

# Transient geographies: 50:50 Sharemilking in the Waikato

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# Introduction



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- What is sharemilking? – landless and mobile farming practices
- ‘Gypsy Day’ – 1 June
- More-than human rural studies approach combined with mobilities framework
- Active methods – ‘*farming with*’ comparing sitting at a table to being on farm
- Preliminary findings



# Sharemilking in NZ



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- Contractual arrangement developed over time that shares the costs and benefits of operating a dairy farm
- Figures from 2002: 37% dairy farms operate sharemilking contracts which produce 42% of NZ's milk – worth close to NZD\$9 billion (Buchanan 2002)
- The average operation milks 285 cows
- Gypsy Day – 1<sup>st</sup> June



# Non-human rural studies approach



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- 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-human nexus can contribute to current thinking in rural studies and agricultural geographies

# Mobilities and assemblages



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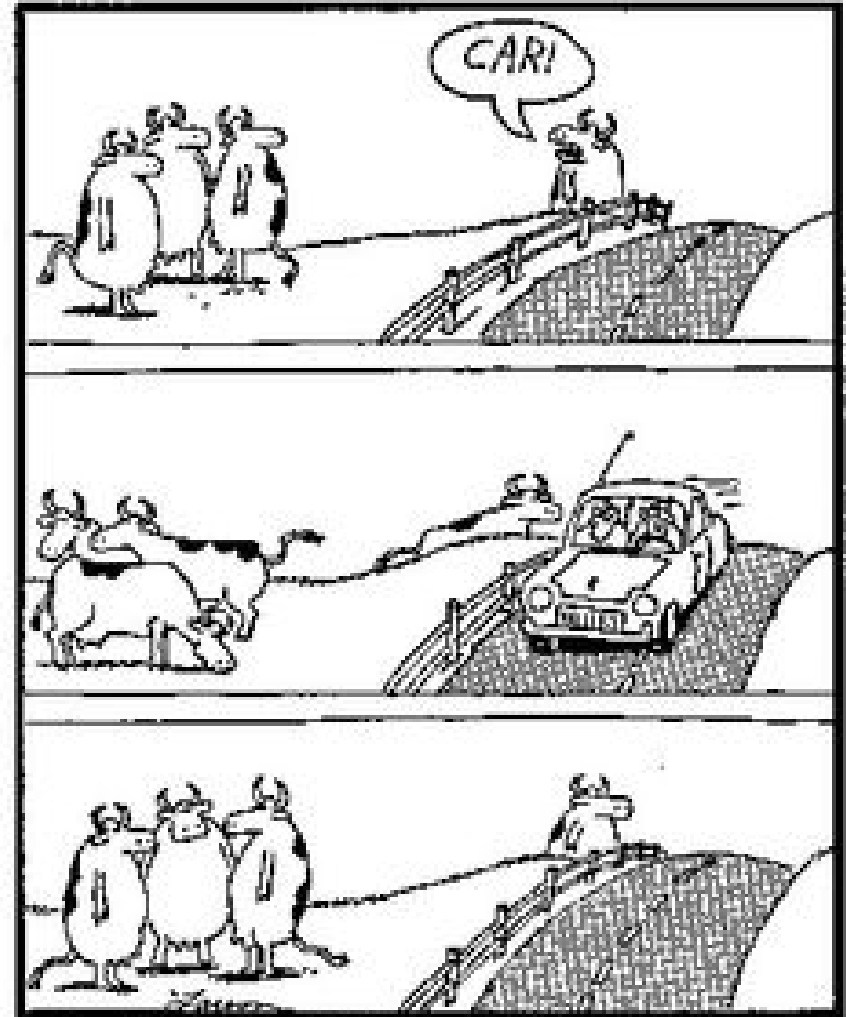
- I stress the combined movements of people, objects, animals and information in all of their 'complex relational dynamics' (Sheller 2011).
- Farmers and farm workers may experience moments of liberation and constraint within their mobile existence
- Highlighting a cascade of mobilities at different scales which are entangled in the multitude of technological and non-human assemblages [moorings]

