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4 Women who love chickens: Gender and interspecies care in Finnish small-scale egg farming guides

Introduction

In 1913, 20 farmwives held a meeting at a local dairy in Alastaro, in southwest Finland. At this meeting they established an egg cooperative. They agreed upon the rules of the cooperative and elected a board of directors. However, the governor of the region did not accept these rules, as all the founders and the directors of the cooperative were women and they had not sent him the necessary letters of attorney from their husbands. The women had to resubmit their application and assure the governor that they were fully in charge of their henhouses. Finally, the governor ratified the rules, and the co-op was ready to work.[1]

The history of the female chicken farmers of Alastaro is related by the farming consultant Niilo Rautakoski in his chicken-keeping guide entitled *Kananhoito kannattaa* ('Chicken Farming Pays'), published in 1931. Rautakoski describes the egg co-op as one of the most successful of its kind in Finland and speaks highly of their practices: "When one observes the reception of the eggs in Munala [the name of the co-op's house], one notes how it happens as calmly and systematically as in any office."[2] Rautakoski encouraged his readers to form egg co-ops like the one in Alastaro.

Chicken farming increased in Finland from the end of the nineteenth century. Up until this time Finns rarely owned more than a few chickens, and the total number of chickens in Finland was small.[3] At the end of the 1870s, for example, there were about 170,000 chickens in Finland. This increased to nearly 540,000 chickens

1 Niilo Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa* (Helsinki: Pellervo-seura, 1931), 60–61; J. K:wi, "Munanmyyntiosuuskunnat siipikarjanhoidon edistäjinä," *Siipikarja* 4 (1919): 50.

2 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 61. All citations from texts that are originally in Finnish have been translated by the author. All italics in the citations are as in the original.

3 Auli Bläuer, *Voita, villaa ja vetoeläimiä* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 2015), 145–148; Teppo Vihola, "Pärjääkö pienviljelys?," in *Suomen maatalouden historia 2*, ed. by Matti Peltonen. (Helsinki: SKS, 2004a), 175.

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by 1905 and 980,000 in 1920.[4] By 1935 there were nearly 2.6 million chickens.[5] In the 1910s, the economic significance of chicken keeping was still marginal because there were relatively few chickens and they did not lay very many eggs.[6] The guides indicate that good hens laid between 120 to 200 eggs a year, but many laid considerably less. Until the First World War, Finland received a lot of eggs from within other areas of the Russian Empire, and, as Jari Niemelä writes, hardly anybody in Finland was interested in keeping chickens.[7] In 1919, the newly independent Finland imposed a duty on eggs. Shops emptied of cheap Russian eggs, and consequently, egg farming started to interest more farmers. Export of Finnish eggs started at the beginning of the 1920s, and the export subsidies for egg producers, introduced in 1928, increased the attractiveness of egg farming more.[8] During the 1920s and 1930s, egg farming became an important agricultural sector in Finland. Much of this was due to generous export subsidies.[9] In most cases, egg farming formed a part of small-scale family farming.[10]

Many people attempted chicken farming for the first time in the years after the First World War at a time when not a lot of education and literature on the matter were available. Many of the new chicken farmers did not prosper. Consequently, between the 1910s and 1930s, poultry keeping spokespersons and associations published many books and leaflets promoting egg farming as a profitable enterprise. Rautakoski's description of the episode about the female chicken farmers of Alastaro is a good example of this trend: he wrote many pages about the economic success of the egg co-op and invited his readers to follow suit.

Rautakoski's description also repeats another common message in the poultry literature of the time: women were the pioneers of the egg industry in many places, and poultry farming was an important area in which women living in agrarian communities could gain economic and political agency.[11] Not only did women work as egg farmers on small-scale family farms and form co-ops, but they also worked as itinerant poultry-keeping consultants. Furthermore, they

4 Vihola, "Pärjääkö pienviljelys?," 175; Jari Niemelä, *Talonpoika toimessaan* (Helsinki: SKS, 2008), 179.

5 Teppo Vihola, "Maatalouden rakennemuutokset itsenäisessä Suomessa," in *Suomen maatalouden historia 2*, ed. by Matti Peltonen. (Helsinki: SKS, 2004b), 345.

6 Vihola, "Maatalouden rakennemuutokset," 176.

7 Niemelä, *Talonpoika*, 163.

8 Niemelä, *Talonpoika*, 163–164; Vihola, "Maatalouden rakennemuutokset," 374–375.

9 Niemelä, *Talonpoika,* 180.

10 Vihola, "Maatalouden rakennemuutokset," 377.

11 Caring for cows, milking them and processing the milk was another area in which women gained agency in agrarian communities; see Taija Kaarlenkaski, "Of Cows and Women: Gendered Human-Animal Relationships in Finnish Agriculture," *Relations* 11 (2014): 9–26.

worked as teachers in a poultry farming school, wrote books and leaflets about chicken keeping, and edited poultry magazines.

