

Farm animals: Between pets and livestock

– A case study from a Swiss alpine farm

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Abstract

This essay explores farmers' interaction and emotional attachment to their cows. More precisely, the emotional attachment, conceptualisation of a good cow and good stockmanship was analysed using phenomenological approaches and Rhoda Wilkie's (2005: 218) classification of sentient commodities as a central concept. The fieldwork was carried out as a participant observation on an alpine farm in the Swiss Alps during one summer. The essay discusses how farmers emotionally relate to their cows, how the emotional relationship is different to other livestock animals and ultimately, how the emotional attachment of the farmer to their animals enables the transgression of the division of pet and livestock in farm animals.

Key words: Alpine farming, human-livestock interaction, Simmental cows, Switzerland

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1. Introduction

In Europe, the interaction between farmers and their dairy cows used to be very close until the introduction of milking machines in the 1920's (Ekesbo 2011: 53-55). Cows were hand-milked three times a day which led to a tight bond between humans and animals. This was a time consuming practice and with raising demand of food by a growing population, new techniques were introduced to rationalise the production of food. With the introduction of milking machines, the time spent with the individual cow was reduced – in the same time as one cow used to be hand milked, five could be milked with a machine. Along with the technical improvement, the number of cows per farmer increased dramatically during the last century because more cows could be milked in less time. These developments led to modern dairy cow farming with a high yielding cows and a less well developed human animal bond (Ibid.).

Switzerland is not an exception to this development although small scale farming managed to survive next to large scale farming until today. However, small scale farms are nowadays mainly found in the alpine and subalpine regions of Switzerland. The mountain valleys used to be isolated from each other which led not only to the development of distinct local identities but also to well-adapted livestock breeds (Lauber *et al.* 2013). The climate and topography of each valley drove the evolution of cow breeds that were perfectly adapted to the local condition and the farmers' needs (Ibid.). With modernisation and agricultural intensification, the valleys started to be more connected to the rest of the country and it was easier for farmers to get new technology and improved breeds. Improved infrastructure also allowed them to market their produce in better ways (Ibid.). With this development, the local and well-adapted breeds became gradually replaced by more modern and improved breeds (Ibid.). A lot of biodiversity got lost from this development (Ibid.), and the more intensive farming with a higher number of cows per farm means a looser bond between farmer and cows and a smaller dependence of the farmers on their individual cows. However, some farmers held on to the traditional breeds and therefore helped them survive agricultural modernisation and are until today prevalent in Swiss agriculture.

Over the centuries, not only agriculture underwent a change but also the way we relate to animals changed from seeing them as emotionless creatures to sentient beings with an own consciousness (Salisbury 1994). While agricultural modernisation led to bigger herds and an anonymisation of the livestock, many people at this time took also animals into their homes and started treating them as quasi persons. For pets, the body of literature about animal studies and human-animal interaction is

large and there are numerous studies. The main share of literature focuses on companion species (e.g. Sanders 1999, Bekoff 2002, Haraway 2008) and on rather philosophical and moral questions as to how we differ from animals or how we are allowed to treat them (e.g. Despret 2008, Haraway2003, Haraway 2008). A limited number of studies and pieces of literature have also been done on the interaction between horses and humans (e.g. Brandt 2004). Classically, animals are grouped into different categories like pets, laboratory animals, livestock, and wild animals. The study of the interaction between pets and other animals we keep as companions seems to be important and prevalent in the social sciences, the study of the interaction between livestock and humans, however, is more scant. Some authors have been studying the interaction and emotional attachment between stockpersons and their animals (e.g. Ellis 2014, Holloway 2001, Pettitt 2013, Risan 2005, Wilkie 2005; 2010). Although livestock are put into a different category than pets, they can transgress this divide as it has been suggested by some authors (e.g. Holloway 2001, Wilkie 2005; 2010). On the one hand, they provide the income for the farmers but on the other hand they can also take on a position that is much closer to a pet than a production animal. To explore how farmers are emotionally attached, how they relate to their animals and how animals can take on a status in between a pet and a farm animal is my aim for this thesis. The thesis is based on a qualitative case study set on an alpine farm in the Swiss Alps and was conducted during summer 2014.

1.1 Farming in Switzerland

Just as in most other European countries, the number of farmers in Switzerland has been constantly decreasing during the last century while the size of the average farm has been increasing accordingly (BFS 2014:9). While there were 70'500 agricultural holdings in 2000, in 2012 there were about 56'600; mainly farms holding less than 20 ha of land were closing down (Ibid.). Animal production accounts for half of the agricultural economy in Switzerland and dairy production accounts for 22% (BLW 2014:22). The rationalisation of agriculture led to more specialised farms but, compared to other European countries, it is still common to have mixed farms with livestock and crops in Switzerland (Ibid.) As in other European countries, the main share of Swiss farms are family farms (BFS 2014:32). The average Swiss farm holding has around 18 ha while average farms in Central and Northern Europe are at least double that size (Eurostat 2014). Small farms are mainly found in the alpine and subalpine parts of Switzerland while larger farms with over 40 ha

land are found along the intensively farmed plateau (BFS 2014:10).

Farmers in most European countries depend heavily on subsidies and Switzerland has among the highest subsidies in Europe and farmers would generally not be able to survive without subsidies (BFS 2014:32). With the new agricultural policy which has been implemented in 2014, subsidies are given by farmed area rather than by number of livestock as it has been the case before (BLW 2014). With this new policy, the pressure on smaller farms will be even bigger than in the past and the number of farms will most probably decrease while their size will increase. For the alpine regions, the dependence on subsidies is even larger. The farm in my study is no exception to that and as they told me, they are only able to live from their farm with the subsidies they receive from the state.

1.2. Alpine farming and traditional cow breeds in Switzerland

Alpine farming in Switzerland dates back to the Middle Ages but is still common today (Bürigi *et al.* 2013); 7100 alpine farms are in use every summer and about a third of the livestock (cows, goats, sheep, horses) is pastured on alpine farms during summer (BLW 2014). Other than the farms in the plateau, the farms in the mountains could not profit as much from agricultural modernisation because the improvement of infrastructure was too expensive for the mountainous regions (Bürigi *et al.*). At first, agricultural modernisation only brought negative impacts for alpine farming because of increased market competition but it changed gradually. The farms in the mountains eventually received more attention and support from the government for keeping a tradition alive but also for its function and impact on the alpine landscape. Farming in the mountains shapes alpine ecosystems by keeping the landscape open and creates meadows rich in biodiversity (Ibid.). The combination of keeping an old tradition alive, the positive impact on alpine habitats as well as an attraction for tourists are reasons for the government to support this farming practice (Ibid.).

Alpine farming is the seasonal husbandry of alpine regions (Bürigi *et al.* 2013: 38). Due to climate conditions, alpine regions can only be inhabited in summer which means that the livestock is moved to the mountains between late May and early September. An alpine farm can belong to a cooperative or a family (Ibid: 39) and usually livestock from different farmers are pastured on one alpine farm over summer. Until the early 20th century, dairy cows used to be the main share of livestock pastured on alpine farms (Ibid: 46). The milk was processed on the farm into cheese,

butter and other dairy products over the whole summer to secure food for winter (Ibid.). Nowadays, dairy cows are still a big share of the livestock on farms in Switzerland but there are increasing numbers of farms with mother-cow-husbandry, sheep or other livestock for meat production (Ibid: 47).

While agricultural modernisation introduced high-yielding dairy cow breeds and led to the disappearance of many older breeds, traditional cow breeds are still much more common than high-yielding breeds in some regions of Switzerland. Compared to “modern” or “improved” breeds traditional breeds give less milk, are generally sturdier and smaller and more resistant to diseases and require less feed in order to produce milk and meat (Swiss herdbook 2013).

The farmers in my study exclusively keep a traditional cow breed called the *Simmental* cow. They live in the *Simmental* region of Switzerland, a region with a high prevalence of its traditional cow breed. It is a hilly subalpine to alpine region, a region where alpine farming was and is an important part of agriculture and animal husbandry. The *Simmental* cow gives on average 7,000kg of milk per year while it would be around 10,000kg for a modern breed such as the *Red Holstein* (Swiss herdbook 2013). The *Simmental* cow is still most common in the region where it originated from whereas high yielding dairy cow breeds like the *Red Holsteins* are especially common in the intensively farmed plateau (Ibid.). *Red Holstein* cows are typical dairy cows only kept for the purpose of producing a high yield of milk, *Simmental* cows on the other hand were and still are farmed for their meat and milk which makes them a dual purpose breed (SVS 2014).

The *Simmental* cows were shipped to Africa already in the 19th century and later to countries all over the world (Ibid.). With its robustness, toughness and good physical constitution the breed is adaptable to different climates and is therefore a common sight in many countries today (Ibid.). However, the cows were cross bred with local breeds and over the decades the breeds evolved and are substantially different from the original breed. The American version, for example, is black while originally it is red or beige with a white face and legs (Ibid.). Today, the value of traditional livestock breeds has been recognised and effort to conserve the original *Simmental* cow is being made by different organisations (Pro Specie Rara 2014).

2. Research questions and aim of the thesis

Farmers keep dairy cows to make a living and therefore, the relationship between the farmers and the cows can be defined rather rational. For example, a cow can stay on the farm as long as she gives enough milk, gets a calf every year etc. However, there is an emotional bond between the farmers and their cows that resembles a relationship between a pet owner and his/her pet (e.g. Holloway 2001, Wilkie 2010, Risan 2005).

In the practice of alpine farming, the farmers have small herds and there is a high level of interaction between the cows and the farmers. An alpine farm was therefore the setting of choice for my study. Hence, the aim of this thesis is to explore how farmers emotionally relate to their cows and how livestock can transgress the division between pet and farm animal. The research questions refer to the farmers on my study farm solely.

For this thesis I therefore ask the following research questions:

- How do the farmers conceptualise what a good cow is?
- How do the farmers emotionally relate to their cows and how does the emotional relationship differ from other species?
- How is a good farmer constructed in accordance with their emotional relationship to their cows and the understating of what a good cow is?

