New Alliances on Farmland:

Balancing Scalability and Local Empowerment on Herenboeren farms in the Netherlands

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Cultural anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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"Anyone who thinks that a new world will be born top down, they don't get it. Life grows from the bottom up and localization is where the new world will be created" (Vadana Shiva 2021).

Foreword and Acknowledgement

After three months of fieldwork on two different Herenboeren farms, I feel like I could write a book, filled with anecdotes and stories of the adventure that I experienced on the Herenboeren farms. Of course it is impossible to tell the whole story in this thesis. My story is a personal reflection off my experiences and observations on two Herenboeren farms, which I try to interpret through an anthropological perspective.

In order to safeguard the privacy of my respondents, the exact location of the farms is not mentioned and pseudonyms are used for personal names.

Humbled and filled with gratitude, I would like to take the opportunity to express how beyond grateful I am to all those people who helped me to do my research and write my thesis. Doing my fieldwork on the farms has been an unforgettable experience for me and I feel blessed with having had the opportunity to learn so much about daily life on the Herenboeren farm, as well as the opportunity to gain so much bonus knowledge of farming in general. Every day on the farm was an adventure. For this I would especially like to thank the farmers who have been so welcoming and supportive of me; without them I could not have written this thesis. From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank all the helpful and supportive people I met on the farms, they have been incredibly important and their support, interest and willingness to tell me about their experiences made my thesis! It has been an inspiration to see so many people come together and have the perseverance, courage and overall positive spirit to turn their motivations into practice and change their consumption patterns.

Lastly I would like to thank my supervisor Vinzenz, whose critical questions and carefully-formulated comments were always exactly what I needed to stay focused and keep going and improving.

Introduction

On a sunny day in February I arrive on the farm where I find the farmers and some of the community members on the neighbouring farm. Here, a company is doing the initial dig to see what type of ground the farm is located on, and at what level they can construct a well for their irrigation system. Everybody is anxious to see the results of the drill. Unfortunately, the results are not what they had hoped. The water is full of iron which is damaging for crops. As they dig deeper, the ground becomes thicker and it is impossible to drain water from the thick mud-like ground. One of the members of the community in particular seems very disappointed. He has worked at a watering company in the Netherlands and seems to know best what this drill means exactly. ''I do not know how to continue,'' he says. As we stand around in a circle, some people share their disappointment and some ideas are mentioned on how to continue. Eventually the farmers and volunteers agree that the group of volunteers will brainstorm to come up with an alternative plan and report back to the farmers.

As we are walking back to the farm I ask one of the farmers what his thoughts are. Surprisingly, he reacts lightly:

> *''If this would have been our farm, we would have been bankrupt now. We can carry this setback because the risk is divided amongst 200 households. On the one hand it is disappointing, but on the other hand it is also exciting. No farmer would ever have the opportunity to experience how it is to work without proper irrigation; for us it is also an opportunity to see what happens next and how we can deal with water scarcity.''*

This particular farm is not owned by the farmers. The Herenboeren farms where I conducted my research, are owned by approximately 200 households who collectively buy a piece of land where they grow their own food. They employ a professional farmer who has the responsibility to grow the food for them and who functions as a manager of the farm. The farmer has the final responsibility for the farm, but does not work alone. Many members pitch in to volunteer on the farm, help with animal care, take charge of the distribution of the food or take on some of the management or administrative tasks. The first Herenboeren farm was created five years ago in 2014 (Herenboeren 2021). Since then the movement has grown rapidly to now encompass ten working Herenboeren farms across the Netherlands. For three months I conducted anthropological research on two of these farms to understand how the Herenboeren concept takes shape in practice. One farm located in the south of the Netherlands had been operational for over a year, the other farm, located in the east of the Netherlands, had been operational for approximately half a year at the time of fieldwork.

Agriculture is linked to a wide range of concerns such as the unsustainable use of natural resources, the growing impact of climate change, loss of biodiversity and poor food quality that can lead to chronic illnesses and starvation (IAASTD 2008, Mayer et al. 2020). In the past decades a ''cost efficient'' form of farming has been dominant; agricultural science focused on boosting production with newly developed technologies. This led to increased profits and lower costs for large scale farming. However, these developments came at a high environmental cost and did not succeed in ''solving'' social and economic problems. Around a quarter of global emissions stem from agricultural activities. Our world is hotter now than any time in recorded history, unleashing heatwaves, megadroughts, and acidifying seas. A million species are on the edge of extinction (IPES-Food, 2016). The cost-efficient form of agriculture has proven unable to provide solutions for these predicaments. Moreover, countries in the global south have generally been the ones who least benefited from this production boost (IAASTD, Mayer et al. 2008). Advocates of regenerative agriculture argue that, to come up with sustainable solutions for the challenges that are brought about by this profit-dominated form of agriculture, we need to go beyond the appeal of individual benefit (Crini and Lichtfouse 2019). Initiatives to promote eco-friendly agriculture and to bridge the gap between producer and consumer have proliferated in recent years (Cói 2016).

Early exponents are found in the so-called Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement, whose origin is traced back to an experiment in the late 1970s in Switzerland, which spread to the United States in the 1980s (Adam 2006). A CSA farm is characterized by a relationship of mutual support and commitment between farmers and members. Essential traits are reciprocity, transparency, fairness and active commitment of consumers (Cói 2016). In the Netherlands the CSA model was adopted in the late 1990s, following the example of CSA projects in the United States (Otters 2008). With the growing urgency to think about solutions for the climate crisis, a myriad of fresh and combative consumer and farmer organizations emerged from 2010 onwards (Cói 2016). Herenboeren is one of these newer initiatives that builds on earlier experiences in the CSA movement (Herenboeren 2021).

The Herenboeren farms are a type of economic project that is not driven by profit maximalization, but primarily focuses on fostering a type of consumption, production and distribution that is driven by ethical considerations of what a fair economy should entail. The Herenboeren model attempts to address the contemporary challenges in agriculture through a new form of food production where attention is paid to more biodiversity and less pollution, and where the farm as an organization does not strive to maximize individual profit. The approach uses ideas from agroforestry and permaculture to enrich the soil, the farmer is employed by the community, and risks are divided amongst the members. Therefore, the Herenboeren approach frees the farmer from the pressure he or she would encounter in regular agriculture. Thus, ideas on how to produce,

matters of sustainability and the pressure on farmers in the dominant agricultural system are all addressed in the exchange system of the Herenboeren farms.

As such, the Herenboeren organization can be defined as part of what is known as the 'social and solidarity economy' (SSE). Social and solidarity economies are characterized by a form of economic activity that prioritizes social, and often environmental, objectives over profit, and where producers, workers, consumers and citizens are acting collectively and in solidarity (Utting 2015). As stated by Peter Utting (2015): "Taken together, SSE is fundamentally about reasserting social control or 'social power' over the economy by giving primacy to social and often environmental objectives above profits, emphasizing the place of ethics in economic activity and rethinking economic practice in terms of democratic self-management and active citizenship.''

Within the SSE movements, the Herenboeren model has an interesting position because the creation of Herenboeren farms is a largely a top-down organized process. That is, the majority of the participants are connected to each other through the umbrella organization. Most members learn about the Herenboeren model individually, and only get to know their fellow farm owners once they have already joined the community. Therefore, the renown of the Herenboeren organization, and its ability to have an online and media presence, are key in mobilizing members to join. Secondly, the Herenboeren organization has a general, relatively standardized model that has the potential to work anywhere provided there are enough participants and available land (approximately 20 hectares).

However, turning a model into practice is never without its challenges. With this thesis I try to unravel what happens when a standardized solidarity economy turns into practice, and answer the question: How do Herenboeren communities transform a standardized model into local practice, and how can this local practice of the Herenboeren model help us study the precarious balance between necessary simplification on the one hand and local empowerment on the other?

Drawing on three months of ethnographic research on two Herenboeren farms in the Netherlands I argue that in practice, Herenboeren farms become a type of social experiment where a top-down organisation brings people together to locally construct a sustainable new food economy. As such, Herenboeren farms become a site of constant negotiation between scalability of the model and local reality. As such the Herenboeren farms are an excellent example that showcases the potential and challenges of a largely top-down implemented SSE.

Theoretical framework

Recently the social and solidarity economy (SSE) movement has grown extensively, and interest in the movements and academic research on challenges and implications of scaling up SSE has proliferated. An example is the volume *Social and Solidarity Economy: Beyond the Fringe* (Utting 2015), that specifically focusses on the question of ''whether SSE can be scaled up and sustained

while retaining its core values and objectives" (Utting 2015, 3). Summarizing the various studies in this volume, the general findings on this topic are that SSE has significant potential, however the structural context can constrain this potential. That is, the relations with external institutions and actors, internal dynamics within the organisation, and trade-offs between different objectives are potential roadblocks on the way to successfully operating SSEs. Nevertheless, under certain circumstances it is possible to manage these constraints which allows the SSE to scale up whilst maintaining its core values and objectives. Overall the authors of the volume agree that players in the field of SSE should be more reflexive and expand their knowledge of the specific tensions and compromises involved in scaling up. In addition, they call for more analytical preparedness amongst players in the field of SSE. This latter suggestion aims to not only increase knowledge of the complexity and contradictions in the field, but to also build the evidence base that is needed to convincingly make the argument that society should take SSE seriously (Utting 2015).

Although there are definite similarities between the Herenboeren model and the struggles and challenges of scale as described in *Beyond the Fringe* (Utting 2015), unlike the SSEs described in the volume, Herenboeren is a model that was specifically developed to grow in size. As described by Darryl Reed (2015), scaling up has different dimensions: horizontal scaling up and vertical scaling up. With horizontal scaling up, Reed refers to ''the multiplication of numerous, often small scale, activities, at the grassroots level or in specific sectors" (Utting 2015, 4). With vertical scaling up, he argues that scaling up "may be 'vertical', as in the case of individual organisations and enterprises that grow significantly in terms of the scale of economic activity and membership, associate in networks or move up value chains" (Utting 2015, 4).

The Herenboeren movement does not fit in either the vertical or the horizontal form of scaling up. In contrast to the previous studies of SSEs, Herenboeren is not a grassroots movement that professionalizes or expands over time, but it contains a proposal for an organisation at grassroot level with the preconceived intention to multiply. Therefore studying the consequences and practice of scale in the Herenboeren model can add to our knowledge of scaling up SSE as it gives us a unique insight into what happens when the process of scaling up is not something that naturally happens over time but something that is planned from the beginning.

On the one hand, the Herenboeren organization has the capacity to bring people together and gives them the tools to create a relatively large communal project in a small timespan. In addition, the preconceived scope of the community brings many different people together. These individuals can bring different qualities to the table. Together, the co-owners of the farms can create a large pool of knowledge where people can use their personal and sometimes specific skills for the communal good. Indeed, I often witnessed this use of knowledge for the communal good on the farms. However it is not unusual that local expertise is inhibited by the general model, as

standardization and control are an inherent part of a general model that does not leave room for local knowledge. Simultaneously the scale and top-down nature of the organisation brings a set of challenges on its own as well. In practice it may be the case that the local reality does not coincide with what the model of Herenboeren preaches. The model is presented as the simple solution for a set of different and complex problems. In fact, this idealized construct often fails to grasp the complexity of local reality.