In this chapter I examine, in a literary studies framework, eight poultry keeping guides published between 1916 and 1931. Five of them are books and three are booklets. All of them are targeted to small-scale family farmers. In terms of methodology, I draw on articulation theory, which focuses on connections between different discourses.[12] I ask how the guides talk about how gender equality and the position of small farmers develops entangled with the egg-industry in Finland. In other words, I ask how the growing exploitation of chickens, the broadening scope for action for women and the growing small farming economy interweave in these guides. How did the position of chickens, the position of small farmers and the position of women on those farms change differently but entangled and simultaneously? I focus especially on practises of human–avian love and care, as the guides often emphasise the importance of lovingly caring for the chickens. The understanding of care in the guides is tightly bound to their genre: they are written in order to highlight the best way to utilise chickens, and consequently care is coupled with exploitation.

The oldest guide I examine is by the teacher and consultant, Olga Autere, and is entitled *Kansan emännän kanakirja* ('The Farmwife's Hen Book,' fig. 4.1.), published in 1916 by the Martha Organisation, a home economics body for which the author worked. The next five guides are from the 1920s. Two of them are written by Autere: *Pojat ja tytöt kanoja hoitamassa* ('Boys and Girls Keeping Chickens,' 1922) and *Pienviljelijä ja kananhoito* ('The Smallholder Farmer and Chicken Husbandry,' 1923). The third book, *Kananhoidon käsikirja* ('The Handbook of Chicken Husbandry,' 1924), is by the journalist, farming consultant and politician Jaakko Kivi and the geographer, writer and politician Kaarlo Hänninen. The fourth guide from the 1920s, *Pienviljelijän kananhoito eli käynti Kana-Kaisan luona* ('Smallholder Farmers' Chicken Keeping, or a Visit to Hen-Kaisa,' 1925) is by four authors: the chicken husbandry consultant Siiri Siikaniemi, the agronomist and the head of a poultry-keeping school Ilmari Relander, the poultry farming teacher Matti M. Ilkka and the chicken husbandry consultant Jaakko Kaila. The fifth book from the 1920s is *Pieni kananhoidon opas* ('A Small Guide to Chicken Husbandry,' 1929), by ten authors, among them the agronomist and teacher Martta Bruun, the architect Katri Jansson, the doctor of agriculture and forestry Erik Bruun, as well as Siiri Siikaniemi, Matti M. Ilkka, Jaakko Kaila and four other chicken farmers. From the 1930s I study two guides: Ilmari Relander's *Kananhoidon alkuopas* ('The Beginner's Guide to Chicken Husbandry,' 1931) and the above-mentioned *Kananhoito kannattaa* ('Chicken Farming Pays,' 1931) by Niilo Rautakoski.

12 Kukku Melkas, *Historia, halu ja tiedon käärme* (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), 27–28.

Gender in this chapter is understood as a difference produced in social relations and something that interlocks with other differences.[13] The guides I have examined describe gender as a male/female-dichotomy. In the guides, chicken husbandry is understood as work that requires performing many small jobs in the henhouse throughout the day: It is recommended that chickens should be fed 4 to 6 times a day if possible; eggs had to be collected at least once a day and more often if trap nests were used; heating stoves had to be used most of the year to keep the chickens warm; the henhouse had to be aired and lit depending on the weather and the season. Moreover, henhouses with all their equipment had to be kept clean and tidy; bookkeeping had to be done precisely; and preparing food for chickens also took a lot of work. Furthermore, poultry farming entailed breeding chickens, caring for the sick ones, and growing, collecting, or buying crops and vegetables for them.

Chicken farming consisted of several daily duties and hence it was mainly promoted for the benefit of smallholder farmers, as they worked mainly at home and could therefore go to their henhouses many times a day. Among smallholder farmers it was especially recommended for women, who usually bore the main responsibility for animal husbandry.[14]

Other reasons for recommending chicken keeping for smallholder farmers were that it was possible to start with smaller initial capital and less land than most other forms of animal farming. Thus, it was even possible for former crofters and cottars. Even the smallest farms were able to produce at least some food scraps and edible weeds that could be fed to chickens. On the other hand, if a farmer owned woods, as many did, it was relatively inexpensive to build a henhouse and a wooden pen – a custom recommended in many of the guides. The work and time of smallholder farmers and especially the farmwives were not considered a cost. Therefore, the guides promoted chicken keeping as a very cost-effective form of animal husbandry in small farms.

Hence, when I talk about women in this chapter I have in mind mostly the women of smallholder farms in agrarian areas, mostly in the south and west of Finland. Chicken husbandry up to the present day is concentrated in these regions. As it was physically light work, chicken keeping was also considered as being suitable for the elderly and children. Consequently, chicken keeping offered women, the young and the elderly the chance to raise the degree of self-sufficiency of the farm. They were also able to earn money by selling eggs, chicks, adult birds and meat.

