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Andrea Petitt & Jacob Bull

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Imag(in)ing ‘good’ Swedish meat: gender, sexuality, race and nation in the sale of higher welfare chicken

Andrea Petitt and Jacob Bull
Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

ABSTRACT
This article attends to the ways that meat from higher welfare chicken is sold in supermarkets in Sweden. Recognising that the ‘welfare-friendly chicken body is an achievement between the market, the animal and publics’, this article continues these discussions to show how gender, sexuality, race and nation operate within these markets and publics by looking at how welfare is marketed in chicken meat sales, particularly higher welfare chicken, compared to other meat. By attending to the images used to sell chicken, we examine how ideas about ‘the farm’ and ‘the family’ are mobilised in the supermarket. Using images of specific families, they position chicken both in the Swedish rural landscape and in intersecting social categories. These two narratives intertwine and operate as a device in the sale of high welfare chicken meat. This, we argue, hides the dependency on global supply chains and workforce, but also (re)produces ideas about what high welfare is, who cares, and how we should care. Throughout the article, we demonstrate how the narratives of farm, family, and nation operate in relation to species and welfare, as the ‘Swedish family farm’ is imag(in)ed to sell high welfare chicken in ways that contrast with meat from other animals.

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Introduction
Considerable work over recent decades has emphasised the gendered, raced, and classed aspects of meat consumption. Parallel to this, there have been critical examinations of how animal welfare is constructed and communicated within production and supply chains. The purpose of this article is to bring these two literatures together to examine how the images used to sell meat, specifically higher welfare chicken, also draw on power-laden
imaginings of rurality. ‘Higher welfare’ is a contested term, not only in how it is measured, assessed, and implemented, but also in how it co-opts chicken bodies into the systems of production. While we recognise the contested nature of the term, we are interested in the phenomenon because of the scale of the global chicken industry. The FAO suggests that there are currently 22 billion chickens alive in the world and we consider it important to critically question how bodies are differentiated. In this article we use the term to bracket together products that explicitly or implicitly claim higher welfare standards such as freedom to roam, chicken lifespan, time spent outdoors. Organic agriculture is included in this bracket.

In focusing on how the product is sold, we are not interested in consumer preferences or opinions in making a purchase, nor do we only focus on the producers’ stated aims; rather we are interested in the accompanying discourses of race, nation and sexuality that are circulated, particularly through images, as higher welfare meat is sold. We address how social power operates in implicit and unspoken ways, and connect to the practices of welfare and care. We thus consider how power relations are made and circulated at the same time as discourses of welfare, regardless of whether these are tied to consumer or producer stated preferences and values.

Animal welfare has been viewed as a ‘non-issue’ in Sweden. Consumers perceive Swedish welfare standards to be higher and thus ‘high’ animal welfare products have not offered a competitive advantage (Roe, Murdoch, and Marsden 2005; Roe and Marsden 2007). Indeed, Miele and Lever (2014, 151) state that suppliers ‘don’t find any competitive advantage in introducing private labels referring to animal welfare. This ‘market’ has not been created.’ In addition, animal welfare in Sweden is strongly legislated and perceived as a public good (Miele and Lever 2013). However, in recent years, the market for higher welfare chicken and the connected production of ‘slow-growing’ chicken meat has had a major upswing in Sweden (Jordbruksverket 2017). There has been a 177% increase in organic chicken meat production between 2015 and 2016, making it the fastest growing organic meat sector in the country (ibid.). In addition, Mayfield et al. (2007) found that Swedes are concerned about animal welfare, especially hens, and that product labelling was an important factor in forming opinions about products. This upswing in the market for higher welfare chicken in Sweden raises questions about how welfare is conceptualised and communicated.

Previous studies have identified how animal welfare is used as a marketing tool (Miele and Evans 2010) and examined how welfare claims are communicated on product packaging (Miele 2011; Miele and Evans 2010; Roe, Murdoch, and Marsden 2005; Roe and Marsden 2007). Welfare is constructed at various instances along food production chains (Buller and Roe 2014), and what ‘good food’ is and who should eat it is, in some cases, defined by ideas...
and practices linked to social categories (Guthman 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). Statements are also made about who produces ‘good food’. These statements might be implicitly made in food discourses that encourage consumers to ‘eat local’ or support national farmers. Therefore, as images are increasingly used to depict who is producing our food, it is important to examine how welfare is visually linked to power-laden constructions of rurality. This is particularly important because animal welfare is a growing issue globally and is linked to the imagining of sustainable futures. We continue these discussions by investigating what, and who, gets to represent animal welfare.

It is important to note that we encourage the development of higher welfare chicken production and recognize that farmers are in precarious situations within the industry. We do not aim to critique the producers engaged in promoting higher chicken welfare. Rather we seek to critically question how the dominant discourses of animal welfare are visualised and ask what implications this has for the way that ideas around welfare are reproduced. As we attend to the ways in which higher welfare is presented in the sale of meat, we address three core questions: How is welfare presented in the sale of higher welfare chicken? What is used to distinguish higher welfare? How are discourses of higher welfare accompanied by power-laden imaginings of rurality?