Herenboeren is an example of a top-down organized and standardized movement that draws on discourses and practices propagated by grassroots movements that challenge the unsustainability of a globally-organized, corporate-driven system of commodity food production and distribution. The case of Herenboeren is of value to better understand the generalizability and the challenges of scaling up, and the top-down implementation of social and solidarity economies. In this thesis I approach and interpret the local practice of Herenboeren and its relations to the standardized model from three theoretical lenses.

In the first chapter I use anthropological theory on scale and standardisation (Scott 1999; Tsing 2012) to describe the logical constraints and challenges that are consequential to a model that aims at expansion. I argue that these theories, specifically Anna Tsing's interpretation of scalability, capture the essence of the blind spot of the Herenboeren model. Using anthropological theory on the commons (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2016; Harvey 2012), I explore in the second chapter how the practice of Herenboeren actually goes beyond the expectations of the model. Drawing on interpretations of Ostrom (2012), Harvey (2012), and Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy (2016), I use the broader concept of commons to further explore the unforeseen consequences that are linked to managing and creating a commons on the Herenboeren farms. In the last chapter I use the historical concept of moral economy (Scott 1976) to explore how we can understand Herenboeren farms as a new moral economy in the making. I argue that the Herenboeren model is an example that shows that commons and moral economy are more connected than suggested by the separate treatment of the two phenomena in the scientific work on these topics. In fact, I argue that in the process of commoning, the practice of Herenboeren needs the creation and reinforcement of shared ethical values and morals that go beyond the expectations and the predictions of the standardized model. The ways in which the practice of commoning is linked to the elaboration of a shared vision on what is fair and just in the relations between humans as well as in the relation with nature, as entailed in the concept of moral economy, has not received much attention in previous work on moral economy or commons. As such, my work contributes to broadening our understanding of the connection between a sharing economy and the construction of shared ethical values that have the potential to create a culture of change.

Research location and population

All Herenboeren farms are located in similar environments. That is, they are close to a city, or in a relatively densely populated area of the Netherlands, but lie (with two exceptions) outside the Randstad. The Randstad is the urbanized ring that connects the cities Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam and The Hague. It is the most urbanized and densely populated area of the Netherlands (Besamusca and Verheul 2014). The fact that most Herenboeren farms lie outside of this urban region is due to the much higher land prices in the Randstad. This makes it challenging to find a location that is affordable inside the Randstad.

However, in order to find enough members for the community, it is vital that the farms are easily reachable and that the area is populated enough to find the 200 households that are needed to start a farm. Therefore the Herenboeren farms are all located near a city (Herenboeren 2021). This research was conducted on two Herenboeren farms in the Netherlands, one east and one south of the Randstad area. Both lie next to a large city (within the top 40 of large cities in the Netherlands) and both municipalities have a population of over 100.000 inhabitants (Stedennetwerk g40 2018). Combined with the smaller villages that lie around the farms, the farms have an accessible location for enough people and these municipalities form a suitable location for a Herenboeren farm.

In a three-month period, I visited each farm at least once a week to participate in the daily activities in order to understand and learn how the communities work in practice. During this three-month period I got to know, and spent time with many members of the community as well as the farmers of the different farms. It is important to note here that the members of Herenboeren communities are in no way obligated to participate in voluntary work on the farm. In fact, the group that volunteers is a relatively small part of the entire community. Many members only go to the farm to pick up their share of the harvest. As my research was done on the farm, I spent most of my time with those members of the community that indeed participated in the voluntary work. Although I sometimes spoke briefly with some members that came to the farm only to pick up their food, most of my findings are based on the experiences and conversations with those who regularly participated in voluntary work on the farms.

The Herenboeren community exists of members, farmers and the umbrella organisation Herenboeren Nederland. Together these players create the Herenboeren communities.
Some similarities can be detected amongst the members who regularly participated. Overall the people participating in Herenboeren could be categorized as higher middle class and relatively highly educated. The initial buy-in to the Herenboeren model, and the costs in general, are not particularly cheap. The members pay a one-off joining fee of 2.000 Euros to become part of the Herenboeren farm, and then pay an extra 6 to 12 Euros per week to cover the structural costs of running the farms

such as the farmers' salary and seeds. In the first two years of farming on a new farm, it is not financially 'attractive' to get food through Herenboeren. The members were willing to pay more than they would pay when buying food at the supermarket. Although it can be claimed that all members were motivated by something else than food alone, their specific motivations and expectations differed greatly. Some were part of the community as a hobby or as an activity, others had the desire to have access to high quality meat or were specifically involved because they wanted to get their food locally, and others where ideologically motivated and driven by a desire to contribute to a more sustainable form of agriculture. Common professions amongst the members were care workers, educators, civil servants, managers, professors and entrepreneurs. Many were retired or worked part-time so they would have time to come and volunteer. Overall the members who participated regularly were middle aged, and generally in their fifties and sixties. Amongst the members who only would come on the farm to pick up food, I saw a lot of younger people with small children as well.

The farmers on both farms where relatively young, and I heard that this was the case on most Herenboeren farms. For some of the farmers, the Herenboeren model is an opportunity to become a farmer without having to pay for a farm. Land in the Netherlands is expensive and it is not easy to become owner of a farm. For some, becoming a Herenboeren farmer was a stepping stone where they could experience what it is to be farmer, and work in a relatively autonomous way. Others, however, amongst whom the farmers I worked with, were primarily motivated by ideals to transform agriculture and they had a passion for practising regenerative agriculture. One of the farmers I worked with told me that he believed that the farmers were actually more committed to practicing organic and sustainable farming than the average member of the communities or of Herenboeren Nederland, which was, in his words, mainly pragmatic. Working for Herenboeren was a specific ideological choice for the farmers I worked with. Sometimes the farmers told me their motivations and ideas clashed with the more practical attitude of Herenboeren Nederland and the members of the community. On several occasions I witnessed how the farmers prioritized quality over quantity; that is, they preferred to deliver less food but produced in line with their ideals of what sustainable agriculture should be. In the first chapter of this thesis I will further analyse how their priorities sometimes presented farmers with difficult dilemmas as it seemed, in reality, often unrealistic to deliver the expected amount of food produced in the expected manner of production.

The last player in Herenboeren communities is Herenboeren Nederland, the umbrella organisation. The umbrella foundation provides support for the local initiatives and simultaneously acquires knowledge and connections that can help the organisation to grow and increase impact. Each new Herenboeren farm pays € 75.000 to the umbrella organisation when they start, and this money is used to explore further growth and improvement opportunities. An additional yearly contribution from the farms to Herenboeren Nederland is needed in order to sustain the umbrella

organisation and give it the funds to grow and do research. The base of the community, the fundamental objectives and how to go about it, are established by Herenboeren Nederland. All farms have to work within these basic principles. Herenboeren Nederland checks and monitors if the local farms indeed follow the basic principles[1].

Research in time of corona

It is important to acknowledge the extraordinary time period in which this research was conducted. I conducted research from February 2021 until May 2021, the period during which the Covid-19 pandemic dominated all social interaction. The pandemic influenced my field of research in many ways.

For instance, Herenboeren farms are not only supposed to be about communally producing and consuming food; the community is also meant to have a social component as well (Herenboeren 2021). That is, usually the Herenboeren farms organise social activities, such as educative children programs, movie nights and barbeques as well. However, all of these activities were impossible to organise due to Covid during my stay on the farm. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that this vital part of the Herenboeren community is not represented in my research.

Secondly, the virus changed the type of social interaction that was possible as well. Examples of this are the limits on the number of people that could come to volunteer on the farm. Where usually everyone is welcome, the groups of people that could come help with specific tasks were now limited to a specific amount. For harvesting for example, the group of people on one of the farms was only allowed to consist of a maximum of three volunteers (excluding me). Another example is the distribution of food. This is supposed to be a sort of social gathering as well, where people can meet each other. Volunteers on one farm described how this distribution was supposed to be a kind of market, where people could have a cup of coffee and a nice chat. Instead, this farm now distributed food through a drive-through system where people stayed in their cars while volunteers brought them their share of the food. This highly efficient form of distribution kept the amount of social interaction to a minimum and thus completely changed the social aspect of the food distribution.

Methodology and positionality

[1] I have viewed and consulted the documents stating rules and requirements that Herenboeren farms need to follow. In order to respect the privacy of the participants and the communities I have decided not include them as an appendix.

During my research I used a variety of ethnographic methods that helped me to find an answer to my research question and to comprehend the local practice of an implemented solidarity economic model.

Ethnographic work frequently uses triangulation, a technique where several methods are used to answer a question to increase reliability (Reeves, Kuper and Hodges 2008). Following this approach of triangulation I used several qualitative research methods to expand my knowledge of the community. My primary source of information was participant observation. As DeWalt and DeWalt state, participant observation is a method in which ''a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture'' (2011, 12). I thus gained most of my understanding of the community through participation in the daily activities of the communities, hanging out and many informal chats. In addition, I used observations, structured and semi-structured interviews to find reliable answers. Being present and participating in the work on the farm gave me the opportunity to discover the multiple questions and problems that have to be answered and solved in the daily practice, for example, how to organize the work with volunteers, how to organize the distribution or how to deal with unforeseen problems. In the research field, many questions arose that I could not have imagined without seeing with my own eyes the complexities of organizing agricultural production with many stakeholders, and the many different perspectives on the movement's objectives and goals and the different ways to realize these.

Although I started my research with the intention of focusing only on participants and farmers, I soon realized that researching this community meant taking the umbrella organisation into account as well. As the umbrella organisation dictated much of the structure of the farms, it is vital to take their role into account when trying to understand how the communities mobilize their ethical principles in a system of exchange. As it was impossible to do participant observation with the umbrella organisation, I used interview and online data research to gain an understanding of what the umbrella organisation entails. Herenboeren Nederland, as the umbrella organisation is called, has a big online and media presence where its intentions and ideas are explained clearly. In addition, I used interviews with members to broaden my understanding of how the organisation works.

For me, entering the field was relatively easy. I was welcomed with open arms on both farms and it was very easy to engage with the members and farmers during work. I had no bad encounters whatsoever. Everyone I met was willing to speak to me about their motivations and experiences in addition to the many informal conversations we had. The voluntary work is organized in a very laid back and relaxed way as it is of course voluntary. In between different tasks we would have coffee and during work we would often discuss current affairs or other light topics. Overall it was easy for me to blend in and get to know many participants on a personal level. Although I am significantly

younger than most participants on the farm, I did not feel like this created any barriers for me to connect with the members.

It is however important to note that my personal ethics and politics are aligned with most of the people I encountered. Although I tried to be aware and reflective of my own personal support for the goals and activities of my research group, it is of course inevitable that my alignment with the group's values coloured my thesis. In addition, I believe that it is not possible for an anthropologist to be completely objective. In line with anthropologists such as Philip Bourgois (2003) and Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995), I tend to practice a more engaged type of anthropology. That is, as I am convinced an anthropologist cannot actually be objective, I prefer to lean in to my subjectivity rather than to pretend to be the ''fly on the wall''. For me this creates a more honest and equal relationship with my research participants, where I share my own opinions as well as their expressed viewpoints.

Thesis structure

This thesis consists of three chapters.

