



# BOE ZEGT DE KOE

*Cultural Conceptualizations of  
Farmed Animals in the Netherlands*

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## Introduction

## Farmed Animal Discourse and Biopolitics



Figure 1. One of the Dier&Recht campaign posters.

In recent years, animal farming has become a relatively controversial topic in the Netherlands. In August of 2021, the Dutch animal rights group Dier&Recht launched their campaign “Help with quitting dairy” (*Hulp bij stoppen met zuivel*),<sup>1</sup> a campaign that aimed to expose the animal suffering in the dairy industry in order to discourage consumption of dairy products. The slogan is a direct reference to an older governmental campaign that offers help with quitting smoking. As part of their campaign, Dier&Recht hung three different posters in

seven large cities, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. Emulating the anti-smoking narrative, the posters have a large font with “Need help quitting?” (*Hulp nodig met stoppen?*) and a small milk carton that is designed like a pack of cigarettes, with a shocking picture of a practice in dairy farms (such as transporting newborn calves in a wheelbarrow), a black frame, and a warning in bold letters.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, one of the slogans is almost a direct copy of an anti-alcohol campaign, replacing alcohol with dairy, emphasizing the connection to other health-focused campaigns combatting unhealthy habits. The posters focus on the suffering of calves in the milk industry, using dreary pictures of calves behind bars and in wheelbarrows. The slogans include: “Milk destroys more than you’d like: Calves drink artificial milk, because their mother’s milk is in your cappuccino”; “Dairy causes severe animal suffering: Calves are taken away from their mothers directly after they are born”; and “Dairy is deadly: 1.5 million

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all further translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Dier&Recht, “Hulp bij stoppen met zuivel.”

calves are slaughtered annually for dairy.”<sup>3</sup> The posters refer to a website, [www.stoppenmetzuivel.dierenrecht.nl](http://www.stoppenmetzuivel.dierenrecht.nl), which offers more information about the lives and suffering of calves and a long list of accessible dairy alternatives; another part of the campaign that imitates similar resources for smoking and alcohol. As a response to this campaign, the farmer’s organization Agractie sued Dier&Recht, claiming that it was slandering dairy farmers for causing animal suffering. They won the case, forcing Dier&Recht to remove one of the three posters from the seven cities that they hung in. The verdict claimed that it was slander because dairy does cause animal suffering, but it was not proven to be *severe* suffering which the poster claimed.<sup>4</sup> The farmers from Agractie claimed that taking calves away directly after birth is in fact better for animal welfare and safety in the barns.

The campaign and the subsequent court case sparked discussion about the welfare of animals in the dairy industry, the sustainability of farming, and the role of farmers in the Netherlands. The well-known Dutch journalist Rutger Bregman, for example, wrote an activist piece arguing against the verdict.<sup>5</sup> He pointed out that the “awkward, but unavoidable truth” about the suffering in the dairy industry that Dier&Recht attempted to point out with their posters has been scientifically proven several times. Bregman cites the 2020 research done by the University of Wageningen on the discomfort scale (*ongeriefscore*) for dairy cows, reiterating that separating a calf from their mother is ranked with the highest score. The score is a scientific method to analyze animal suffering. Similarly, the lives of calves after being separated, with long transports, small enclosures, and lack of daylight, are attributed high discomfort scores.<sup>6</sup> Bregman expresses his anger at what he considers the injustice of the

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<sup>3</sup> Dier&Recht, “De posters.” “Melk maakt meer kapot dan je lief is: Kalfjes krijgen kunstmelk, want hun moedermelk zit in jouw cappuccino”; “Zuivel veroorzaakt ernstig dierenleed: Kalfjes worden direct na de geboorte weggehaald bij hun moeder”; “Zuivel is dodelijk: Jaarlijks worden 1,5 miljoen kalfjes geslacht voor zuivel”.

<sup>4</sup> Het Parool, “Rechter in kort geding.”

<sup>5</sup> Bregman, “Zuivel is ernstig dierenleed.”

<sup>6</sup> Wageningen Livestock Research, “Update Ongeriefanalyse landbouwhuisdieren.”

verdict, calling it a "historical blunder of the Dutch judge."<sup>7</sup> He points out that Dier&Recht is now prohibited from exposing the suffering in the industry, while the dairy industry is allowed to continue proclaiming the famous slogan "milk is good for all" (*melk is goed voor elk*). Bregman is an example of one side of the heated debate; those who were angry and confused by the judge's verdict.

On the other side of the debate, there were farmers and farmers' organizations. One such organization, Nederlands Agrarisch Jongeren Kontakt, launched a campaign on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, 2022. Seemingly in response to Dier&Recht, the campaign consists of a radio- and tv-commercial and is sponsored by the Dutch Dairy Organization (NZO). It is summarized in the hashtag #farmerslovecows (*#boerenhoudenvankoeien*). On the website, it states that "as young Dutch farmers, we would like to tell you that we take good care of our animals."<sup>8</sup> The website defines six points of "what dairy cows want": walking around freely, having enough water and food, brushing their fur, being milked with care, fresh air, and relaxation. Each point cites the national laws that secure these welfare rights and the campaign claims that Dutch farmers take meticulous care to fulfill them all. In the tv-commercial, the voiceover explains that dairy cows are able to do all these things, adding after each point "if they want to." It appears to be a direct response to what many Dutch farmers felt to be Dier&Recht's attempt to frame their practices as cruel and irresponsible.

Animal farming has been a point of debate in the Netherlands for several years, mainly for animal activists and climate activists, who point out the pollution it causes. These accusations have sparked heavy protest from farmers from 2019 onwards. These frequent protests have mainly been organized by the Farmers Defence Force (FDF), which formed in May 2019 after a group of animal activists occupied a pig farm for ten hours. The initial goal of the FDF was to "help farmers who are being confronted with the excesses of climate

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<sup>7</sup> Bregman, "Zuivel is ernstig dierenleed."

<sup>8</sup> Boeren houden van koeien, "De campagne."

activists” and protect them against animal activism, but eventually expanded to other issues, such as fighting newly instated government regulations that aim to reduce livestock and thereby the excess of nitrogen produced by the animal industry.<sup>9</sup> Since 2019, there have been frequent protests by farmers as they demand more respect and understanding for farming and less restrictive regulation, often accompanied by blocking roads with tractors in The Hague, the political center of the Netherlands, and highways in June 2022.<sup>10</sup> A significant part of the Dutch population, mainly outside of the large cities, has expressed support for these actions with the slogan “proud of our farmers” (*trots op onze boeren*), posted on the side of roads or as bumper stickers. Evidently, Dier&Recht’s campaign for dairy cow welfare was launched in the midst of an active and heated debate on farming practices in the Netherlands, full of feelings of anger, injustice, and lack of understanding.

The ethics of animal farming are actively being debated, regarding its effect on the climate as well as the welfare of its animals. In February of 2022, the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* wrote about the continued abuse in Dutch slaughterhouses, as pigs are drowned in boiling hot water, severely wounded, and extremely stressed.<sup>11</sup> Another newspaper, *Trouw*, reported that though 60 percent of Dutch people agree with a ban on intensive animal industry, very few actually refrain from eating meat.<sup>12</sup> In fact, only four to six percent of the Dutch population are vegetarians<sup>13</sup> and according to the Dutch Association for Veganism, in 2020 there were approximately 150,000 vegans in the Netherlands, which amounts to less than one percent.<sup>14</sup> This means that though farming and its implications are being questioned and the

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<sup>9</sup> NOS, “Farmers Defence Force.”

<sup>10</sup> NOS, “Boeren voeren opnieuw actie.”

<sup>11</sup> Waarlo, “Levende varkens in bloedheet water.”

<sup>12</sup> Brandsma, “Meerderheid Nederlanders is tegen intensieve veehouderij.”

<sup>13</sup> Vegetariërs Bond, “Hoeveel vegetariërs zijn er?”

<sup>14</sup> Nederlandse Vereniging voor Veganisme, “Hoeveel veganisten zijn er?”

suffering of farmed animals has become common knowledge, the average Dutch person continues to consume its products.

This is in part due to the ways that Dutch culture represents farmed animals in the social imaginary of animal farming, which is a discourse that is much older than the recent debate. This thesis attempts to deconstruct this discourse of animal farming in the Netherlands, specifically how it emerges and is shaped by cultural representations of the animals in it. It is important to point out my own position in this, since it is deeply connected to the reason this research came about. I am Dutch, but also a vegan and a climate and animal rights activist, so I have strong opinions about farming and consuming animals. I firmly disagree with the dominant idea that humans have a right to kill animals, and attempt to dismantle these ideologies in many different ways in my academic ventures as well as my personal life and my activism. Though this thesis aims to treat all sides of the debate with respect and understanding, its goal is not merely to observe the details and consequences of animal farming discourse in the Netherlands. Rather, it attempts to actively deconstruct it and enact change, arguing that this change is greatly necessary for the lives of the millions of animals suffering in the farming industry.

The position of these animals is truly underprivileged. As the previously mentioned report of abuse in slaughterhouses and research on discomfort scores illustrate, it is undeniable that animals suffer because of farming. In most modern societies, the farming of animals is naturalized and unquestioned; the idea that humans have the right to exploit animals for their consumption is considered self-evident. The field of critical animal studies aims to analyze the cultural roles of animals in order to deconstruct the ideologies that perpetuate the oppression of animals. It is a practice of analysis that is explicitly concerned with the liberation of non-human animals. As Dawne McCance summarizes in *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction*, the field “first emerged some forty years ago as a specialization within analytic philosophy, one that set



out both to expose, and to offer ethical responses to, today's unprecedented subjection and exploitation of animals."<sup>15</sup> In contrast to traditional human-animal studies, critical animal studies aims to deconstruct the implicit human centrism that is caused by the dualist and speciesist "like us" standard, which examines "the ways in which animals are – or are not – like us, and therefore should – or should not – be treated like us."<sup>16</sup> Additionally, it does not reproduce the initial distinction between 'human' and 'animal'. Instead, critical animal studies attempts to move away from anthropocentric notions in order to critically examine the ways in which humans treat non-human animals.

The dominant ideology that underlies human dominion is the belief in human superiority over all other life, also known as speciesism. Coined by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation* in 1975, speciesism has become a well-known term in human-animal studies. Singer is a perfect example of a traditional human-animal scholar, as is evident from his text "Speciesism and Moral Status" wherein he argues that ascribing higher moral status to humans because of their cognitive abilities is complicated by both intelligent animals (he mentions great apes, dogs, and parrots) and humans with cognitive disabilities, and is thereby conducting an analysis with the previously mentioned "like us" standard. Moreover, speciesism reinforces the categories of species as well as social constructions of the 'human.' However, the term speciesism has stuck around and with its clear connection to other -isms like racism and sexism, it has potential within the field of critical animal studies.

Another important concept in critical animal studies, which will shape the main theoretical framework of this thesis, is biopolitics. Originally developed in the essay "Right of Death and Power Over Life" from *The History of Sexuality I*, Michel Foucault explains that up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, sovereign power was defined by the power over life and death, the right

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<sup>15</sup> McCance, *Critical Animal Studies*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Oliver quoted in McCance, *Critical Animal Studies*, 3.

to “*take* life or *let* live.”<sup>17</sup> Since then, he argues, power over death has transformed into power over life, as he puts it, “a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death.”<sup>18</sup> It is now a right to influence biological life in order to maintain and improve it. According to Foucault, this contemporary biopolitics developed in two ways: the first, also called “*anatomo-politics*” by Foucault, centered the idea of the body as a machine, as something that can be disciplined, optimized, extorted and integrated into systems. The second is the focus on the species body, the body of the population, as something that must be supervised, regulated, and intervened with in order to optimize its aspects like mortality, births, health, life expectancy.<sup>19</sup> In these two forms, argues Foucault, biopolitics developed as the power over life.

In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben takes up the concept of biopolitics and further expands it where Foucault could not. To do so, he introduces the two ancient Greek terms to describe life: “*zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or group.”<sup>20</sup> He defines classic politics as an exclusion, which is simultaneously an inclusion, of bare life. This exclusion can be identified by the metaphysical definition of humanity as the beings with language. Through language, *zoē* transforms itself into *bios*, and thereby creates politics: “There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion.”<sup>21</sup> However, since biopolitics is a politics specifically concerning bare life, the excluded *zoē* begins to collide with *bios*: “the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and

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<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality I*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, 138.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, 139.

<sup>20</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Agamben, 10.

*zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction.”<sup>22</sup> This collision is what Agamben identifies as biopolitics.

Agamben explains how Foucault argued that modernity is defined by the biopolitical development that the bodies of individuals are centered in a society’s political strategies.<sup>23</sup> However, he disagrees with Foucault’s argument that the inclusion of *zoē* in the *polis* is new, arguing instead that it is “absolutely ancient.”<sup>24</sup> The defining characteristic of modern politics, then, is “that modern democracy presents itself from the beginning as a vindication and liberation of *zoē*, and that it is constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find so to speak the *bios* of *zoē*.”<sup>25</sup>

Dinesh Wadiwel, in *The War Against Animals*, identifies this as one of the two defining differences between Agamben and Foucault’s conceptualizations of biopolitics. Agamben considers biopolitics as fundamental to the Western political tradition. Secondly, Agamben explicitly defines biopolitics as an ongoing distinction between human and animal. Wadiwel explores biopolitics in relation to discursive construction of the ‘animal’, in order to explore the mass violence done to non-human animals in contemporary society. He explains: “We can certainly summarise here that biopolitics according to both Agamben and Foucault is precisely located at the point or threshold between human and animal; biopolitics is almost, as it were, ‘the productive’ effect of the tension between human and animal.”<sup>26</sup> Biopolitics is, in this sense, deeply connected to conceptions of the non-human. Additionally, biopolitical strategies, that consider bodies as machines and which continuously intervene in order to optimize production, is seamlessly integrated into the ways in which human society exploits certain animals. Wadiwel explains how industrial animal farming is exemplary of biopolitical exploitation; on

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<sup>22</sup> Agamben, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Agamben, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Agamben, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Agamben, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 26.

the one hand, through maximizing reproduction, since large-scale killing requires large-scale breeding; and on the other hand, by optimizing the process to make use of every bit of animal energy in order to maximize profit.<sup>27</sup>

Wadiwel explores the mass-scale violence done to non-human animals through the concept of a ‘war on animals’, using Foucault’s conceptualization of war and sovereignty as organized violence that is integrated in civil political spaces in an invisible way.<sup>28</sup> In his definition of a ‘war’ on animals, Wadiwel illustrates that the exclusion of non-human life in human politics constructs divisions between ‘human’ and ‘animal’, which justify excessive violence. Additionally, he argues that in order for these politics and the war on animals to function, the civil and political space needs to hide evidence of this war, and “forms of intense domination of animal life, through apparatuses that do not, at least on the outside, betray the form of war.”<sup>29</sup> This thesis aims to identify and deconstruct such apparatuses that conceal domination and violence to non-human animals in Dutch society, specifically in relation to animals on Dutch farms.

There is a strong cultural connection between Dutch people and dairy, which is partially because of governmental campaigns, biopolitical interventions, which promote animal products to Dutch people. The previously mentioned slogan “milk is good for all” is an iconic example of one of these influential campaigns. These campaigns naturalize the consumption of animal products by constructing the notion that dairy is not only very healthy, but indeed necessary for any diet. As such, these governmental campaigns are biopolitical in the sense that they promote ‘healthy’ lifestyles and thereby promote and regulate both human and non-human life. An example is the cartoon figure Joris Driepinter, named that way because he always poses with three pints of milk. Driepinter was introduced in the 1960s, and was accompanied by the slogan

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<sup>27</sup> Wadiwel, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Wadiwel, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Wadiwel, 28.



Figure 2. A milk commercial featuring Joris Driepinter.

“Milk is a must. Milk does you good” (*melk moet, melk doet je goed*, fig. 2). Drawn as a cute stick figure, the commercial clearly was clearly marketed towards children, and created to become an icon for the dairy industry. This was very effective, since the older generation of Dutch people remembers him fondly. The slogan rhymes in Dutch, just like “milk is good for all” (*melk is goed voor elk*), which means they are memorable and catchy. “Milk, the white engine” (*melk, de witte motor*) was popularized in the 1980s,

combining notions of the healthiness of milk with the biopolitical construction of the body as a machine which needs an effective engine to function. Recently, in 2021, the Dutch Dairy Organization introduced a new slogan: “Dairy grows with you” (*zuivel groeit met je mee*), emphasizing the importance of drinking milk for all ages. Evidently, the marketing of milk as a necessary part of a healthy diet is still very much ongoing. As a cause and a consequence of these slogans, dairy, and milk in particular, is a large aspect of Dutch identity. Many Dutch people are proud that the Netherlands has the tallest population in the world, and though this has been attributed to several factors including good health care and relative social equality, it is most famously claimed that this is because of the Dutch love for milk and dairy.<sup>30</sup>

Naturally, the Dutch association with dairy is also influenced by the immensely successful agricultural industry, as the Netherlands is the second biggest agricultural exporter worldwide and exported an estimated amount of 95,6 billion euros in agricultural goods in 2020.<sup>31</sup> As such, farming is deeply rooted in the Dutch identity. This is illustrated not just by the popular commercial slogans for dairy and the continued support for farmer’s organizations, but also by Dutch media, like the incredibly popular TV program *Boer Zoekt Vrouw*, a program

<sup>30</sup> Houthuijs, “Hoe zuivel, gelijkheid en vergrijzing onze lengte verklaren.”

<sup>31</sup> Horbach, “Record-high Dutch export of agricultural goods in 2020.”

that follows several Dutch farmers on their quest for love in a similar set up to *The Bachelor*. The program, which attracted 3.1 million viewers to their most recent episode in 2022,<sup>32</sup> gets up close and personal to the loveably awkward farmers and broadcasts their attempts at dating. It uses a typical Dutch farm aesthetic, for example in its intro which uses old-fashioned music, Delfts-blue, and soundbites of cows mooing. Naturally, the setting of the farm is an important aspect of the program. The suitors have to work along with the farmer during the weeks that they are in the program, and their excitement and understanding of it is often a significant part of the farmer's decision. Therefore, the episodes show the work that is done on farms, including milking cows, helping during lamb season, and working in the dirt of fruit and vegetable farms. As the show has been running for twelve years, it can be said that the program is partially responsible for a significant part of the Dutch conception of farming and farmers. It humanizes farmers, a group that, especially with recent governmental regulations and more awareness of the climate crisis, is often demonized for their profession. The program frames farmers as friendly, hard-working and reasonable people who are deeply committed to their business, to the extent that they are unable to find a partner without the program's help. It portrays farming as an important and natural practice, one that requires respect and care for the animals involved.

In the seventh episode of the most recent season of *Boer Zoekt Vrouw*, aired on the third of April 2022, a dairy cow gives birth, assisted by "boer Evert" and one of his suitors, Maud. Maud narrates the moment emotionally. "It couldn't be more beautiful. It was so romantic. Yeah, that really touches me," she explains. "Beautiful. It was all so new, such a warm little animal..."<sup>33</sup> In the barn, she asks Evert, "Can you immediately see what it is?", to which he answers, "Yes, a bull." Maud notices the white pattern on the calf's head, which looks like a heart, and calls him a "love cow." As the mother licks the calf clean, the other two suitors walk in and congratulate Evert. One asks him, "But when will you take him, the bull, away?", and

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<sup>32</sup> AD, "Boer zoekt vrouw goed voor 3,1 miljoen kijkers."

<sup>33</sup> Boer Zoekt Vrouw, "Afl. 7."

Evert answers, “Well, in a bit maybe...” and with a zoom out accompanied by some gentle piano music, the scene ends. The bull, born on a dairy farm, will be taken away from his mother within the hour, and will be raised on artificial milk, until he is slaughtered for his flesh after a few weeks. The reality of the lives of these calves, which Dier&Recht displayed uncensored on their posters, is not a part of the romantic scene in *Boer Zoekt Vrouw*. The music, narration, and adorable shots of the calf create a beautiful moment and though the imminent separation is hinted at, it is not a genuine part of the scene. This is a significant example, since it illustrates that though *Boer Zoekt Vrouw* is a notable influence on the Dutch imaginary of farming, it consistently leaves out the controversial aspects of farming; especially when they pertain to animals.