13 See Paula Arcari, *Making Sense of 'Food' Animals* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 225–227; Alice J. Hovorka, "Women/Chickens vs. Men/Cattle," *Geoforum* 43 (2012): 875–877; Lisa Kemmerer, "Introduction," in *Sister Species*, ed. by Lisa Kemmerer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 9.

14 Kaarlenkaski, "Of Cows and Women."

The effect of the Finnish poultry business on the development of equality among humans is not only a matter of gender, but also a matter of age and class.

Species here is understood in the same way as gender: a category of difference intersecting with other categories of difference. My analysis draws on a common definition utilised in the research traditions of ecofeminism and critical animal studies, especially in discussions that focus on the ethics of care.[15] The guides I examine in this chapter make it clear that not all chickens are equal: sex, health, breed, age, character and egg-laying abilities all had major consequences for the birds – as they still do in the chicken meat and egg industries, as well as among backyard flocks.

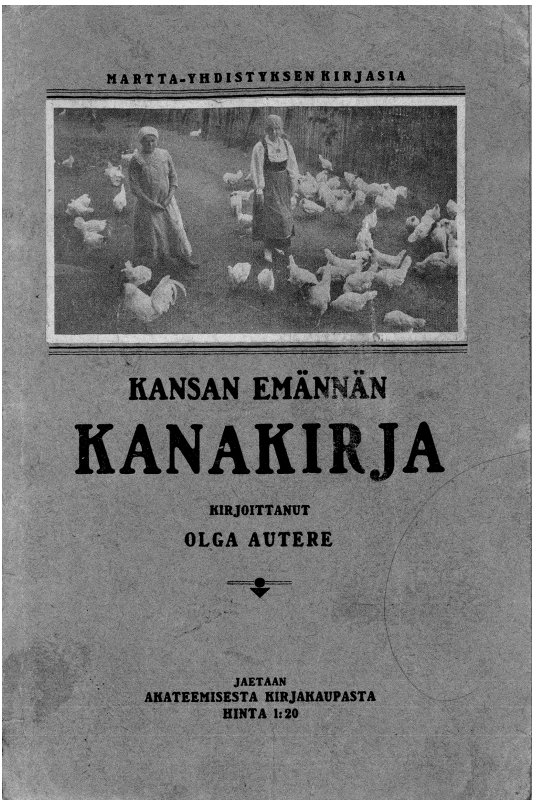

Figure 4.1: Two women with chickens. The cover of *The Farmwife's Hen Book* (1916).

15 Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, eds. *Animals & Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, eds. *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); pattrice jones, "Roosters, Hawks and Dawgs: Toward an Inclusive, Embodied Eco/Feminist Psychology," *Feminism & Psychology* 20:3 (2010),

Women and chickens, equally useful

> Well really, man, you are going to start your business in a loony way. Chickens, huh! My wife also wants to have them; whatever can be the reason why those women love chickens, those lousy animals? Wherever there are chickens, there is a house in trouble.[16]

Olga Autere's four-page booklet entitled *The Smallholder Farmer and Chicken Husbandry* is a causerie that utilises a dialogic form, a centuries-old form of pedagogical literature.[17] Story's subtitle is "At Croft Suomela: A Causerie About Chicken Husbandry." The dialogue is between the farmer Suomela[18] and his neighbour. Suomela is building a chicken pen when a neighbour stops by to ask him what he is doing. When the neighbour hears that the Suomelas are about to set up a henhouse, he relates his sceptical views on chicken farming. According to the neighbour, chickens empty granaries as they eat so much, they destroy growing sprouts in fields and the roosters crow all night so that no-one is able to sleep. Moreover, he adds that hens either lay no eggs or hide them – and he remarks that his own wife still keeps harping on about getting her own henhouse, because eggs are too expensive to buy. This leads to an argument about chicken farming between Suomela and his neighbour.

The structure of the story is simple: first the neighbour outlines his argument against chicken farming. Then Suomela gives a longer counterargument that convinces the neighbour. This pattern is repeated multiple times. In the end Suomela has convinced his neighbour – and possibly the reader too – about the economic benefits of chicken farming.

Every guide examined in this chapter is partly dedicated to arguing against the view that chicken farming is uneconomic. In Rautakoski's *Chicken Farming Pays*, this is already evident in the title. Rautakoski writes about how neighbours initially laughed at chicken farming pioneers; then, a few years later, they built their own henhouses.[19] Rautakoski hoped to encourage people to try and develop chicken keeping "also in those places where it is only met with contempt and suspicion."[20]

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doi.org/10.1177/0959353510368120; Kemmerer, "Introduction;" see also Arcari, *Making Sense*, 227–228.