In the first chapter I will describe the Herenboeren organization and analyse the difficulties that are associated with the implementation of "grassroot" initiatives from above. That is, Herenboeren is designed as a model that is suitable for generalisation, but is executed and practiced locally. However, implementing a model does not directly create a community. By focussing on anthropological theory concerning the process of scaling (Tsing 2012) and standardisation (Scott 1999), I will explore the general constraints and challenges in relation to scaling and top-down organization. Specifically, following Anna Tsing (2012), I consider how scaling or scalability is essentially an unnatural practise that requires the use of unnatural resources that are susceptible to standardisation and control. However, a Herenboeren farm is a place that is to a large extent unscalable as it is strongly dependent on natural resources and conditions that cannot be planned. In case of the Herenboeren, these natural resources are not only nature, but also human behaviour. The variety of expectations held by different actors involved in Herenboeren creates a challenging and difficult position for the farmers. Although it is possible to say that there are some common interests amongst participants and farmers, priorities and expectations can still differ and sometimes even clash. In theory, the model of Herenboeren seems to be able to meet all different expectations, however in practice this is not always possible. In fact, sometimes different expectations can contradict one another. This leads to a reality in which priorities frequently need to be renegotiated. The negotiation of priorities thus seems to be a constant and time-consuming part of the local practice.

In the second chapter I will discuss the role of knowledge sharing and communal responsibility in the local context. Sharing knowledge and investing time for the communal good are

a common practice on the farms that can be interpreted as a form of immaterial commoning that is crucial for community building (Polanska and Weldon 2020). As such, one might say that forming a community is a process that is largely created in bottom-up interaction. However, this crucial aspect of community building is not consistently recognized by Herenboeren Nederland, which uses more individualistic incentives to motivate members to join the community.

In the last chapter I will discuss how the practice of commoning actually goes beyond the expectations of the model that needs and creates broader shared ethical values amongst participants that go beyond the idea of conscious consumption. As such, I argue that commoning on the Herenboeren farm allows the emergence of a shared sense of morality that can be understood as a new moral economy in the making. Within classical theory, the concept of moral economy is mainly used to describe traditional arrangements associated with specific expectations and views about moral rights and ethics (Thompson 1971). Although the concept was originally used principally for traditional societies and associated with subsistence farming (Scott 1976), in more recent studies it is also used for forms of economic and social organization explicitly based on ethical principles (Götz 2015; Adelsman 2020). In this vein the Herenboeren approach could be seen as a new form of moral economy in the making, not associated with long-standing traditions and deep-rooted convictions about rights and obligations.

In the conclusion I will circle back to the initial question of this thesis: How do Herenboeren communities transform a standardized model into local practice, and how can this local practice of Herenboeren give us more insight into the precarious balance between necessary simplification on the one hand, and local empowerment on the other? I argue that due to the organization's basic concept, the local Herenboeren practice becomes a process of constant negotiation between scalability and locality. I will emphasise that the living reality on the farms is specific and unpredictable due to the particular use of natural resources as well as the social aspect that is so essential. This leads to tensions and challenges in the translation of the theoretical model to the local reality. In fact, the model misses one of the most essential processes within the local Herenboeren practice: the practise of immaterial commoning amongst members. This process is not only vital for creating a community and strengthening community ties; in addition to the practice of commoning, shared ethics and morals that go beyond conscious consumption are taking shape. Here the practice goes beyond the expectations of the model and a new moral economy is taking root within locality.

The local Herenboeren practice shows us that the challenge for a general model is to leave space for local customisation and tailormade approaches. The general model should be tailored to the specific local situation. Drawing on the interpretations of the commons by Bromley (1992) and Ostrom, Pennington and Tarko (2012), I argue that the Herenboeren concept will only work long-term if the people locally are empowered to make local decisions.

Chapter 1: Negotiating priorities: Standardisation, Scalability and Expectations

> *''Obviously we have to deal with Herenboeren Nederland who almost conduct themselves as a franchise organisation, a sort of ivory tower from which the policies are set, guidelines are given and initiatives are developed in which we all have to participate. A simple example is: we have a workgroup that works on the development of the terrain. These are all men from a certain age with little hair, and when the sun is shining they will burn their head. So we want to have some hats available for them, actually this is even mandatory by law. Now Herenboeren Nederland made the rule that we can only purchase these products through them, they are in charge of these type of things. Quality assurance they call this, and of course, they are quite right*" (Laurence, Herenboeren member 2021).

As mentioned in the introduction, Herenboeren Nederland has a fixed model that is implemented in different places to create the Herenboeren farms. These farms therefore all function more or less in the same way. In fact, the influence of the Herenboeren model is much more actively present than expected when entering the field. For instance, the farmers are employed by Herenboeren Nederland and then are seconded to the different farms. All the farmers have to follow Herenboeren Nederland training courses that guide the farmers in the specific ways of Herenboeren farming. Other examples are the active monitoring of the farms, policies concerning food distribution and community organization, and the supervision that is provided by Herenboeren Nederland to the farms.

Daily life on the farms thus is a product of interaction between the theoretical model of Herenboeren and the local interpretation of this system. Addressing the issue of scale therefore seems inevitable when we want to increase our understanding of how the local practice of Herenboeren comes to life.

To this day, relatively little is known about the process and implications of scaling up Social Solidarity Economies (SSEs) – which Herenboeren can be conceived as – especially when focussing on local embeddedness and meaning for the SSE members (Gomez 2015). In this chapter I would like to further explore the tensions that affect the Herenboeren model in its mission to grow. The founder of the Herenboeren organization clearly envisioned a propagation of his model. He saw his model as a way to boost regenerative agriculture in the Netherlands, which was only 3% of the total agricultural production in the Netherlands at the time when Herenboeren was founded (Van der Veer 2020). The founder hoped that an expanding number of local farms would help to diminish the

costs of maintaining the umbrella organization, which are a significant expense for new farms. It is therefore legitimate to say that there is a need to scale up: more farms make the maintenance of the organization more viable. However, the process of scaling up is inherently linked to challenges concerning issues of trust, standardization and control, institutionalization and bureaucracy (Scott 1999; Graeber 2015; Tsing 2012; Gomez 2015) – all of which are factors that can potentially be problematic for successful scaling up. I argue that the umbrella organisation's mission to expand and scale up leads to specific challenges and friction for the local Herenboeren communities. According to anthropologist Anna Tsing something can be scalable when: ''small projects can become big without changing the nature of the project'' (Tsing 2012, 507). For Tsing, something is only truly scalable when it can expand without changing. This means that for the Herenboeren model to be scalable, it needs to standardize specific characteristics that are distinctive for a Herenboeren farm.

However, the specific standardized characteristics that are implemented by the umbrella organisation in practice are rather vague and often open for interpretation. This leads to a model that appears to be the simple solution to a range of different and complex problems. Herenboeren not only tackles issues of sustainability in agriculture, it also: provides a local alternative for fresh products normally bought in shops and markets; gives the opportunity to produce high quality food; liberates farmers from debt pressure; heightens consumers' insight into unpredictable outcomes and risks in agricultural production and environmental problems; and stimulates a more conscious attitude towards our daily food. As the model seems to capture all these different challenges at once, it also attracts members with many different priorities and expectations. Some prioritize the quality of food, others prioritize the quality of the land, others are looking for a hobby, others are primarily motivated to join in order to enrich soil or support farmers. In practice, it is not realistic to solve all the issues that the Herenboeren concept pretends to solve. On the local farms this leads to a reality where the negotiation of priorities is a constant part of local practice. In addition, the amount of different motivations and priorities lead to a system that puts a lot of pressure on the farmers who are expected to turn all these expectations into practice, and to efficiently manage it all.

Secondly, the process of standardisation can be understood as a contradiction to locality (Tsing 2012; Scott 1999). That is, standardisation aims for universality which inherently clashes with the use of local knowledge. As such, one of the major challenges for the Herenboeren model is to leave room for local differences which is, as I will discuss in the second chapter, a factor of significance when it comes to the construction of a community.

To further explore these tensions and challenges around scaling ambitions of Herenboeren Nederland it is important to understand what a Herenboeren farm is exactly; what is it that these farms have in common that allows them all to carry the name Herenboeren?

What is a Herenboeren farm?

''Certain forms of knowledge and control require a narrowing of vision" (Scott 1999, 11).

Given that all different farms carry the same name, it makes sense that they should have certain common characteristics that makes them Herenboeren farms. In other words, some form of standardization or implementation of standards is needed to organise a Herenboeren chain, and to be able to scale up.

This is done by Herenboeren Nederland through the implementation of seven guidelines[2]. When a new farm wants to open under the Herenboeren umbrella, they should sign and follow these guidelines if they want to carry the name (Martin, pers. comm., Herenboeren Nederland 2021). In practice, this Herenboeren approach means that a farm needs to have around 200 members who each pay €2.000 to start a farm of around 20 hectares. The operation costs (seeds, farmers' salaries, lease membership fees etc.) are covered by the monthly contribution paid by the members. The farms produce eggs, vegetables, fruit and fodder, and maintain animals such as cows, pigs and chickens. The production is done with the three core values in mind. In Dutch, these values are: *''natuur gedreven, sociaal verbonden en economisch gedragen''*, which can be loosely translated to: nature driven, socially connected and economically viable. The final ideal of Herenboeren farms is to have a "zero input" farm, that is, to be completely circular. All local farms are run by the local cooperative with a board, the members and the farmers. It is clearly stated that the members are involved in the production process and have a say in what is produced and how much. They can volunteer on the farm but do not have to. The yearly fee that local cooperatives pay to Herenboeren Nederland provides certain benefits, such as use of the Herenboeren website. Yet there are some constraints: local cooperatives can never speak on behalf of the umbrella organization; in some cases, they are permitted to use only the specific tools provided by Herenboeren Nederland; are they are subject to yearly control to determine to what extent they are fulfilling their obligations to the umbrella organization.

These standards for becoming a Herenboeren farm seem quite straightforward and easy to follow, but are in practice open for interpretation and can lead to many different expectations. For instance, what is a ''nature driven'' manner of production? Is this sustainable in the way of zero input? Is this paying extra attention to animal welfare? Is it organic or biodynamic? In theory, it seemed to mean all of this and more. However, in practice this cannot be always achieved. This

[2] I have viewed and consulted the documents stating rules and requirements that Herenboeren farms need to follow. In order to respect the privacy of the participants and the communities I have decided not include them as an appendix.

created much discussion on the farm as some of the interpretations of this concept could not be achieved.

On one of the farms I visited regularly, there was a very aggressive brood of hens. Unfortunately during my research period, the Netherlands had a universal confinement duty with poultry as there was much risk of bird flu. This meant that all the chickens on the farms had to stay inside. This was problematic with the aggressive chickens. They pecked each other to death - one chicken commonly died each day due to the pecking. This led to discussion among the owners of the farm. The farmer wanted to change the type of chickens into a less aggressive type. However, these less aggressive chickens where also less productive when it comes to producing eggs. Until my fieldwork was over, the decision had not yet been made. In the meantime the brood kept pecking each other to death. This affected the farmer. She wondered:

> *''How can I tell people that I am producing in a 'nature driven' manner when my animals aren't having a good life at all? Is this really sustainable?''*

Indeed, 'nature driven' is supposed to mean at least organic, and this would affect the type of breeding. That is, there should be some standards for animal welfare. However, within the Herenboeren model it is also stated that the members would get eggs. The amount of eggs calculated for was the amount produced by the aggressive yet productive type of hens. Thus, for the farm to keep the promise of animal welfare, it would have to give up on the expected amount of egg production.