3. Theory and conceptual framework

To understand the personal and subjective views of the farmers, phenomenological approaches are suitable. Phenomenology is the study of a person's or a group of persons' perception of the world and how they understand and make sense of it (Inglis 2012:86). Phenomenology is used to study the everyday life in an actor-centred way to understand how people see and make sense of the world and the feelings and emotions their experiences involve (Ibid.). Most things we do in our day-to-day routines happen on a semi-conscious level. For example, we do not think and reflect when we enter a bus or withdraw money – we just do it (Ibid.). Yet, these unconscious behaviours might tell much about the persons' lived experiences. What we do on a semi-conscious level is called *practical*

consciousness (Ibid.) and, hence, for the study of every day routines, this concept can help understand people's actions.

With a lack of a common, verbal language, the necessity of finding another medium through which we can communicate is essential if the desire to connect with another species exists. Depending on what ways the species we want to interact with uses to communicate with their conspecific, we might either use sounds or movements of our body. Practical consciousness shapes the way we use our bodies when we interact with other human and non-human beings. Especially when we interact with non-human beings, where vocal language is not an option, body language is important. In fact, with some animal species it is the main language that we can use to communicate efficiently with our animal partner.

As Keri Brandt (2004) found in her study about the communication between horses and humans, the body is the main medium through which communication happens (Brandt 2004:304):

Humans cannot “speak” horse, and horses do not use verbal language as a means of communication. This means that together the human and horse must create a system of communication, using a medium they both can understand. For both species, the body is a tool through which they can communicate a wide range of emotions and desires.

Compared to narratives, the study of practical consciousness and embodied knowledge enable us to understand the interaction between humans and animals on a more practical and applied level. It is the way people actually interact with their animals rather than what they say about them and what they claim about how they treat them.

Since the farmer owns his/her livestock, the power relations can never be equal and are therefore an important aspect in the relationship between humans and livestock. When one interacts with an animal that is much bigger and stronger than oneself, established power relations in the form of domination are necessary. The line between domination and violence can be thin and sometimes dominance can tip over to violence. The relationship between humans and animals and the use of dominance or violence when interacting with their animal companions has been studied by other authors before. Andrea Petitt (2013) studied the relationship between cowboys, horses and cattle. She concluded that a cowboy is considered a good cowboy if he/she can handle animals with the right amount of dominance but without being violent towards them. Since the interaction between humans and animals often happens via the body, domination is embodied as practical consciousness

in the farmer's body as he/she has to be the dominant one at all times. Domination over animals can, on the one hand, be the physical domination when interacting with an animal and, on the other hand, the less direct domination or control over an animals' body. This kind of domination can happen in the form of physical alteration of an animal's body as it has been described for race horses (Berry 2008) or the management of the herd in general. The power over other beings' bodies is called biopower (Rabinow and Rose 2006, Holloway and Morris 2014, Foucault 1990) and is commonly used to discuss power relations between human beings. However, Holloway and Morris (2014: 8) used the concept of biopower to describe the power relations between humans and animals in the context of breeding of farm animals. A farmer has at all times the control over the bodies of his or her livestock. For instance, the farmers decide when to sell an animal or which ones are good enough to breed and to go to exhibitions with.

The fact that an animal can be owned and therefore, the owner has the power over his or her animal does not necessarily mean that the animal is regarded as an object. Be it machines or animals, humans tend to credit any object of interaction with human attributes (Jackson 2002: 336-37) which can make something that is technically an object becoming a subject. In the study of human-animal interaction, the process of changing the perception of the animal from an object into a subject and back is important as it shows how humans relate to their animals in different ways.

The way people relate to their animal companions has been studied with companion species like dogs or cats. In many ways, companion animals are perceived as subjects rather than objects and at times even as quasi-persons (e.g. Haraway 2008). Companion animals or pets are classically categorised differently compared to livestock. Pets are, in this classic way of categorising, kept for joy, companionship, emotional support and, generally, less economic reasons. In contrast, livestock or farm animals are seen as purely bred and kept for economic reasons with no emotional bond between the stock person and the animals. Gradually, this view and way of categorising is changing. Rhoda M. Wilkie (2005, 2010) wrote about livestock animals and how farmers relate to them. Livestock animals are not only perceived as commodities but their sentience is recognised. In this context, she introduces the term *sentient commodity*. Sentient commodity refers to the ambiguous nature of livestock, which can be both, subject and objects. They are bred for commercial reasons and therefore commodities but at the same time they are sentient beings (Wilkie 2005: 228).

The sentient nature of livestock can be recognised on different levels. The way farmers see their livestock may depend on different factors. Rhoda M. Wilkie (2005) grouped the way farmers relate

to their livestock into four categories. Those are *detached detachment*, *concerned detachment*, *concerned attachment* and *attached attachment* (Wilkie 2005: 218). In detached detachment livestock is seen as pure commodities with no individuality. In concerned detachment, livestock is seen as sentient commodities but without granting them any individuality. In concerned attachment, livestock is decommodified and recommodified and gives them some individuality. Attached attachment, finally, decommodifies livestock without recommodifying them, livestock gets individuality and there is meaningful human-animal relationships (Ibid). The degree of emotional attachment can depend on the animal species but also on the size of the farm and herd (Ibid.).

These categories show how farmers who work with livestock have a difficult profession. All the animals they take care of will eventually be sold or get slaughtered. However, this does not mean that they do not appreciate and feel emotionally attached to their animals. In fact, it puts them into an emotionally complicated position, which characterises the ambiguity of human-livestock interaction. Colter Ellis (2014) described the profession of ranching as “emotionally labor intensive” (Ellis 2014: 95). In the context of beef production in the United States he identified a set of emotional skills that helped the ranchers deal with their emotional connection and disconnection (Ibid: 105): “Responsibility”, “dominion” and “the cycle”. The ranchers recognise their responsibility in taking care of the cattle but at the same time, they see the cattle as having a responsibility too, namely, to produce food for them (Ibid: 105-7.). Another way to deal with it is to accept the religious belief that animals are intended to be used by humans (Ibid 107-9). Finally, the cycle of beef production – breeding, birth and selling – helps ranchers to overcome the negative feelings when they sell their cattle as they know that calves will be born and the cycle of life on the farm will start over again.

The interaction between farmers and their animals and the way they relate to them has different aspects and nuances. I will use the conceptual framework discussed above to analyse my empirical findings and eventually, understand more about this complex interaction.

4 Methodology and background information about the farm

4.1. Methodology

To understand and be able to relate to people’s everyday life, their routines and worldviews,

ethnographies are valuable ways of working to come closer to the core of interest in one's studies. As Michael Jackson (1996:6) puts it:

[E]thnography remains vital, not because ethnographic methods guarantee certain knowledge of others but because ethnographic fieldwork brings us into direct dialogue with others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truths but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground. In this process our social gumption and social skills, as much as our scientific methodology, become measures of the limits and value of our understanding.

Since this study is about the farmers' views, their subjective emotional experience and the way they relate to their animals rather than about narratives and what the farmers say participant observation is the suitable method (Bernard 2006:413). Participant observation is an anthropological method and involves "immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly" (Bernard 2006:344).

Apart from participant observation I also did informal interviews with the farmers from my study farm and visiting people from other farms and relatives of the family. Informal interviews are characterised by a total lack of structure, the researcher rather tries to remember conversations held and heard during the day (Bernard 2006: 211). The informal interviews were done while we were working or during our spare time such as in the afternoons or during meals.

The main body of this study draws on observations and stories from my host family. These are the two parents and their four daughters. Throughout the essay, if not specified otherwise, *farmer* or *farmers* will refer to my host family. The people I talked to or got in contact with were either family of my host family or the neighbours and will be referred to specifically in the text.

For my fieldwork, I spent one summer, eleven weeks, on the farm and helped with different tasks and observed all everyday routines on the farm. In the beginning I helped with basic work such as mucking and housework. After one week I learned how to milk the cows and got gradually included into the whole spectrum of different tasks that are needed to be done on the farm. These included everything that was connected with the animals such as mucking stables, feeding the pigs and chickens, maintaining the cows, herding the cows in the morning and milking them. I also helped with and learned all the different steps of making cheese. In the beginning I helped with the basic

steps and towards the end I was able to carry out the whole cheese-making process. Whenever the weather allowed, we did general farm work such as maintaining the pastures, weeding, putting up and taking down fences, haymaking and I helped out with household work like cooking and cleaning. Overall, I was fully included into the everyday routines and the different tasks that needed to be done.

4.1.1. Field notes and analysis

While I was on the farm I wrote different types of field notes as it has been suggested by my supervisors and in methodological handbooks (e.g. Bernard 2006: 389). All the notes I took were hand written. I had two different types of books: One diary book and one small book for scrap notes. It is common for participant observers to have a small notebook in the pocket to take notes throughout the day (Ibid: 289-90). I chose to not do that as I did not want to make the family feel that they were under constant surveillance. Instead, I had a scrap notebook which I kept next to my bed to take small and incomplete notes of happenings throughout the day. Later, when I had more time, I put the notes together into my diary. In my diary book I wrote three different types of notes: A descriptive part, an analytical part and a diary. I always started with the descriptive part (Ibid: 397-98) where I described what has happened during the day. In the second part, the analytical part, I wrote about themes and interesting observations (Ibid: 398) and the third part was a diary in the real sense of the word with personal feelings and emotions (Ibid: 391-92). The different parts of my field notes were different in lengths depending on the day, what we were doing and how I was feeling. I usually wrote my field notes in the evenings or during calm hours of the day when I knew that I had enough time to reflect and gather my thoughts. To structure the field notes into different parts helped to organise thoughts, to divide emotions from observations and analytical thoughts and it helped to save time when the field notes were analysed after the field work.

In addition to the notes I took pictures and videos as visual memories of my time on the farm. All interactions as well as my diary were in my native tongue, Swiss German. All quotes used in this essay are therefore my translations from Swiss German to English.