16 Olga Autere, *Pienviljelijä ja kananhoito* (Kerava: Suomen maatalousseurojen keskusliitto, 1923), 3.

17 Penny Brown, "'Girls aloud': Dialogue as a Pedagogical Tool in Eighteenth-Century French Children's Literature," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 33:2 (2009): 202–218.

18 A common surname and house name in Finland. The word has national connotations as it has the same roots as the word *Suomi* ('Finland').

19 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 7–8.

20 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 47.

As for Autere's other books, *Boys and Girls Keeping Chickens* begins with children's enthusiasm for chicken keeping in contrast to the hesitation of adults, and *The Farmwife's Hen Book* opens with the notion that it has been common to think that chicken husbandry is unprofitable. For its part, *Hen-Kaisa* by Siikaniemi, Relander, Ilkka and Kaila includes a somewhat comical character, Kustaa Töllinpää ('Hut End'), who has not managed to profit from his chicken keeping because of his stubbornness and ignorance about productive methods.

Thus, the neighbour in Autere's *Smallholder Farmer* is not alone in holding suspicions. Mr. Suomela understands him and tells that he and his wife have previously disagreed about chickens. The neighbour replies: "I get that. Those missuses and chickens, they are equally useful."[21] The reply playfully mixes misogyny with attitudes towards chickens and chicken farming. Suomela replies by highlighting the economic benefits of both wives and chickens:

> If our wives get to keep chickens and we build nice, modest homes and runs for the birds, we get to see that the work devoted to it is not for nothing. Our wives cook us tasty and varied food from the eggs. They even sell the eggs for hundreds, even thousands of [Finnish] Marks and thus help us in earning our living.[22]

As the neighbour ridicules both women and chickens, Suomela objectifies both as economically useful. *Smallholder Farmer* shows how the same story can both express instrumentalising attitudes towards women and non-human animals and talk about women as emancipatory subjects who work as agriculture pioneers.

The wives do not figure in Autere's causerie, but they are the original chicken farming agents of the story. They want to have chickens; they want to care for them and use and sell their eggs. Mrs. Suomela persuades her husband to build her a henhouse. At the end of the story, the hesitant neighbour has built a henhouse too, partly inspired by Suomela's defence of chicken farming, and partly by his wife's persistent willingness to acquire chickens.

The character choice of Autere's story enables different reader positions. As the people discussing chicken farming are male smallholder farmers, the causerie especially invites the same type of readers. Yet, as the women in the background of the story are the pioneers in the field of chicken farming, the story gives female readers the possibility to feel nice superiority and invites them to join the community of the innovative female chicken farmers.

Among short poultry keeping guides, Autere's causerie is not alone in its literariness. Another example of the diverse use of literary devices in these guides is *Smallholder Farmers' Chicken Keeping, or a Visit to Hen-Kaisa*. This is a travel ac-

21 Autere, *Pienviljelijä ja kananhoito*, 3.
22 Autere, *Pienviljelijä ja kananhoito*, 4–5.

count with a first-person narrator, who tells us about a group trip to a 'chicken parish' in Southwest Finland. There they visit the female chicken farmer Hen-Kaisa, who has kept hens for nearly twenty years.[23] Kaisa is described as a true authority on chicken farming: she is asked a lot of questions, "but always the experienced poultry woman was able to explain matters."[24]

Kaisa tells the visitors that when she and her husband originally started with a few birds, she initiated it and her husband agreed to it – the order is the same as in Autere's story about the Suomelas and their neighbours. However, in Autere's story the women are in the background, but in *Hen-Kaisa*, Kaisa's husband is a distant figure away from the gathering. There is still a key male character in the story, Kustaa Töllinpää, who has arrived with his wife Sohvi. They have chickens, but they also have some problems: their hens are not laying that many eggs and they have a habit of dozing on the roosts during the day. At Hen-Kaisa's place, the tangle-haired Kustaa learns many reasons for this: for example, chickens should have more windows than they have in Töllinpää. Sohvi reminds Kustaa that she has said this on multiple occasions. However, it was not until their visit to Hen-Kaisa that Kustaa is convinced of the need for improvements.

At the end of the story, two years have gone by since the visit to Hen-Kaisa, and the narrator takes us to Töllinpää. There "Sohvi has got Kustaa to build a henhouse,"[25] and they have about 50 white Leghorn hens (fig. 4.2.) in their pen.[26] The narrator tells us the following:

> We dropped in at the cottage of Töllinpää, and there was quite an argument going on between Sohvi and Kustaa.
>
> "It's so hard to drum some sense into your head, my old man," said Sohvi, "I can't make you understand anything about how we have to have an egg co-operative in this village."[27]

Kustaa initially opposes the idea, because he is, in the narrator's words, "old-fashioned by nature and therefore incapable of instantly comprehending something new and modern, such as co-operation." However, when the co-op is finally

23 Field trips were common among the members of the Finnish Poultry Farming Association. See, for example, Martta Bruun et al., *Pieni kananhoidon opas* (Hämeenlinna: Suomen Siipikarjanhoitajain Liitto, 1929), 8.

