first winter was very difficult, especially when you come from a tropical climate. I work 11 or 12 hours a day here. Life is just work here. I miss my family the most, my dad and the entire family. Family gatherings. The weather in my town is very comfortable. It is a temperate climate. It is very difficult to bear the cold around here... It took me almost a month to get here from Las Margaritas. Fourteen of us came, five of which were women from Chiapas. I went through the desert. The journey was not easy at all since we walked a lot – more than 12 hours straight. There was only one coyote [a person who smuggles immigrants across the Mexico–United States border] with us. There wasn't much food or water. One of my companions hurt her hand. We arrived at a house that we stayed in for a whole day and night, and the next day they took us from Texas all the way up here. It was more than three days by car. The trip cost me nearly $8,000 plus interest. I worked more than 72 hours a week for a year just to be able to pay off my high-interest loan. I'm barely getting back on my feet so I can send money to my kids. They live with my sister. I have a 13-year-old boy and an 8-year-old girl. All this sacrifice is for them. Nothing more. (Gladys, interview, February 15, 2021)

Gladys and Mariana's stories remind me of a poem by Rossy Evelin Lima, a migrant and writer who has won various literary awards.

I Have Lost so Much

(excerpts from the poem)

Here's my accent of tin
Stuttering, stone on stone,
Rattling in the empty street
of understanding.

Why haven't I lost my accent?
I have lost so much
I lost my way,
The wind turns it back on me
I've lost so much

I have lost the freedom
To cross borders
To the rhythm of the butterflies,
I am stiff though they dwell within me

I have lost my howl,
The thread I used to darn my chest
Leaving my heart exposed.

I have lost the brush
That untangled my free will.
I´m in knots
with the me I was
and the me I resist.

With my eyes forever lost,
blindly tattooing myself,
laws that don't give solace,
tattooing the Do not Enter
of this place that riles me. (Lima, 2017)

The poem evokes a profound sense of loss. There's a condition of alienation and disconnection that permeates the poem and leads to a feeling of dissociation within the speaker's identity. The tension is reflected through the speaker's accent and their inability to lose it, suggesting a fragmentation of identity and self-expression. The juxtaposition is clear; on one hand the accent represents identity but at the same time a barrier. The accent as a figure of resilience stands as a form of resistance, of clinging to the essence, to the origin. The self is shattered and displaced and the accent becomes the only freedom.

The hands of Gladys and Mariana have a voice with an accent of resilience, sacrifice, and survival. Hands that hold the world.

Gladys continues to work on the same farm; her 15-year-old son has just crossed the border and is now working with her.

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *The Pre-Columbian Golden Age*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Chapter IV

Food Alleviates Nostalgia

Miguel, the *Paisa*, originally from Tlalixtlipa, Puebla, is a man who prides himself on his culture and place of origin, and the richness of his land. “I am proud of Puebla, its ceramics, its *mole*, its sweets,” he says. The Paisa is a traveling merchant, who brings a carnival of synesthesia, colors and flavors to the farms in the Upper Valley and northern Vermont. But beyond the diversity of his products, he also brings the flavor of culture, nostalgia, sense of community, and reminders of where one comes from, to the dairy farms’ tables. With his products, Miguel puts the reminiscences of one’s place of origin on the palates of migrants in dairy farms.

Before the pandemic, the *Paisa* toured through the dairy farms and distributed bread, cactus, Oaxaca cheese, Cotija cheese, tomatillos, tortilla dough, pork rinds, cured meat, spiced meat, and tostadas, every fifteen days. Even *cueritos* [pickled pork rinds], wow! “I like meeting people,” he says, as he opens the trunk of his truck, battered by the mud, salt, and snow of Vermont’s dirt roads. The paisa’s hands are love, community, and warmth in the heart.

For the *Paisa*, his hands are sustenance: “My hands are sustenance, labor, a form of survival, for procuring care, providing. My hands are health.”

“I arrived in the United States 39 years ago,” the Story of the Paisa

I crossed the Rio Grande in 1983 when I was only sixteen years old. It cost me $400. I remember that they caught me the first time and I was able to cross on the second attempt. I had told myself I’d come work for two years and return home after. My parents didn’t have the means to pay for my studies. We wholly dedicated ourselves to the field; the months of June and July were dedicated to planting and in September, the field gave us all its harvest. But we were a large family. I have eight brothers. My parents did not have enough money. I came with my uncle. I was hungry on the way. They are very difficult memories. I arrived with a very large group of people, I don’t remember how many we were. I was first in Houston, working at the Astrodome, and then I came to New York to work in a restaurant for long hours. Back then, I earned about $270 a week, which was a lot, but it certainly wasn’t enough to afford living here and send money to Mexico. Then I went to Massachusetts and eventually Hanover, where I worked in a Chinese restaurant for nearly 10 years. In 2000, thank God I received my citizenship and that changed my life, allowing me to feel safer and be able to travel to Mexico to see my family. I subsequently settled in the Upper Valley. It’s such a beautiful place. Since I’ve lived here, I’ve realized how difficult it is to find Mexican food products, even something like a simple tomatillo, and that’s why I dedicate myself to distributing them. I stock up in New York since they import just about anything of good quality there.

His market-on-wheels routine was transformed during the pandemic.

It changed in the aspect that I have to do everything very carefully now, and I’m not allowed on all the farms I used to be able to visit. I have to pay more attention when handling the products, always have a mask, and change my gloves. You know the risk, but it’s complicated because in order to survive you have to go out and earn a living. We take risks, but when we have a family there is no option but to take that risk to continue living. (The *Paisa*, interview, April 8, 2021)

Excerpt from **Letters to My Mother's Hands**
By Edgar Morales

Mask Mandate

Large burn marks, darker than the *piel de canela* you gave me. Cracked fingernails. Bursting veins up your arm. Callused knuckles masked with lavender ointment and latex gloves when you are at work. They say it's to protect you from COVID-19, but I know it's to protect customers from seeing the hands that make the food they eat. (Morales, 2021)

Three Hamburgers for $190, Ismael's story

Ismael came to Vermont almost four years ago. He is originally from the city of Las Margaritas, Chiapas, located 25 kilometers from Comitán, on the border with Guatemala. In this repetitive story, the reasons for self-exile from the land where he was born are the same as always, those of many; hunger, poverty, and systemic violence.

Ismael is the son of a large family of five children: three men and two women. When he decided to go "to the other side", his wife was pregnant with his third daughter.

> It took me a month and a half to get here. I crossed the border at Juárez. I didn't get across on the first try. We were a group of 10 men and four women. The trip cost me $8,000. I was very, very scared and hungry throughout the entire journey. You don't know what you're getting yourself into, no matter how many stories they tell you. I remember that we walked for more than nine hours, well into the night, before reaching the first fence, which was very high. We climbed over it using a ladder. Then we walked another 10 hours to Santa Teresita, El Paso, Texas, and there the *raidero* [someone who gives rides for money] picked us up. We made it to Dallas and from there, I came to New York.

By chance, Ismael came to work on a farm in Franklin County in northern Vermont, located near the Canadian border. This is one of the counties with the largest number of dairy farms as well as migrants. Franklin County, unlike Addison and Orange counties in central Vermont, has been heavily guarded by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) or other border customs police as of 2016 under the Trump presidency. Migrants working on the dairy farms in the north deal not only with the crippling cold of the long winter, but also with anxiety, fear, and the irony of food insecurity. In regard to this, Ismael says:

> There were 5,000 cows and 80 milking machines on this farm. We lived on the second floor cramped together, 15 migrant workers living there. We didn't have means of going out for food or anything, since there is nothing close by in the area and nobody had a car to get around. We sometimes worked more than 72 hours a week. The situation was stressful. The work was very heavy. Life consisted of going from our room to work. The work was very heavy and the boss paid us very little. We were very marginalized, unable to leave the farm at all; there were no stores nearby to get food and the *migra* [immigration] was always around. Our boss would bring us food regularly and sometimes as if to change our menu a little, we would order hamburgers, paying $190 just to have three hamburgers delivered to the farm. The working conditions there were very bad. Our boss paid very little. (Ismael, interview, February 4, 2021)

The Rubenstein School of Environmental and Natural Resources at the University of Vermont published an article on its website which stems from research conducted by environmental justice expert Bindu Panikka. The article speaks, among other things, of the inequity towards the migrant population that works on dairy farms, and the urgency of creating policies that ensure health and safety for them.

> A good 80% of the milk produced in the United States comes from farms that employ immigrant workers. More than 50% of all labor in the dairy industry is performed by immigrants. The dairy industry is critical to Vermont: 20% of Vermont's land is used for agriculture. Vermont alone generates 63% of all the milk produced in New England; Vermont's dairy industry generates approximately $2.2 billion each year. (Panikkar, B., & Barrett, M.-K., 2021)

This is a great and infamous paradox if one takes into account that almost 70% of the production of the dairy industry on Vermont farms comes from the hands of migrants. In other words, this incessant workforce puts food on our tables and on those of their families in Mexico and Central America daily;

at the same time, they are also exposed to food insecurity on this side of the wall. The dairy farms of Vermont and the Upper Valley would not survive without the hands of our migrant friends, and perhaps neither would the dairy industry. How can this be explained?

An article published by *The Guardian* and written by journalist Nina Lakhani in the Rio Grande Valley speaks in great detail about this paradox. “I know the workers that put food on American tables but do not have enough to go grocery shopping.” (Lakhani, N., May 13, 2021)

In this article, she says that undocumented immigrants break their backs working on farms, and thanks to them, the food industry keeps up; however, they face the challenge of feeding their families:

> Of the 2.5 million hands that work on farms in the United States, half are undocumented immigrants, according to the United States Department of Agriculture, although it is estimated that these numbers are nearly 75%.
>
> Even before the pandemic, farms were among the most dangerous workplaces in the country, where low-paid workers have little protection against long hours, repetitive strain injuries, pesticide exposure, dangerous machinery, extreme heat, and animal waste. Food insecurity, substandard housing, language barriers, and discrimination also contribute to dire health outcomes for farmworkers, according to research from the John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. Many undocumented farmworkers have worked hard in the fields for years, pay taxes and have American children, but do not enjoy labor rights. They have extremely limited access to occupational health services and live under the constant threat of deportation. (Lakhani, N., 2021 May 13)


JAMES

Women's Hands

"My hands are Mexican flavors on their tables," Victoria's story

Victoria grew up until she was 21 years old, in Altotonga, Veracruz, about 40 miles northwest of the state capital, Xalapa. She never imagined that she would one day emigrate: "I never thought of leaving. My plan was like that of many, to continue working in the shirt factories, in the tolls, making rounds and saving up to buy some land. I earned very little."

Victoria's hands are also hands of hard work. "My hands mean independence, support and provision to me," she says.

