

‘Most farmers prefer Blondes’: The Dynamics of Anthroparchy in Animals’ Becoming Meat

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My visit to the Royal Smithfield Show, one of the largest events in the British farming calendar, reminded me of the gendering of agricultural animals. Upon encountering one particular stand in which there were three pale honey coloured cows (with little room for themselves), some straw, a bucket of water, and Paul, a farmer’s assistant. Two cows were lying down whilst the one in the middle stood and shuffled. Each cow sported a chain around her neck with her name on it. The one in the middle was named ‘Erica.’ Above the stand was a banner that read, ‘Most farmers prefer Blondes,’ a reference to the name given to this particular breed, the Blonde D’Aquitaine. The following conversation took place:

Erika: What’s special about this breed? Why should farmers prefer them?

Paul: Oh, they’re easy to handle, docile really, they don’t get the hump and decide to do their own thing. They also look nice, quite a nice shape, well proportioned. The colour’s attractive too.

E: What do you have to do while you’re here?

P: Make sure they look alright really. Clear up after ‘em, wash ‘n brush ‘em. Make sure that one (he pokes ‘Erica’) don’t kick anyone.

E: I thought you said they were docile.

P: They are normally. She’s abnormal that one-- really bad tempered.

E: Perhaps she doesn’t like the crowds and the lights?

P: She certainly didn’t like the lift yesterday.

E: I don’t suppose she’s had much experience in lifts.

P: Nah, it’s not that. She’s just a bitch, that one.

The difficulty with ‘Erica’ the cow is that she does not behave in the way expected by this breed. The Blonde D’Aquitaine has been produced through rigorous selective breeding in order to obtain a ‘good looking’ and easily managed farmed animal. Cows occupy a particular place in a typology of species in which different kinds of animals are assigned to different groups. These groups are distinguished by different formations of human–animal relationships. Drawing on Ted Benton’s (1993) useful categorization, I consider that animals can be construed as ‘wild’ (in conditions of limited incorporation with humans); used as a labour force; used for entertainment or edification; installed as household companions; employed as symbols; and consumed as food (Cudworth 2003: 165-6). Shifts in forms of ‘pet keeping’ and in representations of animals have led some to argue for significant change - a postmodernisation of human animal relations (Franklin 1999; Baker 2000). By this, they infer that in ‘modern,’ Western, relatively wealthy regions of the globe “the categorical boundary between humans and animals...has been seriously challenged, if not dismantled in places” (Franklin 1999:3) and that there is an increase in respect and affection for a wider range of animals. However, for most people in such regions, the main relationship with animals is one of objectification – animals are expendable resources, eaten as meat. The farming of animals has long been, and continues to be, the most significant social formation of human–animal relations.

Human animal relations are not postmodernised, and in terms of concrete social practices, humans and animals rarely have close affinities (as suggested in the fantasies of theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Rather, the largest animal populations in the West,

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those used for 'food', are caught in relations of human dominion that involve their exploitation and oppression. From conception until death, the lives of these animals are shaped by their location as potential food, and billions of animals are transformed into a multiplicity of 'meat products' each year.

This paper investigates the processes and practices through which agricultural animals become meat and it will argue that alongside the 'naturing' of animal agriculture and meat and dairy production, these processes and practices are socially intersectionalised. In feminism, this term intersectionality (McCall 2005) has been used to describe the way in which relations between gender and 'race' do not just overlap, but are changed by their mutual influence. For example, women who are not white are not necessarily more oppressed or socially excluded, but differently situated, particularly when other factors such as geographic location, class, age, faith, sexuality etc. are also included. In human-animal studies, there are some well-known attempts to consider the ways in which our relations with non-human animals have been shaped by gender, for example, studies which looks at cultures of meat eating (Adams 1990; Donovan 2006; Donovan and Adams 1996).

This paper is interested in the political economy of meat production and concentrates on the ways 'livestock' farming; slaughtering and butchery are constituted through gender relations. There are three ways in which the gendered process of animals becoming meat might be identified. First, meat animals may be disproportionately female, or bred for specifically gendered attributes which might correspond to patriarchal constructions of masculinities and femininities. Second, animals might be feminized metaphorically by workers within the industry. Third, forms of human control of animal fertility, sexuality and reproduction in modern British farming practice may be gendered.