24 Siiri Siikaniemi et al., *Pienviljelijän kananhoito eli käynti Kana-Kaisan luona* (Tampere: Pienviljelijäin liitto, 1925), 8.

25 Siikaniemi et al., *Pienviljelijän kananhoito*, 18.

26 On the use of different chicken breeds in egg production, see Catherine Oliver's chapter in this volume.

27 Siikaniemi et al., *Pienviljelijän kananhoito*, 18.

founded, due to Sohvi's insistence, Kustaa even becomes a bit ambitious, as the co-op is his wife's idea. This brings us to the fascinating ending of the story: "Kustaa Töllinpää was unanimously elected to be the manager of the co-op, under the surveillance of the skilled Sohvi, of course."[28]

Why is it that Kustaa and not Sohvi became the manager of the co-op? There had already been some egg co-ops run by women for years at this time, as mentioned in the history of the female egg farmers in Alastaro. Finnish women won the right to vote in 1906, and there had been multiple female Members of Parliament since 1907. Against this background, it is somewhat surprising that it is Kustaa who heads the egg co-op and not his wife, who is depicted having a real passion for egg farming and the co-op. What is more, this decision is not explained in the narrative in any way, as if it was self-evident.

A possible explanation to this has to do with readership. Kustaa has already been described in a comical manner: he is tangle-haired, ignorant and an old-fashioned, slow adopter character, who does not even utter a reply when Sohvi rebukes him. Compared to him, Sohvi and Hen-Kaisa, the central female characters, are quick-witted and well-informed. If Kustaa had been simply left on the sidelines to watch his wife run a co-op, would this have been too little agency for a male character? Considering this, the choice to make Kustaa the manager of the co-op appears as a nod to male readers.

The male domination of society is also visible in Rautakoski's *Chicken Farming Pays*. The book describes many henhouses and chicken keepers. Most of the henhouses are introduced with the name of a man, even if men, wives and sometimes children are involved. Still, Rautakoski recommends that women, in particular, should join egg co-ops and be on their boards, as there is no longer any fear of governors being against it. Rautakoski writes the following: "Besides, it has been noticed that when there are active farmers' wives on board, they have usually advanced the development of the co-op very efficiently."[29] Thus, Rautakoski does not defend gender equality for equality's sake. He defends women because they possess great use value as efficient workers, just like chickens, and are in this respect equal to men.[30]

28 Siikaniemi et al., *Pienviljelijän kananhoito*, 20.

29 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 68.

30 I thank the researchers of the Figuring Nature in the North project for bringing this to my attention, especially Marianna Lammi, Elsi Hyttinen and Jouni Teittinen.

Smallholder farming with chickens

> [L]ast year our egg co-op divided almost a million marks among our egg producers. When almost every producer is a smallholder farmer, you can see how significantly chicken keeping effects the private and public economy in both our parish and the whole nation.[31]

Agrarianism was a strong force in Finland. It began in the nineteenth century and especially flourished between the 1920s and 1950s. As the above quote from *Hen-Kaisa* illustrates, smallholder farms were considered to be the backbone of the Finnish economy and society.[32] A small-scale family farm is often defined as large enough for a family to earn a reasonable living as full-time farmers. Still, they often needed sidelines.[33] Egg farming constituted one of these sidelines, albeit a very important one in some districts. Rautakoski stresses the economic importance of the egg trade to the "egg parishes," especially to those which could feed the chickens with local crops.[34]

All the guides studied in this chapter recommend practising egg farming as a sideline, as large henhouses are potentially risky business. Among his descriptions of different henhouses, Rautakoski presents a few farms with several hundred chickens, but reminds the reader repeatedly that he recommends much smaller flocks.[35] Autere, for her part, emphasises in *The Farmwife's Hen Book* that chicken keeping is a sideline, and, as the climate in Finland is not favourable, it should stay so. According to her, big henhouses do not usually make a profit: "In most cases, it's best to keep the flock small enough to be cared for among other chores."[36]

Baking with eggs and using eggs in casseroles became popular at the end of the nineteenth century. This increased the demand for eggs.[37] Still, before the First World War, the egg trade was marginal and the economic significance of egg farming stemmed mostly from farming families using the eggs themselves.[38] *The Farmwife's Hen Book* tells us that egg farming for one's own use always pays,

