Chook Talk and the Controlled Junglefowl

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Abstract

My critical autoethnography questions the discursive practices surrounding the consumption of domesticated junglefowl, birds scientifically known as *Gallus domesticus* and commonly known as 'meat' or chicken. I investigate the degree to which language might matter when it comes to the fate faced by billions of farmed junglefowl every year, beginning with a description of my family's small-scale egg husbandry and associated rooster and hen slaughter. I then outline Western stereotypes that belittle junglefowl in ways that are nearly always negative and often misogynistic. This leads me to a consideration of the terminology employed by animal advocacy and 'meat' industry communities, where I find that while the animals I call here 'controlled junglefowl' are commonly referred to in the 'meat' industry as poultry or chickens, and referred to as hens, roosters and chicks by those interested in changing their life patterns, all terms are used across all sectors. This makes me question the degree to which words matter, compared to context and culture. I conclude by turning to the communications of domesticated junglefowl, and as an old chook, find that despite advances in understanding the cognitive worlds of these avian beings, not much has changed in the social license to breed, grow and slaughter them.

Keywords

Poultry; chickens; *Gallus domesticus*; animal welfare; animal rights, critical autoethnography; intertextual discourse analysis

Introduction

Animal advocates are working hard to make improvements in the limited life choices available to billions of half-grown avians scientifically known as *Gallus domesticus* or *Gallus gallus domesticus*, and less known for their common name, domesticated junglefowl. Despite efforts to improve the conditions under which most domesticated junglefowl live, the overwhelming cultural acceptance of the status quo has limited these changes.

The lives lived by most domesticated junglefowl are brutally different to the lives of their ancestors. In intensive animal agriculture these animals are winnowed, caged, crowded, and killed at six to eight weeks. Without such human intervention, these animals freely forage, bathe in any kind of dust that suits them, create their nests to personal specifications, determine what roost will best keep them safe, and generally get on with each other as they prefer, with a life expectancy of up to twenty years.

This situation has drawn my attention to the discursive practices that surround these animals. I began this essay under the impression that the narrative strategies of animal welfare reformists and abolitionists advocating for legislative change to modify or halt the consumption of 'chicken meat' were very different to the stories told by chicken farmers and government regulators. This inkling was shaped by my reservations about categories that problematically divide humans from other animals. In response to this exceptionalism, like many of my animal studies colleagues, I often use the term 'people' beyond my own species. I realise that this more inclusive personhood may create confusion in readers unfamiliar with this perspective, but I find this linguistic strategy more fairly represents domesticated junglefowl and helps steer my own thinking.

A little way into this research, I started using the term domesticated junglefowl, when I didn't have a given name (such as Sue) to use when referring to the feathered people under my critical consideration. Before this, 'chook' was my preferred word because in my familial culture this term is suggestive of kindness. Chook is slang for a female domesticated junglefowl, a word of British origin often used in so-called Australia and Aotearoa-New

Zealand. As chook suffers the limitations of gender, I thought perhaps a neologism might be better, a deliberate misspelling, similar to the way G'ua G'ua/Erub/Mer artist Destiny Deacon instigated Blak for her community in this continent where I live (Munro). Sadly, all I could find was chouk, which means marketplace. Chock and choke were just as grim. I continued to use the term domesticated junglefowl, until I realized how the word domestication erases the violence in the carceral lives of most of these beings. I shifted to the more accurate phrase 'controlled junglefowl'. This term jolts me out of the culturally acquired assumptions which come to roost when I use the words chicken, hen, rooster, chook, and domesticated junglefowl.

This essay firstly recounts some of my experiences with controlled junglefowl, then outlines a range of Western stereotypes that denigrate these people. This is followed by an overview of the terminology employed by advocacy and industry communities when referring to controlled junglefowl. I conclude by considering the communicative lifeworlds of controlled junglefowl. I do not offer new findings on the communicative patterns of controlled junglefowl, either between themselves or with humans, or by humans about them. Rather, my work underlines the fact that despite all the work being done to better understand and talk about the cognition and behaviours of controlled junglefowl, their living conditions have barely improved.