I see the political economy of meat production as a key social form in which certain species of non-human animal are exploited and oppressed. In turn, it is part of a wider system, the domination of nature. It is here that I will begin, proceeding to show how meat production exemplifies the domination of animals-as-nature and the ways in which this is shaped by patriarchy and capitalism.

Entanglements: gender and the domination of animals-as-nature

I have long been interested in the coalescing of different forms of social domination based on inclusive/exclusive social practices such as those around gender, class and ethnicity. In trying to understand gender relations, I have thought it necessary to defend the use of a concept of patriarchy. Whilst 'sexism' refers (albeit critically) to practices of discrimination on the basis of gender, the concept of 'gender relations' is politically neutral. The strength of the concept patriarchy is that it refers to a *system* of complex interrelationships in which women are oppressed by men (Cudworth 2005:8-9, also Walby 1990). Patriarchy contains both a critical politics and enables us to see gender relations as having regular features or patterns. I have also been attracted to complexity theory in order to make sense of the intermeshing of social systems as both distinct and interrelated with others, such as capitalism, ethnocentrism, colonialism and so forth. I have sought a similar concept to understand human relations with non-human animals specifically, and with 'nature' more generally.

I have developed the term 'anthroparchy' to capture the social ordering of human relations to the 'environment'. Anthroparchy literally means 'human domination', and I see anthroparchy as a social system, a complex and relatively stable set of relationships

in which the 'environment' is dominated through formations of social organization which privilege the human (Cudworth 2005: 63-71, Cudworth 2007: 351-357). I consider that anthroparchy has certain advantages over other possible terms such as 'anthropocentrism' and 'speciesism'. The term anthropocentrism has been deployed by deep ecologists (such as Naess 1989, Devall 1990) to describe societies which are organized around a principle of 'human-centrism'. However, I consider that centrism is too weak a term politically to capture some of the severity of violence and exploitation involved, and a term implying domination is to be preferred. 'Speciesism' has long been used by those concerned with the exploitative treatment of non-human animals (Singer 1990). It has been linked to other forms of discrimination, such as that based on gender, in interesting and complex ways (Dunayer 2004). However, it suggests a practice, a kind of behaviour and is a parallel term to those describing other undesirable practices, such as racism, sexism, and class discrimination. We do not (just) live in societies which discriminate against non-human species. Rather, we live in societies which are organized around a species hierarchy, a hierarchy in which the needs, desires, interests and even whims of human beings shape the kinds of relationships we are likely to have with non-human species.

What is dominated, in an anthroparchal society, is the 'environment' and this can be defined as the non-human animate world and its contexts – including the whole range of multifarious animal and plant species. Whilst there are incredible differences between and amongst these phenomena, I group them by biological referent - their being both non-human and 'live' (manifesting properties of metabolism, growth, reproduction and response to stimuli, see Capra 1996). In societies structured around relations of human domination, the complex and highly diversified non-human animate lifeworld is homogenized as 'nature', as 'Other' to the human. 'Nature', as applied to non-human animals, is a socially constituted category with the physical referent of species difference. Human relations with other species are constituted by and through social institutions and processes and these can be seen as sets of relations of power and domination. These interrelate to form a social system of natured domination - anthroparchy.

Human domination may assume different forms and operate to a differing extent around the planet. Thus anthroparchy involves different forms and practices of power: oppression, exploitation and marginalization. I use these terms to indicate distinct degrees (extent) and levels (amount) at which social domination operates, and also the different formations it assumes within which only some species and spaces may be implicated. For example, animals closer to humans in biology and sentience can experience oppression, such as non-human great apes used for 'research' in laboratories or for exhibited for human entertainment in zoos. Other species may not be implicated in anthroparchal relations, but exist in symbiosis, such as the biota in the human gut, for example. Different oppressive forms apply to different species due to their specific characteristics and normative behaviours such as the presence of sociality and the ways in which this presents itself. Exploitation refers to the use of some being, space or entity as a resource for human ends, and one might speak of the exploitation of the properties of soils, woodland or the labour power of domesticated animals in agriculture, for example. Marginalization is most broadly applicable, referring to human centrism.