The themes of animals, places, and people that came out of our data analysis offer a structure to the article. These themes focus our literature review on animal welfare in the next section. After reviewing the methodology and methods implemented, we present our results, showing how animals, places, and people become important foci. We then provide a thorough discussion of these three themes before offering conclusions and reflections on their implications.

**Storying animal welfare**

Theoretically, this article is positioned in the long tradition of cultural geography that focuses on the iterative relationship between imaginings of place and their material manifestations (Duncan 1995). It is important to analyse these relationships because the imaginings of place, the processes by which they are materialised, and the relationships that they create and perpetuate are imbued with power relations (Daniels and Cosgrove 1988; Mitchell 2001). Constructions of the rural idyll hide complex issues regarding, for example, ethnicity (MacKrell and Pemberton 2018), gender, sexuality (Little and Panelli 2007; Bell 2000), and rural youth (Leysenon 2011), and have considerable implications for the daily lives of people within it.

Attention to how visual representations have contributed to the production of imaginaries of place is central to much of this work, parallel or combined with an attention to constructions in written text (e.g. Brace
The production of landscapes, therefore, entails ongoing processes by which the seemingly immaterial is materialised and the material shapes social relations (Brace and Johns-Putra 2010). This process can be understood as a narrative – telling stories about space, place, and identity, and telling stories with the diverse materialities that make up landscapes. To frame these processes as stories is not to diminish them, stories are powerful mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Leyshon and Bull 2011), but to emphasise the processes by which meaning is made.

The subject matter of this article is considerably more vernacular than the landscape paintings that form the basis of Daniels and Cosgrove’s analysis, but the focus is the same. Even though these are everyday images, probably un-reflexively consumed, they still tell a story about animal welfare. As we show through this article, this story is told with specific bodies that also tell other stories, including power-laden stories about rurality. Following Dahl (2017), we recognise that it is imperative to critically reflect on which bodies are involved in the stories of sustainable futures.

While animals and meat have been explored in terms of how they are gendered and sexed (see for example Adams 2007 (1990); Sumpter 2015), as well as racialized (see for example Neo 2012; Griffith, Wolch, and Lassiter 2002), there is scope to further interrogate how animal welfare is placed within coordinates of social power. Welfare claims are often bundled with other attractive product attributes (Roe and Marsden 2007; Miele et al. 2011), and animal-friendly products increasingly communicate with consumers through a ‘story’ drawing on ideas of an animal’s ‘natural’ life (Miele and Lever 2013).

**Storying higher welfare through the animal body**

According to Buller and Roe (2014, 142) the ‘welfare friendly chicken body is an achievement between the market, the animal and publics’. Kjaernes and Lavik (2008) suggest that the character of the human–animal relations through food and the act of purchasing, preparing, and eating food is rarely discussed, and when brought up often refers to a de-contextualised consumer (Kjaernes and Lavik 2008, 48). However, according to Buller and Roe (2014,142) ‘the welfare friendly chicken body is and achievement between the market, the animal and publics’. Discourses of good welfare foreground bodies to generate affect in the consumer and thereby to sell products. Miele (2011) proposes that messages presenting ‘animal happiness’ are a powerful marketing technique.

Animal bodies are used to convey messages in term of growth rates, freedom to roam and forage, and images of specific chicken bodies in ‘old-fashioned’, ‘non-commercial’ settings. As such, they do ‘narrative work’: they convey intangible understandings of happiness and soften, if not hide, the
complexity of contemporary western agriculture. As Linné (2016) argues, portrayals of happy cows in the Swedish milk industry construct milk consumption as ethically unproblematic and make consumers feel better about their choices. This, according to Linné, is a form of affective/emotional capitalism (ibid. 725), operating to generate empathy and facilitate sales. Packaging therefore becomes a way of reintroducing the animal and the consumer is expected to relate to the animal re-contextualised outside of the everyday realities of agriculture.

**Stories of place, nature, and the family farm**

The ‘local’ and the ‘natural’ play important roles in the construction of alternative food movements and animal welfare products are often constructed as embedded in ecologies (Alkon 2008). Buller and Cesar (2007) describe how farm animal welfare is bound up with concerns of sustainable development and markets products in a way that engages ideas of the rural, nature, and animal as well as consumer health. Nature and the ‘local’ is placed in opposition to the industrial agriculture, and the presentation of ‘naturalness’ is used to imply that some meats are more ‘authentic’ than others (Parry 2009).

While generalised references to nature and rurality tell stories about meat production and locate food production within particular local, regional or national boundaries, this becomes more specific and begins to involve particular bodies through the motif of the family farm. Although ‘family farming’ could occur at any scale, ‘the family farm’ is presented as an opposition to industrialised ‘factory’ agriculture, constructing a vision of low-intensity agriculture defined by bucolic relationships to Nature and more ‘personal’ relationships between people and animals. The relationships between farmers, animals, and ecologies, as imagined through the motif of the family farm, have been assumed by consumers to offer better welfare regimes (Miele et al. 2011). Welfare thus becomes ‘placed’ in the family.