Methodological indications

Animal studies has always crossed disciplines. In a scholarly journal issue dedicated to other-than-human ethnography, the editors, Marianne Elisabeth Lien and Gisli Pálsson, point to the work of animal studies philosophers Dominique Lestel, Jeffrey Bussolini and Matthew Chrulew, drawing out the connection they make between ethology and ethnography. Lestel and colleagues, privileging the relationality of storying over the atrophied realism that marks human exceptionalism, describe this approach as 'good empirical work' that lends itself to 'ongoing theoretical and speculative interpretation' (125). This notion of scholarly freedom

sits well with a piece written by Tim Ingold in Lien and Pálsson's special issue. Ingold strongly supports the intellectual fluidity made possible by 'observant participation' (169). He notes that many ethnographers work 'for the love of it, motivated by a sense of care and affection, personal involvement and responsibility', and they do so 'for life' (155, 166). This is true for many animal studies scholars, myself included, whose 'day jobs' often involve different but related fields.

There is a particular responsibility that comes with using critical autoethnography as a scholarly mode of inquiry. By foregrounding positionality in the interests of transparency and relationality, it is made clear that personal interest explicitly drives the thinking presented. Communication scholars Robin Boylorn and Mark Orbe describe the methodological benefits of this interest-led approach in political terms, pointing to the way lived experience allows the critical autoethnographer to turn away from the fiction of an objective 'other' (for nothing is truly objective) so that the relational self becomes fully visible. They go on to argue that this explicit personal and cultural positioning, where critical autoethnographers 'take responsibility' for their 'subjective lenses', makes the potential for social change more visible (15). Ethnographer Cheryl Le Roux expands on this idea, arguing that critical autoethnography's scientific validity emerges through the 'trustworthiness' that comes with a reflexive researcher perspective (196). This ethical framework can be seen in my approach here. My lived experience of farming, feminism, First Nations rights and animal advocacy leads me to connect the poor treatment of controlled junglefowl to systemic colonialist misogyny.

The hegemonic structures that underpin industrial animal agriculture have been carefully described by a range of critical animal scholars. The misogyny embedded in the exploitation of farmed animals was clearly drawn by theologian Carol Adams over thirty years ago. Adams' recent collaboration with philosopher Lori Gruen draws together an impressive range of critical thinking that further theorises this misogyny, adding an intersectional perspective that resonates with my work as a teacher working in Indigenous studies. As a settler /invader/uninvited guest thinking about colonialisation, I find the links

philosopher Syl Ko draws between racism and nonhuman animal exploitation have strong sympathies with the theoretical position of political scientist Dinesh Wadiwel, who has written extensively about the colonialist structures that support human violence against other-than-human animals, highlighting the latter's resistance to these harms. With Wadiwel, Ko, Adams and Gruen, alongside many other thinkers I engage with, I find that human violences are intensified by colonialist categorisations that place white men at an apex created by a particular construct of 'God' made incarnate in a power elite with dominion over people of colour, women, and other-than-human animals.

This intersectional critical position informs my concern with the farming of controlled junglefowls. It dismays me that there is very little in the lives of most of these people that comes anywhere close to the multibeings justice theorised by the animal studies thinkers who inspire me. As the scholarship around multispecies justice makes clear, my human perspective makes it impossible to know what justice for these communities might look like to them, but that does not mean equity is unimportant. Environmental scholar Sria Chatterjee and cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis describe the tensions across animal lifeworlds as an 'unassimilable, unknowable difference' that holds humans apart from other animals (Celermajer 497). In dialogue with Chatterjee and Neimanis, sociologist Danielle Celermajer makes a similar point, arguing that beings who are not human 'have different phenomenal lifeworlds, biotic affordances, capacities, and needs' (479). My notions of justice and freedom are necessarily based on my own lifeworld, affordances, capacities and needs; the personhood I grant to controlled junglefowls might feel certain and real to my thinking body, but may be less relevant to them.

This is a limitation only insofar as it directs my analytical engagement largely towards the expressions and texts humans produce in relation to controlled junglefowl. In this respect, my analysis draws upon my scholarly grounding in literary studies. Close reading, which can be referred to as interpretive attention (Ohrvik), makes my approach here quite different to formal discourse analysis. Encouraged by Norman Fairclough, a critical discourse analysist who dismisses the limitations in 'systematic analysis', my work is

interested in intertextual discourse analyses that describe the hermeneutical sense-making of actors who work to bring their world into coherence with others, transforming 'ideological assumptions' into an apparent common sense (64). Recipients do their own interpretive work around the stories they encounter, but this work is influenced by the storytellers. As political scientist Maarten Hajer argues, different actors create different stories to achieve 'authoritative narratives' (46). Political scientist Dan Lyons describes these various authoritative narratives as discourse coalitions, suggesting both intensive farming coalitions and animal protection coalitions deploy storylines that make 'complex phenomena that are not immediately perceptible' into narratives with an ethical coherence that achieves 'discursive hegemony' by persuading their audiences to see the story the same way as they do. Storylines create and maintain a discursive order that makes sense to those telling and hearing the stories, and when it comes to controlled junglefowl, the stories most often told and heard follow the extractive patterns of advanced Western capitalism.

