

Of Cows and Women

Gendered Human-Animal Relationships in Finnish Agriculture

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ABSTRACT

In the Nordic countries, the tending of cattle was regarded as women's work in agrarian culture. This was also the case in Finland, where the gendered division of labor on farms was fairly strict until the mid-20th century. The purpose of this article is to discuss the gendered representations of animal husbandry and cows in written narratives collected in a public writing competition. The writing competition about the cow was arranged in 2004 by the Finnish Literature Society and the Union of Rural Education and Culture, and an exceptionally high number of stories were sent to the competition. It will be argued in the article that gender, embodiment and emotions are often intertwined in the practices of animal husbandry. According to my interpretation, one reason for the division of labor was the bodily relationship with cows, which was allowed for women but not for men. In addition to the division of work, there are other aspects of cattle tending in which gender and embodiment emerge in the narratives. For example, the cows are also frequently gendered: one typical way for especially women to represent cows is to emphasize their gender and to articulate solidarity between females.

Keywords: Gender, human-animal relationships, animal husbandry, cows, embodiment, emotions, empathy, agriculture, writing competition, narrative.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Finland and other Nordic Countries, the gendered division of labor was influential in agrarian culture. Tasks outside the farm, such as working in the fields or in the forest, were mostly done by men, while women took care of the household and the cattle¹. Although the division of labor was

¹ This type of gendered division of work has been typical in agrarian societies in Western countries, although there have been regional differences concerning specific tasks, such as harvesting (McMurry 1992, 251; Simonton 1998, 20-34).

strict on the normative level, in practice it was flexible, albeit usually only in one direction: women could participate in men's work, if needed, and gained prestige for it. However, men conducting female tasks could be regarded as unmanly (Frölander-Ulf 1978, 91-2; Thorsen 1986, 140; Markkola 1990, 20-1). In Finland, the gendered division of labor on farms was fairly strict until the mid-20th century and cattle tending, in particular, was regarded as women's work. Although the causes and effects of this division have been studied on the levels of societies, communities, and family relations, the human-animal relationships formed in cattle tending have seldom been explored from this perspective. The purpose of this article is to discuss the gendered representations of animal husbandry and cows in written narratives collected in a public writing competition in Finland. Firstly, I will concentrate on the embodiment of work in the tending of cattle in the context of small-scale family farming. Secondly, my aim is to find out how genderization is related to human-cattle relationships and to the conceptions of the animal.

The research materials of this study consist of texts which were sent to the writing competition about cows, arranged in 2004 by the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society (FLS)² and the Union of Rural Education and Culture³. The title of the competition was *Ei auta sano nauta*, which can be freely translated as "No can do, said the cow". Writing competitions are very common in Finland; the Finnish Literature Society alone arranges several per year on different topics⁴. The writing competition about the cow was directed to Finnish people in general, not merely for farmers, for example. As a result, the material contains numerous different viewpoints on the cow, written from the perspectives of present-day and former cattle tenders, people who have spent their childhoods on cattle farms and also people who have only encountered cows occasionally.

Concerning human-cattle relationships, Finland is an interesting case. Compared to other Western European countries, it was an exceptionally agrarian society until the 1950's, but after that, the industrialization process has also been remarkably rapid. This has changed the cultural meanings of animal husbandry and cows significantly. Since the 1960s, the number of

² Finnish Literature Society is an international research institute, national memory organization and national cultural organization. See <http://www.finlit.fi/english/society/index.htm>.

³ The Union for Rural Education and Culture is a Finnish adult education and culture organization that produces educational and cultural services. See <http://www.msl.fi/index.php?pid=1&cid=35>.

⁴ For the history of collection campaigns of the Finnish Literature Society, see Nirkko 1999; Latvala and Laurén 2012, 126.

cattle farms has decreased fast in Finland, and at the same time the average size of the remaining farms has increased. However, the herd sizes in Finland have been smaller than in other European Union countries. In 2004, when the writing competition was arranged, a typical Finnish dairy farm had approximately 18 milking cows (Niemi 2006, 30)⁵.

Along the mechanization process in animal husbandry, the contribution of men has grown significantly. Since the 1950s, men have increasingly started to participate in cattle tending, and contemporary dairy farms are typically managed by couples, who also take care of the cattle together. The development of technology has even made it possible for one person, typically the man, to take care of the cattle alone, while the wife may be employed outside the farm (Siiskonen 1988, 91; Kallioniemi et al. 2011, 64). Despite the changing of the gendered division of labor on the farms, the link between women and cows is still apparent in the writing competition material. For instance, 78 per cent of the participants were women. The usual proportion of female contributors in writing competitions on life history is approximately 65 per cent.

2. GENDER, EMBODIMENT AND ANIMAL NARRATIVES

Exploring the issues of gender and human-animal relationships, I am particularly interested in the descriptions of embodiment. In feminist research, human-animal relationships have been theorized (see e.g. Gruen 1993; Adams and Donovan 1995; Donovan 2006; Gruen and Weil 2012), but the focus has not usually been on everyday bodily contacts, which are central in animal husbandry. The work of cattle tending encompasses the element of corporeality in various ways, because it is physical work in which both strength and handiness is needed. The body is an instrument of work and its abilities may both enable and restrict the activities needed. In addition, cattle tending requires close contact with the bodies of the animals and, in fact, the animal body produces the output of the farm. Working with animals also contains aspects of care and emotions (Brandth 2006, 17, 19-20). Furthermore, emotional experiences are often described and emotive expressions used in writing competition materials in general. Therefore, emotion is also a central concept in my analysis. I see emotional experiences as both subjective and constructed in social practices (Harding and Pribram 2009, 4, 12; Latvala and Laurén 2012).