**Stories of welfare, stories of people and power**

As previous studies have shown, there is no common definition of animal welfare (Roe, Murdoch, and Marsden 2005, 35). Furthermore, welfare-friendly food markets are very diverse, as Roe, Murdoch, and Marsden (2005) pointed out in their investigation of how welfare is communicated on food packaging. Welfare is not simply defined by science or by objective economic principles, but created by social/cultural and technical/material processes that work together to create and co-determine the market for welfare (Buller and Roe 2014). Returning to the iterative relationship between landscapes and social structures, it is worthwhile to further explore how human power relations that contribute to or are made with the higher welfare chicken body.
Neither animal welfare nor the general spaces of alternative food movements are neutral territories. Guthman (2008a, 2008c) calls attention to the racialized character of alternative food movements and colour-blind discourses that characterise farmers’ markets and community-supported agriculture. De-centring of whiteness as a neutral, ‘normal’, and unmarked category, she looks at how whiteness works to shape social relations within alternative food movements. Guthman’s (2008a, 395) concern is that ‘whites continue to define the rhetoric, spaces, and broader projects of agro-food transformations’. Moreover, whiteness aligns with ‘doing good’ in alternative food practices (Slocum 2007, 7). Assuming the universal goodness of organic and local food, for example, contributes to othering those who do not agree or are priced out of markets.

Furthermore, ‘sustainable’ agriculture is often gendered (Guthman 2004; DeLind and Ferguson 1999; Trauger et al. 2010). Jarosz (2011) shows how a care ethics is at the centre of women’s motivations for participating in community-supported agriculture. Similarly, women are seen as more interested in animal welfare than men (Kjaernes and Lavik 2008, 76). The narratives and performances of ‘good’, ‘alternative’, and ‘sustainable’ agriculture and food practices thus draw on gendered and raced norms. It is therefore important, as Dahl (2017) shows in her analysis of a Swedish TV commercial for organic milk, to examine which bodies (human and animal), along with which places, are used in the imagining of ‘good’ futures.

Methodology and methods

To answer our questions about how higher welfare is portrayed and tied to power-laden imaginings of rurality, we attend to visual depictions on packages as a means by which animal welfare stories are circulated. Following Rose (2016, 22), we take images seriously, acknowledging that they have their own effects not reducible to context; we explore the social conditions and effects of images and their distribution; and we are aware of the way that we, as researchers, look at the images.

Like Crang (2009), we are interested in how visual representations tell multiple stories. We are interested in how images tell stories about ‘good welfare’ and, by doing so, circulate additional stories of race, nation, sexuality, and rurality. To critically reflect on the multiple stories is not to suggest the narratives of animal welfare are ‘untruthful’, but to question how bodies are used in the story of animal welfare.

The data collection for this study is based on observations conducted in October–November 2016 in the supermarkets around Uppsala, Sweden’s fourth largest city with around 222,000 inhabitants. We began with a review of eighteen stores from the three supermarket chains that regularly stock the newer
brands of organic chicken as well as meat marketed as higher welfare. We also included five other stores from additional chains to ensure we had a broad sample. We focused our selection of products on fresh and frozen unprepared chicken meat cuts. Variations in products stocked were larger between small and big stores than between supermarket chains. Ultimately, ten larger stores that had the most variety of higher welfare chicken products were selected. Following Roe and Marsden (2007, 35), we took a broad, inclusive, and context-dependent perspective on what we identified as animal welfare claims. Further, as unprocessed food, such as fresh meat products, is more often labelled welfare-friendly (ibid.), we took the packaging and in-store marketing of unprocessed fresh meat as our focus. Our survey resulted in 364 photographs. As products and their packaging change over time, it is important to note that our analysis applies to the images available during the time of our data collection.

The photos of chicken and other meat products from all visits to the supermarkets were coded thematically for content (Rose 2016, 85ff). It was quickly clear that animals, places, and people were used differently on packages of chicken meat. Looking through the photos, both authors individually sorted them in themes related to how animals, places, and people were portrayed in the images. We then compared themes and chose a smaller number of photos that represented our themes to show to two other colleagues in our research group and triangulated our analysis with their readings of the photos.

In an effort to gain a better handle on our data and further validate our interpretations, we conducted a contextual analysis of the websites of the leading chicken producers in Sweden. This contextual analysis of web-based communications confirmed our selection, as motifs such as family or depictions of Swedish rural space were repeatedly presented. Although this contextual analysis of images, and occasionally texts, demonstrates that these images make up a visual trope chosen as part of marketing strategies, they should not be read as expressing the intentions of the companies per se. We cannot and do not intend to assess whether the producers or consumers of the images (and the products) intentionally place their products, or actively choose products that also carry power-laden imaginings of rurality. While such analysis would give insight into the explicit or verbalised articulations of power and oppression, we are interested in the implicit, everyday and unarticulated workings of power, which is what visual analysis offers insight into.