For the purpose of this thesis, I define farmed animals as cows, pigs, and chickens. Though sheep, goats, and horses are equally a part of Dutch farming practices and certainly warrant analysis, they will not be considered extensively in this thesis as they are not a part of intensive farming to the same extent.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, it should be mentioned that while Dutch cultural representations mainly broadcast cows, they are certainly not the only animal that is intensively farmed on Dutch farms. In fact, pigs and chickens are farmed in much greater numbers than dairy cows: according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, while there were 3.8 million cows in the Netherlands in 2021, there were 11.4 million pigs and 99.9 million chickens.<sup>35</sup> Still, black-and-white dairy cows in green meadows are typical elements of Dutch scenery. Dairy cows are a comfortable farmed animal to represent, as they are not kept for slaughter but are rather appreciated when alive and they spend much more time outside than pigs and chickens, literally in view of the public. In this sense, the Dutch farm discourse is

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<sup>34</sup> The production of goat milk is similar in procedure as cow’s milk. The suffering in the goat industry could even be considered greater, as the flesh of bucks is less popular than that of bulls and because the goat industry does not have as much regulation, as pointed out in Wakker Dier, “Geiten.” Nonetheless, goat farms remain less intensive than cow dairy farms.

<sup>35</sup> Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, “Hoeveel landbouwdieren.”

disproportionately focused on cows and milk production. Cows are a 'visible' animal in Dutch culture, while pigs and chickens are generally unseen. Because this thesis aims to deconstruct representations of farmed animals in Dutch culture and the majority of these are of dairy cows, the case studies also mainly consider cows. Nonetheless, this thesis will extensively deconstruct the conditions of the Dutch dairy cow's apparent visibility and continue to consider those animals who are left unrepresented.

Specifically, this thesis will consider the representation of farmed animals in Dutch culture and examine the causes and consequences of these various representations. It will argue that in a biopolitical system that perpetuates a dichotomy between 'human' and 'animal' and enforces notions of human dominion, Dutch culture fails to represent actual farmed animals and instead either idealizes them or erases them, in order to keep the ideology and norms of the animal industry intact. The thesis will encompass a broad selection of case studies since it will also consider children's literature, specifically picture books. In this sense, the research attempts to include representation from across all ages, arguing that the cultural objects that are presented to children affect those that are later produced, and that knowledge is already shaped from very first impressions.

While farmed animals are not often the subject of literary fiction, except for the religious farm novel which will be discussed in Chapter 2, they feature prominently in literature written for children, especially in picture books for young children. Considering these visual narratives, as well as textual ones, proves to be fruitful. In *Words about Pictures*, Perry Nodelman was one of the first to consider children's picture books to be a worthy object of study that might produce interesting analysis. Indeed, there is much to discuss about a picture book's style, portrayal of action, emotional quality, symbols, and even its relationship with words, if there are any. Additionally, these picture books offer insight into what ideas children are presented with at a young age and what effect that might have on their perception of the world. In the field of



developmental psychology, reading with children using picture books has proven to be beneficial for language acquisition,<sup>36</sup> and importantly, picture books are an effective tool to introduce children to concepts that might otherwise remain unknown or unfamiliar to them.<sup>37</sup>

This transfer from picture book to reality is a “symbolic task” that requires children to realize that the picture they are seeing represents an object in reality.<sup>38</sup> Gabrielle Strouse et al. point out that this symbolic task becomes more difficult when the picture does not clearly depict the real life object. As Patricia Ganea et al. illustrate, picture books vary in “*iconicity* – the degree of physical resemblance between a picture and its referent” and this has consequences for the child’s understanding of the real object.<sup>39</sup> In Ganea et al.’s findings, it becomes clear that recognizing and naming real life objects based on pictures becomes more difficult when they are less realistic and highly iconized, for example with cartoons. Therefore, the representations of objects in picture books are significant for children’s understanding of those objects in the real world.

Often, children encounter farmed animals in picture books before ever encountering them in real life. The ways in which farmed animals are most often depicted are highly iconized and can barely be said to resemble the actual animal. Additionally, the narratives that feature these animals, including the textual ones for older children, are unrealistic in general, as actual farming practices and slaughter are hardly discussed. This is partially justified by the desire to protect children from these harsh realities, but it also maintains an image of farming that somehow exists without these unpleasant truths. Since children familiarize themselves with concepts and objects through narratives, it is significant that narratives of farmed animals rarely contain realistic or honest representations. The effect of this is that children are only introduced

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<sup>36</sup> Whitehurst et al., “Accelerating Language Development Through Picture Book Reading.”

<sup>37</sup> Strouse et al., “The Role of Book Features in Young Children’s Transfer of Information from Picture Books to Real-World Contexts.”

<sup>38</sup> Strouse et al., “The Role of Book Features.”

<sup>39</sup> Ganea et al., “Transfer between Picture Books and the Real World by Very Young Children,” 49.

to a highly stylized depiction of farming that reframes and avoids the uncomfortable truth of the lives of farmed animals. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate the role of the representation of farmed animals in children's literature, in addition to adult literature, in shaping farmed animals' position in society.

The field of animal representation is broad and analyzes the various different ways that animals are written, filmed, made, and discussed in textual as well as visual narratives, and often problematizes these representations. Representations matter beyond academia. It affects and influences a culture's perception of any given animal, which has direct consequences on the way it is treated by the culture. As Jonathan Burt points out in "The Illumination of the Animal Kingdom," the ways that animals are visible or invisible in visual culture reflects their prominence in society. He states: "Changes in the configurations of animal visibility and invisibility not only determine the style of presentation in the public domain but also demarcate the boundaries of how animals should be treated in a civilized society."<sup>40</sup> In addition to visibility, the *ways* in which animals are represented not only reflects but equally shapes the possibilities for animals in society. Visual and textual narratives that represent an animal are complicit in producing their status. John Berger, in "Why Look At Animals?", one of the most influential texts of the field, argues that an increase of representations of the animal parallels the actual disappearance of the animal from human society. Encounters with animals, Berger claims, have been replaced with representations of them. These representations replace personal experiences and thus shape both human understanding of animals and human conceptions of their 'place' in the world and in society.

Though Berger is well-known within animal studies for this influential essay which is still important forty years later, the rest of his oeuvre is equally interesting, especially in the context of farmed animals. Berger was a farmer and wrote much about rural life and poverty.

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<sup>40</sup> Burt, "The Illumination," 207.

As Andy Merrifield puts it, his case for animals comes from a rural perspective: “Berger’s sympathy for animals is a peasant sympathy: he might be fond of his pig, raises it lovingly, caringly, and is glad to salt away its pork.”<sup>41</sup> As Berger famously argued for seeing animals directly, he also lived closely with them and farmed them, which he argued to be a natural and ethical way of interacting with animals. In this way, he complicates the dominant interpretation of his *About Looking* essay, and nuances the idea that animal farming is inherently unethical. He demonstrates how the perspective of the farmers themselves, those who work closely with farmed animals and form undeniable relationships with them, matter in the discussion of farmed animal lives. This perspective will therefore be further explored in Chapter 3.

This thesis is divided into three chapters that focus on three narratives about farmed animals in the Netherlands. The first will discuss the idyllic image of the farm as presented in children’s picture books. The chapter will argue that the idyllic farm constructs an alternative narrative that serves to replace the reality of farmed animals. The narrative of the idyllic farm is very salient in children’s books, which are the first introduction to farms for many Dutch people. Therefore, this chapter will consider two different children’s books: *Boerderijdieren: Kijk en voel*, a picture book for very young children, and *Boer Boris en de eieren*, a picture book with slightly more text for older children. It will problematize the pastoral image by illustrating how it erases the actuality of modern Dutch farms, which have evolved into large businesses, and how it erases farmed animals by picturing them as cartooned versions or moving them completely to the background.

The second chapter will consider the Dutch farm as represented in literary fiction. It will discuss the genre of the religious farm novel, which are accounts of Reformed Protestant families that live on rural farms in the Netherlands. Two well-known novels in this genre are Marieke Lucas Rijneveld’s *De avond is ongemak* (*The Discomfort of Evening*) and Franca

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<sup>41</sup> Merrifield, *John Berger*, 109.

Treur's *Dorsvloer vol confetti* (*Confetti on the Threshing Floor*). The chapter will argue that these representations of farms construct animals as symbolical beings, fulfilling metaphorical roles for the human characters. Similar to the pastoral image of the farm, this representation erases non-human voices on farms by only challenging the structures that cause human suffering. Additionally, it will consider in which ways the philosophy and history of Reformed Protestantism enforces and produces a particular category of the 'human'.

The third chapter will analyze the interspecies relationships on Dutch farms using the feminist concept of the ethics of care. The relationships that farmers have with their animals, despite forming in an unequal system, are real and deserve mention. However, these relationships also function in very specific ways in order to justify the conditions of intensive farming. This chapter will focus on the relationship between human farmers and farmed animals, how those may differ from human relationships with other animals like companion animals, and how these distinctions are incredibly significant in order to maintain the practices of farming in their current capacity.

Research on farmed animals from a cultural perspective in the Dutch context is limited. However, Clemens Driessen has done much work on Dutch farming and the connection between science and culture. For example, he co-wrote an article on the introduction of milking robots, which are used on almost all Dutch dairy farms, and the implications it has on animal ethics.<sup>42</sup> Driessen and Heutinck point out an interesting relation between technology and ethics, illustrating that what is 'natural' is constantly shifting. While milking robots offer freedom to cows to choose their own moments to be milked and therefore seems more natural than when farmers enforce milking times, it is also totally distanced from the farmer and thus could also be considered less natural than the old-fashioned way. Additionally, they present the fact that research on milking robots revealed that cows in fact did not desire to be milked, despite what

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<sup>42</sup> Driessen and Heutinck, "Cows desiring to be milked?"

was assumed. As Driessen and Heutinck put it, “the development of the robot revealed that cows do not desire to be milked (by humans or machines, they do seem to have the desire to have their calves drink when, in rare occasions, they are given the opportunity to do so).”<sup>43</sup> In this sense, Driessen’s work matters for the critical perspective that is applied in this thesis, especially when it comes to the cultural context of the Netherlands in terms of the shifting conceptions of what is ‘natural’.

As this thesis is a project within the field of critical animal studies, it is worth mentioning again that the explicit ideology of liberation is important. As Richard Elmore illustrates, “CAS [critical animal studies] is characterized by scholars within its ranks as more explicitly political than other forms of animal studies” as it “arise[s] at the intersection of activism and the academy.”<sup>44</sup> It is also, in that sense, deeply connected to other activist fields of study such as anti-racist and feminist theory. This thesis, arising from the field of critical animal studies, is therefore adamantly political. It is not distanced from the suffering that it discusses and the ultimate aim of this analysis is the liberation of non-human animals from human dominion.

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<sup>43</sup> Driessen and Heutinck, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Elmore, “Biopolitics,” 84.

## Chapter 1

## The Idyllic Dutch Farm and Children's Picture Books

In *War Against Animals*, Wadiwel illustrates how the violence in human domination over other animals must be seamlessly integrated in society.<sup>45</sup> The violence that is inherent to the animal industry must be hidden “through apparatuses that do not, at least on the outside, betray the form of war.”<sup>46</sup> This chapter will investigate one of these apparatuses in the Dutch discourse of animal farming: children's picture books. It will argue that these picture books create a discourse of an idyllic farming practice by anthropomorphizing, stereotyping, and cartoonifying farmed animals. By teaching children a particular and unrealistic version of animal farms, picture books create an alternative reality for farmed animals, which leaves their actual reality unaccounted for.

In “Constructing Consumables and Consent: A Critical Analysis of Factory Farm Industry Discourse”, Cathy Glenn defines discourse as “the production of knowledge and power through language” and discursive practices as “those institutional formations (or epistemes) within which meanings of and between contradictory discourses are constructed.”<sup>47</sup> Following Foucault, Glenn connects discourse to the construction of meaning and the establishment of power. She writes about the deliberate discursive practices of the US factory farming industry that use advertisements with ‘talking’ animals and double-speak, which she defines as “a style of discourse ... that – although descriptive – is intentionally misleading by being ambiguous or disingenuous.”<sup>48</sup> These discursive techniques are meant to generate support for factory farming and undermine efforts to change or end the intensive animal industry. Glenn explicitly links the general ineffectiveness of campaigns against factory farming to the success of the industry's generated discourse: “despite significant concerns among environmentalists and activists,

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<sup>45</sup> Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Wadiwel, 28.

<sup>47</sup> Glenn, “Constructing Consumables and Consent,” 64.

<sup>48</sup> Glenn, 64-65.

resistant strategies have brought about little, if any, change. Part of the reason for this ineffectiveness, I suggest, is the immense power of the discursive practices constructed to support the industry.<sup>49</sup> Though this analysis focuses on the farm industry discourse in the US, the immense power of these type of discursive practices equally applies to the Netherlands, though it takes on a different shape.

The previously mentioned slogans for milk that were popularized and which heavily incentivized the consumption of animal products are a prominent example of the discursive practices of the animal farming industry in the Netherlands. In addition to these slogans, the advertising by largest dairy company in the Netherlands, Friesland Campina, can offer another typical example of the dominant perception of animal farming, created and maintained by the industry itself. Figure 3 illustrates how the Dutch public is being encouraged to buy and consume dairy. Campina advertisements always contain extremely green grass, usually in photographic form but occasionally as a digital reproduction (in this poster, there is even grass in the consumer's house). Usually, the grass is combined with a few cows grazing or standing next to a charismatic farmer. There are never more than five cows on images like these, giving the impression of small-scale farms with wide meadows. This particular poster makes a direct connection between the cows producing the milk and the consumer drinking it, suggesting that the distance between the cow grazing and the



Figure 3. A typical Campina advertisement.

<sup>49</sup> Glenn, 64.

consumer in their kitchen is minimal and separated by the necessary production process that creates the pack of milk splitting the two images.<sup>50</sup> This production process can also be seen in the differences between the two meadows: one is raw and ‘wild’ while the other is mowed neatly. On the poster, the text reads “The best of our land” (*Het beste van ons land*), referring to the role of dairy cows in Dutch nature and claiming that this animal product is the best that the landscape produces. Campina’s slogan, which features mainly on their transportation trucks is “It is in our nature” (*Het zit in onze natuur*). Due to the visual association with cows, it is not clear whose nature is addressed here: it could be interpreted as being about cows, stating that it is in a cow’s nature to produce milk for humans; or it could be interpreted as being about the consumers, stating that it is in a human’s nature to drink cow’s milk. Either way, the slogan naturalizes the dairy industry and simultaneously implies that Dutch nature equals farmland, much like “The best of our land.” The cows in these advertisements play a significant role. They are depicted to suggest that the connection to nature and the origin of the product is not lost; but they are also there to eliminate any concerns about animal welfare in the dairy industry. The cows in these pictures live in ideal circumstances, with wide meadows, clean grass, and a caring farmer. As Glenn mentions, in the farming industry “positive images of animals’ health and welfare become just as saleable as the products rendered from the animals.”<sup>51</sup> Though all the cows in Campina’s ads are always outside, in reality, in 2019 only 77% of farms allowed their animals to go outside at all, for about 1,648 hours in a year.<sup>52</sup> This is about two months; for the rest of the year, dairy cows are kept inside on barred floors, often covered in manure. However,

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<sup>50</sup> The consumer in question, and all consumers and farmers in Campina ads, is also particular one that is deeply influenced by racial ideas of what a Dutch person looks like: white with blond, long hair; thin; and stereotypically feminine with a female figure and pink clothing. Most dairy ads, also those for cheese for example, feature white and thin people to represent the average Dutch consumer.

<sup>51</sup> Glenn, “Constructing Consumables and Consent,” 71.

<sup>52</sup> Bakker, “Meer koeien in de wei, maar wel minder lang.”



it is in Campina's benefit to portray their animals as being content and treated and in a way that seems most natural to the Dutch public.

The way that seems the most natural is an important part of the discursive practice of the animal industry. Following Fiepko Coolman's summary of developments in Dutch farm mechanization, it becomes clear that the dominant idea of farms in the Netherlands is reminiscent of the farming practices of before the Second World War, when "milking was still done by hand by the family members or hired labor,"<sup>53</sup> and most animal farms were "mixed-type small (sometimes very small) family farms with arable land, and some dairy cattle, pigs, hogs, and poultry."<sup>54</sup> After the Second World War, the number of farms decreased while the average farm size increased; dairy farms became much larger, milking machines replaced hand milking, and the milk production per cow rose from 4500 to 7000 liter. As Coolman puts it, "in the Netherlands the after-war period can be seen as a time of rapidly increasing production of agricultural products."<sup>55</sup> This is closely connected to the period of famine in the Netherlands in the winter of 1944-45. After the war, Sicco Mansholt, the new minister of agriculture, fishing and food security, coined the slogan "never go hungry again" (*nooit meer honger*), and became the founding father of the new agricultural policy in the Netherlands. In a portrait of him written in *De Correspondent*, Mansholt is remembered as "the man who killed the small farmer and the environment and died full of guilt about his misconduct."<sup>56</sup> He pushed Dutch farmers towards industrial practices and strove for a maximum growth of production, driven by his passion to eliminate the mere possibility of another famine in the Netherlands. Though Coolman does not mention him, Mansholt is an important factor in the development of Dutch agriculture into the high-tech enterprise that it is today. Importantly, the discursive practices of the animal industry maintain the image of farming from 19<sup>th</sup> century, small-scale family farms that produce

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<sup>53</sup> Coolman, "Developments in Dutch Farm Mechanization," 2.

<sup>54</sup> Coolman, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Coolman, 6.

<sup>56</sup> Vanheste, "Nooit meer oorlog, nooit meer honger."

just enough for themselves and their community, while also benefitting from the still reigning post-war sentiment that large-scale production is necessary.

In *The War Against Animals*, Wadiwel introduces the idea of a biopolitical war against animals, which he illustrates with examples of animal farming and slaughter; “Factory farming and industrialised slaughter technologies, for example, enable a monstrous deployment of violence and extermination.”<sup>57</sup> As biopolitical practices consider bodies as machines and aim to optimize their productivity and exploit their products, the connection between biopolitics and farming is evident. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben identifies modern (bio)politics as the inclusive exclusion of *zoē*, bare life. The creation of the discursive categories of ‘animal’ and ‘human’ is fundamental to biopolitics; Wadiwel states that “mass orchestrated violence against animals both maintains systems of human domination and, simultaneously, constructs epistemologically how we understand the ‘animal’ as a discursive category that is opposed and subordinated to the ‘human’.”<sup>58</sup> In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben conceptualizes the cultural apparatus that constructs these discursive categories as the anthropological machine.<sup>59</sup> The anthropological machine continually works to create arbitrary distance between ‘human’ and ‘animal’. Agamben offers the example of Ernst Haeckel, a 19<sup>th</sup> century scientist. Haeckel sought to solve the ‘problem’ of the origin of humanity, which meant he had to argue that though we evolved from apes, we are not apes. Haeckel presumes that the core characteristic of humanity is language. However, that meant that within evolution, there must have been an ape with the potential for language in order for it to evolve into human; but that ape would then have already been more human than ape. Therefore, Haeckel developed the idea of an evolutionary ‘missing link’ between apes and humans; an “ape-man” with the potential for language, as a humanoid passage between animal and human. Using this example, Agamben

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<sup>57</sup> Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Wadiwel, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Agamben, “Anthropological machine.”

argues that the anthropological machine is constantly working to ensure that the categories of animal and human remain separate, even in evolutionary theory.

The anthropological machine creates the category of the ‘human’ by excluding characteristics from it that are then deemed ‘animal’ instead. As Agamben puts it: “the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside.”<sup>60</sup> The indetermined state of exception, that which makes humans not animals, is not fixed. It is whatever works in a particular context: language, culture, empathy, intelligence, consciousness.<sup>61</sup> Hence, the categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ are in no sense steadfast.

However, the disappearance of the clear-cut difference between human/animal is at all times avoided, especially in animal farming discourse. As Wadiwel states, the war against animals means comfort and pleasure for humans: “Human sovereignty over animals is characterized by excess beyond proportionality.”<sup>62</sup> This means that systems of violence, like the farming industry, will resist any change, as “change potentially threatens a rupture to the continual excess of human claimed rights and pleasures (the spoils of war).”<sup>63</sup>

In this sense, the cultural discourse of farming in the Netherlands must work continually to maintain the spoils of war, the pleasures of human dominion. Not only does it define the discursive categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal’, but it defines separate categories within animals in order to justify exploitation and killing of certain species. One of the ways that Dutch discourse does this is by isolating farmed animals within the space of the farm. Indeed,

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<sup>60</sup> Agamben, 37.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Whiteness’ has also shaped this state of exception, defining what a human being is; an example of this is the history of Jewish people and their fluid categorization as white or non-white. Though currently, white culture is often summarized as “Judeo-Christian”, Deborah Britzman explains that “the idea of the Jew as ‘white’ in both North America and Europe is barely fifty years old.” Qtd. in Cynthia Levine-Rasky, “Jewish whiteness”, 362. Whiteness is not an affixed characteristic, but rather a social construction that is fluid and changing. As the indeterminate zone of exception in the anthropological machine, it functions to define which people are fully human and which are not. In this sense, as Aph Ko puts it, “Animals are a part of the grammar of white supremacist violence.” *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft*, 112.

