

# Native Non-Native Kinship Handbooks

## *Remaking Kinship in Transformed Landscapes*

### **On Migration, Belonging, and the Politics of Classification**

The Dutch landscape tells a story of dominion. Centuries of engineering have drained swamplands, sculpted islands from ocean beds, and reshaped water itself into ordered systems of control. This landscape did not simply happen—it was made, repeatedly, through violence and vision, through the labor of many hands and the ambition of those who sought to master nature. Yet the same culture that orchestrated this ecological manipulation also developed a language for categorizing people:

*allochtoon* and *autochtoon*—the non-native and the native. To those who find themselves on this land, whether by choice or circumstance, these categories carry weight. They shape access to belonging, to resources, to the possibility of being heard.

What emerges at the intersection of these histories is a profound alienation: not only from institutional structures that police and exclude, but from the very ground beneath our feet and the more-than-human communities that inhabit it alongside us. This is the terrain where the Native Non-Native Kinship Handbook emerges: at the convergence of ecological manipulation, immigrant experiences, and the search for alternative frameworks of relationship and care.

The project operates from a deceptively simple premise: that alienation reveals something rather than obscures it. By sitting with the experience of not-belonging—of being foreign to a place, even as one is forced to live there—we gain insight into how relationships are built, sustained, and transformed. More provocatively, it suggests that those of us who are displaced, who do not fit neatly into the categories that define the modern nation-state, might have more in common with the land itself than we have been taught to recognize. The dominant landscape, after all, is also displaced—its waters no longer follow their original courses, its plants rearranged into new configurations, its microbial communities responding to novel conditions. Both human migrants and ecological refugees inhabit a world of forced transformation and creative adaptation.

### **The Ecology of Knowledge and the Problem of Categories**

Central to the handbook's approach is a critical examination of how knowledge itself is categorized and valued. In Western academic and institutional frameworks, certain forms of knowledge are recognized as legitimate: the scientific, the documented, the reproducible. Meanwhile, other ways of knowing, particularly those associated with feminized labor, racialized practices, and non-institutional communities, are relegated to the margins. Herbal knowledge, fermentation techniques, embodied ritual practices, and the accumulated wisdom of immigrant families become invisible precisely through their invisibility, obscured by systems that cannot quite see them.

This invisibility is not accidental. It is the result of centuries of epistemic violence, through which colonialism, industrialization, and state rationalization have

systematically devalued knowledge that emerges from intimate engagement with place. When a person learns about plants through their grandmother's hands rather than a botanical textbook, when healing knowledge is transmitted orally rather than formally credentialed, when the body itself becomes a site of knowledge production through somatic practice—this knowledge becomes suspect to institutions that require their information pre-packaged and standardized.

The handbook directly challenges this hierarchy by insisting on the validity of multiple ways of knowing and being. By gathering recipes alongside ethnobotanical information, personal reflections alongside intergenerational conversations, the publication refuses the false divide between the practical and the conceptual, between lived experience and theoretical insight. This is not merely a choice of form; it is a political act. It asserts that knowledge produced through everyday practice: cooking, foraging, fermenting, embodied ritual, is as crucial to understanding how to live otherwise as any academic framework could be.

### **Alchemy as Method and Metaphor**

If alienation is the diagnosis, then alchemy offers both a methodology and a philosophy of cure. As practiced historically, alchemy sought to transform base materials into precious ones, lead into gold, through processes of heating, mixing, observing, and patient engagement with material transformation. But it was never simply about material change. Alchemy operated at the intersection of the physical and the spiritual, the observable and the mystical, engaging practitioners in a process of self-transformation alongside their work with materials.

The handbook reclaims alchemy as a mode of inquiry particularly suited to the conditions of migration ecologies. Yi's practice—working with fermentation as intimate collaboration with invisible microbial life—exemplifies this alchemical approach. Fermentation is transformation enacted at the smallest scale: the conditions created by human hands allow billions of microbes to labor invisibly, converting materials into something new through processes we can observe but not fully control. It is a conversation between human and more-than-human, a negotiation of agency and gift. To engage in fermentation is to practice a form of witchcraft, to quote the project, in which we participate in creation without mastering it, in which transformation happens through relationship rather than domination.

Esh's work, engaging ritual and invocation through spoken word and material mixing, similarly activates alchemy as a technology of subtle transformation. When participants speak into a cup as an act of spell-casting, they participate in a practice that recognizes the power of breath, voice, and intention to alter what is possible. The boundary between what seems fixed—the distinction between guest and host, inside and outside, self and other—becomes porous, open to renegotiation. Alchemy here becomes an art of reshaping the possible through attention, care, and creative collaboration.

What both practices share is an insistence on transformation as process, not event. You cannot hurry fermentation; you cannot control the precise moment when a plant

begins to heal. These practices require presence, patience, and a willingness to be changed by what you tend. They model a different way of being in relationship with the world—not as masters seeking dominion, but as participants in transformation, offering labor and attention while remaining humble before what exceeds our control.

### **Belonging as Practice, Not Birthright**

The handbook's central questions challenge the assumption that belonging is a fixed status, something you either possess or lack. Instead, they propose belonging as something cultivated through practice: through cooking, through walking, through foraging, through careful listening to the more-than-human world around us. This shifts the terrain entirely. Rather than asking "Do I belong here?" a question whose answer is determined by bureaucratic and historical categories beyond individual control, it asks "How might we make kin with the neighbors we have not acknowledged?"

