ECRN Network Seminar

Sharemilking with the Te Raparaha Lands Trust (Wāotū)
Sharemilking in NZ

• Contractual arrangement developed over time that shares the costs and benefits of operating a diary farm

• 34% of NZ’s dairy herds are in the Waikato, 28% of national total land

• Approximately 1,488 sharemilkers, 5.9% of total regional employment, contributing 9.8% regional GDP [NZIER, NZ Statistics 2014]

• The average operation milks 285 cows

• Moving Day – 1st June
Non-human rural studies approach

- The countryside is more-than-human (Whatmore 2003) and complex ‘Culturenature’ and hybridity of cows and farming questions sharp distinctions between social and non-social (natural/material)

- Yarwood and Evans (2000) a sharper focus on livestock can contribute to current thinking in rural studies and agricultural geographies

- Fluid notion of place

Distancing from animals as food: thinking about livestock and farming

• People eat ‘meat’ not animals – split between conceptual and material

• Spatial, emotional and ethical dimensions of the relationship between landscape, livestock, farming and rural communities

• Complexities of relationships with livestock as economic units and as intrinsic to farming identity along with genuine care for a sentient being (Philo 1992; Yarwood & Evans 1998)
Methods

- Attention and commitment to a feminist methodology
- Traditional semi-structured interviews
- Farm interviews – *in situ* research, going-along with...
- Experiencing a ‘Moving Day’ (2016)
- Solicited diaries and self-directed photography
‘Farming with’ experiences
Moving Day 2016
Moving and vulnerability

- Landowner has power to decide contract terms and negotiation
- Land = security
- Sharemilkers not only have to move house, business, equipment, machinery for farming but also a herd of cows
- Money (equity) in cows on a fluctuating global market = high risk
Sharemilkers in Waikato: dairying through a crisis

• 2016 a significant downturn in milk solid prices on the global market

“The farm was sold within a month and the sharemilker that was on the farm, he’s been on there 15 years – and just like that! 15 years work within one month was gone [clicks fingers], destroyed – because the people who bought the farm said, “We don’t need a sharemilker” – so that was it! That would be soul destroying//” [Interview December 2015]
Contract woes

• Contracts were individually tailored

• Debt ratio and contract negotiation directly affects farmer stress

• Knock-on effect to animal welfare and farming practice
Farmer identities and suicide/stress/anxiety

• Increasingly disproportionate rate of suicides of farming men in rural NZ and Australia “The fallen hero: masculinity, shame and farmer suicide in Australia” Gender, Place and Culture (2015)

• Wet season (winter) – “It’s the wettest season in 20 years, I’m tossing the turning in bed at night, knowing the cows are tight on their breaks ... I was right up against the edge at certain times, thinking, how can I actually carry on? I spoke to plenty of blokes who, you know, had a knot in their guts” [Interview 17 November 2016].

• Paper written on the impacts of the weather for Social and Cultural Geography “Research Tropospheres”
From economic crisis to social crisis??

- Farmers represented as profit-driven and uncaring polluters
- Past practices have been shortsighted in the extreme
- Little tolerance of ‘dirty’ practices
- Little acknowledgement of ‘plunder’ of environment
- Ethics and morals of dairying are increasingly scrutinised
Sharemilking with Te Raparahi Trust

• A more positive focus

• Taking the study beyond crisis, suicide and ethics

• Case-study on sharemilking with Te Raparahi

• Non-ownership of land enables sharemilkers in different ways
Miraka Milk Company

- North West Taupō
- Geothermal power
- Small carbon footprint

- https://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/country-calendar/episodes/s2016-e32
Te Raparahi Lands Trust

- *Te Harore a Kapu*
- Farming in perpetuity
- *Kaitiakitanga* (stewardship/guardianship)
- Educational grants for local community
- (Sharing wealth)
- Relationships
The long game – a positive focus

• “Being in Maori ownership it’s about perpetual ownership – setting the operation up for sustainability, the Trust is not so worried about production/profit in the short term, but you have to be successful, otherwise what’s the point? I mean successful across the board, as in success in finance, sustainable practice, environmental impact, cow health, soil health – it all ties in together – and we’re all in it together

[Interview 17 November 2016]
Wāotū as place: working with Naomi

• Wāotū as place
• Raukawa Iwi
• Stories of gardens and pathways (on land)
  • *He wā tū tahi ngā rākau*
  • “the place of high trees standing by themselves”
• Jim Barnett Reserve
• Pikitū Marae – Ngāti Huri
Hopeful geographies?

• Focusing on Te Raparahi Trust model unfolds a lot of positives

• Cautionary steps that include full histories of place

• Narrations of place, landscape and relationships reveal complexity of approaches to farming

• Place and geography matters – relationships matter

• “Yeah I appreciate cows, they give you their life, I love them and being around them” [Interview 17 November 2016]