The nature of my research topic comes with the handicap that I sometimes wonder whether my colleagues gossip about me. Without being paranoid, I am quite certain they do agree that I am a hopeless chocoholic. In fact, my chocolate brownies have built up a reasonable reputation in the department. The secret about these brownies is that I always add a pinch of chili. Working on this dissertation was like baking with chocolate and chili; while addictive, it could taste spicy at times. Be that as it may, the work would not have been as compelling without the latter ingredient. In the following, I would like to thank those people who aided me in finding the perfect recipe for my work.

First and foremost, I thank my first supervisor. Rafael, you literally supported me with chocolate all the way through, and even beyond, my research project. Working with you has been an incredibly inspiring, pleasant, and fruitful experience. It was your spirit which helped me through the spicy times, along with making this “gossip project” fun. Your endorsement of my plans to attend international conferences, summer schools, and research visits all played a substantial role in my development into a well-rounded and confident scholar.

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My life as a researcher was further enriched by the network of helpful and sociable colleagues. I thank the WOT-team for tolerating and reading my papers on gossip over and over again. Alona and Birgit, you were my most important accompanists on the various trips to the north of the Netherlands, where we collected data for our research.
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