After coming back from my fieldwork I sat down and wrote down certain themes that I thought were emerging and afterwards I went through my notes using the ocular scan method (Bernard 2006: 406), which means simply reading through the field notes over and over again. In that

process, certain themes and patterns emerged. I noted the themes in the margins of the note books. After this initial part, I bundled notes with similar themes together and only then did I start writing on my computer. I analysed the empirical findings using the theory and conceptual framework described under chapter 3.

4.1.2. Reflexivity

As Harvey Russell Bernard (2006: 348) points out in his book:

“Some fieldworkers start out as participating observers and find that they are drawn completely into their informant’s lives.”

This is what happened during my fieldwork. At the beginning, I felt much like “the researcher” on the farm. Even though I had some experience of working on a farm from before I clearly am no farmer and I was much more characterised as a student who did not know much about their farm, their way of living and their daily routines. Although they were kind to me from the start I could feel some distance between me and the family. I knew that I would have to work hard and proof myself, show my interest and that I was dedicated for this summer in the mountains and I did exactly do that. I worked hard and showed interest in their lives. I have always been interested in animals and skilled at working with them and they soon realised that I had a good way with the cows. That I was able to recognise all the cows after two weeks impressed them. But it was not just the ability to work with the animals, it was also my general interest and readiness to work and to do any task that made them appreciate me. After a short while we established a high level of trust and I felt much more like a member of the family than a researcher from the outside.

The fact that I come from the same region and speak the same dialect made it easy to blend in. I was cautious to not stand out as the researcher at all times since this would have influenced the relationship between me and the family, I suppose, negatively and we would not have gotten as close and an equally high level of trust. This made my work easier and more difficult at the same time. Being so close to the family enabled me to understand them and to get them to tell me personal stories but at the same time I had to remind myself that I was there for fieldwork and that I had to put on that lens and stay focused on what was going on on the farm.

At the same time as I wanted to get the family’s trust and be involved in the happenings, I needed to be clear on the fact that I am doing research and that I was going to use my observation to write my

thesis. From the first meeting I explained them my research plan and they did not have an issue with that. During the fieldwork, I kept an open dialogue about it and they were asking about my work and what I was writing about. At times, they even asked if I wrote down a certain event that they thought was important. That way, they were not deceived or unaware of the fact, that I was doing research. Being aware of ethical aspects of ethnographic fieldwork is important (Bernard 2006: 70-74). However, my presence and interest might have affected them and the stories they told. Since they knew what I was interested in, it is possible that they might have told more stories about their animals than they would have done otherwise and this is an important fact to keep in mind.

4.2. Introduction of the farm

The fieldwork was, as mentioned above, carried out as a case study on an alpine farm in the Swiss Alps between June 20th and September 6th which is also the a typical period for summer pasture in this area. The “alp” *Blatti* is situated the canton of Berne and the village of Lauenen and run by two families. The term *alp* (*Alp*, *Berg* or *Alm* in German) is used to describe a farm in the mountains plus the surrounding land as a whole, contrasting to “the Alps” which refers to the mountain chain in central Europe. The alp is divided into two sections called *Unteres Blatti* (i. e. lower *Blatti*) and *Oberes Blatti* (i. e. upper *Blatti*), throughout the essay I will just refer to *farm* which means both sections. The alp has a total area of 115ha and a range between 1660 and 2160 m a. s. l. (Alporama 2007). In the lower section, the houses and stables of the two families were completely separated while in the upper section, everything is in the same house with the two families living next door to each other. In both places, the cows are only separated by a door between the stable and the kitchen meaning that they were physically close all the time.

The alp is an alp corporation (*Alpkorporation*) between five owners (families). Alp corporations are among the common ownerships of alps in Switzerland. An alp corporation has several owners with the right to use it, which means the right to pasture their animals, but they also have the obligation to maintain it (Stadler 2008). Out of the five owners of the alp only two run the farm and take care of the animals during summer, the others stay in the valley and make hay. For some days they come and help maintaining the pastures. My host family was one of the two families that take care of the cows. In their care were their own cows (10), the brother’s cows (10) and three more cows making a total of 23 cows while the other family had a total of 18 cows. Adding to that, there were also 11

calves and 11 heifers from my host family and 28 heifers and calves from the other family. This is a total of 91 bovines for the whole alp. In addition there were also a total of 11 pigs, 6 hens, 1 rooster and two cats.

My host family were the two parents, their youngest teenage daughter, who was on the farm most of the summer, and their three older adult daughters, who were visiting and helping out sporadically. The neighbours were a couple including their children and grandchildren visiting and helping out sporadically.

4.2.1. The yearly cycle on the farm

To explain the way of living and to clarify the different farmsteads I will give an overview of the yearly cycle on the farm. This is similar for all alpine farms but cannot be applied to every one of them specifically. This particular family has 4 different farmsteads (*Wolfegg, Zünneweid, Unteres Blatti, Oberes Blatti*) and they move between them in a cycle.

As most alpine farms, they have a farm in the valley where they stay the longest time of the year, in this case it is the farm called *Wolfegg*. This one also has the most comfort with electricity, TV etc. which all the others do not have. This is also the farm where they spend the winter months.

Early in spring they move with their animals for the first time to *Zünneweid* their *Vorsass*. *Vorsass*, *Vorschess* or *Vorweid* could be translated as pre-pasture usually meaning a grazing area that is grazed before and after they go to their alp during summer. Having a *Vorsass* is typical in alpine farming. They walk with their cows and calves from one farmstead to the other and all the goods are moved with a car. There they stay for approximately 5 weeks. On this farmstead they have very simple living areas with a small kitchen and a bed. They do not stay there continuously but sleep there from time to time to save fuel.

After the five weeks in *Zünneweid*, they to move to *Unteres Blatti* which is the actual alpine farm together with *Oberes Blatti*. In *Unteres Blatti* they stay for approximately 14 days. There as well, they walk with the cows and calves and move the rest with a car. The homestead there is a bit more comfortable than in *Zünneweid* but still simple without electricity and little space. During the last days in *Unteres Blatti* we got the pigs that were going to be fattened over summer.

After those 14 days they move to *Oberes Blatti*. Moving from *Unteres Blatti* to *Oberes Blatti* is a bit different, since there is no road. The cows, calves and pigs walk while everything else is transported with a small cable car. The homestead in *Oberes Blatti* is again a bit more comfortable than in *Unteres Blatti* with a more spacious living area, a shower and toilet but still no electricity. The total time spent there is seven weeks.

After the seven weeks in *Oberes Blatti* the whole process is reversed: Two weeks in *Unteres Blatti* five weeks in *Züneweid* and then they move back to their main house in *Wolfegg* for winter. Every moving day usually takes up a full day for the actual moving plus preparation the day before and installing the day after.

The moving days are special not just because the farm is moving but it is also festive in a way. The cows get decorated with bouquets of flowers, they get all cleaned and they wear their big moving bells. Especially the *Alpaufzug* when they move to the alpine farm, in this case to *Unteres Blatti*, and *Alpabzug* when they move from the alpine farm, in this case from *Unteres Blatti* to *Züneweid* are celebrated

4.2.2. The daily routine on the farm

A lot that is particular for this farm, the way I experienced it during summer, happened as daily routines. Those routines are important since they characterise, impact and shape the lives of the farmers and the daily interactions with their animals

Every day started the same way: We got up at around 7.00. Early mornings in the mountains are always chilly with some mist hanging in the valley, sometimes the sun was slowly making its way through and on other days it was pouring rain. There was a low jingle in the air suggesting that the cows were still far away on their nightly pastures. The rooster was crying in the cage, wanted to be let out with his chickens. While walking from our room to the kitchen, we felt the chill of the fresh mountain air and hurried up to get inside again. In the kitchen, there was already a fire burning in the stove making the room a little warmer. I usually started preparing breakfast while the others took care of the cheese from the previous day and prepared everything to milk and make cheese later.

Once we were done eating breakfast one of us went to feed the pigs while the others got ready to get the cows from their nightly pastures. Getting the cows from the pastures to the stable took, depending on how far away they were, 30 minutes to one hour. There was always one of us waiting back by the stable to tie the cows up as soon as they come back. As soon as all cows were at their places, we started with the milking. We used milking machines that were driven by a pump and a current generator. The bucket from the milking machine was emptied into a copper pot that could hold 400 litres of milk and that we later used to make cheese. The milking took around two hours and while the cows were milked, one of us washed the cows' tails.

After the milking, it was time to make the cheese. Cheese is the main income during summer and therefore it is important to work thoroughly and do it properly. As the milk was already in the pot, we added the bacteria culture from the previous day, put it over an open fire and started heating it up. Once the milk reached 32.5 °C we took it away, added rennet and let it rest for 30 minutes. After that the milk curdled and we cut it into small pieces, until it looked like cottage cheese and then put an electric stirrer into the pot and let it stir for another 30 minutes. After that, it was heated on the fire again, up to 52°C within 40 minutes. When it reached the temperature, we (always 2 persons) took the cheese out with big linen sheets and put the fresh cheese into plastic rings so it would get its shape. The whole cheese making process took between 2 and 3 hours. Just after we finished making the cheese, one of us went to feed the pigs with fresh whey. Meanwhile somebody had to make lunch and prepare the bacteria culture to make cheese for the next day. This meant that depending on how many people were there, two persons had to do everything or if there were more, we split the responsibilities.

In the afternoon, if the weather was nice, we went out to do some maintenance work on the land which involved cutting down small trees and pulling out weeds. Sometimes we had to change the fences so the cows could go to different pastures or there were some other small works to do such as cutting wood. However, the cheese had to be flipped over a few times in the afternoon for it to get a good structure. This meant that somebody had to be in the house all afternoon to take care of the cheese. If the weather was bad, we stayed in and played cards, read, or drew and had time to chat.

At around 5 we had to go back into the stable to start mucking. We always mucked before milking in order to keep ourselves and the cows fairly clean. This took around 30 minutes and then we milked all the cows again. When we were done with that, which took around 2 hours again, all the

cows were released to go on their nightly pastures. The cows were always inside during the day and outside during the night because there were so many flies and horse flies during the day that would stress the animals.

After all the cows were out, we mucked the stable again, put new straw in and fed the pigs. All of that took another 30 minutes to 1 hour. After the animals were taken care of, we ate dinner and afterwards went to bed.

