
# Relationality in The Netherlands:
## Exploring How Organic and Biodynamic Farmers Build Relations Through Food

A Research Paper presented by:

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The Netherlands

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Human Rights, Gender and Conflict Studies: Social Justice Perspectives**
(SJP)

Specialization:

**Agrarian Food and Environmental Studies**

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The Hague, The Netherlands
November 2019

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**Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the land that grows the food that nourishes me every day.

Thank you to everybody who welcomed me into their lives this summer, letting me spend time at their farms while sharing their stories with me.

Thank you to my supervisors, Wendy and Rosalba, who shared their knowledge and support throughout this process.

Thank you to my friends for listening to me while working, thinking, laughing and of course eating with me.

Thank you to my love for holding my hand, for walking with me and for making me feel powerful every day.

Thank you to my family, who taught me to listen carefully and to pay close attention to my surroundings.

Last, thank you to my grandpa for the artwork he made with the fruit, vegetables and nuts from our garden.

This project would have been impossible without those mentioned above and it holds pieces of every single one of them in many different ways.

# Contents

## Abstract

This thesis uses a feminist approach to research relationality in the Netherlands, specifically in the farming and eating practices of organic and biodynamic farmers. We ask how these farmers are challenging the binaries inherent to Anthropocentric ways of understanding the world and disembodied ways of being in it. This is necessary if we want to contribute to agrarian transformations that move away from monocultures of farming and singular ways understanding our existence, towards more socially and ecologically just ways of producing and eating food.

To achieve this, the researcher aimed to co-construct knowledge that included different narratives, which was achieved by carefully working together with and listening to the farmers, who are the experts behind this research. Doing this allowed for their stories to be at the basis of this thesis, which helped exploring different ways of writing and doing academic work. Throughout this process, food was the lens through which writing was rethought and it was the starting point to ask questions about relationality and the different social dynamics that exist at farms in the Netherlands.

## Relevance to Development Studies

This research adds to the discussions that challenge mainstream agricultural practices based on Anthropocentrism and disembodiment by looking at alternative farming as a way to acknowledge and reclaim diverse relationalities. By researching the role of food in the lives of organic and biodynamic farmers in the Netherlands, the binary understandings of *humans and nature* are rethought and reshaped, making way for the exploration of the interconnectedness between humans and other-than-humans. Not just the ways of relating to each other were explored in this research, but how we research this was also critically thought about. Feminist and participatory methodologies allowed me to research critically in my own context to challenge the dominant development discourse and conventional research practices. Finally, this research adds to a growing field of literature that uses new writing techniques to break through the prescribed *academic* writing methods that erase diversity and creativity in ways of transmitting knowledge.

## Keywords

Anthropocentrism, Eating, Feminism, Food, Humans, Other-than-humans, Relationality.

You are invited to the

# DINNER OF RELATIONS

This dinner of relations will be an exciting night where we ask ourselves questions about the food we eat,
the ones who grow it and the different ecological and social processes that are at the basis of our existence.

As we share different dishes, all made with biodynamic and organic products from three farms in Flevoland, our senses will be stimulated in new ways. It will be an opportunity to meet the humans and other-than-humans who were involved in growing the food that is being shared. We will also use the dinner as a moment to learn about the locations where the food was grown.

I look forward to sharing the experience with you

Kind regards,

Rosa de Nooijer

# 2 The Dinner of Relations

It is the end of a hot summer day when you are on your way to the dinner of relations. You decided to walk there, because the days are long, and you want to enjoy the sun as much as possible. When you arrive to the place, you open the door and enter, after which you see a room with a big table that is beautifully decorated with a colorful tablecloth. The right side of the room has an open kitchen where people are talking to each other, occasionally making a joke and laughing, as they are preparing different dishes. You walk towards the table and take a seat, after which a small note in front of you catches your attention. It says:

*Welcome to the Dinner of Relations.*

*You, among many others, have been invited to come to this special place to partake in a new dining experience. This room will help you to stimulate all your senses. We are asking you to look around you to see who else is sharing this space with you, but we also want you to listen, smell, taste, feel and sense what is happening. Time, as you know it, will not be relevant as long as you are here, as the space is in relation with the seasons and ecological cycles. Please relax and pay close attention to everything that is happening around you, it is all part of the experience.*

*Eetsmakelijk!*

When you finish reading, you close your eyes and inhale deeply, you smell fresh garlic and onion, and then the sweet smell of wildflowers and freshly mowed grass enters your nostrils. You feel heat on your face, so you open your eyes and see the sun shining through leaves above your head. A breeze makes the leaves move, and you hear a bird. Looking around the room you see that it is filled with flowers with insects buzzing around them. In the distance, a potato field stretches out, and it looks like someone is working the land. Next to the potato field you see a forest with a pond where cows are gathering to drink and enjoy the afternoon sun. The flatness of your surroundings and the stacked clouds in the distance make it look like the fields are never-ending, which is a feeling that you get more often when looking at the Dutch landscape.

A world is unfolding in front of your eyes, and you realize that the table is no longer empty. Other guests have arrived, and a chatter is filling the room, blending in with the other sounds. Then you pick up a conversation that two women sitting close to you are having.

It looks like they are partners, because they are holding hands and smiling while they talk about the food that will be eaten tonight. They are asking critical questions about the way in which the food was grown, and how it ended up in this place. One of them points out that the countryside and the city are connected in many ways, but she wonders how it is

possible that the people in cities are so disconnected from the food they eat. Not just the disconnection between people in cities and the food they eat needs to be thought about, but she thinks it is also important to consider how contemporary food systems are creating heavy burdens. To her, it seems like these burdens "disproportionately fall to the poor and disenfranchised, to rural communities, to women, to animals, and to the systems that compose the natural world" (Gilson 2015: 14). She hopes that this dinner will shed light on some of the violent practices that are inherent to the contemporary food systems, but more importantly, she would like to know more about alternative ways of producing food, as they might challenge and rethink some of the exploitations and disconnections that are widespread today.

Her partner agrees and says that another important thing to look at when we talk about food is the "complicated relationship among cooking, eating, and gender, including how food practices work to construct gender identity" (Avakian as cited in Gilson 2015: 11). Historically, they have shaped the work that is done and by whom, this often means that certain tasks, such as care work, which includes the preparation of food, are systematically given to women. These constructed gender identities make it complex to imagine other ways of engaging with the production and preparation of food. For example, in many places, food shaped the identity politics, "gendered routines and rhythms […], smells, sounds, feels and tastes of [everyday life]" (Wynne 2015: 381). When women rethink or reject the food practices which have been assigned to them, this can be considered a political decision that challenges predefined gender roles (Wynne 2015: 380). She wonders whether there will be women present at this dinner who are challenging these gender roles, perhaps by not just preparing food, but also by being engaged in other tasks at farms.

While discussing the importance of feminism in relation to food and the ethics behind this dinner, they do agree that it is nice to be in this place. Hearing birds and seeing the crops growing in the distance allows them to feel a bit closer to the food that will be shared tonight.

You smile as you are thinking about what you just heard. Then it occurs to you that this room must have taken you to a specific place with a particular reason. You decide to introduce yourself to a woman who is sitting across you, and after saying hi you ask her if she knows where this room has taken you, and why. She smiles and hands over a book called 'Dinner of Relations Reader Guide', suggesting you keep this with you because it explains some concepts and it includes different chapters that might answer some of the questions you have. After saying thank you, you start reading.

**Dear reader,**

The first part of this reading guide will help you to locate yourself and the different products that were used for the dinner. Moreover, it will explain in some more detail why this dinner is being organized.

## New Land; a Brief History

The food used for this meal was all grown and produced at three different farms. These three farms are located in a province called Flevoland, also referred to as 'de Flevopolder'. Flevoland is the youngest province in the Netherlands, and before it was drained it used to be part of the Zuiderzee (Wijnen 1999: 59). The draining of the Zuiderzee took place between 1930 and 1968 and was one of two large-scale water management projects that were executed in the 20th century in the Netherlands (Hoeksema 2007: 125; Stive and Waterman 2012: 289). In an attempt to reclaim land and to strengthen water management strategies in order to protect existing land from flooding, The Delta Project that was carried out in the Southwest of the country, together with the Zuiderzee project, drastically altered the topography and environment of a surface over 1000 000 hectares (Stive and Waterman 2012: 289). The region where the Zuiderzee used to be, was called 'Nieuw land' or in English 'New Land', and was mostly used for "agriculture, recreation and urban expansion" from the 1960s onwards (Hoeksema 2007: 113); (Wijnen 1999: 59). Even though the water management projects have been successful in resolving some of the main flooding threats, they have also "resulted in a loss of natural values and of the natural system's resilience", meaning that the ecosystems in the region have been altered in such a way that they are no longer independently adapting to the water inputs from the sea or when it storms (Stive and Waterman 2012: 289). Not just the farmland in de Flevopolder, but also the nature has been manufactured by humans, meaning that it was planned out where nature areas would be, and what they would look like.

Ever since the Zuiderzee was drained, humans' relations to the new land have been influenced by this. One of the reasons why these relations are still shaped by the past is because "[t]he relationality of time sees the past as actively constituting the present. The past is alive; it is the binding force of many communities" (Vazquez 2012: 8). Especially when a region is manufactured by humans, the suffering and oppression of the land needs to be remembered and continues to shape the connections between that land and the people who work on it.

The Flevopolder is well known in the Netherlands because of its history, and because of the type of farm work that is done there. Over the years, it has become recognised as an area where pioneers started doing alternative ways of farming, for example organic and biodynamic farming (Wijnen 1999: 59). As the province is young, so are the farms in this region, meaning that many of them are second or third generation farmers (Everdingen en Janssens 2001: 9). Next to mainstream agriculture, organic and biodynamic agriculture have always been widespread in the region, for example in 1999, 11% of all Dutch organic agriculture and horticulture were in Flevoland (Wijnen 1999: 60). One of the characteristics these farms is that they are diversifying by renting out apartments, having a campsite or by organizing recreational activities such as cooking workshops (Wijnen 1999: 32). Another project in this region is the collaboration between municipalities, citizens and farmers to create nature management projects such as green belts (Everdingen en Janssens 2001: 10). These projects are meant to contribute to the regeneration of nature, allowing insects, birds and other wild animals to have a space where they can breed and live in safety (den Blijker 2018).

Today, the region is mostly characterized by the farms that are producing crops that are sold in supermarkets all over the Netherlands. The presence of the sea is still felt, and when one walks through the fields, seashells can still be found in the soil. As organic and biodynamic farms are becoming more common, new relationalities come to be in this region because critical farmers are rethinking their interactions with the land by acknowledging that it used to be part of the ocean.