In addition, non-human 'nature' has its own properties and powers which can be exercised in specific situations, which operate within/across/alongside anthroparchal networks of relations. In turn, the structure of human social organization, involving the

exploitation of the environment, implicates human communities, practices and institutions within ecological systems. However, natural systems, for example, tidal flows and a host of weather patterns may have considerable impacts on the ability of people to dominate their environments (see Latour 2001). Some may feel the term 'human domination' is strong, but as it is an intersected system it does not mean that all humans, in all places are in a position to dominate their environments, nor that all humans engage in exploitative and oppressive practices all of the time. The existence of other systems of social domination, of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism, for example, means that some groups of us are positioned in more potentially exploitative relations than others. In addition, individuals and collectivities choose not to exercise potential powers of domination and exclusion and also to contest them.

I suggest that five arenas network to form a social system of anthroparchy. First, production relations, that is, the sets of relations emergent as we interact with nature in order to produce the things we need (food, fuel etc.). The industrialization of production and market distribution associated with modernity in Europe significantly increased the ecological footprints of certain groups of humans, and the globalizing tendencies of modernity has led to industrialized production being an important formation across much of the globe. The second arena is domestication. Certainly, innovation has characterized human engagements with the environment for millennia, through the breeding of plants and animals. The last two centuries have seen intensification of such processes, especially in the West, for example, reproductive interventions in animal food production. Domestication also operates at the symbolic level, for example, in the distinctions between species that are safely domesticated and those dangerous beings that are not. The third arena is political. Institutions and practices of governance may re/produce or contest and change relations of systemic domination. States and state-like formations, can act as direct or indirect agents of anthroparchy. Examples include subsidizing intensive animal farming or making certain practices unlawful (such as the use of battery cages for laying hens or the hunting of certain non-domestic species such as foxes, dolphins or eagles). Fourthly, we have systemic violence. For some species, violence can be seen to operate in ways similar to violences affecting humans. For example, food animals may be terrorized, beaten, raped and killed. Finally, anthroparchal social relations are characterized by cultures of exclusive humanism that construct notions of animality and humanity and other such dichotomies, which encourage certain practices such as animal food consumption.

The following sections of this paper seek to exemplify the notion of anthroparchy as both a system of relations and one which is cross cut by other kinds of relations – those of patriarchy and capitalism. An empirical study of the British meat industry illustrates a specific site in which anthroparchal institutions, processes and practices may be evidenced and these can also be understood as co-constituted through those of gender and capital.

The practices and processes of animals 'becoming-meat'

This study of the British meat industry included interviews, observation and textual analysis. Written material produced by the meat industry took the form of journals, reports, magazines, legislation, government directives and circulars. Pressure groups campaigning for animal welfare provided information which was utilized where it could be corroborated by my own observation on farms and in abattoirs, or by material from interviews that I undertook with meat inspectors, butchers, meat packers, slaughterhouse staff, farmers,

farm animal breeders, and representatives of firms making products and equipment for animal agriculture.

This account draws largely on best practices. The farms I visited and farmers I interviewed were largely beef and dairy, and all allowed their animals to graze (i.e. a ‘free range’ system), supplemented by a predominantly vegetarian diet. I declined the opportunity to visit an intensive pig farm and to observe the slaughter of pigs and birds, but according to animal welfare groups and those I spoke to in slaughterhouses and farms, these involve some of the worst practice in animal farming. Here, I have relied on accounts provided by animal welfare groups corroborated by comments from those working in the industry, and reports from Government appointed bodies such as the Farm Animal Welfare Council. My access to abattoirs was facilitated by the Local Authority Meat Inspectorate. A Senior Inspector admitted that what I observed was more considerate and careful work than would usually be the case:

There shouldn’t be that number of animals in the lairage. They’ll do thirty nice and slow whilst we’re here then whack another thirty through when we’ve gone.