5. Empirical findings and analysis

5.1. Individual interaction

The every-day-interactions between the farmers and the cows show the typical interactions, how the farmers relate to their cows and how they communicate with each other. But it is also the interactions during special days that characterise their relationship. While working on a farm like that, there was a lot of interaction with the cows and the other animals. The cows' stable was only separated from the kitchen by a wooden door and one could always hear and smell them and it was easy to check on them by just opening the door. This section will discuss how individual interactions with the cows are shaped and will also show the way body language is used to communicate with another species that shares no common vocal language.

5.1.1. Herding: Body language

When we got the cows in the morning it was always the same ritual. Right after breakfast we got ourselves ready with appropriate clothing depending on the weather. Using binoculars, we checked where the cows were, and then everybody grabbed a wooden stick and started walking towards the cows. To get the cows efficiently, we first went to the groups furthest away and started moving towards the stable and on the way we would take all the cows with us. To me, it always looked so simple to do this since they just went out and came back with the cows and I did not see what was happening on the way. But once I go out there myself I realised how much actually happens and can go wrong while doing this.

I remember one morning, when all the cows were somewhat scattered and it was just two of us who went out to get them. I walked towards the cliffs that created natural fence to get one part of our herd. I walked and walked and it felt like after every turn there would be more cows and I had to continue walking for some time to find them all. Once I was in the very far end and I found the last cow, I wanted to take them back. The problem was only, that they were scattered along the hill as well – some of them were on the bottom of the hill and some were on top of it. It was very difficult for me to get them moving as a herd, so what I did was to run up and down the hill and made them move individually. Obviously, this took me a long time and resulted in me being frustrated and angry at the cows. Coming finally back to the stable, the farmers were somewhat amused with me being so upset with the cows.

For the farmers, it is not such a difficult task to get the cows from the pastures back to the stables. It is, after all, what they are doing most of their lives and what they grow up with. For them it was an easy task and they did not think that they needed to tell me how to do it. They learn their skills to interact with and handle their cows while they grow up. Children are involved in the farm almost as soon as they can walk. They start taking care of animals like the chickens first and then the calves, the heifers and the cows. On my study farm, it was always the youngest child who took care of the calves, the second youngest took care of the heifers and the older ones helped with the cows. This way, they get to know their animals and they learn how to read and interact with them. It becomes natural and there is no need to reflect on it because it is in their practical consciousness. I, on the other hand, had an obvious lack of skills when I tried to herd the cows because I had to learn everything. While the farmers are able to interact with and read the intentions of the cows without thinking and considering what would be best to do, I had to reflect and think about what I learned and then it was maybe already too late.

The way of interacting and communicating with animals via the body and body language is not unique to cows but is similar with many companion and other animals. Donna J. Haraway (2008:212-213) for example, lists a number of details that one has to follow when starting agility training with dogs. While those details feel rather technical in the beginning and have to be learnt by heart, after a while, they start to feel natural, are taken into one's practical consciousness, and the human and the animal are able to understand each other. Just like that, I had to learn how to interact with the cows and while it felt strange in the beginning, after some time I realised that I was not thinking about how I have to do certain things anymore but just did them.

Besides the knowledge of the cows, they also know the terrain. The oldest daughter once explained to me:

“I try to always make them cross the rivulet over there [pointing at a shallow part of the rivulet]. That way, they walk over that path and not through the really wet area where they always split up.”

This quote shows on the one hand, that she has an understanding of both the terrain and the herd of cows. She knows how to combine the knowledge to get the cows moving and to make them walk where she wants them to. These are skills that cannot be learned during one summer but are gained through years of practice. When I think back to my attempt to move the cows, I realised how different they would have done it. First of all, they knew the terrain; they knew where to walk with the cows, where it would have been easier. Second, they would have succeeded in moving them as a herd instead of running up and down the hill. Many times I observed in awe how they managed to herd the cows together, exactly the way they wanted them to.

Once, I was getting the cow with our neighbour. He told me to go there or go there in order so they would walk in the desired manner. I was completely lost and confused but for him it made sense and in the end the cows walked in a nice trail back to the stable, exactly the way he intended them to. In moments like these I felt like the farmers were able to predict what the cows will do, how they will react and where they will go if certain things were to happen. Apart from this, it is about where you put your body in relation to the cows' bodies and how you move. You should not stand too close and neither too far away from them, use the right amount of determinism and domination. But it was important to always stay calm and not overdue with violence because that would destroy the dynamics of the herd and would make the animals nervous.

On moving days, on top of the usual interaction between farmers and their animals, there was a range of activities unique to moving days and, coming along with that, unique interactions between humans and animals. Moving days are not just a special day for the farmers but also for the animals. The moving bells are almost like a trigger for the cows. As soon as they hear that the moving bells are taken down they start mooing and get alert and nervous, just as they would know what is going to happen when they hear those bells. Once, some of the other farmers came by to do some maintenance work and they were standing outside the stable chatting with each other. Usually, they would only come all together on the moving days so the cows were standing up, started to moo. They seemed to have mistaken the people to be there for moving. Given the excitement of the cows

during moving days, I imagined them to start running as soon as they get released. They did do that when we moved from *Oberes Blatti* to *Unteres Blatti* but at that time they were supposed to move by themselves. All we had to do was to release them and they walked to the new grazing ground without anybody guiding them, just as if they knew what they were supposed to do. But when we moved between *Züneweid* and *Unteres Blatti* they did not do that but waited for the person leading the trail to call them with a loud “*CHUU EM, CHUUU EM, CHUUU EM*” which can be related to the Swiss German word “chum” which means “come”. It is, however, shouted out loud, supposedly imitating the sound when cows call for each other. As soon as the leading person started walking and calling them they started walking and followed that person. They followed that person even if they were passing by very tasty grass.

Even though we cannot really know what the cows are thinking, in these situations it seemed like the cows knew exactly what was going to happen and what they were supposed to do. The moving bells seem to be like a kind of trigger that tells them that something special is going on and from previous experiences they remember what happens when they wear those bells. Besides the bells, the locality also seemed to make a difference since they behave differently when we moved between *Oberes* and *Unteres Blatti* and *Züneweid* and *Unteres Blatti*. If these observations are compared to the existing literature on companion species (e.g. Haraway 2008), there are similarities. Cows seem to be able to read their human companions and understand their intentions in particular situations as it has been described before with dogs, for example.

5.1.2. Inside the stable: Dominance and violence

Cows live in social groups with strong hierarchies where only one cow can be the leader cow. The leader cow is the strongest cow and all the other cows yield to her. Knowing the power structures and the hierarchy between the cows is helping the farmer to understand his herd. It is not only about knowing who is stronger and who is weaker but the farmer also has to place himself in the herd – or on top of it rather. Just as the leader cow is the strongest and therefore dominant over the herd, the farmer takes the same position but above the leader cow. Domination is a crucial factor for a well-functioning herd and it is necessary to interact with cows in a safe way.

After we got the cows to the stable, we had to tie them up at their places. Some of them always went to their places and some of them never did. When a cow was on the wrong place and I wanted

her to change and go to her place it was often hard to get her moving. But when the farmer came, he only needed to use a bit of a louder voice and she would not just go away from the wrong place but also immediately go to her place. It was so striking that he is the boss of the herd. Without using any violence at all the cows would obey. His whole body expressed so much assertiveness and dominance and he just does this, he does not need to think about how to act in order to make the cows move. He spent his life working with cows and knows how to read them and how to handle them. Having said that, I hardly ever saw him getting angry at his cows at all and neither did I see him being violent with his cows. He knows his herd by heart and knows exactly how to treat every single individual and the cows in turn know him and respect him. I, in comparison, was not used to working with cows and at first had to learn how to read them and how to handle them while they also had to accept and respect me.

Several times I was told:

“The cows do not respect you enough!”

They were always making it very clear, that the cows have to respect you and if they do not, they could seriously injure one. That is why they always pointed out:

“You always have to bring a stick with you when you go to the cows but you never bring the stick inside the stable because it makes the cows scared and fearful and it will be much more difficult to tie them to their places!”

The way the farmers expressed themselves, dominance is good and necessary and the cows have to respect the farmers. Violence, however, is unacceptable. This attitude was vocalised often. It seems like the fact that someone is good with animals is much more important and worthy to talk about than if someone is incapable. It is appreciated when people are able to be dominant over the cows without being violent towards them, the cows should respect the farmer and not get fearful and anxious. This is similar to the findings of a study about the relationship between Canadian cowboys and their horses and the cattle they herd (Petitt 2013). As much as dominance over the animals is important, a good cowboy is supposedly one that can communicate with the animals, can read and understand them without using an unnecessary amount of violence.

But it is not always the farmer who is in charge but the cows can be taking decisions or even be dominant in certain situations. When I let the cows loose for the first time I was not used to the way cows behave, I did not know how to do it and where to stand and also, nobody told me because for

them it was such an obvious thing. So I just stood next to the cow and untied her and expected her to walk back. But she did not and walked towards me instead. Later it was pointed out to me that I should always walk away when I untie the cows because sometimes they are very eager to get out and then they could just run me over.

“You always have to watch out when you are with the cows. Even the nicest and most gentle cow might hurt you. If they get scared or start fighting with each other, they won’t watch out for you!”

In these situations it is accepted that the cows are eager to get outside and that we are not supposed to stand in their ways although we are supposedly the dominant ones and the cow would technically need to yield and walk around us. For the farmers it is natural how a cow should be untied and where you should stand so she does not run you over. Just like the tying up, releasing them is knowledge deeply rooted in the understanding of the relationship between the cows’ and humans’ bodies. It is not just the “not standing in the cows’ way” but also the handling of the cows before untying and on the way out, being able to read them and foresee what they are up to and potentially prevent something bad to happen.