**The Products**

The food used for this meal is from three specific farms in Flevoland. The reason why these farms were chosen is because they are biodynamic and organic, which means that the farms are understood and explained as "living system[s where emphasis is] placed on the integration of crops and livestock, recycling of nutrients, maintenance of soil, and the health and wellbeing of crops and animals; the farmer too is part of the whole" (Philips and Rodgriquez 2006: 2). At the root of these living systems, is the building of relations and collaborations between the people doing the work in the fields, directly connecting with Earth and acknowledging how their life is intertwined with the environment (Philips and Rodgriquez 2006: 14). More so, astrological cycles are used for planting calendars, and the connection with other planets, the zodiac and the celestial atmosphere are an important aspect of biodynamic farming practices (Caldwell 2013: 12). The acknowledgement of spiritual and physiological connections between the universe, Earth and agricultural practices, can be linked directly to the farming prescriptions of biodynamic agriculture. For example, the use of artificial fertilizers and chemical inputs is prohibited because they disrupt these connections (Caldwell 2012: 3).

Using crops that were produced at these farms allows us to tie different parts of existence together. More so, it serves as a physical link between our own bodies, the soil that produced crops, the water and sun that helped them grow while it also creates a spiritual link between ourselves and the universe (Gilson 2015: 35). It also links different lives and ways of existing together, such as the life of the eater and the farmer or that of the human, animal, plant and the seasons (Gilson 2015: 35). Lastly, it links us to the location where these beings exist, and therefore, inherently, also to the histories, the present and futures of these places.

**The Reasons for this Dinner**

Food, eating[1] and agriculture are fundamental to sustaining our life. Not only do we need to eat in order to have energy so we can achieve the things we do on a daily basis, but historically, it has played a big role in the creation of communities, especially urban dwellings. The production of food can only be achieved by working the land to grow crops or rear livestock. "[I]f done properly, [the process of growing, cooking and eating food] can draw deeper and richer relationships between the land and the people living from it" (Tarr 2016: 52). These relationships have existed for a long time, as the Earth's resources have been used for human survival for thousands of years already.

First, the use of resources had minor impacts on the Earth, but now we have arrived in the 'Anthropocene', which is the first "human-dominated geological epoch" meaning that, for the first time, human activity is the dominant influence which is impacting, not only the environment, but also the climate at a rapid rate

[1]Food and eating, in this research, are understood as relation-holding terms, not just a material matter and a verb, but as essential for experiencing different relationalities.

(Nightingale 2018:706; Vazquez 2017: 5). The impacts of our activity will most likely "be observable in the geological stratigraphic record for millions of years into the future, which suggests that a new [geological] epoch has begun" (Lewis and Maslin 2015: 171). Historically, one of the developments that can be read in the stratigraphic records is the origin of agriculture, which "causes long-lasting environmental impacts as it replaces natural vegetation, and thereby increases species extinction rates, and alters biochemical cycles" (Lewis and Maslin 2015: 174). Another clearly recognizable change in the records is linked to colonial expansion, when new worlds were discovered and annexed, which "led to the largest population replacement in the past 13,000 years" while being the starting point of a globalized world with cross-continental trade of goods (Lewis and Maslin 2015: 174). More so, it led to a drastic decline of the human population in that time, because the Europeans who colonized large parts of the world killed millions of humans and other life by exposing them to diseases, wars, enslavement and famine (Lewis and Maslin 2015: 174). Since the colonial times, exploitation, violence and oppression have not ceased to exist. On the contrary, since the major expansion of the human population from the 1950s onwards, the "development of novel materials from minerals to plastics to persistent organic pollutants and inorganic compounds" have been exploiting the Earths systems and violating the safety of its inhabitants in new ways (Lewis and Maslin 2015: 176).

One of today's polluting and exploiting industries that is causing the Earth's systems to change, is the agricultural system, which has been increasing its production to feed the growing population an increasingly wide variety of products. Accelerated production has meant that more and more pesticides are being used in an attempt to control pests in order to secure high yields (Carson 1962: 32). The residues of these highly toxic chemicals are poisoning the soil, groundwater reserves and are contaminating streams, while also "fatally poisoning bees and cows, and causing human illness" (Carson 1962: 33).

Not just that, but the same logic that allowed for colonization, which was based on exploitation, oppression and the expansion of Western worldviews all over the world, is still causing a violent erasure of diverse relational worlds (Vazquez 2017: 3). The Western worldview that is the dominant driving force behind many of the decisions made today, is characterized by an anthropocentric understanding of the world, where humans and other-than-humans[2] are seen as separate (Vazquez 2017: 6). Anthropocentrism[3] puts humans at the center of existence, making them into the actors who decide what happens with all other forms of life, essentially allowing for a continued exploitation, and oppression of other humans and other-than-humans (Vince 2015: 5, Vazquez 2017: 3).

[2]The term other-than-humans is used to refer to all other forms of life, including plants, animals, enzymes, fungi and more. It also acknowledges the influence of the seasons, the ecosystem and astrological cycles, on all forms of life. Using other-than-humans rather than 'nature', 'non-humans' is a conscious decision made to challenge the binary that is otherwise created. This binary allows for the violation of those who are 'not human', making them into objects that can be exploited because they are understood as lacking human characteristics, making them into disposable beings (Nightingale 2018: 23).

After careful deliberation I decided not to use Val Plumwoods 'Earthothers' because the term limits other forms of life to Earth, which would make it challenge to argue that astrological cycles, the seasons and the complexity of the ecosystem are also connected to the discussion (Plumwood as cited in Clement et al. 2019: 5).

[3]Not all humans understand the world through an anthropocentric lens. For example, "Buen Vivir is an idea whose genealogy does not belong to the European tradition of thought" (Vazquez 2012: 1). Many indigenous cosmologies and traditions in Latin America make sense of the world outside modernity's neoliberal and capitalist power structures and instead they believe that "the human is always in relation with the cosmos and with nature" (Vazquez 2012: 1-4).

The separation between humans and other-than-humans was at the root of the decision to drain the Zuiderzee. Now, this separation is what allows for different oppressions in this region, for example the over-consumption of life and the pollution and exploitation of the soil that grows our crops.

## Anthropocentrism in Flevoland

Thinking about the region where the farmers live who produced food for the dinner of relations, it is important to be aware of the anthropocentrism that was necessary for this region to be created. People, drained the water and made agricultural land of an area that used to belong to the sea, disrupting ecosystems and interfering with a world mostly unknown to us. The seabed was suddenly bare, and the worms, clams and fish were displaced and killed to make way for different beings; the plants, humans and animals that would now inhabit the place.

Even though this violent past of the region cannot be ignored, it is also important to acknowledge the effort that farmers are putting into reconnecting with this land by building relations with it that are based on care and collaboration by acknowledging the interconnectedness between humans and other-than-humans. Especially the farms where the products for this dinner were grown are examples of places where peoples' relation to the land is changing. By seeing farms as holistic places where many physical and spiritual processes take place, new ways of working the land are explored and there is a shift away from the historically violent way of relating to the land. Alternative farmers are countering the anthropocentric logic by rebuilding collaborations with the other-than-humans on their farms and by choosing ways of farming that do not require pesticides. Flevoland, being one of the places in the Netherlands where different methods of farming are practiced, allows us to rethink and challenge some of the violent ways in which food is produced (Everdingen and Janssens 2001: 46). Its organic and biodynamic farms are at the root of some of the necessary agrarian transformations if we want to move towards more non-anthropocentric and therefore possibly more ecological ways of producing food that nurtures a diversity of relationalities (Everdingen and Janssens 2001: 45-46).

If we want to work towards socially and ecologically just ways of producing food, that take into account the current ecological crisis that we are facing, it is essential to acknowledge the role of farmers in this process, as they are the ones who manage the land and produce the food that we eat (Blijker 2012). One of the ways to rethink anthropocentrism can be found in the collaboration of farmers and citizens who are engaging in grassroots initiatives to create spaces where close relations between producers, products and those buying them are restored (de Boer 2017: 61). This dinner of relations is an example of such a grassroots initiative. It serves as a space where we can interact with the many beings that are involved in the processes related to food production. While acknowledging that everybody needs food to survive, it is also necessary to think about ways in which food is "integral to [...] questions of health, gender, race and the environment" (Goodman 2016: 1). This dinner will allow us to look at some of these questions by talking to the different people in this room who know more about food cultures in the Netherlands and different ways of eating and producing food. The farmers who provided products for tonight, farm by focusing on collaborations between humans and other-than-humans, while moving away from just looking at productivity. This might help us to start thinking about the complexity of food production that is ecologically and socially more ethical, which can be linked to some of today's discussions about ecological breakdown and the urgent need to critically think about anthropocentrism, which is causing oppressions in many spheres of life (Vazquez 2017: 9).

Another reason for organizing this dinner is related to the challenge to rethink the "possibility of being at home in and with Earth" which is a result of the Earthlessness and worldlessness that are necessary for the functioning of the capitalist and consumerist societies we live in (Vazquez 2017: 12). As time passes, there are less and less places in the world where growing, picking, preparing and eating food are communal activities which teach people about their ancestry, while nourishing their souls with the memories that the food they eat holds and allowing people to acknowledge their deep relations to the world (Wynne 2015: 383-387). By eating together, we hope to struggle against this and to create spaces where the world is understood as a place full of relations. It is necessary to move towards ways of understanding life as relational and deeply intertwined with Earth and all beings on and beyond it (Vazquez 2017: 12).

Countering the loss of multiple relationalities can be done in different ways, one of which is through producing food and eating it with others, acknowledging how it nourishes us. Food is an essential part of our being in the world, historically, in the present and in the future. To nourish embodied ways of knowing, we need to think through the "variety of deeply personal and intimate relationalities that we encounter viscerally through our bodies" (Bartos 2017: 156). Therefore, this dinner means to provide a space where we can share food and start practicing embodied ways of listening to each other.

When you finish reading the text, you will now see that the space has taken you to the Flevopolder, and you realize that the others who have joined you in the room are related to food and agriculture. You decide to take one more look at the book and, as you flip the page, you realize that you are still to read the final section of the first chapter. Then, you open the book again and start reading.

**Questions Asked in Preparation for the Dinner**

For the organization of the dinner, it seemed important to have a set of questions that could guide the preparation process. Tonight, these questions will guide the conversation, and, even though they cannot be answered by a single person, weaving the different stories together might give a look into some ways in which they can be answered.

Guiding questions

How are social and other-than-human relationalities shaped by organic and biodynamic farmers in the Netherlands? And how do they challenge anthropocentric and disembodied ways of understanding the world?