Living with chook talk

My formative avian-related experiences are different to the intimacies of 'safe' sanctuaries, the intentional caring communities described by Heather Rosenfeld. As the youngest of four children, actively involved in the workings of a small dairy farm, I had regular contact with controlled junglefowl. I am not exactly sure how long and how often we enclosed five to ten hens and one rooster, but I do remember our food-producing prisoners were not named and seemed quite alike, with only one rooster being memorable for his way of coming at small humans with his feathers and voice raised. He didn't last long. I only made the effort to differentiate between these birds when a member of the flock got broody and sat on her eggs in the yard. She fought hard for her choice to lay her eggs on her own terms, resisting the wire nesting structure built on a slope in the 'chook pen' to make eggs easy for humans to collect, and impossible for hens to keep warm enough to hatch. It was a structure, as

architectural scholar Natalie Lis explains, created to 'direct how labour unfolds' (43). The end of each carceral project was marked with bloody incursions by canines, sometimes dogs and sometimes foxes, who were skilled in compromising chicken wire fences.

We were generally given laying hens by our neighbours, but one exceptional season we held a hen captive under a triangular frame where she stoically sat on her eggs just outside our back door. Her enclosure was so small we could reach in and tempt her to take food treats held in one hand, while taking out one of her eggs with our other hand for the joy of listening to her babies chittering inside their shell. The sweetness of that brood educated me to experience any wad of thick blood attached to a yolk as a tragedy.

Like my parents and three siblings, I ate 'meat' then, although we are nearly all vegan now. We most often ate sheep, grown at a distance from our home, and sometimes rabbits, 'pests' tellingly nicknamed 'underground chicken', who were trapped by the male members of my family. Before mass production lowered the price of young chickens, we rarely ate controlled junglefowl, with the exception of the hens who stopped laying and the sensibly aggressive rooster.

I was never asked to skin rabbits or sheep, but I wasn't allowed to shirk plucking the feathers from hen and rooster corpses after they were dunked in boiling water to make their feathers come out more easily. It was appalling work. I didn't have to do the 'gutting' but was once handed a warm egg to keep safe for later consumption. I felt the injustice. The murdered hen wasn't a non-layer at all. Two lives, unfairly taken. Being part of this process informed my transition from omnivore to vegan, although it took a few decades in the city to move to my current position.

My limited knowledge about controlled junglefowl was broadened by other birds I got to know as a child, and then as an adult. The younger of my two older sisters was given a caged budgerigar. Every day Jo was let out of his cage to fly inside the house for a long stint. He often landed on our heads, would easily be cajoled onto our fingers and sometimes dived

into our meals. His lip pecks were like kisses. He flew to freedom when the back door was left open. My sister sourced a replacement budgerigar who repeated this pattern more quickly and that was the end of that.

Once we were gifted five ducks by my mother's cousin, who called them her dear wee bitty-birds. They travelled in the back of our station wagon, raising a stink over a five-hour drive that was only noticed when we got out of the car for our own toilet break. They were placid and tolerated petting. I loved the way they followed me. Before long, the foxes followed them.

I had little more to do with human-controlled birds until I left home. A close friend moved into a shared home that included a young bantam hen. I carefully nursed Sylvia whenever I visited, feeling the heartbeat under her small fragile ribcage and the ribbing of her feather quills that felt like the teeth of a fine-tooth comb.

Having recently moved back to the country from the city, I am once more living near people who fence in hens to eat their eggs and bodies. A dancing friend sells 'rescued hen' eggs. Her daughter is an animal justice warrior, and under her tutelage my friend's car carries a spray can, gloves and a box lined with a towel so she can stop and check the pouches of kangaroos and wallabies killed by cars. My friend is a good egg who spends more money on feeding these hens than she makes selling ova. I buy eggs from her for my non-vegan friends and family. These purchases are shaped by our family's many nameless hens, the scary rooster, the brood of tiny chickens, those cheeky budgerigars, the five gentle bitty-bird ducks, Sylvia the charismatic bantam and my friend's unknown rescued hens. My muddy politics are a mixed stream of cool distance and warm familiarity. My heart seeks abolition while my mind sees the benefits in increments of kindness.