Having said that, the farmer has to be dominant in such a way that the cows do not try to challenge the power relations. This is similar to the way the leader cow is always dominant and the other cows do not really challenge it. In the same way as the leader cow uses subtle movements to show her dominance, the farmers do the same thing – be it with their body language or by using their voice. But once the dominance is established, the cows know it and they do not challenge it. It was striking for me so many times when I tried to make the cows stand up or when they went to the wrong places. I sometimes tried to make them move for what felt like an eternity while the farmer just came and said one word and the cow obeyed. This shows how the cows actually knew what they were supposed to do but they just tried me, they knew that I was new and that the hierarchy was not as clear as with the farmers.

5.1.3. Milking: Sealing the bond

We had three machines to milk all the cows; 23 in the beginning and 10 in the end because gradually, more and more went “dry”. A cow becoming dry means when a cow goes from lactating into the period before calving when she is not milked. This happens – at least on this farm – two

months before calving for the cows to recover and to assign enough energy to the calf. The cows were always milked in the same order and by the same person which left them the same amount of time between every milking and therefore they had a stable milk yield.

We started milking them as soon as all of them were in the stable. The procedure was the same every morning: I grabbed one of the machines, a milking stool – a special stool with only one leg that can be strapped around the waist in order to sit while milking instead of having to crouch next to the cow – and some cleaning tissues and went to my first cow. My first cow was always Wilma. While putting the machine next to her and connecting it to the vacuum pipe I gently stroked her, talked to her and sat down next to her to clean the udder. Then I put the milking cups over the teats and she was milked for about five minutes. During that time I either stood by her head and stroked her or brushed her. When she was done I checked if she actually gave all the milk because sometimes the cows do not. To check this, I gently squeezed the udder to feel if it was empty or if there was still milk in it. If there was still milk in it, I massaged the udder and pulled down the milking cups to increase the vacuum force to get the rest of the milk out. When the udder was empty, I released the vacuum, the cups came off and I turned off valve for the vacuum pipe, emptied the milk into a bucket and went to the next cow.

Milking is an intimate interaction happening twice a day. Some handling has to happen, no matter if it is on a large farm or on a small one like the farm I was doing my fieldwork on. Compared to beef cattle farming or pig rearing, dairy cow farming has much more human-animal interactions on a regular, daily basis. There was always some waiting time between the milking of two cows which left room for some caressing, brushing and appreciation of the herd as a whole. Comparing that with the heifers, there is a striking difference. They still know their heifers but never did I hear the same affection about a heifer as about a cow. On the one hand, they are young and therefore have not been “in the family” for very long. And on the other hand, they are outside most of the time and most importantly, they are not milked which means there is much less interaction between them and the farmers. This intimate and frequent interaction between the farmers and the cows enables them to develop a close bond. If the interaction would not happen as frequently and not be a necessity, as it is the case with beef cattle for example, the farmers would have to work actively on this bond. Therefore, a bond between humans and animals is predetermined in the system of dairy farming.

Although cows seem passive while being milked, they actually are not and they do know the course of the milking and know when they should be milked. Every time a cow went dry, we only milked

her once a day instead of twice in order to decrease the milk production a little bit and to prevent the udder of becoming too tense¹. This meant that we skipped milking the cow once every day for three days and some of the cows reacted because they expected to be milked since they knew the course of the milking. When Alissia went dry and I skipped milking her for the first time, she was fixating me with her eyes and followed every step that I took, it seemed like she was trying to get my attention. The cows are also well aware of the person milking them and they do recognise somebody new – be it from the looks, the smell or the inept handling. When I was in the stable for the first few times, the cows were very curious about me; some of them were just staring at me like they were wondering what I was doing in here, some of them sniffed me thoroughly and some licked me. If the cows do not like the person milking them they can as well refuse to give the milk. The first time I milked Anita, for example, she did that and there is nothing one can do about it except wait and see if it will be any better the next time. With Anita, the next morning she was fine with me and everything went smooth. Then there are those cows that just dislike certain persons. Wilma is one of those. She and the second youngest daughter dislike each other and there is not much one can do about it; if she wants to milk her, Wilma does not give any milk.

During the process of milking individual characters like the ones described above become obvious. Compared to a herd of cows that is outside or in a large freestall all day and night, the interaction between farmer and cow is given at least twice a day for several hours. This is why the process of milking bonds the farmer and the cows tightly and makes dairy cows one of the more affectionate farm animals. It is this inevitable interaction that increases the likelihood of them developing emotional attachment towards each other. Even on a larger scale, dairy farmer seem to be more attached to their animals than other livestock farmers such as beef cattle, pigs or poultry farmers (Bock *et al.* 2007, Ekesbo 2011). How the farmers on the farm I studied are making a difference between different species will be discussed further into the essay.

5.2. From subjects to objects and back

The cows on the farm were treated like individuals and they were seen as subjects in many ways. For one, they all had names which made it easy to distinguish them from each other. They were also allowed to have their individual characters and peculiarities. However, sometimes they were also

¹ This practice is controversial and we had some discussions about it. It may make the process of going dry less uncomfortable for the cow but it may also take her longer to get dry, the chances of infection might increase etc.

treated like commodities, much more like objects. This is the ambiguity of farm animals. They are at the same time treated as a commodity, more like objects, and as sentient beings, more like subjects. In the forthcoming section I will describe how the transition between object and subject happens and how it differs between different types of farm animals.

5.2.1. Pigs

Traditionally, pigs are kept on alpine farms to turn the leftover from making cheese, the whey, into meat. It is, up to today a common practice on alpine farms. This fact already describes the crucial difference between cows and pigs. While cows are on the farm and in the family for years, the pigs are only kept for one summer and for the obvious reason to be slaughtered and turned into food. This fact influence the way the farmers interact with and relate to the pigs as compared to the cows.

On the moving day the pigs were the first animals to be moved. Pigs have bad vision which probably is one of the reasons why it is rather difficult to move them. The pigs' range was fenced with an electric fence and since their vision is poor, they do not actually see the fence but know where it is because they get a shock a few times. Even when the fence is down, they would not pass the line by any means. I was told a story from a previous moving day when they tried to move the pigs through the range and over the line where the electric fence was. Nothing helped; the pigs would not cross that line. After a long while, they realised why it was not working and took the pigs out through the entrance door and this worked without problems. So this is how we did it too. We opened the door and stood outside and called them. Even though they were sceptical, they finally came outside and we started walking. I was walking in front of them calling them with a hearty *HÖSCH HÖSCH HÖSCHÄ HÖSCH*. They use this call to call for the pigs; it is supposedly an imitation of the sound the pigs make when they communicate with each other. While walking in front of them and calling them, they were following me, the two other persons were helping and walking after the pigs just to make sure that they would not leave the path.

Although the farmers were telling me that moving the pigs is different from moving the cows, to me it seemed quite similar. One person walks in front and calls them and some more people following to make sure that all the animals stay on track. However, the handling of the pigs differs from the cows. Pigs are very susceptible to stress and if something happens one needs to keep patience. If they see something startling they will take a long time to investigate it and to make sure that it is not

dangerous. And since we were walking on a mountain path it was important to keep them on the path because otherwise they could have fallen down.

On the way, we were chatting and the brother of the farmer from my host family said:

“You know, pigs are very different from cows. Cows are smart you can somehow train but pigs you can’t. They just do whatever they want.”

The attitude farmers have towards the pigs is negative. The moving of the pigs is perceived as an unpleasant task as compared to the moving of the cows. In a chapter about attitudes of stockpersons towards their animals Hemsworth and Coleman (2011: 95-102) found that the attitudes a stockperson has towards a certain animal or group of animals also influences the way they handle them. Positive attitudes generally facilitated the handling of the animals while a negative attitude was a precursor of problems during the handling. So there is something happening even before one starts working with an animal or a group of animals. The attitude one has towards them is built and maintained before the encounter but then influences the encounter. In the process of forming an attitude, I argue that the subjectivity of an animal is playing an important role. By granting the animal a subjective character, it is more likely to see it as a sentient being which makes it more likely to accept the acting of the animal as something with a reason behind and not just out of stupidity or ignorance. If the animal is seen as a smart and sentient being, it is granted a status as a subject rather than an object and the attitude will be more likely positive than negative. If the animal is not granted any subjective character, on the other hand, but just seen as an object who acts out of stupidity or unintelligible reasons, it is much more likely to have negative attitudes towards the animals. In this context, the pigs were seen as stupid animals that cannot be taught anything compared to the cows that are much smarter and easier to handle. It is, therefore, the negative attitude they have towards pigs that influences the way they interact and relate to them.

Pigs are treated and related to differently than cows. Pigs are much more seen as commodities than the cows. They are on the farm for one summer in order to produce meat with relatively little interaction and then they are sent to the slaughterhouse. Drawing on categories made by Rhoda M. Wilkie (2005:218), cows and pigs could be grouped into different categories. While the relationship to the cows is most like attached attachment, the relationship with the pigs is between concerned detachment and concerned attachment. The pigs are not really seen as individuals, rather as a herd. They never really get names; they just name them after the week days because they always have

seven pigs. However, there was one pig called Wednesday, who was somehow standing out and was recognised as an individual. Interestingly, he was also the one who went to the slaughterhouse the last although he was the biggest and should have been going with the first pigs. Wilkie (2010:133) found, that *[S]tockmen seem to actively befriend a few animals, regardless of the size of the herd. This serves the obvious function of managing the rest of the herd, which makes their job easier, but it also injects interest into their day-to-day work.*

Be it an active choice or a coincidence that Wednesday was standing out as an individual it was an interesting observation. It made the pig herd a bit more individual with Wednesday standing out like that. It moved the pigs from concerned detachment to concerned attachment. At the same time, it is striking, how the pigs are different in their purpose, they are not on the farm to stay but to be slaughtered in the end of summer. The farmers know from the beginning that the pigs are there as a source of food, in fact, they are often referred to as food. This reference of them being food may be a way of actively detaching themselves from the pigs as it has been showed by before by other authors (e.g. Wilkie 2005: 141). The pigs are treated like the sentient commodities they are: The farmers are concerned about their wellbeing, they might appreciate their intelligence and might also enjoy petting them or playing with them but it is never the same affection as when they handle or talk about their cows. While there were countless stories about cows that have long been passed away, there was not a single story about a pig that was kept for fattening. There were a few stories about pigs rather as a group or about individual pigs that were sick for some reason but they were not appreciated in the same way and they were not talked about in the same affectionate manner. There was, however one pig called Louise, she was a breeding sow and there were some stories about her showing affection towards her.