‘Just machines really’: animals as natured objects

Farm animals are constituted as entities which become meat through a discourse of natured objectification. European Union countries adopt the same legal definition of a domesticated agricultural animal as outlined in the Treaty of Rome wherein they are ‘agricultural products’. For example, in regulatory narratives, animals constitute standard units of ‘parity:’ “1 bovine, horse or deer, 0.33 swine and 0.15 sheep or goat will be equivalent to one livestock unit” (*Statutory Instruments* 1991). However, farm animals are also capable of experiencing physical pain and mental anguish. They may demonstrate ‘stereotyped’ (pointless, repetitive) and violent behaviours (killing young, attacking peers) when denied opportunity to engage in activities biologically normative to their species: caring for young, company of adults of the same species, adequate diet, exercise, play, sex, and various species specific behaviour (dust-bathing for hens, foraging for pigs).

In intensive agriculture, lives are particularly ‘nasty, brutish and short’. Most chickens are reared in large numbers (40-80,000 birds per unit) in windowless sheds called broilers. They live less than seven weeks, fed on a high protein diet that rapidly increases their weight, putting strain on limbs and organs and leading to 60,000 dying daily from disease, deformity and stress. Towards the end of their lives they are packed tightly, unable to move around on their contaminated litter, which burns them when they rest and in which rats, flies and maggots thrive. Laying hens in battery systems (used by 75% of egg producers within the European Union) are kept five to a cage measuring eighteen by twenty inches. They cannot spread their wings, their feet grow deformed from standing on wire mesh floors and lack of exercise means they suffer brittle bones and a fatty liver. The frustration associated with this environment may lead hens to pecking cage mates and to prevent this, many are ‘de-beaked’. ‘Free range’ describes a variety of systems and practices where hens have access to outside runs. These may allow limited exercise, involve large groups and offer chickens no protective cover from the predators they fear, or at the other end of the spectrum may be smaller scale and on a woodland pastoral model. Free range chickens are slaughtered between three and four months. In non-intensive systems, where farmers may see the animals over some months, there may be some element of human compassion. My interviews with dairy farmers found some genuinely troubled that the animals they maintained had such “boring lives”. This was a minority

view amongst farmers as a whole, they suggested, and absent from factory production. When I asked an ex-battery farmer what he felt about chickens, he said he found them “stupid and noisy. Can’t have a relationship with them – they’re just egg-producing machines really. Anyway, they’re not worth much and they don’t last very long”.

Pig farming is around 80% highly intensive. British sows are confined in farrowing crates prior to and after birthing, unlike those in intensive farms in other European Union countries, who spend most of their time in metal crates with boars kept in small pens. In all cases, piglets are fattened in pens and small runs with no bedding and nothing to do. The day after birth, piglets have teeth and tails ‘clipped’ to prevent ‘vices,’ such as knawing the mother’s teats and biting off tails of penmates, caused by the stress of living in a barren, over-crowded environment. After two weeks the piglets are separated from their mothers, packed into flat deck cages and hot rooms with slatted floors and they are graded according to sex and size. Once grown a little, the pigs are moved to overcrowded fattening pens. In their short lives (18-24 weeks) these animals will see nothing outside the factory, have been deprived of exercise, and had no opportunity to play. This small, dull, stressful existence can only be understood as such if pigs are accepted as sentient animals with species requirements, rather than as becoming-meat--as illustrated in the following excerpt from a conversation with the managing director of a company producing bars and crates for intensive farming:

It’s luxury, intensive pig farming. Huge buildings, lovely and warm and bright. I don’t know what these animal libbers complain about. The pigs don’t complain. If they were unhappy, they’d be thin. They’re very happy pigs; they stay in a five star hotel they do. Erika: They don’t get out though do they? Don’t they get bored? Bored? They’re *pigs!* Of course they don’t get bored. Heat and food, that’s all they want. You’re not one of those animal loonies are you?

Animals in less intensive systems still have radically foreshortened and difficult lives. Beef cattle are fattened quickly and slaughtered below the age of eighteen months; dairy cattle are usually slaughtered by six or seven years of age when their productivity reduces. The cows’ natural lifespan is thirty years. Most beef and dairy cattle are reared on a free range system, but some farmers are turning to semi-intensive housing and keep cattle inside over winter. Although there are battery lamb farms in Britain, most sheep live outside. This creates different problems, with three million lambs dying each year from cold or starvation due to what even the industry will admit is inadequate stockmanship. Most are five months old when slaughtered, although breeding females may be kept for up to five years, which is still significantly less than the potential twelve or fourteen year lifespan.