Naming and shaming domesticated junglefowls in popular culture

In the Western culture that raised me and surrounds me now, discursive assumptions around controlled junglefowl are linked to negative human behaviours. These stereotypes mostly revolve around sexist and ageist notions of inferior intelligence.

A silly old bird is rarely a man, and my mother says, far too often, I'm as useless as an old chook. Public opinion suggests only a bird brain would appreciate chick lit, chook books, or chick flicks. It is mainly women who are said to be broody, and only a woman can be no spring chicken or fuss like an old hen. All genders can exhibit apparent irrationality, but it is unusual for a male to be told they are acting like a chook with her head cut off. These confabulations bear out feminist studies into the 'parallels between the discourses of gender/sexuality and animality' (Birke et al. 168). Cultural stereotypes about the selfish or unreasonable behaviours of controlled junglefowls are also often misogynistic. Women are most often said to have had their feathers ruffled and the notion of a pecking order alludes to competition amongst women for the attention of men. Joan Dunayer writes that this linguistic work 'communicates scorn,' reinforcing the idea that both women and hens are exploitable as mere bodies' (12). The work of such talk, as she goes on to explain, is to suggest an experiential world not worthy of consideration.

There are also sexist putdowns related to male humans that put down roosters. Bombastic male humans are criticised for strutting around all cock of the walk, crowing about themselves. Oddly, the opposite also applies. It is usually males who are considered chicken-livered, although all genders can chicken out. The idea of a henpecked man derides both males and females.

Controlled junglefowl have not always been dismissed as stupid, selfish, arrogant and cowardly. Annie Potts' cultural analysis, *Chicken*, is a compelling account of shifting human perspectives around the controlled junglefowl she refers to as 'chickenkind', from 'respected and even feared' beings, to a community suffering deeply established patterns of abuse and disregard (465). As Potts points out in this work, and in a more recent study, a

broad range of other cultures admire roosters as heroes of the morning and understand hens as hospitable and exceptional mothers. I can see echoes of this in older strains of the Western culture that shapes me, particularly in the delightfully queer Christian metaphor of loving care, where a Christ-like hen gathers in their chicks.

There is also a gentle use of 'hen' as an affectionate address between close friends and family. This empowering term of endearment is used among the female characters of *Derry Girls,* the 'first female-led Northern Irish teen sitcom in UK television' (Jaraso Álvarez 2). In so-called Australia, 'hen' is rarely used this way, but 'chick' can have a similar connotation. At least, it doesn't feel like a negative reduction when I call my niblings and children chicks, and they haven't yet called me out on it. Perhaps they find infantilising terminology acceptable when it comes from an old chook like me.

Generally, however, negative stereotypes prevail, and this may limit the possibilities for controlled junglefowls to live more fully. Cultural theorist Claire Parkinson argues that carnism is supported by these kinds of discursive strategies, suggesting that 'cultural practices and conventions' shape direct and mediated encounters between species, in relational if not interchangeable ways (3). Peter Chen's detailed political analysis of the formation and maintenance of 'meat'-eating cultures in so-called Australia describes the efforts required in 'avoiding the realities' of what is involved in meat consumption (64). Communication scholars Núria Almiron and Olatz Aranceta-Roboredo argue that humans can live with this cognitive dissonance because of the 'meat' industry's concerted effort to 'justify the exploitation of nonhuman animals' by 'lobbying against compassion' (411). They suggest that this 'constant exposition and habituation to suffering' limits compassion, numbing individuals in ways that 'normalize violence' (413). As social psychologist Melanie Joy famously makes clear, it is hard to turn against the overwhelming carnist 'truth' that eating 'meat' is 'normal, natural and necessary'. Adams has theorized this social function in her analysis of the term 'meat', developing the philosophical concept of the absent referent. In certain contexts, present referents seem just as problematic as absent ones. Some 'meat'-eaters go so far as to eat only animals they know (Wahlquist). I have eaten with people who

call the dead animals on their tables by their human-given names. When hens, roosters and chickens are named in a carnist context, neoliberal connections to individualism are strengthened and no lives are saved. Naming creatures who are to be killed might make them more familiar, but it is not a radical interruption to carnist cultures. Language swings like an animal hung upside down to bleed out.