Bock *et al.* (2007) used Wilkie's (2005:218) classification for their study about farmers' relationships with different animals in different countries. What they found was that the way farmers relate to their livestock depends on the livestock species, the size of the herd and on the production system. Beef or veal farmers showed much less emotional attachment than breeders or dairy farmers who have the individual animal for a much longer time (Bock *et al.* 2007: 113). The same was true for pig farmers, while in general being less attached to their pigs than cows, they showed a closer bond to breeding sows than to fattening pigs (Ibid:114). As a reason, they named the number of animals but also an active detachment to the animals since they know that they are going to be slaughtered and they do not want to get too attached to them. Wilkie (2005: 142) also found that fattening animals are seen like meat and hoof rather than animals with individual

characters and personality. The farmers in my case study did exactly the same, the one breeding sow they had was named and still remembered years after they sold her while the countless fattening pigs were frequently referred to as meat and none of the fattening pigs seemed to have a story worth remembering.

Referring to the pigs as meat is a way of emotionally distancing oneself from the animals. As Colter Ellis (2014) found, farmers have different emotional skills and strategies to deal with the fact, that they breed and raise animals for slaughter. By allotting the animals a responsibility or a job that they have to fulfil, the whole process becomes natural. To see the pigs as meat and to accept that this is their job that they have to do, just as it is the farmers job to take care of them, it becomes emotionally easier to deal with the fact of killing animals that they raised and cared for.

5.2.2. Cows

Cows are, as already touched upon in the section above, treated and seen differently from pigs. Although the cows are kept for commercial reasons, in many ways they are treated more like pets than like production animals.

As it happens, not all cows get pregnant immediately and at the first try. In this case, the farmer has to decide if this cow can stay and or if she has to go. If the cow stays, they might try artificial insemination or they might wait until the next mating season, meaning that she stays on the farm without being really profitable. Kastanie was one of those cows that did not get pregnant, she only had her second calf and got very good placing at the exhibitions and therefore they decided to keep her. But other cows had different fates and they had to be sold. On the one hand age seems to be a crucial factor when it is decided if a cow should stay or not. It is emotionally much more difficult to sell a cow that has been on the farm for a very long time than one who just has been there for a couple of years. But it is also the animal's "career path" that influences the way the farmers get attached to it in the first place (Wilkie 2005: 142). By knowing that an animal will stay on the farm for long, the farmers allow themselves to get emotionally attached compared to fattening animals that only stay on the farm for a short while. Although Kastanie was not on the farm for very long, she had her trajectory as a dairy cow and was therefore related to in a different way than if she would have been a stock animal. The same is true for calves. The female calves are kept to grow up and be dairy cows themselves. If a calf gets sick, it is treated and the veterinary bills often exceed

its value. If fattening or stock animals get sick or injured, they are rather put down in order to save money.

Cows on this farm are never really treated as object but are subjects from the day they are born². They get names, they are tended to and caressed and they play with them. The process of growing up is observed and registered. They sometimes talked about the heifers and how they were developing, how they changed since they were calves. Each of them has her individual history, some of them were sick when they were calves, others were really small and cute or any anecdote about them really. They do value their cows as individuals and they appreciate every life. They were upset by the fact that in some large dairy farm the male calves are just suffocated and “discarded” as soon as they are born. The oldest daughter once said:

“They put the hand over the nostrils and wait until they stop breathing. Just after they are born. And then they are thrown away. How can they do that? It is still a life!”

It may be that cows are treated as pure commodities on some farm but on this particular farm they are not. They are treated as sentient commodities. While they are very individually treated throughout their life on the farm, sooner or later every cow has to go. When a cow is not profitable anymore, meaning she does not get pregnant anymore or is sick for some reason, she has to go because after all they live off their livestock. At this point, the cow becomes a commodity again; she changes from a subject into an object. Somehow the farmers need to deal with the fact that they have to sell their animals after a long time on their farms. Unlike the pigs, the cows are not on the farm for the purpose of becoming food, they are on the farm to produce milk and calves over long period of time. While it might be easy to stay distant to an animal that is only on the farm for some months, a cow that is milked twice a day for over a decade is impossible not to bond with and get emotional feelings for. Other studies have found similar findings; that people have bigger problems to give away breeding and other animals that are on the farm for a long time (Wilkie 2010, Bock *et al.* 2007).

If a cow has to be sold, they either bring her to a livestock market or they bring the cow to the slaughterer directly. If they do either of it depends on the animal. They consider it to be more humane if they bring the cow to the slaughterer directly because the cow will get slaughtered

² At least the females, the males might be on the farm for a short while and then get sold if they are not kept for breeding purposes.

immediately without having to wait, being driven around in a trailer or having to move around and change owners. If they sell a young cow, she would be sold at the market because she might not have to be slaughtered yet and might get an owner that keeps her. If the cow is old, on the other hand, she will have to be slaughtered and this is when they bring the cow to the slaughterer themselves. They say that they get less money but they prefer it because everything will be done properly. They can take the meat back and eat it but this is not always appreciated. They told me the story of Fränzi, one of their most precious and liked cows they had. When she had to be slaughtered they took the meat home but when they sat around the dinner table, nobody touched the food. They could not eat their favourite cow that was on their farm for such a long time.

The farmers do see their cows as sentient commodities and they do accept that they have to be slaughtered when they are not economically profitable anymore but much like pet owners, they do feel grief when they have to slaughter one of their favourite animals and it seems to be again this trajectory of an animal that makes it hard to change it into something else. A dairy cow is not meant to be food and therefore they had troubles when they were supposed to eat Fränzi. Other studies found that farmers have troubles slaughtering their dairy cows (Eriksson 2011, Holloway 2001). In some cases, the farmers even let the cows die of old age and do not bring them to the slaughterer (Eriksson 2011: 9). Even if they bring the cows to the slaughterer, they remember them years after their deaths which is again, much like pets.

5.2.3. More than livestock

Whenever we were sitting together, be it for a meal or in the evenings after all the work was done, they always told a lot of stories. Most of the stories were in one or another way connected to farming and the experiences they made on the farm during summer. And out of the stories that circled around the farm, the majority were about their cows and how some cows were special in certain ways and that they had on their farm for a long time.

The most common way to name the cows is to choose a name starting with the same letter as the mother's name. That way, it is easily possible to know who were the mother and grandmother of any cow. They currently have four lines: The V-line (Viviane), the F-line (Fränzi), the R-line (Rosline) and the W-line (Wilma). For example, Viviane, one of the cows that were talked about a lot, has progeny called Violetta, Viktoria, Valena etc. By knowing the name of a cow, you will

know to which line she belongs and who her ancestors were. From the beginning, they told me how the cows were related to each other, what the names of their mothers and grandmothers were and how they are similar or different from each other.

One of those cows was Viviane, she reached the age of seventeen which is very old for a dairy cow especially compared to cows on conventional farms which only become around five years of age. A cow that is seventeen years old will have had fifteen calves if she got pregnant every year³. For the farmers it is important to have “good cows”. A cow that has been on the farm for such a long time and has such a big number of offspring is obviously a good cow. A good cow has many different attributes such as good legs, a good udder, a consistent character, good fertility and good overall health that can easily be connected to economic aspects. However, there are other aspects that cannot be explained by economic needs but rather emotions and affection. Some of the cows that were on the farm were not at all the most profitable of cows but were attributed by their personality or their beauty. Ramona is one example. They had to sell one cow and had two to choose from. Ramona, who is a beautiful cow with a nice face, beautiful horns and very affectionate but rather hard to milk; Heidi on the other hand is very easy to milk, gives a decent amount of milk but is otherwise not such a nice cow, she had one of her horns removed during a fight and did not seem to be as affectionate. When they were discussing, which one they wanted to keep, they finally decided to keep Ramona although Heidi would have been more economically more valuable:

“But look at this beautiful face!”

The beautiful face, horns and the character seemed to be more important than the milk yield or the ease to milk the cow. Of course, beauty also has an economic value. To have beautiful cows means that you can go to exhibitions and in turn sell them more expensively, also their offspring will be sold more easily and more expensively. Venus is one of those super cows that were allowed to go to the big exhibition in Berne. They said that this significantly raised her value. They were offered a lot of money for her but they kept her anyways because they like her. And having such a cow in your herd also means that you probably will have good offspring from her and this in turn will on the one hand improve the herd overall but is also an economic security because the calves will have a higher price.

³They get their first calve at the age of three, some of them even at the age of two, and will then have one every year.

There is also the affective aspect of keeping cows and this seems to be completely disconnected from economic aspects. Although this was not vocalised (except by the youngest daughter), it was obvious that the farmers like working and spending time with their animals. When the farmer walked by his cows and he had this gentle looks in his eyes and stroke over of them over the back, for me this was a clear sign of emotional connection to his cows.

Viviane was one of the cows they talked about a lot. She seemed to be very sensitive and easily scared.

“If Viviane would have been with a very stern farmer that wouldn’t have caressed her as much and have patience with her, she would have died for sure.”

She needed very gentle handling and a lot of affection. Affection and the personality of this cow and all the other cows are irrelevant for the operation of the farm, but still they are appreciated and valued by the farmers.

The way farmers talk about their cows, with the family lines and the affection they show towards their animals, reminds of dog or horse owners. Much like hobby farmers or pet keepers, they know their animals very well, they know who their mothers and fathers are and they know their offspring, they know the family history of all the cows and they have plenty of stories to tell about their cows. It seems that there is more than pride over the herd, it is not always the “best cows” that they feel affection towards but basically any cow

The farmers are in the difficult place of economically relying on their animals and at the same time seeing them somewhat more than just commodities and a means for survival. This is the ambiguous position that farm animals have. They are appreciated, in a way they are part of the family and the same time the farmers depend economically on them and at some point they have to decide to send a loved animal to the slaughter for the sake of their own survival. Those decisions are often difficult and painful for the farmers but they are necessities in a life of a farmer because otherwise he would not be a farmer. In a way, they are prepared for this final decision all of the life of the cow because it is the trajectory of a cow on a farm. But opposed to the relationship they have with the pigs, they do allow themselves to get attached to their cows. Being attached to an animal is not just positive for the animal but also for the farmer. Lewis Holloway (2001) made a similar conclusion in his study about the relationship of hobby farmers to their animals in England and Wales. In these contexts, the farm animals acquire a status between the traditional category of livestock and pet

(Ibid: 305). This study only talks about hobby farmers and somehow puts them outside the field of farming as a profession it shows the two-sided relationship people have to farm animals. Farm animals cannot be purely regarded as livestock and neither can they be regarded as pets.