How do organic and biodynamic farmers in the Netherlands farm, and in what ways does this shape their connections to other humans and other-than-humans?

How does the embodied act of eating and sharing food influence how farmers build relationships inside and outside their farms?

# 3 Meeting the author of the text

Thinking about what you just read, you wonder who might have wrote those questions and what the next part of this dinner will be, but your thoughts are interrupted when the fresh apple juice you asked for is brought to you. As you take a sip of the juice, you sit back and look around, taking in the space, feeling the sun on your face and hearing the birds singing their songs.

It is not long after this, that one of the two women, who were talking about gender earlier, introduces herself to you. She saw you reading and shares with you that she is the author of the booklet. Driven by curiosity, you ask if she could tell you a bit more about herself. She smiles while she shares her story.

My name is Rosa and I was born in Zeeland to a Dutch father and a Greek mother. As a family we would go biking through the countryside to visit farms. We had our own vegetable garden where we worked multiple times a week, but we also went to our family farm in Greece every year to pick olives. We moved to a farm when I was ten years old and since then I have continuously listened to birdsong, the buzz of bees and the sound of our sheep who replaced the sound of our lawnmower. Now that I live in the Hague I long for the sounds and sensations that used to be my every day and I mourn when my grandparents send me messages about the visible decline of biodiversity at our farm.

The main reason why I got involved in the organization of this dinner was because I wanted to find ways to mourn the loss by doing something real instead of staying inside without doing anything. The last 6 months have been filled with different types of preparation for this dinner, one of which was spending three weeks at different farms, to get to know the locations, the humans and the other-than-humans there. Being outside is what makes me happiest and by working with those who produce the biodynamic and organic food that is sold at supermarkets, I got the opportunity to relate to the food I eat in a different way. But not only that, it also allowed me to be in touch with the part of myself that is trying to be aware of the knowledges that were taken away from me before I could possess them.

I am a feminist and luckily, I am surrounded by other feminists. Together, we have been thinking about the ways in which humans and other-than-humans relate to one another, and how those relationships change as we are increasingly disconnected from each other. Cooking and eating together is a way for us to connect, while also thinking about those who cultivated the food we cook with. Our way of reconnecting to the food we eat is by carefully buying and preparing it, but there is a missing link in this process because we do not know the ones who produce this food. This generates a sense of loss of knowledge, and it makes me long to inhabit, share and embody this knowledge. These feelings stirred my curiosity and made me want to talk to the ones who are growing the food that I buy in the store. I got involved in the organization of this dinner because it would allow me to meet some of the farmers who are working on regaining, sustaining and reclaiming the knowledge that is slowly being lost in the Netherlands.

Listening to Rosa's story, you are curious about the trips to the farms, and how these were organized. She continues, sharing that she went to the farms in order to get to know the places, the humans, and other-than-humans who would be connected to the dinner of relations. The farmers are the experts behind this dinner, meaning that their experiences with growing, preparing, eating and sharing food would be at the basis of helping us reconnect with Earth while exploring diverse relationalities that we are embedded in.

Rosa continues that in preparation for the trips to the farms, it was necessary to think about a methodology that would allow for a "lived experience of food which could 'enliven social theory by injecting living, breathing, feeling bodies into social methods and conceptual frameworks'" (Carolan as cited in Bartos 2017: 156). Wondering how she did this, you ask her if she can elaborate further, but she tells you to read the next chapter in the reading guide. The chapter includes reflections on how she prepared for the weeks at the farms, and she shares that today's dinner would not have been possible without the thoughts and theory in this chapter.

## Methodological Recipe

Starting my journey to the farms, one of my main aims was to "address questions [...] that [were] simultaneously personally, politically, and academically significant" (Napels 2013: 13) which meant that the methodology and methods needed to be aligned with this. This was achieved by using reflexivity, participatory research and feminist methodologies, which allowed me to create (Napels 2013: 26) "more interpersonal and reciprocal relations between researchers and the individuals whose lives and experiences constitute the focus of the research" (Bloom, 1998; Lawless, 1991 as cited in DeAnne et al. 2004: 42). Not only dialogue and engagement with, but also listening to the experts at the farms were necessary strategies to achieve more reciprocal relations based on trust and collaboration rather than exploitation as research subjects (Napels 2013: 26). Researching food from a feminist perspective meant that I needed to "think about the latent conflict between perspectives focusing on the problematic social meanings of food, bodies, and health" connecting them to relationality at the farms (Gilson 2015: 12).

This was one of the reasons why I wanted to work with the famers, rather than interviewing them a few times and writing about the information they shared with me. Using Donna Haraway's theory on situated knowledges, I wanted to use "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway 1988: 589). Instead of talking about the people who I would meet at the farms, which could potentially dehumanize them and silence part of their story, I wanted their expertise to be the main voice that would help me make sense of their lived realities, which would allow for the co-production of knowledge instead of a single narrative by me as an author (Da Costa et al. 2015: 272-73). The challenge here was to explore "how [...] I can understand the world, and simultaneously be in the world" (Askins 2018: 1279) while "[facilitating] exploration and unmasking of the ways dominant ideologies and systems shape and constrain thinking and action [...]"(O'Leary 2017: 144).

Before going to the farms, one of the ways in which I tried to work together was by involving the farmers in the creation of my "research design, questions, knowledge and outcomes" while searching for "new ways of collecting data, of learning and encountering one another, of being in the world" (Askins 2018: 1284).

It was a conscious decision to visit farms in the Netherlands, where I was born and raised, because that would allow me to do 'at-home ethnography' in order to challenge traditional ethnographic work (Espig and de Rijke 2018: 217). At-home ethnography allows the researcher to look critically at their context, while rethinking what it means to use an ethnographic approach by "including aspects of positionality and status as insider-outsider" (Espig and de Rijke 2018: 217). Other methods that I used during my time at the farms included participant observations and the mapping of the space, which served as tools to locate myself and to become aware of my surroundings in an embodied way.

Full participation in the daily life at the farms helped me to think through possible conflicts and social meanings. While being at the farms, I let the activities and the work shape my day and the interactions with the humans and other-than-humans there instead of following a schedule. Working the field, cooking and eating together inserted me into the lives of those I was working with, and allowed me to experience a "myriad of not only relationalities but also of new ways to actually come to know [the spaces I was navigating]"

(Mol as cited in Bartos 2017: 157). Throughout this process, I kept a diary[4] in which I gave detailed descriptions of the setting, the atmosphere and the activities done that day (Flick 2018: 434).

As I collected information at the farms, I was aware that analysing this data could be done creatively, which was achieved by writing three stories, one for each farm. The experiences of the summer and the different stories written about them, were the main sources of information when envisioning how the dinner of relations could be organized

**Writing method**

Next to using feminist methodologies in the field, the writing of this document also required a feminist approach. It was a conscious decision to cite mostly women, to recognize their knowledge and to show that they are working with these topics. Inviting farmers and academics to the dinner of relations allowed for their first names to be incorporated in this document, which is a way to show that the majority of the sources used were written by women.

More so, I hoped that writing stories would allow for relating, embodying and feeling, to counter the distancing, disengaging and removing that often takes place when researchers write up their findings (Richardson 2000: 253). One of the ways to challenge this distance is by exploring new ways of writing of the findings we gather when we do research. Instead of having just a scientific, or just a creative approach, increasingly "ethnographers desire to write ethnography which is both scientific – in the sense of being true to a world know through the empirical senses – and literary- in the sense of expressing what one has learned through evocative writing techniques and forms" (Richardson 2000: 253). Writing about experiences creatively, meant that the relations to those experiences continued to be taken into account, instead of disconnecting them completely from the spaces where they were lived and embodied. While writing the stories about my time spent at the farms, there was a need to keep looking back at my time there while acknowledging the importance of the different interactions with the humans and other-than-humans I met. The stories told by those I met at the farms inspired the three stories written about my stay there.

When the stories were finished, they were sent to the farmers to make sure that feedback could be incorporated before using them as a source of information for the dinner of relations. It was necessary to send the stories around, not only to receive feedback, but also because the dinner was going to be in English, which meant that parts of the conversations we had were be translated. Doing this, I was aware that translation is not an innocent practice because "accurate interpretations, let alone the nuances of language and speech, are often lost through interpreters or in the process of translation" (O'Leary 2017: 49). The erasure that might have taken place is something I wanted to handle with great care and awareness. My goal was to be as accurate as possible, while acknowledging the inherent risks of translation. Knowing that I would write stories meant my time spent at the farms was characterized by paying close attention to my surroundings, most of the time simply by listening to others. In a way, listening was used "as an ethical orientation, towards

[4] These diary entries and notes are at the basis of the imaginary that is being created for this research project. Creative writing and storytelling allowed me to use my experiences in this text.

knowledge as relationality" which helped me to think about ways of countering the silencing or erasing that often happens when findings are translated before they are incorporated in texts (Vazquez 2012: 7). As I was writing the stories and preparing for the dinner, I tried to be reflexive in order to be reminded of the interactions that took place at the farms, while remembering the setting, atmosphere and the way in which others were expressing themselves. The stories are a result of these reflections and are the main source of information for the organisation of this dinner.

When you finish the text, you realize that this dinner is not just a moment where you will eat delicious food, but it is also introducing you to the processes behind it and the people who were involved in its creation. Rosa has been the interlocutor for you to see those connections. You ask her to reflect on what it was like to go to the farms and then she elaborates how she felt.

I was nervous about meeting new people, learning new things and putting myself in a new environment. At the same time, I felt calm traveling to the farms, looking out of the window of the bus, seeing how the landscape got greener by the minute, with windmills that turned in the strong sea wind on my left side. The feeling of *home* got stronger when I arrived at the farms, where I was always welcomed with open arms by those living there.

Usually, the first afternoon was for getting comfortable in the room where I would stay, or by setting up my tent under a tree. Looking around the farms and being introduced to the people living and working there helped me to ground myself and to "be open to the possibilities of encountering, bumping up against, and becoming part of relationalities known and not yet known" (Bartos 2017: 157).

The week at each farm was filled with weeding, listening, talking, sharing, cooking, eating and sensing. While doing all these things I realized that time, somehow, shifted from minutes, hours or days, to the number of rows left to weed, or to night and day, the cycles of growth and to seasons. It changed the way of interacting with each other; work was done together and when we finished weeding a field we celebrated together. The interactions with my surroundings also changed, somehow making me look closely at what was happening around me and what the things around me really looked like. It made me aware of the size of crops, such as corn, which would rise high above my head as I walked through the field. After years of only seeing corn in the distance, while biking past it, or worse, as I would look out of a train window, I had forgotten that the true size of crops can only be felt when you are next to them.