The cultural assumption that controlled junglefowl are less clever than humans supports the idea that it is appropriate for humans to consume them. It is telling that humans generally consider chickens the most edible of animals, while also belittling the capacity and capability of their minds compared to mammals (Bastian et al.). By erasing the intelligence of the animals they are eating, humans manage the cognitive dissonance of animal consumption (Leach et al.). This belief is supported by the equally fallacious idea that genetic fine tuning has bred ineptitude into 'domesticated' junglefowl, a narrative of pre-determined unthinkingness that is also directed at other animals used by humans, including cows and sheep.

This claim of a genetically designed stupidity has been comprehensively disproved by scientific investigations. As with other controlled animals, controlled junglefowl are not so different from red junglefowl. The differences are in plumage, not intellectual capacity. Despite intense breeding and genetic manipulation, 'domestic chickens remain similar to their uncontrolled counterparts', the red junglefowl, or *Gallus gallus* (Marino 129). The difference is created in the cages (Johnsson). While animal behaviour changes under carceral management, animal potential is not so affected.

Ramifications follow from this false narrative. Philosopher and veterinary ethicist Bernard Rollin suggests that this broad cultural disrespect is part of the reason chickens are often the last to be considered when it comes to public concern about intensive confinement agriculture. He points to the United States 1957 Humane Slaughter Act which did not include chickens, arguing that this oversight is why welfare reforms are still 'primarily directed toward mammals' (2). This marginalization is even worse for smaller animals bred for food, such as farmed fishes and, increasingly, insects (Wadiwel 'Do Fish Resist?';

Crummett). At this point in time decisions like these cannot be blamed on a lack of available scientific data. Twenty years ago, animal behaviour scientist Lesley Rogers began to study 'the cognitive abilities of the domestic chicken' because these animals, as a group, were the 'most exploited and least respected' (221). Now, according to animal behaviourists Rafael Freire and Susan Hazel, the number of studies into the cognition and emotions of controlled junglefowl exceeds that of most birds, with articles being published in numbers comparable to scholarly works regarding mammals (3). Overall, however, scientific research has not created much difference in the lives of controlled junglefowl.

This is the paradox: knowing how smart these animals are, even knowing them personally, does not always reduce people's willingness to eat them. Rollin suggests that 'anyone who has kept chickens around the house and spends time with them will bond with them and detect in them many of the traits that one finds in other companion animals' (3). However, as psychologists Ewan Bottomly and Steve Loughnan point out, meeting chickens 'may increase how intelligent and social we believe them to be, but may not make us care about them more' (3). Animal psychologist Marc Bekoff puts it bluntly: 'we must use what we know on behalf of other animals', instead of 'pretending we need more data' (2). Bekoff's criticism suggests the main achievement of researching controlled junglefowl, either by meeting them or writing about them, is the maintenance of an expectation that we need to know more about them before we stop killing them.

I am not convinced. The horror of those deeply embedded feather quills and that warm egg didn't stop me eating these beings immediately, but it made me uneasy, and that was the start of entering the stories around me differently. The problem lies in the well-funded heft in industry's storytelling, boosted by government support, that influences the sciences and popular culture. Almiron and Aranceta-Roboredo show how farming industry narratives aim to align society with 'hegemonic industry discourses regarding the control and management of life,' including those bare lives of the vast proportion of controlled

junglefowl (414). 'Meat' farmers in Europe and the US receive around a thousand times more public funding than non-'meat' industries (Carrington). The farming industry's biopower involves serious investment.

More funding directed at agricultural productivity is likely now that scientific research is heading in environmental directions. I am relieved it is no longer a debated point that climate damage is imbricated with intensive animal agriculture. However, welfare concerns are rarely a focus in these environmental considerations (Costantini et al.). The 'meat' industry is trying to find ways to operate under this 'seismic time of change' (McDougal). It appears that, so far, feed and infrastructure changes are the silver bullets. Better welfare might be a byproduct, but it is rarely an aim. Consumption reduction is rarely on the table.

It would take a lot of investment to redirect Big Farmer's dominant narrative and I'm not sure what would be the best way to achieve such a shift. My own experience makes me uncertain. Meeting the babies I had heard inside their shells is one of the reasons it horrifies me to imagine the death of those chicks six to eight weeks after they hatch. Toddlers, not far grown from babies, small enough to be cupped in my hand. Yet although those chicks I held had the chance to mature into an egg-laying adolescent or an extraneous male, in the end, they were still killed and accepted by me as food.