Systems of social domination do shift and change. There have for example, been moves to remove some of the cruel practices associated with intensive farming, such as the removal of sow stalls, allowing sows to socialize until heavily pregnant, and a pending ban on the use of battery cages by 2012 in Western European Union countries. However, these changes only ameliorate some severely oppressive instances of a system which is based on the exploitation of animals as food. Whether intensively farmed or not, all ‘meat’ animals are transported to slaughter in conditions of extreme discomfort for long periods - tightly packed, and subject to overheating, suffocation and crushing. Sheep are easily alarmed, and heart attacks resulting in death or paralysis are common. Such moribund animals are sent to the knackers’ yard, those already dead are thrown in pet food bins. As a lower price

is paid per animal if it is not killed in the usual manner, farmers have a vested interest in getting as many of the animals “who can still walk” to slaughter as possible.

Physical violence permeates the processes of slaughter and animals are regularly treated in an aggressive manner, but the most obvious violences in meat production are endemic rather than incidental: the stunning and killing (‘sticking’) of animals. Cattle are stunned by a captive bolt pistol administering a bullet which penetrates the brain. If the animal moves its head, or the bolt is placed incorrectly, a second shot is used. Cattle are inquisitive, used to being handled and most enter the stunning pen willingly. Whilst no unease could be found in the slaughtermen, meat inspectors often do not like to see animals killed, as one put it: “I can’t watch them, I usually wait in the car ‘till it’s over”. The farmers I spoke with preferred not to talk about slaughter, but a number seemed to take heart from contemporary stunning techniques: “It’s not as bad, the killing, as it used to be, not when they used to pole axe ‘em”. These techniques however, are not as effective for pigs, sheep and goats, whom are stunned by electrical tongs that are regularly applied for a few seconds rather than the required seven. According to both animal welfare groups and the Official Veterinary Service, many animals are immobilized but remain sensitive to pain and may recover full consciousness. Pigs, for example, may reach the scalding tank conscious, and die from drowning (Tyler 1990:4), despite having had an electric shock and their throat slit. Similarly, birds often rise in the shackles by which they are confined, ‘flying’ over the electrified water bath and reaching the automatic knife conscious. As one slaughterhouse manager advised, “Don’t see birds, it’s dreadful” and “it’s very grim with pigs”.

Good mothers and stropky cows: animals as gendered objects

Agricultural animals are gendered in two ways. First, farm animals tend to be female - being the most useful profit maximizers as they produce feminized protein (eggs and dairy products) and reproduce young, as well as becoming meat themselves. Egg production is the clearest example of this as male chicks are destroyed soon after birth and female birds are transformed into super egg-producers by genetic interference which ensures their eggs are infertile and frequent. Second, farm animals are constructed in ways resembling human gender dichotomies. Breed journals, for instance, indicate that genetics are manipulated to produce attractive, docile ‘good mothers,’ and ‘virile,’ strong, ‘promiscuous’ males.

The dairy industry is also based on reproductive manipulation of female animals. Male offspring, along with most female calves (i.e. those not selected as dairy replacements), will be sold for beef or veal production so that “If you get a bull, it’s not a complete disaster,” but many male calves are simply shot when days old. Not only is there an attempt to gender farm animals by reproducing females, cattle are also bred for characteristics which conform to patriarchal discourses of domesticated femininity. My dairy farmers noted that cattle are inquisitive, following people for amusement, investigating unfamiliar places, but on farms “their lives are so boring,” and placid breeds are sought because they are disinclined to be difficult (“the last thing you need is a stropky cow”). The ideal cow has “a friendly personality” is “affectionate,” not “independent or willful,” and is “a good mother”. In addition, they should have particular physical qualities:

You want ‘em tall and quite large, stature is important. Good solid legs. Udders are important, they need to be fairly firm, not too droopy or they can get infected. Even size is good. The udder is probably the most important factor in selection really. You want a ‘milky’ cow, if

she doesn't give a good yield, she's done for. If you look at them from the top, they should be pear-shaped.