Additionally, I was exposed to new relationalities because I started to use my senses more, for example by taking moments for listening to birds and bees, smelling the soil, and flowers, and feeling the leaves of the crops as we were weeding in the field. This changed my way of working; the work became more embodied as I paid attention to the details around me. Adjusting to the pace of life at the farms by actively engaging resulted in an embodied

experience that allowed for different ways of knowing to be explored and helped me connect to the food that we grew (Bartos 2017: 158).

At the same time there were challenges I ran into, for example, doing this for the first time meant that I was not always sure about the right way to ask questions. Being a young woman in traditionally masculine spaces influenced the interactions, for example task divisions were still based on stereotypical gender roles where women do the care work. More so, it was hard to remain critical of the information shared with me by the people who invited me into their lives.

Regardless, the experiences at the farms allowed me to think through my own life in ways that would not be possible if I had stayed in the city.

As you are listening, you realize that you want to know more about the people who welcomed Rosa into their farms. They are the main people behind this dinner. You ask but Rosa asks you to wait, the dinner is to begin, and you are ready to meet the farmers in person so they can share their own stories with you.

# 4 Meeting the Farmers[5]

Suddenly, the chatter in the room dies out because Rosa stands up and thanks everybody for being here. Then, she wants to take a moment to think about the soil that grew the crops used for the different dishes which will be served tonight.

After a moment of silence, she continues and asks the farmers to introduce themselves, as they are the ones who grew the food for this dinner. The idea is to have a short round of introductions, then, a dialogue between the people present can take place. When she is finished, people toast to the dinner, and the introductions start.

First, a man and a woman introduce themselves, sharing that their names are Tom and Tineke. They have travelled to this dinner from de Stadsboerderij (urban farm in English), in Almere, which is their biodynamic family farm. Accompanying them to the dinner are their kids, Tycho and Roos who are 19 and 23. There are many other people connected to their farm in different ways, but they did not join for this dinner. Tineke and Tom are first generation farmers and they have a mixed farm with livestock and agriculture. De Stadsboerderij, and it is a place where many people from Almere come to learn things about the countryside and food production. One of the moments when there are many people from the city at the farm is during their weekly farmers market. During this market, people from the region come to the farm to sell their products. It is a moment to meet new people and to create connections between the farm and the city. This connection is important to them, and they point out that this is why their farm is close to the city. They hoped that the farm would become a place for people to reconnect to the countryside, "because in the Netherlands there is a very strange relationship between farms and cities" (Tineke). They are also challenging the perceived divide between nature and agriculture at their farm. To them, food and eating play an important role in this rethinking, as food is grown at farms, meaning that they can be the place where some of the necessary discussions can start.

For the dinner of relations, they have provided the entrecote for the starter, and a vegan beetroot hummus has been made for those who do not eat meat. Both are served with bread that was made by the baker who always joins for the weekly market at their farm.

Next to talk is an organic farmer named Gerrit Senior, who is accompanied by a group of people from many different places. Part of them are his family, others are living and working at the farm permanently, but they are not related to Gerrit, and there are also international students who are doing their internship at the farm. He explains that the farm, which is called Eko de Eerste, is a mixed farm with dairy cows, a cheese factory, agriculture,

[5] All quotes and information in the following sections are from conversations with the different farmers which took place during the summer of 2019. The first week at Lizelore's farm was between the 14th and 19th of July, the second at de Stadsboerderij was between the 23rd and 28th of July and the third week at Eko de Eerste was between the 31st of July and the 5th of August.

The conversations were recorded and transcribed in Dutch and translated to English for this section.

greenhouses and there is a farm shop with a delivery service in the region. Currently, there are about 15 people living at the farm, all of whom are involved in the work that is happening there. Gerrit himself is a third-generation farmer on this land, and his son, Gerrit Junior, is a fourth-generation farmer. Eko de Eerste is a place where many people meet, and it is linked to its surroundings through their farm shop. Next to putting effort in creating relationships with people from the region, another important goal, that the people at this farm are striving for, is to "take care of the Earth by focussing on life instead of death as we produce food" (Gerrit).

The cheese and the yogurt that will be shared tonight were produced at Eko de Eerste. Not just that, but also the fried Roman Cauliflower, which looks like it came from space, and the lettuce used in the salad.

The last farmer to introduce herself is called Lizelore and she is a third-generation biodynamic farmer. She shares that her "grandfather was involved in draining the Zuiderzee, which is why he got a piece of land, as this was one of the ways in which people were rewarded for their work" (Lizelore). After her grandfather passed away, Lizelores mom and dad were the next to farm the land, and after years of mainstream farming they realized that more pesticides were needed every year for the same yields, which made them think about different ways of producing food. They decided to start farming organically, and under the influence of her mother's idea that "farms should be holistic places where everybody and everything connects with each other, they soon switched to biodynamic farming" (Lizelore). Since then, their goal has been "to create a farm where all humans and other-than-humans would be respected and cared for, acknowledging the need for mutual respect and collaboration instead of exploitation" (Lizelore).

After studying to become a veterinarian, Lizelore realized that she wanted to take over the farm from her parents, because she "felt a special connection to the land" where she grew up (Lizelore). Now that she is farming there, she points out that "the land in the region is in desperate need of attention and care because it has been over-used and is being killed with fertilizers and pesticides" (Lizelore). By being in communication with the land and listening to what it needs, she is working on "building meaningful relations with the crops [she grows] and the different cycles that are necessary to make them strong" (Lizelore). Not just that, but many different people work at her farm, making it a place where various types of relationships are nurtured.

The vegetables in this dinner are mostly from Lizelore's farm, for example, the soup has pumpkin, carrot and onion from her land. More so, the delicious homemade French fries are made with the special potato variety that her dad designed.

Now that you are getting to know the hands behind the food that is being shared tonight, you are looking forward to hearing the dialogue between the different farmers and other people at the dinner. It is clear that there are similarities in the ways of producing food at the farms, but you realize that there must also be differences, and you are curious to learn more about this. Other people in the room seem excited as well, and as the food is being served, everybody starts eating while listening to the conversation between the farmers.

# 5 The Dialogue

As people start eating, the first topic of conversation is brought up by Lizelore who shares a story about the collaboration with onion flies as a form of pest control. She talks about how in her onion field, some of the rows have small fly traps set up, which are there to measure the amount of onion flies in the field. The gathered data is analysed and used to indicate how many sterile male onion flies need to be released into the field. The reason to release sterile flies is because they will mate with the female flies, resulting in infertile eggs, and a decrease of flies harming the crop. This method is a way to control a pest without the use of insecticides, which means that other insects, who might not cause a threat to the onions, stay alive and continue playing their roles in the ecosystem. There is also a shift in the way in which Lizelore interacts with her surroundings. She acknowledges the existence of different animals and insects. Instead of eliminating a so-called 'pest' completely by spraying a chemical, she consciously collaborates with other insects to prevent the pest from getting out of hand. When Lizelore finishes her story, a lady at the other side of the table says she would like to add to this. Her name is Rachel, and she says that setting one insect against the other is a particularly effective way to handle pests without using chemicals (Carson 1962: 252). Encouraging the pest's natural enemies has different advantages, for example that "it is relatively inexpensive, it is permanent, [and] it leaves no poisonous residues" (Carson 1962: 252-53). Rachel continues and says that not just other insects are important in pest control, but so are birds, who are the principal enemy of most insects (Carson 1962: 108). As birds die because they are poisoned, it becomes increasingly challenging to deal with the resurgence of insect populations because their natural enemy is no longer there to regulate their numbers (Carson 1962: 108).

Nodding along to the conversation is a man who is sitting across Lizelore, whose name is Dave. He is a bumblebee expert and points out that it is interesting how Lizelore is collaborating with some insects, making them responsible for pest control. By doing this, she grants existence, not only to other insects such as bees and bumblebees, but also to birds and other animals. More so, he believes that she also acknowledges the importance of conserving different species, because they are responsible for our wellbeing as humans, but more importantly because of their essential roles in the ecosystem (Goulson 2016: 240). Her way of interacting with her surroundings shows that she is aware of the diversity of life on Earth, and the complex interrelations between these life forms (Goulson 2016: 240). Then, he continues to say that:

> "We need worms to create soil; flies and beetles and fungi to break down dung; ladybirds and hoverflies to eat greenfly; bees and butterflies to pollinate plants; plants to provide food, oxygen, fuel and medicines and hold the soil together; and bacteria to help plants fix nitrogen and to help cows to digest grass. We have barely begun to understand the complexity of interactions

between living creatures on Earth, yet we often choose to squander the irreplaceable, to discard those things that both keep us alive and make life worth living" (Goulson 2016: 240).

Lizelore smiles and agrees that it is important to let the diverse lifeforms at her farm exist alongside the work she is doing. It is clear to her that "almost everything is connected and even though we might not always see a direct link between different species, that should not be the reason to destroy the ones that seem to play an insignificant role" (Lizelore). Instead, she enjoys hearing insects buzzing around the flowers in her field and she knows that without them, agriculture would look very different, so she consciously chooses for protecting the variety of life at her farm.

When Lizelore's story is finished, Gerrit is the next one to speak. He adds to the story that organic and biodynamic agriculture "focusses on life instead of death, which links directly to finding new ways of controlling pests" (Gerrit). Even though "we do weeding on the farm, which is essentially killing weeds, it is still different, and in the general production process, life is valued over death" (Gerrit).

By collaborating with the other-than-humans that can be found in and around the farm, it can be argued that a different way of relating to ones surroundings is created, which also links to the conservation of different species that are sometimes considered as harmful, as nuisances or simply as useless beings. Gerrit's way of countering this way of thinking, is by moving beyond the basic guidelines that exist for organic farms. Instead, he pays extra attention to the conservation of other-than-humans who pass through the farm as the seasons move along. He says:

"I do this by planting trees, I really love trees, they change the surroundings and they allow for new life to exist at the farm. That means a lot to me as a person, but it also means a lot to the farm as a whole. You create some shade, you create some peace, and you create a place for birds and a space for biodiversity to thrive, more than it would do if you just plant some flowers at the side of your field. What I find particularly nice about the trees I plant is that they also have an agricultural function. For example: we deliberately planted a girth on the north side of the land, so it breaks the cold northern winds. The solitary trees are purposefully planted on the south sides of our land because then they create shade for the cows; this is clearly an agricultural purpose" (Gerrit).

The planting of trees is done for different reasons, some of which are directly linked to the production of food, while others focus on the conservation of species. One of the other guests says that this is an example of how human and other-than-human relations are renegotiated and reconfigured, which allows us to explore "new practices of sharing, appreciating and exchanging" while challenging the violent divide between humans and other-than-humans that is based on exploitation and oppression (Nightingale 2019: 23).