31 Siikaniemi et al., *Pienviljelijän kananhoito*, 3–4.
32 Niemelä, *Talonpoika* 122; see also Jorma Kalela, "'Yhteiskunnallinen kysymys' ja porvarillinen reformismi," in *Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan poliittinen historia*, ed. by Ville Pernaa and Mari K. Niemi (Helsinki: Edita, 2008), 35.
33 Niemelä, *Talonpoika*, 123.
34 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 37–38.
35 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 24, 40–41, 43, 47.
36 Olga Autere, *Kansan emännän kanakirja* (Helsinki: Martta-yhdistys, 1916), 8–9.
37 Vihola, "Pärjääkö pienviljelys?," 175–176; Vihola, "Maatalouden rakennemuutokset," 345–346.
38 Vihola, "Maatalouden rakennemuutokset," 404.

because every wife needs eggs in cooking, and with hens, one does not have to buy eggs.[39] Chickens are also described as "the last link in the chain," because they can be mainly supported with nutritional scraps.[40]

The high price of eggs is a particular topic in Autere's *The Smallholder Farmer and Chicken Husbandry*, in which Mr. Suomela rascally says to his neighbour, who is dubious about the profitability of chicken husbandry:

> In the winter, eggs cost even two and a half Marks – at the time of your son's christening – and there were eggs in the cakes and biscuits you offered. And what about the *kinkerit* [a parish catechetical meeting]! There were eggs in both the main dishes and the cakes. [. . .] It is better for us farmers not to buy what we can produce.[41]

Still, farming families usually had a lot to do even without egg farming. Hence, they had to think who had the time to care for chickens. Some of the guides, especially *Boys and Girls Keeping Chickens* and *The Handbook of Chicken* Husbandry, encouraged the active participation of children as chicken farmers, with proper

Figure 4.2: Women and girls feeding white Leghorn chickens in the village of Reitkalli in Hamina, Southern Finland, on July 20, 1924. In the background of the photo there is a wooden fence of the pen. Identifier: KK4372:5805. Finnish Heritage Agency, Collection of Ethnographic Images. CC BY 4.0.

39 Autere, *Kansan emännän kanakirja*, 5–7.
40 Autere, *Kansan emännän kanakirja*, 5–6.
41 Autere, *Pienviljelijä ja kananhoito*, 4.

guidance. These guides also advised that the elderly could care for chickens. Rautakoski writes about an old couple, who had earned their principal living from their henhouse for 16 years: "Of course they don't have enough strength to do whatever, but even old people with their short steps can still walk to their chickens, and their hands can do, what's needed in the henhouse."[42]

Keeping chickens did not require great strength, nor a lot of seed money, maturity, or certain gender. Chickens could survive on smallish grounds and by eating inexpensive food. Increasing the flock was not expensive either, as broody hens did most of the work. For these reasons, chickens were especially important for women, children and the elderly on smallholder farms.

Human-avian love and care in egg farming

> But very rarely have I met real enthusiasm about chickens. Only a few people have it. It is a special affection for those beautiful and lively animals. I've met someone to whom her small chicks are the apple of her eye, who motherly tends them from their first steps and takes part in their joy and sorrow. When mature, the pullets know their caretaker from her voice and walk and show gratitude to their careful keeper in many touching ways. I have met this kind of attachment to chickens in both women and men.[43]

Many of the guides examined in this chapter stress that chicken farmers have to love their birds and care for them kindly. In Jaakko Ilkka and Kaarlo Hänninen's *The Handbook of Chicken Husbandry* there is an entire chapter entitled "A Suitable Caretaker". The first characteristic mentioned herein is "chicken enthusiasm." Similarly, Ilmari Relander writes that usually, after the first year with chickens, the farmers know whether they have enough time, love and enthusiasm for the chickens.[44] He also advises that as it is usually a woman who takes care of chickens, the henhouse should be built near "the building where women live," so that they would "have time to often go to the henhouse and *say kind words* to their chickens. You see, chickens are fond of people, and therefore they need to be socialised with to produce well."[45] The fictional Hen-Kaisa, for her part, ad-

42 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 21.

43 Jaakko Kivi and Kaarlo Hänninen, *Kananhoidon käsikirja* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1924), 150.

44 Ilmari Relander, *Kananhoidon alkuopas* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1931), 10.

45 Relander, *Kananhoidon alkuopas*, 24. In some of the gardening guides of the late nineteenth century it was similarly advised to situate the garden so that the farmwife could take care of it among her other household chores. See Taija Kaarlenkaski and Marjukka Piirainen, "Hyötyä ja hyvinvointia kansalle," *Elore* 21 (2014): 8–9.

vises her visitors to care for chickens with "tenderness and love," because "without these characteristics one gets nothing but nuisance from her henhouse."[46]

In summary, a loving and caring attitude towards chickens is an important characteristic of an egg farmer. Yet, what constitutes love and care in these books is not self-evident.