Similarly one of the farmers told me that the members received a blueprint from Herenboeren Nederland with all the types and amounts of food that would or could be produced on the farms. According to the farmer, this blueprint was often conceived as a guarantee and people would expect to get exactly what was written down. This would lead to disappointments when they would not get exactly what they believed was promised. She told me that working with the blueprint was challenging, not only because it created expectations that couldn't always be met, but also because the numbers given weren't completely realistic. For instance, the blueprint stated that the farms would have space for 15 cows. This was true, she said, 10 hectare is enough space for 15 cows. However, it is not enough space to also produce enough food for them. Thus, having 15 cows would mean having to buy extra food for the cows in winter season. She argued that this clashed with one of the main ideals of the farms: zero input farming. For her, it would go against Herenboeren principles to have 15 cows, as this would mean that zero input farming could not be achieved:

''Where does this extra food for the animals come from? This can be hard to trace. Perhaps it comes from Brazil or something. Can we call ourselves sustainable if we feed our animals with this?'' (Nina, Herenboeren farmer 2021).

The amount of cows became a point of discussion. One team supported the idea of fifteen cows, the other team was against. The key question became: What was more important: getting the ''promised'' amount of meat, or following the ideal of zero input farming? In the end the members compromised by outsourcing the cows to a local ''wandering farmer'' who had more ground available and was thus able to maintain the cows all year long. This meant the local cooperative retained 15 cows, fed locally, but not on their own farm.

Farmers on the other farm I studied were also bothered by the blueprint used by the members and the umbrella organisation. When I observed a general meeting in which the expected amount of vegetables was discussed, farmers Sam and Floris expressed their irritation about this to me:

''This estimation is made for a farm of 20 hectare; our farm has only 15. Obviously this has an impact on the amount of vegetables we can produce'' (Sam, Herenboeren farmer 2021).

Of course, the deceptive simplicity as well as the very optimistic estimation of the possible yields can be understood as a consequence of the mission to expand. That is, both are used as marketing strategies that should attract members to join the local communities. However, another unforeseen consequence of these marketing strategies is that they put a lot of pressure on the shoulders of their employees; the farmers are not only expected to be good farmers, but additionally need to be in possession of great social and people skills, be able to work as conflict resolvers and process supervisors. I will revisit this theme in the section 'Being a farmer is not a nine to five job'.

Scaling up, top-down planning and standardisation

The way in which these standardized values and characteristics are used and how they relate to local practice on the Herenboeren farm is worth further exploration.

In his book *Seeing like a State*, historical anthropologist James Scott describes the consequences of large-scale top-down planning in politics. According to Scott (1999), some form of standardisation is always required in large-scale exchange and trade. This urge to standardize is actually a logical consequence of the larger scale. In fact, he states, standardization is necessary to have some control over large scale processes. In order to control a large-scale project, it needs to be what he calls ''legible'', that is, it should apply a tunnel vision strategy that can focus on certain aspects of the complex reality. This simplification makes a complex reality governable because the

legible and simplified tunnel approach means the project becomes more susceptible to measurement and calculations (Scott 1998). However, when things are made legible, stakeholders inherently become blind to the things that are not schematized, as legibility means only focussing on a specific part that needs to be governed. Scott sees this as the fundamental problem for state governing. The simplified version of reality does not leave space for subjective needs, and most importantly does not leave room for what can develop in a coincidental turn of events.

Although Scott explains his theory by using the state as the entity of power that implements legibility, several others have argued that this process is in fact not limited to what Scott calls the state (Li 2005; Hansen and Stepputat 2003). According to Li (2005), the implementation of simplified models on the world we would like to control is not a strategy that is limited to the working of states. In fact, this form of governing is practiced by many different authorities, including for example, NGOs.

Within the collaboration between Herenboeren Nederland and the local farms, some tendencies to make the local reality ''legible'' for the umbrella organisation can be detected, for instance, in organising safety and safety protocol on the farms. As official companies, Herenboeren farms are obligated to adhere to certain criteria such as the health and safety laws. This means that specific controls and measures need to be executed to show that the farm is indeed functioning in a way that is safe. Herenboeren Nederland uses one external company that monitors the implementation of these protocols on all the farms. This makes sense of course, as it seems far more efficient to implement the same type of protocol to measure and control safety on all the farms. Therefore, the classification of ''safe'' is the same across all the farms, and the ability to ensure safety becomes easier for the umbrella organisation. However, following Scott's argument (1999), this standardization is partially blind. In one of the communities, the expertise to execute a professional safety check was already present within the members. The use of local knowledge not only produces value in terms of community building, using existing expertise seems much more efficient as it is not costly and does not have to be arranged in collaboration with the umbrella organisation.

Anna Tsing (2012) further explores the notion of standardisation in relation to scaling up. She argues that scalability is in fact the opposite of diversity. According to Tsing, projects are only scalable if they can expand without changing. Scalability without change is not an ordinary feature of nature, and usually making things scalable takes a lot of work. To be scalable means to be controlled and standardized. Tsing describes this with the example of plantations that were able to expand due to the use of technology. By using unnatural resources such as artificial irrigation systems, the plantation owners were able to control and expand their production to a much larger extent than previously. The tendency to control increased on the plantations, as this led to more production. Control generally involves unnatural resources, as these are the ones that humans can most easily

influence. This led Tsing to the question: what happens to diversity in a scalable system where standardisation is key? According to Tsing scalability is never complete(2012, 515). That is, scalability cannot embrace everything as it does not have the capacity to capture non-scalable practices. In other words, not everything can be controlled; certain non-scalable practices will intervene in attempts to scale up projects. Therefore, studying diversity requires different modes of knowledge. Managing humans or other species is in fact not possible in a scalability paradigm.

Herenboeren farming, even more so than other types of farming due to the social aspect and the specific use of natural resources, is a practice that is to a large extent impossible to plan. Farming in general is hard to control, as farms strongly depend on natural circumstances such as the quality of the soil and the weather. As argued by Tsing, it is in fact impossible to manipulate the natural circumstances and therefore the type of farming used on Herenboeren farms can actually be interpreted as a non-scalable practice.

However, working with a model is impossible without a discourse of scalability. Standardization, simplification and unification are processes that are inherently associated with implementing a standard model in different localities. Although the strategies of control implemented by Herenboeren Nederland make sense and are actually a logical consequence of the scale, the challenges they create for the local practice shouldn't be underestimated.

Being a farmer is not a nine to five job

My own observations about the essential tensions and challenges in Herenboeren communities, and the blind spots of the model, align with those of Tsing (2012). That is, the Herenboeren umbrella organization has underestimated the complexity of the process of translating a schematic or theoretical standard model to a concrete, elusive and living local reality, and has not left adequate space in the model for unpredictable factors. In the Herenboeren model, the unpredictability is not only found in the diverse use of nature, but also in the explicit social component of the farms that make the task of managing the farms much more complex than only managing farm work. Not only do the farmers have to deal with the unpredictability of nature and working with natural resources, they also must work within a social reality that cannot be planned. Simultaneously, the role of the farmer is very demanding as the farmers have to deal with the expectations of Herenboeren Nederland as well as with the expectations and wishes of all the different farm owners. Their work is not only very varied due to the type of farming practiced on Herenboeren farms (a mixed farm where farmers need to have knowledge of cattle breeding as well as agriculture and horticulture), but their work also demands another set of capacities such as flexibility, management skills and people skills. For instance, one of the farm members told me how

he thought that being a Herenboeren farmer also includes being a good host. He described how, on the first day on the farm, he did not exactly know what was expected of him or what he should do. According to him it would have been helpful to have the farmer ease him in to it, give a little tour, explain how the concept works in practice and what is expected of the volunteers during their shift. Another volunteer told me how the farmer did not bring coffee to the volunteers. The volunteers decided to bring this up with the farmer as they felt that it was a part of the job as a Herenboeren farmer to facilitate the volunteers. In a conversation I had with farmer Floris he told me:

> *''I do not want the people to be stressed out. So, if I need something, the least I can do is mention it on time. However, this is easier said than done because I have so much to do that making a plan in time sometimes isn't feasible. Here's a difference in working with volunteers or working with agricultural contractors. With contractors they work for you, you are the client, so to say, and it is their job to do whatever you ask them. With volunteers however, they do it because they want to, so I feel that the least I can do is make it nice for them and facilitate that they have a good and fun experience.''*

Thus, being a Herenboeren farmer is much more than only farming. It means carrying the community, motivating the members to join in volunteering and being the host - tasks that are not only demanding but also time-consuming.

The farmer is employed by Herenboeren Nederland which is in charge of the farmers' salaries and the extension of their employment (Appendix 1). It is partially true that the farmer is freed from the pressures of standard agriculture, however, this comes at the cost of certain autonomy. Not only do the farmers have to deal with Herenboeren Nederland which is in charge of their employment, in addition, they have what one of the farmers called ''200 bosses for one employee". For her, the members and the board all had their opinions and priorities, and as she worked for them, they expected her to deliver on these expectations.

Farmers are expected to be more flexible than in other jobs. For example, ploughing is impossible when the soil is too wet as the machines needed for this task do not have the power to plough through the mud. Planting is also a time-sensitive activity that needs to be done when it is the right time. If not, the seedlings will go bad or the crop will not have enough time to grow. This means that if it has been raining the whole week except for the farmers' day off, the farmer will have to do the planting on the day off. The same goes of course for human behaviour, which is an unplannable and therefore unscalable part of life.

On one farm, a neighbour - who presumably had some political issues against the practices of Herenboeren – sometimes sabotaged the farm by cutting the fences around the pigs' field. The pigs

would inevitably run away, and the farmer would have to come on her day off to capture the escaped pigs, as this was not the kind of task that could wait until Monday.
Strangely enough, the farmers are employed on a fixed hourly contract in which the farmer is expected to fix everything. This does not necessarily leave room for the unexpected setbacks that are inherently part of local practice, as argued by Tsing (2012) and Scott (1999). This raises the question to what extend it is possible to organize the farm-work as a nine-to-five job, as assumed in the Herenboeren-model.

Conclusion

In contrast to other forms of social and solidarity economy (SSE), local Herenboeren farms have to deal with the expectations raised by the theoretical model of Herenboeren Nederland that has the goal of scaling up. This means the practice of Herenboeren doesn't rely on the bottom-up community, but on the interpretation of the top-down model. This creates challenges as the implementation of a planned model can sometimes clash with what happens locally.

Control and standardisation are practices that are inherently connected to a scalable project. As argued by Scott (1999) and Tsing (2012), these processes often fail to understand the importance and un-plannability of locality. Within the Herenboeren community, the presence of standardization and control lead to pressure on the farmers, who are expected to not only deal with unrealistic expectations but also to deal with an unplannable, and to a large extent unscalable, reality.

Chapter 2: Going beyond the individual and back to the commons

"*Wiithout a commons, there is no community; without a community, there is no commons*" (Gudeman 2001, 27).