> I decided to come because I met Martín, my current husband. He told me "if you want, I will support you". I met him online, and we talked for a long time over the course of a year. He was very hesitant about bringing me over, especially because of the dangers crossing the border. In April, when my cousins were about to leave, I talked to them to see if I could come with them. They didn't want to because I was a woman and they said that they treated women badly, separated them and did ugly things to them. They were very clear with me and told me that if I went with them, they would not be responsible for anything.
>
> We left on April 30 and it took us two days to reach Nuevo Laredo. We were just two women. Those nights we all slept like sardines on one mattress. That's where they took our backpacks from us. We were taken to the bank of a river. We spent two nights in a little, run-down house, where there were snakes, it was dirty, and it was cold. We tried to cross, but there was a lot of surveillance. They then gave us the option of walking for three hours. They put 20 people

in a small boat. It was at its sinking point. That journey lasted more than an hour. We were soaked. We walked three hours. Suddenly someone shouted "*la migra*!" and we all split up. I went with a woman, her child, and husband. Then we whistled at one another and met up again. We walked much more. The smuggler called the person who was picking us up and told us that he was coming in a red truck with a punt. He separated the women. On the highway the men pushed us as they piled into a van, unaware that they were sheriffs; they grabbed them and the *migra* took them away. Thanks to the scoundrel men I was saved from being taken by the *migra*. I ran, jumped, fell, and split my head open. I met with a very nice man and I spent the whole night with him. We contacted the others with a cell phone and we met up again. It got dark and we waited for them to come for us. We decided to cross the towering fence and walked until 5:00 in the morning. I couldn't walk anymore. My groin ached.

Victoria then narrates how her cousins abandoned her and the man who was with her ended up protecting her. She called her boyfriend, Martín, who had been here in the Upper Valley for five years and said, "You know what? I'm going to give myself up to the *migra* because I can't walk anymore and the guide doesn't answer me." The man who was with her told her "Whatever you want, girl" and he helped her...

We walked until 8:00 in the morning. He was crushing the weeds, removing the cacti until we reached a four-lane highway, where we were finally picked up and taken to a house in Laredo, Texas. From there, they moved us to another house and we waited there another two weeks for a trailer or van that could take us. The day finally came; they took the back seats out of a truck and nine of us sat with our knees in our throats for more than two hours. We arrived at another house and from there they took us to Arkansas. There, a "*raidera*" took us to New York and from there to Vermont to my boyfriend Martín's house. It took me a month and a half from when I left my town to get here.

Victoria quickly learned the labor required for milking, though in secret, for when she arrived, she was the only woman and the boss doubted her skills. Martín taught her the chores of the dairy farm and convinced the boss to give her a job milking and feeding calves. Her workday was 80 hours a week.

> I worked there for a year and it was very heavy. We left that farm because the boss was not good; he laughed at us, until an American friend of my boyfriend recommended us for work on this farm where we are now and we like it a lot. We have been here for more than five years now and our bosses are very good. I have already been here in the United States for six and a half years.

Now Victoria is dedicated to preparing Mexican food that she distributes daily to more than six dairy farms:

> Thanks to my hands I cook, I sell my food and create sustenance for myself that way. For me, cooking and selling my food brings me satisfaction, because I can help my family financially, but on top of that, I bring a bit of Mexico to my fellow countrymen who come from ranches. I make them feel at home. My hands are flavor on their tables. (Victoria, interview, November 12, 2020)

What Victoria's hands do is rebuild identity again. An identity that is lost, forgotten, broken. Because food, in addition to being an element of expression of social and cultural relations, identifies us with our place of origin. Victoria brings a sense of pride, of belonging, and cohesion to the tables. Our friend Margarita does the same.

The Flavors of Yoscama, Oaxaca, on Vermont's Tables. Margarita's Story

More than 5,000 kilometers away from Orange County, Vermont, is the town of Yoscama, nearly invisible among the Oaxacan mountains, with less than 50 inhabitants, condemned to oblivion. The distance, the climate, and the scarcity of resources are all one story of many, where the lack of opportunities clings to the planting of beans and corn as an act of survival. When I spoke with Margarita, she had only arrived in these Saxon lands less than a year ago. Here, she was awaited by the inhospitable weather, the pandemic, and the eternal nostalgia for her place of origin.

Margarita is from near San Antonio del Monte Verde Teposcolula, Oaxaca, a community located in the heart of the mountains. In her own words:

> I belong to Colonia Reforma, also known in our Mixtec language as "Yoscama." My town has less than 50 inhabitants. My neighborhood is close to the municipality, about 30 minutes on foot. It is one of the smallest neighborhoods in the municipality, with very few resources. All of us in the town are peasants, we work on a plot so that we can at least have tortillas and beans.

Margarita told me about the lack of resources in her community:

> In my neighborhood there is no store, no school, no hospitals, nor any clinics to attend to our health. There is nowhere to go shopping, nothing. In order to go to school we have to walk more than 30 minutes to reach the municipality. Not through streets or anything, it's all mountain and dirt roads.
>
> In my family there are eight of us. I have my parents and five sisters, one of whom is 17 years old and the other three are under 10 years old. I have an eight-year-old brother. My parents,

like everyone else, are farmers and are dedicated to planting corn, beans, and vegetables. All of this is only for the family, there aren't enough crops for more, since others plant the same and it is difficult to sell the products. I am the oldest of my sisters.

Margarita is twenty years old and she decided to emigrate and come to Vermont in order to "be able to help with the groceries at home, and so that my family can eat a little better." Margarita arrived 11 months ago, at the height of the harshness of winter and the outbreak of the pandemic. For her, her hands are her strength, she says: "I depend on them to support me and my family. My hands are now the pantry for my family in Oaxaca, so to speak."

Getting all the way out here wasn't as difficult for her as it was for others because she came with a work visa:

Well, the truth is that it wasn't very difficult for me to come here since I came with a work visa that I processed in Monterrey. I made two attempts to come. Well, the first one wasn't easy because there were many questions on the forms and I didn't know how to answer them. That's why I didn't pass the interview and they denied me the visa. The second one was easier for me, since due to COVID-19 the interview was written and it became easier for me and a person helped me answer the questions correctly.

My trip was very long since I had to travel to a city that was three hours away from my town just to take a bus that left for Mexico City. The ticket cost me $400, it was very expensive. I had never been out of Oaxaca and I was very sad. From Mexico City, I took another bus that took me to Monterrey, which cost me more than $1,000. Once I was in Monterrey, I stayed in a hotel for more than a week because there were complications with the procedures there. To get through those procedures I had to wait more than eight months. The second time in

> Monterrey, after I already had my visa approved, we took a long car trip with seven other women. The trip took a long time on the road to Indiana, more than 30 hours. We only made stops to go to the bathroom at the gas stations and to buy any little thing to eat to endure the journey until we arrived. I worked there for three months and then decided to catch up with my husband who was here on a dairy farm in Vermont. He sent for me with a *raidero* and yes, it scared me because I didn't know anyone. What reassured me was that my husband knew my location and as such was aware of where I was. That trip was also very long, more than 13 hours.
>
> But it has been very difficult adapting myself to this cold, especially in the mornings when it feels so harsh and your bones ache. Back in my town I never felt so cold.

Margarita works part-time on the farm and she covers the shifts for her colleagues who get sick, but to help herself some more she also makes food and sells it to her housemates and those living in other houses. She commented to me about it:

> With the food sale, I help my husband pay for the expenses here, such as the rent for the house and the utilities. Whatever money is left over we send to both my family and his parents in Oaxaca. I sell lunch and dinner every day. It feels nice to be able to eat together and that they like Oaxacan food; it's like being in Mexico. I make the tortillas by hand and that is what they like the most. The paisa gets me the flour to make these snacks. (Margarita, interview, March 4, 2021)

The hands of Victoria and Margarita are hands that speak of a sense of community and love. With the art of cooking they alleviate their countrymen's yearning in very foreign and distant lands. They are women's hands that calm nostalgia.

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *Anglo-America*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Chapter V

The "American Dream," a Dream Shattered

In 1931, historian and writer James Truslow Adams wrote the book *The Epic of America* and gave birth to the concept of the "American Dream":

> The American Dream is that dream of a land where life should be better, richer, and more plentiful for all, with opportunities for everyone according to their ability or achievement. It is a dream of a social order in which every man and woman will be able to attain the highest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or their position. (Truslow, A. & Schneiderman, H., 1931)

The American Dream has its roots in the Declaration of Independence, which states that "all men are created equal", and that every man/woman has the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This dream is full of lyricism and utopia for the citizens of this country and even more so for those who emigrate for an idol that stands on clay foundations.

On August 28, 1963, under an immense, blue sky, more than 250,000 people gathered near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. to demonstrate for jobs and freedom. Martin Luther King stood before them to share his dream and said:

> Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. (Luther, K. M., n.d.)

But the dream that the United States promises migrant dairy workers is quite different. It is a dislocated dream of broken promises, fragility, fear, marginalization, exploitation, and inequity. The only thing it fulfills is the perpetuation of structural vulnerability, shredding one's identity.

The book *EL PAÍS DE UNO*, by political expert and journalist Denise Dresser, begins with an extraordinary prologue that shakes the reader; "The Task Assigned to Us." It is a timeless prologue, and it speaks of a Mexico that oscillates between "sad sadness" and the disparity of those who "shop at Saks Fifth Avenue and ignore those who beg on the streets a few meters away." (Dresser, D., 2018, pp. 14) Dresser depicts Mexico as the country of "palliative and minimalist reforms." This seems to be a Mexico that is always attached to the vices and practices of the past which are also those of today, those of a Mexico where "transparency advances, but opacity persists." "The Task Assigned to Us" is an implacable gaze that scrutinizes every corner, every betrayed hope, every hemorrhaging fissure, where in the words of Dresser, "the country always loses…Mexicans jump into the void from Chapultepec Castle and don't manage to escape. For them, it is better to remain silent. It is better to ignore. It is better to emigrate." (Dresser, D., 2018)

Indeed, this Mexico that Dresser exposes mercilessly vomits up its citizens who cross over to the other side, de-citizenizing them in search of the great and deceitful promise of the American Dream. This dream promises only one possibility: the hope of returning to one's place of origin, the place of catastrophes, of chronic disease where these patterns are rooted and sentenced to remain *per saecula saeculorum.*

Dresser also talks about the walls that Mexicans face in their own land. Walls that are impossible to bore through:

> There are walls-educational, cultural, social, corporate–built against them, hindering mobility. Impeding ascent. Preventing any sort of income. Of the poor. Of countrymen… Of those who would take advantage of real opportunities if they existed, and who cross the border–at a rate of 400,000 people a year–in search of them…A System that slows down a country's competitiveness in a globalized world…which feeds the exodus and the export of talent. That makes Mexico a country where one in five men between the ages of 26 and 35 lives in the United States… (Dresser, D., 2018, pp. 33)

In this way, faced with the impossibility of penetrating these walls of crude, rapacious, and disloyal capitalism and a government engorged with power and corruption, the impoverished leave and cling to the false promise of a dream that is nothing more than a grave. They emigrate terrified, thrust into uncertainty, into limbo, as fresh bait to feed the insatiable appetite of racism and of systemic violence. They are delusional fugitives seeking shelter from the poverty that skins them. They throw themselves into exile in a futile search for the promise of the American Dream, hoping for a land that will grant them a less undignified future.