First, love towards chickens is deeply entangled with the egg-laying abilities of the hens. The guidebooks repeat the idea that loving chickens rewards the chicken keeper. Kivi and Hänninen write poetically: "*The personality of the caretaker* and the fervent participation in her darlings' creature comforts form a secret key to a hen's ovary store that opens with gratitude to the caretaker even when the gift of eggs seems to be against the law of nature."[47] Rautakoski also writes about how tender care is a requirement to ensure a great number of eggs.[48] Similarly, Relander concludes his book with the following sentences, which mix loving chickens with nationalism:

> Above all, one has to treat chickens *with love*. Chickens will reward a good caretaker, so we can be sure that if we tend to a chicken house well and rationally, it will be one of the cogs in the *Sampo* that mills love and success to our beloved fatherland.[49]

Writing about love and care in these guidebooks hides the fact that hens do not "give" their eggs to their keeper or reward her with them. All egg farming practises – from breeding and feeding to pasturage and friendly talk – are ultimately aimed at securing a rich supply of eggs. While Rautakoski, for example, stresses that a hen is not an egg machine and that hens cannot be bred to lay maximally because their bodies do not survive it and they will lose their fertility,[50] this animal welfare stand is deeply entangled with the goal of securing as many eggs as possible in the long run.

Second, individualised care forms part of the intensification of animal agriculture. Love towards great layers can mean hate towards those that lay less. Hen-Kaisa tells her visitors how she hates both lazy humans and lazy hens, because they live at the expense of others. Therefore, she uses trap nests to find out who are the "lazy" ones that are deemed not to lay enough eggs so that she can destroy them.[51] Here, both hens and humans are seen instrumentally. Similarly, in *Chicken Farming Pays* Rautakoski cites the chicken farmer Oiva Jääskeläinen,

46 Siikaniemi et al., *Pienviljelijän kananhoito*, 4.
47 Kivi and Hänninen, *Kananhoidon käsikirja*, 151.
48 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 11.
49 Relander, *Kananhoidon alkuopas*, 147. *Sampo* is a magical device in Finnish mythology, particularly known from the national epic *Kalevala*, in which Sampo is a mill that gives riches.
50 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 34.
51 Siikaniemi et al., *Pienviljelijän kananhoito*, 9.

the owner of a large henhouse of 1200 chickens, who calls those hens who rarely lay eggs "hen-thieves," who have to be weeded out.[52] *The Beginner's Guide to Chicken Husbandry* highlights human-avian love in egg farming, but firmly advises that all sick and weak chicks are destroyed, as they will never become good layers.[53] In the children's book *Boys and Girls Keeping Chickens*, the reader is similarly encouraged to compare the egg-laying of different hens, but the killing of unproductive hens is not mentioned.

Surprisingly few of the guidebooks describe methods of killing chickens in detail or even at all. The scarcity of references to killing practises is partly explained by the fact that the supposed reader is a smallholder farmer and is therefore assumed to already have some knowledge of killing. However, *The Farmwife's Hen Book* depicts how the silence around killing partly stems from the same source that justifies the killing by referring to lazy chickens and the vital growth of productivity – from love that makes the killing uncomfortable. Autere writes:

> The slaughter of chickens is the most unpleasant work in chicken keeping, and it happens every autumn. Most chicken keepers don't want to see it. But a chicken farmer has to make sure that her dear birds get as painless a death as possible. She has to familiarise herself with an animal welfare society in order to be able to follow the progress in this field, too.[54]

Here Autere relates that it is important to learn the most painless killing methods, and thus be familiar with the animal welfare societies. At the time these were the organisations developing and disseminating knowledge about how to kill animals.[55] However, she does not give advice about killing chickens. Instead, she moves straight on to plucking instructions.

As the philosopher María Puig de la Bellacasa has stated, care means different things in different contexts.[56] So does love. Human-animal love and care can challenge human exceptionalism and the institutional exploitation of animals.[57] Yet, in many cases they do not. In the guidebooks studied in this chapter, emphasising love towards chickens and caring for them is bound to the notion of them as killable and edible. As Taija Kaarlenkaski writes, "[e]motional and instrumental attitudes are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they constantly coexist

52 Rautakoski, *Kananhoito kannattaa*, 45.

53 Relander, *Kananhoidon alkuopas*, 136.

54 Autere, *Kansan emännän kanakirja*, 61.

55 Nora Schuurman and Karin Dirke, "From Pest to Pet: Liminality, Domestication and Animal Agency in the Killing of Rats and Cats," *Trace* 6 (2020): 9–14.

56 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 1–7.