**Storying chicken welfare with images**

To address the three questions we set out in our introduction, we present selected images representative of our survey. To answer the question ‘How is welfare presented in the sale of chicken?’, we first compare chicken to other meats, noting a significant difference in the use of images in chicken.
We then go on to describe what is presented in the images and thereby address our second question, ‘What is used to distinguish higher welfare?'; in particular we identify how higher welfare chicken is presented in relation to particular animal bodies, places and people. Our final question, ‘How are discourses of higher welfare accompanied by power-laden imaginings of rural-ity?’, is taken up in our discussion in the next section.

**Chicken compared to other meat**

Compared to other meats, the chicken products in our survey were more likely to be sold using images. Figure 1 illustrates this point with three birds from the same producer: a chicken, a goose, and a turkey. Whereas the goose and the turkey are sold with the generic shield logo, the chicken has a full-colour photograph, including people, a barn, and a flock of geese.

![Figure 1. Chicken compared to other meat. Three products from the same company: corn-fed chicken on the left, goose in the middle, and turkey on the right.](image)

Other meats and meat products are also sold using images of animals, places, and people, but as the selection in Figure 2 shows, packaging of other meats use vague images of spaces/landscapes/farms and generic (lacking breed or individual markings) animals. Significantly, there is almost no human presence in these images. In the image to the left, the meat is sold using a line drawing of a cow, and in the image in the middle, the animals are depicted by a white silhouette of a cow and two pigs. Chicken is also sold using similar images (as illustrated in the right-hand side of Figure 2). However, unlike other meats/meat products, chicken is sold using ‘real’, specific, ‘live’ photos of animals (in the case above, a picture of geese on the chicken) and often includes references to specific farmers and farms, as we show below. This is clearly not an image of the bird in the package; in this regard, the image is still generic. However, the use of photographs ensures that a specific (if not this specific) animal is referenced.
In the few instances where other meats are tied to specific humans, it is mostly with images of authorities/experts such as chefs, or what seems to be a country store manager, as shown in Figure 3 above.

In terms of locale, other meats are sold to a larger degree as regional: Irish or local Swedish regions, such as Uppland or the island of Gotland, are featured. In contrast, images place chicken on specific farms. The name of the particular farm is sometimes marketed on the website or on the product packaging. The selling point is the specificity of a place rather than a certain region as shown in Figure 4 (below).

Figure 2. Selling meat with generic animals. Image to the left is beef filet steaks, in the centre a marinated pork joint, and to the right a joint of chicken.

Figure 3. People selling meat. One of the few incidences where people are used to sell meat other than chicken.

Figure 4. Regional meats, farm-specific chicken.
Selling meat with the help of specific animals, places, and people might not be exclusive to chicken, and chicken meat is not exclusively sold in these ways, but it was most commonly and clearly depicted on packaging selling chicken within our survey. Thus, we conclude that chicken is sold in ways that contrast with other meats. In particular, chicken is sold using photographs of specific animals, places, and people. Moving forward, we want to demonstrate how those specificities map onto the sale of higher welfare chicken.

**Selling higher welfare chicken**

Turning specifically to chicken and how images are used to sell higher welfare meat, the meat in our survey can be classified into five broad categories. These categories are described in Table 1. The first two categories are excluded from this analysis, as they either offered limited visual data (no marketing images) or were not present in the fresh food counters of the store (usually limited to frozen).

Table 1. Welfare claims of imported and Swedish brands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Welfare Claims</th>
<th>Imagery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Imported No explicit claims about welfare</td>
<td>Limited imagery used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organic standard equivalence</td>
<td>Limited presence/no presence observed in fresh market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Swedish No explicit claims about welfare</td>
<td>Identified by national labels e.g. Svensk fågel and/or supermarket own brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Some claims about welfare (e.g. feed, access to range, length of time to slaughter house)</td>
<td>National brands/farms with wide distribution networks e.g. Viking fågel, Sol &amp; Sprätt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Organic/Higher Welfare (organic certification or specific claims about higher welfare)</td>
<td>National brands (e.g. Reko, Bjäre fågel) or supermarket’s own brands, Krav (organic) certified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Categories 3–5 (chicken meat labelled as produced in Sweden) exhibited trends similar to those discussed above regarding chicken in relation to other meats. The chicken farms where these chickens are raised are owned and managed by individual Swedish (often family) companies that are contracted to the various Swedish brands. Interestingly, our survey shows that as welfare becomes increasingly important in the marketing of chicken, there is increased specificity in the imagery. This specificity follows the trio of animals, places, and people as described above.

**Animals selling chicken**

As Figure 5 below shows, chicken depictions vary according to welfare claims.

Where no claims about welfare were made, the labels often did not depict a chicken. Meat products with some welfare claims included a white silhouette of a cartoon chicken; the meat from a brand that makes explicit higher welfare claims used a more detailed illustration. The contrast is not as sharp
as in the chicken compared to other meats - drawn images are used for a variety of categories of chicken - however, photos or specific images of live chicken are used to sell higher welfare chicken. These images are also reproduced on the websites. Affirming Miele (2011, 2076), these images draw on health and wellbeing (rather than ‘happiness’) at a specific point in the production chain. The birds displayed on packaging for higher welfare chicken (as shown in Figure 8 further down), and on websites have the red or mixed colours typical of and specific to the slow-growing Rowan Ranger and Hubbard breeds, drawing on slow growth as an asset rather than a problem (see Buller and Roe 2012; Torssonen 2015). On webpages of the larger brands, such as Reko, Bosarp and Bjäreťågel, that sell slow growing chicken, photos of red and white coloured chicken or yellow chicks were common.