People around the table are nodding, and then Tineke says that she would also like to share something about food production in relation to the divide between humans and

other-than-humans. She points out that this divide is present in the ways in which agriculture is practiced in the Netherlands and says that:

> "a landscape with two types of deserts has been created here; nature deserts and agricultural deserts. The nature desert is completely barren, and wildlife gets no chance to survive there, whereas the agricultural deserts are characterized by monocultures and are therefore very monotonous. The reason for this is because there is a fence in between the two, separating them completely from each other. Farmers don't want any nature, everything has to be straightforward and organized, whereas those responsible for nature reserves don't want any policies to regulate what happens there" (Tineke).

The divisions created by the mainstream agricultural systems separate humans and other-than-humans, as well as different types of other-than-humans from each other. In other words, humans are now the ones deciding which type of other-than-humans get to exist in agriculture and which ones do not. Anthropocentrism is regulating which beings get to exist in which places and how they are treated. This regulation results in the erasure of different relational worlds that are part of the ecosystems which we depend on for food production (Vazquez 2017: 3). The crops that are produced in agricultural deserts are lacking different relationalities, because they did not get to exist in relation to the other-than-humans that were kept separate from them. The sterile and controlled monocultures in which many crops grow, mean that relationalities are also made into monocultures, only allowing one way of existing, connecting and being in the world in these places. However, there are ways to counter this and Tineke, points out that by acknowledging the needs of: "nature and agriculture, a harmonious combination of the two is created where insects, soil life, birds and bugs are all seen as essential for fair and healthy agriculture. If we want to farm without chemicals, there is a deep dependency on these species, and that understanding of collaborating with nature is still mostly lacking when you look at the ways of farming in the Netherlands" (Tineke).

Hearing this, you realize that by rethinking the ways in which they can work with nature instead of against or besides it, the anthropocentric divisions that are erasing relationalities are challenged. While focussing on biodiversity and by taking into account the seasons and the needs of the other-than-humans that might not be directly beneficial for agriculture, the production of food changes. This change allows for the final products to hold different relationalities within them as they have been grown by nurturing connections instead of destroying them.

The people around the dinner table continue talking about the importance to acknowledge that agriculture can also be done by taking into account the other-than-humans which might not be considered of direct use. Then, Tineke and Tom point out that in the Netherlands, the separations that were just talked about exist in many different ways. A similar separation exists between cities and the countryside. When they were envisioning

what their farm would be like, it was very clear to them that they wanted to challenge different divisions, one of which was related to the disconnection between cities and rural areas. Tom points out that farms are "not just for farmers, but they are a bit for the whole world", which is why they "thought that de Stadsboerderij [urban farm in English] would be the perfect name for our farm" (Tom). Elaborating further, Tineke shares that it was always part of their vision to have a farm that would also be open for people from the city:

> "We think it is cool that we are able to show a real farm to people. The farm is not a décor, or a petting zoo where you can find a chicken that will walk there forever, but instead you really become part of a running farm the moment you enter the property. This means that you have to be careful because there will be tractors driving around, as people are doing their work. Even though this means that there are certain dangers, we don't want to put signs everywhere saying 'Beware!' because we want people to feel welcome" (Tineke).

Making people feel welcome is achieved by having the doors to their farm open Monday until Saturday. People are always allowed to come and explore and to ask questions when someone is available. Then, she explains that one of their ways of connecting the city to their farm is by "having school classes [sometimes up to 200 classes visit in a year] come to the farm because children are excited about everything. They are curious, ask questions, and want to learn new things, which they then tell their parents when they come back to the farm together" (Tineke). Doing this, Tineke has realized that most people are disconnected from farms to an extreme extent. For example:

> "one time I heard a mother saying to her kid 'no those apples on that tree are not for eating, you should not pick those'. So, it seems like people think that apples are supposed to be in a package in the supermarket, and not on a tree. Another thing that shocks me sometimes is that many people do not recognize vegetables; they cannot tell apart lettuce and cabbage. At the same time, I realize that people really want to learn something, and once we start having conversations about these things, they are always very happy to learn new things" (Tineke).

This is the moment when different relations between people from the cities, the producers of food, the land and other-than-humans which are involved in these processes are deepened (Tarr 2016: 52). By talking about agriculture and thinking about ways in which everybody is connected by and depending on food for survival, the conversations become more personal and directly linked to the food we eat. Tineke points out that, as people are asking questions and learning new things by looking around the farm, the conversations that occur are deeply linked to food and food production. For instance:

> "When someone asks, 'why is that calf still with the big cows?' or 'what type of machine is that?' the conversation instantly moves to food and food production but also to topics such as fertilization and how producing and eating food is inherently linked to caring for the Earth. This is one of the reasons why we created a communal kitchen on the farm. It allows us to cook and eat with others, and as we do this, we use products from the farm, which means we can tell their stories. Food, in a way, is one

> of the main ways in which we connect to each other, because everybody has their own memories related to food, or preferences when it comes to what they like to cook and eat" (Tineke).

Suddenly, people's interest in their food grows, as they are engaging with those who cultivated it while learning something about the places where it grew (Tarr 2016: 52). Not just that, but people who visit the farm are also introduced to "the process of intentionally nurturing, growing, harvesting and celebrating food" in ways that are challenging large scale industrial agriculture (Tarr 2016: 53).

By opening the farm for different people, a space of exchange and learning is created, allowing for interactions that can be hard when farms are further away from a city. Not just that, but the separation between the places where food is grown and those in cities is made smaller. As Tineke is sharing this, one of the other people at the table puts up her hand to show that she wants to say something. First, she shares that her name is Erinn, and then she points out that the reconnection between cities and the countryside is crucial in an attempt to restore the relationalities that were lost as food production became about 'efficiency' in the narrow economic understanding of the concept (Gilson 2015: 15-16). This so-called efficiency was only possible by denying interconnections, relationality and dependency as fundamental to growing food, which has resulted in seemingly efficient, but deeply harmful and violent agriculture and food production that is based on the domination, oppression and exploitation of other humans and other-than-humans (Gilson 2015: 16). She ends by sharing that de Stadsboerderij seems to be a place where the detachment between the countryside and the city is countered by offering a space where respectful connections between "workers, animals and natural systems" are rebuilt (Gilson 2015: 27). By creating places of learning about food while sharing and enjoying it, the separation between cities and rural areas is challenged. Not just that, but it also means that people need to face the relationalities that they are implicated in, which will hopefully have an impact on their engagements and choices when it comes to the way in which they eat (Gilson 2015: 32).

Another way of bringing people into agriculture is found at the farm Eko de Eerste, where international agronomics students can complete their internships. Gerrit explains that this is a conscious decision that they made at the farm, because they want to move beyond the basic rules that prescribed for organic agriculture. He says that "organic farming is more than just these basic rules, and it also needs a level of integrity when it comes to ways of treating people at farms" (Gerrit). Not only decisions related to agriculture reflect the goal to move beyond organic rules and regulations, but also the social decisions at this place are an example of that. According to Gerrit, the predefined rules are lacking a social awareness, because they do not talk about how we should treat each other at farms. He shares:

> "This is one of the reasons why we choose to have people over at this farm for longer periods of time, offering them a place to live while they work here. Instead of just hiring somebody for one day when a certain job needs to be done, people live with us at the farm. Some other farmers would probably just tell them to rent a room in the Polish hotel in the village next to us. By

hosting people, we get to know those who work with us, and we share different moments of the day with each other" (Gerrit).

The shared moments at Eko de Eerste usually involve food in some way or another. What Gerrit is saying makes sense to you because to work one needs energy, energy is obtained by eating food, and eating is an activity that can easily be done together. Then Gerrit points out that:

"This is one of the reasons why we have breaks and meals together; to have communal moments. Especially for those who work more individually, for example with the cows or making cheese, it is important to have a moment together with others, so we make sure the schedule is adjusted to this. In those moments we get to know each other and share something more than just working, because in the end, the work we do is all for people, we produce food for people, and that gives the human a certain central role in this all, so it would be contradictory to leave the human and their needs completely out of the equation" (Gerrit).

Erinn is quick to add to this that it is not just the importance of relations between humans that is recognized by having communal moments like the ones Gerrit described, but also to share food plays an essential role in offering a space where connections can be made, she says:

"food locates us in a network of relations of dependency […]. Food is a medium of expression, a vehicle for meaning, and also a locus of connection in the most evident sense: it is a physical link between human bodies and soil, water, and sun; it ties various kinds of lives to one another (human and animal, eater and farmer, familiar and unfamiliar, proximate and distant); it links disparate and distant places; its meanings change over time, in varying places and contexts, and for different persons and groups" (Gilson 2015: 35).

You realize that the food that is produced by the people who are then eating together and relating to one another, is later distributed and eaten by those who buy it. That food will carry these relationalities within it, meaning that the ones eating it will nourish themselves, not just with the nutritional value of the food but also the relational worlds that went into growing it.

Hearing this, Lizelore shares that she thinks "Eko de Eerste is a beautiful farm because many people are working together to produce organic and fair food" (Lizelore". For her, knowing this adds another layer to eating, and it changes the way food tastes "because knowing where it was produced allows her to connect to it more directly" (Lizelore". She continues "that the way food tastes changes when it is from your direct surrounding. For example, my own products are super delicious, they taste full, pure, gorgeous, and that is because I put my soul and salvation into them. Whether that is placebo or real doesn't really matter to me because that is simply how I experience it" (Lizelore).

Not only does eating food that was produced by herself or in her direct surroundings influence the way Lizelore experiences the way it tastes, but it also shapes her decision-making process in terms of what to eat and how to get access to food. For example, the food that is eaten at her farm is purposefully seasonal and fresh, often produced at her own farm, in her vegetable garden or otherwise bought at and delivered by Eko de Eerste. When Lizelore makes grocery lists with those who are working and living with her at the farm, she consciously discusses with them what to order. When products are out of season or need to be imported from far away, they think of alternatives together. She says that:

> "These conversations are important to me; it is really important to talk about these things with others at the farm, and I like it when people ask questions. Especially because the people who work with me are all very different. Some of them know a lot about the technical and scientific side of farming, whereas others have never seen a fresh carrot before. For them, my farm is full of surprises, and having conversations with these people feels good because it makes me reflect on how much we can all learn by being at farms together. As we share food and cook for each other with my own crops or products form the region, we nourish our bodies and share one of the most important things that is at the foundation of our existence; food" (Lizelore).