5.3. The meaning of the *Simmental* cow as a breed

The foregoing sections dealt rather with the individual character of human-animal interaction on this farm. In the last section I would like to go deeper into the perception of the breed as such. Many aspects of the life as a farmer play into the importance of the cow breed. By having this lifestyle, they are not as much oriented on profit and commercial farming but can have their dual purpose cows instead of specialised dairy cows

5.3.1. The pride of the herd: Tails and horns

A really big emphasise was put on having clean and well-tended animals in the stable and since the summer was so rainy, the cows came back with dirty tails basically every morning. Only washing the tails of all the cows took almost two hours every day. It could be questioned why they put so much effort into cleaning the tails, after all, they could be washed every second day or once a week and it would still be ok. But it seems like it is a part of the pride they have in their cow herd. The feeling you get if you look into a stable and you see only clean and well-tended cows is a different one than if you have a stable full of dirty animals. Once they told me that washing the tails is important so they would be white for the exhibition and if the tails would not be washed every day they would have a yellowish colour instead of white. In a way, this procedure is a preparation for these exhibitions. When going to these exhibitions the farmers only want to present their best cows, they want to show the quality of their herds and of course having well-tended animals is a plus in these occasions.

An aesthetically beautiful animal can have an increased monetary value and therefore, people sometimes put animals through various kinds of operations. Bonnie Berry (2008:84) lists a number of surgical procedures that thoroughbred horses may undergo in order to increase their monetary value. Those involve less invasive procedure such as shock-wave therapy to make their throats look clearer and more invasive procedure such as implants to alter the bone structure of their legs or the

taking of anabolic steroids. Those are all procedure that do not change any genetical traits and therefore do not have an effect on the breeding but they alter and improve the looks of the horses and accordingly, the person who owns the horse gets appreciation from the fellow horse owners: *If the horse looks good, the human owner looks good* (Berry 2008:64).

Just as the procedures with the racing horses, the washing of the tails is a way to increase the value of a cow during the shows. The value might not just be monetary but could also be emotional or increase the respect the farmers get from their colleagues. However, the tail-washing ritual also illustrates a lot of the relationship the people have with their cows. Often they point out, how they like their animals to be natural but really they are not that natural. Having clean and white tails is not such a natural thing for a cow in any case. It is rather the way of constructing an ideal cow, a cow that is “washed, brushed and polished for the show ring” (Holloway and Morris 2014: 2) that make the importance of having cows with white tails in the stable. The aesthetics of a breeding animal are, at times, entirely loosened from productive value and are just taken care of because the breeders or the judges consider them as being good or an important characteristic of the breed (Ibid: 15). While the procedure of washing tails is not exactly as invasive as the procedures described above (Berry 2008:64), it is in a way a similar practice. Instead of trimming the hair or even docking the tail as it is done on some farms, here, the tails are well tended and a lot of time is spent to keep them clean and neat. The looks of the animal are somewhat pivotal for the farmers and the way they look as a farmer and breeder. The last quote from the article can be applied to my own findings about the looks of the herd on the farm. A good looking cow makes the owner look good in such a way, that it is apparent that he is taking good care of his animals but also, that he has valuable and good quality animals. That his herd is precious and therefore, he will be respected during the shows and exhibitions.

Cows and other farm animals are not “just” production animals but they are also appreciated for their looks. During shows and exhibitions this becomes clear and that the farmers spend so much time keeping the tails and the rest of the animal clean every day shows the importance of the aesthetical aspect on this farm. Lewis Holloway and Carol Morris (2014: 9-14) discuss aesthetics in livestock breeding and find that there are practical and aesthetic breeding criteria which confirms that there are aesthetic aspects in breeding but supposedly also in the keeping of livestock in general.

As with the white and clean tails, the horns are part of the pride of a farmer's herd. While nice to look at, beautiful horns also tell that a farmer is able to tend to his animals and that he knows how to handle them. The horns are tended to very carefully while they are growing so they will have a symmetrical shape. The cows' horns were a recurrent theme. For them it is incomprehensible how, in a country like Switzerland with high animal welfare standards, it can be allowed to dehorn cows (and other livestock). As one of the daughters put it:

“How can it be allowed to just cut away a body part? It's like if you would cut away a hand or a leg. I don't understand how people can just cut away parts of an animal until it suits their convenience!”

It is supposedly not purely about the animals' wellbeing when they talk about the horns but also, a question of pride and a way to show to other farmers that they know how to manage their herd. It is, again this ambiguity about the natural lives for the cows.

The horns are an important part of the cow since they use them to communicate with other cows. They had once a dehorned cow on the farm and she bumped into the other cow's stomach when she tried to get respect. This put the unborn calves in danger and therefore they said that having cows without horns provides much more problems than having cows with horns. I suppose this is an individual opinion and I can imagine that farmers who have dehorned cows would say the exact opposite. But it shows that they are used to their ways and that they want to keep their cows with horns. Having cows with horns is not just proper and nice to look at but it is also part of the breed as such.

“There's this guy who has his pastures next to ours. Recently, he built a big freestall and increased the number of cows. He has pure cows but he dehornes them now. But sometimes he calls and talks about our cows or heifers and points out their nice horns.”

In livestock breeding it is not just productive traits that are regarded important but also aesthetic traits (Holloway and Morris 2014: 17). In the same manner, for the farmers on this farm, it is not just the productivity of the animal that is important but also aesthetic aspects. They care about having well tended cows despite it being time consuming and not adding up to any monetary value. Although the aesthetic aspects of a farm animal take the emphasis of yield and production away and may seem like turning the farm animal more into a subject than an object, it can actually be the opposite. It objectifies the animal in such a way that it is reduced to an observed object which is not

granted any subjective character or individuality (Holloway and Morris 2014:12). Similarly, here the farmer is executing biopower by deciding over the cow's body however he wants to and according to his judgement of aesthetic and beauty.

Having a herd of good cows is in some ways like having an expensive racing horse or having a pedigree bred dog. It is more than just having livestock for the purpose of creating an income. The animals are well taken care of day by day, they are taken to exhibitions and they are decorated during special days. However, the pride in the herd does not only show how the farmers appreciate their cows but also how they dominate over their herd and how the power relations work. Finally, it can be argued that the fact of having a good looking cow or a herd of good looking, clean cows with nice horns is making the farmer feel good. Farmers usually take care of their animals first and then of themselves. The animals are fed and milked and the stable is mucked before the farmers get to eat their dinner. It is, in away satisfying to know that the animals are taken care of, that all of them are well and then they can enjoy and relax.

5.3.2. Bells

There are two kinds of bells: Hammered and cast bells and there are, as they say, never two bells with the same sound and therefore every bell can be distinguished by the sound. The cows always wear a small bell when they are outside on their pastures. This is mainly to be able to localise them even if there is mist or rain. The farmers were able to recognise every bell by its sound and could therefore recognise the cows according to the sounds of their bells. As the cows always wear the same bell and the farmers recognise them, they also know which bell was worn by which cow before. In that sense the bells are more than just practicality to find the cows in the mountains but they also provide a kind of memory of the cows they had in the past. In a way, it is like every bell has its own history of where it came from, who gave it to the farmers and which cows have been wearing it.

Apart from the small bells that they used every day they also had big bells that they only used on moving days. Those too are either hammered or cast but the biggest and most prestigious bell is

hammered⁴ and worn by the leader cow. The bells the farmers own are worth a lot of money, some of them they inherited from parents or grandparents, then there are those that they get as presents for important occasions in their lives such as their wedding and then there are those bells that they win at competitions and exhibitions. The big moving bells are always hung up and displayed at a wall on the outside of the house or stable and they always are where the cows are. Every time the cows move they wear those bells and while they stay at the farm, the bells are there to display. Since the leader cow is chosen without the farmer being able to do anything about it, the biggest and most prestigious bell is worn by a cow that cannot be chosen by the farmer.

The big moving bells are not just a thing for the farmer but also for the cows, as it seems. I was told the following story by the farmer's wife:

One of their favourite leader cows, Viviane got once very disappointed when she did not get to wear the biggest bell for the moving. At that time she was already rather old and they thought that she could get a smaller one so she would not have to carry such a heavy bell. But instead of being relieved about it, Viviane seemed offended. Instead of walking in front of the procession as she used to, she was following uninspired somewhere in the back. The farmers were surprised that she seemed to care so much about the bell and the next time, she got the biggest again and seemed to be happy about it, at least then she was in the front again, leading the procession.

This story shows how they attribute their cows human characteristics. The moving bells are heavy and in order to make them stay in place, the collar has to be tight. Wearing those big and heavy bells seems rather uncomfortable but to the farmers this is not something that could be questioned. To make the cows wear the moving and the other bells is another form of biopower since it is the farmer who makes the cows wear them. For the farmers, it is an honourable thing to carry the heavy bell and they project this feeling on the cow because otherwise they might have to question their doings. As Colter Ellis (2014) found in his study about beef production, farmers develop different emotional skills to deal with the fact that they breed cattle for killing them. One of those skills is the two sided responsibility. The farmer has the responsibility of taking care of the cows but they in turn do have the responsibility to turn into food, because it is "their job". So too, do the cows on the farm of my study have "jobs". One of them is to carry the moving bells from one place

⁴ There are different cultures of moving bells in different regions of Switzerland. In *Berner Oberland* the leader cow always gets the biggest bell and this one is hammered but all the other cows wear one too. In other parts, *Toggenburg* for example, only three of the cows wear bells and the rest do not.

to another. By projecting the feeling of honour to the cow, the farmer attributes the cow the feeling of responsibility and takes away the possibility of questioning his decision.