Places selling chicken

The products in categories 3–5 are all labelled as produced in Sweden. We would like to suggest that the discussions about high welfare begin with statements of origin. Part of a broadly unverifiable belief on the part of the consumer, place of origin and national flag/label schemes operate to reassure the consumer on issues of quality and safety (Davidson, Schroder, and Bower 2003). Indeed, concerning beef production in the UK, Davidson, Schroder, and Bower (2003, 92) observed that ‘British consumers believe that production, hygiene and animal welfare standards in Britain are slightly higher than abroad’. We therefore submit that while welfare is not explicitly mentioned, it is implied within broader statements of ‘quality’ and ‘safety’. This is in line with Kjaernes et al.’s (2007) remarks from a comparison between the UK and Swedish markets: ‘Swedish Kronfågel chicken product just carries the words “Swedish chicken”. This conveys a welfare-claim because Swedes know that Swedish animal welfare regulation is higher so implicitly this product has good animal welfare’ (45).

Statements of origin are also combined with visual depictions that also ‘place’ chicken production, geographically, and socially. Chicken is placed in the context of specific farms, and is part of supply chain accountability providing quality and accountability, but as is evident in the line drawing in
Figure 4, it also situates connections to the Swedish landscape. Here, the generic style works to communicate the message that while consumers have not seen this farm per se, this is a building – a form of farming – that is a familiar part of the typical Swedish landscape. The placing of chicken in the Swedish landscape is increasingly prevalent as welfare becomes increasingly central. As Figure 6 below demonstrates, the Swedish landscape is increasingly foregrounded as high welfare is sold, moving from a line drawing, to a photo outside a barn, to a photograph including the views across the landscape. Again, this should be tempered with the caveat that this is not uniform. Not all organic chicken is sold in this way, but it is in higher welfare chicken that visual depictions of Swedish agricultural landscapes are used.

Figure 6. Placing welfare chicken.
Limited welfare claims (left), some welfare claims (centre), organic/explicit welfare claims (right).

People selling chicken

Welfare chicken is not only placed in the physical landscape of Swedish agriculture, but also in the family farm. This is a further component in the implicit communication of good welfare (after Kjaernes, Miele, and Roex [2007]). The meat is labelled as Swedish, placed in the Swedish landscape, and then placed in relation to people and, particularly, on a family farm.

Products making little or no explicit welfare claims use pictures of chicken as meat and thus place them as food. Their only reference to welfare is through the implicit claims about Swedish agriculture, and welfare here is limited to a discourse of food safety – ‘healthy’ animals make safe food products. From our survey, it would seem that images of people are not necessary to make these claims. Some products, however, do include images of farmers and some are clearly depicted as ‘family farms’ (Figure 7 below). Our survey suggested, however, that while images of individual farmers were common, representations of multiple generations were rare.
In contrast to products where there are limited or no welfare claims, products that made explicit claims about welfare often included images of the family. Further, pictures of multiple generations and couples were so frequent that we can suggest that ‘the family’ (not just family farms) is an important tool in the marketing of higher welfare chicken. Figure 8 below shows some of the images found on the packaging and on in-store marketing.

![Figure 7. Farmers and farms.](image)
The left and central images are more typical, but intergenerational images (right) are also present.

![Figure 8. Family farming.](image)
Two images from the packaging and in-store marketing from Reko, a higher welfare brand, each involving explicit references to the family.
advertising. Both pictures show a nuclear family, not dissimilar from a family photo. In the one to the left the children are holding chickens in their arms. The text under the picture on the chicken breast package to the right reads “The farm Stora Torsebo is [organically] certified since 1995. Here the chickens grow up freely at a natural pace in large areas. They are taken care of with love by Arne & Ros-Mari and the next generation on the farm Björn & Angelica. A good and healthy life that gives a better taste.” (Authors Translation)

These are in addition to the images in Figure 6, which also include a family in front of a barn and a father and daughter pictured against a local scene. Groupings, body postures and on occasion the accompanying texts suggest family relations.

The role of the family as a component in these images was further emphasised as we examined the various welfare claims made on the websites of the larger companies that sell slow-growing chicken, such as Bosarp and Bjärengaile, where images of families accompanied explanations of the chickens’ lives. Due to copyright regulations we were unable to include additional images that would demonstrate the wider application of this phenomenon.

Discussion: higher welfare as engaging intersections of human power relations

In the previous section, we presented our survey and compared chicken with other meats, noting that there were differences with chicken being more likely to be marketed using images. We described three strands to these depictions: animals, places, and people. We described how these three themes varied in relation to higher welfare. In this section, we continue these discussions to emphasise the ‘work done’ by these three strands (animals, places, and people) in the communication of higher welfare. However, we also find it important to flag up some crucial aspects of this critique.