The importance of volunteers

Sam and I are sitting on the picnic tables in front of the little office when I ask him if he thinks the Herenboeren concept works. ''Not without the volunteers helping on the farm," he replies. He continues:

> *''This type of agriculture, where diversity, preservation and the implementation of biodynamic principles are key, is very hard work. Biodynamic and small-skill farming is a job you work eight days a week. Not using pesticides and large-scale machinery make this type of agriculture very time- and labour-intensive. As a farmer you have two options: either you hire people to help you with these tasks, which will make your food so expensive that it won't be possible to sell on the market (nobody wants to pay 10 Euros for an aubergine); or you work eight days a week to keep up with all the work yourself.*"

Similarly, he explains, Herenboeren farms would become too expensive to operate if they had to hire the help. As the farmers are employed on a fixed contract, it isn't possible for them to do all the work themselves. This type of small-scale farming and production of a large variety of different crops is therefore not an 'efficient' form of agriculture. Much farming equipment and machinery are constructed for large-scale agriculture as this is the most common form of agriculture. These types of machines however cannot always be used on the Herenboeren farms as the farms are too small in size. This means that more has to be done by hand. Therefore the volunteers helping on the farm have a key role in the functioning of the farm. Together, the volunteers do the majority of the work that needs to be done on the farm.

It is essential to underline the importance of the contribution of the volunteers to the Herenboeren system. However, the Herenboeren Nederland model doesn't mention the importance of volunteering as such. This is of course understandable as the Herenboeren system needs to be attractive for participants, and mentioning the need to do volunteer work might make the model less attractive for potential new members. In practice I saw that the members have a key role in functioning of the farms as they are actually the factor that enables the farms to produce in the

specific small-scale and organic way that is an important feature of Herenboeren farming. The farms where I conducted my research would not be able to work without the help of members.
On one of the farms, a sufficient amount of volunteers was not always a given. Especially with harvesting, it sometimes took a while to find enough members willing to come to help. The farmer therefore adjusted her cultivation plan. Her decision to cultivate certain crops was influenced by the amount of work necessary to grow and harvest these crops. To plant labor-intensive crops would mean that a lot of volunteers would be needed to harvest them. As a sufficient amount of volunteer workers was not always guaranteed, she didn't want to take the risk of having ripe crops on the land without hands to harvest them. Therefore she decided to mainly plant crops that take relatively little time to harvest, such as lettuce and leek. The lack of sufficient volunteers thus directly affected the type of crops produced on the farm, and limited the diversity of food produced on the farms. In this way, the lack of security about the availability of sufficient voluntary support can undermine other ideals the farms stand for, such as crop diversity.

In other words, people volunteering on the farm constitute an indispensable element in the system. Without their participation, this specific form of food production would (probably) not be affordable, and the provision of a diverse range of food for the members would be limited to a certain extent. In this chapter I will explore how we can understand the practice of volunteering and the role of the members of the Herenboeren community not only as a vitally important part for the practical execution of Herenboeren farming, but also as a meaningful activity that creates community.

Cultivating commons

As shown in the previous section, members of the community have an important role when it comes to sustainably maintaining the farms and the ideals they stand for. Moreover, the importance of members involvement in the farms does not stop at the practical advantages that come with having members involved in running the farm. In this chapter I argue that participation on the farm has a deeper meaning and is vital for creating community and a shared culture. However, the importance of this practice is not mentioned or recognized in the general Herenboeren model, where participation of volunteers on the farm is described as an option but not a prerequisite. In my time on the farm I was surprised by the number of members that were somehow involved in the community besides their financial contributions. As one of the farmers told me once:

> *"I think that we as farmers only do ten percent of the work approximately. Take today for example, I think there were at least twenty people present today to do something or other. We had the maintenance crew, the people harvesting, there were people working with the*

animals, not to mention the board members who are in charge of the general meeting later today. With all the hours in the world I could never possibly do as much as the members do together. Actually it is simple math: twenty people today, all working four hours is eighty hours in total. Even when we would take into account that I might work a bit faster than the average volunteer because it is my profession, still I would need at least a week to do it all. And that is just this Saturday."

Within the Herenboeren communities, investing knowledge and time for the good of the community is a common practice. Even in the cold winter months, every Friday morning a group of four to twelve volunteers showed up on one of the farms to help with harvesting. The distribution of food on both farms was even busier. An average nine to fifteen people volunteered every time food needed to be distributed. On one farm the distribution was done in advance and the people would get a crate filled with food in the correct amounts. That is, the households consisting of more people would get (and pay for) larger amounts of food and smaller households would get (and pay for) less. This type of distribution was due to corona and was very labour intensive. The other farm used a system where people would take their food through self-service. This of course is less work for the people in charge of the distribution and therefore fewer volunteers were needed. Another time-intensive task for the volunteers was taking care of the animals on the days the farmers were off. As the farmers work on an hourly contract, they have days off as any other employee. However, taking care of the animals is a daily task. Therefore the group of volunteers in charge of the animals had a schedule of who would come to take care of the animals on the farmers' day off. Another example of voluntary motivation and participation is of course the board of the farms, which has the responsibility of representing all farm owners. For them it was not uncommon to spend one day a week doing voluntary work for the farm.

The participation of members was not only impressive in amount, I was also amazed by the amount of expertise that was present in this group of people. The volunteers come from a variety of (professional) backgrounds and many use their specific knowledge to improve the farm. In other words, with more than 400 members in a community, Herenboeren farms have access to a wide range of different kinds of knowledge that can be used for the good of the farm. This collective pool of knowledge is used regularly. Here, the volunteers can actually be seen as experts, and the use of their knowledge creates value. For instance, I spoke to different members of the community who were employed at the municipalities in which the farms were located. They were ready to contribute their knowledge on how to get permits for certain activities, for example. Another oft-mentioned form of expertise was knowledge of agriculture. Of course it makes sense that a project such as Herenboeren attracts people who are passionate about agriculture. However, I was still surprised by

the number of people who had a professional background in agriculture or who were raised on a farm. I spoke to several volunteers whose parents were smallholders. These members told me that they did similar work in their youth as they were doing now on the farm. They were motivated to join the farm project not only for reasons of nostalgia (doing something they used to do in their youth which brought them joy); they also remembered much about the work they did in their youth and used this knowledge when volunteering. Their experience and skills were specifically visible in the animal care on one of the farms. For example, they knew how to take care of the newborn farm animals, how to ensure their health, how to inseminate pigs and how to nurture chickens that were pecked by the others back to health. Volunteers actively applied these skills and knowledge to improve the farm. As one of the board members told me:

> *"Well, of course we divided tasks amongst the board members in the way that our qualities and expertise are taken into account. For example, in our board we have someone who is very skilled in the financial part (although he has much knowledge of the animals as well); he is in charge of finances. I am more in charge of the administrative side as I come from the corporate sector and do not have much experience with farming (although I like it). Then we have Ben who has more the role of chairman, and Marc is in charge of the terrain and maintenance.*

This use of expertise was not only something that happened in a natural way; in my experience it was something that gave the volunteers pleasure as well. Many spoke to me about how gratifying it was to have the chance to use their knowledge for the good of the farms. In other words, people were eager to use their knowledge for the communal good. In the following section, I would like to further explore how this investment of time and knowledge for the communal good is a meaningful practice that has value for the formation of a community. I suggest that the practice of investing time and knowledge by the volunteers can be understood as a form of creating a commons. Drawing on anthropological theory of creating commons I argue that this practice is not only important to practically improve the farm, but can be understood as a meaningful practice that creates community.

From commons to commoning

Over the years, scholarship of the commons and the practice of commoning has proliferated. Starting with the classical debate between Garrett Hardin and Elinor Ostrom (Polanska and Weldon 2020). In his *Tragedy of the Commons* (1986), Hardin argues that commons are disappearing because it is human nature to prioritize personal benefit. Seeking to self-maximize, people were unable to

collectively manage a commons without exploiting them. In contrast, Ostrom argues in *Governing the Commons* (1990) that this isn't the case. According to Ostrom, commons can be sustainably maintained if the group using the commons has clear boundaries, if policies on how to use the commons are in place, conflict can be resolved and people can self-organize collectively. The way in which the concept is used nowadays has extended and deepened over time (Ruivenkamp and Hilton 2017). The general idea of commons as ''imagined or existing forms of wealth that we share'' (Federici and Caffentzis 2014, 94) was originally used to refer to the access to land in feudal England, but evolved to the idea of natural resources shared and managed by a group of people (Ruivenkamp and Hilton 2017; Harvey 2011). In the contemporary definition, the concept of the commons is used for an expanded interpretation of resources that include, for example, cultural resources and knowledge as well (Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017).

This broadened perspective of commons can be partially traced back to to scholars who advocated that we should study commons as a verb: commoning. Instead of focussing on commons as a thing or openly accessible property, the use of the verb allowed for commons to be studied as a process (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016). Commoning refers to the practice of making and sharing a commons (Gudeman 2001). As such, we can understand commoning as a collective process, or in many cases a struggle to make, share, care for, manage, benefit and negotiate from what sustains a community (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016). Commoning thus involves the creation of rules and protocols for use and access, caring for the resource and taking responsibility to maintain it, and the distribution of the benefits whilst taking the well-being of the community into account. In this way, commons is not limited to material resources but can be used to describe a range of shared non-material goods such as knowledge, education and language as well (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016). In other words, it includes immaterial commons (Polanska and Weldon 2020). As such, volunteering and sharing knowledge and time on the farm, can be interpreted as the creation of a commons. Individuals sharing time and resources for the good of the community is a common practice on the Herenboeren farms. Property (in this case immaterial property such as intellectual property) that was previously privately owned, now is combined with other resources from varying ownerships on the farms, and become a commons.

Economist Peter Levine (2006) argued that it is not only public knowledge itself but also the process of creating public knowledge that we should consider as a good in itself. According to Levine the process of creating communal knowledge builds social capital and strengthens community ties and is therefore of overwhelming value for our existence.

Polanska and Weldon (2020) incorporate all these different aspects of commoning in their research on urban squats, and define commons or commoning as "collectively self-organized practices, that are both a means and a goal, where various types of property and resources – as well

as ideas, experiences, knowledge, and even emotions – are commoned (by freely associated people and groups), and whose effective organization relies on sharing burdens, responsibilities, and common behavioural guidelines which ensure provisioning, safety, and stability within that community" (Polanska and Weldon 2020, 1359-1360).

Within the Herenboeren communities, all these aspects of commons and commoning are visible and the impact they have on the local communities goes far beyond the practical advantages of using volunteers.

Commoning in Herenboeren communities

Within the Herenboeren community, voluntarily devoting time and knowledge for the communal good is a common practice. The farms are organized through the formation of workgroups. These groups all have specific tasks. Examples of workgroups are the distribution group, animal care group, maintenance group, horticulture group, the board, social groups etc.. Individuals can volunteer for the groups they like, and therefore do what already interests them. For instance, the horticultural groups I worked with on the farms consisted of people who already had much knowledge of horticulture from previous experience, as well as people who were interested in learning more about it. During activities such as planting and harvesting, knowledge was informally shared and learning particular skills from others was very common.

In this way, knowledge trickled down and those who knew nothing when they started, had fast access to knowledge that made them experts. With the sharing of knowledge, the responsibility to use it and maintain a certain quality in work, was shared as well. On one of the farms, we had been harvesting leek weekly with a relatively fixed group. The first time we harvested this particular crop, the farmer explained how we should do it. When new volunteers came to help after we had been harvesting for a few weeks, it was obvious that it would be the other volunteers who explained how the job was done. Knowledge was transmitted quickly and efficiently, and volunteers could rely on each other to learn how to work on the farm.