<sup>62</sup> Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 23.

<sup>63</sup> Wadiwel, 23.

children's literature structurally place certain animals in the location of the farm, constructing and maintaining the categorization of *boerderijdieren*, or farm animals. As Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart put it: "the practice of placing an animal in a 'farm' is an enactment of the concept 'farm animal' which also reproduces the meaning of that concept, through the juxtaposition of the animal with the location and their subjection to 'farming' practices."<sup>64</sup> Janae Dimick builds on this by arguing that it prevents any counter discourse and creates the assumption that the place of the farm is the only right space for these animals; "the only legitimate space for these animals is a space where they are raised for their byproducts."<sup>65</sup> Consequently, it becomes very difficult to relate to farmed animals as living beings beyond production. They are established as products or machines and humans as their rightful consumers. The space of the farm commodifies its animals to become something indefinable as animals. In this sense, farmed animals do not truly feature in the discourse.

However, farmed animals feature heavily in cultural products for children, inspiring an abundance of stuffed animals, toys, and books. Children are continuously interacting with representations of farmed animals. These representations, in addition to dairy advertisements, are one of the only media where farmed animals seem to play major roles. Therefore, it is important to consider these representations in children's literature. As previously discussed, representations are vital for children's impressions and knowledge of animals. Ganea et al. illustrate that though children learn significantly better from direct experiences, "in urban settings, a substantial proportion of young children's exposure to animals is indirect, through symbolic media such as television, videos, and books, with their direct exposure limited to

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<sup>64</sup> Cole and Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> Dimick, *And This Little Piggy Had None*, 83.

household pets or visits to the zoo.”<sup>66</sup> The nature of these symbolic representations is important, as it shapes the ways people conceptualize these animals and, in turn, animal farming.

In the anthropological machine, a being’s categorization as ‘animal’ can change over time, as the state of exception is by definition indetermined. Following this, as humanity is defined by the exclusion of animality and animality is defined by the exclusion of humanity, some animals can be considered lesser or more animal than others. This is also at stake in stories that feature animal and animal characters. In *Our Children and Other Animals*, Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart introduce the following figure:

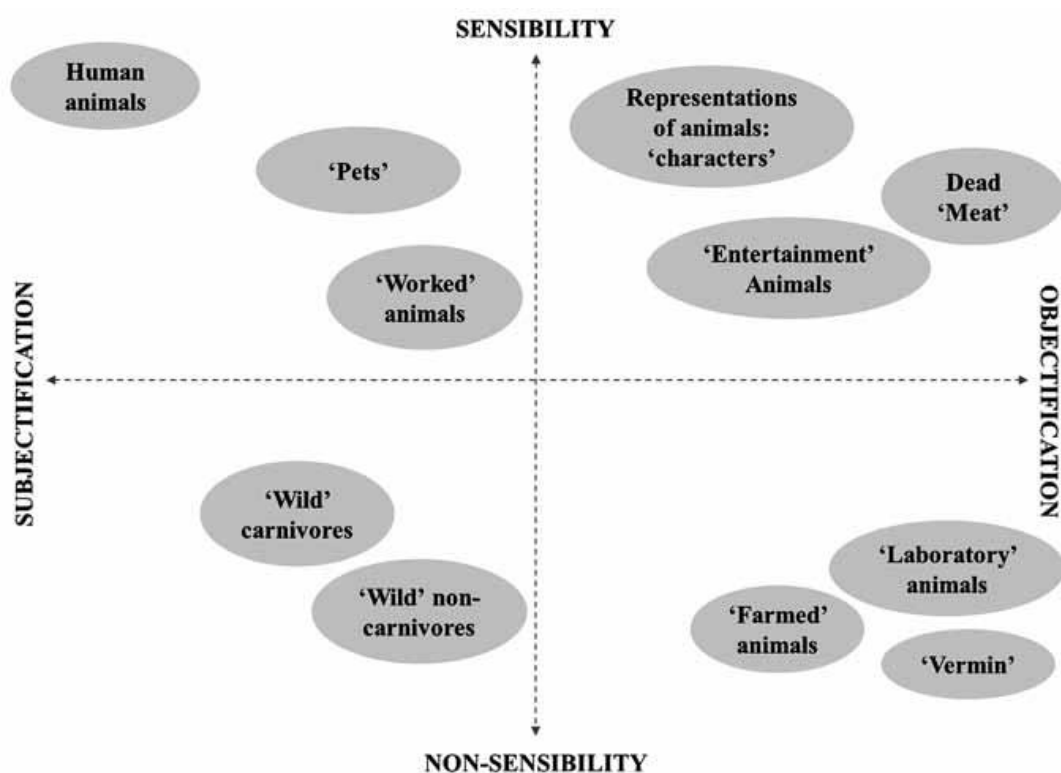


Figure 4. A conceptual map of the social construction of ‘other’ animals.

Using this figure, Cole and Stewart demonstrate that the conditions for being a sensible subject depend on a being’s closeness to humanity. In their analysis of the animated movie *Puss in Boots* (2011), they argue that the animal protagonist is necessarily anthropomorphized in order to be made possible as a hero: “Puss, as the most ‘human’ character in the film (more so than

<sup>66</sup> Ganea et al., “Transfer between Picture Books,” 1421.

the dehumanized humans Jack and Jill ...), wields the greatest power to grant subjectivity to other, lesser, characters and to objectify those who are instrumentalized.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, in Dutch children’s literature, when animals feature in main roles they are portrayed as humanized animals, usually only retaining hints of an appearance that reminds of their original species. This tradition also creates a distance between animals in stories and animals in reality; anthropomorphized animals are protagonists, not products.

As Janae Dimick explains in her book *And This Little Piggy Had None: Challenging the Dominant Discourse on Farmed Animals in Children’s Picturebooks*, it is generally accepted that non-human characters are human representatives, and that usually, the animality of these characters is not an integral part to the story; they might as well have been human. However, “readers are nonetheless using these characters as a means to learn about nonhuman animals; this meaning making can lead to an anthropocentric cultural orientation and may impact children’s views of nature throughout their lives.”<sup>68</sup>

In Dutch children’s literature for older children, who can read on their own, farmed animals are generally not popular as main characters, as Cole and Stewart’s figure illustrates. Animals like cats, dogs, horses or wild animals are preferred. However, farmed animals do appear in some of these children’s stories. Examples of this include *Vuilnisvarkens Job & Bob*, wherein two humanized pigs dressed in overalls work as trash collectors and *Derek het Schaap*, a comic series with short adventures of a clumsy sheep protagonist.<sup>69</sup>

In picture books that are meant to be read to very young children, farmed animals are much more popular subjects. These stories are different from those for an older audience since they do not require a clear or exciting plot, and therefore do not really need protagonists with character. Nonetheless, in some books, animal characters explore the farm, for example in

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<sup>67</sup> Cole and Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*, 92.

<sup>68</sup> Dimick, *And This Little Piggy Had None*, 48.

<sup>69</sup> Veldkamp and Smit, *Vuilnisvarkens Job & Bob*, Northfield, *Derek het schaap 1*.

*Bobbi op de boerderij*.<sup>70</sup> In these books, the characters who are introduced to the farm from an external perspective are traditionally humanized. In *Bobbi op de boerderij*, the farm is being explored by Bobbi, who is an anthropomorphic teddy bear, and his friend, an anthropomorphic elephant. It is from a series wherein Bobbi explores various different environments. However, most picture books are not stories about animals who are having some kind of adventure, but rather informational and told through a disembodied, external perspective (which, when being read out, can then be embodied by the reader) that aims to teach children about these animals.

In her analysis of North American picture books about farms, Dimick uses a method of iconographic analysis: “I examined what the images denoted, meaning what the images visually contained, as well as what the images connoted, meaning what messages the images convey to the reader. To unpack this, I looked at what objects and subjects are featured in the images, also known as attributes, the settings of the images, and the prominence of figures and objects in the image.”<sup>71</sup> This analysis will take a similar approach in order to deconstruct the image of the farm that is presented to young children and in which ways it creates the idyllic alternative reality for farmed animals.

The picture book *Boerderijdieren: Kijk en Voel* is a simple book for very young children, which introduces them to the animals on a farm and allows them to touch synthetic textures that are the animals’ hypothetical fur and skin.<sup>72</sup> It is a typical example of the books available to young children who cannot yet read. Other books, like *Kleine Geit: Spelen op de boerderij* and *Bobbi op de boerderij* contain very similar images of the farm and its animals, though the drawing styles differ.<sup>73</sup> *Kleine Geit* uses a ‘cuter’ drawing style, with round shapes and softer, pastel colors, but also represents the animals as cartoons. *Bobbi op de boerderij* has a more hand-drawn style than *Boerderijdieren* and it uses relatively realistic representations of

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<sup>70</sup> Maas, *Bobbi op de boerderij*.

<sup>71</sup> Dimick, *And This Little Piggy Had None*, 74.

<sup>72</sup> Huisman, *Boerderijdieren: Kijk en voel*.

<sup>73</sup> Baeten and Borsboom, *Kleine Geit: Spelen op de boerderij*.

farmed animals, as the cow and chickens on the cover illustrate. Books like these three always include the same animals on the farm: black-and-white cows, pink pigs, white and sometimes brown chickens with bright yellow chicks, and occasionally white goats and sheep.



Figure 5.1 and 5.2. The respective covers of *Bobbi op de boerderij* and *Kleine Geit: Spelen op de boerderij*.

The content of these picture books are roughly the same, though they take on different forms; caregivers can essentially choose which drawing style they prefer without it affecting the content. However, compared to these other books, *Boerderijdieren* has a distinct interactive element to it as it includes synthetic pieces of fur and skin that children can touch. These pieces of skin, in Berger's sense, replace actual real-life interaction with these animals for children, creating a sensation similar to petting an animal. The skin and fur of these animals are as stylized as the visual elements in the book and they illustrate how these picture books represent animals as the singular types that intensively farmed animals have been selectively bred as. For example, the pigs are hairless and pink, the cows are black-and-white, and the chick has a piece of soft, fluffy, bright yellow fur. Though there are hundreds of different domesticated pig breeds,<sup>74</sup> Dutch people are generally only familiar with the pink and hairless Piètrain or Dutch landrace breeds. Similarly, there are thousands of cattle breeds, but Dutch farm discourse will

<sup>74</sup> Breedlist, "Pigs."



typically only include the black-and-white Holstein cow.<sup>75</sup> The skins of the animals in *Boerderijdieren* calls attention to the limited variety with which children get to know these animals, both conceptually and corporeally.

On its thick cardboard pages, *Boerderijdieren* introduces a peacock, cow, sheep, pig, and rooster. In the background of the pages there are more animals, including horses, squirrels, sparrows, rabbits, storks, chickens, dogs, cats, spiders, mice, bees, geese, and ducks, as well as various types of flora such as mushrooms, flowers, trees, grass, hay, and various vegetables. On each page, there are two lines of rhyme that pertain to the animal that is being introduced and who can be ‘petted’.

The farm in *Boerderijdieren* is not typically Dutch at all; in fact, it is reminiscent of 20<sup>th</sup> century North American farms, with barns of red wood with round roofs, yellow wheat in the background, and even one image with a type of windmill that is most commonly known in the US.<sup>76</sup> This is significant because it illustrates how Dutch children are presented with a visual stereotype of the farm, constructing images that are imminently recognizable as being farms. The stereotype is not only factually incorrect in terms of farming practices, but it is also a conflation of different types of farms, geographically and historically. The most popular cattle breeds that are farmed in the US are not black-and-white ones, but rather black and brown ‘beef cows’ like Black Angus, Charolais, and Hereford.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, the North American barn in *Boerderijdieren* does keep a typically black-and-white Dutch dairy cow. In this way, animal farm discourse creates idealized imagery of farming, using North American fields and buildings

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<sup>75</sup> Zuivel Online, “Melkkoe.”

<sup>76</sup> The multi-bladed windpump.

<sup>77</sup> AG Daily, “Top 10 most popular cattle breeds in the United States.”

to create a large and open space, while still using familiar and recognizable depictions, such as the black-and-white dairy cow.



Figure 6. Pages three and four of *Boerderijdieren*, featuring the cow.

The cow is the second animal who is introduced in the book, pictured as a cartoon (fig. 4). She is standing in a large barn with no walls, munching on some hay with eyes closed, signaling contentment. She has horns, is wearing a red collar with a bell, and is surrounded by buckets of milk, bales of hay, and other animals like chicks, a mouse, a rooster, a dog, a cat, a loving chicken couple with a group of eggs, a few blue tits and other small birds, and what appears to be a brown bull in the background on the left. A jug and bottle of milk have cartoon faces on them. Behind the barn is a vast landscape of green grass and a yellow wheat field. There are no humans in this picture, as there are no humans in any of the pictures in *Boerderijdieren*. This is generally the case in this genre of picture books, including both *Kleine Geit* and *Bobbi op de boerderij*.

The cow in this picture is certainly a dairy cow, illustrated not only by her colors but also by the abundance of milk that she is surrounded by. The picture demonstrates the biopolitical value of the cow in terms of its production. However, this barn in *Boerderijdieren* does not realistically represent the dairy farms in the Netherlands. Though this cow is pictured alone, apart from the bull in the left corner, the average Dutch dairy farm has an average of

more than 75 cows, more than in any other European country.<sup>78</sup> This cow has horns, while in Dutch dairy farms calves are systemically dehorned at two months old. Additionally, dairy cows are mostly confined with metal fences and barred floors, rather than the open, dry, and cozy space of this barn. They are not surrounded by other animals. In that sense, there appears to be basically no connection between this image and the real world; except for the milk. In *And This Little Piggy Had None*, Dimick mentions the connection made between farmed animals and their products, and how “constantly connecting farm animals with the consumer goods that are harvested from their bodies, ... creates a[n] ... association that is difficult to unwed.”<sup>79</sup> As previously mentioned, it defines the body of the cow in its only value: as a milk machine. This particular way of connecting happy cows to the constant and effortless production of milk also means that many Dutch people are not aware that cows give milk for their calf. Therefore, the suffering that is behind milk is not immediately clear in the product of cow’s milk. Pictures like this one in *Boerderijdieren* contribute to this disconnect, implying that the pictured cow simply produces buckets of milk that she does not need.



Figure 7. Pages seven and eight of *Boerderijdieren*, featuring two pigs.

The fourth animal that is introduced is the pig. The picture depicts two pigs gleefully rolling around in the mud (fig. 5). Like the cow, they are cartoons, and one is also anthropomorphic, standing on their hind legs with their front legs raised in happiness and with

<sup>78</sup> Wageningen University and Research, “Cijfers over melkveehouderij.”

<sup>79</sup> Dimick, *And This Little Piggy Had None*, 101.

a small tuft of hair between their ears. Both pigs have a portion of pink, leathery texture on their bodies, meant to mimic pig's skin. The pigs are playing in between the planted vegetables of a vegetable garden, as the picture also contains a wooden shed with some garden tools and a glass greenhouse. There is a white picket fence in the background, though it is not fully connected in order to close off the scene completely. A loaded tractor drives up a hill in the background, and there is a narrow path running through the vegetable garden. The text describes how pigs love to roll around in the mud, and because they have almost no hair, they are clean in no time.

Much like the picture with the cow, this scene is full of happiness and contentment, and the animals are surrounded by space. Equally similar is the disconnect between this image and the reality of pigs in Dutch farms. Arguably, no one would keep pigs in the middle of a vegetable garden, so the setting seems arbitrary in that sense; but the majority of pigs in the Netherlands will not have access to mud in their lifetime. Generally, pigs are unable to express natural behavior like playing and rolling in mud at all. With the “Beter Leven” quality mark, which categorizes farms with one, two, or three stars to qualify their treatment of their animals, only three-star farms have a mud pool outside. One-star farms are not required to offer an outside space; and non-certified farms, which make up two-thirds of the Dutch pig farms, do not have outside space at all either.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike the cow, however, the pigs are represented without a direct connection to their product, as slaughter is not considered appropriate for these picture books. As their bodies are the product, the way that they are actually farmed cannot even be resembled in literature for children. Consequently, these pigs are not represented as farmed pigs, but rather fictional pigs, as is evident from their being in a vegetable garden. Because hobby farmers would never keep pigs close to crops, as they would dig and thereby destroy them, the setting illustrates that

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<sup>80</sup> Beter Leven, “Varkens.” Beter Leven, and how it functions as welfare regulation, will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

*Boerderijdieren* does not represent the pig as a pet, either. Instead, the pig is fictionalized to the extent that it is no longer truly represented.

Evidently, these two pictures in *Boerderijdieren* do not realistically represent the reality of cows and pigs on Dutch farms. Importantly, these pictures generate a



Figure 8. *Parts of Kleine Geit: Spelen op de boerderij* where cow and calf are happily together.

powerful narrative that directly serves to *replace* that reality. Not only do the pictures understandably hide certain elements of animal farming in order to protect children from the violent imagery of industrial farming and slaughter, they create an alternative reality in the place of the real lives of farmed animals. In essence, the books create a screen to project any comfortable reality upon. In this sense, Dutch children are not completely unaware of where their milk or perhaps even their meat comes from; they can connect cows to milk, for example. However, they connect these products to alternative versions of animal lives like the ones presented in *Boerderijdieren*. These alternative stories, which imply that cows give milk abundantly and pigs are free to roll in mud, replace the actual farm within society. This is what Wadiwel outlines as “the sublimation of hostility and aggression into forms of apparent civil peace-ability.”<sup>81</sup> While picture books may at first glance not be violent, Wadiwel demonstrates how violence done to animals must be hidden in cultural apparatuses that do not seem to be a part of it; which these colorful, innocent picture books do exactly.

In all the images in *Boerderijdieren*, including the ones that this chapter does not discuss in detail as well as similar picture books, the reality of farming animals is hidden. In *Kleine Geit*, for example, the cow and her calf are together in every single image, sometimes in the

<sup>81</sup> Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 28.

background and sometimes in the foreground, while *Kleine Geit* explores the farm (fig. 6). Though this will never happen on an industrial dairy farm, it is significant as children potentially identify with the calf automatically as it is being accompanied and cared for by its mother. The images exhibit a natural state of being that a child recognizes and identifies with; however, the fact that farmed animals will never be in this natural state is thereby erased.

Another example of these narratives is *Boer Boris*, a very popular series of twelve picture books about a little boy on a farm. The books are for a slightly older audience than the previously discussed picture books, though not much older than six. They contain more text but are still mostly visual narratives. It is characteristic for narratives like these, different from the very simple picture books for younger children, to be about more than just the farm. They are stories rather than informational images, so they need a protagonist; in this case, Boer Boris himself, a young farmer who has various adventures with his siblings and friends. Because they are not protagonists, the books include farmed animals, but do not center them.

In *Boer Boris en de eieren*, the seventh book in the series, the chickens on Boris' farm have all laid colorful, decorated eggs.<sup>82</sup> But Boris is not worried, because it is Easter and therefore all these eggs should be hidden around town for other children to find. Boris and his friends load all of the eggs into a truck; but when that truck does not start, they move them to a bigger truck and also take all of the chickens along. When Boris has to brake unexpectedly because of a hare crossing the road, all of the eggs break. Because of the shock, all the chickens lay another egg, but those are not decorated. Luckily, this happens in front of a school, and a class of children helps Boris and his siblings to decorate all of the newly laid eggs. In the end, they are able to hide all the eggs around the town, and the reader is also invited to find them.

In contrast to *Boerderijdieren* and the other picture books, *Boer Boris* does contain humans, and they play a larger role than the animals do. Since *Boer Boris* moves beyond a mere

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<sup>82</sup> Van Lieshout and Hopman, *Boer Boris en de eieren*.



introduction of the farm, its narrative is not about the animals but only features them. Similar to *Boerderijdieren*, the chickens in the story are only associated with their product, the egg, and their role in the story consists of their egg-laying. Beyond laying eggs, the chickens do not affect the story. The visuals offer slightly more; in most images, the chickens are responding to what is happening around them, or they are simply walking around. They are drawn in a semi-realistic style, with a blue hue to their feathers. *Boer Boris en de eieren* offers several images of the farm itself, including other animals like pigs, a cat and a dog, and herds of sheep and cows in the background. The farm does not have any fences; rather, the meadows are separated by small streams, and the farmyard is simply a large, open space where all the animals roam freely around the house. There are no cages or cots for the chickens or the pigs. Throughout the story, Boris and his siblings are surrounded by animals walking, sniffing, climbing on things; freely inhabiting the entire space.