Instead, it awaits them with prisons of isolation, marginalization, racism and exploitation.

I am talking about the hands of the survivors who left home, not because they wanted to, but because their home “became the mouth of a shark” (as the poem by Warsan Shire states). They fled with the aim of pursuing the American Dream that they have heard so many stories about. Instead, in their own words, this is what they have found: “My migrant hands remind me of where I come from and my dream is to return. I am not here because I want to be, but because I need to be.” (Pedro, interview, March 15, 2020) “The American dream does not have many privileges” (Aurelio, interview, October 5, 2020), “My life is there, not here.” (The *Paisa*, interview, April 8, 2021).

The American Dream, from the very voices of migrant workers of the Upper Valley dairy farms, is demystified, deconstructed, and transformed into a narrative of “the dream is not to stay, it is to return.” The testimonials below clearly reveal a dream different than the one that Truslow depicted, a dream that is reinvented in its entirety. The dream is reconfigured with the hope of returning to one’s home.

The Dream is to Return, the Testimonials

I do believe in the American Dream. It's worth everything. It is very beautiful here; I love the landscape. The farm people treat us well. My husband and I have almost finished building our house in Veracruz and we have helped our parents build theirs. We are already planning our return. For me, the dream is complete once we have been able to return. I close my eyes and see myself getting off the airplane to hug my child's face. That will be the complete dream. Ever since we left Mexico, we have dreamed of returning. That is the dream for me. (Lizbeth, interview, September 30, 2020)

I had heard the phrase the "American Dream" before. I would hear them say "people leave for their American Dream" and they described being here as being your dream, that you are okay, you live well, and you send your money home. But I never heard them say you had to work so much in order to be able to send money. I never heard them mention racism, everything you have to put up with, that you are not free, that you live in fear. My dream is to not be here. My dream is to work hard to build a stable future with my husband and baby. To give him the best, ensure he lacks nothing, and give him an education. In my family there were so many of us, so I had a limited education. I don't want money to be an excuse for not studying. We want his inheritance to be an education, and for him to be prepared. And I work hard, very hard, to make it happen. The American Dream is not what I used to hear. (Victoria, interview, November 10, 2020)

Yes, I do believe in a dream of being able to be better off financially, although it is a dream that is accompanied by affliction, suffering, and fear in order to achieve it. The fear I have is of running into an immigration officer who will stop my dream. The suffering is not being able to be close to my family, my daughter, and my brothers. The time I've lost with my daughter is time I will never be able to recover. My dream is not to stay here, it is to do a good job, save some money, be thankful, and then be able to return. (Paco, interview, October 29, 2020)

Yes, that is my dream, because you come here with the goal of making money. There are opportunities, we are good workers and that is why we come: to work. Here on the farm, there are times when we work 74 hours a week, but I'm not afraid of the work. The dream is to be able to return with a little money in my pocket and a to build a house. That is the dream. (Gabriel, interview, October 19, 2020)

My biggest dream when deciding to come here was to build a house together with my husband, as well as a small business in my town. I also wanted to help my family in whatever way I

could. My dream is to return to Oaxaca soon to be able to start a family with my husband. (Margarita, interview, March 2, 2021)

For me, the American Dream goes like the song that says "Beautiful and dear Mexico, if I die far from you, let them say that I am sleeping and have them bring me here. Let them say that I am sleeping and have them bring me here, beautiful and dear Mexico, if I die far from you." The American Dream exists for those who can take advantage of it. It is a dream full of opportunities. I was raised in a family where we were taught that wherever you have the willpower and determination, you can grow. Because of our government, we need to leave. You don't want to emigrate, but the government creates that need. The United States would not be great without us, for we are a work force that does not rest, so that families can do better. Those of us who are here know how much life costs here. There are people who say "they earn in dollars" but it is not enough money to live off of here. That is the truth because life here costs in dollars. I am proud to have my two flags. I love my country, but I live here out of necessity. Not by choice. At least I have friends back home and someone will bring us flowers when we die. I miss my homeland. (The *Paisa*, interview, January 25, 2021)

I completely believe in the American Dream. Yes, completely. The United States offers opportunities to progress, opportunities to work. In that way, we can help the family. The first step is to buy land and build a house. I remember when I was a kid, I would see the people who came back to our town in pickup trucks after having crossed to the other side. The dream is always to return. Not to stay here. (Aurelio, interview, October 6, 2020)

Yes, I do believe in the American Dream because thanks to it, I have been able to help my family, my son, and my grandmothers. I like my job. I work a lot and I am very grateful… because thanks to this I support my family and my son. I like the scenery here in Vermont and in New Hampshire. I like how tidy the farm is with its work systems. I like that the roads are clean, that people are generally clean and take care of this landscape. The people I have dealt with have been very respectful. I know there is racism, but there is also a lot of racism in Mexico. If I had the opportunity to do other things, I would, such as learning to drive and to learn the language. But there is no time for anything other than work. My dream is to return to Mexico and be with my son family, and to start my own little business to keep working and living. I have been able to take advantage of my time here. The day I leave, I'll leave happy because I will have managed to help my son and my family, which is the most important thing. (Jazmín, interview, November 2, 2020)

I believed in the American Dream for the first two years, then it became a nightmare. When you dream, it's something

> beautiful, and you don't know what you're going to face, but the dream that you live here is different from what they tell us. They never told me I was going to live in fear. I didn't know that I was going to give up 10 years of my life, years that I can never relive. It hurts me to see my dad so ill and to realize I can't get back the time. Those who have not lived through the American Dream believe that it is very easy to earn the dollars that are sent. It has not been easy. It stops being an American Dream when you realize that you are locked up, caged, always terrified. It ceases to be an American Dream when one pays taxes without seeing the benefits of paying them. Today more than ever the idea that "he who does not risk it all does not win" echoes in my head. We risk our lives crossing the border to provide a better life for our family in Mexico. I cannot understand the American Dream, that is someone else's dream. I am happy, and I have such great happiness in my chest that nobody knows about because I already have a return date. Soon I will be with my loved ones and that will be a dream, a party. (Martín, interview, January 4, 2020)

The dream shared by most of our farm friends is to return. That is the dream that keeps their hope beating and alive. Their construction of the American Dream is, paradoxically, to return. I am referring to the dream of hands that speak of incessant workdays, exceeding 70 hours a week. In a recent conversation with Martín, he told me that 10 years ago, when he first arrived, there were weeks when he worked more than 80 hours and that he didn't say anything to the boss "because I had a lot of fear and I didn't want them to fire me," or in Paco's words "it also seems like we don't get tired." Because the word "work" is repeated *ad nauseam* in these stories.

For these hands, without the right to rest, the milking parlor is one more room in their home. These hands, with a voice of work and strength, are hands that pay taxes but do not see the benefits. Invisible hands without access to health care and education. Invisible hands that have no right to rest or dream. Hands condemned to the misfortune brought on by the perpetuity of structural and systemic violence. Hands that are made invisible by the system, but still have strong voices of resilience, dignity, sacrifice, and love for family. Hands that work, work, work.

In the heart of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, just 30 minutes from the Canadian border, there is a dairy farm with 700 cows. It is in the middle of nowhere, in one of those places forgotten by the gods, a place that perhaps accidentally fell from their hands without notice. Ten Mexicans and two Guatemalans work there. In mid-February 2021, during one of the peaks of the pandemic, I gave a ride to Abel, a native of Martínez de la Torre, Veracruz, to a new job he would be starting on this farm. During the hour and 45-minute drive, being battered by the severe winter wind in the darkness of Vermont at 4:30 p.m., and with a lack of cell phone reception, Abel shared his story:

"Just like many Mexicans, I came here in search of the dream," Abel's Story

> I feel good because just like many Mexicans that cross the border, we came in search of the dream. My dream is not to stay here. My dream is to return to my family once I have the land to cultivate there.

Abel is the youngest in a family of six children, four men and two women. The three older brothers are all in Vermont working on different farms. He arrived at the age of 14 and is now 23. In his own words, "my life here has been a life of working a lot just to be able to go home."

> We saw things in the desert: shoes, pants, and skeletons. I began my journey on a bus from my town to Reynosa, Tamaulipas. I came with my cousin, but when we got to Reynosa we parted ways. I didn't make it through the first time; we got caught and were sent back. On the second try, my cousin was in the other group. In my group, 16 people managed to pass through, but towards the end of crossing the river, the women who came with us weren't able to, and in the end, there were only six of us. You had to walk through the river by

taking your clothes off and holding them up high so they wouldn't get wet. *La migra* also punctured one of the inflatable boats that the other group was coming on, and I saw two companions drown with no one who could help them. I remember the screams of those of us on the shore and everything we said to the police. They did nothing. After crossing the river, we arrived in McAllen, Texas.

I knew how to swim, but I was obviously very scared. The coyotes got cocky and threatened us and treated us badly. We crossed the desert, but our food was not enough. I remember everything we saw in the desert those nine days we walked: shoes, pants, and skeletons. Those images are fixed in me. The two women who came with us stayed behind in a hole. The food in the desert was not enough; we were eating the food that we found thrown away by others who were probably chased by migration and, just like us, threw everything and ran. When they picked us up past the checkpoint, they took us to a house in Houston belonging to someone I didn't know. We spent one night there. The second night I was kidnapped by some people who came presenting themselves with police badges. They came in and woke us up. They grabbed me, put me in the truck and told me I had to pay another $3,000. We were forced out of bed at gunpoint while the people who took care of us in the house we were staying at were beaten and tied up. We were taken to another house and left in the basement for about 10 days, locked up. I couldn't even see the light, everything was dark. They took information from notebooks where everything was written down, detailing what our relatives had paid and they contacted my brother. He had to give another $3,000 to have me released. They took advantage and charged more than usual, even as the trip itself in 2012 had cost me nearly $14,000. It took me a year of my salary to pay it off.

Abel shares that those 10 days of imprisonment still hound him and rob him of his dream to this day.