By taking a moment to consider why it is important to use seasonal products that are produced at the farm or close by, Lizelore and the people she works with are changing the way in which most decisions related to food are made nowadays. Agreeing with this, two ladies who look like sisters and are called Jessica and Allison, point out that what Lizelore is doing can be considered an important "daily project of illuminating the mechanisms through which power surrounds and penetrates the human relationship with food" (Hayes-Conroy A. and Hayes-Conroy J. 2008: 469). The conscious decision-making process that is at the root of the way in which Lizelore eats, makes food into a concrete tool that offers the possibility to think about the power-relations that shape the relationships between humans and other-than humans (Hayes-Conroy A. and Hayes-Conroy J. 2008: 465). By taking into account seasonality, locality and the way in which food is produced and by whom, there is a recognition of "dependency relations and [an investigation of] the quality of the modes of relationality that pervade everyday life, [which broadens] our perspective on the relationships that are central to food and agricultural systems" (Gilson 2015: 37). Highlighting and acknowledging these relationships means that we connect to our surroundings differently, and therefore, food could be one of the tools that can help us to challenge anthropocentric understandings of the world.

While people are discussing, you remember an article that you read by Andrea Nightingale, in which she talks about how "people's identities emerge relationally from their interactions both with the social world and with the natural (nonhuman) world" (Nightingale 2013: 2365). The stories that are being shared tonight are making you realize that the farmers here are engaging with humans and other-than-humans around them by appreciating and

recognising the interconnectedness of all forms of life, which is cultivating different relationalities and ways of being in the world (Singh 2017: 769). Thinking about this, you wonder if they can give examples of how their way of farming shapes their connections to other-than-humans, and how that can be linked to eating and food.

You raise your hand for attention, and when it gets quiet you clear your throat and ask your question. When you finish, Lizelore is the first one to respond, and she mentions the importance of caring for and being in dialogue with the soil that grows the crops she cultivates. Then, she points out that she feels like "everything around her is temporary, but that this does not mean that [she] can be reckless and exploitative when farming" (Lizelore). She says:

> "We are temporary, crops are temporary, buildings are temporary, thoughts are temporary, actually, almost everything is temporary, but the soil, the soil stays. Of course, it might be temporary as well, because we do not know for how long Earth will continue to exist, but you get what I mean. The soil, or Earth, is a lot less temporary than everything that is happening on it. Knowing this makes me feel a deep respect for the soil, it allows me to relate to the things I grow in the soil. Although we might be working on a tiny top layer of it, it is really the soil doing all the work. For example, when I sow carrots, I have a tiny box of seeds which I sow, and after harvesting, my barn will be completely filled with carrots. Then I ask myself; 'who should get the credit for that?' well, it is certainly not me, I don't have that illusion at all" (Lizelore).

Instead of claiming the credit for the work that is done by the soil and the crops, Lizelore thinks it is important to contribute to creating the right conditions for crops to grow, and for the soil to stay healthy and strong at the same time. To achieve this, she thinks from the perspective of the plants that she is growing which means that:

> "Before sowing seeds, I ask myself 'is the bed that this seed will be put into comfortable, is it warm enough? Is there enough food? Will the seed feel safe and welcome? Then, I think about what the seed might need to grow, while simultaneously caring for the soil that will provide it with nutrients. The reason why I think about the soil is because if we ruin it now, then future generations are not going to be able to farm with it because we are exhausting and exploiting it in many ways. When I look at how some farmers in the region are treating the soil it really makes me feel like crying. Talk about connections! Well, if you are connected to your soil like that, I think that is an extremely violent way of connecting" (Lizelore).

By imagining the needs of the other-than-humans that she works with while producing food, Lizelore is engaging with the resources that she depends on for her livelihood (Nightingale 2013: 2363). Contrary to that, but much more common nowadays, "there are those who share a deep [dependency], attachment and respect for nature, who nevertheless treat 'the environment' in damaging ways in order to sustain our livelihoods (White as cited in Nightingale 2013: 2362). This contradictory and violent way of breaking down connections and erasing relationalities is resulting in the degradation and exploitation of the humans and other-than-humans around us (Nightingale 2013: 2376). This disconnects us from the food

we eat and takes away our ability to sustain ourselves without harming others (Nightingale 2013: 2376).

Seeing that these disconnections become more and more widespread, Lizelore shares that she feels like she has "a responsibility to care for the soil by acknowledging that it should not be treated as something fixed" (Lizelore). One of her ways of doing this is by living with the seasons, then she explains:

> "in spring and summer, the soil opens itself up, showing its strength and allowing me to collaborate with it so I can grow crops. Summer is a busy time, and I feel like the energy of my surroundings help me to open up as well. In summer I can keep going much longer than in winter, and I enjoy communicating with the people around me a lot more during this time of the year because it is light, and everything is alive. In winter, however, the soil becomes silent, it creates a crust and turns inwards. This is the time when important processes are happening, and soil life is preparing for a new season of growth and collaboration with the outside world. Not only the soil is more closed during this time, but I am too. In winter I want to be inside more, taking time for myself, in winter I want to stay on my own island, which is this farm and land so I can recharge my energy levels for a busy spring that will come as the seasons change" (Lizelore).

The changing seasons are shaping the ways in which Lizelore relates to her surroundings, to other people, to the soil and the other-than-humans around her. She points out that it is important for her "to be in touch with the feeling that some things are temporary, and others are not" (Lizelore). Reflecting on the story that was just shared, Neera, another lady who is sitting at the table, points out that how this way of building connections shows that Lizelore is "not a stand-alone actor but a relational being entangled in a complex set of relations with other human and nonhuman actors" (Singh 2017: 760). Her way of working is nurturing "relations of care and reciprocity with nature and other species in the process" of growing food (Singh 2017: 760). By being concerned about the well-being of others while acknowledging how she is relationally entangled with everything and everyone around her, she is challenging the separations and divisions that are part of anthropocentric understandings of the world (Singh 2017: 760). Neera continues by reflecting on an article she once read and she says that the food that is produced at Lizelore's farm is grown while taking into account that "the cosmos emerges, again and again, out of diverse ways of composing worlds, of crafting attachments and connections that link soil and Earth, compost, humus, mud, grass, dogs, sheep, humans, and more" (Despet and Meuret 2016: 35). The many relational systems that we are connected to and embedded in, are given a space to exist, and by engaging with other-than-humans in the way Lizelore does, the perception of the human as the decision-maker and the one in control is put into question (Despet and Meuret 2016: 26).

Then, Tycho continues the discussion related to the seasons by pointing out that "the seasons are not just an important part of growing food, but that they also shape their own relation to food every day" (Tycho). Seasonality is a part of dinner in different ways, reflecting not only in the products that they eat, but also in the time of eating. Dinnertime is not set, especially not in summer, when the pace of life is shaped by the work that is being done in the fields. He says:

> "In summer, the time of eating changes every day because some days we are back really late from work. Sometimes we will eat dinner at 21:45, simply because that is when we get back from the fields. In winter, we can adjust our work to dinnertime more easily because we are doing smaller tasks without the need to hurry. Fixing a machine, for example, does not have time-pressure behind it and can be continued the next day. That is not always possible when we are harvesting crops because continuing the next day might mean a failed harvest, which cannot happen, so in those cases we need to keep going until we finish harvesting the crop" (Tycho).

Tineke is nodding while Tycho talks, and she adds to his story that it is not just the time of eating that is influenced by the farm work, but also the preparation process of dinner. Even though all family members know how to cook, the work on the land is important during summer, which often results in her being the one cooking the meals. Then, she points out:

> "I don't cook because I have to, but I enjoy preparing food, and during busy times that means that I often am the one preparing dinner. Usually I will get to know who will join for dinner as the afternoon develops, and I will text the others, so I have an idea of the time when dinner should be ready and how many people will join. I do not feel pressure to do this, rather it is my decision, and I know that, if I decide not to cook one day, this will not be frowned upon. In that case we will prepare something quick and easy together when the others come back from the field" (Tineke).

Just like Lizelore, Tineke and Tycho link eating habits and the pace of life to the seasons, and they point out the contrast between daily habits in winter and summer because the seasons are leading their life. To elaborate, Tineke gives the following example:

> "In summer we live outside and in winter we live inside and this shapes our activities in many ways. In winter we talk, read, study or we have discussions about things we want to learn. In summer we live outwards, so we are working, we are outside, and we might take a moment to lay on our backs at night so we can study the stars. They are two completely different lives" (Tineke).

Tycho continues, and says that not only their lifestyle and daily activities, but also eating habits are influenced by this:

> "we eat with the seasons, so we will eat carrots from July until October, but then they are harvested and taken away in one go, so then we will shift to other crops that are available in October and the months that follow" (Tycho).

The different ways of eating and cooking are linked the availability of certain crops. Tineke agrees with this and elaborates that:

> "In summer there is abundance and exuberance, not only in the way we live but also on the land and in the garden. Food is growing everywhere, and many people bring food from different places; it seems never-ending, and that is really what it is like during this time of the year. This also means that there is no need to think about groceries or to worry about what to cook because food is plentiful during this time. In winter there is more structure and that also reflects in the food we eat, so we might have a stew on Mondays, something with rice on Tuesdays, and during this time I ask the men to cook as well, which allows me to take a break from cooking, which makes it easier for me" (Tineke).

You realize that life is shaped by the complex ecosystems which are influencing the interactions between the humans, the soil, the water and all the other-than-humans that are present at the farm. By thinking about the ways in which this interconnectedness is part of daily life, the abundance of relationalities is acknowledged, which directly counters the detachment that occurs in processes of food production. Instead, it nurtures the relations between farmers and the others involved in growing food while connecting them to their surroundings and stimulating meaningful relations with those one eats with, allowing them to share meaningful social worlds with them (Gilson 2015: 28-30)

Fundamental to the creation of meaningful social worlds full of relationalities is the awareness of the countless "types of relationships involved in not only the making of food but also the making of meaning surrounding food" (Gilson 2015: 30). One of the ways in which meaning surrounding food can be experienced is by knowing the story of the food, which is explained by Tineke who shares that:

> "All the food that we eat at our farm has a story behind it. When people bring food, they always share with us where it was found or how it was produced. That is how I want to eat, because I think that when we are eating those stories, they nourish us" (Tineke).

Eating food that is full of stories is a way to challenge the emptiness of most of the food that is eaten today. This benefits both those who are engaged in agricultural processes and the ones that they share food with, giving dining experiences "value beyond the quality of nutrition: relationality" (Tarr 2016: 58). You are convinced, as we get to know the stories of the food that we eat, our ways of relating change, and instead of eating food without knowing anything about it, we can now 'eat and connect to these stories' making them part of ourselves.