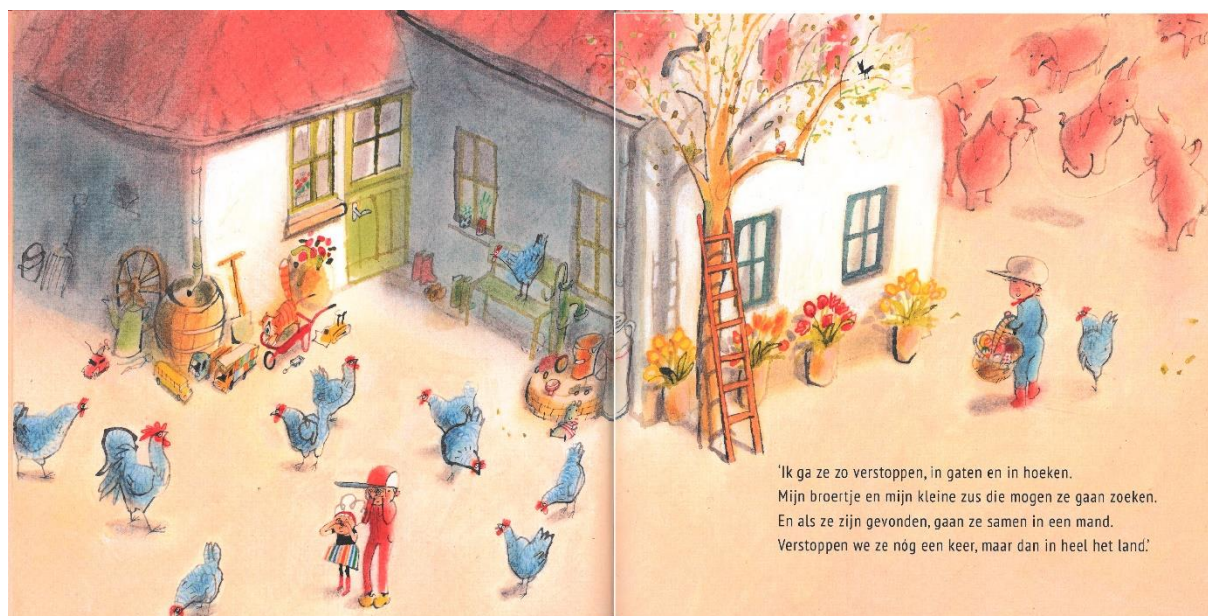


Figure 9. Page five and six from *Boer Boris en de eieren*, showing the farmyard and the pigs skipping rope.

On one specific page spread of the story (fig. 7), Boris is hiding eggs for his siblings to find. The spread shows the farmyard, including the freely roaming animals. In the background, a group of anthropomorphized pigs are skipping rope. The pigs are the only animals in the book that are drawn in a human way, standing on their hindlegs and playing a distinctly human game.

The other animals, including the sheep and cows in the background, are drawn more lifelike. Since the pigs do not play any part in the textual narrative, their role is predominantly humorous and in the background. In Cole and Stewart's image, they are animal 'characters' rather than 'farmed' animals, meaning they are more sensible but still objectified. Mostly, the pigs add to the general joyful and free atmosphere of the farm. Because they are drawn in such a human way, they are not restricted to the muddy and low pen that pigs are usually drawn in. Instead, they can dance and play like humans can, which is a much lighter and happy image for the background of this scene. On the next pages, the pigs are swinging the jump rope for the group of chickens, who look much more disturbed and confused to be playing the game; illustrating the difference in sensibility between 'farmed' animals and animal 'characters'.

*Boer Boris* illustrates two important trends in narratives about farms and farmed animals. Firstly, it contains a narrative like *Boerderijdieren* which does not represent, but rather replaces the actual farm and farmed animal lives. The farm that is presented to readers of *Boer Boris* is idyllic, full of open space and free animals, and reminiscent of 20<sup>th</sup> century small-scale family farms. This imagery substitutes the reality of the large, efficient businesses of current-day farms. Secondly, *Boer Boris* exemplifies how farmed animals disappear from media for older audiences and farms become a background setting. Already in *Boer Boris*, the animals are not the main actors in the story. The few animals who do matter remain objectified. As *Boer Boris* demonstrates, the Dutch farm is culturally reduced to a pastoral setting with uninvolved animals.

As illustrated by these picture books, Dutch people are accustomed to an image of the farm that is deeply unrealistic. As a consequence, this idyllic image is what comes up when one thinks of farms in the Dutch context. Though the idyllic farm technically has animals on it, they are cartoonish and typical versions that are not connected to the actual animals on farms. Farm narratives for older audiences continue to perpetuate the pastoral image of a small family-run



farm, while the animals disappear to the background. The consequence of this stubborn image is that the actual farm, with its actual animals, is able to function completely outside of societal awareness, as the idyllic farm has replaced it in the cultural imaginary. This is, as Glenn demonstrates in their factory farm discourse analysis, deliberately convenient for the animal industry, because it means that resistant strategies and genuine criticism struggle to generate any actual change. These picture books function in the discourse that hides and erases violent domination over animals.

Every Dutch animal rights organization aims to inform people that cows only give milk because they have a calf which then has to be taken away from them. Because the discourse introduces cows and their milk with images such as the one in *Boerderijdieren*, and erases the process of separating the calf completely, the connection between milk and animal suffering is not automatically made. Understanding the plight of pigs in Dutch farms becomes significantly difficult when the image of pigs that comes to mind are the two dancing cartoons from *Boerderijdieren*, or the jumping humanoids from *Boer Boris*.

In *This Little Piggy Had None*, Dimick discusses alternative picture books for children that aim to represent farmed animals honestly or even promote vegetarianism, like *That's Why We Don't Eat Animals: A Book About Vegans, Vegetarians, and All Living Things* by Ruby Roth. Though they are not wide-spread and still only read by a select group of parents, there are a handful of English books for children that are honest about the plight of farmed animals. There appear to be no such alternatives available to Dutch children. At the time of writing this, in 2022, there are no Dutch children's books about farmed animals that discuss their lives or their suffering realistically. Since there is no different narrative available, the Dutch farming discourse continues to perpetuate an ideal that does not exist and thereby hides the violence that is inherent in farming animals.

## Chapter 2

### Reformed Protestantism and the Religious Farm Novel

As explored in the previous chapter, there is an abundance of literature about the farm and its animals for young children. In literary fiction, however, the farm is rarely written about. Those novels that do feature the farm generally either idealize the place of the farm and the work of the farmer, like Gerbrand Bakker's 2006 novel *Boven is het stil* which takes place on a small-scale, non-industrial dairy farm which is run only by the protagonist; or they are coming-of-age stories about growing up in and usually breaking free from strict religion. The latter is the most common kind of farm literature, and it is the novels about strictly religious families that are most familiar to Dutch readers. This genre of the religious farm novel is partially constructs the strong connotation of farms and strict religion, specifically Reformed Protestantism, in Dutch culture. It is enforced by the concept of the "Bible-belt," the area with the highest population of Reformed Protestants, which is spread across rural areas in the Netherlands in which many farms are also located. As such, the Dutch imaginary of farm life is heavily connected to religion, which is expressed in the literary genre of the religious farm novel.

Christian faith, especially Reformed Protestantism and Calvinism as they were the major religions in the Netherlands for decades, has greatly influenced Dutch culture. As such, orthodox Christian notions of natural human dominion over nonhuman beings are deeply rooted in Dutch society. The Bible plays an important role in the construction of the 'human' in relation to the 'animal', which in part makes the biopolitical exploitation of animals possible.

This chapter will explore the genre of the religious farm novel by looking at two examples, Franca Treur's *Dorsvloer vol confetti* and Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's *De avond is ongemak*, in order to investigate how Dutch religious attitudes towards animals might take shape in narratives that take place on animal farms. The analysis will consider how the distinctions between 'human' and 'animal' are constructed through religious exceptionalism

and how this simultaneously renders the nonhumans in these stories as invisible and unimportant. The novels illustrate the various ways that farmed animals are literary (im)perceived in the religious farm novel, by being instrumentalized, symbolized, or rendered invisible in the background.

The cultural connection between farming and religion specifically refers to Reformed Protestantism. Reformed Protestantism is closely related to Calvinism, but as an interpretation, its teachings go beyond Calvinist teachings. In his chapter about the Netherlands in *Calvinism: A History*, Darryl Hart outlines that after the Reformation, Martin Luther's philosophy quickly spread across the Netherlands; Lutheranism was especially popular in the North and East of the Netherlands. However, by the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was mostly superseded by Calvinism. In 1571, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk was formed, and it became the public church of the Dutch Republic.<sup>83</sup> In those states that were not a part of the Republic, in the South of the Netherlands, Reformed Christians were heavily prosecuted, which created a flow of refugees from the South. These refugees formed their own Walloon churches, in which French was the main language. As such, they distinguished themselves from the Low German churches. During the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618, the first of several schisms in the Dutch Protestant church occurred; two hundred pastors were removed from service because of their interpretations of the faith and they created a separate group, the Remonstrant Brotherhood, or the Remonstrants. In 1816, the French ruler William the First fused the Low German and Walloon churches into the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk. In the late nineteenth century, there was unrest in the Church again, as more contradicting interpretations and ideas took shape among the different communities. In 1886, minister and politician Abraham Kuyper initiated a break with the Church into a separate community, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dolerende). In 1944, another conflict in the Church caused the most conservative group to

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<sup>83</sup> Though both Hervormd and Gereformeerde are translated as Reformed, Reformed Protestantism will refer to Gereformeerde Protestantisme in the rest of the text.

break with the Reformed Church, and define itself as the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt. This community still exists separate from the Reformed Church, while the other two churches, Hervormd and Gereformeerd, have been working together since the 1960s, through the “Samen op Weg-proces”, under the umbrella organization Protestant Churches in the Netherlands (PKN).

The belief of Reformed Protestantism is summarized by the Three Forms of Unity, consisting of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. The Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563 by Zacharias Ursinus, a student of John Calvin, is a set of 129 questions and answers grouped into 52 Sunday sermons. It is structured in the Medieval tradition of a dialogue and written as a personal creed, using ‘I’ and ‘me’. It speaks of suffering, salvation, and gratitude, and focuses on dimensions of faith, commandment, and prayer.<sup>84</sup> The Belgic Confession is a document written in 1561 by Guido de Brès, another student of Calvin. In this document, Calvinist influences are salient, especially the decree “sola gratia”, meaning “by grace alone”: the belief that salvation comes only by divine grace, and cannot be earned.<sup>85</sup> Lastly, the Canons of Dort is a document that was created as a correction of the Five Articles of Remonstrance, which was proposed by the Remonstrants during the schism in 1618.<sup>86</sup> The five points of the Canons of Dort is known in English as the Five Points of Calvinism,<sup>87</sup> which can be summarized with the mnemonic TULIP:

1. Total depravity; because humanity is ruined by sin, they cannot return to God on their own accord, but only through God’s mercy.
2. Unconditional election; God’s love is evident from His choice for people to believe in Jesus Christ, even though they all deserve eternal damnation. This election is

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<sup>84</sup> HeidelbergseCatechismus.nl, “De Heidelbergse Catechismus.”

<sup>85</sup> NederlandseGeloofsbelijdenis.nl, “De Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis.”

<sup>86</sup> DordtseLeerregels.nl, “De Dordtse Leerregels.”

<sup>87</sup> Though the Reformed Church is not Calvinist, the official Dutch website for the Canons of Dort mentions this English interpretation as being the same as the Reformed interpretation of the Canons of Dort.

unconditional in the sense that it is not dependent on a person's actions or predetermination.

3. Limited atonement; the atonement that Christ has offered by His dying on the cross is only for those chosen by God with His mercy. This is opposed to the thought that Christ's death implies inherent salvation for anyone.
4. Irresistible grace; when God has decided to show his mercy to someone, it cannot be avoided. It is not the case that God's mercy requires a more sensitive conscious or stronger faith; rather, these things are proof of God's loyalty and mercy.
5. Perseverance of the saints; the faith that God has granted is present forever, though the practice of it may waver. Those who have stopped believing never had faith to begin with, or they will return to the faith, if they are indeed one of God's chosen ones.<sup>88</sup>

As these three creeds demonstrate, Reformed Protestantism is defined by pious belief and characterized by strict practice. In one article of the newspaper *Trouw*, the religion is characterized as one of the most "intensive" religions, mentioning their restrictive rules on clothing, female autonomy, and church attendance.<sup>89</sup> Within Reformed Protestantism, however, there are still degrees of strictness, as Marthy P. Veerman illustrates. In her research, she identified three general degrees of Reformed practice: experimental, orthodox, and modern.<sup>90</sup> These degrees depend on how literally a particular church interprets the Bible. Therefore, the practices of faith differ amongst local communities. Though the literary genre of the religious farm focuses on Reformed Protestantism, differences like these mean that there is not one version of faith across all novels, which is also evident in the case studies of this chapter.

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<sup>88</sup> DordtseLeerregels.nl, "Tulip."

<sup>89</sup> *Trouw*, "Waar zwaaien vrouwen inmiddels de scepter in kerkelijk Nederland?"

<sup>90</sup> Amelink, "Goed gereformeerd en toch modern."

Since Catholicism was outlawed in the Netherlands in 1580, Protestantism was the major religion in the Netherlands for a large part of its history. Though it lost its privileged position in 1816, when the French ruler William the First formed the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, there remained a Protestant majority throughout the nineteenth century. In 1829, approximately 60% of the population were Reformed Protestants, 39% were Catholic Christians, and 1% were Jewish.<sup>91</sup> Currently, Reformed Protestantism has become a localized minority; in 2019, 15% of the population were Protestant, surpassed by mainly non-believers, but also Catholics.<sup>92</sup> This is a consequence of increased secularization in combination with the intense restrictions of the Reformed faith. This localized minority of strictly Reformed Protestant communities is often referred to as the Dutch “Biblebelt.”

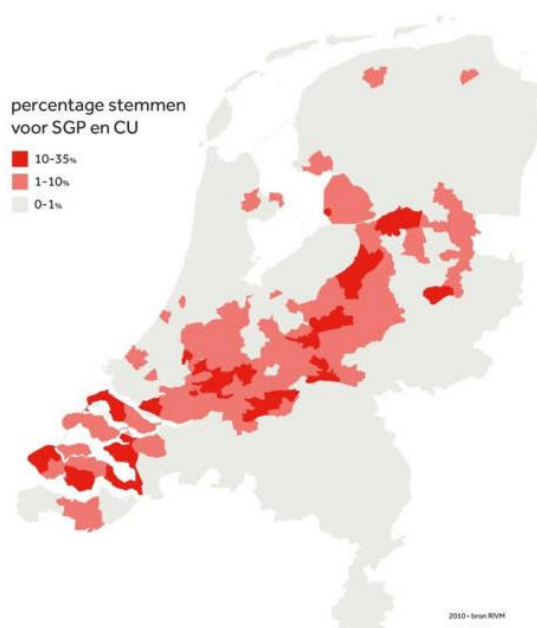


Figure 10. Visualization of the “Biblebelt” in the Netherlands.

The term “Biblebelt,” in Dutch referred to as the *Bijbelgordel*, *protestantenband*, *Refogordel* or *Refoband*, is a term that was first used in the Dutch context by the social geography scholar Hans Knippenberg in 1988.<sup>93</sup> In most visualizations, such as figure 10, the Biblebelt is defined by the percentage of voters for conservative religious parties, including the *Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij* (SGP) and the *ChristenUnie* (CU). The Biblebelt, as it has also been named the

*Refoband*, consists of mainly Reformed Protestants. There is no direct correlation between the religious cluster and farms, as the spread of agricultural businesses far exceeds the scale of the

<sup>91</sup> Van Eijnatten and van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*, 208.

<sup>92</sup> Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, “Welk geloof hangen we aan?”

<sup>93</sup> Knippenberg and de Pater, *De eenwording van Nederland*.

Biblebelt.<sup>94</sup> However, the Biblebelt certainly encompasses farm locations, as it is located mostly outside of large cities. This explains the connection between farmers and Reformed Protestant communities which is central to the genre of the religious farm novel. Additionally, since many strict Reformed Protestants isolate themselves from society as they consider popular culture to be sinful, there is a strong association between isolated religious communities in small towns and family farms.

The Christian faith, and extension Reformed Protestantism which strives to follow the Bible exactly, implies certain attitudes towards nonhuman animals. One of the key thoughts that relates to this can be found in question six of the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the three formational texts of Reformed Protestantism: God has created humanity in His image, in order to rule over all other living beings. The Heidelberg Catechism cites Genesis 1:26: “And God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth’.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, this passage has, among others, inspired notions of naturalized dominion over everything nonhuman in Christian faith. As Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan put it: “The world and all its nonhuman inhabitants, on this view, because they lack independent value, are to be regarded and treated as so many recourses to be used by human beings.”<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, as Linzey and Regan also point out, there is another way of viewing nonhumans by interpreting the Bible; as having intrinsic value: “this involves viewing the animals, the flowers and the other objects of creation, as having independent value – value in their own right, apart from human needs and interests.”<sup>97</sup> In this vein, Johan Graafland argues that the Bible sees animal life as intrinsically valuable; when He

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<sup>94</sup> Kuhlman and van de Weegh, *Het Nederlandse agrocluster in kaart*.

<sup>95</sup> Gen. 1:26 (King James Version).

<sup>96</sup> Linzey and Regan, “Introduction: A Great Ethic,” xi.

<sup>97</sup> Linzey and Regan, xii.

created it, “God saw that *it was* good.”<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Graafland illustrates that Genesis 1 can be considered as God’s ideal earth, Paradise as He created it. At the end of Genesis 1, God explains what His newly created beings might eat: “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which *is* the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth ... *I have given* every green herb for meat: and it was so.”<sup>99</sup> Therefore, argues Graafland, God’s Paradise is characterized by an absence of violence between living beings. Graafland explains, “I carefully interpret that vegetarianism is a first best solution, ... and the consumption of meat, though permitted by God, second best.”<sup>100</sup>

However, though he reads the Bible quite literally, Graafland expresses a relatively modern interpretation. Reformed Protestantism, as it is explicitly conservative, is inherently opposed to new readings of the Bible; the first mentioned interpretation, which justifies human dominion over the earth, is therefore leading in Reformed thinking. In this sense, the faith maintains the thought that human beings are not only justified but *meant to* exploit animals and consume them. This thought is deeply rooted in Dutch culture, partially as a consequence of centuries of Christian faith. It is also connected to the isolation of the Reformed faith in small communities, often in rural towns with farm estates, meaning that many Reformed Protestants actually personally facilitate the consumption of animals on a large scale.

The Bible plays an important role in constructing the categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal,’ as well as ‘plant,’ ‘fish,’ et cetera. As becomes clear in Genesis 1, God creates these categories distinctly separate from one another, on different days, even if He sees them all as “good” and therefore recognizes their intrinsic value. In this sense, religion contributes heavily to the discursive categories that are inherently required in the biopolitics that justifies human

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<sup>98</sup> Gen. 1:25 (King James Version).

<sup>99</sup> Gen. 1:30-31 (King James Version).

<sup>100</sup> Graafland, “Mogen we dieren eten?”



exploitation of other animals. As Graafland illustrates, in the Creation, God creates humanity through its difference from the animals: “it is notable that humanity is also clearly distinguished from the animal.”<sup>101</sup> This distinction is mainly because, as previously mentioned, humanity is created in God’s image, whereas the animals are not, which means that “according to the Bible, humans possess characteristics that make him and her resemble God more than the animals do.”<sup>102</sup> Graafland mentions rational thinking and moral responsibility. Additionally, religion is significant in the functioning of the anthropological machine, as one of the many states of exception; because only humans have religion, we are distinguished from the animals. Thereby, religion crucially contributes to conceptualizing what a ‘human’ is: not only is it the only being shaped in God’s image, but it is also the only being that can conceptualize God to begin with.