> After that, I went with another coyote to his house, where we waited for my cousin and we came to Vermont. I think it was more than 45 hours. I immediately got to work on a farm. I worked 11-12 hours each day with only one day off per week. Then I moved to another dairy farm and stayed for eight months because they treated us badly. They rushed us all the time. It was a farm with 3,000 cows and 17 workers. I was paid $9.50 an hour before taxes. Five of us lived in a two-bedroom trailer home. There was no safety in those trailers. It was not until one of the trailers burned down that each of us went our own way. I went to another farm near South Royalton with another cousin who helped me, and I stayed there for over a year. Afterwards, I changed to another farm in which I worked at for several years, until now that I am going north. (Abel, interview, February 22, 2021)

For Abel, the cold has been challenging, but his eyes water when he talks about his family; “I have always missed my family. I need them the most. I miss the climate because it is not easy to get used to the cold.”

“It feels like hell coming over here.” From La Unión, Guatemala to the Farms in the Northeast Kingdom, Vermont: José’s story

José is a native of Zacapa, Guatemala, from a town called La Unión that is more than 100 miles away from Guatemala City, the capital. Located in the northeastern part of Guatemala, Zacapa borders Honduras. The temperature there fluctuates between 60 and 85°F year-round. Zacapa is located in the Granadilla Mountains, in the Merendón mountain range, famous for its natural springs. La Unión is known as “The Oasis of the East” for its wooded areas. In his country, José was dedicated to fieldwork;

> We are five brothers; I am the second and they all work in the fields. There, we plant coffee, corn, and beans, as well as bananas. It was not easy for me to leave my family; it was very sad, but I was forced out by the great poverty that exists in Guatemala.

La Unión is nearly 3700 miles from the Northeast Kingdom, Vermont; a considerable distance. There’s a dead cow on this dairy farm in the middle of nowhere. José works 72 hours a week and traveled 3700 miles to conquer the American Dream, which in his own words “felt like hell to come here”. That hell, like a frenzy, was not an obstacle for José to reach the merciless cold of the north.

José is about to complete seven years since he crossed the border between Mexico and Guatemala and later, the US border. He first came to Philadelphia to do construction work for seven months, and then a *raidero* brought him to Derby, Vermont.

For José, his hands are bread for his family; “My hands are my movement, they are my everything in sustaining my family, I am here for them.”

His crossing through the two borders lasted 40 days:

> It was very difficult, but with faith one can always move forward. In my case, I had to cross two borders. I came in 2016. You suffer a lot to come here. I went through the desert and the truth is I suffered. You come with two conditions: you can make it or die halfway. It is difficult to carry food and water while walking so much. There are times where we spent entire days enduring hunger. When people gave the coyotes the money they brought with them to cross, the *coyotes* bought food whenever they felt like it. We were always at their mercy. It feels like hell to be able to get here.
>
> One endures a lot of hunger, entire days of hardship, hunger, and thirst. It took me more than 40 days, especially because of the drug traffickers' checkpoints. They lock you up because they are always fighting for their territory while settling their affairs. It's very scary.

For José, the dream is not to stay in the United States:

> The dream is to return and decide to build your little house, with a little money brought home, so you're able to eat and continue on. That is the dream: to take home a little money and be able to help your family live better on the daily bread. It's a dream that makes one fight just to be able to return one day. The dream is to progress and be with the family once more. (José, interview, April 9, 2021)

The American Dream pursued by the migrant friends of the Upper Valley dairy farms has migrated with them, wrapping them up in the bitter cold of Vermont winter. In their loneliness and longing, it nourishes their souls and also their bodies. The dream is not here, as they brought it on their backs, and it will return with them when they have enough money to go back home and hug their loved ones. They thirst to return to their homelands. It seems that this "dream of theirs" is the

light that appears at the end of the migratory tunnel. The dream is nowhere to be found. Neither here nor there. The word dream has been stripped of its meaning. The dream they have conjured is a dissonant one with a new, somewhat schizophrenic meaning. The dream is to return to the place from which they have been expelled. What is the dream?

Photo by María Clara De Greiff Lara

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *The Pre-Columbian Golden Age*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Chapter VI

COVID-19, Quarantines of Poverty and Poetry as a Space for Freedom

When invited to Joe Biden's presidential inauguration on January 20th, 2021, the young North American poet Amanda Gorman read the poem, *The Hill We Climb*. With this poem, she opened a sacred space of hope for poetry to reclaim the place it has always deserved.

The poem has some extremely valuable lines, and while it is not a poem about migration, it illustrates resilience brilliantly:

> When day comes we ask ourselves,
> 'where can we find light in this never-ending shade,'
> the loss we carry,
> a sea we must wade?
> We've braved the belly of the beast. (Gorman, A., 2021)

Those that flee their countries abandon themselves to their faith and hope, in search of a trace of light at the end of the tunnel of all the violence that expels them from their homelands. They take shelter in the faintest glimmer of hope from their hands' daily work, loyal companions that color the light at the end of the tunnel: a return to their homes. As Nelson Mandela would say, "Hope is a powerful weapon and one [that] no one power on earth can deprive you of."

In another of her poems, titled "Amordura" (a combination of the Spanish words for "love" and "lasting"), Gorman says, "If poetry is making a world from sight, being a poet is making beauty from the wound."

I sure hope so, because poetry is that intimate space of absolute freedom, a terrain of discovery to transcend frontiers, a possibility of reconfiguring oneself, of reinventing one's own story. In so many ways, we are immigrants: nomads, citizens of our inner worlds, traveling in the search to colonize unknown paths, territories, and lands. This search is precisely the pursuit of poetry: a space for freedom where anything is possible.

For Paco, who is originally from Pachuca, Hidalgo, writing poetry is "taking a breath in the quiet of the last instant of the day and exhaling the poem." Outside of his arduous work schedule of 12-hour days, 6 days a week, immersed in the whispers of nostalgia, Paco writes and publishes poetry in both English and Spanish.

Vermont

Stunned
I stared
your mountains blush
about to expose
the nakedness of their forests

It is the daring winter
shedding your leafiness,
stripping your forests of their clothes
hielding them with an ephemeral candid white color

how can one explain
before your gallantry is once again upon us
with an intense emerald green,
your trees will give us the sweetness of their soul

A landscape in its full green bloom!

Stunned
I stared
at your mountains. (Mendoza, 2021)

Poverty

Fear shudders before you

You strip life away

You mutilate with unforgiveness

Damn you!

You emerged

before I was born

Your presence is inescapable

To disdain you would be useless

It would only make my sentence eternal. (Mendoza, 2024)

“I’ve spent five years in quarantine from the American system,” Paco’s Story

Paco is originally from Hidalgo, where he worked in a bank until about six years ago. Paco has an accounting degree, and he also spent two years in a seminary with the intention of becoming a priest. After working almost fifteen years in the bank, he was fired. In despair, he planned his departure for the United States.

For Paco—or “Uncle,” as his coworkers at the farm graciously call him—his hands are the foundation that support his work:

> In these times of the pandemic, [my hands] remind me that I can’t be close to my family nor to my friends. They’re economic stability. For me, my hands mean embracing my daughter’s hands. My hands mean the work to build her future. They’re the happiness and the instrument that have helped me accomplish my achievements. I’ve spent five years with a longing which has turned into a daily nostalgia for the lost time with my family that I’ll never get back. This time has taught me to value actual quality time with my family, to understand that conflicts aren’t forever.
>
> I haven’t felt a great difference in my daily routine during the pandemic. I’ve spent five years in quarantine from the American system, because we already live isolated. We have the same lifestyle: we didn’t stop going anywhere because we didn’t go anywhere to begin with. With the quarantine, Americans are now feeling the fear and the isolation that we’ve felt since we arrived in their country. I’ve already known the quarantine for five years, and I know that they’re longer than forty days.

> Knowing that they were going to fire me, my coworker at the bank told me about a job at a dairy farm in Vermont, and he put me in contact with a relative that was working at the farm. I had no idea what awaited me. So, I flew to New York, and on my third day there, I called the coworker's friend. He told me, 'Yeah, there was an opening at the farm, but it was just filled.' That was one of the saddest nights of my life. I was offered a job in Buffalo, and the person that contacted me about it told me, 'You have no idea what I'm offering you; what I'm offering you is filthy. You're going to sleep next to the cows. You're going to bathe with them, and there's only going to be one wall separating them from the cot where you're going to sleep. That's what I can offer you.' I cried like a baby. They told me that they were going to charge me $1,200 to take me from New York to Buffalo. I called the coworker's brother back, and he said, 'Don't worry, I already talked with the boss, and he told me that you should come here, and that he'll help set you up at another farm.' I only had $120. I ate only cookies and juice because I didn't know how to order things. One day I met a Hispanic man in Brooklyn that sold pizza slices and he said to me, 'You're hungry, right?' I told him, 'Yes,' and he gave me a pizza. Later I took a bus here, and along the way, they gave me the news that somebody had just left the farm and that the job was mine.

Paco successfully paid for his daughter's college degree in Mexico, after working an average of 70 hours a week at the dairy farm - checking the milking systems, making sure the machinery is calibrated and clean, and that it meets the quality standards of the company that buys the milk. In the farm where he works, there are more than 1000 cows, and they milk 200 cows an hour.

Paco is in his third semester at a Massachusetts university, after obtaining his GED and diploma from the State of Vermont. Paco's driving purpose has been to save money to pay for his daughter's college tuition and prepare to start up a small artisanal beer company upon his return to Mexico.

He talks of the importance of learning the English language:

> Arriving somewhere where you can't even order food is not pleasant, and during all this time I've kept my mind busy. I was able to do high school online, and a year ago I received my diploma and GED through the State of Vermont. That hasn't changed my way of thinking, but it has changed how satisfied I feel with myself. My boss realized I was interested in learning and helped me to qualify for a different position here at the farm.

Currently, Paco is collaborating with a program at Cornell University to disperse a study plan to other migrant workers at the dairy farms.

> This project intends to say, "I'm a certified technician in my area," that we're not only milkers or calf-tenders, but also qualified and certified technicians. So that tomorrow, if a worker wants to move to another farm they can say, "I don't only know how to work; I also studied it." (Paco, interview, October 26, 2020)

On January 17th, 2021, Paco suffered an accident at the farm due to the harsh winter conditions. He slipped on some ice in the milking parlor and fractured his radius. His right arm was in a cast for three months. Unfortunately, it didn't heal completely, and the doctor decided to perform surgery in October of 2021.