Doubling down the discourse

It is difficult to find the right words to talk about the lived horror of the vast majority of controlled junglefowls in this world, especially when the cruelty of farming methods such as debeaking, light saturation and crowding, are accepted as best practice in the regulations of most jurisdictions. Some of the work being undertaken by advocates working to unsettle these prevailing discourses involves thinking about the language used to describe these communities.

A style guide created for media practitioners recommends the term 'poultry' be avoided by those working to improve the welfare of controlled junglefowls, putting forward 'chickens' as a less reductive term (Animals and Media 4). It is true that the word 'poultry' does not suggest personhood, and this is reflected in the content of industry publications such as *Poultry World*, the work of research bodies like Poultry Hub Australia and the articles in journals like *Poultry Science* (Sandøe et al.; Janssen et al.). Communications scholar Carrie Freeman refuses 'industry euphemisms in describing birds', and always includes active verbs such as 'farmed, used, exploited, bred, sold, consumed' to make explicit the human role in using these beings for an agricultural or business purpose (2). For Freeman, employing these verbs creates a radical and much-needed transparency about what is being done to whom.

I sometimes do the same at the dinner tables I sit at, calling out the flesh and carcasses of people that my loved ones prefer to call 'meat'. My hope is that using such language might help create dietary change. I see similar benefits in creating a hierarchy from disassociation to personhood: poultry; broilers; broiler chickens; meat chickens; chickens bred for meat; chickens raised for meat; farmed chickens; intensively farmed chickens; slow grown chickens; sustainable chickens; chickens, roosters, hens and then, ideally, given names for these beings.

Yet perhaps only new words will do. The Dutch neologism plopkif, inadequately translated as 'exploding chicken,' is a powerful example. This term was put forward by animal advocates to draw attention to the physical hardships suffered by chickens bred to have more breast than their legs can hold up. Either the word itself, or the culture which created it, significantly shifted welfare standards, at least according to the animal welfare group Wakker Dier, who popularized the term. Once an eight-week-old controlled junglefowl began to be seen as four-year-old, bred and fed to weigh eighty kilos, more than half the chickens consumed in the Netherlands were regulated to live a little longer, and have a little more room indoors and outdoors with access to a little more natural light

(Neilson). These gains show that benefits do come with language changes, but in this case at least, the changes were limited because the call was for more ethical 'meat' consumption, rather than for the abolition of killing other animals for food.

It is possible to think about exploding chickens, the plopkif, differently. Imagine another verse to Dana Lyon's anti-carnist animated folksong 'Cows with Guns', involving 'chickens in choppers' teaming up with cows in a collective resistance to being burger-ised. Imagine chickens strategically sacrificing their toddler bodies to explode ideas of what is normal, natural and necessary, by strapping dynamite to their breasts and lobbing themselves into a fast service restaurant. This is not a pleasant image, but it is worth noting, with Potts, that such ideas are present in contemporary ideas of a 'vengeful chickenkind' (*Chicken*). Zoonosis has been considered in the same way by visual artist and philosopher Tessa Laird, who writes of 'chickens coming home to roost with an avian flu made of secret herbs and spices and growth hormones' (688). Gender theorist Jack Halberstam points to the avian resistance in the animated adventure film, *Chicken Run*, suggesting that Mrs Tweedy misses the chance to join a 'sisterhood' ready to revolt because she doesn't see this community of controlled junglefowls 'think[ing] with others' towards 'a more collective futurity' (31, 44). Halberstam's insight takes me to the struggling movements of the roosters and hens chosen for slaughter in my childhood. My eldest sister remembers a rooster, running with his head chopped off. The moment she says this, I remember it too. These fictive narratives of a suite of tactics employed by controlled junglefowl communities to avoid their murder is a satisfying thought experiment that counters my experience of feathered beings struggling against the inexorable grasp of humans.

This question of resistance can be taken metaphorically. If being told you are acting like a controlled junglefowl is an act of control, then it might be that chook-like behaviour itself can be read as an act of revolt. Best I keep talking my head off, fluffing my feathers and hanging around like an old chook, scratching out a living in the dust bath of my words.