Though the general decline of religion left only a small concentration of Reformed Protestants in rural towns, the formative ideas about the conceptualizations of the human and the nonhuman persist in the genre of the religious farm novel. As these religious stories are essentially the only stories about farms in Dutch literary fiction, they perpetuate the categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ and the conceptualization of the ‘farm animal.’ Religion, especially when it is as orthodox as Reformed Protestantism, functions in what Joshua Perry coins “Biblical biopolitics,”<sup>103</sup> which Erin Runions describes as “how the Bible is persistently made to be a conservative guard and protector of ‘life’.”<sup>104</sup> As the analysis of the case studies will illustrate, Reformed Protestantism is biopolitical beyond the Biblical conceptualization of the ‘human,’ but also in how it naturalizes human as well as male dominion, and intervenes in the

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<sup>101</sup> Graafland, “Mogen we dieren eten?”

<sup>102</sup> Graafland, “Mogen we dieren eten?”

<sup>103</sup> Perry, “Biblical Biopolitics.”

<sup>104</sup> Runions, “The Bible as Biopolitics in *Obergefell v. Hodges*,” 465.

lives of animals in order to optimize their machine-bodies. Though some of these aspects are critically examined in religious farm novels, the conceptualization of the nonhuman is not.

Novels in the religious farm genre are principally written by so-called “ex-refos,” those who have distanced themselves from the faith, often because it negatively affected them in their childhood. Because it has become a sufficiently shared experience that many desire to talk about, there is even an organized event for ex-refo’s, a “lotgenotendag.”<sup>105</sup> Many former Reformed Protestants suffered as children from the faith’s dark subject matter as well as the intense restrictions on daily life. At the same time, the communities would form tight groups that offered a lot of safety and comfort. These themes also return in the literary genre of the religious farm novel. Many authors are distinctly critical of the Reformed faith but also want to share the experience of such a closed-off community. Nonetheless, though these novels are by definition critical, they generally do not question the attitudes towards nonhumans that are traditional in Reformed Protestantism, like those pertaining to animal farming. In fact, a returning element of the ex-Reformed narrative is cruelty and abuse to animals as an expression of helplessness and the desire to break free.

The genre of the religious farm novel can be roughly traced back to Jan Wolker’s *Terug naar Oegstgeest*, from 1965, in which Wolker narrates his own childhood by combining the recollection of memories and actually travelling back to his hometown.<sup>106</sup> Many of the memories he describes are gruesome and traumatic, including several instances of animal abuse and torture. The story focuses on Wolker’s distancing from his Reformed Protestant upbringing, to which much of his childhood trauma can be attributed. A little later, in 1990, Jan Siebelink published *De overkant van de rivier*, which tells the story of the author’s mother, growing up in a small farmers community and with different variations of the Christian faith.<sup>107</sup> It offers an

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<sup>105</sup> KleinJan, “Je haalt de kerk niet zomaar uit de refo.”

<sup>106</sup> De Bibliotheek jeugd, “Terug naar Oegstgeest.”

<sup>107</sup> Jan Siebelink (website), “De overkant van de rivier.”

image of developments within farmers communities from 1906 onwards, discussing difficult themes like religious suffering and incest. Siebelink's second novel about religious farm communities, however, is one of the most influential in the genre. The 2005 novel *Knielen op een bed violen* is generally the first that comes to mind when thinking of novels about farms, as one of the bestselling Dutch novels ever.<sup>108</sup> While *De overkant* described his mother's upbringing, *Knielen op een bed violen* is the story of Siebelink's father, and it is chiefly one of religious struggle. It describes Reformed Protestantism and Calvinism in great detail as it narrates the grievous consequences of the protagonist's faith for his family's happiness. Between Siebelink's two novels, various other novels attributed to shaping the genre of the religious farm novel, including Maarten 't Hart's *De vlieger* and *Het hondje van Sollie* by Hans Werkman.

In 2009, Franca Treur published *Dorsvloer vol confetti*, in conformity with the genre. Treur describes the childhood of Katelijne, the only daughter with six brothers in a strictly Reformed Protestant family on a dairy farm in the Dutch province of Zeeland. The story closely follows their day-to-day lives, including church services, choir meetings, and house visits from their pastors; as well as their daily tasks running the dairy farm. Additionally, the novel narrates Katelijne's struggle with the restrictions of the faith, as she occasionally breaks out of the community's bubble and desires to explore 'forbidden' activities, such as reading, listening to music, and going out. Her being the only girl in the family also affects her life greatly, as she is constantly being left out of farming activities, leaving her feeling lonely and frustrated.

*Dorsvloer vol confetti* describes one consequence of the discursive categories of 'human' and 'animal' as established in the Bible; that some humans are more human than others. Biblically, God has ordered women to be subordinate to men as punishment for Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, as outlined in Genesis 3:16: "Your desire will be for your husband,

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<sup>108</sup> HP/De Tijd, "Jan Siebelink: Mijn hele leven was een voorbereiding op *Knielen op een bed violen*."

and he will rule over you.”<sup>109</sup> Consequently, women are structurally oppressed in Reformed Protestantism. So far, despite societal change and modernization in some churches, the Christian Reformed Churches have resisted any emancipation within the religion. In May 2022, after several years of conflict within the Church and despite many dissenting voices, they voted to continue excluding women from serving within the Church, citing 1 Corinthians 14:34: “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.”<sup>110</sup> One of the men who decided on this states: “The majority says: we have absolutely no problem with the emancipation of women. We do not want any deprivation of women. But we think that, on Biblical grounds, you cannot establish women as pastor, presbyter, or deacon.”<sup>111</sup> It is evident that the Church does not encourage equality between men and women, but rather enforces it.

As such, women are placed below men, closer to animals, in a very similar biopolitical position. This becomes especially evident in the protective measures of religious political parties in the Netherlands on abortion and embryo research, which implicitly define the female body as a reproductive machine. As Wybo Dondorp and Guido de Wert outline in their chapter “The Role of Religion in the Political Debate on Embryo Research in the Netherlands,” despite secularization, Christian parties like ChristenUnie and Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij remain strategically influential on issues that pertain to female bodies.<sup>112</sup>

In *Dorsvloer vol confetti*, both the protagonist Katelijne and the nonhuman animals, mainly the cows, are rendered unimportant by the Biblical discourse that subordinates them. The novel describes Katelijne’s suffering as she is rendered invisible in her family dynamic. Her being both female and imaginative, which is considered sinful indulgence, isolates her from

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<sup>109</sup> Gen. 3:16 (King James Version).

<sup>110</sup> 1 Cor. 14:34 (King James Version).

<sup>111</sup> NOS, “Kerkscheuring dreigt.”

<sup>112</sup> Dondorp and de Wert, “The Role of Religion in the Political Debate on Embryo Research in the Netherlands.”

those around her. Simultaneously, the animals on the farm are invisible both in the story as well as outside of it. While the novel offers a detailed description of Katelijne's inner suffering, claiming a voice that is silenced within the religion, it does not offer the same for the nonhumans in the story. Though the story occasionally hints at the parallels between Katelijne's subordination and that of the cows, it does not explore it fully; Katelijne does not connect with any animal, and the narrative does not discuss them as autonomous persons, but only integrates them as elements of the family business. As such, the story disrupts one element of Reformed Protestant thought, pertaining to the position of women, but it otherwise perpetuates the distinction of human and animal as established by the anthropological machine.

Kateljijne's family owns a dairy farm that has been in the family for generations, and her brothers are being prepared to take over the farm to continue the business. Because Katelijne is a girl and the family is strictly Reformed, she is not included in any of the farming that her brothers are doing. She also loves reading, which is not technically allowed by her beliefs, and which is mocked by her family. This makes her feel isolated and misunderstood. In one of the first passages of the novel, the family is discussing business, "about the minister of agriculture Braks, about percentages fat and protein, about five hundred guilders for a calf, readying the wagons to go to the land with or without cage wheels on the tractor and about not too much gas in the tank."<sup>113</sup> Katelijne is left out of this conversation entirely and is instead thinking about the book she is reading. She describes that her brothers "learn not to listen to her, for the simple reason that she, by their standards, never has anything interesting to say."<sup>114</sup> Importantly, her brothers *learn* not to listen to her; presumably from her parents, other family, and their faith, which consistently reminds them that Katelijne is a girl and not fit for participating in the

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<sup>113</sup> Treur, *Dorsvloer vol confetti*, 6. "... over landbouwminister Braks, over percentages vet en eiwit, over vijfhonderd gulden voor een kalf, de wagens inspannen om naar het land te gaan met wel of geen kooiwielen aan de trekker en over niet al te veel gasolie meer in de tank."

<sup>114</sup> Treur, 7. "De jongens leren niet naar haar te luisteren, om de eenvoudige reden dat ze naar hun maatstaven nooit iets interessants te melden heeft."

business of their farm. On the one occasion that Katelijne does help with milking, her father rudely dismisses her: “‘Have you done that one yet?’ asks father. He pushes her away without waiting for her answer and does it himself. ‘If we do it at your speed, we’ll still be working tonight.’”<sup>115</sup>

In addition to the way she is excluded by her family, Katelijne feels limited and burdened by her religious beliefs, which she has heavily internalized. She enjoys things that she is not supposed to enjoy, like books, music, and fashion, but she fears repercussions from God. This is evident from one nightmare she has, in which she is standing in front of God’s tribunal and is shown slides from moments in her life where she sinned: when she worried her family during a game of hide-and-seek, when she hit her brother for falsely accusing her, when she talked back to her mother. When Katelijne wants to escape from watching these scenes, two angels hold her back and force her to continue watching. At the end of the dream, God declares: “Remove her from my sight. ... Cast her into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” a direct quotation from Matthew 22:13.<sup>116</sup> As a response to this dream, Katelijne desperately prays for her salvation. The earthly pleasures that she cannot help but enjoy are sinful in Reformed Protestantism, and she cannot partake in this religion while desiring them.

Throughout the novel, Katelijne is partially able to disrupt the gender hierarchy within her family, compelling them to acknowledge her. At the end of the book, one of her brothers gets married in the barn. Katelijne has meticulously prepared a large bag of confetti that will rain down onto the couple, working for days with magazines and a hole punch. During the wedding, the construction holding the confetti breaks and Katelijne interrupts her other brother, who is milking, to ask if he can help fix it. He does, but because he was distracted, he

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<sup>115</sup> Treur, 92. “‘Heb je die al gehad?’ vraagt de vader. Hij duwt haar weg zonder haar antwoord af te wachten en poetst ze zelf. ‘Als we ’t op jouw tempo doen, zijn we vanavond nóg bezig.’”

<sup>116</sup> Treur, 121. “‘Doe haar weg van voor Mijn aangezicht. ... Breng haar naar de buitenste duisternis, waar weinig zal zijn en knersing der tanden.’”

accidentally milked a cow with mastitis, meaning the whole batch of milk cannot be sold. Katelijne's father is furious, and it threatens to ruin the whole reception. Katelijne attempts to explain that she was sorry for distracting her brother, but that the festivity would be worth it, and she surprises everyone with the enormous amount of confetti that she made herself:

A whirling white curtain hid the family from everyone's view for a few seconds. ... Bodies squirmed, feet kicked, hands slapped. ... Confetti twirled around, like droplets of a shaking dog that just came out of a waterway. For a moment it seemed as if the bride married in white, after all. Katelijne laughed. It was beautiful. It got totally quiet for a while. Then there was the sound of confused laughter from the guests.<sup>117</sup>

At this moment, Katelijne is able to deescalate a tense situation and simultaneously prove to everyone that her work on the confetti, which was previously dismissed as girly and therefore silly and unnecessary, was in fact a fantastic contribution to the wedding. It is a short moment, but it is clear that she gains the respect from those around her, despite their previous lack of understanding for her hard work. In this moment, everyone acknowledges her.

Though the position of the woman and the animal in Reformed Protestantism are related, *Dorsvloer* does not generally connect them, except for one moment, when Katelijne realizes that her family always refers to the cows as male by using the "hij"-pronoun, which functions as a relatively 'neutral' pronoun in Dutch: "I didn't mark him.' Her, realizes Katelijne suddenly. I didn't mark *her*. They always say 'he' to a cow and that's why she belongs to the men's world."<sup>118</sup> This moment illustrates how the discourse around farming has distanced the individual of the cow, including its gender, from the practice of farming. They become

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<sup>117</sup> Treur, 218. "Een wit dwarrelend gordijn onttrok de familie voor enkele seconden aan ieders gezicht. ... Lichamen kronkelden, voeten schopten, handen sloegen. ... Confetti dwarrelde in het rond, als de druppels van een zich uitschuddende hond die net uit een watergang komt. Een moment leek het zelfs alsof de bruid toch in het wit was getrouwd. Katelijne lachte. Het was prachtig. Even werd het helemaal stil. Toen klonk er verbaasd gelach van de gasten."

<sup>118</sup> Treur, 210. "'Ik heb hem niet gemerkt.' Haar, realiseert Katelijne zich opeens. Ik heb háár niet gemerkt. Ze zeggen altijd 'hij' tegen een koe en daarom hoort ze bij de mannenwereld."

collective milk machines, referred to with the neutral “hij”. Simultaneously, this distances the cow from Katelijne, who does not consider the cow to be in a similar position to her, but rather elevated to a superior status by being considered a man, which she is jealous of. Though the thought hints at the intertwined complexities of religion, gender, and animality, *Dorsvloer* does not manage to challenge the biopolitical categorization that prevents Katelijne from connecting her situation to those of the cows.

Though the cows are essential for the farm, they are never truly a part of the story. They are reduced to elements of the business and the scenery. The farm that Katelijne lives on is above all a business, as Katelijne’s father makes clear when he is milking: ““It is so beautiful, ... to see your income stream in like this. Fresh, whole milk, all natural.””<sup>119</sup> A popular story told in the family is how Katelijne’s grandfather started the farm by building it up from nothing. Slowly, he managed to purchase more cows. The story is one of perseverance: “When he had eight cows, they fell ill one by one and all eight had to be killed. It took a year before he could buy a new one, a year in which he and Grandma did not know how to pay the bills.”<sup>120</sup> The death of the cows is devastating for the brand new farm, but not so much for the loss of the cows’ lives or their being ill. Their bodies are, in a typically biopolitical sense, only useful when they are alive and healthy. In *Dorsvloer*, this story about Grandpa’s struggle to build the thriving business serves to humble the children and most importantly to celebrate the success of the farm as a business, despite the hardships.

As such, the cows are only mentioned when it is to do with the business of the farm. One whole chapter is dedicated to a visit from the local cattle dealer, with whom Katelijne’s father argues about the price for two cows. In another moment, Katelijne’s father is making an

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<sup>119</sup> Treur, 92. ““Wat is het toch mooi, ... als je zo je inkomen ziet binnenstromen. Van die verse volle melk, puur natuur.””

<sup>120</sup> Treur, 27. “Toen hij acht koeien had werden ze één voor één ziek en moesten ze alle acht worden afgemaakt. Het duurde een jaar voordat hij weer een nieuwe kon kopen, een jaar waarin hij en de oma niet wisten hoe ze hun rekeningen moesten betalen.”



inventory: “It is a table for the cows, in which father writes when they last calved, when they were with the bull, and when they have to calve again in the future.”<sup>121</sup> Overall, the cows only actually appear in the story when Katelijne interacts with them, which is when they are being milked. They are not individuals; even those who have names are named as a collective: “Katelijne takes Suzanne to the cow barn to point out all the Katelijnes. Long ago they named a calf after her, who has had calves since. She says that there are five Katelijnes and that they are all very sweet. Especially Katelijne 4, who she calls her favorite cow for this occasion.”<sup>122</sup> They are, in this sense, still nameless. When they are ill, this is most of all troublesome for the farm’s business: “‘I marked that one,’ says father, ‘because it has mastitis. ... They are relentless about penicillin. ... And I’ll drop back again to twenty-five years of first-class milk, instead of twenty-eight.’”<sup>123</sup>

Though *Dorsvloer* hints at the connections between religious biopolitical regulations on female and nonhuman lives, it is not thoroughly explored. In essence, the novel continues to perpetuate the categories of human and animal and the notions of natural human dominion that are prevalent in Dutch society. The setting illustrates how animal bodies are depersonalized and collectivized on the Dutch farm.

Marieke Lucas Rijneveld’s recent novel, published in 2018, could be considered a modern interpretation of the religious farm novel. *De avond is ongemak* narrates the childhood of a young girl in a Reformed family, who also runs a dairy farm, as they attempt to deal with her older brother’s drowning. Because the family refuses to discuss their grief, inspired by Reformed belief in necessary suffering and “speaking is silver, silence is gold”, the protagonist

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<sup>121</sup> Treur, 62. “Het is een tabel voor de koeien, waarop de vader schrijft wanneer ze voor het laatst gekalfd hebben, wanneer ze bij de stier zijn geweest en wanneer ze in de toekomst opnieuw moeten kalven.”

<sup>122</sup> Treur, 85. “Katelijne neemt Suzanne mee naar de koeienstal om alle Katelijnes aan te wijzen. Lang geleden is er een keer een kalfje naar haar genoemd en die heeft inmiddels zelf ook weer kalfjes gekregen. Ze zegt dat er vijf Katelijnes zijn en dat ze allemaal heel lief zijn. In het bijzonder Katelijne 4, die ze voor de gelegenheid haar lievelingskoe noemt.”

<sup>123</sup> Treur, 93. “‘Die heb ik gemerkt,’ zegt de vader, ‘want die heeft uierontsteking. ... Ze zijn enorm fel op penicilline. ... En ik zak dan weer terug naar vijfentwintig jaar eersteklas melk, in plaats van achtentwintig.’”

and her two other siblings slowly descend into chaos. They try to cope with their grief by physically and sexually abusing each other, torturing animals, and dreaming of escape. It is clearly inspired by Jan Wolker's work in how it is similarly narrates many grim events and is permeated by suffering.

In *De avond*, Jas and her older brother Obbe utilize animals in their expressions of emotional turmoil, much like Wolker's novel and several other novels in the religious farm genre. In psychology, the connection between family violence and animal abuse by children is widely accepted, meaning that when a child commits acts of animal abuse, this is often an indication that there is domestic violence.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the fact that animal abuse is so prevalent in religious farm novels also demonstrates how psychological violence might attribute to instances of animal abuse. This is not the only reason that children might commit abuse, however. As Melissa Bright et al. illustrate, "Children may commit acts of cruelty to animals because of curiosity or imitation of actions they have observed, their desensitization to violence, decreased empathy, or lack of attachment."<sup>125</sup> According to Arnold Arluke, theory on children's violence to animals can be put into two categories: the displacement model, which sees abuse as a necessary expression of internal pressure which can reduce further aggression; and the graduation model, which argues that animal abuse signals a progression into further aggression that might mature into violence against humans.<sup>126</sup> Bright et al., for example, argue for the graduation model.

Arluke, however, argues to give more credit to children and their reasoning when abusing animals. His theory on "dirty play" appears to be very applicable to Jas and Obbe's situation. Arluke states that animal abuse is more than just expressing built-up frustration, but that it can in fact be a type of play, which is disapproved of by adults but nonetheless important

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<sup>124</sup> McPhedran, "Animal Abuse, Family Violence, and Child Wellbeing: A Review."

<sup>125</sup> Bright et al., "Animal cruelty as an indicator of family trauma," 288.

<sup>126</sup> Arluke, "Animal abuse as Dirty Play," 406.

for a child's development, which is why he designates it as "dirty" play.<sup>127</sup> He explains that dirty play is an appropriation of adult society: "These children attempt to live up to adult standards of behavior. ... each instance of dirty play attempts to make an implicit statement about the rights of preadolescents to engage in a set of activities and to have a set of opinions in the face of adult counterpressures."<sup>128</sup> Rather than an uncontrollable expression of frustration or helplessness, in this model, children's animal abuse is a much more conscious, willing act, which is experienced as cool or thrilling and, by some of Arluke's respondents, still considered exciting for years afterwards. By considering animal abuse as dirty play rather than an impulsive explosion, Arluke argues it is a "part of a larger social process of appropriating adult culture."<sup>129</sup> In instances of animal abuse specifically, Arluke demonstrates that the appropriation can be interpreted as a grappling with the complicated relations that humans have with nonhuman animals, as Arluke puts it in the abstract: "a wider culture racked with inconsistencies about the proper treatment of animals." In the case of Jas and Obbe, who live on a dairy farm but for example also own animals rabbits, which are both pets and food, their animal abuse can certainly be considered a grappling with the confusing human-animal relations around them. The farm can be considered exemplary of what Arluke describes as teaching "how to construct and effortlessly shift between categories that objectify animals in certain situations and personalize them in others."<sup>130</sup>

Generally, Jas and Obbe appear to abuse animals out of curiosity and the desire to be seen by adults by doing what they believe to be 'adult.' In Arluke's words, they "usurp adult information to address their own confusions, fears, and uncertainties, including those relating to their transition out of adolescence into adulthood."<sup>131</sup> The animals in Rijnveld's *De avond*

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<sup>127</sup> Arluke, 407.