At one of his post-op appointments, Paco went to the radiology department for an x-ray and suffered a near-fatal heart attack. He was immediately taken to the emergency room and diagnosed with considerable blockage in three of his arteries. Using catheters, they placed stents in each of the three arteries, bringing the blood flow back up to normal levels. On October 29th, Paco once again

entered the operating room for a second intervention, in which they removed a blood clot and placed a balloon-expandable transcatheter to open up the artery, achieving 75% of normal blood flow.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the Thetford Hill Congregational Church, the Thetford Food Shelf, the FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund, and friends of the community, Paco has been able to go to his cardiovascular rehabilitation appointments and to buy food. The costs have been daunting; despite having paid taxes for five years, Paco doesn't have adequate access to healthcare, nor to health insurance that could support him in such an emergency. In a recent visit to the farm, I saw him strong, thin and rejuvenated, thriving in his optimism, working six days a week once again, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.

“In Mexico, we were in poverty’s quarantine, and that is hard!” Gabriel’s Story

The poem, *The Emigrants, Now*, from Uruguayan author, Eduardo Galeano, speaks of the “castaways of globalization”: “In immense caravans, the fugitives march from the impossible life… They have been dispossessed of their jobs and their land… Many flee from wars, but many more flee from exterminated salaries and devastated soils.” (Galeano, E., n.d.)

When I read this poem, I think about the life and stoicism of each and every story I’ve come to know of the migrant workers of the Upper Valley’s dairy farms. I think about their strides, their exiles, and their fears as a driving force. Gabriel, who’s originally from Martínez de la Torre, Veracruz, arrived in the Upper Valley seven years ago. For him, the quarantine and the seclusion of the pandemic mean nothing:

> For us, the daily routine stays the same, but before we would leave occasionally to go to the store or to buy supplies. Now they’re very empty. With the quarantine, we almost never go out. This quarantine is quite different from the one we lived through in Mexico. In Mexico, we were in poverty’s quarantine, and *that* is hard! The quarantine here doesn’t feel quite as difficult, but we’re still isolated.

As with all these stories, his is greater than fiction or any action movie.

> It’s already been seven years since I arrived. I came through Reynosa. I tried to pass over six times, and five times they sent me back. Reynosa was super dangerous, because the zones are claimed by Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel. I spent a month trying to pass. My greatest fear was the river because I don’t know how to swim. We managed to cross the river and hid in a

wild boar's den, all of us packed together in there. The sixth time was going to be it because the *coyotes* and guides knew the route that's also known as "the special route, the marijuana route." I was already disheartened because when we were floating on inner tubes in the river, a police boat had punctured two of the tubes, and right in front of my own eyes, I saw two of our group members drown. I saw how the border police passed by in their boat and hit a kid and his uncle, and they died there, drowned. That mental image will accompany me for the rest of my days. It was really messed up. Extremely discouraging.

In my group there were twelve men and two women. We walked almost exclusively at night, jumping fences up to three meters in height. On one of those, the spotlights passed over us and everybody scrambled. I grabbed the *coyote*'s backpack that he had thrown, and later I found two others that belonged to the *coyote*'s helpers. There were now nine of us in total. In the backpack there was an orange, a Milky Way bar, a Red Bull, a can of Goya sausages, and a flour tortilla. We then walked for five days.

One day we crossed a six-lane highway, where cars flew by at full speed. We stuck close to the rail on the shoulder, and finally our contact passed by us in a red Mustang. We sprinted to throw ourselves in the car and tear off. I hopped in the trunk with one of the others. From there it was seven hours until Houston. It took me two months to arrive here. It cost me $10,000, and with a year's work I was able to pay off the loan. (Gabriel, interview, October 19, 2020)

Gabriel works 74 hours each week, sometimes more. For him his hands are great tools, "without hands there is nothing. They are the essential part, the work, a symbol of friendship; for me they're my life."

Gabriel misses a full life, "if there's something that I yearn for, it's freedom, living without so much fear."

Gabriel's hands are tireless, experienced and constant. Hands that never give up.

When asked about the pandemic's impact on their daily lives, the farmworkers' most common response, coincidentally, is that it hasn't had a large effect. The majority emphasized the seclusion and isolation to which they had been subjected to since their arrival in these northern lands.

> Here we haven't felt an impact. We only work here on the farm; we don't go anywhere. There isn't anywhere to go. We care for each other a great deal. I live alone. (Gladys, interview, February 15, 2021)

> Initially, it affected me a lot, because ever since my son was born a little over a year ago, I haven't worked full-time at the farm. I cook and sell food at other farms, and the farm owners prohibited me from entering at the beginning of the pandemic. My sales dropped significantly. Now, with the precaution measures, they let me enter again. I don't feel a great difference because here we live really isolated lives. I'm always working. (Victoria, interview, November 10, 2020)

During the pandemic, Mariana lost a day in her weekly work schedule; "I've resented it a lot. If before we left the farm just a little bit, now we leave even less. But since I've been here, I've been isolated, so my life continues just the same." (Mariana, interview, October 12, 2020)

> For me, my way of seeing life has changed. Before, I didn't notice how life smiles at you. I took it for granted. Now, I place more value in taking care of myself and being able to help others so that we'll all be better. But there's a lot of stress: I go out with fear. Before I felt calmer going out because we have a lot of family here on the other farms, and on our days off we would always go to visit family. Now it's different. In any case, here we live isolated: we almost never go out, and now even less. (Lizbeth, interview, September 30, 2020)

It hasn't affected me at all. No, because we almost never go out, we don't have a car. We live on the farm, and from the house we walk to the packing plant and the farm. But whenever we left to send money home, well, the whole world had on face masks. And everything looked really empty. We live very isolated lives. (Jazmín, interview, November 2, 2020)

Here, nothing has changed, because our routine is the same. We don't go out. Our work continues unaffected. We've forbidden ourselves from meeting up with the paisano community of the neighboring farms. Initially, things were becoming scarce, but now everything has normalized. Thank God that we have a job where we can continue working all the time. (Martín, interview, January 4, 2021)

No, nothing has changed: we live and work on the farm. We don't leave as it is. We've been isolated since we arrived, so I don't feel a difference. I work the same as always, almost 74 hours each week. There isn't time to think about the virus. (Marcos, interview, May 12, 2020)

COVID-19 has affected my family in my town in Oaxaca, because now, even though they want to go out to work, there isn't any work. The town's resources have diminished significantly, and there's not much food. In the clinics nearby, there aren't medications available for people infected with COVID. Those hospitalized in the city have more resources. But thank God that in my family we haven't had anybody catch COVID, despite catching some other illnesses. We're accustomed to curing ourselves with medicinal herbs and teas. With that, we continue alleviating our pain. Here in Vermont, well, I don't even know. As it is, we don't go out anywhere. From home we go to the farm and that's it. And none of our coworkers have gotten sick. (Margarita, interview, March 2, 2021)

Despite the fact that the workers on the various dairy farms have felt isolated since their arrival to the US, this helpless condition of invisibility was transformed at the start of the pandemic into a notoriety that made them hyper visible and extremely vulnerable.

During the Trump presidency, the patrols of ICE intensified, especially in the northern counties of Franklin, Orleans, and Essex, which lie along the Canadian border. The ICE and border patrol agents operate anywhere within 100 miles from the US border, and they can detain, interrogate, and search anybody without reasonable suspicion or a warrant within 25 miles of the border. They can also have access to private property without prior notice. In Vermont, many of the border patrol arrests during this past presidency were directed specifically at migrant dairy farmworkers, confining them to even more isolation and seclusion. The milking parlors are therefore an extension of their homes, where they spend up to 16 hours on their shifts. The parlor is a refuge that protects them from being deported, while simultaneously being a space of exploitation through the arduous working conditions. The milking parlor is a hideout which sentences them to a harsh invisibility. The system orchestrates this perverse dichotomy, whose tensions between the opposites of invisibility and notoriety were exacerbated at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the pandemic, dairy farmworkers had grown accustomed to oscillating between the tension of invisible borders and the tensions they are subjected to by their marginalized condition. This became more pronounced during the initial outbreak of the pandemic due to the scarcity of face masks. In those first months, both hand sanitizer and face masks were nearly impossible to find. Many of the workers' accounts coincided on receiving dirty looks for not wearing face masks when they would go to the supermarket. With respect to this, Aurelio told me, "They look at us with disgust because we don't have masks, but they're nowhere to be found." (Aurelio, interview, October 6, 2020)

In addition to being easily identifiable before the pandemic, on account of the color of their skin and their language in a population that's predominantly white and English-speaking, being without face masks made them even more visible, exacerbating their deeply rooted fears of leaving the farms.

In the following chapter, I will talk about how FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund was born, like a spark of relief in the immediacy of an unprecedented pandemic.

José Clemente Orozco, Panel *The Modern Migration of the Spirit*, The Epic of American Civilization, fresco, 1932-34, Hood Museum of Art Dartmouth, Orozco Room, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Chapter VII

FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund Is Born

"Awareness is everything that,
come what may, brings us to oppose
all that threatens the dignity of life"
André Bretón

The origins of what is currently the FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund date back to the year 2017, when professors Israel Reyes and Douglas Moody (of the Department of Latin American, Latino, & Caribbean Studies (LALACS) at Dartmouth College), designed the class "LATS 37: Migrant Lives & Labor in the Upper Valley." The content of this class intended to bring students closer to the culture, social relations, and political economies concerning the migrants on the dairy farms of the Upper Valley. The course had in-person classes, as well as fieldwork, with a study plan of assigning the students to teach English as a Second Language (ESL), which today continues via Zoom due to the pandemic.

After noticing the multiple necessities of our migrant friends, the students, with the counsel of the professors, formed FUERZA Migrant Outreach. Their mission was to establish lasting relations of trust with the farmworkers, and in this manner empower them with information about their rights and assist them on matters of health and learning English:

> FUERZA was founded with the purpose of building durable and reciprocal relations with the migrant workers and provide invaluable resources that will enable them to be their own self-defense. Our immediate objective is to provide classes in English with the aim of facilitating interactions between the community members and the migrant workers.[8]

[8]https://journeys.dartmouth.edu/lats37/mission-statement-mision/

Given that the class was only taught for one term each year, the outlook of FUERZA Migrant Outreach was fragile, which left the organization's responsibility to fall on the shoulders of some students committed to social justice. In addition, it lacked "official" recognition in the eyes of the institution, due to the fact that it was conceived during Donald Trump's presidency, when the demons of racism, the persecution of migrants, and xenophobia, among many other evils, were rampant. FUERZA existed in that gray and fragile zone in which the institution had to take care not to shelter a student organization that intervened in the already tense and polarized subject of migration. The atmosphere was suffocating, and FUERZA Migrant Outreach, if it ever breathed at all, was a wick that was extinguishing.

In March of 2020, the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, that unknown and ravenous monster that undermined global health, arrived to remind us, above all else, of our extreme fragility and impermanence.

It was then that three Dartmouth students, Gabe Onate, Juan Quinonez, and Keren Valenzuela; a student from Thetford Academy, Frank Loveland; and this writer decided to meet virtually, each from our own island; Gabe from California, Keren from Texas, Juan from Mississippi, and Frank and I from Vermont; to trace a plan, act promptly, and not leave forgotten our migrant friends from the dairy farms.