5.3.3. Contrasting views on traditional and modern breeds

When talking about different breeds, the opinion that *Simmental* cows should be preferred was always prevalent. However, it was not exactly vocalised but rather implied and one could read between the lines that the traditional breed was preferred. Many of the issues mentioned above somewhat play into this final section of analysis. It is not just about the breed *per se* but about the whole way of living, the life style of farming and the way of treating the animals. The youngest daughter once said:

“Actually every farmer in the village except one has pure bred [they use the word reini which means pure] Simmental cows. One guy has crossbred cows [by crossbred they mean Red Holstein] but he leaves the horns so it’s ok.”

Not just once they talked about how many of the farmers in the village have the *Simmental* breed, it seems to be an important fact that all but one farmer have this breed. It is not just part of the family’s identity but the local identity of the village. The farmer who set on a different breed decided to have them with horns, keeping them in a more traditional way than it is commonly done.

Farmers develop their own cultures around their way of living which also includes their livestock. There are, for example, 7 different terms for female cattle describing the respective stage in their reproductive life cycle. These are specific to the region and can vary greatly compared to other regions in Switzerland⁵: *Kalb* calf, 0-1 year old; *Mäsche*, heifer, 1-2 years old and not in calf; *Mäschchueli*, 2-years-old heifer in calf; *Rind*, a 3-years-old heifer in calf (*Simmental* cows usually get their first calf at the age of three); *Erstmelch*, a cow in her first lactation, *Kuh*, cow, everything that is being milked; *Galtkuh*, a cow in her dry period of the lactation cycle. These terms show how big a part the cows are in the farmers lives. They adapt their life according to the cows, they move with them on a yearly cycle which makes them living very closely to their cows and the biology of them.

⁵ Most are also different to the terms used in Germany

Animals have been modified ever since humans started domesticating them (Demello 2011:346). This included modifying them via selective breeding but also modification of the body through branding and other kinds of marking (Ibid.). While livestock breeds historically have been bred to adjust to the local environment, in more recent times, the breeding focused on performance only resulting in animal breeds that are only used for one purpose instead of two or more in past times. In the profession of alpine farming, this development stagnated at the point where cattle breeds were adapted to the local environment. Of course, the breeders still have goals how to improve the breed; the more modern *Simmental* cows give much more milk than they used to fifty years ago for example. But compared to their conspecific *Red Holstein* they are much closer to the cow as it was domesticated back in the days.

Sometimes it felt like the farmers just appreciated the cows for their beauty. One on an occasion when we moved all the heifers to a separate pasture, one woman helping out said:

“Look! It is so lovely to see so many Simmental cows in one crowd. Not a single crossbred! In previous years we had some crossbreds but it is so much nicer when there are only pure bred cows!”

On this particular farm, the cows are appreciated for more than just their economic value. The looks and aesthetics are, as was already discussed, an important part in the relationship between the farmers and their cows. The tails, the horns and the bells are all ways to appreciate the beauty of their cows. In a study about the geography of traditional livestock breeds in Great Britain the authors concluded that traditional livestock breeds often were most common around the place of origin (Yarwood and Evans 1998: 151). As with the *Simmental* cow, they are most common in the area they originated. Although there could be other breeds suitable for the farmers there, they prefer to keep the breed that has been farmed in the area for a long time, the same breed as their parents and grandparents used to have. It seems that keeping the traditional breed is also a kind of nostalgia and connection to their past and family history. In the same study, the authors also found that breeds which look unusual and are optically attractive are more likely to survive (Ibid: 153). As it has been said by the farmers many times, they do like their cows for their looks as much or even more than for their milk yield and monetary value.

The farming practice seems to be crucial for the choice of cow breed. In Sweden, a farming practice similar to alpine farming exists (Eriksson 2011). Farmers practicing summer farming keep traditional cow breeds and they state the adaptiveness of the traditional breed to the local

environment as the main reason to hold on to it (Ibid: 6). They compare their traditional cow breeds to high-yielding breeds kept on larger farms and say that they are not only physically unsuitable for summer farming but that they also lack the skills for finding good feed or good walking paths (Ibid. 10). In the Swedish context of summer farming, having the right kind of cow breed seems to be crucial for the farming practice to sustain. As much as the farmers in my study appreciated optical values of their cows, it is also the traditional and well-adapted breed that enables them to continue with their farming practice and their way of living.

6. Conclusions

Cows are more than just livestock and income for these farmers. They are appreciated as individuals and in some cases it seems like they are more pets than livestock. The relation the farmers have to their animals is also rooted in a long history of traditions and deep connection to the special lifestyle of alpine farming.

Coming back to my research questions I would first like to discuss them individually and then make a general conclusion.

- How do the farmers conceptualise what a good cow is?

For the family on this farm, cows have a special role in their lives. As much as they live off them, they also cherish the cows for entirely non-economic reasons. These different incentives to keep cows are also reflected in the way they conceptualise what a good cow is. On the one hand, a good cow has to fulfil her job as a cow which means producing milk and getting a calf each year, be of good health and robust. She should produce a good amount of milk solely on the grass available in the mountains. On the other hand, there are the attributes of a good cow that are rather unobvious. A range of attributes that characterises a good cow is separated from economic incentives or income generating. The personality and the looks of the cows are among the most important aspects of the cows on this farm, which shows the importance of the interaction between the farmers and the cows on an emotional level. The affective facet for the keeping of cows in this family is significant. The emotional meaning of the cows and the importance of the personality and looks of the cows remind of a relationship between a pet and the pet owner.

The breed of the cows seems to play an important role as well. To have *Simmental* cows has aspects of both, the economic and emotional incentives to keep cows. The breed is well adapted to alpine farming and therefore it makes economic sense to keep this breed. Many of the traditions, with the horns and bells for example, are connected to the traditional life of an alpine farmer. The cow breed enables the farmers to keep their lifestyle as much as the lifestyle keeps the cow breed alive.

- How do the farmers emotionally relate to their cows and how does the emotional relationship differ from other species?

Cows do play a very important and special role in the life of this family. Not only do they depend on them economically but also emotionally, it seems. They are much more than just livestock; they are part of their family, much more like pets than livestock. Compared to other livestock, pigs in this case, the cows have an emotionally different status. It is, as it was shown by Rhoda M. Wilkie (2005; 2010) before, a difference for the farmers if the animal is on the farm for the purpose of meat production and only stays for a short while or if it is on the farm as a dairy animal and stays for a long time. The farmers do actively emotionally detach themselves from the animals that are on the farm for a short time and for the purpose of meat production. The pigs on the farm never had the same importance for the farmers as the cows did. Although cows will eventually be slaughtered, the farmers allow themselves to get attached to them, they are treated like individuals compared to the pigs that are rather treated and referred to as a drove and not as individuals. While both pigs and cows are perceived as sentient commodities, cows are rather seen as subjects and pigs are rather seen as objects. When the time comes and they have to let go of their dairy cows, they are reluctant to eat their meat. The emotional attachment the farmers have to their cows goes far beyond livestock and production animal but seems much more like a relationship to a pet.

As it has been argued by Holloway (2001) in the context of hobby farming, livestock can transgress the divide of pet and production animals. Livestock are not just pure production animals. For that, the farmers show too much affection and joy when working and interacting with their animals. But neither are livestock pets. They do have their purpose on the farm – be it the production of milk or meat – and they are kept for those reasons. They are not just on the farm because the farmers enjoy their company. In this particular study it became plain that especially the cows are transgressing the divide between livestock and pets.

As it has been touched upon, the breed of the cows seems to be important for the affection they have towards them as well. It seems that the *Simmental* breed is especially likeable for them. However, if they had other cows they would probably be just as drawn towards them but for those farmers it is out of question to keep other cow breeds. The cow breed is embedded in their way of living and their traditions and, for them, it would not make sense to change to another one.

- How is a good farmer constructed in accordance with their emotional relationship to their cows and the understating of what a good cow is?

How to be a good farmer is in this context connected to alpine farming. Alpine farming shapes the lives and it shapes the way farmers interact with their animals. The sizes of the herds are smaller and the stalls enable a close interaction between the farmers and the cows. The cows are tame and used to the handling by the farmers. A good farmer knows his herd and the individual cows, knows how to handle them, how to read and interpret their behaviour and, ultimately, how to be a part of the herd. In many ways, a good farmer relates to his cows as subjects with individual characters. The farmer knows those individual characters and remembers them even after the cows are sold or dead. The farmer should also know how to dominate his cows but never be violent towards them. The animals should be well tended as the pride over the herd is a big part of being an alpine farmer.

Being a good farmer is ambiguous since the farmer is supposed to take care of the animals but at the same time there will be a time when every cow has to go. As Colter Ellis (2014) discussed in his study about beef cattle production, farmers see the relationship between themselves and their animals as a two-sided responsibility. The farmers themselves have the responsibility to take care of their cows while the cows as well have the responsibility of fulfilling their job. In this way, in order to be a good farmer, this two-sided responsibility has to be maintained.

During the time I was on this farm I was able to observe a range of different interactions between farmers and their animals. Conclusively, my study shows that the relationship between the farmers on this particular farm and their cows is a complex and interwoven web of emotional and rational aspects. However, they do relate differently to different kinds of animals. While they relate to their pigs much more as livestock in the classical meaning of the word, they relate to their cows much more as pets than livestock. The cows on this farm are not purely livestock but they are getting closer to pets and therefore transgress the divide of pets and livestock that is classically made.

For future research, a similar study on a larger and more commercial farm would bring insight into the relationship between farmers and their livestock. Even on large scale farms, livestock might be transgressing the divide of production animal and pet. Animals cannot be classified into clear boxes but rather on a scale between human-like on the subject end and commodity on the object end. On this scale, there are different shades rather than absolute divides and on large farms the animals might rather be placed towards the commodity side than the pet side while on the farm I did the study on, the animals were closer to the pet side.

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