<sup>128</sup> Arluke, 407.

<sup>129</sup> Arluke, 421.

<sup>130</sup> Arluke, 427.

<sup>131</sup> Arluke, 413.

exist in two broad categories: those who the children directly interact with through abuse, and the farmed animals, the cows. The abused animals serve as emotional prosthetics for the children's helplessness, morbid curiosity, and their understanding of the world in the sense of Arluke's "dirty play." The cows, on the other hand, are important in the same way as in *Dorsvloer*; for the business as machine-bodies, but not beyond this.

Though the family in the story is religious, they are not as strict as in *Dorsvloer*. In the family's home, the religious principles are not as uncompromising as in Katelijne's family. It is mostly mentioned in small references to the Bible: "'Meat or cheese first before you go for the sweet stuff,' [mom]'d always say. This was the rule and it would make us big and strong, as big as the giant Goliath and as strong as Samson in the Bible."<sup>132</sup> The most salient influence of Reformed Protestantism on the family is not so much in their practicing of the religion, but rather in their struggles to communicate openly and to be emotionally available. The way Jas thinks about God demonstrates how she considers Him to be oppressive and mean: "I'm beginning to have more and more doubts about whether I find God nice enough to want to go and talk to Him."<sup>133</sup> In the beginning of the story, one of Jas's brothers drowns after falling through a hole in the ice. The family's grief is enormous, but never expressed, under the motto "We don't [talk] about the dead, we remember them."<sup>134</sup> As a consequence, Jas's mother stops eating, and the three remaining children are consumed by repressed emotion, suffering under the tension in the household.

Like *Dorsvloer*, *De avond* also describes the invisibility of the protagonist in their family; though in this novel, there are hardly any moments where Jas is able to break through. As the parents suffer greatly with the loss of their son, they ignore the other children. Apart from attending to their basic needs, the parents do not show their children love or affection, but

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<sup>132</sup> "'Eerst hartig en dan pas zoet,' zei ze zoals gewoonlijk. Dat was de regel, dan werden we groot en sterk, zo groot als de reus Goliath en zo sterk als Simson uit de Bijbel." (Rijneveld, *Discomfort*, 10 / *Avond*, 10)

<sup>133</sup> "Al twijfel ik steeds meer of ik God nog wel lief genoeg vind om met Hem af te spreken." (53 / 71)

<sup>134</sup> "Over de doden praten we niet, die gedenken we." (87 / 117)

rather keep a cold distance from them. The pain that this causes is especially clear in a passage when Jas's mother comes into her room at night, noticing that Jas is still awake. Jas initiates a familiar ritual, one that they used to do before her brother died, and her mother plays along: "“Big Bear, Big Bear! I can't sleep, I'm frightened.’ I peek through my fingers as she walks to the window, opens the curtains and says, ‘Look, I've fetched the moon for you. The moon and all the twinkling stars. What more can a bear want?’ Love, I think to myself ...”<sup>135</sup> Jas struggles with how her parents do not seem to see her; her inner world, one that is full of grief and hormonal confusion, is insensible to them. Later, she states: “Look, I don't know what love is, but I do know it makes you jump high, that it makes you able to swim more lengths, that *it makes you visible.*”<sup>136</sup>

The novel not only features farmed animals, unlike *Dorsvloer*. The biggest part that animals play in *De avond* is in the cruel experiments and abuse that the children inflict in their struggle to express their pain. Throughout the novel, Jas interacts with two toads that she has taken from the lake where their brother drowned. She keeps them in a bucket under her desk, where they slowly wither away, without water, sunlight, or food. As Arluke describes, these toads “[facilitate] youthful exploration of a variety of adult social roles” for Jas.<sup>137</sup> They become the only persons she is truly close to, describing how “touching them I've finally got something I can hold, even though they feel funny.”<sup>138</sup> Simultaneously, the toads symbolize Jas's parents, who she believes must be intimate with each other again to solve all of their suffering. Therefore, she has decided that the toads must mate in order to make her parents do the same. She forcefully pushes them onto each other: ““Then it's time to mate now,’ I say decisively,

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<sup>135</sup> ““Grote Beer, Grote Beer! Ik kan niet slapen, ik ben bang.’ Ik kijk tussen mijn vingers door hoe ze naar mijn raam loopt, de gordijnen opendoet en zegt: ‘Kijk, ik heb maan voor je gehaald. De maan en al die flonkerende sterren. Wat wil een beer nog meer?’ Liefde, denk ik bij mezelf ...” (120 / 163)

<sup>136</sup> “Kijk, ik weet niet wat liefde is, maar wel dat je er hoog door kunt springen, dat je er meer baantjes door kunt zwemmen, dat *het je zichtbaar maakt.*” (99 / 134, emphasis mine)

<sup>137</sup> Arluke, “Animal Abuse as Dirty Play,” 421.

<sup>138</sup> “Om ze aan te raken, terwijl ik eindelijk iets heb wat ik wel kan vasthouden, ook al voelen ze gek aan.” (Rijneveld, *Discomfort*, 66 / *Avond*, 88)

picking up the smallest of the two. I gently rub its underbelly over the back of the other toad. ... While I rub the toads together, I whisper to them, 'Otherwise you'll die. Do you want to die or what? Well?' ... I clutch the toads tighter and tighter and press them together more and more insistently."<sup>139</sup> The toads suffer in the conditions that Jas keeps them in, becoming bleak, thin, and weak. Jas notices these changes and feels sorry, but does not act to free them. In addition to their symbolic task, the toads are Jas's only opportunity to speak about her grief, and she monologues to them several times:

But to be honest, dear esteemed toads, I think we've dug ourselves in, even though it's summer. We're buried deep in the mud and no one is going to get us out. Do you actually have a god? A god who forgives and a god who remembers? I don't know what kind of god we have. Maybe He's on holiday, or He's dug himself in. ... I'm going to put you back in the bucket now. I'm sorry about this but I can't set you free. I'd miss you, because who would watch over me when I sleep?<sup>140</sup>

The suffering of the toads is in service to Jas's grief, as they are her only opportunity to talk openly to anyone. As a symbol for her parents, the toads offer her a sense of control to change the pain that they are in, and then for them to start paying attention to her. Her inability to free them is connected to her isolation and loneliness; as she forces them to stay with her, she joins them in her pain, putting them in an inescapable situation like the one she is in. The inner lives of these toads is not only imperceivable to Jas, but equally to Rijneveld. It is clear to both that the toads are suffering. But their power as a symbol for Rijneveld and the comfort that they

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<sup>139</sup> "“Dan is het nu tijd om te gaan paren,’ zeg ik beslist, en pak de kleinste van de twee op. ... Zachtjes wrijf ik hem met zijn onderbuik over de rug van de andere pad heen. ... En terwijl ik de padden over elkaar heen wrijf, fluister ik tegen ze: ‘Anders gaan jullie dood, willen jullie soms dood? Nou?’ ... Steeds steviger omklem ik de pad in mijn hand, steeds dwingender duw ik ze op elkaar.” (68 / 91)

<sup>140</sup> “Maar eerlijk gezegd, zeer gewaardeerde padden, denk ik dat we ons ingegraven hebben, ook al is het zomer. We zitten diep in de modder en niemand die ons er nog uit haalt. Hebben jullie eigenlijk een God? Een God die vergeeft of een God die onthoudt? Ik weet niet meer wat voor God wij hebben. Misschien is Hij op vakantie, of heeft Hij zich ook ingegraven. ... Ik ga jullie nu weer in de emmer terugzetten. Het spijt me daarvoor, maar ik kan jullie niet vrijlaten. Ik zou jullie gaan missen, want wie waakt er dan nog over mij als ik ga slapen?” (99-100 / 134)

offer for Jas override any true consideration of the lives of these animals, and the complex desires that they might have.

Obbe, Jas's older brother, is equally affected by the loss of his brother and the grave tension in the household, which he mainly expresses in aggression and abuse towards his sisters and various animals, for example keeping live butterflies in his desk drawer. In one passage, as an experiment or perhaps a joke for his sisters, he drops their hamster Tiesje in a glass of water and covers the top, drowning the animal. Jas narrates the event: "I can't help laughing, it looks funny. Everything you can turn into a maths sum has a reassuring solution – I bet he'll need to breathe again after one minute. The hamster moves faster and faster from one side of the glass to the other, its eyes beginning to pop out, its legs kicking about wildly. It's only a few seconds before he starts to float like a grey air bubble in a spirit level. No one speaks."<sup>141</sup> Hanna, their younger sister, cries about the death of the hamster, but Jas and Obbe are simply speechless, not feeling shock or guilt. Indeed, like most of Arluke's respondents, they are morbidly thrilled by the events.

Crucially, Arluke also mentions that children hurt animals in order to verify information that they have heard, or to obtain information that is being withheld from them. One of his respondents "claimed to have been frustrated as a child because he could not acquire information about death, so he explored this topic by abusing animals."<sup>142</sup> This is something that Jas and Obbe are explicitly doing in *De avond*, as explained by Jas when Obbe cuts off the whiskers of Jas's rabbit and forces him to mate with a dwarf rabbit, who then dies from the pressure. After this incident, Jas explains that "We say nothing but we both know that we'll

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<sup>141</sup> "Ik moet lachen, het ziet er grappig uit. Alles waar je een rekensom van kunt maken, heeft een geruststellende uitkomst: ik gok op een minuut voordat hij weer adem nodig heeft. De hamster beweegt steeds sneller van de ene naar de andere kant van het glas, zijn ogen beginnen uit te puilen, zijn pootjes trappelen wild in het rond. Het duurt maar een paar seconden voordat hij blijft drijven als de grijze luchtbel in een waterpas. Niemand zegt iets." (60 / 79)

<sup>142</sup> Arluke, "Animal Abuse as Dirty Play," 422.

have to repeat this until we understand Matthies's death, even though we don't know how."<sup>143</sup> This makes explicit that the young characters in *De avond* are using violence against animals in an attempt to process their grief and gain some understanding of loss; as Arluke states, they are retrieving information that is otherwise kept from them "through firsthand exploration with animals."<sup>144</sup> The experience of the animals themselves is in this sense unimportant to the processing of grief and loss that Jas and Obbe must go through.

Whereas the frogs, hamster, and rabbits are 'just' animals, rendered disposable, the cows are an important element of the business, and constitute the financial stability and day-to-day rhythm of the family. Though they are therefore not disposable, they are nonetheless reduced to working machines who, like in *Dorsvloer*, are only useful when they are healthy enough to produce.

The largest event featuring the cows in *De avond* is the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, which occurred in the Netherlands in 2001, which forces the family to kill all of their cattle. Like with Grandpa's cows in *Dorsvloer*, a lot of the grief surrounding these deaths is because it is devastating for the business: "When [Dad] looks at the farm he sees three generations of farmers. It belonged to Grandpa Mulder and he took it over from his father. After Grandpa's death, many of his cows lived on. ... Dad's entire living will be taken from him in one go."<sup>145</sup> Jas questions this focus on profit, wondering "Isn't it a greater loss this way? All those steaming bodies we love so much will soon be killed."<sup>146</sup> For her, the worst thing about the loss of the cows is that it will make the family even more desperate and upset. She fears that without the cows, there will be nothing left of their home, only silence, and her parents will

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<sup>143</sup> "We zeggen niets maar weten allebei dat we dit moeten herhalen totdat we de dood van Matthies begrijpen, al weten we niet hoe." (Rijneveld, *Discomfort*, 91 / *Avond*, 123)

<sup>144</sup> Arluke, "Animal Abuse as Dirty Play," 424.

<sup>145</sup> "Als hij naar de boerderij kijkt ziet hij drie generaties boeren. Hij is van opa Mulder geweest en die heeft hem weer overgenomen van zijn vader. Na opa's dood leefden veel van zijn koeien voort. ... Vaders hele bestaan wordt hem in één keer afgenomen." (Rijneveld, *Discomfort*, 126 / *Avond*, 170)

<sup>146</sup> "Nu maken we toch een groter verlies? Al die dampende lijven waar we zoveel van houden zullen straks doorgemaakt worden." (130 / 176)



never feel better. However, when she witnesses the slaughter itself, she is suddenly confronted with the reality of these cows' lives. Her narration of the slaughter is gripping:

I follow her into the cowshed, and at that very moment the first cows fall down dead on the gratings, and their unwieldy bodies are pulled along the ground by their back legs to the grab loader, which picks them up like cuddly toys at the fair and drops them into the truck. Two bovines stand under the rotating cattle brush chewing idly, their noses covered in thick scabs. They stare feverishly at their fellows whose legs are giving way, or who are slipping and smacking down onto the floor blocks in the stalls. Some of the calves are still alive as they go into the carcass-disposal truck, others get a stud shot into their foreheads with a bolt stunner. The moaning and the sound of banging against the side of the truck causes small cracks under my skin, and my body begins to feel feverish. It's no longer enough to pull my collar up to my nose and chew on my coat cords. Even Maxima, Jewel and Blaze are killed without remorse. They collapse and are gone, folded up like empty milk cartons and thrown into the container.<sup>147</sup>

In this passage, Jas sees individuals being murdered, and is greatly affected by the violence of it. Apart from this passage, however, the effect of the large-scale slaughter on the thousands of individual cow lives is not further discussed in *De avond is ongemak*. Instead, the suffering of the humans dealing with the consequences takes center stage.

Arguably, the success of *De avond*, especially after being translated and winning the International Booker prize in 2020, is because its portrayal of Dutch rural society is so potent.

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<sup>147</sup> “Achter haar aan loop ik de stal in en net op dat moment vallen de eerste koeien dood neer op de roosters en worden hun logge lichamen aan hun achterpoten over de grond gesleept naar de grijpmachine, die ze oppakt als een knuffelbeest van de kermis en ze boven de vrachtwagen loslaat. Twee runderen staan onder de roterende veeborstels loze kauwbewegingen te maken, hun neuzen bedekt met dikke korsten. Koortsig kijken ze naar hun soortgenoten, die door de poten zakken of uitglijden en tegen de blokjesvloer in de melkstal klappen. Sommige kalveren gaan nog levend de kadaverwagen in. Anderen krijgen een schietmasker, waarbij een pin door het voorhoofd wordt geschoten. Het gejammer en het gebonk tegen de wanden van de wagen veroorzaakt scheurtjes onder mijn huid, en mijn lichaam begint ook koortsig aan te voelen. Het is niet meer genoeg om mijn kraag tot aan mijn neus op te trekken, om op de jaskoordjes te kauwen. Zelfs Máxima, Juweeltje en Blaartje worden zonder enig berouw afgemaakt. Ze zakken door hun poten en zijn weg, worden als lege pakken melk opgevouwen en in de container gegooid.” (141 / 190)

The suffering of Jas and her siblings in a Reformed Protestant atmosphere where expressing pain is not possible is internationally interesting, because it is not a very well-known part of Dutch society. It is, like *Dorsvloer*, a striking portrait of the lives of these farming families. However, the animals on these farms, despite being a crucial element of the families' lives, are not actually visible in them. They are mentioned but not considered; their suffering is normalized in the context of the farming business and is therefore unimportant to the characters and the readers alike. The reigning biopolitical discourse in the Netherlands dictates that the animal's expressions are only interpreted in connection to the farming: if they are ill, upset, or lame, it matters only because it might affect the value of their production. More importantly, they are not heard beyond their expressions of pleasure and pain. Their complex needs, like a mother wanting to bond with her calf, or a chicken enjoying the sun, or simply a desire for freedom, are unthinkable. Their existence is reduced to their basic needs and considering anything beyond those would be anthropomorphizing; those kinds of desires and aspirations are reserved for humans. The animals that constitute these farms are generally reduced to either elements of the business or metaphors for the characters' emotional lives. In this way, these two novels illustrate how farmed animal lives are rendered invisible in Dutch culture. Their existence on these farms is reduced only to the bare minimum – do they eat well, are they healthy, can they carry calves – and their biopolitical value as producing machines.

These novels have much potential to consider these animals in full, exploring the ways that the humans on the farm relate to the animals, how they communicate and connect. It is telling that instead, these animals become set pieces, and that despite the animals being constantly present in the lives of these characters, the novels do not consider them in any meaningful way. It is illustrative of the fact that though Dutch culture is very concerned with dairy and meat consumption, the animals that provide it are left out of it entirely.

## Chapter 3

### The Dutch Farmer and an Ethics of Care

In June 2022, Dutch farmers are in newspaper headlines every day, as their protests against new government regulations escalate. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, the cabinet introduced new plans to drastically reduce nitrogen emissions by cutting down the agricultural sector. In some parts of the Netherlands, including Brabant and Gelderland, the goal is to reduce nitrogen production with 70 to 80 percent.<sup>148</sup> The plan forces many farmers to drastically reduce their livestock or even stop altogether, to reduce emissions and to protect vulnerable nature around them. As a response, farmers mobilized all across the country to protest. Many of these protest were violent and illegal, including blocking highways with tractors and bales of hay, setting large fires, and threatening politicians by showing up at their homes.<sup>149</sup> The protests have been going on for almost a month, causing unrest and doubt in the cabinet about the new regulations.

The explosive response of farmers to these new regulations are exemplary of the general feelings of misunderstanding and anger that have been brewing for many years. Many farmers feel misunderstood by citizens and the government, feeling that they do not understand the struggle of making a living from farming. They argue that even if they wanted to do everything differently, it simply is not possible. As Arjan Zant, a farmer in North-Holland, states in a Dutch newspaper: “If we do away with a hundred cows, we will go bankrupt.”<sup>150</sup> A farmer’s organization argues that “The farms continue growing to keep their heads above water, farmers are working harder than ever. They try to keep up with the costs from regulation and emission requirements. The requirements for food safety, environment, and animal welfare are incredibly high. The sector meets many requirements, but the income does not increase and the

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<sup>148</sup> NOS Nieuws, “Kabinet neemt vandaag stikstofbesluit met grote gevolgen voor boeren.”

<sup>149</sup> NOS Nieuws, “Dag van chaotische taferelen op de weg door boerenblokkades.”

<sup>150</sup> Gelder, “Ook in Zuinderdorp staat de trekker klaar.”

sector is the plaything of political debate.”<sup>151</sup> Farmers feel that regular citizens and politicians are ignorant to the reality of farming.

A consequence of this is that many farmers resist any accusations of animal suffering in the industry and write it off as ignorance, arguing that they love and care for their animals. The #farmerslovecows campaign, mentioned in the Introduction, is an example of this. The campaign expresses a sentiment that the majority of farmers feel; they *do* love their animals, even if activists claim that they cannot. Farmers responded to the Dier&Recht accusations of ‘grave animal abuse’ that they were “hurt deep in their soul.”<sup>152</sup> It is important not to disregard these testimonies, but instead to consider the lived relationality closely. As the previous chapters have analyzed how the Dutch cultural imaginary naturalizes the consumption of farmed animals by erasing them, it is interesting to consider how farmers function in these biopolitical systems, when the presence of these animals is undeniable in their lives.

For the analysis of this chapter, I deliberately challenge my own presumptions about farmers and attempt to listen to their testimonies in a curious, open-minded, and forgiving manner. I believe it is important to include their perspectives as nuanced as possible in this thesis, in no small part because farmers live more closely to farmed animals than I ever have. Though I still strongly disavow the farming of animals, I also understand the complicated position of Dutch farmers as the focal point of social and political debate while also simply providing for the majority of consumers who still want animal products. It is also interesting to consider how farmers are both influenced by the Dutch conceptualization of farming and simultaneously take part in creating it.

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<sup>151</sup> Hietberg, “Wij steunen onze boeren en hun dieren.” It should be noted that many farmers are technically very rich; one in every five millionaires is a farmer, as pointed out by Gert-Jan Versteegen, “Eén op de vijf miljonairs is boer.” However, this money is invested in their land, meaning that they do not have a lot of money to spend and that their wealth depends on the size of their business, which they are now forced to reduce.

<sup>152</sup> Mons, “Dier&Recht in hoger beroep om anti-zuivelcampagne.”