Cattle are selected via trade exhibitions or through breed catalogues. In beef cattle, there are three considerations. As the National 'Sire and Dam Summary' for the South Devon beef cattle breeder puts it, these considerations are, "value of the carcass at the point of slaughter. The cost of the feed in getting to slaughter point...calving difficulty and associated mortality at birth". All breeds are monitored according to weight gain, mothering instinct, reproductive ease and meat value and are marketed accordingly. In the case of the Aberdeen Angus catalogue, the:

BULL leaves calves that: are naturally polled with a will to live, grow well on grass, do well on roughage, need a minimum of concentrates, give a high killing out percentage.

COW: is easily managed, is a good forager, means low maintenance costs, calves easily, lives long, breeds regularly, with outstanding mothering ability.

Breeders map family trees of certain herds and determine the heritability of each desirable trait. The Blonde d'Aquitaine, is held to have particularly docile cows and 'promiscuous' bulls, as well as 'good fleshing,' and breeders argue they are also popular for their 'pleasing' appearance. The natured and gendered evaluation of cattle as potential meat is reflected at agricultural shows, where 'best of breeds' are groomed, paraded around a ring and judged on their appearance. The final part of the evaluation however, comes when a number of the best of a breed are selected and slaughtered to enable butchers to select the 'winning' carcass.

The lamb industry is similarly premised on the manipulation of reproduction. Although male sheep are useful for both wool and meat, females are also useful as reproductive machines, and farms require few males. Female sheep selected for breeding must produce as many offspring as possible, and in the last twenty years reproductive technology has enabled two lambing periods. On farms in South East England, ewes now have reproduction synchronized via use of chemicals and vaginal sponges to concentrate lambing periods, and fertilization takes place by artificial insemination with pedigree selection (*The Sheep Farmer* 1994:12). As with cattle, breeding is gendered and natured, with animals selected according to natured characteristics of good meat and gendered characteristics of temperament and good mothering/birthing.

Pork is one of the cheapest meats due to the 'efficiency' of the industry, premised on absolute control of reproduction. In the predominantly intensive system, breeding sows are kept in stalls in which they are unable to turn round or exercise throughout their sixteen and a half week pregnancies and often lapse into stereotyped behaviour, trying repeatedly to build a nest from nothing. They give birth in farrowing crates (with a concrete, plastic or perforated metal floor and no bedding). Once piglets are born, the mother cannot see them properly and this often results in sows becoming frightened of their young or aggressive due to their biting. Piglets would properly be weaned at two months, but are taken away at two weeks, so good mothering is not an overwhelming breed requirement. Fast growth is the essential characteristic. In the case of free-range pig farming, criteria differ for pigs that are bred for gendered as well as natured characteristics:

Docility and mothering ability, so important in outdoor sows...giving the potential of a lifetime of large litters with strong healthy piglets. When crossed with the Newsam Large White boar, the Newsam gilt produces vigorous, thriving piglets, capable of rapid and efficient growth...Large Whites have a reputation for their strong legs and mating ability...This hybrid boar combines high libido and stamina with a lean carcass

When pigs are raised outdoors, the gendering of breed selection is stronger, as the 'Pig Improvement Company' argues, piglets need to be more 'durable,' boars more highly sexed and gilts (young sows) docile and motherly, as unlike in the factory farm, mothering on a free-range system is not fully deconstructed.

The major agricultural animals in Britain, chickens, cattle, sheep and pigs, are natured Other, bred for meat, eggs or milk for human consumption. This Other is also gendered, for agricultural animals have a strong tendency to be female - the proportion of females is higher than males because females are more profitable. Gendering can further be seen in the human manipulation of female animals' fertility and reproduction, wherein animals are forced into constant reproduction. Finally, gendering may be seen in the criteria for the breeding of cattle, sheep and pigs, in which the different sexes are constructed as having clearly gendered desirable characteristics.