# Methods



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- Attention and commitment to a feminist/ active/ embodied methodology
- Traditional semi-structured interviews
- Farm interviews – *in situ* research, going-along with...
- Solicited dairies and self-directed photography
- Media dissemination





# Before, during, after: Gypsy Day 2016



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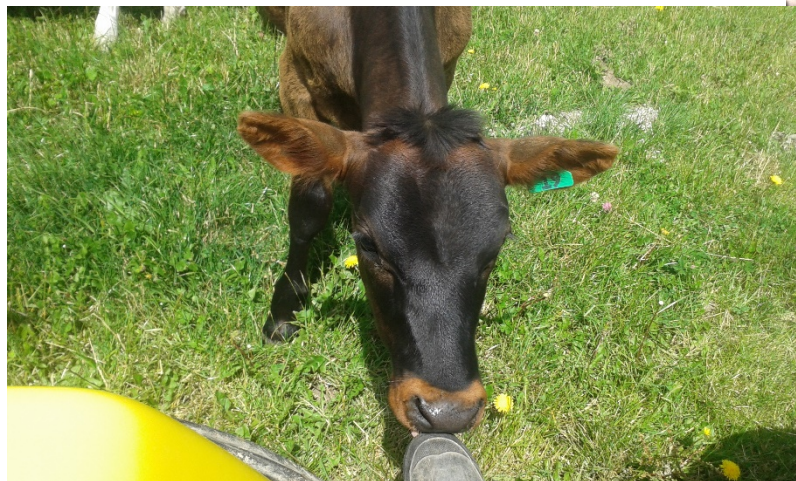




# In the shed, on the bike, out the back



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# Preliminary notes:



- Sharemilkers move around but often try and stay in a similar part of the country
- Hours of work averages between 70 per week year round (Blunden et al. 1997)
- There can be 40-100 applicants for a single contract – competitiveness of the industry
- You can have both good and bad relationships with a landowner but there is often vulnerability around contract renewal or not
- Pete: “We walk a fine line everyday and even though you have a perfectly good working relationship, money talks and landowners can sell-up for a multitude of different reasons”

# Moving



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- Moves are emotionally, economically and physically stressful on everyone concerned incl. animals

Michael and Sonya:

“It’s a hugely stressful time, it’s shifting house, family, business, cows and equipment, so it’s not just packing everything into boxes, it’s the entire upheaval of all earthly possessions”

- Need support from friends and family



[www.jesperdeleuran.dk](http://www.jesperdeleuran.dk)





# Gender roles



- Sharemilking labour is traditionally conceptualised as a family-based unit
- The female partner mostly raises the children, keeps the house and nurtures and feeds the calves during calving
- More women are having an active role in finance and running the sharemilking business, however, women sharemilkers/farmers are rare
- Pete: “I’ve missed out on a lot of jobs because my partner is not on the farm feeding calves, looking after the house and grounds and feeding me three meals a day, they absolutely do make those assumptions!”

# Cows need to settle in to a new place



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- Cows have hierarchies and friends
- It takes 2-3 times into each paddock before the cows settle into a farm
- Pete: “one of the hardest parts is actually getting to know the farm, the good calving paddocks, the wet paddocks, all that sort of thing”
- Changing terrain can be difficult...

Michael: “We had a major disaster, we had some cows congregate into a hole and we lost the whole lot of them, there was nothing we could do to save them, it was awful. Those first days you need to check on them all the time”



# Pilot Study summary



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- Sharemilkers display a complex and shifting relationship with their herd, torn between genuinely liking cows as animals and economic decisions
- There is often an attachment to a particular place/area which increases the desire to win the contract – emotion without ownership
- Sharemilking is challenging and volatile as contracts can be complicated and rest on open communication and good-will which is not always achieved

# Moving on: possible questions/themes for further exploration



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- What are the challenges of being transient in the dairy industry?
- How can small rural communities stay invigorated and maintain jobs for youth within transient framings?



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# Health and well being, does it include sharemilkers?



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# Questions?



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