The possibility that attention to phraseology might lead some people towards more abolitionist thinking is supported by the Australian government's recent senate enquiry into the use of the word 'chicken' when describing plant-based foods (Commonwealth of Australia). The Australian Chicken Meat Federation submitted that they 'strongly object' to anything other than products involving 'the flesh of a slaughtered chicken' being labelled in this way (Kite 1). The precision in those words – flesh, slaughter – could come straight from an animal advocate's mouth. The context in which these words are used makes all the difference.

In so-called Australia, the RSPCA refers to 'meat chickens' when urging support to 'take action'. The pan-European advocacy group, Eurogroup for Animals, refers to 'broiler chickens'. A publication from the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals uses 'broiler chicken', 'hens', 'chicks' and 'bird' in the one publication (Stadig and van den Berg). They also sometimes call these people by a name.

Academics in animal studies also use a full range of terms. Wadiwel describes, in chilling detail, the 'large-scale chicken resistance' that 'has produced the nightmare reality of the chicken harvesting machine' ('Chicken' 536, 543). There is nothing conciliatory in Wadiwel's depiction of beings who 'press against, disrupt, and leak value from' the most 'complete and relentless models of authoritarian subordination' humans can devise (528). In Wadiwel's context, 'broiler chicken' becomes a powerfully fitting description.

The carnism in the term 'bpm' or birds per minute can also be taken more than one way. It is, first and foremost, the count of the harvest (Patel and Moore). But some humans actively compete to see how quickly they can eat a chicken wing. By my calculations (wing flesh by ounce, to the weight of an average 'chicken') the record is half a bird per minute, bpm, or the equivalent of six birds in one twelve-minute sitting. The competitors might well consume the acronym as quickly as they eat these people. Reemploying this word can underline the horrors suggested by the usage of such a term, bringing the status quo undone, but it can also reinforce ideas of efficiency around the way these birds get killed and eaten. It is a conundrum. Fast service restaurants use the word 'chicken' to describe a food choice,

I use the word to describe a family of motherless toddlers who haven't had the chance to learn how to stagger towards independence, and animal advocates use all the words available to them.

Most likely, for as long as the slaying of chickens is not understood as barbaric, words like bmp will remain as unfixed as words like chook. Making reality clearer does not always create discomfort for those adhering to the social practice of 'meat' eating. How can it, when this practice is overwhelmingly experienced as unproblematic? From this perspective, bpm is nothing more than a measure. Words matter, context matters more, but culture matters most of all.

Sentient chook talk

My consideration of discourses surrounding controlled junglefowl must, ethically, include attending to their communications. My personal expertise in such communications is limited, not least because I do not live with controlled or red junglefowl. Even humans engaging in daily relational encounters can only speak the languages of controlled junglefowl in rudimentary ways.

Some researchers are conducting affective multimodal deployments of discourse analysis that decentre established linguistic patterns. Parkinson suggests this approach offers significant critical gains by gathering sound, smell, touch and visuality into questions of 'spoken or written language' (7). This methodological direction aligns with the biocentric view Freeman and Debra Merskin call for, which aims to 'infuse more humility and interconnectedness' into how we humans position ourselves 'in and among other animals who also want to live freely in safe and healthy habitats' (Freeman and Merskin 1-2). Increasingly, animal studies is taking this direction, seeking a 'radical reciprocity' in dialogue (Tavella and Spiegelhofer). Language need not be limited to words, and power is not always fixed in the relations humans have with avians, even in the most intensive of farming situations.

Whatever the research approach, there is no question about the intelligence and emotional reach of controlled junglefowl. However, measuring responses to animals kept within the confines of a laboratory is questionable and data is uncontrolled when it comes to researching animals able to please themselves in the limited context of animal husbandry (Lester et al.; Lis). Body language can feel like the surest measure, particularly when it comes to resistance.

Despite this caveat, I am convinced by animal behaviourist Lori Marino, who finds that 'chickens are just as cognitively, emotionally and socially complex as most other birds and mammals' (127). She argues that it is the commodification of these beings that has led to the misperception that they lack the 'psychological characteristics we recognize in other intelligent animals' (128). In Marino's assessment, a controlled junglefowl has strong visual, spatial and arithmetic capacities; self-control; an ability to self-assess; the self-aware ability to take the perspective of another animal; and a perception of time intervals and anticipation of future events. Controlled junglefowl are sophisticated complex social learners who make logical inferences and exhibit emotional contagion and empathy (141). Other scientists, like Kristen Andrews, have reservations about some of the studies that comprise Marino's findings, particularly the study that finds controlled junglefowl will put aside immediate small rewards for larger rewards (3). This is, however, as Andrews points out, a small quibble when it comes to thinking about how these people should be treated.