This reframing is significant because it moves us from a framework of inclusion/exclusion: binaries that ultimately serve state interests in categorizing and controlling populations, to a framework of relationship-building and ecological care. When you forage for plants in a place, you enter into relationship with those plants. We learn their names, their seasons, their gifts and dangers. We transform them with your hands and body, and they transform you through nourishment. You are no longer a stranger to this place; you are in kinship with it.

The two public workshops organized by the project: Invasive Remedy and Misery Mixer, operationalize this philosophy. Invasive Remedy invites participants to transform plants labeled as "invasive" (and therefore undesirable, dangerous, in need of eradication) into healers and allies. By engaging with these plants through making tinctures, salves, and ferments, participants literally transform the narrative. The plant that was "invasive" becomes a generous giver of medicine, a more-than-human community member worth knowing and caring for.

The naming itself is significant. "Invasive" is a category applied to plants (and, by troubling analogy, to people) deemed to not belong in a particular place. Yet in a globalized world shaped by centuries of ecological and human migration, this category becomes increasingly meaningless. Plants move across borders carried by human hands, by wind, by water. They establish themselves in new places and create new ecosystems. Rather than fighting this reality through eradication campaigns that echo the violence used against immigrant communities, the project suggests we might instead ask: what can we learn from this plant's resilience? What medicine might it offer? How might we live together?

### **The Gut as Site of Transformation**

The Misery Mixer workshop engages what might seem like a strange metaphor: "as we ingest, we let the collective gut mutate our tongues in the ways we've always let language mutate our bodies." This moves the workshop beyond simple socializing into something more explicitly about embodied, collective transformation. The act of

sharing drinks, tinctures, and ferments is not merely social; it is alchemical. As we consume these preparations created through collaborative labor, they enter our bodies and become part of us. We are transformed by what we ingest, and in ingesting together, we create a shared bodily experience that binds us.

This attention to the gut is not incidental. The microbiome—the vast community of microbes living in and on our bodies—has become a powerful metaphor for thinking about interdependence and the impossibility of individual autonomy. We are not singular beings but ecosystems, composed of billions of microbial entities whose health shapes our own. By ingesting ferments and herbal preparations together, participants in the Misery Mixer engage a radical form of becoming-together at the most intimate scale.

The workshop also holds space for grief and joy simultaneously: "the enormity of both the grief of alienation and the joy of place-making." This is crucial. The handbook does not pretend that alienation is something easily overcome through sufficient attention to plants and ferments. Rather, it insists on feeling the weight of that alienation even as we work to build different relationships. The rituals and practices offered are not palliatives but containers for holding complexity: the grief of not-belonging alongside the possibility of kinship, the joy of discovery alongside the acknowledgment of historical violence.

### **Digital Platform as Archive and Commons**

The decision to develop the handbook as a publicly accessible digital publication reflects a commitment to mutual aid and collective knowledge-making. The handbook is not authored by experts for a passive audience; rather, it emerges from community contribution, with participants in the workshops invited into the editing process. This distributed model of knowledge production mirrors the book's content: just as the recipes and practices documented within the handbook emerge from intergenerational sharing and collective experimentation, so too does the structure of knowledge production itself become collective.

The digital form is significant. It allows for continuous updating, for linking recipes to ethnobotanical information and somatic exercises, for embedding audio or video of intergenerational conversations, for creating a living archive rather than a fixed text. It also makes the handbook accessible to the people most likely to use it, those without access to expensive physical books, those whose knowledge practice is distributed across digital and embodied platforms, those who need care and healing resources now rather than waiting for publication cycles.

The intention to develop a printed edition later suggests this is not a dismissal of print but a recognition of digital platforms as crucial infrastructure for knowledge-sharing, particularly for communities whose practices have been systematically excluded from formal publication. The digital handbook becomes a commons, a space where people can access, contribute, and build upon each other's knowledge.

### **Toward Healing Justice**

What animates the entire project is a commitment to healing justice: a framework that recognizes healing as inherently political, as inseparable from questions of justice, accountability, and collective liberation. The plants engaged in the Invasive Remedy workshop are not chosen arbitrarily; they are plants positioned at the intersection of ecological and social marginalization. Dandelion, stinging nettle, Japanese knotweed, these are plants that persist despite efforts at eradication, plants that thrive in disturbed grounds, plants that many cultures have long known as medicine but that dominant Western institutions have categorized as weeds.

By engaging these plants through the framework of healing justice, the project asserts that the process of learning to make medicine with "invasive" plants is inseparable from learning to make kin across lines of difference and marginalization. The healing offered is not only individual, though individual participants do learn techniques for creating tinctures and salves. But collective and political. It is healing that emerges through recognizing our shared vulnerability, our interdependence, our imbrication in systems we did not create but must navigate.

### **Toward Otherwise Futures**

The Native Non-Native Kinship Handbook emerges from a specific historical moment and geographical location—the Netherlands, with its particular histories of colonialism, ecological engineering, and immigration—yet its questions resonate far beyond these boundaries. In a world of climate change, species extinction, and increasing human displacement, the question of how to build belonging across lines of difference becomes increasingly urgent. How do we live together when the ground beneath our feet is constantly shifting? How do we honor the knowledge and resilience of those deemed foreign while also acknowledging historical violence? How do we move beyond frameworks of fear and domination into frameworks of kinship and care?

The handbook does not offer easy answers. Instead, it models a way of being in relationship with these questions: through practice, through attention, through the willingness to be transformed by what and whom we encounter. It suggests that alchemy is not a fantasy but a daily practice, enacted whenever we tend to fermentation, when we walk in a landscape with open senses, when we sit together to share food and stories. In these ordinary moments, transformation becomes possible. Belonging becomes something we make together.