First, we want to underline that by attempting to look at the ways that gender, sexuality, race, and nation operate to situate good welfare in particular social categories, we do not aim to undermine the positive steps made through animal welfare provision. Second, we do not want to criticise the individual farmers involved in these marketing campaigns – if anything, we are concerned about the trend in which farmers are expected to offer biographical information in the sale of their product. Third, we are also not interested in making judgements about the organisations engaged in the developments and their marketing campaigns per se. Rather, we see these images as illustrative of the way in which welfare is being placed through visual discourse in relation to specific social categories. What this material demonstrates is that gender and sexuality, as well as race and nation,
operate within the rhetorics and spaces that define welfare and alternative food movements. Regardless of how or why the images ended up on the packaging, they do, we argue, work to imagine animal welfare as placed in specific social coordinates. Dahl (2017) argues that while the commercial included in her data might appear to be a trivial cultural artefact it is, in fact, suggestive of larger structural patterns. Further, Dahl (2017, 6) observes in her discussion of the advertising of Swedish milk that ‘in an increasingly neoliberal time when nationalism and racism are growing [...], it matters who gets to symbolize milk and brightness in the land of organic milk’. In the same vein, we take the images on packaging to say something about assumptions made around welfare and society. While offering photos of specific animals, places, and people, the packaging of higher welfare chicken portrays and imagines what higher welfare looks like, and makes statements about what it ‘should’ look like. It is thus, we argue, more than simply seeing a photo of what is there. It is simultaneously an imaging and an imagining of higher welfare chicken. This imag(in)ing draws on notions of the family together with locality and particular chicken bodies, as we discuss further below.

Using specific chicken bodies and the portrayal of higher welfare

The marketing of animal wellbeing while selling higher welfare chicken in Sweden is done through imagery that places the product in opposition to the neoliberal, capitalist processes of mass production and factory farming. The way that this is done draws on images that highlight a specific moment of the chicken production – when the chicken is on the farm – and the chicken as an animal is made to matter (Evans and Miele 2012). In contrast to the mainstream production that tends to smooth over the uncomfortable realities of eating animals, the sale of higher welfare chicken in Swedish supermarkets puts the animal up front. Rather than focusing on the chicken meat, the live animal on the family farm is chosen for portrayal.

Further, the use of realistic drawings of chicken and photos of actual chickens on the packaging of chicken meat with higher welfare claims invites the public to see what kind of chicken has been transformed into meat. Our survey shows the packaging is selling a chicken with the characteristic red and mixed colours of slow-growing breeds. These colours resemble those of some traditional breeds and again operate as mechanism for distancing higher animal welfare from the white-feathered broilers of industrial agriculture. The images signal that these bodies are materialisations of alternative values different from those in large scale agribusiness production. They are visibly different and significantly, shown as
individuals. As such, they operate as a way of presenting the powerful marketing message of animal happiness (see Miele [2011]).

Photos of actual chickens portraying them to be healthy and happy speak to potential buyers’ embodied senses (Evans and Miele 2012). Images bring the animal and the farm into the supermarket. This raises the question of whether chickens, and especially higher welfare chickens, are more ‘edible’ (or ‘killable’, to follow Haraway [2008]) than other animals, as despite being pictured as an individual living being, their death is not considered problematic.

Bringing a specific place into the supermarkets

In contrast to the French market (Buller and Cesar 2007, Heller 2006) but similar to the British setting (Jackson, Ward, and Russell 2009), the marketing of higher welfare chicken in Sweden does not draw on ‘terroir’ – the knowledges, traditions, or nature of a specific region – but the images on higher welfare chicken highlights that it is a specific place, which may or may not be local to where it is sold. While the main emphasis on animal welfare in France is on the way that it can be translated into a ‘quality’ food product that the consumer can (partly) taste (Buller and Cesar 2007), Swedish higher welfare chicken images a ‘typical’ Swedish countryside – and notably the family farm – instead of regional terroir. Importantly, these images portray a typical ‘Swedish’ setting and thus invoke nation and a moral economy of buying Swedish and therefore good welfare. By bringing the farm into the supermarkets through these images, there is a slippage between local and specific place, as a specific place is not necessarily ‘local’ in the sense of near by.

The Sweden that is portrayed is that of an idyllic rurality and the ‘traditional’ family farm. While the farms imaged on the chicken meat packaging are those where the chickens are raised, and in this way ‘true’, it is significant that those images are selected, and not other parts of the production chain. This selection hides the fact that these chicken bodies are the products of a global production chain that involves, for example, gene development laboratories in Scotland and France, or egg hatcheries in Denmark and Sweden operating for French or American companies. It is the recognisable Swedish landscape and family farm that get to speak for animal welfare. While communicating higher welfare in this way, however, specific images of gender, sexuality, race, and nation are being reproduced, as we discuss below.