Since caring for their animals is central to the work of the animal farmer, this analysis will make use of the feminist concept of the ethics of care. Originally formulated by Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice* and then picked up by Josephine Donovan, the ethics of care is defined as a critical opposition to the Kantian tradition which dictates that decisions should be made based on abstract principles, disconnected from context. An ethics of care, on the other hand, focuses on relations and narrative context to make ethical decisions, a kind of ethics that “would not be possible under absolute principles of right and wrong with universalizable ‘neutral’ ethical standards invoked.”<sup>153</sup> Donovan introduces Simone Weil’s conceptualization of ‘attention’, “that is, paying attention to what is overlooked when the subject is framed according to prescribed value and aesthetic ideals, relegating the overlooked material to insignificance or indeed to nonbeing.”<sup>154</sup> This concept of attention reveals aspects that are obscured in universal abstraction. This ethics of care has been introduced to ecocriticism and critical animal studies to think about human relationships to nonhuman beings and the natural world. Donovan summarizes it as: “nonviolent, adaptive, responsive, and attentive to the environment, perceiving other creatures as subjects worthy of respect, whose different voices must be attended to, and with whom one is emotionally engaged, interwoven in an ecological and spiritual—subject-subject—continuum.”<sup>155</sup>

Thinking about non-human animals with an ethics of care, then, enables “a reformulation of their ethical status as beings of comparable dignity and worth to humans and deserving of comparable treatment.”<sup>156</sup> In *Matters of Care*, María Puig de la Bellacasa expands on the ethics of care as also involving “affective, ethical, and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequence.”<sup>157</sup> Care is an ethical and political intervention that can never be

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<sup>153</sup> Donovan, *The Aesthetics of Care*, 6.

<sup>154</sup> Donovan, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Donovan, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Donovan, 10-11.

<sup>157</sup> Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 4.

neutral; and one that can, importantly, also be done within and for worlds that we might object to.<sup>158</sup> That is to say, an ethics of care is not a predetermined list of emotional practices, but rather a starting point for analysis, for deconstructing complicated relations: “The question, then, is not ‘how can we care more?’ but instead to ask what happens to our work when we pay attention to moments where the question of ‘how to care?’ is insistent but not easily answerable.”<sup>159</sup> One of the places that one might find deplorable but that care definitely takes place in, albeit in complicated ways, is the farm. It is a good example of a place wherein the question of ‘how to care?’ is always there but complex to answer, which signals a good place to start with an analysis using an ethics of care.

Rachel Adams considers care, as “work, an attitude toward others, and an ethical ideal”, in the context of interdependency. She states: “Care is almost always characterized by asymmetries of power, ability, and resources.”<sup>160</sup> She points out a significant addition to thinking about interspecies care specifically, which is that those who need the most care are usually those with the least power. The ethics of care, then, aims to intervene in this imbalance: “Care ethics seeks justice in the context of inequality, reframing the value of a good life for dependents and those who sustain them.”<sup>161</sup>

In biopolitics, care is key in Foucault’s conceptualization of pastoral power. In the compilation of lectures titled *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault attempts to trace the history of governmentality to a pre-political concept. He introduces the pastoral as a distinct form of power that precedes governmentality. As summarized by Wadiwel in *War Against Animals*, pastoral power is considered as a distinct form of power with four identifiable characteristics. Firstly, it is concerned with animate property, such as bodies of slaves, citizens, and animals, rather than inanimate property such as territory; secondly, it is defined as a power

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<sup>158</sup> Puig de la Bellacasa, 6.

<sup>159</sup> Atkinson-Graham qtd. in Puig de la Bellacasa, 7.

<sup>160</sup> Adams, “The Art of Interspecies Care,” 695.

<sup>161</sup> Adams, 696.

to be beneficent and to ‘do good’; thirdly, it centers around sacrifice; and fourthly, pastoral power has the capacity to both individualize and aggregate its subjects.<sup>162</sup> Pastoral power, being pre-political, is discussed in the metaphor of the shepherd with their flock. A good shepherd does not consider the management of the flock to be instrumental but rather cares for the flock as a modest sacrifice. Wadiwel criticizes Foucault’s definition of pastoral power as a distinct form of power that is not connected to sovereignty as a mode of organization. Additionally, Wadiwel stresses Foucault’s blindness to the inherent violence in the shepherd’s care for their flock.

In “The Violence of Care,” Christopher Mayes investigates this inherent violence in Foucault’s pastoral power from a religious perspective, as Foucault bases his conceptualization of pastoral power on Hebrew and early Christian pastors. However, as Mayes points out, Foucault does not mention David in his analysis, while a “significant aspect of the Davidic pastor is not sacrifice, but violence.”<sup>163</sup> Mayes illustrates how pastoral power and biopower are in fact directly related, as Wadiwel also points out, and how love and care is indeed at the core of biopolitical power.<sup>164</sup>

Wadiwel follows, suggesting that a good shepherd, as presented by Foucault, does not exist: “Even the kindest shepherd, the most beneficent shepherd, maintains some form of instrumentalisation that guides this practice of pastoral power. ... it is true, that in order for the shepherd to use his or her sheep, then a care must be inculcated in order to maintain the lives of the flock for that use. However, care here is twisted with violence in a particular way.”<sup>165</sup> Love and care for animals, then, is only relevant in the context of their production and their bodies, which Wadiwel points out is inherently violent. In this sense, questions of animal welfare are also a part of biopolitics. Wadiwel notes how contemporary animal ethics is defined

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<sup>162</sup> Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 108.

<sup>163</sup> Mayes, “Violence of Care,” 115.

<sup>164</sup> Mayes, 118.

<sup>165</sup> Wadiwel, *War Against Animals*, 112.

by the unquestioned right of human dominion. Assumed sovereignty actually precedes ethics. The question becomes ‘how do we use animals’, rather than ‘should we use animals’: “ethics becomes a question of how to manage or regulate the effects of our own self proclaimed dominion.”<sup>166</sup> Wadiwel demonstrates how questions of welfare originate from domination: “We offer welfare to those we have dominion over, and wish to continue to dominate for our own benefit.”<sup>167</sup> Testimonies of Dutch farmers about caring for their animals illustrate that their considerations of welfare are indeed stem from such an assumption of human dominion. Wadiwel’s deconstruction of welfare ethics also emphasizes the important conflict between animal rights organizations like Dier&Recht and animal farmers; when Dier&Recht denounces the implied sovereignty of humans over animals, farmers respond with evidence of how they do care for the animals that they have the right to keep.

As such, farmers feel that organizations like Dier&Recht are “misleading and unfair”<sup>168</sup> because they are already doing their best for their animals by following government welfare regulations, for example. One of these regulatory apparatuses is the Beter Leven quality mark, previously discussed in Chapter 1. Beter Leven excellently illustrates how the discord between animal rights activists and farmers cannot be resolved as is, because the two sides of the argument are fundamentally different. Additionally, it demonstrates how care in animal farming is a fragmented ethics of care. Beter Leven is an initiative of the Dierenbescherming, one of the largest anti-animal cruelty organizations in the Netherlands, created to offer more transparency for the consumer and to ensure that consumers think critically about the animal products they consume. As they state on their website, “Because you don’t buy most products directly from the farmer, but for example from the supermarket or the kiosk at the station, it is not always possible to gather information about animal welfare yourself. The Beter Leven quality mark

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<sup>166</sup> Wadiwel, 22.

<sup>167</sup> Wadiwel, 22.

<sup>168</sup> Mons, “Dier&Recht in hoger beroep.”



helps you with this, to make it transparent how well the animal behind your product was taken care of.”<sup>169</sup> Though the Dierenbescherming aims for an expansion of biological animal farming, which, they argue, considers animal welfare much more, they consider it “unacceptable if that means that no one is fighting for the millions of animals that are not kept biologically”. As such, the Beter Leven mark functions to make the desperate plight of industrially farmed animals only slightly better by regulating it more closely.

As previously mentioned, this means that the one-star Beter Leven standard signals minimally improved industrial farming circumstances, the “bare minimum of animal welfare,” and the two- and three-star standard is then slightly improved from those standards.<sup>170</sup> This means, for example, that pig farmers who have three Beter Leven stars are responsible for offering distraction material in the barns; but practically, this could mean a single rope hanging from the ceiling. In December 2017, the animal rights organization Ongehoord published shocking undercover footage of chicken farms full of sick and dead chickens, three of which they claimed supplied Beter Leven eggs. The Dierenbescherming denied these allegations, stating that any such chicken farms would immediately lose their Beter Leven mark. Ongehoord, however, argued that “... these images prove that there is no animal-friendly way to produce eggs” and that the egg production in the Netherlands is too intensive.<sup>171</sup>

Ongehoord’s criticism illustrates the trouble with these animal welfare regulations that many farmers adhere to; they do not address the inherent suffering in animal farming. As the Dierenbescherming also points out, the Beter Leven quality mark is to ensure the bare minimum of animal welfare in farming, but therefore it cannot acknowledge the suffering in necessary farming structures like confinement, forced production, excessive breeding, and slaughter. Similarly, when farmers consider farmed animal suffering, they might think about aspects like

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<sup>169</sup> Beter Leven, “Wat is Beter Leven?”

<sup>170</sup> Olthuis, “Een, twee of drie sterren op je vlees en zuivel: wat zegt dat eigenlijk?”

<sup>171</sup> RTL Nieuws, “Eieren met Beter Leven-keurmerk zijn niet diervriendelijk.”

those that were addressed in the #farmerslovecows campaign: proper food and water, fresh air, the absence of physical abuse. In this sense, Beter Leven cannot be said to ensure an ethics of care for farmed animals, but only to certify minimal improvements to inherently cruel situations. As such, that which is considered true suffering in animal farming is superficial. This chapter will analyze farmers' testimonies to argue that, despite their conscious efforts for care, Dutch animal farmers continue to function in a biopolitical system of assumed human dominion. In a framework of an ethics of care, this means that their practice of care is production-focused and hollow; however, in their experience, their care is more than sufficient. The biopolitical normative and economic system that they function in prevents a true practice of care in animal farming.

In the personal experience of Dutch farmers, they care intensely for their animals, and claims by animal activists that they are abusing their animals are more than simply offensive; they are hurtful. Farmers feel strongly that they are misunderstood by citizens and politicians, believing that they have no right to speak about farming since most of them have never even been on a farm. As a response to what farmers feel is a spreading ignorance about farming, the Limburgse Land- en Tuinbouwbond (LLTB) released a 40 minute documentary in November 2021. The documentary follows four farmers and their ways of life, their motivation to continue farming, and their hardships. *Vanaf de Velden: De boer, de tuinder, de mens* is a sincere representation of farming made by farmers that aims to capture the “essence of being a farmer or gardener.”<sup>172</sup> Therefore, it is a useful case study to analyze how Dutch farmers conceptualize their way of farming and especially their way of caring. The documentary follows Wim van den Eertwegh, a farmer with a mixed farm with crops and dairy cows; Paul van der Hulst, a rose cultivator; Rebecca Steinbusch-Lacroix, who co-runs a dairy and fruit farm; and Koen van Eijk, who co-runs a pig farm. All farmers live in Limburg, since the LLTB represents this

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<sup>172</sup> LLTB, “LLTB-documentaire ‘Vanaf de Velden’.”

province. It should also be noted that Limburg is the province with the highest amount of intensive animal farming, relatively.<sup>173</sup>

The documentary was made with the explicit intent to inform the general public about the lives of farmers and especially the ways that caring is at the core of their practice, one farmer, Rebecca, says: “So I hope to get that appreciation again. And the realization that it is still more complex than, uh, ‘oh there is that farmer’.”<sup>174</sup> However, *Vanaf de Velden* mainly succeeds in illustrating how conventional Dutch farmers engage in a hollowed-out practice of care. While Donovan outlines that an ethics of care is embodied by an attentive love that sees significance that has otherwise been stripped away by the “quantifying, objectifying, affectless gaze of Enlightenment epistemology and capitalist commodification,” *Vanaf de Velden* illustrates how Dutch farmers care for their animals precisely with this objectifying gaze, focused on production and profit.<sup>175</sup> Nonetheless, the framing of the documentary exemplifies how farmers do not consider their way of care to be insufficient, as the documentary aims to inform the public about the good that farmers are trying to do and the care that the regular citizen does not get to see.

Donovan writes that “Any worker who deals with the elements—weather, land, and sea—has to operate adaptively according to the pragmatics of *mētis* [being responsive to one’s immediate environment].”<sup>176</sup> Indeed, Rebecca reiterates this as she leads a group of children through one of their orchards, leading an educational outing. She explains: “As a farmer, you can’t do without nature, but nature can’t do without the farmer, either. We come from a history after the war, production is just the most important thing. ... It is assumed that nature and farmers are opposite to one another. But we are both there to sustain nature, and we can’t

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<sup>173</sup> Kooman, *Nieuw Boeren*.

<sup>174</sup> LLTB, 40:55. “Dus ik hoop weer die waardering te krijgen. En het besef dat het toch wel complexer is dan, uh, ‘oh, daar heb je die boer’”.

<sup>175</sup> Donovan, *Aesthetics of Care*, 8.

<sup>176</sup> Donovan, 87.

cultivate without the natural biology around us.”<sup>177</sup> Importantly, in her argumentation that farmers do not work against nature but with nature, she repeats that “production is the most important thing”, illustrating how this ‘working with’ nature is not *mētis* in Donovan’s sense, which “requires emotional interaction” and centers “emotional qualia.”<sup>178</sup> Instead, working with nature for these farmers is interpreted as ‘needing’ nature in the simple sense that it is plants and trees who have to grow the food, and without those plants and trees, there is no food.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that farmers have to adapt to their environment and thereby be responsive to it, as is illustrated by the flooding of Wim’s crops during the summer of 2021. The documentary shows Wim walking on the edges of the flooded field while a piano plays disembodied chords, creating an atmosphere of horror. While the music picks up with a tender accordion, Wim saves a young hare from the water, muttering “see?! That is just... But this one I will save. No matter what,”<sup>179</sup> expressing his powerlessness in this situation as well as his disbelief at the violence that the water causes; not just to this wildlife, but also to his business. Wim shows emotion at his neighborhood all coming together to help him, as he expresses how the flood interferes with the rhythm of the farm: “Because now we are feeding the cows the winter supply, in the middle of the summer. Because they can’t go outside. And they still have to eat. Those are all ramifications... You suffer from those for a long time.”<sup>180</sup> The documentary mostly uses this event as an opportunity to market the LLTB, who organized the neighborhood aid. Still, the flood exemplifies that though farmers are dependent on the elements, this does not mean that they work in harmony with them. Instead, an excess of water will destroy Wim’s crops and put him in great trouble, as his production system is not prepared for it. Wim explains

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<sup>177</sup> LLTB, 15:12. “Je kan als boer niet zonder de natuur, maar de natuur kan ook niet zonder de boer. We komen wel van een geschiedenis na de oorlog, productie is gewoon het belangrijkste. ... Er wordt wel verondersteld dat de natuur en de boeren tegenover elkaar staan. Maar we zijn er allebei om de natuur in stand te houden, en we kunnen niet telen zonder de natuurlijke biologie om ons heen, hè.”

<sup>178</sup> Donovan, *Aesthetics of Care*, 78.

<sup>179</sup> LLTB, 33:33. “Kijk, dat is toch... Maar die red ik. Hoe dan ook.”

<sup>180</sup> LLTB, 39:02. “Want nu zijn we de koeien midden in de zomer de wintervoorraad aan het op voeren. Want die kunnen niet naar buiten. En die moeten toch eten. Dat zijn dan allemaal bijkomstigheden... daar heb je nog lang last van.”

that these floods happen in the winter, but that they were not prepared in the summer: “In the winter you can get this. Or, then, you take it into account a little bit. And then the farmland floods. Oh well, then the water stays for fourteen days. And then it goes away and life goes on. ... But we’ve never experienced this. In the summer. At this scale.”<sup>181</sup> Ironically, the unexpected summer floods are part of the natural disasters caused by climate change,<sup>182</sup> which is worsened by agricultural emissions. While recent governmental regulations are forcing farmers to lessen their emissions to prevent these natural disasters, farmers have responded with intense and aggressive protest, as previously discussed. In this sense, farmers feel that nature is disconnected from their practices when it is not operating in ways that they are familiar with or that they can make use of.

The farmers in *Vanaf de Velden* also demonstrate a production-focused care when it comes to the nonhuman animals that they farm. When Koen talks about the pigs that he farms, he explains that people do not appreciate the animal enough: “The pig is much more than just bacon on the barbecue,”<sup>183</sup> while he is browsing through a catalog of products that are made with pig parts, including bullets, candy, brooms, et cetera. He exclaims: “In 182 products! And I think everyone would be astounded to realize how important the pig is for all of us.”<sup>184</sup> Here, Koen explicitly relates the worth of the pig to its production value; the animal is important to us because their flesh and other parts of their dead bodies are used in many parts of human society. While his initial introduction seems to promise his deeper understanding of the pig as a live individual, stating that they are much more than just meat on a barbecue, he continues reducing them to products, if in a broader sense. Arguably, this demonstrates a superficial

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<sup>181</sup> LLTB, 35:50. “’s Winters dan kan je het hebben. Of dan houd je er wel een beetje rekening mee. En dan lopen de landerijen onder. Nou ja, dan staat het water veertien dagen. En dan trekt het weg en dan gaat het leven verder. ... Maar dit hebben we nooit meegemaakt. In de zomer. In deze mate.”

<sup>182</sup> Wilby and Keenan, “Adapting to flood risk under climate change.”

<sup>183</sup> LLTB, 4:28. “Het varken is veel meer dan alleen maar het speklapje op de barbecue.”

<sup>184</sup> LLTB, 4:44. “In 182 producten! En ik denk dat iedereen er wel versteld van staat hoe belangrijk het varken is voor ons allemaal.”

connection with the pigs that Koen farms, and a striking lack of attentive love for the non-humans that he spends every day with.

In farming, there is an important paradox in simultaneously caring-for and profiting-from. There is an undeniable need for producing; in the end, farmers farm to make a living, to profit off these animals and their bodies. As Rebecca states: “And it’s really not about the money, but you always need to watch out that you’re not doing something that you can’t get bread on the table with”<sup>185</sup> and Koen explains: “You can compare it with top sport, yeah. You have to make sure that you’re one of the best. Because with an average business, you can’t develop further. You always need to produce at your best to secure the financials later.”<sup>186</sup> Because of this, farmers argue that proper care for their animals is inherent to the job, because healthy and happy animals produce better products. Wim explains about his cows: “A farmer is good to his animals. Because a farmer who is not good to his animals, doesn’t produce. A cow will give too little milk or won’t grow and you don’t want that because it doesn’t work financially either if an animal is not happy.”<sup>187</sup> When talking about caring for his pigs every day and night, Koen illustrates that he does this because he wants to improve his product: “The more you take care of it, the more you get from it.”<sup>188</sup>

The paradox in the farmers’ care-for-production is that research shows that the way humans are keeping and caring for non-human animals in farming causes suffering and harm to them, and that in this way, contemporary animal farming is only possible through suffering. A certain level of animal suffering is inherent to mass-producing animal products. The separating of calves from their mothers, which is necessary for mass milk production, is

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<sup>185</sup> LLTB, 16:10. “En het draait echt niet om het geld maar je moet altijd opletten dat je niet met iets bezig bent waarmee je geen boterham meer kan verdienen.”

<sup>186</sup> LLTB, 29:46. “Je kan het goed vergelijken met topsport ja. Je moet zorgen dat je bij de besten hoort. Want met een gemiddeld bedrijf kun je niet doorontwikkelen. Je moet altijd top draaien om later financieringen rond te krijgen.”

<sup>187</sup> LLTB, 17:07. “Een boer is goed voor zijn dieren. Want een boer die niet goed is voor zijn dieren, dat produceert niet. Een koe die geeft dan te weinig melk of die groeit niet en dat wil je niet want dat werkt financieel gezien ook niet als een dier het niet goed heeft.”

<sup>188</sup> LLTB, 36:56. “Hoe meer je ervoor zorgt, hoe meer je ervoor terugkrijgt.”

attributed the highest possible discomfort-score.<sup>189</sup> In most pig farms, tail docking is still standard practice, despite it being forbidden in the EU; but with the ways that pigs are confined, docking is necessary to avoid relatively more harm because pigs otherwise bite each other's tails in frustration and boredom. As the KNMvD (Royal Dutch Society for Veterinarians) explains, "as long as the welfare of pigs with long tails on pig farms cannot be guaranteed, [pig veterinarians] feel forced to state that docking is necessary."<sup>190</sup> Similarly, calves on dairy farms are always dehorned, which is a painful and stressful procedure, to protect the cows and especially their udders from damage that they would do to one another. As these examples illustrate, current farming practices do not only cause harm to the animals, but *necessitate* harm in order to ensure the functioning of the farm as is. Farmers, like Wim and Koen, therefore must cause harm to their animals in order to farm them in the current system.