57 Kathy Rudy, "LGBTQ . . . Z?," *Hypatia* 27 (2012): 605–612.

in animal husbandry."[58] Caring for farmed animals often includes instrumentalisation.[59] There can be human-avian love and care in egg farming, but they are shaped by the instrumental nature of the relationship. As Paula Arcari, a social scientist who has studied the meat discourses of the twenty-first century, writes, "a *rhetoric* of love or care can be layered largely untroublingly over persistent inequities and become another mechanism by which the exercise of power in concealed."[60] According to Arcari, the love directed at "food" animals is "a specific kind of love that is allocated to living others over which an advantaged group assumes dominion [. . .]. It is the kind of love that accepts control, coercion, mistreatment, and even death as part of its remit."[61] In animal husbandry, a farmer's love and care towards animals is entangled with commodification and instrumentalism, or, in other words, seeing the animals as one's own property.[62]

However, it is possible to see this pastoralist love and care in a more positive light. Donna Haraway, for example, defends animal farming because she sees it not as oppression – like Arcari and most other critical animal studies scholars do – but as human-animal labour; a form of commensalism. According to Haraway, even if farming includes killing or otherwise hurting the nonhuman animals, it is mutually rewarding. Still, Haraway strongly emphasises that ethical troubles are unavoidable when killing nonhuman animals. Even when animals are killed they should never be made or perceived as killable.[63]

In feminist ethics of care – a diverse strand of care theory much used in critical animal studies – the conception of care is more straightforward: care in the ethical sense of the word can never include exploitation.[64] However, when we talk about care as work or affections, the relationship between care and oppression is unavoidably more complex. Care is an acceptable word when describing these daily practises of feeding chickens, ensuring their light and warmth, talking to them in a kind manner and treating sick birds. It is also a possible word to

58 Kaarlenkaski, "Of Cows and Women," 23; see also Taija Kaarlenkaski, "Cattle Tending in the 'Good Old Times,'" in *Affect, Space and Animals*, ed. by Jopi Nyman and Nora Schuurman (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); Kaarlenkaski and Piirainen, "Hyötyä ja hyvinvointia kansalle," 14.

59 Jack Slater, "Ambiguous Care: More-Than-Human Care at the Beehive," *Journal of Animal Ethics* 11 (2021).

60 Arcari, *Making Sense*, 229.

61 Arcari, *Making Sense*, 229.

62 Arcari, *Making Sense*, 231–234.

63 Annie Potts and Donna Haraway, "Kiwi Chicken Advocate Talks with Californian Dog Companion," *Feminism & psychology* 20 (2010): 329–331.

64 Josephine Donovan, "The Voice of Animals: A Response to Recent French Care Theory in Animal Ethics," *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 11 (2013).

describe the sorrow a chicken farmer can feel when slaughtering her chickens. Nevertheless, the care for chickens described in the guidebooks is pastoralist, controlling and violent.

Conclusion

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, human egalitarianism in Finland evolved together with animal farming. The changes in the position of chickens are in many ways connected to the changes in the position of small-scale family farmers, female and male, young and old. Species, class, gender, age and domicile interweaved, as chickens were non-intentional agents of human egalitarianism. The guidebooks studied in this chapter illustrate how egg farming increased the social, economic and political agency of the farmers, especially female farmers.

Still, when the guidebooks discuss egg farming and nationality, neither the chickens nor the farming humans – men and women alike – are seen as beings with intrinsic value. Both are in use: the role of humans in the guidebooks is that of a citizen of a young or formative nation state, and the job of chickens is to improve the living standard of the nation. This is partly due to the genre of the texts: in egg farming guidebooks it would not have been possible to discuss the value of chickens outside of the realm of production. At the time and in the genre, both chickens and humans were described either as hard-working and productive or lazy and unproductive, good or unfit members of the multispecies society. The guidebooks not only advise how to use chickens, but also how to make the most use of the people themselves. Most of the guidebooks promote animal and human welfarism and women's agency, but this is not a genre that discussed abolitionist animal or human liberation perspectives.

The incipient egg industry in Finland both expanded the agency of women and increased the exploitation of chickens. Chickens and female chicken farmers were not allies, although the guidebooks represent them as such. When women gained more agency through the exploitation of the female reproductive system of chickens, the sexism against women declined, but the sexism against chickens increased.[65]

The chicken-keeping guidebooks promoted both animal welfare and more efficient use of chickens. This mixture of care and oppression still characterises ani-

65 See also pattrice jones, "Fighting Cocks: Ecofeminism versus Sexualized Violence," in *Sister Species: Women, Animals, and Social Justice*, ed. by Lisa Kemmerer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 53.

mal farming. Also, the agrarian thought that a family is the best unit of humans to care for farmed animals is still common in the marketing that celebrates "family farms." When it comes to human-chicken relations, the guidebooks do not describe a bygone era of the "good old days" that was totally different than today, but, in a less-extreme form, the same ideas that dominate in chicken husbandry today when chickens are the most common bird both in Finland and globally.[66]

66 Warm thanks to people in the "Culture of Unsustainability" and "Figuring Nature in the North" projects for the conversations that helped to shape this chapter.