Reflecting on what was just shared, Gerrit adds to the conversation how he believes that 'we are what we eat', which can be directly linked to the ways in which food is grown, and how eating food is directly impacting the way in which we are in the world. Then, he shares the following story to clarify his point:

> "Imagine that you have a mainstream potato and an organic potato. That mainstream potato was grown in a field where chemical products were sprayed, and it got chemical fertilizer, it grew on soil that as filled with crap, and, in the end, a nice potato is harvested. The moment this potato was harvested, it was put in a barn until March. The potato was alive when it was harvested, but in order to store it and to make sure it would not germinate before being sold, they sprayed a gas over it to kill it. When buying it, you can make fries with the potato, and those are pretty tasty, but the potato you make them with is dead. So… when you are eating mainstream potatoes you are eating 'death'. If we want to believe that 'we are what we eat' that would mean, we are dead when we eat those potatoes. That is very black and white, but this is how I see it.
>
> Then we have an organic potato, which grew in summer and did not get anything sprayed on it. There were a few more tractors involved, to keep the weeds away, but other than that not so much. It was harvested and the yield was a bit lower than that of the mainstream potato, but it is also a tasty potato that is stored over winter. The storage has a low temperature and when you eat this potato in March, then you could also plant it and a new plant will grow out of it. The potato is alive, so you are eating 'life'. Eating organic food means you are eating life. And then I ask myself, if I had to choose, do I want to be dead or alive?" (Gerrit).

The room is silent when Gerrit finishes his story, and it is clear that people are thinking about what he just shared. It highlights how the "current ecological crisis is deeply connected with our ways of being human" and shows how humans are the ones who decide what gets to live and what does not (Singh 2017: 769). These decisions are, not only, harming our surroundings, but also our own bodies, as we are using heavy pesticides to grow crops. Those crops not only have toxic residues on them, but they are also emptied of relationalities, as their stories were erased, and their surroundings were killed in order to grow them as efficiently as possible.

Then, the quietness in the room is ended by Lizelore who points out that it is important to keep thinking about these topics, but that we should simultaneously keep looking for positive ways to approach these issues. Food, makes her very happy, and while it is necessary to be critical, we can also need to be aware that:

> "Food is the foundation of our existence. We simply would not exist without it, which makes it something very important in our lives. I enjoy learning about food and sharing that with others because I keep being surprised time and time again when I work the land; every year is different, and things are always evolving" (Lizelore).

Thankful for the more positive note, people around the room start to chat and think of questions to ask. Rosa and her partner begin the conversation by thanking everybody for

sharing their stories, after which they invite a conversation about gender. They ask if anybody could elaborate more on what it is like to be a woman and a farmer, especially because farms are traditionally masculine spaces. Rosa elaborates how her experiences at the three farms were very different. She became more aware of the gendered division of labour on the farms, and how people saw work differently. When she was talking to one of the women at Gerrit's farm, they discussed how it is often perceived that women are more precise and caring when they do their tasks, and that men are considered less careful. This bias can be frustrating for women as jobs are predefined through these stereotypes. For example, she knows how to drive tractors, but people act shocked that she can drive a tractor as it is not considered a woman's job. She shared how she does not enjoy cooking, but she does it because it is expected, and it is part of the rules the farm has created for living together. Working with crops every day, and engaging with food in many ways, she is very honest about the stereotypes that can be found in relation to gender, especially in an agricultural setting.

Lizelore is nodding as she hears Rosa telling this story and jumps in to add that she has a similar experience. She says that one of the challenges she faces is that she is responsible for all the different tasks that need to be done at the farm. She says:

> "I really have to do everything, and I think that is more extreme because I am a farmer. At farms, usually the masculine and the feminine tasks are very separate, meaning that it is predefined who does what. In my case I am responsible for everything, I need to take care of the land, I need to fix machines and I need to communicate the things that need to happen to those who are working with me. At the same time, I also need to take care of the vegetable garden, I need to cook, clean and make sure to do all the other things that are expected from me as a woman. This means that during harvest time, when every minute counts on the land because there might be rain on the forecast, the tasks that are supposedly for women, fall behind, meaning that sometimes I don't have time to eat or clean, because the pressure is extremely high to get the farm work done" (Lizelore).

As Lizelore is saying this, you realise that they are all living in a society where "western modernity, coloniality, patriarchy, hetero-normativity and capitalism [are] all interwoven" (Walsh in Harcourt and Nelson 2015: 105). This is reflected in the way people in the Netherlands relate to their surroundings, and in the powerful gender-relations that are shaping their daily lives. As they are challenging the binary understanding of humans and other-than-humans by collaborating with nature in order to find an alternative to mainstream agriculture, other binaries are still persisting in their life. This shapes the ways in which people interact with each other, and it predefines the tasks. Lizelore is breaking through the stereotypes by taking up a different role, but it is an exception to the norm that she is the one is in charge of the farm. When she is talking about being a woman in a male-dominated space, she points out that she does believe that this will change over time. She says:

> "I am sure that this is going to change in the coming years. Whenever people come to my farm for research, or to do internships, they are almost always women. I really think that these spaces are necessary to allow women a safe space to learn how to be a farmer without being thrown into the rugged, macho male culture that is common at most farms" (Lizelore).

By letting other women engage with agriculture in safe spaces, Lizelore is challenging the masculine agricultural system, and connecting to those around her in new ways. While she is doing this, food plays an essential role in allowing for new engagements, in this case with the land and tasks that were first considered 'men's work'. As more and more women are in charge of the everyday actions at farms, which are inherently linked to food, there is the opportunity to rethink and reshape relationalities of food (Hayes-Conroy A. and Hayes-Conroy J. 2008: 469). While connecting gender discussions to food, it becomes clear that "'gender' requires one to not only analyze relations based on biological sex within society, but also to analyze how such relations are constructed, contested, and internalized, *and* how these processes of power are co-emergent with ecologies and environments" (Nightingale 2016: 1). How we understand ourselves in relation to food is influenced by the different processes of power that have predefined the ways in which we are seemingly allowed to relate to food. For women, that has meant that they are expected to take on the caring roles, which were historically within the walls of the house. Now that more women are engaging with food in ways that move beyond its preparation, new relationalities are emerging and gender-stereotypes are challenged.

Then, Rosa adds how she sees food as a lens through which we can learn about relationality and the many social dynamics that exist all around us. Looking at spaces where food production and preparation are part of daily life, sheds light on the gender-dynamics that shape the ways in which people relate to one another. Not just that, but it also helps us to "explore the complex social relations that inhabit and co-construct the multiple, contingent materialisms of food as it travels from outside the body to the inside [shaping our] thought-processes [in many ways]" (Goodman 2016: 6). This exploration helps us to practice embodied ways of knowing, that challenge the disconnections we are facing when it comes to the food we eat.

When Rosa finishes, you look around and see that people have almost completed eating. You take a moment to reflect for yourself, while enjoying the last bites of the delicious food that is in front of you.

# 6 The Closing of the Dinner

The dinner of relations is ending, and your head is filled with different topics after listening to all the stories that were shared. The short gender discussion at the end of the dinner makes you realize that there is no time left to go into all of your questions, so you suggest organizing another dinner soon. People around the room nod, and they agree that there are many more things that can be discussed in detail, for example "the global crisis of climate justice, food security, energy justice, vanishing wildlife, maldevelopment, habitat loss, industrial animal food production", but also racism, discrimination and LGBTQI+ issues in the countryside and more (Gaard 2011: 32). The stories shared made it clear that, when talking about these topics, it is helpful to use a feminist and ecological perspective, in order to start seeing the interconnectedness between all of them (Gaard 2011: 32).

Thinking back to the beginning of the night, when you were handed a set of questions to consider, you realize that the farmers you met have a complex understanding of how they relate to the humans and other-than-humans around them. The social and other-than-human relationalities that they engage in are influenced by their visions and the work they do. Their stories made it clear that if we want to challenge anthropocentric and disembodied ways of understanding the world, it is essential to acknowledge how we are all cohabiting this world, and that to farm, one needs to be aware of this interconnectedness. Cohabiting means that there is a need to take into account the seasons, the soil, and ecological cycles among others, and all the processes that are taking place around us. Embodiment of the seasons and eating food that is full of stories are fundamental to the social and other-than-human relationalities that influence the farmers' ways of being in their surroundings, which creates the possibility to challenge anthropocentrism.

Furthermore, in the Flevopolder, where the sea was forced to make way for humans, the relations between humans and other-than-humans have been violent and disruptive. The food that is grown there today, holds these histories within it, this region is still tied to its history which shapes the farming practices there. Mainstream agriculture uses different chemicals, killing, not only the crops that are eaten, but also further violating the soil and the ecosystem in many ways. Lizelore, Gerrit, Tom and Tineke are countering these exploitations by understanding their farms as livings systems where all humans and other-than-humans are part of a bigger whole. This is at the root of how they rethink the ways in which they want to relate to the humans and other-than-humans around them. As they are caring for the soil by listening to what it might need to continue being fertile, while strengthening the connections between the city and the countryside, they are nurturing multiple relationalities at their farms.

When you reflect, you conclude that, even though they are challenging mainstream agriculture, it is still necessary to remain critical by questioning what it means to do alternative farming, and to what it is an alternative. Even in organic and biodynamic agriculture, the soil is manipulated for our benefits as humans, which can be considered inherently violent and

exploitative. You wonder what the farmers might think about this, so you write your thoughts down for the next dinner where you hope to discuss more about this.

Then, it is time to discuss the final guiding question about embodied acts of eating and sharing food, and how this influences the ways in which farmers build relationships inside and outside their farms. First, you realize that it is important to acknowledge that there is a variety of ways to communicate and connect to the humans and other-than-humans around us, which is fundamental if we want to care for each other. This means that the decisions made in organic and biodynamic agriculture are based on complexity and interrelatedness, resulting in new ways of caring that are based on diverse relationalities. Doing this will allow for an active rethinking of the binary divides that are at the root of the power structures that are causing the decline of relationalities. To try and counter this decline, the farmers are not just focussing on producing food, but they are also cooking, sharing, preparing and eating food with each other. Embodied acts of eating, therefore, play an important role in how the farmers relate to those inside and outside their farms.

Listening to the people who are actively working with the other-than-humans around them to grow the food that we all eat, is a first step in regaining knowledge and in finding ways to challenge the systems which have disconnected us in the first place. While doing so, it is necessary to stay critical, and to use our feminism to keep asking ourselves why and how we relate to those around us. Thinking about this, you recognise the importance of questioning the ways in which improvement can still be made at the different farms. You wonder how gender stereotypes could be challenged more and, even though it was not discussed tonight, you realize that it is important to challenge more of the oppressive power-structures that might occur at the farms. Next time, you would be interested in asking more questions about how capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, racism and homo/lesbo/bi/transphobia can also be challenged within alternative farming, first, by acknowledging their existence, and then by finding ways to link the ideals of these ways of farming to these structural oppressions, exploitations and violations.