However, to farmers, these kinds of interventions are at the core of their care; if they do not dock pig's tails, for example, they will suffer more. The suffering that is inherent to the system of industrial farming is not at stake in the conventional farmer's version of care. As such, farmers do not feel like their care is insufficient, and accusations of animal abuse are hurtful. Wim states: "Please assume that animals that are being kept in the Netherlands don't have it half bad. I know, a cow that has been here five or six years and who has had four calves, and who has always has it good."<sup>191</sup> A similar sentiment can be found in the #farmerslovecows campaign, as a response to the Dier&Recht campaigns about animal abuse in the dairy industry. Importantly, the points that #farmerslovecows brings up about caring for cows are not the points that Dier&Recht argues against. The main point of the anti-dairy campaign was about separating cows and their calves, which they consider to be the most unknown suffering in the

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<sup>189</sup> Wageningen Livestock Research, "Update Ongeriefanalyse landbouwhuisdieren."

<sup>190</sup> KNMvD.nl, "KNMvD standpunt Couperen van varkensstaarten."

<sup>191</sup> LLTB, 17:34. "Ga er alsjeblieft van uit dat dieren die in Nederland gehouden worden hebben het nog niet slecht. Ik weet, een koe die hier 5 of 6 jaar is geweest en die heeft 4 kalfjes gehad, en die heeft het altijd goed naar haar zin gehad."

dairy industry. The counter-campaign, however, does not include this in the aspects of caring for cows. They outline care for cows in six points, “what cows want”: walking around freely, having enough water and food, brush and scratch their fur, be milked with care, access to fresh air, and space to lie down. This campaign, and the farmers in *Vanaf de Velden*, do not address the structural suffering that the farming industry requires; which includes excessive breeding, interfering with bodily autonomy (like docking and dehorning), and confinement. In this sense, the version of care that conventional farmers undertake must necessarily conceptualize animals as products or machines; like Koen, who relates his pigs’ worth to their value in constructing products.

Importantly, when farmers do feel a fuller and more complete sense of care, they treat their animals differently. This is exemplified by Wim in *Vanaf de Velden*, who feels a special connection to one of his cows, Josefien: “Look, there are cows that you have a special bond with. ... Josefien is her name. ... And the children of my son Chiel: ‘There is Josefien!’ They know her already too. And yes, I don’t have to say now that Josefien has to go. So yeah, that that one jumps out. And that is then something special.”<sup>192</sup> Josefien is the only cow with a name; at other points in the documentary, Wim is shown calling other cows by the numbers on their ear tags.<sup>193</sup> Josefien exemplifies a personal connection, a deeper sense of care; her name illustrates the attentive love that she is being treated with. Consequently, Wim does not send her away like he would with the other cows. He explicitly treats her differently; she is not subjected to the same amount of suffering as other cows, like transport and slaughter. Josefien is given a name, and therefore has gained a pet-like status in the family. She is being considered as an individual worthy of love and attention and as such, as Wim says, she “jumps out”. Nonetheless, she is still excessively milked and forced to give birth like every other dairy cow,

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<sup>192</sup> LLTB, 18:45. “Kijk, er zijn wel koeien daar heb je een speciale band mee. ... Josefien heet ze. ... En de kinderen van mijn zoon Chiel: ‘Daar loopt Josefien!’ Die kennen haar ook al. En ja, ik hoef nu niet te zeggen dat Josefien weg moet. Dus ja, die springt eruit. En dat is dan iets speciaals.”

<sup>193</sup> LLTB, 17:25.



because this is the inherent suffering that is not recognized as such by the farming industry, and therefore not by the farmers who work within it.

Though it has been enlightening for me to consider farming in a framework of interspecies care, the testimonies that I analyzed did not drastically change the way I think about farming and farmers. I had hoped to find more expressions of genuine connection and care which would perhaps shake my convictions, but I was mostly disappointed to discover once more that in conventional farming, the animal is most of all a part of production. Adding to this, the recent farmers' protests have been disproportionately violent and disrespectful, and thus I still find it complicated to find compassion for Dutch farmers. However, after researching the complexities and hardships of farming in more detail, I do understand the farmer's perspective better. Mostly, I see how the cultural conceptualizations of farmed animals, as discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, prevent farmers from investigating their relationships to these animals more closely. Rather, they generally avoid the potential intuitive paradoxes that relationships with a cow like Josefien might provoke. Nonetheless, as the concluding chapter will illustrate, there are farmers in the Netherlands who are doing things differently; and though I do believe that ethical animal farming does not exist, I commend these efforts and I believe that they are leading the industry towards change and thereby creating a better future for farmed animals.

As the documentary *Vanaf de Velden* illustrates, Dutch farmers feel that they care for their animals; which is, in many cases, true. This version of care, however, does not consider the broader context of nonhuman lives, because it does not question human dominion. Farmers are able to care for their animals, even beyond a production model, but they still function within a biopolitical norm which not only naturalizes human dominion but also exploitation of other animals, justifying the excessive breeding and slaughtering of animal lives. Farmers must function within this structure in order for their business to continue being profitable, which, as several farmers stated, is paramount. Anything more than individual exceptions, like Josefien,

would render their business inefficient and eventually bankrupt. In contemporary Dutch farms, which are large-scale, industrial businesses, a true ethics of care as outlined by Donovan and Puig de la Bellacasa is impossible; farmers either express a production-focused care, in which caring for animals produces the best products, or a compromised care, like Beter Leven, in which minimal improvements are possible.

## Conclusion

### Changing the Stories We Tell

This thesis has attempted to deconstruct Dutch discourse about farmed animals in order to investigate how it makes possible the mass-scale consumption and exploitation of animals. In essence, it is a project about dispelling the cultural illusions that exist around farms and the animals that are placed within them, by deconstructing the inner workings of the stories that Dutch people tell each other. At stake in this project is the millions of animal lives that are subject to the Dutch farming industry every day – more than 1,7 million animals are slaughtered every single day, with a total of 541 million in 2021.<sup>194</sup> Though Dutch people are generally not in favor of the animal industry,<sup>195</sup> actual change proves to be incredibly difficult. As this thesis has attempted to prove, the representations of farmed animals in Dutch culture creates an insidious discourse which acts as a screen to hide and erase the reality of animal farms. This discourse is doing more than just distancing products from animals, making it difficult to realize how meat and dairy is made. Rather, it is actively replacing the reality of farmed animals with an alternative version. Additionally, Dutch culture enforces a harmful biopolitics over animal bodies, which perpetuates the dichotomy between ‘human’ and ‘animal’ and naturalizes human dominion over nonhuman animals. Dutch culture controls and regulates animal bodies in favor of human bodies, claiming that animal products are not only natural for humans to consume but physically necessary.

The animal farm discourse is sustained by the broader structure of biopolitics in Dutch society, which constructs the right for political power to influence biological life in order to maintain and improve it. In Michel Foucault’s summary of the history of biopolitics, two developments were crucial: the consideration of the body as a machine (anatomy-politics), and the focus on the body of the population as something that must be regulated and intervened with

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<sup>194</sup> Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, “Vleesproductie.”

<sup>195</sup> Brandsma, “Meerderheid Nederlanders is tegen intensieve veehouderij.”

in order to optimize it. Giorgio Agamben expands on this, arguing that biopolitics confuses the classical exclusion of *zoē*, bare life, as the definition of politics. Instead, the focus on sustaining and optimizing bare life means that *zoē* and *bios* collide in biopolitics. As such, biopolitics necessitates a continuous distinction between the conceptual categories of ‘human’ (then, *bios*) and ‘animal’ (or, *zoē*). In this sense, biopolitics can be considered the product of the tension between these two categories, as Dinesh Wadiwel demonstrates. It is responsible for the discursive construction of the ‘human’ in opposition to the ‘animal’. Additionally, Wadiwel defines the mass-scale violence done to nonhumans as a “war on animals,” using Foucault’s conceptualization of war and sovereignty. A key characteristic of this war, he argues, is the seamless integration of violence into society, hidden in cultural structures that do not seem violent at all.

The thesis has deconstructed the Dutch cultural apparatuses that hide evidence of extreme dominion and violence done to nonhuman animals, specifically on farms. Additionally, it has considered how various narratives contribute to conceptualizing the categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ and by doing so, create a cultural imaginary that justifies the exploitation and consumption of animal bodies. The respective chapters analyzed the three main stories that are told about farmed animals in Dutch society: the idyllic family farm, as presented in children’s picture books; the conservative and isolated farm in the religious farm novel; and the testimonies of contemporary farmers.

Firstly, it analyzed the role of nonhuman animals in children’s literature, specifically farmed animals in Dutch picture books. Chapter 1 argued that these picture books are significant as a cultural object that naturalizes and erases the suffering of animals in the farming industry and thereby constructs a discourse that is remarkably difficult to dismantle. As Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart conceptualize, nonhuman animals in children’s narratives become sensible subjects by humanization. This is connected to Agamben’s anthropological machine, which is

a crucial element of biopolitics that works continually to separate humanity from animality through indetermined zones of exception such as language, intelligence, empathy, religion, et cetera. In this sense, to create an animal character who can be a protagonist, they must become human to a certain extent. Often, these characters are only animal in some aspects of their appearance. In Dutch literature for children, animals are indeed humanized when they lead the plot. However, picture books for very young children do not contain such a plot; rather, they are informational narratives, told from an external perspective which can be embodied by the caregiver reading it out. Therefore, these picture books about farms do not contain farmed animal protagonists.

Farmed animals are one of the most popular subjects for these informational picture books. They aim to educate babies and toddlers about farms and the animals on them, in part to explain where their food comes from, and because animals are an easy and familiar topic to engage with. Because they are for children, these books necessarily simplify the activities on a farm, but additionally, they (re)produce important elements of the larger cultural discourse about farmed animals. Firstly, the visual stereotype that is used in these picture books is based on North-American, 19<sup>th</sup> century, small-scale and “mixed-type” (meaning with various different animal species) farms, with wide fields, wheat, and red barns. These are not only idealized and unrealistic farms, but also distinctly not Dutch. As such, children are presented with the visual stereotype of a farm which becomes immediately recognizable as such, despite being factually incorrect. Secondly, the animals on these farms are equally stereotypical representations: the cows are always black-and-white Holstein dairy cows; the pigs are always hairless, pink Piètrain pigs; the chickens, though notably less uniform, are usually white broiler chickens, colorful roosters, or bright yellow chicks. Thirdly, these animals are occasionally anthropomorphized, but only visually, standing on hind legs or jumping rope. Importantly, they are not anthropomorphized as protagonists, meaning that they might speak or be autonomous.

Fourthly, the books focus the characteristics of these animals which are usually connected to their products. Generally, these books only discuss those products that live animals produce, such as eggs and milk, rather than those that are produced from their flesh, like meat and leather. As Janae Dimick points out, these informational segments and visual connotations serve to connect, and thereby reduce, farmed animals to their respective products. In a biopolitical sense, the animals are defined by their bodies as productive machines.

These elements illustrate how Dutch picture books initiate an understanding of the standard way of thinking about farmed animals, which is an alternative reality in which they gladly produce food for humans to consume, living on wide farms or in clean and cozy barns. Additionally, they serve to connect these animals to the place of the farm, unconditionally defining them as ‘farm animals’ and keeping them distinctly separate from human animals. This imaginary is continued in advertisements for animal products like Campina milk. Picture books are a substantial part of creating the discourse which, as Cathy Glenn illustrates, then becomes difficult to change.

Chapter 2 analyzed the genre of the religious farm novel, the main farm narrative in Dutch literature. This genre specifically narrates the lives of Reformed Protestant families who run farming businesses. Religion, as one expression of the anthropological machine’s zone of exception, perpetuates the discursive categories of the ‘human’ and the ‘animal’, and orthodox Christianity like Reformed Protestantism also further establishes a naturalized human dominion over all nonhuman beings. Because of the long history of Calvinism and by extension Reformed Protestantism in the Netherlands, as other religions were prohibited for decades, it has deeply informed attitudes towards nonhumans in Dutch society. The beliefs of Reformed Protestantism, consisting of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, form an uncompromising and bleak outlook on salvation and faith. The practices of Reformed Protestantism are particularly dedicated and restrictive, which has also contributed

to it becoming a religious minority in the Netherlands after increased secularization. Nonetheless, its fundamental beliefs in human dominion and exceptionalism have informed Dutch society as a whole.

In Genesis 1, God creates humanity as distinctly different from any other life form; in God's own image. Additionally, He creates every other life form, such as land animals, fish, insects, and plants, at separate moments and in different ways. In this sense, the Bible carefully constructs the categories of 'human' and every other life form as distinctly separate from one another. In Genesis 1:26, God states that humanity shall have dominion over every being on earth. Despite some interpretations that argue that God preferred vegetarianism, this divinely acquired right is mainly interpreted to justify the exploitation of animals for human advantage and consumption. Most literary narratives written by (ex-)Reformed Protestants take place in their childhood on an animal farm, creating the cultural connotation of strict religion with isolated rural towns and farm life. The case studies discussed in Chapter 2 illustrate how these novels challenge some harmful conceptions of Reformed Protestantism, such as the oppression of women and the negative consequences of emotional constraint. However, they perpetuate the discursive categorization of living beings and specifically the erasure of farmed animals from Dutch culture. Franca Treur's *Dorsvloer vol confetti* consistently connects the cows to the dairy farm and does not consider them in any other dimension, despite the connections between gender and the animal in religious discourse. Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's *De avond is ongemak* similarly reduces cows to the farming business that they sustain, and additionally makes use of a recurring feature of the religious farm genre: animal abuse and torture. By using the nonhumans in the story as props in the character's emotional development, the novel does not challenge their subordination in Biblical discourse nor in broader Dutch culture.

Chapter 2 illustrates that the literary genre of the religious farm novel contributes to the biopolitical discourse that justifies human dominion and exploitation of nonhuman animals.

Additionally, it considered how Biblical biopolitics oppresses both nonhumans and humans, and how religious history has influenced the attitudes towards nonhumans in Dutch society.

Thirdly, the thesis investigated the attitudes of Dutch farmers towards the nonhumans that they keep. As the current discourse around animal farmers emphasizes, farmers feel misunderstood by citizens and politicians and argue that those who accuse them of animal abuse are ignorant of the actual practices of animal farming. Chapter 3 considered farmer's testimonies in the documentary *Vanaf de Velden: De boer, de tuinder, de mens* in a framework of an ethics of care, which focuses on relationality and narrative context and introduces the concept of 'attentive care,' a practice that pays attention to that which is overlooked in the traditional perspective of abstract ideals and capitalist value. Interspecies care, specifically, is based upon a power imbalance, in which nonhumans need care in a human world. Care ethics, then, aims to create justice in this inequality.

This inequality is also an important part in the biopolitical expression of pastoral power. As Mayes points out, love and care is in fact at the core of biopolitics. Wadiwel demonstrates how assumed human sovereignty precedes questions of animal welfare. The quality mark Beter Leven, which regulates minimal improvements done to industrial farming, is an example of this. Beter Leven does not question whether humans should keep animals, but rather how they should do this in the best way possible. Similarly, Dutch animal farmers do not consider the suffering that is inherent to keeping animals, such as confinement and exploitation, as a responsibility of their care.

*Vanaf de Velden* exemplifies in which ways Dutch farmers define their care in the necessary interventions that make exploitation of animals as effective as possible. They state that farmers always take care of their animals, because otherwise they would not be good products. In this sense, the care that Dutch farmers undertake can be considered a hollowed-out ethics of care; one that is production-focused and in that sense, superficial. While farmers work



closely with nonhumans, both animals and plants, they function within a fixed biopolitical system that justifies the use of nonhuman bodies for the good of human bodies. As such, the accusations of animal rights organizations cannot be conceptualized within this system. Farmers feel that they take care of their animals with great effort, and that better care is simply not possible, while animal rights organizations criticize the fundamental practice of animal farming and the suffering that is inherent within it.

The analysis of these three central stories to the Dutch cultural discourse of farmed animals demonstrates how cultural representations of farms construct, perpetuate, and naturalize human dominion over nonhuman animals. Simultaneously, they continually restate the distinctions between ‘human’ and ‘animal’ in order to justify human exploitation and consumption of other animals. As Wadiwel describes, these constructions are seamlessly integrated into society so as to appear matter-of-fact and disconnected from the extensive violence done to farmed animals on a daily basis. The Dutch context is illustrative of this, as the second largest agricultural exporter in the world and its long history of promoting the expansion of farms as well as the consumption of animal products. The Netherlands is considered a farmer’s country, despite only 2% of the working population being a farmer.<sup>196</sup> Still, the Dutch landscape is largely taken up by meadows and crops, and many people associate the Netherlands with farms.

Rethinking the naturalization of nonhuman oppression reveals how integrated these ideas are in Dutch society, as well as Western society as a whole. Deconstructing it, however, might also inspire ways in which to alter the discourse and perhaps the ways in which Dutch people consider farmed animals. Various animal rights organizations in the Netherlands are already attempting to create more awareness about the reality of animal farming. While it is not common knowledge that milk production requires structural separation of cow and calf, which

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<sup>196</sup> Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, “Feiten en cijfers over de landbouw.”

this thesis has analyzed is partially due to milk advertisements, popular programming like *Boer Zoekt Vrouw*, and the initial introduction to cows in children’s literature, well-funded campaigns like the Dier&Recht posters force public awareness. Radical organizations like Animal Rights continue to publish undercover footage of great misconduct in animal farms and slaughterhouses, contradicting the general assumption that those are exceptions to the rule. Dairy alternatives are becoming more wide-spread in the Netherlands, even outside of the large cities. Though the dominant discourse is continuously working against this progress, Dutch society without the consumption of nonhuman animals is slowly becoming thinkable.

Positive changes within animal farming, though they do not directly challenge the ethics of keeping animals, also contribute to producing an alternative discourse about farmed animals. The group Caring Farmers works to connect veterinarians, consumers, suppliers, scientists and NGO’s to quicken the transition into circular agriculture, which they define as: “Our food production must be socially and ecologically efficient so we can feed as many mouths with as little input from grounds and recourses, no external input and where there is no negative or preferably a positive impact on biodiversity, nature, climate, and the animal.”<sup>197</sup> Caring Farmers plants trees, organizes farmer’s meetings, and actively discusses the nonhuman animal in the farming industry. Similarly, in his book *Nieuw boeren* Kees Kooman interviews ten farming



Figure 11. The outside area of Kipster.

families that have transitioned into a new kind of farming. One chicken farmer, for example, created the *Kipster*, a chicken farm that is built to cater to the chicken’s natural needs and desires. The barn has a wide glass roof, allowing natural light in,

<sup>197</sup> Caring Farmers, “Wat doen we?”

as well as plants, fake tree-like structures – because the chickens quickly destroyed actual trees –, logs and branches that create climbing structures, a large outside area and generally, a great amount of space. The website explains: “A chicken is more than the combination of the eggs she lays, the food she eats and the manure she leaves. It is an animal with brains and a nervous system, with desires and feelings.”<sup>198</sup> Though *Kipster* could be considered a minimal improvement to industrial animal farming, its recognition of the paradox of farmed animal welfare signals an important change in the way of thinking about animal farming: “We have learned that animal friendly animal farming is basically impossible. ... But as long as people want animal products, we have the collective duty to treat animals with respect for their ‘being’.” Though these developments continue to raise nonhuman animals for their products and generally do not challenge the discursive categories of the ‘human’ and ‘animal,’ they are promising for the representation of farmed animals in the Netherlands.

This thesis has attempted to deconstruct the ways in which Dutch culture hides the excessive violence in human exploitation of nonhuman animals on farms by analyzing the three main stories that Dutch culture tells about farmed animals. In doing so, it aims to create an awareness of the integrated biopolitical beliefs that are dominant in Dutch culture and which maintain large-scale industrial animal farming and thereby the suffering that is inherent in to it. This awareness, as members of animal rights organizations and most vegans will attest to, has the potential to undo the deeply rooted conviction of human superiority and the naturalization of animal consumption that the discourse promotes. As such, deconstructing this discourse through careful and critical analysis hopefully has the potential to change the stories we tell, and thereby improve millions of animal lives.

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<sup>198</sup> Kipster, “Maar wat maakt *Kipster Kipster*?”

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