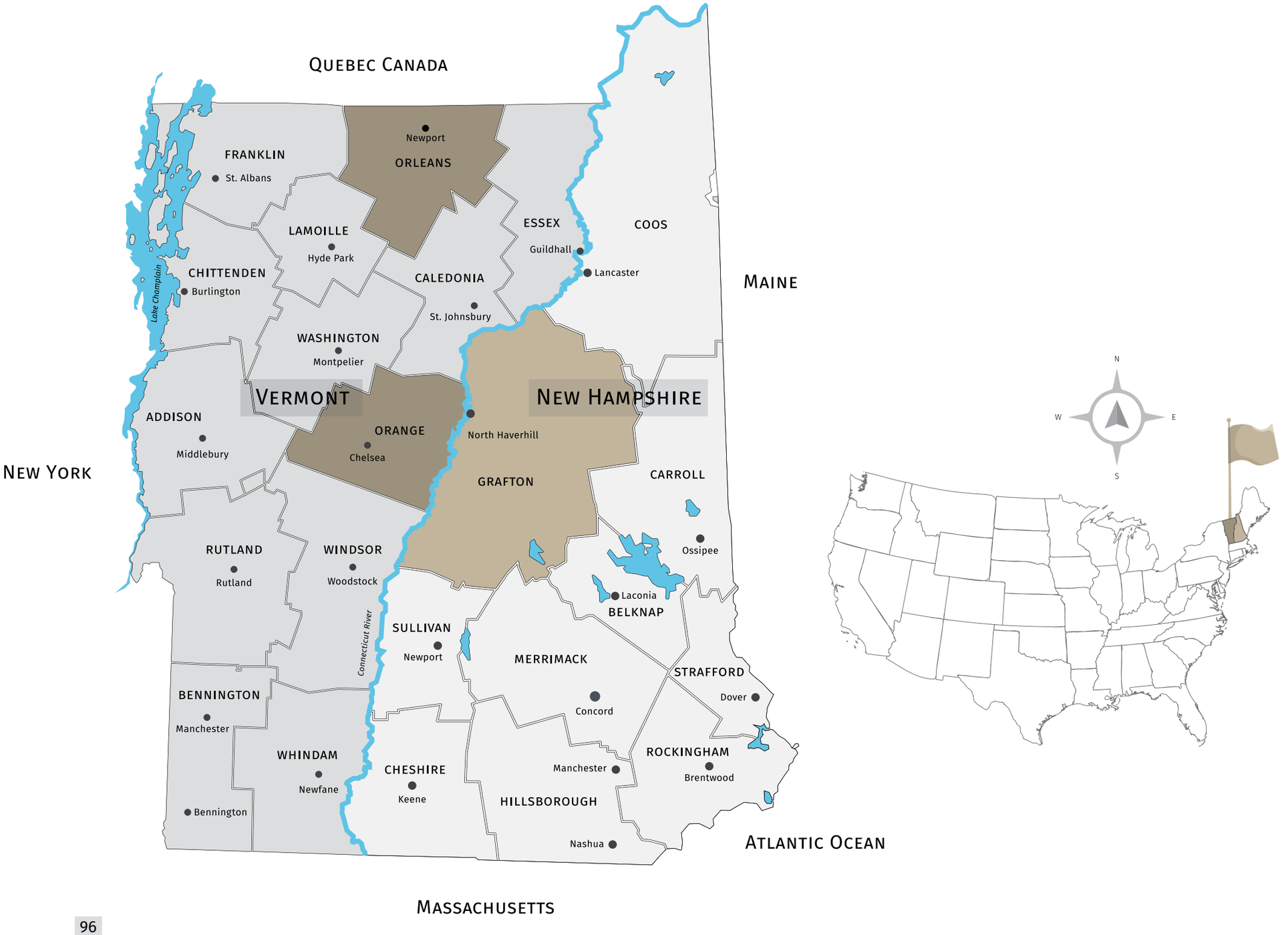
We then founded FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund, with the purpose of constructing horizontal relations with a social group buried in the shadows of invisibility. FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund was born without a trace of paternalism, and even less a trace of charity, which reinforces the hierarchies of inequity. FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund arose from an empathetic gaze, creating a brotherhood that latched on to the stories of breakdown and collapse within an extremely resilient population. From its beginning, the organization walked hand in hand with our migrant friends, with a sense of equity, appreciation, and respect.

With the fury of the pandemic charging at us, inhabited by stress and anguish over shattered certainties that come from the unknown, those of us who were in the area visited six dairy farms: four in Vermont (three in Orange County and one in Orleans County) and two in Grafton County, New Hampshire. We put the topic of the pandemic on the table, not to decide what the needs of our migrant friends were, but instead to listen to their fears, their uncertainties, and their worries with the advent of this new virus.

In the face of rampant misinformation, partly because COVID-19 was a new virus that we were learning about day by day, and also because of the outrageous nonsense that was circulating on social media, it was important to speak with the workers, aware of our mutual concerns and doubts regarding this threat. We were accompanied by the physician assistant, Michael Gaffney, who provided medical information that was available at that point in time. We also distributed multivitamins and nutritional supplements.

On these visits we confirmed that the majority of our friends didn't feel a great difference with the arrival of the pandemic, since "as it is, we live isolated." They were worried more for their relatives in Mexico and Central America. Additionally, they were greatly troubled due to their sudden hypervisibility: "They gave us dirty looks when we went to the store because we didn't have masks."

As I wrote in Chapter VI, the scarcity of masks exposed the workers of the dairy farms to a hypervisibility that they hadn't yet faced, at least not to this extent, making them more susceptible to the relentless gaze and scrutiny of the residents of Vermont and New Hampshire, where the population is mostly white.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Hyde Park
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Burlington
Lake Champlain
CALEDONIA
St. Johnsbury
WASHINGTON
Montpelier
VERMONT
NEW HAMPSHIRE
ADDISON
Middlebury
ORANGE
Chelsea
North Haverhill
GRAFTON
CARROLL
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BELKNAP
SULLIVAN
Newport
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MERRIMACK
Concord
STRAFFORD
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BENNINGTON
Manchester
WHINDAM
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Combining this scarcity of masks with the rural nature of the area, the friends from the farms were vulnerable to becoming too conspicuous. Thanks to the support of the parishioners of Thetford Hill Church, and to the generous donation of Gabe Onate's aunt, we managed to collect over 200 home-made masks, which we took to disperse among the different farms, along with medical gloves. Our friends told us that on many of the farms, their bosses mandated that they wear masks without considering the difficulty in obtaining them. Pressure to use masks had the workers very distressed. This was because the protocol did not seem to apply to everyone. Milk tanker drivers from out of state didn't wear masks, jeopardizing the already vulnerable health of the migrant workers.

At the same time, FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund kicked off a series of forums, roundtables and chats to enable the voices of the friends from the farms to be heard. In addition to bringing light to their existence, their presence, their working hands that speak, we sought to deconstruct the unfortunate concept of "they need to be given a voice," which usually occurs in vertical and hierarchical relationships that are paternalistic in nature.

The migrant farmworkers have a voice; they only need spaces for it to be heard. We began to put on a series of panels which we titled, "Hands that Speak, Voices From the Farms of the Upper Valley." In these panels, the audience spoke with our friends from the farm and asked them questions about their immediate needs, about their lives, and about their personal stories. But most importantly, they were seen, and the audience became aware of their presence in our region. The farmworkers' voices were heard. With the goal of fostering these spaces, FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund urged this act of awareness, which according to André Bretón, "... brings us to oppose all that threatens the dignity of life."

It was surprising to see the reactions of many who had no idea that, only a few miles from their homes, there was a population of migrants that worked up to 80 hours per week to produce the delicious cheese and milk of the profitable dairy industries of Vermont and New Hampshire. This reminds me of the anecdote written by University of Vermont social anthropologist, Teresa Mares, in her extraordinary book, *LIFE ON THE OTHER BORDER: Farmworkers and Food Justice in Vermont*, a deep and painful exposé of the inequities of the corrupt dairy industry and its migrant labor. Mares narrates that in one presentation, on the eve of her being hired as a professor, she spoke about the seeds of her field research which would later become her book. At the end, in the question-and-answer section, a student raised his hand and said, "Wait, what are you going to do in Vermont? There aren't any Mexicans in Vermont." (Mares, T., 2019, p. 38)

This writer had the same surprised reaction when in 2017, Professor Douglas Moody invited me to visit some dairy farms in Orange County. To my surprise, I found a group of extraordinarily resilient workers from Veracruz, Chiapas, and Tabasco, with a genuine sense of community, enduring the excruciating winters and remote nature of rural Vermont.

The aim of FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund with these forums and roundtable discussions was to shake the conscience of the audience so that they would see beyond the products of these farms. Behind the deceitful and hypocritical slogan, "Buy Local," there is a history of inequality, exploitation and abuse of the tireless hands that work without many rights, while putting dairy delicacies on our tables and food on those of their families in Mexico. Our intention was to lay bare the underlying reality of the dairy products that we consume daily and the lucrative industry behind them.

Despite the distance and disruption that COVID-19 brought to all of our lives, FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund kept exploring the realm of possibilities, fundraising to make resources accessible and

responding to the immediate needs of our friends from the farms. We never lost sight of the tenet of looking at them in a horizontal manner, without objectifying them as something to be studied from afar. The aim was to strengthen relationships and make them level, dignified, and based on mutual trust, not paternalism or social work that legitimizes stratifications. FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund was born out of empathy and a sense of camaraderie, to feel the farmworkers "in your skin" rather than seeing them as the "other": distant beings, foreigners, strangers. The Fund was conceived with the intent of recognizing and appreciating the strong working hands of our migrant friends from the six different dairy farms. Behind their dramatic life narratives and abject migratory odysseys, they have remarkable stories of dignity, resilience, and stoicism.

The diet of the farmworkers was also greatly affected at the start of the pandemic. Traditional Mexican food on their tables is a symbol of identity, communal culture and a sense of belonging. The *Paisa* stopped doing his rounds of the farms with his wheeled market of Mexican foods. In response, we started up a campaign to raise funds to purchase some of this merchandise. Keren Valenzuela sent boxes weighing over 100 pounds from Texas, with products like Maseca brand corn flour, hibiscus flowers, tamarind, and Mexican sweets—commodities that are very difficult to find this far north. I remember the rejoicing when we went to the farms to distribute these goods. Aurelio told us that it had been almost 13 years since he had tasted tamarind.