Selling higher welfare using people at specific intersections of social categories

Our intention in this section is not to point out marketing strategies as racist, sexist, or nationalistic, but, as Guthman puts it – ‘one can be nominally
nonracist and still contribute to a racial society’ (2008a, 390). For example, we can ask ourselves: ‘Who gets to care?’ or ‘who gets to represent people who care?’ The specific section of the production chain chosen to portray higher welfare chicken involves specific animal bodies and specific places, as we have seen above, but also specific people. Portraying this section allows a focus on the welfare-friendly Swedish family farm, and ignores all the other people involved in the production chain from breed development to the abattoir. The images of the people on higher welfare chicken packages (also reflected on company webpages) show a specific intersection of gender, sexuality, race, and nation. It is heteronormative, white, and Swedish. The way that this is imaged most prominently on these packages are by showing ‘Family’.

These images can go unnoticed because they portray the norm, and importantly, they perpetuate the norm. That is why it is not only productive to decentre whiteness in alternative food movements, as Guthman proposes, but also to decentre the heterosexual nuclear family as well as, in this case, Swedishness. Recurring depictions of gender, sexuality, race and nation reproduce what is considered natural, typical, and also appropriate. Far from being a neutral channel of information, the images are a non-neutral territory. The image of welfare is thus not only tied to ideas about the animal and what it needs, but also to ideas about which social relations are ‘natural’, who is capable of, or interested in, taking care of the animals in appropriate ways, and what kind of caretaking is ‘good’.

The images in our survey show an implicit heteronormativity in the presentation of the family farm. Nostalgic images portraying family farms as ‘natural’ and ‘traditional’ also included the reproduction of normality of specific intersections of gender, sexuality, race and nation. This is not the only instance of gender and race operating in this arena (see for example Linné [2016] and Dahl [2017]). However, in the marketing of higher welfare chicken meat, specific animals are placed within the family, on a family farm, connecting to and reproducing the idea of the heteronormative, white, Swedish nuclear family.

In all the pictures of families included in our survey, we can learn either on the packaging or on the company website that it is the actual families of the chicken farm owners in the photos. However, the choice of imaging them as a family stands out from non-welfare and non-chicken meat packaging. On chicken meat packaging not profiled as higher welfare, the owners of the farms are less frequently portrayed with their families. On other meats, there are images of farmers, owners, and chefs, but none are pictured with their families. Further, while it is ‘true’ that the people in the pictures do engage with chicken farming, there are many other people within the supply chain that are equally integral to the provision of higher welfare chicken and
who also affect the chickens’ lives. These people are not photographed. This is significant because the imaginings of rural space in European countries have been documented to be white (Hubbard 2005) and heteronormative (Little 2002). Imaginaries of Swedish rurality is no exception. Therefore it is necessary, as Panelli et al. (2009, 357) argue, to develop ‘an explicit “anti-racist geography” in which the assumed whiteness of rural space is exposed and critiqued’. So, too, is it important to challenge the implicit heteronormativity in the imaging of higher welfare.

While it may not be the expressed intention of the marketing campaign, the images in our survey recreate and perpetuate a particular imagining of rurality, and we argue that the fact that these images are tied to higher welfare chicken bodies is significant. While welfare is tied to nation, whiteness and rurality, chicken geographies are more complicated. Chicken spaces are not necessarily rural. From the gene lab through breeder farms and the hatchery, the delivery truck and then on to the slaughter house, many other spaces, people, and networks also engage with the very same chicken – in ways that could arguably be as important for the welfare of the chicken. Higher welfare chickens are thus placed, through these images, in rural spaces, on specific farms, and in families in ways that hide these complex geographies and imag(in)e welfare as happening in particular social coordinates. The pictures in circulation around higher welfare chicken meat are heteronormative, white, and Swedish.

**Conclusion: implications of images for the imagining of welfare**

Through this article, we have looked at the selling of meat in supermarkets. Focusing on the imagery used in the marketing of meat, we have observed that chicken, in contrast to other meats, is sold using specificity. These specificities are of animals, places, and people. We have noted that these three nodes operate together in the sale of higher welfare chicken in particular. To answer the second question posed in the introduction, higher welfare chicken is distinguished by the imaging of specific animals, places, and people. Animals, places, and people are used as a market device to tell a story about care, to narrate welfare. This is in line with Jackson et al.’s (2009) argument that the chicken economy is moral, as it manufactures meanings together with the chicken product – meanings that are closely tied to the responsibility of the producer, the consumer, and discourses of ethical consumption. The notions of consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement place agricultural produce and farmers (in our case, chicken and ‘good farmers’), as Guthman (2008b) argues, within moral reach of consumers.
Through our analysis, we have argued that the moral stories that these images tell are of welfare conditions for chickens, but they implicitly or explicitly draw on norms of gender, sexuality, race, and nation to make these stories of higher welfare. In making this argument, we have added further nuance to Buller and Roe’s (2014) comment on the ‘welfare-friendly chicken body [as] an achievement between the market, the animal and publics’ (142) by showing the importance of knowing how the ‘publics’ are imagined and reflected in the imaging of welfare. Situating these publics and the study of them in a specific place and culture (as Hovorka [2017] suggests), we have been able to unpack ‘welfare’ and show how it is gendered and draws on specific notions of sexuality, race, and nation. We would like to conclude by addressing the implications of these couplings.