It is also worth noting that animals, regardless of sex, are feminized metaphorically by slaughterhouse staff in terms of the use of gendered terms of abuse which are applied to animals (cunt, slag, bitch, dosy cow) used often to hurry them. The animals most likely to be injured in transit to slaughter are breeding females because of damages or weaknesses resultant from continuous reproduction. The ill-health of the 'older' breeder animals and their often appalling treatment is corroborated by leading figures in the meat inspectorate (as evidenced in *The Meat Hygienist*). This suggests that such examples are not exceptional and extreme cases. Thus whilst all animals are likely to experience overcrowding, overheating and fear, it is likely that in the process of slaughter, the most heavily feminized animals – breeders - suffer most.

'It's a really manly job': the gendering of human dominance

Farming is a male dominated form of employment. In factory farms, labour is almost exclusively male, bar office staff. In farms based on family production, I found that women tend to be involved in subsidiary activities such as running farm shops and 'pick-your-own' enterprises. There is a gendered division of labour that prevents women engaging in the heavier manual work, the use of heavy machinery, and certain tasks involving larger animals.

The slaughter industry exhibits patriarchal closure in terms of both the gender segregation of employment and the masculinization of its work culture. According to those who teach the skill at Smithfield market, the largest meat market in London, it takes a "certain kind of person" to slaughter-- one who has "disregard for the lives of animals" and who has "got to be callous". Slaughterhouses operate piece-rate systems, paying staff by output (animals killed), which encourages time saving measures which contribute to animal suffering. Sheep, goats and pigs are inadequately stunned, aggressive language is used to urge fellow workers to quicken pace, and animals are hurried with goads and sticks. Where women are present, they are segregated into particular areas such as in lightweight meat packing or as

local government inspectors in quality control and hygiene. Smithfield is described by men who work there as “a bastion of male dominance”. Slaughtering and cutting at Smithfield is carried out by men, with a few women present as office staff and buyers for catering firms. The market is run by a number of families but no woman has ever been a partner. Constraints on women’s participation in the industry are not solely based on male networking but on the heavily masculinized employment culture:

I’ve trained a great many people to slaughter, but in all the years I’ve done it, I’ve only taught one woman. She really was very good, strong as an ox and hard as nails. Not much like a woman at all. Only lasted six months, she couldn’t take any more. She must have felt ostracized. It’s a hard job; the people match it.

Others suggested that the decline of family business structures may lead to an aggressively masculinised work culture:

In the past, being a slaughterman was like being in a family business, like being a dustman. Now people get into it ‘cause it’s macho like. It appeals to young men ‘cause of the macho-thing. It’s a really manly job.

Animals are killed by men who, in addition to being poorly paid and overwhelmingly white working class men, are something of a caricature of masculinity. Most slaughtermen have a muscular physique, revealed by sleeveless tee-shirts and vests or often a bare chest. Most carry scabbards of knives. After the first ‘line’ of the day, they are all covered with blood, not just on hands and arms, but splattered over clothing, faces, hair and eyelashes. My interviews with butchers and meat packers suggest that despite the low status of butchering and slaughtering, killing and fragmenting animals may be a means of enhancing machismo. Butchering is also overwhelmingly male employment. Women may have an historic presence, often as wives assisting ‘traditional’ butchers in their shops with some processing, such as making sausages, yet they are largely absent from modern meat processing plants and male workers tend to see the work as unsuitable for women:

Without being sexist, they couldn’t do the physical work. Well, I’m sure there are some girls who could do it, but y’know – it’s very ‘laddy’... Well, I mean they comment on women they’ve seen in passing, like, where they drank last night, where they’ll drink together that night. They all drink together. Men only.

Certainly some meat packers undertake strenuous physical labour, unloading heavy frozen carcasses from container lorries in limited time. Like the slaughtermen, the meat packers were mostly muscular in physique and highly masculine in appearance. The meat packers had a dichotomous conception of gender roles and felt an all male work environment which required heavy manual labour enhanced their own sense of masculine identity. Thus the institutions and processes of animals becoming meat are those in which men predominate, a rigid gender segregation of tasks is apparent, and particularly in the case of slaughter and butchery, a highly masculinized work culture can be found.