With the support of Give Essential, another Dartmouth student organization, we began distributing groceries that were scarce in the supermarkets, such as toilet paper, detergent, diapers, shampoo, and cleaning products. We made alliances with various organizations and NGOs, such as the Thetford, VT-based Hearts You Hold, which is dedicated specifically to acquiring clothes, mostly winter clothes, and other basic needs of migrants and political refugees.

Our following step was to continue to find spaces for the voices and “hands that speak” of our friends to be heard, from within their deepest hopes and fears. I took upon the job of interviewing and following them during their shifts on the farm, entering and sharing their world. I started a new column, “Hands that Speak,” which was published in the Mexican newspaper, *E-Consulta*. Simultaneously, we hosted panels via Zoom with various Dartmouth College organizations, including Physicians for Human Rights from the Geisel School of Medicine, SUNRISE (a student organization devoted to environmental and social justice), the Dartmouth Student Union (DSU), the Sustainability Office, and the Coalition For Immigration Reform and Equality at Dartmouth (CoFIRED). Through these panels, our friends exercised their right to free speech and narrated their personal life stories. We put the dialogue on the table, encouraging them to participate in these forums. We abandoned the position of speaking about them from our place of privilege, inviting them to be part of the conversation and express their opinions.

In the summer of 2020, we renewed the ESL classes via Zoom. As COVID-19 permitted it, we went to the farms personally to visit our friends during the kinder, warmer weather. These visits were accompanied by delicious food, soccer games, music, sometimes a baby shower or a birthday party; because if there’s something that our friends from the dairy farms do appropriately, it’s celebrate life. Occasionally, we held their hands through grief and loss.

Building bridges with the greater community, friends from neighboring towns would at times join us, like Kevin Brooker of Thetford, VT, who learned how to make homemade cheese, delicious *tres leches* cake, and cornbread from the recently harvested corn, all baked by Aurelio. Ridge Satterthwaite of Fairlee, VT, is a regular guest at the Tuesday lunches that are prepared by the women. He has made close ties with our friends. Ridge has an impeccable grasp of Spanish, and he supports us with translating, in addition to giving farmworkers rides to the hospital and clinics. His hands speak of kindness, generosity, and social consciousness. In fact, Paco spent several days at Ridge’s house recuperating from surgery.

Among the many challenges, including the linguistic and cultural barriers faced by our friends from the farms, we learned about the painful inequity when it comes to physical and mental healthcare. Scheduling dental appointments was an enormous task. Local dentists only accepted urgent cases. Once the appointment was scheduled, they wouldn't allow anybody else inside during the appointment to provide live translation services. The costs attributed to the urgency of the appointments were considerable. Again, we defied the costs, the distances, the language barriers, and the lack of transportation with the help of many. We went in pairs, giving rides and doing simultaneous translation over the phone (sometimes from Texas, Mississippi, or even California), raising funds to cover the costs.

We learned about the fortitude, tolerance, and the incomparable resilience of our migrant friends, when some dealt with tooth pain for months, not knowing what to do other than taking ibuprofen to numb the pain; working 12 to 14 hours daily with an iron will and the tenacity born from no other option but to "work, or work." For example, Pedro was dealing with a bad ear infection for some time and had resigned to losing his hearing. His lack of balance was noticeable, and he was depressed. Nevertheless, he kept working. We went to see him, and PA Gaffney prescribed him some antibiotic drops that Frank and I then purchased. They cost an incredible $380! Thankfully, after a week of using the drops, Pedro was a whole other person, with a radiant smile full of gratitude.

FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund continues to carry on, with the yearning to become an NGO, allowing it to work hand in hand with other respected and remarkable organizations. For example, Migrant Justice, with their campaign "Milk with Dignity", fights for reasonable, well-paid hours for the dairy farmworkers as well as dignified living conditions. Another amazing initiative from the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College, Project Salud, whose mission is to provide comprehensive medical acre to migrant farmworkers. We are in close contact with Bridges to Health, a University of Vermont program that helps address the unmet health needs of migrant farmworkers throughout Vermont.

Another UVM initiative is The Huertas Project, which teaches the farmworkers to grow their own produce in kitchen gardens.

In addition, there have been a few individuals that have provided critical support to the migrant farming community. Chef M. has employed several farmworkers at his restaurant with well-paid hours. Dr. Steve Generaux, who has a private practice in Wells River, VT, and a heart too big to fit in his chest, has worked for more than 18 years with the migrant communities of the various dairy farms. Doctors Jinny Brack and Eileen Granahan, from Dick's House at Dartmouth College and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, respectively, have helped us on various occasions by providing medical consultations for the women of the farms. Suzanne Serat, a highly experienced local midwife and friend, has also provided consultations for women, and has given rides to medical appointments.

Today, FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund is composed of more than 13 students, organized in four committees. The first, the Women's Health Committee, consists of four students, minister Robin Junker-Boyce of Thetford Hill Congregational Church, two pediatricians and a female farmworker. This committee has the mission of:

> [providing] attention for the wellness of the female workers of the dairy farms, whose needs are often overlooked. The Women's Health Committee is focused on all women's needs, centering on preventative health check-ups, trips to the hospital, and assistance with mental health, family planning, and sexuality.

The second committee, the Pedido Committee (Requests Committee), is in charge of working directly with the NGO, Hearts You Hold, uploading requests for winter clothes, shoes, and other needs of the farmworkers, in addition to designing and carrying out clothing donation campaigns.

The third, the Fundraising/Social Media Committee, is composed of four students and two professional designers from Cancun, Mexico, Katya Villarreal Valdez (who helped us with the design of our logo) and Jorge Carlos Álvarez. These two collaborate with us on the designs of the flyers and posters for our events.

Finally, the fourth committee, the Immediate Response Committee, is managed by six students who are each assigned to one of the farms that we work with. These students are in charge of direct communication with a worker from their assigned farms, who together keep us updated on the situations and needs present in the workers' daily lives. For this, they have created WhatsApp groups with the farmworkers so they can stay in contact.

Each Sunday from 8:00-9:00 p.m., FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund meets at La Casa to share the progress made by each committee. Generally, we have a guest from the farm, either by Zoom or in-person, who participates in the meeting and speaks about what has happened during that week on their farm.

Recently, both Robin Junker-Boyce, as a representative of her church's Peace & Equity Team, and Father Timothy Danaher, director and chaplain of Aquinas House, Catholic Student Center at Dartmouth College, have joined the ranks of FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund. In our many visits to the farms, we have noticed two aspects of life that have been neglected: spiritual and mental health. Thanks to Father Timothy's mastery of Spanish, we have been able to put on "traveling" masses for the farms in the company of Minister Robin. More recently, FUERZA, partnered with SHARE Outreach in New Hampshire, supporting the farmworkers with telehealth visits with two mental health providers from Mexico City, Dr Nordia González, a psychotherapist, and Ana Cecilia Alós, a life coach.

There's still much yet to do, but we're considering working with WISE, a marvelous organization that advocates for domestic violence prevention, in addition to providing therapy for victims.

Hopefully, we will have little libraries, projectors for movies, ping-pong tables, puzzles, card games, and other recreational activities. Why not? It all starts with a dream.

In an essay written by Juan Quinonez for his LATS 20 class during the fall term of 2021, titled "FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund: A Focus on Underground Student Social Justice Work Happening at Dartmouth," he asked the other cofounders of the Fund about how they measured the success of the budding organization, and this was the response:

> Keren answered saying she would like the organization to continue to aid as many farmworkers as possible stating, "Because we do so much individual work, success to me is [measured] by the number of people that we are connecting, by the trust that farmworkers give us—and the services we are able to provide them. To me, it is [measured] by looking at how many people are WhatsApp-ing us and asking for help, because they know we can pull through." Both Juan and Maria Clara focused on longevity with Maria Clara stating, "Success is not to die out, it's to survive." However, Gabe noted that his measure of success is not measured on the survival of the Fund but rather on its end, nothing, "In order for this to be successful, we would no longer need to exist." (Quinonez, J., 2021, p. 4)

Every day, we receive an average of 15 messages from our friends, about one thing or another, or just a simple hello. The hands of the students are also hands that collaborate, hands that speak of solidarity and devotion, hands that reach out and are committed to the “others”; the “others” with whom they now share space and a dream of justice and equity. Hands that speak of social consciousness.

A few days ago, a student member of FUERZA Farmworkers’ Fund, Edgar Morales, accompanied our friend, Victoria, to bring her American Dream to a close with a flourish, returning home after seven years in the Upper Valley. He guided her on her return journey that included multiple airport layovers, lasting all night, until he said goodbye to her and her two-year-old at the boarding gate of a direct flight to Mexico. In the words of Zeke Baker, a graduate of Dartmouth, “it is one of the most honorable acts done by a student that I’ve ever heard of.”

FUERZA Farmworkers’ Fund has placed itself in the same orbit as our friends from the dairy farms; we are intertwined. For that reason, the hands of the Fund’s members also speak. They speak of empathy and organization. They are the hands of a group of good citizens, with a social consciousness devoted in body and soul to volunteer work. They are the hands that from our trenches trace the dream of social change, because there is no dream that willpower cannot reach.

Sustainability and Solidarity Mural

Painted by the students and artists of the Lats 37 class

Spring 2021

The “Hands That Speak” in the Organic Farm Mural

The idea of a mural at the Dartmouth Organic Farm emanated from a creative process that began in LATS 37 class workshops. With the oversight of a volunteer steering committee, comprised of the principal artist, Ernesto Cuevas ‘98, staff members from the Sustainability Office and from the farm, as well as students from the class, we conceived and designed a mural that we all felt spoke to some of the central issues around dairy farming, sustainable land management and the history of agriculture in the Upper Valley. Included were the contributions of the original inhabitants of the land, the Abenaki, who first planted crops in the fertile soil of the Connecticut River valley.

The nine panels of the mural represent the different peoples who have populated the Upper Valley over time and the labor of those who have farmed this land over many generations.

There are the hands of the dairy farm workers, who care for and milk the cows that produce the dairy products we eat daily, as well as the hands of mothers and fathers, who care for the children who will inherit the land. There are the hands that plant and harvest the vegetables that grace our tables. There are the hands of the farmers at the Dartmouth Organic Farm who teach and instruct students about planting sustainable, healthy food, which is then shared with the Dartmouth student body and various organizations in the Upper Valley. There are the hands of people who hold the signs that call for change, as people march in solidarity with Migrant Justice, in support of the dairy farm workers. Finally, there are the hands of the many artists and volunteers who painted the mural and created a significant work of public art at Dartmouth; art which celebrates the collective efforts of the many hands that united for this project that, I believe, suggests a better way forward in developing a world joined in solidarity and through sustainability.