Another way in which communal knowledge and expertise was maximized, was by creating a pool of knowledge. Individuals with specific skills would express them to the farmer or the board, and were then called upon when needed. This was particularly important for specific skills. For example, there were willing volunteers with specialized forestry skills, people with expertise in company safety, employees of the municipalities, a pig farmer and managers. Margo, for example, who had a professional background in animal farming, was actively involved with ensuring the health of new-born animals on the farm. When the pigs where born, she informed me how to ensure their health, and when the baby calf was born bowlegged and could not reach for his mother's udder, she knew how to feed him properly. Another member, Anna, used her professional experience with

logistics to better structure the weekly distribution. Coen used his extensive knowledge of trees (obtained partially from his job at the municipality and partially from personal interest), to help with the construction of the tree hedges. He was especially passionate about bringing back ancient knowledge of the healing powers of plants. He explained how farmers traditionally used the natural healing qualities of plants to ensure the health of their cattle. For instance, some plants were specifically beneficial for cows, while others attracted specific birds and others bees. Using these specific qualities of the trees could benefit the farms, he argued, and he had a specific reason why certain trees should go in exact places.

Through collaboration, conversation and sharing burdens and responsibilities, immaterial commons are created and sustained in the community. These immaterial commons have positive outcomes for the community in ways that go beyond the practical advantages. First of all, sharing a commons strengthens community ties and has importance for creating a community. An example is the invention of the baking circle on one of the farms. This was an initiative of enthusiastic member Frank. Frank is actively involved in volunteering on the farm and worked every week with the maintenance crew and sometimes with the distributional crew as well. At one point he thought: "Wouldn't it be nice to have some homemade pastries with the coffee?" He decided to start a group with bakers that would take turns baking something nice for the volunteers to have with their coffee. Around fifty members volunteered which meant that they would have "bake duty" once every three months. The positive impact of this initiative went much further than just a nice piece of cake with the coffee. Members who were volunteering often told me how they felt rewarded and acknowledged: "It's like getting a reward for all the hard work we are doing," volunteer Jasper told me once. Besides, the baked good became a reason to socially interact. During my stay on the farm, the breaks changed due to the baking circle. When the baker brought the snack of that day, all the volunteers would gather. Groups that first had individual breaks (such as the harvesting or planting group and the maintenance group) now came together, and the bakers, often not as involved as the previously mentioned groups, got acquainted with the members that were actively participating and get an idea of how a day volunteering on the farm looked like. This baking circle was a clear example of something that grew from bottom-up over time and strengthened the sense of community. Thus the baking initiative not only allowed members to symbolically contribute to the farm by taking the time and effort to bake something, it also created the opportunity to get to know one another and it show appreciation for those working on the farm which was very motivational.

The process of commoning is directly linked to community (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016; Levine 2006; Polanska and Weldon 2020; Gudeman 2001), that is, the group amongst whom the commons is shared and created. Studying commons as a relational process means studying the commons in relation to community (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016).

However it is argued that a community that owns commons is not necessarily given (Huron 2015, Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016). Rather a community can be constituted through the process of commoning. In other words; a group of individuals coming together to protect or create a commons, forms a community around it. Similarly in the case of Herenboeren, the community that assembles does not “share an essence” (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy 2016, 196), but is creating a shared essence or value through the practice of commoning. This is not a straightforward process, and as with other commoning processes that are creating a community, can often be seen as a struggle. Within the members of Herenboeren, many different expectations and motivations need to be represented, and priorities can still differ greatly and lead to contradictions. However, the common interest of protecting and improving their alternative form of food production benefits when sharing knowledge and time. This process of immaterial commoning contributes to a sharing of knowledge and expertise which in fact creates and strengthens the community.

Communal responsibility and individual incentives

Paradoxically, commoning doesn’t play an important role in the Herenboeren model. In fact, Herenboeren Nederland focusses dominantly on individual incentives to get people to join the community. For instance the frontpage of the Herenboeren website summarizes participation as: paying the membership fee, paying the monthly contribution, receiving food and becoming a partial owner of a farm (Herenboeren 2021).

And although the benefits of the community, such as social activities, workshops, children’s activities and making contact with other members, are specifically named as a features of the farm, how the communities come into being and the process of creating a community as a shared responsibility, is not mentioned. When I asked a representative of Herenboeren Nederland to define the responsibilities of the members, his answer was:

> *“They have the responsibility to pay the membership fee, that is the most important thing. As soon as they pay the contribution, a lot goes well already. In addition, they might also have the responsibility to pick up their food although it is of course possible not to do this… Well besides that, you actually do not have much responsibilities as a member, although it is of course possible to do much more if you want to. But this is not a responsibility as such. Volunteering is possible but not mandatory. No, besides paying and consuming there is nothing else you have to do as a member.*”

The organization’s emphasis on an attractive model clashes with the tough reality of forming a community. That is, it is not possible to make individual members feel obliged to participate in

volunteer work. And when trying to understand the perspective of Herenboeren Nederland, it makes sense that the organization predominantly focuses on the financial contribution of members, as the fees paid by the members sustain the organization and allow it to expand. However, when studying the Herenboeren as a community it is impossible to conceive the community without the participation and communal responsibility of the members. Top-down expectations here clash with what happens, and needs to happen, locally. The individual approach of Herenboeren Nederland fails to foresee the importance of communal responsibilities, and how creating commons and actively participating in contributing to these commons is important for creating community.

As previously argued others such as Harvey (2011) and Ostrom (1990), the concept and practice of commons has a difficult relationship with issues of scale. Harvey (2011) argues that managing and sustaining a common is doable in small scale situations, but when the scale increases, it is inevitable that we resort to some sort of hierarchical strategies to manage the commons. Similarly, the role of the commons and the practice of commoning seem natural in the local situation, but do not have a place in the model. This blind spot in the model could potentially be an obstacle for further development and long-term stability in Herenboeren communities at local level, as the importance of the commons in practice is what creates the community.

Conclusion

The importance of the role of the volunteers is twofold. Firstly, the practical role the volunteers play is vital for the farms to operate. The connection of food production and shared responsibility for production and distribution makes Herenboeren a feasible solution for problems in agriculture. Individuals engaging in voluntary work provide the manpower needed to sustain an otherwise unaffordable food economy.

Secondly, I have argued that participation in voluntary work on the farm is not only important to create solutions for the contemporary problems in agriculture, but also has an important role to play in creating the community and giving meaning to participants. By interpreting the process of investing time and knowledge in the community as a form of immaterial commoning, I have explored how this practice has symbolic meaning and strengthens the community ties.

However, the vital role members of the community have to play as a collective, is not conceived as such by the theoretical construct of Herenboeren Nederland. The Herenboeren umbrella organization largely overlooks the communal importance of immaterial commoning and the vital roles of responsibility played by volunteers in the functioning of the local farms. This essential element of immaterial commons in the Herenboeren communities is not described or acknowledged as such by the Herenboeren model, and can therefore be seen as a crucial blind spot of the model.

Chapter 3: Beyond conscious consumption: an emerging moral economy:

> *"Since I've joined Herenboeren I have gotten a whole new type of appreciation for my food. Actually, I assure you, it really tastes different! The eggshells are firmer and the eggs taste better too. Also, I throw away much less food. Because you are producing it yourself, you'll realize a lot better how much work actually goes into food and therefore you'll see its value much clearer. I've started making my own sauerkraut and every time we open a new jar I'm really happy and looking forward to eating it"* (John, Herenboeren member 2021).

The previous chapters zoomed in on the difficulties of turning a theoretical model into practice. I have argued that on the one hand, the implementation of a model means standardization, a practice that actually goes against locality (Tsing 2012). On the other hand, one of the most important features of the practice of Herenboeren, the collective creation of immaterial commons is not recognized in the model, even though this is a vital part of local reality. The standardization that is crucial for a system to grow has the tendency to overlook the importance of the local.

In this chapter I explore how the practices I witnessed on the farms actually go beyond the idea of conscious consumption. I argue that the members brought together by the shared desire or interest to change their form of consumption, in practice create new values that reach further than that. In fact, I suggest that features of what I witnessed on the farms can be interpreted as a new moral economy in the making. The practice of immaterial communing, essential for the functioning of the farm and for bringing the community together, nourishes the emergence of shared values that go beyond this practice. In working together as a community and experiencing the difficulty and hard work of food production, ideas on how to righteously practise economy are articulated, and shared values and notions of what constitute a fair food economy are rendered more specific. This is not a straightforward process but often a struggle in which strategies for creating a Herenboeren farm culture still need to be crystalized.

Creating values that go beyond consumption

We have seen above that the process of creating and caring for a commons allows for the emergence of additional shared values for the group. This creation of commons can be interpreted as a generally anti-capitalist process, following Harvey (2012), because commons are not created through financial exchange or state input, but rather, through people's actions and the social relations between them. Commons are inherently collective and non-commodified, and therefore are generally "off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations" (Harvey 2012, 73).

Commons generally stand outside the central motive force of the capitalist mode of production, which is based on private property, accumulation of private capital, and commodification, or putting a price on everything. As contemporary philosopher Charles Eisenstein notes in his book *Sacred Economy* (2020), the creation of a sphere of circulation outside the monetarized value system can be considered an antithesis to capitalism. Indeed, the very act of sharing resources for the common good, goes inherently against capitalism that is based on individual profit maximization, the privatization of resources and competition. Commons can disentangle our lives from the market and the state and thus be understood as an alternative to capitalism (Caffentiz and Federici 2014).

Similarly, it could be asserted that the social practice of commoning in the Herenboeren communities has some anti-capitalist tendencies. Even when not a project with a clear anti-capitalist ideology, in practice, the farms function as an alternative to the capitalist system as outlined above. Moreover the whole project of community building, sharing knowledge, dedicating time and effort to the project, doesn't produce the ideal consumer of capitalist economy eager to acquire the newest gadgets and to satisfy the wants created by the economy of ever-expanding consumerism. On the contrary, people that find purpose and satisfaction in working with their hands will have less need to look out for commercial offers that promise distraction or pleasure (Eisenstein 2020). On one of the farms for example, we harvested leek every week for several months. This was a beloved activity amongst the members who jokingly told me that they would *''rather harvest leek than go on an all-inclusive holiday''* (granted this was in times of corona, and an all-inclusive holiday meant sitting in a hotel the whole time). I agreed. In fact, the members generally enjoyed participating on the farm. John for instance told me on several occasions that it was the highlight of the week coming to the farm. He especially liked to pull weeds. He considered this task really satisfying because you could so clearly see the result. Three other members, Alex, Jose and Monica, emphasized the benefits of participaton in their local Herenboeren farm:

> *"You do not have to go to the gym anymore, you'll finally get enough vitamin D because of all the time you spent outside, you will get very nice and tasty food, it is cozy and you will make new friends, you know you are contributing to a sustainable project, you'll learn about plants and the work gives so much pride and satisfaction. What else could a person ask for?!''*

Getting out of the daily routine of sitting behind desks and screens, meeting new people, learning new things and having a chat, but most of all, having the feeling of satisfaction and pride after completing a task on the farm, gave purpose and pleasure to the volunteers I met on the farms. The belief that a commons can create an economic system that rethinks interdependence beyond the market, can be connected to the notion of moral economy. I suggest that the practice of

commoning on the Herenboeren farms creates specific shared ethical considerations, which encompass notions of fairness and justice that transcend the personal desire to acquire fairly produced food for private consumption.