No doubt such disagreements will be ironed out as advances in technology offer researchers more precise findings. For example, data analysis based on the co-location of animal vocalisations can now identify 'non-random, communicatively relevant call combinations and, more generally, signal sequences' (Bosshard 121). However, I am not sure how many humans will be ready to hear such findings and then act differently, in accordance with what I would see as the ethical implications of such research. It's not as if there is any ambiguity around this community's preference not to be eaten.

I am not without hope. Many humans are reorienting themselves towards multibeings co-existence. Philosopher Eva Meijer draws on the work of Len Howard to describe these 'new forms of interaction' between birds and humans across geographical situations, celebrating the fact that humans increasingly don't bother distinguishing between 'domesticated, wild, [or] liminal' birds (237-238). In response, these birds 'co-shape' home decoration, garden planning and nocturnal and diurnal habits (238). Such mutual care seems a good way forward, given that human environmental destruction has left very few places of safe refuge for unfenced junglefowl.

Innovative shared space creation is a positive step towards multispecies justice, but it is sobering to remember that although many humans understand the depth of 'domesticated' junglefowl communications, billions of controlled junglefowl continue to be slaughtered every year. It is hard to imagine this process will come to an end anytime soon, even if farming practices might be made a little less ruthless.

This dismal likelihood is underlined in the decades of work done in animal studies around sentience; important work that is assisting animal advocates to build arguments for animal welfare advancements. In 2019, RSPCA UK stated that 'if animals can have feelings, as we know many can, both their physical and mental welfare needs must be taken into account'. Animal advocate Mark Jones finds the UK Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 a necessary development well reinstated in legislation, arguing 'recognition in law is a vital step towards improving welfare,' with the Animal Sentience Committee functioning 'to hold Ministers to account' (1-2). Yet the introduction of the legal concept of sentience has so far achieved only the most limited of gains: a few more hours of light, a few more weeks to live, no more lifting by the legs when it comes time to be taken to slaughter.

It is always difficult to shift the status quo in a meaningful way. As Dan Lyons argues, animal welfare efforts are 'rarely sufficient because of a tendency towards the politics of symbolic reassurance and dynamic conservatism'. For Lyons, laws form part of a hegemonic policy discourse that appears to consider animal welfare, but the discretion allowed for in legal texts, combined with information control, leads to a 'discursive

dominance of powerful and credible elite scientific and economic interests'. The evidence for this lies in the lack of fundamental changes in most 'domesticated' junglefowl communities.

Conclusions

During my earlier years, living on a farm, my family's extractive use of controlled junglefowl was normalised by carnist discourses. In my broader cultural context, negative stereotypes belittled the personhood of controlled junglefowl in ways that helped justify mistreatment of controlled junglefowl. I have changed since then, but these cultural putdowns remain largely in place. There is more movement in the phraseology used by the 'meat' industry and animal advocacy sectors, although all use 'meat'-oriented terms such as poultry or broilers, and animal-oriented words like hens or birds. The words chosen might be less important than the narrative strategies directed to their respective audiences. It is the context that makes most difference to the words in the story, and culture that shapes how that story is heard.

The limited trends towards better welfare for controlled junglefowl are taking place in a world where measures of avian sentience, including individual utterances, cognitive complexity and body language, are well understood. It seems that interpretations of controlled junglefowl discourses are limited only by the possibilities conceivable by the human imaginations involved in such research, and the technologies available for deployment. Yet despite the linguistic and embodied languages of controlled junglefowl now being understood as representing significant cognitive complexity, the social license to operate a process of breeding, growing and slaughtering these animals has not been undermined. The social license to kill members of this species is so strong that industry abolition seems a long way distant, even with all the work being done by human animal

advocates to make this action abnormal, unnatural and unnecessary, alongside the even more desperate work of the controlled junglefowl themselves, who are continuing to directly resist extractive use of their bodies.

I appreciate the incremental changes in welfare policies that might shift humans away from murder and into care, even those reluctant to leave the social norms that have shaped them, and understand, at least in part, the reason why progress is so slow, through my childhood self, plucking feathers out of a corpse, teeth gritted. I am grateful to the many animal advocates, both human and avian, who have educated me with the full force of their discursive power, into my current state of culinary freedom.

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