Professor Douglas Moody


JUSTICIA
MIGRANTE

Epilogue

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the world to the truly unstable beam our food system relies on and the great need of the people who produce it. These reclassified “essential workers” became hyper-visible to the public and their labor was acknowledged for the first time. Yet, with the witness it came, the public recognition and solidarity vanished, and “essential workers” were once again deemed disposable and invisible to American consumers. This pattern of labeling and disposability is one that occurs with frequency in the United States. From the latest fashion trend to the new “superfood,” rarely does any consideration go to the workers sustaining these industries. Workers who oftentimes are forced to work under exploitative and hostile conditions. This is the case with hundreds of thousands of migrant dairy farmworkers in the United States who provide. Working in remote corners of the country, these farmworkers labor in freezing temperatures, complete 70-plus hour work weeks, sustain their families in their home countries, and yet still find empathy for the animals they care for and love in the work they do. However, it is one thing to realize this and another to do something about it. The FUERZA Farmworkers’ Fund team mobilized to provide immediate PPE and essential necessities to farmworker friends in the Upper Valley. Soon, the team realized the further urgent needs that existed in these communities. Thus, long before and still after the world held these farmworkers on a pedestal of gratitude and then left them to be deemed invisible once more, the FUERZA Farmworkers’ Fund is addressing organizational and human rights needs to combat the neglect that dairy farmworkers experience daily.

Founded on March 2020, the FUERZA- meaning “strength” in Spanish- Farmworkers’ Fund began as immediate responders to the lack of aid and resources that rural farmworkers in the Upper Valley were experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through casual conversations, three undergraduate students, Keren Valenzuela Bermúdez, Gabriel Onate, and Juan Quinonez Zepeda, Dartmouth professor, Maria Clara de Greiff, and a Thetford Academy high school senior, Frank David Loveland, worked to

fill the urgent needs of dairy farmworkers who were being affected by the impact of this pandemic. Needs that soon escalated and extended beyond the global pandemic. “Everyone else seemed to have forgotten farmworkers [during the pandemic] ... (Keren).”

Given their rurality, farmworkers from Central and Latin America, are isolated in a myriad of ways. This invisibility serves as a double-edged sword. While it can provide a sense of protection from policing structures it also leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and far removed from access to medical, nutrition, and social needs. During the beginning of the pandemic, farmworkers reported being hyper visible to the public, due to not having access to masks, as they were not provided at their place of employment and sold out across local stores. Thus, the Funds first’s response was initiated.

The group reached out to trusted community church members in Thetford, Vermont, and Gabriel’s aunt in California to provide face coverings for the farmworkers. Upon delivering them, Maria Clara noticed that many of the farmworkers had misinformation about COVID-19, so her partner -who is a certified PA- provided educational information regarding COVID-19, its effects, and how to stay safe. Through building more connections and trust, the FUERZA group noticed the more urgent needs of the community.

Seeing medical, dental, and reproductive health needs, the Fund derived three core focuses: educational access, health and wellness, and cultural substance. Each one was informed by the needs of their friends at the farms. Soon, the Fund began to ask for donations online and created partnerships with other local organizations and businesses such as Hearts You Hold, First Branch Coffee, Dartmouth Student Union, Dartmouth’s Coalition for Immigration Reform and Equality at Dartmouth (CoFIRED), Sunrise Dartmouth, Pine, local churches, and multiple groups in the Geisel School of Medicine.

Since their initial days, the FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund has grown from four core members with two or three helping members to fifteen current student members, alumni, and Professor DeGreiff. Still, the majority is run by students, and they continue to create and conduct various tasks of the organization centering on the three core focuses. Moving forward, all co-founders reported wanting the group to transition to NGO status to not be as heavily reliant on mutual aid fundraising, to hire full-time staff, and to expand resources to farmworkers.

Even without NGO, 501(c)(3) status, the majority student-run FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund has raised over $12,000 in less than two years, to improve the lives of rural farmworkers in the Upper Valley by providing immediate care and centering their needs. While some organizations exist that do similar work, the founders of this Fund note that their multiculturalism, ability to speak the language, and similar experiences of migration all compile to allow them to build trust and personal relationships with these farmworkers they call friends. However, much like the community they serve, their work is invisible to some.

The book *Hands that Speak: Voices From the Upper Valley Dairy Farms* is a dedication to the labor and care dairy farmworkers in the Upper Valley do daily, and to their voices that remain and that we must listen and learn from.

Juan Quiñonez Zepeda

Dartmouth College Student

Co-founder of FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund

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Healing Through Our Hands

“Grandma how do you deal with pain?” the granddaughter asks.

“With your hands, dear. When you do it with your mind, the pain hardens even more.”

“With your hands, grandma?”

“Yes, yes. Our hands are the antennas of our soul. When you move them by sewing, cooking, painting, touching the earth or sinking it into the earth, they send signals of caring to the deepest part of you and your soul calms down. This way she doesn’t have to send pain anymore to show it.”

“Are hands really that important?”

“Yes my girl. Thinking of babies: they get to know the world thanks to their touches. When you look at the hands of older people, they tell more about their lives than any other part of the body. Everything that is made by hand, so is said, is made with the heart because it really is like this: hands and heart are connected. Masseuses know this: When they touch another person’s body with their hands, they create a deep connection. Thinking of lovers: When their hands touch, they love each other in the most sublime way.”

“My hands grandma... how long haven’t I used them like that!”

“Move them my girl, start creating with them and everything in you will move. The pain will not pass away. But it will be the best masterpiece. And it won’t hurt anymore. Because you managed to embroider your essence.”

Elena Bernabé.

If you would like to learn more about

FUERZA Farmworkers’ Fund

you can look at our website:

fuerzafarmworkersfund.godaddysites.com

you can contact us at

fuerzafund@gmail.com

or follow us on Instagram

@fuerza_farmworkers_fund

Donations are appreciated

and can be done via

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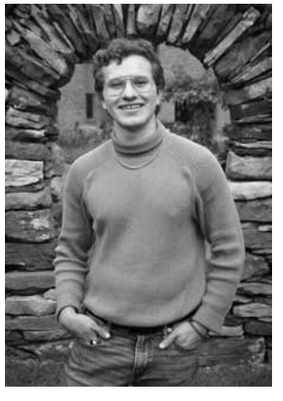
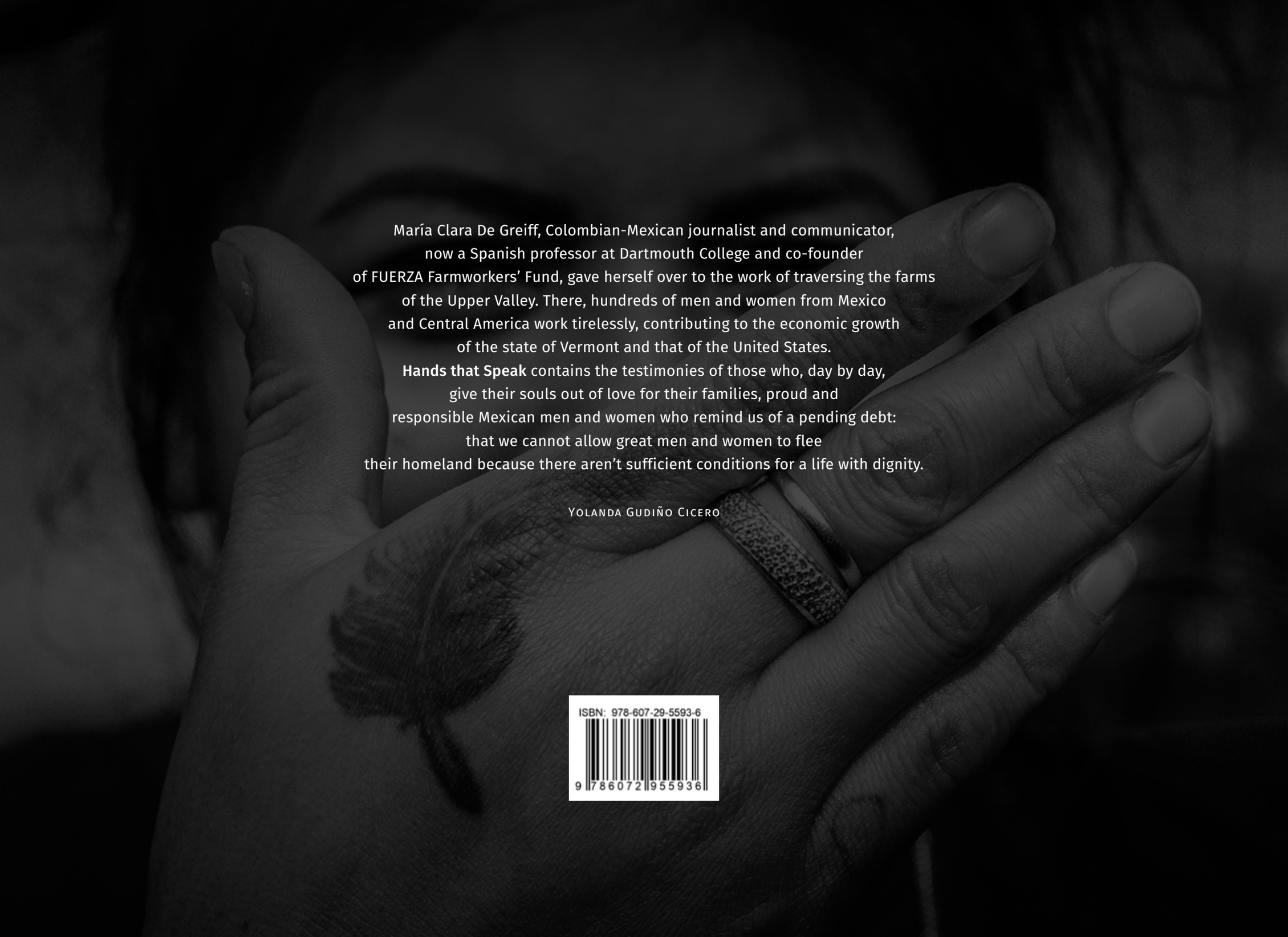
Co-founders of FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund

Juan Quiñonez, Keren Valenzuela, Gabriel Onate, María Clara de Greiff Lara

and Frank David Loveland de Greiff





María Clara De Greiff, Colombian-Mexican journalist and communicator,
now a Spanish professor at Dartmouth College and co-founder
of FUERZA Farmworkers' Fund, gave herself over to the work of traversing the farms
of the Upper Valley. There, hundreds of men and women from Mexico
and Central America work tirelessly, contributing to the economic growth
of the state of Vermont and that of the United States.
Hands that Speak contains the testimonies of those who, day by day,
give their souls out of love for their families, proud and
responsible Mexican men and women who remind us of a pending debt:
that we cannot allow great men and women to flee
their homeland because there aren't sufficient conditions for a life with dignity.

Yolanda Gudiño Cicero

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