Alternative farming is not done to get rich in a monetary sense or to maximize personal profit; alternative farming communities are motivated by ideals that go beyond rational self-interest. As Anderson argues: ''It is done as a labour of love and as a passionate ethical commitment'' (2015, 14). Therefore, theory that acknowledges that human behaviour is motivated by more than only the rational objective to individually maximize utility as a consumer and profit as a producer, is relevant to understand the motivations behind alternative farming (Anderson 2015). One such theory that is broadly used is the idea of moral economy (Carlisle 2015). The concept of moral economy has been used extensively to better understand social relations and dynamics in the pre-capitalist era or peasant economies. It refers to the interplay between cultural norms and values and economic practices. The term moral economy has been used and criticised extensively in social science.

Moral economy

The concept of moral economy gained broad attention for the first time when used by historian E.P. Thompson (1963), who applied it to demonstrate that the hunger riots in England in the eighteenth century were not so much propelled by acute hunger, but were more a form of political mobilisation and resistance against the rise of the free market economy. This mobilisation was rooted in the specific society of eighteenth-century England, when it was common to form alliances to help the poor in times of scarcity. These alliances were founded upon traditional conceptions of social norms and duties, justice and legitimacy. With the rise of the market economy, this pre-existing and precarious equilibrium eroded and became the main reason for the riots in England (Thompson 1971).

Thompson defined this moral economy as: “a popular consensus as to what are legitimate and what are illegitimate practices, grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community” (Thompson 1971, 79). Thomson’s definition has been criticized for being too historically specific (Fassin 2009; Palomera and Vetta 2016; Götz 2015). That is, the concept of moral economy was, for Thompson, specific to the context of popular resistance to price-making markets in the time of industrialisation in England and could therefore not be generalized for comparable research (Hann 2018).

Shortly after the introduction of the term by Thompson, political scientist and anthropologist James Scott (1976) used the concept to better understand the relation between the poor peasants and the state in South East Asia. Scott speaks of a “moral economy of subsistence ethics” which focusses more on a fluid approach of values, whereas Thompson’s definition was more concerned

with norms and obligations (Hann 2018). Scott argues that the peasants he studied held deeply-rooted beliefs about their right to subsistence security. This principle became determinant for their view on economic justice. Therefore Scott understands peasant rebellions not so much as a result of an absolute surplus extraction, but more as a reaction to the subversion of specific social patterns and expectations (Scott 1976). Scott's interpretation of moral economy thus stays close to Thomson's conception as embedded in social, cultural and normative expectations of how an economy should function, but broadens the concept to an extent to be useful and applicable in other contexts.

Thomson and Scott agree on the importance of the historical roots of a community. For them, a moral economy comes into being through a shared history that creates a set of norms and values that are seen as moral or ethically correct by the community.

Decades after Thompson and Scott, the debate around the concept moral economy proliferated and the concept has now become more detached from a connection with a specific historical context (see for instance Fassin (2009); Palomera and Vetta (2016)). One of these new moral economy thinkers is Norbert Götz (2015) who proposes the use of the concept of moral economy to "illuminate key features of economic allocations as are motivated by ideational, rather than material expectations of personal gain" (Götz 2015, 148). Götz sees no reason to accept Thompson's proposal to tie the term moral economy to pre-modern protests against emerging markets in the period of endemic hunger riots in eighteenth-century England. He reminds us that eighteenth-century thinkers like Rousseau and Fortunato Bartolomeo de Félice used the term moral economy for conditions where justice, equitability and reciprocity were guiding principles. Therefore Götz argues that moral economy can be used as "as an antithesis to the "rational choice" imperatives" (2015, 147).

For Götz, the moral economy concept opens the way to recognize and acknowledge altruistic motives in economic transactions as forms of utility maximization, or rationality, which is not possible in the classic economic theory, where material gain is the declared objective of economic transactions.

Jeremy Adelman continues in this line of thought (2020). He emphasizes that moral economy always and everywhere is associated with resistance to the expansion of the capitalist market economy. The exchange and production of commodities, and the treatment of human beings as exchangeable units, inevitably triggered ethical debates about justice and equity and economic practices, which transcend the discipline of economics. Moral economists want to bring back aspects of economic life that have been expelled from economic theory. The idea of moral economy permits a critical stance towards capitalism. It offers "a critical vocabulary, alternative histories, and political counterpoints to

mainstream thinking about what Polanyi called "market society", and ways to rethink human interdependence beyond the market" (Adelman 2020, 192).

Implementing a moral economy:

The Herenboeren concept seems to be in line with Adelman's (2020) and Götz's (2015) interpretation of moral economy. The Herenboeren model is indeed an economic movement inspired by ethical principles about how to practice ''good agriculture". These ethical principles are part of the theoretical model of Herenboeren. The farmer is not trapped in the system of debt and market insecurity that causes sleepless nights to many farmers on privately-owned farms. The consumers gain from their access to nature and sustainably-produced fresh food. If we accept that sustainable agriculture is an urgent need in the context of climate crisis, then future generations, if not the planet as a whole, benefit from this form of moral-economic cooperation.

However, this raises new questions regarding the nature of the Herenboeren model. To what extend is it possible to implement a moral economy? A model inspired by ethical values is not the same as a rooted system of social and economic relations stemming from, and sustained by, a set of shared values and norms. Although in more recent scientific contributions the moral economy concept was detached from specific historic roots, it is undeniable that the mores and values that inspire the common outlook in moral economies are rooted in tradition.

In fact, the notions about fairness and justice that form an integral part of the moral economy in peasant societies have a long history. As Barrington Moore (1984) pointed out in his classical analysis of peasant responses to the transition of their world from agrarian to industrial societies in Europe, America and Asia, traditional systems of land tenure and the custom of equal access for all to the undivided commons, served as a kind of social insurance, which permitted the members of the community to survive and perform their social obligations. While these protective arrangements were a necessity in the pre-industrial world without which societies would collapse, simultaneously they formed the source for moral standards by which the peasants judged behaviour of themselves and others. This is the reason why the restoration of ancient rights was often a central theme in peasant uprisings, whereas a slow deterioration of the living conditions can become accepted by its victims as part of a normal situation. As Moore described: "What infuriates peasants . . . is a new and sudden imposition or demand that strikes many people at once and that is a break with accepted rules and customs" (1966, 474). James Scott (1976) builds his analysis of the moral economy of the peasant precisely on this notion that the ethic of peasant societies is rooted in the economic practices and social exchanges in the world of the village. Addressing what he names the "age old question of false consciousness" (1976, 12) Scott demonstrates that analyses that merely focus on acute threats to subsistence ethic or relative deprivation, miss a central point. That

is, peasants are born into a specific society and culture that provides them with cultural moral values and expectations regarding the behavior of others, and a set of concrete social relations (Scott 1976).

He discusses how transformations during the colonial period in Southeast Asia undermined the pre-existing social insurance patterns and violated central moral principles as the norm of reciprocity and the right to subsistence. He notes that peasant protests against this transformation are best seen as defensive reactions which appealed almost exclusively to the past and its traditional practices.

In a certain sense, the situation of the Herenboeren farms is the opposite of the situations outlined by Scott. What is at stake is not the preservation of a traditional system against its undermining by political and economic pressures, but the creation of a new system against the destructive power of a ruthless extraction economy. This means that it cannot be expected that solid rules and traditions to build on are available, nor that they can be provided by a general model. They need to be sorted out in practice. Who decides within the communities and how are these decisions legitimated? Who is entitled to what, and on what grounds are rights and privileges derived? For instance, I remember a semi-serious conversation taking place on one of the farms about how the members who actually actively participated and helped out on the farm should have the right to get the better food, or get some other form of material recognition for all their hard work. One of the volunteers described that it somehow felt unfair if she had been cleaning and cutting leek the whole morning, and would then receive the old unclean leak from the previous week in the distribution. Another question that needs to be addressed is who bears the burden of extra work in the face of setbacks or failures. To what extent is it fair to expect that the farmers work overtime without compensation?

Similarly, the specific rights and powers of the farm boards were still sometimes a topic of discussion. On the one hand, to work efficiently and decisively, the boards needed some amount of autonomy to make decisions. On the other hand, as all the members are co-owners of the farm it is important to represent all different expectations and priorities. Although in theory the board has the power to decide autonomously within the budget that has been preapproved by the general meeting, in practice unexpected costs and problems may arise, that need to be dealt with. This creates a difficult position for the boards. They have to judge the situation and determine whether they will decide for themselves, or take the matter to the general meeting—a practice that will slow them down.

Interestingly, on both farms the amount of meat produced was a topic where opinions varied greatly. Many members on both farms told me that they now ate more meat than before they joined Herenboeren. They felt conflicted: on the one hand the meat that comes from the farm is produced in a conscious manner; on the other hand meat consumption in general felt like something that

should be done in moderation, due to the unsustainability of meat production. This resulted in quite a lot of members choosing to not consume the meat produced on the farms, or to only order meat for one person whilst being a household of two or more. However, another group of members consumed meat daily and for them the amount of meat that could be distributed seemed to be not enough. To navigate between these different perspectives is not an easy task, and to make a collective decision on an amount of meat was difficult. Members of one farm sent out a survey to all the meat-consuming members, in which they could voice their opinions regarding the quality and the amount of meat. However, this survey was only sent out to those who in fact consumed meat from the farm. This meant that those people who ate meat but consciously chose to buy it elsewhere (because the amount of meat distributed on the farm was too much for them), were not invited to voice their opinions.

The meat issue—the problem that a standard Herenboeren farm is in fact too small to feed twenty cows—touches directly on deeper questions about what is central to regenerative and organic agriculture. Here, too, it is premature to expect an elaborated and shared vision of members and farmers. Such questions are usually not an issue in traditional peasant cultures because the farmers use methods and practices that have proven to be not detrimental to the local ecological equilibrium. In fact, anthropologists zooming in on agricultural practice have shown that the idea of reciprocity not only serves as a central moral formula for interpersonal contact (Scott 1976), but also encompasses the whole of nature. In relation to the Andean region, Catherine Allen (1988) stated that reciprocity is essential to social life in the Andes and extends beyond the human community as well. “The obligation extends to domesticated animals and plants, to *Pacha,* to the many animated places in the landscape itself, and even to the saints. The whole cosmos participates in the give-and-take of reciprocity. . . . This responsibility is inherent in life; there is no getting out of it. As all things are alive and interconnected, our responsibility extends to the whole world” (Allen 1988, 94). The recently-founded Herenboeren farms also miss in this respect a “moral heritage”. As discussed in chapter one, Herenboeren Nederland’s definition of ecological agriculture is rather vague, and questions can be raised about the concept’s applicability in different local contexts. This means that, on every farm, the participants have to find out what is possible and what is not with respect to the condition of the soil, local climate conditions, the availability of water, the availability of extra hands, specialized knowledge and a shared vision of the principal characteristics and aims of ecological agriculture.