As we have discussed above, the use of a specific point in the supply chain – when the chicken is on the farm – means that one particular story, out of many possible stories, is told. While not necessarily ‘less true’ than any of the other possible stories, choosing this moment places higher welfare chicken on family farms. While there would be other ways to portray chicken welfare, it seems what is chosen to sell higher welfare chicken is the family farm. Thus, to answer our first question from the introduction, chicken welfare is presented as living on a rural, family farm. In relation to our second question, images of specific chicken bodies, places and people are used to distinguish higher welfare chicken from other chicken and other meat. Addressing our third and last question, we have shown throughout our discussion how the visual discourses of higher welfare chicken is accompanied by power-laden imag(in)ings of rurality that perpetuate ideas about Swedishness, heteronormativity, and whiteness. Implicitly, it suggests that a normative model family cares for chicken in ways that ‘industrial’ farming does not. We suggest that this linking of welfare and ‘the family’ has implications for both humans and chickens.

Taking the implications for people first, there are two scales/levels at which this operates. First is at the social level – these images are part of the ongoing discursive production of the nation (see Dahl [2017] for an excellent review of how race, class, gender, and sexuality are enrolled in narratives of the nation via Swedish milk commercials). These images are used to sell chicken, but at the same time they also reproduce ideas about the Swedish nation. This is important because, rephrasing Dahl (2017), it matters who gets to symbolise Swedish higher welfare chicken. While these images perpetuate myths about the typical Swede, they also (re)produce narratives of ‘rurality’. Thus, our second implication is for farmers, farming, and the construction of the rural space.

As for the social level, there is an issue of representation. Although the white, patriarchal, and heterosexual hegemonies may be more prevalent and less challenged within rural space, just as in urban space there are a
diversity of lives lived and so once more it matters how rural presents and futures are imagined. Further, there is also a need to question the continued presence of family farming as the future of rural space and agricultural practice. Work over the last 30 years has demonstrated the huge and uneven labour investments of family members into farming (see for example Andersson [2014] for a review). But our analysis of the images in our survey shows that there is also a need to continue to think about the family in family farming. That is to say, more than a socio-economic unit of farming, family is a powerful rhetorical device implying both history and future. If family is to do more than reproduce conservative ideas about Swedishness, farmers, and rurality as part of a market device, we need to be honest about the diverse kinship relations that make up family farming and the multiple ways that said family can be constituted beyond the linear narrative of successive nuclear families that farmers are currently expected to sell.

As we have shown, family has been used as part of a moral economy and as a device for selling higher welfare chicken. The heteronormative family is presented as offering both a link back to a ‘tradition’ and a future for Swedish chicken production. It is also important to query the implications of this for chicken. Here we have two points. First, simply, this data shows that higher welfare has been tied to gender, sexuality, race, and nation and we should recognize that animal welfare is a space where norms are in operation. Second, while the imagery places chicken bodies in particular spaces and within particular social coordinates and thereby makes the double move of connecting to a past and imagining a better, higher welfare, future, we should also question whether this rurality is mirrored in the lifeworlds of the chicken. Higher welfare chicken do spend more time outdoors ‘in nature’ than their shed-raised counterparts, but we should question how far these practices differ from other forms of industrial agriculture. These systems are still within a neo-liberal capitalist model with global supply networks, patented genetic material, centralized hatcheries, and transit networks all driven by efficiencies and economies of scale. Although the higher welfare chicken body moves through rural spaces in its lifetime, chicken spaces are broader and more complex than that. While the images and imaginings of higher welfare are specific to particular farms, the geographies of higher welfare chicken are much wider than the family farm. We suggest that the images of the gendered and race-specified ‘family farm’, which also draw on sexuality and nation, operate to render invisible those wider chicken geographies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
Notes on contributors

Andrea Petitt is a researcher at the Centre for gender research at Uppsala University, Sweden. Her main research interests focus on gender and agricultural animals and previous research include cowboy masculinities in the Canadian west, women’s cattle ownership in Botswana and breeding traditional Swedish cattle. With an MSc in Anthropology from Université de Montréal and a PhD Rural Development from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Andrea enjoys ethnographic methodologies when studying agriculture and rural change. She is a core member of the research team working with the FORMAS-funded project ‘Changing animal bodies: breeding responses to environmental, economic and social pressures’ and an active member of the Humanimal Group.

Jacob Bull is a social and cultural geographer. Working with fish, ticks, cattle and bees his work focuses on the role of animals in understandings of space, place and identity. His previous research includes a PhD on recreational fishing in the Southwest of England, work on the EU WELFARE QUALITY project into farm animal welfare and a short project investigating agricultural identities in light of the social and cultural constructions of livestock farming. He is coordinator of the Humanimal Group and is Lead applicant on the VR-funded project ‘Becoming human: gender theory and animals in a more-than-human world’ and the FORMAS-funded project ‘Changing animal bodies: breeding responses to environmental, economic and social pressures’.

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