Sexualization, or, ‘you can do it best with a sheep’

Animal agriculture is premised on the manipulation and exploitation of the reproductive powers of animals. This is constituted through gendered and natured processes involving tight human control of animal fertility, sex and reproduction. For example, to produce milk, cows give birth every year from two years of age. Should they not ‘come into calf’ they will be slaughtered. They are usually impregnated artificially and separated from their calf after a few days, from whence the calf is fed via a tank with rubber teats. In intensive pig farming, men intervene in the reproductive process by determining which boar will be made to have sex with which sow and by inserting the pigs’ penises into the sows with their hands or by obtaining sperm with artificial vaginas and inserting this into sows. Animals’ sexuality and reproductive capacity is appropriated in order to ensure continuity, efficiency and consistency in the production of milk and meat.

The actual killing of cattle, sheep, pigs and goats is via the slitting of the animal’s throat, followed by a process known as ‘sticking’ wherein a large ‘boning’ knife is ‘stuck’ with some force down into the animal’s chest cavity in order to ensure fast blood loss through the main arteries and full brain death. Slitting and sticking are the crux of slaughter - the point at which animals die. Sticking could be understood as a metaphorically sexualized practice. In sexual slang for example, ‘boning’ is a term for heterosex--the actual physical practice is redolent of machismo, and in the abattoir itself, the task described with heavy sexual connotations.

The sexualization of labour in butchering is also strongly gendered and natured. Butchers work with ‘products’ which are selected on the basis of species membership, are disproportionately female, and are feminized as male workers have a tendency to relieve the monotony of their labour via sexualization of animal carcasses. According to some of the meat packers I spoke with:

You can do it best with a sheep. You can pick them up by putting your hand up their rib cage, or up their arse, basically, ‘cause there’s a big hole where their tail’s bin cut off. There’s lots of it, all the time y’know - sex with sheep.

You might get a huge steak; they’re chilled, not frozen, right? An’ you might slap it about a bit...Well; slap it about someone’s head. Especially if we got a bag of steak that’s full of blood, could squirt it on them. It looked like the inside of someone, something, y’nah?
(Erika: The inside of what?) Beef curtains (laughs).

These kinds of sexualized practices can be seen as escapism for men engaged in low status and repetitive work. Yet butchering is an extreme example of a gendered and sexualized form of production. In this heavily masculinized and sexualized employment culture, the natured animal carcass is represented and sometimes treated as a female sexual body.

Conclusion – the gendered nature of becoming-meat

The case of British meat production can be seen to exemplify all three levels at which anthroparchal relations operate. First, marginalization is involved in the definition of certain species of animal as a resource and as a human food. This is a form of human-centrism. Second, the becoming-meat of animals involves material (that is, physical and economic) oppression and exploitation. Animals can be seen to be oppressed to the extent that they are denied species specific behaviours (such as play and socializing) and are

incarcerated or physically harmed. Animals are exploited as a set of resources in the process of their becoming-meat, as exemplified by the utilization, modification and magnification of their reproductive capacity. There is some diversity in the levels of operation of anthroparchal practice. Intensive animal agriculture can be seen as an extreme or strongly oppressive form whereas some kinds of non-intensive production are concerned with animal welfare, albeit within the frame of becoming-meat. Meat production demonstrates a range of anthroparchal arenas and processes. First, it constitutes a specific set of production relations. Second, it is a strong example of the practices of domestication as a means of dominating non-human natures. Third, the institutions and practices of governance both reproduce and shift the processes of animals' becoming-meat. Finally, different forms of violence against animals as non-human natures can be seen in the killing and dismemberment of animal bodies, and in some practices associated with reproductive control.

As a complex social system, anthroparchy is intersectionalised. In the case of the British meat industry as a site of anthroparchal relations, the intersection of capitalist and patriarchal relations is particularly marked, the latter of which, has been the focus of this discussion. The object of domination in the manufacture of meat is patriarchally constituted. As such animals are largely female and are usually feminized in terms of their treatment. Farmers disproportionately breed female animals so they can maximize profit via the manipulation of reproduction. Female animals that have been used for breeding can be seen to incur the most severe physical violences within the system, particularly at slaughter. Female and feminized animals are bred, incarcerated, raped, killed and cut into pieces, and this tale of becoming-meat is very much a story of commodification. Yet whilst the production of meat is shaped by relations of capital and patriarchy, it is most clearly a site in which anthroparchal relations cohere as certain kinds of animals are (re)constructed as a range of objects for human consumption.

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