Time and work are needed to come to consensus on how to proceed. The sustainability of the community largely depends on the creation of rules that are not represented in the model but need to be constructed in practice. This process is only just beginning. Through the acquisition of common property, a commons is created. How to properly manage the commons is then a process

that to a large extent still needs to be sorted out. This requires a step-by-step process of analysing experiences and solving problems, which in time could allow fixed norms and patterns to crystallize. As the work of Ostrom et al. shows (2012), the process of crystallizing clear and unambiguous rules needed for sustainable management of common resources is essential and delicate because in addition to clarity, the influence of those directly involved is crucial. The rules and arrangements worked out have to resonate with a shared vision on what is right and appropriate in the local context.

Emerging shared ethics in practice

In the concrete context of the farms, something grows that transcends the ideal of fair production and consumption. It became clear that the practices of collaboration and participation on the farm not only create a more conscious form of consumption, but reach beyond that to enable the emergence of a deeper, shared, sense of what a good food economy should entail.

During our coffee break on a Saturday morning, some members and I had a conversation about how being a member of Herenboeren changes people's vision of food. One of the volunteers told us:

> *"I was having dinner at my daughters last week and she served me haricots verts. Before I would not have had an opinion about this, but now I got this strong intrinsic feeling like: this is wrong! We aren't supposed to eat this now. Is started to feel like something that really is not right!"*

Everyone agreed that they now too felt that it is actually very strange to eat fruits and vegetables that are not natural to the season. For many, this changed their way of cooking as well. Stella and Joanne, for instance, told me how they had started cooking much more classical Dutch food since becoming Herenboeren members, because this was precisely what we are supposed to eat if we want to make a meal with what the season naturally offers us.

Although I had many similar conversations, this did not mean that these shared notions or consensus of what is legitimate or illegitimate consumption were born overnight. In contrast to the traditional moral economies, within the Herenboeren communities, morality is not embedded in a shared history and shared experiences. In reality, people only start to build a shared experience once they start contributing on the farms. The general motivations to join Herenboeren overlap amongst members. These motivations resonate with a more general idea in society: the urge to consume more consciously.

However, practical knowledge and experience to organise and structure this new type of food economy is still missing. This is a process of trial and error that only starts when the Herenboeren farm begins to operate. As described by scholars such as Moore (1984) and Scott (1999), a moral economy does not only comprise a shared view of justice, it is also connected to a specific necessity. In the case of the Herenboeren movement, this necessity is not collectively felt because of a shared history, but it stems from a specific consciousness.

The management-model of the Herenboeren farms is still largely a theoretical construct that did not grow out of concrete conditions, practices and experiences at local level. In the long run, mores and morals could develop from the economic and social interaction on the Herenboeren farms, that will give the agreements that currently have to be sorted out by the members, the self-evidence necessary for a stable management of commons.

Conclusion

The model of Herenboeren is based on certain ethical motivations and values. In this sense they fit into the description of moral economy as proposed by Götz (2015). Members have certain motivations to join the communities due to the model's emphasis on sustainability, but this does not immediately create a culture of consensus. Moreover, the more historical approaches of moral economy emphasize that moral economies are rooted in long traditions. Sharing a sense of morality and having a consensus regarding ethical principles will emerge when there is the opportunity to root in society over time. Due to the top-down nature of the Herenboeren model, local farms lack this cultural heritage. However, the practice of commoning permits the growth of a shared vision with the potential to evolve to a local moral economy, capable of sustaining the care and management of communal assets in the long run. Rules and protocols need to crystalize in local practice.

Through the practice of immaterial commoning another awareness emerges, and shared ethical considerations that go beyond conscious food consumption are slowly taking shape through shared experience.

4. Conclusion

The transformation of the standardized model of Herenboeren into local practice is a demanding process in which the preservation of the precarious balance between inevitable simplification and local empowerment is as essential as challenging. The attempt of the Herenboeren to set in motion a grassroots movement through the implementation of a model hides a contradiction. A standardized model calls for simplification, yet the local and complex reality on the farms is strongly dependent on local empowerment. The standardization causes essential local features that are formed in practice to be overlooked. A vital part of local reality is creating and maintaining immaterial commons. The contribution of the volunteers on the farm is not only important to enable this type of agriculture, but it is also essential for the formation of a community and the enhancement of a sense of purpose amongst members. Both of these features are essential to the survival of these commons. In this sense local practice transcends the expectations of the model.

However, common ownership is not all that is needed to sustainably maintain and manage a commons. This needs a shared system of values as well. The practise of commoning opens the way to the emergence of a shared vision, but the historical approach to moral economy demonstrates that such a shared system of values or morality is a long-term process that is constructed over time as a product of shared traditions and customs. As a recently formed commons, local Herenboeren farms miss this heritage. Moreover, in traditional settings the ideas about what was fair and just were closely associated with necessity. Given the objective limits to productivity in pre-modern agricultural societies, traditional systems of land tenure and arrangements about the use of commons were necessary to protect and preserve the availability of labour. In the context of crisis in energy, climate, water, soil, high Carbon Dioxide emissions associated with industrial agriculture and transportation of agricultural products over enormous distances, there is an objective necessity to change the system, but this is not yet felt as an economic and social necessity.

By facilitating the formation of new commons, Herenboeren is making an important counter-movement in the context of the prevailing trend toward industrialized mass production and scaling up in agriculture. In our understanding of managing a commons and the process of commoning, I have argued that this process does not only need specific guidelines and rules, as argued by Ostrom at al. (2012), it also needs a shared ethical vision of what constitute legitimate and illegitimate practices.

Admittedly nothing grows from above. I have pointed out that standardization—as part of politics of scale and consequently the need for a rapid growth of the number of Herenboeren farms—might be an important obstacle for the development of local farms with genuine grassroot

characteristics, that are embedded in and sustained by a local community. But the seeds fall from above. They only need fertile ground to take root and grow. In this sense, the Herenboeren model can be considered as a seed that can trigger promising processes of localization and the growth of alternatives for the problematic forms of production and consumption. But seeds need to take root before they can grow into a plant.

I have a lot of admiration for the dedication and overall positivity of the people I met on the farms, who have the courage to look for a new form of economic life. The Herenboeren concept brings people together. The concept]has great potential for bringing people together and initiate the development of concrete alternative for the problematic effects of current agricultural production and consumption, but there are also ifs and buts. Perhaps the first step would be to acknowledge that there is no simple solution for complex problems. Further research on this topic can possibly further illuminate the problems identified in this thesis: that is, the limitations and constraints associated with the use of a schematic and theoretical model in diverse non-schematic local reality of nature and humans. I feel a lot of gratitude towards all the people who were open to sharing about the ups and downs on the road they took, full of surprises and unexpectedness.

Discussion

Within this thesis I have shown how the practice of commoning can be further explored and understood by researching it in relation to the notion of moral economy. Although previous research on the commons has advocated that we should focus on local arrangements when managing a commons, the connection with the concept moral economy has not made in the existing research. I suggest that long term management and maintenance of a commons does not only depend on setting clear guidelines, boundaries and rules as suggested by Ostrom (1990), but also requires a shared sense of morality amongst the group members. Managing a commons thus depends on sharing or forming a moral economy. Future research on how the maintenance of a commons is related to a moral economy could help enhance our understanding of commoning.

The specific value of the use of the concept of moral economy is that it not only focusses on the shared ethical principles amongst a community, but that it also points to the necessity of these shared principles for a community to thrive and an economic system to function well in the long-term.

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Appendix 1:

Vacature Herenboeren boer

Voor nieuwe Herenboerderijen zijn we op zoek naar een agrarisch bedrijfsleider voor een kleinschalig, gemengd boerenbedrijf. Op het kleinschalige bedrijf worden o.a. groenten, fruit en vlees geproduceerd voor de Herenboeren, zijnde 200 huishoudens die in deze boerderij investeren en als coöperatie gezamenlijk eigenaar zijn van hun kleinschalige Herenboerderij.

De agrarische bedrijfsleider waar wij naar op zoek zijn, is de 'waard' van de Herenboerderij. Als agrarisch bedrijfsleider plan, coördineer, stuur en controleer je de uitvoering van alle landbouwkundige werkzaamheden tot en met de oogst en uitlevering/distributie. Je doel is om op circa 20 hectare grond kwalitatief goed eten te produceren dat smaakvol is en voldoet aan de wensen van de community én samengaat met de natuurwaarden op en rond het bedrijf.

Daarnaast ben je verantwoordelijk voor de landbouwkundige zaken omtrent administratie en wetgeving, zoals de gecombineerde opgave, mestboekhouding en andere verplichte zaken.

Belangrijke taken zijn:

- Het telen van de gewenste groenten en fruit en het waarborgen van een goed verloop van de teelt;
- Het verzorgen van de runderen, varkens en kippen en het waarborgen van hun gezondheid tot aan de slacht;
- Het plannen c.q. uitvoeren van de benodigde werkzaamheden rondom het bewerken van de grond, zaaien, oogsten, bewaring/opslag en uitlevering/ distributie. Daar waar nodig of gewenst kan de hulp ingeroepen worden van de community of externen;
- De Herenboerderij beheren als sfeervolle plek met beleving;
- Het bijhouden van een deugdelijke administratie en andere wettelijk verplichte zaken;
- Onderhouden van een goede relatie met het bestuur van de coöperatie en de community;

- Meedenken in het organiseren van activiteiten ten behoeve van community building;
- Als ambassadeur optreden van het Herenboeren-concept;
- Kennis uitwisselen met andere Herenboerderijen;
- Blijven studeren, gemiddeld één dag per maand.

Functie-eisen:

Voor de invulling van de vacature zijn wij op zoek naar een sociale, innovatieve, gedreven, praktische, pragmatische en zelfstandige kandidaat die:

- Werkt op HBO werk- en denkniveau;

• Een aantal jaren relevante praktische ervaring heeft;
• Goede feeling heeft voor de teelt van diverse gewassen en de verzorging van vee;
• Over goede sociale en communicatieve vaardigheden beschikt;
• Een besluitvaardige en praktische instelling heeft;
• Interesse heeft in innovaties en direct contact met de klant/Herenboer.

Functieaanbod:
Een fulltime aanstelling op een kleinschalig agrarische bedrijf dat groenten, fruit en vlees produceert voor de 200 huishoudens die lid zijn van de coöperatieve Herenboerderij. Er is een gezamenlijke motivatie om kwalitatief goed en smaakvol eten te produceren en te weten hoe het geproduceerd is en waar beleving, ecosystemen en een sfeervolle locatie belangrijke kernwaarden zijn.
We biedend een passend salaris, mede gebaseerd op leeftijd en ervaring.
Gewenste ervaring: minimaal 2 jaar
Aantal uren per week: fulltime
Opleidingsniveau: MBO+/HBO
Rijbewijs: B en E
Computervaardigheden: goed
Functievoorwaarde:
De boer van de Herenboeren is nooit uitgeleerd. Een voorwaarde voor een aanstelling is dat hij/zij bereid is tot continue (bij)scholing, stages en coaching door en met collega's en andere deskundigen. Als voorwaarde geldt ook dat de door Herenboeren Nederland geïnitieerde cursus met goed gevolg is afgerond.
Informatie en sollicitatie:
Tot slot, heeft u vragen met betrekking tot deze functie, neem dan contact op met Geert van der Veer, voorzitter Herenboeren Nederland via Geert@Herenboeren.nl of 06 – 10 96 05 31. Sollicitaties kunt u per mail richten aan info@Herenboeren.nl. Nadere informatie over Herenboeren staat ook op: www.Herenboeren.nl