As you are thinking about your critiques and questions, you open up the booklet once more, curious what Rosa concluded as her final thoughts:

**What did I learn from this experience?**

Now that the organization of the dinner is finished, I have much to think about. The writing of this booklet and the organizing of this dinner taught me a lot about myself, and the importance of challenging my own thinking, personally, politically, academically. I have worked hard on using a different way of writing, which allowed me to explore new ways of acknowledging the voices of those who are the experts behind this all. Creating the dinner of relations was a way to rethink relationalities, not just in answering the questions that I asked myself before starting this journey, but also in ways of researching and writing. Now that I am finishing the final section of the booklet, sitting at the same desk where the first thoughts about this project germinated, I realize that there is much more to say and to connect to. For example, connecting to those around me by learning about new ways of experiencing food, while I am trying to be more in touch with the seasons, is allowing me to find relationalities that I was unaware of before my trips to the three farms. This all, is the starting point for a continuation of conversations and thoughts about our relational existence, and the need to rethink how we connect to one another. Food will be at the basis of these conversations, because we all need it to nourish ourselves, not only with its nutrients, but also with the stories it holds.

At the same time, I learned that doing research is hard and that using participatory methods, letting opportunities occur naturally, can be challenging. Being a young woman who was doing this type of research for the first time meant that I was not always sure how to interact with people, which shaped the relationships we built. At some farms I felt more confident than at others, which influenced the work I could do there. Next time, I want to think more about a methodology that includes a back-up plan in case I do not know what to do, which is important when you are depending on other peoples' willingness to share their stories with you.

All in all, I learned a lot, and I will take these experiences with me so I can improve in future projects.

When you finish the section, you realize that this dinner of relations was not just about bringing people together, but also about challenging the ways in which we try to do research. Rosa's trips to the farms, and her engagement with different humans and other-than-humans made her aware of the importance of finding a new way of transferring her experiences, which she tried to do by organizing this dinner and writing the booklet which included extra information. She experienced how food is a fundamental element in the lives of organic and biodynamic farmers, as it is present in all parts of their life, not just as they work with their surroundings, but also because eating is a way to connect to others. This dinner was a reflection of that, and as the night progressed, you got to know many new people who shared their stories, introducing you to their realities and the other-than-humans which play an important role in their lives.

Now that the dinner is over, you have new questions, and you know that it is important to write those down so you can take them to the next dinner. As you take the last sip of your drink, you feel content and full. The food that was shared tonight was not just delicious, but it was also filled with visions, alternative practices and stories. This allowed for those present to connect to one another while everybody was sharing, asking questions, and listening to what the others had to say. Eating food with stories nourished by alternative visions and practices, while listening to them, is one of the ways in which we can nurture relationalities and it essential to be aware of that if we want to continue to work together with all the humans and other-than-humans that are all around us.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

Map of the area


Source, Google Maps – Screenshot taken on May 20, 2019

Two of the three farms visited are located in the region of the upper circle, and the other is located in region of the lower circle.

## Appendix 2

Webpages

The following webpages include information about the farms and the region where they are located.

**De Stadsboerderij Almere**

Website: http://stadsboerderijalmere.nl

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/stadsboerderijalmere/

Oosterwold Region: https://maakoosterwold.nl

**Lizelore Vos:**

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/biodynamischakkerbouwbedrijfvos/

Extra information: https://www.bioromeo.nl/boeren/dames-en-heren-vos/

Article about Lizelore taking over the farm (in Dutch): https://edepot.wur.nl/367481

**Eko de Eerste:**

Website: http://www.ekodeeerste.nl

Facebook:https://www.facebook.com/pages/Eko-BoerderijDeEerste/1688794948062826

Extra information: https://www.hofweb.nl/boeren/eko-boerderij-de-eerste

**Flevoland:**

Dutch Society for Nature Conservation: https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/flevoland

Society of Nature in Flevoland: https://www.flevo-landschap.nl

## Appendix 3

Presentation University College Roosevelt

On the Friday before submitting my Research Project I was asked to teach two classes at my old university. The topic of the class was food and relationality, and my experiences of the last summer were at the basis of the class that I taught. I consider this an important moment because I got to discuss my thesis with other students, who, in a way, became part of the project by discussing it with me. They did a story-telling exercise, and we had a group discussion about the stories they wrote. Below you can find my presentation text and the exercise that I created for the class.

**UCR – Notes**

**Introduction:**

Introduce me – My name is Rosa, my favorite food is tacos and one word that I think of when talking about food is relationality (with many parts of life, people, much more, I will talk more about this later).

Your turn: (here the students introduce themselves, their favorite food and a concept that comes to mind when they think about food.

Now, a bit more about me and why I am here: I am from Middelburg, studied here and now I live in the Hague where I am finishing my MA in development studies.

SJP (social justice perspectives, gender and human rights) and a focus on feminist environmental studies, particularly food politics.

The main reason why I am so interested in these topics is because I grew up around vegetable gardens and my family thinks food is very important, and then, at UCR, I went to Oaxaca with the going glocal, which was a trip that taught me even more about the importance of food. That trip made me realize how, in the Netherlands, we are increasingly disconnected from the food we eat, and Rolando played a big role in making me aware of how this disconnection is at the foundation of many of the oppressions and exploitations that we find in life today and that we are implicated in.

An example of this is related to the environment and our use of resources, which is a much discussed topic today, and I have been working on that issue, particularly related to food, because food production is a polluting industry, but also one that we depend on literally in order to exist (we all need food to survive).

So, after I left UCR I went to the ISS in the Hague, where the courses I took related mostly to feminism, gender studies, and some to the environment. As ISS is a critical institute, we were constantly challenged to re-think the ways in which we do research, which is something that helped me be critical of how I want to be in the world, and I think that shaped my current research in many ways.

For my thesis, I am researching relationality in the Netherlands and how food plays a big role in this. Over summer I did literal fieldwork at three biodynamic farms, where I co-created research with the farmers who were the experts in this research. We talked about many different things and being there taught me about the importance of being aware of all the processes that are happening around us when we are growing and eating food. They taught me about the seasons, and how we need to listen to crops because they tell us many stories about the state of the soil and the environment. Not just that, but I also saw how food is at the basis of many of the relations that we build, for example, one of the farms tries to connect the countryside and the city – to counter the disconnections that have become

widespread today. They teach people about food production, which puts people back in touch with the soil that we depend on for life.

As I was doing critical research, it was important for me to challenge to dominant ways of writing academically, which is why I used storytelling as a technique to write my thesis. Doing this, allowed me to incorporate the voices of the farmers I worked with, as well as my own, because it was important to be very clear about the reasons why I was doing this type of research.

Now, I am finalizing my thesis, and I realize that there are so many different topics that connect to food. Gender discussions of who gets to do which tasks at farms are important, but also LGBTQI issues relate to it, racism, class struggle, future studies and much more.

This is one of the reasons why I decided to stay in the Netherlands for this research, I really believe that there is a lot that needs to change here, and the only way to start looking at that critically is by grabbing a mirror and seeing how we are behaving. Of course, we can travel the world to do research elsewhere, but personally I think that telling others how to change when we are one of the biggest polluters and we are responsible for a lot of the exploitation in the world, is very unfair.

Now that you know a bit more about my research, I want to introduce the exercise.

So, as we are talking about food and relationality today, I assigned a reading that connects to this.

I want to ask you to divide into groups of 4, organize the room into different 'islands' at which you will sit, and I want you to work together.

The article is one that I used for my thesis, and particularly this quote is at the basis of today's exercise: "How we come to know is partly a result of a variety of deeply personal and intimate relationalities that we encounter viscerally through our bodies. When we prioritize disembodied ways of knowing, our understandings of the world are limited" (Bartos 2017: 156).

I want you to write a story that gives examples related to this quote and the text that you read. The story is meant to be a reflexive exercise where you are invited to ask yourself 'how do I understand embodies ways of knowing, especially when it comes to food and eating/sharing". Also take into account the different relationalities that can be found around producing and eating food.

A story can be a poem, a role play, and you can use illustrations to give extra examples if you want, as long as you can present this in the second half of the class so you can all have a discussion with each other.

Also discuss with each other how food can be connected to different oppressions and exploitations. Think about ways in which we can counter that and how we can start creating different ways of being together to challenge the disconnections that are common today. Here, you can also use examples of your own lives if you want to – try to write this into the story (maybe as a conclusion/a call for action). When you finish, give your group a name and write down all group members on the paper which I will collect.

## Appendix 4

The Seminar

Before my Research Project Draft seminar took place, I visited all three farms so I could make food that could be shared at the presentation. This was suggested by Gerrit, who said that it would be strange to talk about food without letting people eat anything. His idea stuck with me, and it was the perfect way to visit the farms again before presenting, which would give me another moment to feel the places and to see the people I worked with during Summer. First, a group of friends and I visited the annual harvest festival organized by de Stadsboerderij, where we ate lots of food all afternoon while listening to music, seeing the cows, looking around and relaxing in the sun. I also got ingredients for the different dishes I was planning to make, and my groceries for that week. It was special to share this moment with friends, and as we were biking to the farm from the train station in Almere, we enjoyed the forest around us and talked about many different things that were not related to academic work. It was like a little holiday, and it meant a lot that I could show one of the places where I spent time that summer to my friends.

The next week my mom and I drove to Eko de Eerste and Lizelore's farm where we were warmly welcomed. Both had prepared a big box full of vegetables and fruit for me to take home, and Gerrit Senior also added a cheese to the box. We had lunch at Lizelore's farm, where we talked about the summer, what I learned, and future plans. After lunch Lizelore told me I should come back soon, which I agreed with, because we got along very well during summer. Being there with my mom added another layer to the experience, and I was happy to spend that day catching up with her while sharing some of the experiences I had at the farms.

Then, it was the day of the seminar, and my friends gathered in my room to cook together. It was special to prepare for a presentation in such a different way. Cooking is something I really enjoy doing, so it helped me calm my nerves, and when we got to the university to share the food, we enjoyed being together and tasting all the different flavors. After that, I was ready to complete my seminar, and I was proud to present my findings and share with other people what I had learned over the past months. Sharing food with my friends before presenting my findings was a great way to do my seminar, and it made me very happy to have them by my side while doing this.

All in all, this was an important added layer to this research, and it made me aware of the need to break through the ways in which we usually present in academia. By cooking and eating together, a relational aspect was added to the research process, and this helped me to think through my writing as I was finalizing the Research Project over the past weeks.

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