⁵ In 2011 the number had risen to almost 28 cows (Niemi 2006, 30).

My discussion is theoretically informed by posthumanist and materialist viewpoints that emphasize the intertwining of material and cultural practices. Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who has theorized the phenomenology of the body, states that humans relate to the world with their bodies that also interact with other bodies (Merleau-Ponty 2000; see also Acampora 2006, 5; Mazis 2008, 15; Ruonakoski 2011, 58-64). Thus, the understanding of the world and the creatures encountered as part of it are constructed in a process between the world and the perceiver (Mazis 2008, 18). Merleau-Ponty's thoughts have also been applied to human-animal encounters. It has been suggested that especially when encountering other mammals, we often discern the animal as an intentional and perceiving subject which can be understood through similar gestures and bodily functions (Acampora 2006, 19, 23-4, 76-9; Mazis 2008, 18; Ruonakoski 2011, 102-12).

Physicist and feminist philosopher Karen Barad sees bodies as "material-discursive phenomena" constituted in the entanglement of material and cultural practices, which are inseparable from each other (Barad 2007, 3, 25, 33-4, 153). Importantly, she understands also non-humans as active agents, that is, agency, intentionality and subjectivity are not exclusively human attributes. In fact, Barad claims that agency is "doing" or "being", rather than an attribute. Agency is constructed in multi-layered relationships and practices within the discursive and the material, which Barad calls "intra-action", instead of "interaction" (Barad 2007, 33, 178; see also Mazis 2008, 17). Similarly, Donna Haraway (2008, 15-6, 21-7, 32, 71) has emphasized the agency of non-human animals and developed the concept of "naturecultures", which underlines the dissolving of the dichotomy between nature and culture.

Following the phenomenological ideas and posthumanist thinking presented above, I regard materiality and embodiment as significant aspects in interpreting the human-cattle relationships. However, since my research material is in written form, it is inevitably culturally mediated: the writers process their personal experiences, but also use cultural models of narrating and create fictional worlds. The pieces of writing are read as narratives which construct and interpret reality, instead of merely reflecting and describing it (Riessman 1993, 4-5; Ryan 2005, 344). As Jopi Nyman (2004, 2) has suggested, animal narratives may be seen as cultural objects, located in their historical and cultural contexts. Consequently, I emphasize the importance of taking into account both the animal agency and the cultural representations of it, as they are intermingled and construct each other (Barad 2007, 151-2; Haraway 2008, 4, 26).

3. RESEARCH MATERIAL: THE WRITING COMPETITION ABOUT THE COW

In human-animal studies, narratives written by laypersons have rarely been used as research material. However, this type of data provides interesting perspectives, since the writers are able to choose their viewpoints and themes of narration rather freely. Certainly the instructions of the writing competition influence them, but they may nevertheless recount the aspects that they find important. Therefore, both the content and the form of narration vary significantly (see also Latvala and Laurén 2012, 126, 129). This variation was endorsed in the writing competition about the cow, since it was divided into two categories, recollection and fiction. This was an unusual feature compared to other writing competitions organized by the Folklore Archives of the FLS: usually people are asked to write autobiographically and to recount their own experiences. In the instructions of the competition, the recollection category was defined as “real life stories”, “experiences”, and “your own memories”, whereas for the fiction category people were asked to write “cow-related short stories or stories”.

The fiction category makes the narration of these writing competition texts particularly interesting, because not only recollection but also fiction may mediate different aspects of cultural images, moral values and empathetic knowledge (Lamarque 2009, 239-52). Interestingly, the inclusion of the fiction category in the writing competition enabled the respondents to write also from the point of view of the cow. For the purpose of this paper, the narratives written from the cow’s point of view are of special interest, because in these narratives the writers have pondered what it would feel like to be a cow and how she might experience her life.

The popularity of the writing competition about the cow demonstrated the remarkable interest in the cow-theme in Finland, as an exceptionally high number of stories were sent to the competition. The total number of texts was 2962, which would evidently be too large a number to be discussed in qualitative research. During the process of comprising the research material, I read approximately 500 pieces of writing, of which I chose 146 texts as the primary research material. To make sure that the material would include perspectives of people from different backgrounds, I looked at the demographic information provided by the writers and selected texts written by people of different ages and occupational groups. In the selection, I used the guidelines of targeted sampling and constructionist grounded theory (see Charmaz 2008; Linders 2008, 475-6). In the research material, the ages of the writers range from 10 to 87, and approxi-

mately half of them work or have worked in animal husbandry, while the other half are or have been employed in other fields ⁶.

4. THE GENDERED EMBODIMENT OF CATTLE TENDING: THE CASE OF MILKING

Before the mechanization of animal husbandry, milking was the most strictly gendered stage of cattle tending and was exclusively done by women. This was the case in Nordic countries, whereas in England and Ireland, for example, also men could milk cows (Thorsen 1986; McMurry 1992, 251, 254; Shortall 2000, 249-51; Myrdal 2008). As historian Janken Myrdal has justly pointed out: “There is no biological determination to say that women are more suited than men to milking cows and processing dairy products” (Myrdal 2008, 64). Thus, the reasons for such a strict division were cultural and social. It has been suggested that in vernacular thought in agrarian Finland and Sweden, milking was related to female sexuality, nakedness, and bodily fluids (Sommestad and McMurry 1998; Östman 2000). In general, women’s work was more strongly related to corporeality than tasks that belonged to men (Sommestad and McMurry 1998, 151; Östman 2000, 210, 214-5, 235). There was a “strong feminine coding of milk” (Sommestad and McMurry 1998, 150), which was probably related to the fact that women themselves also produce milk (Simonton 1988, 122). As a result of this feminine coding, milking cows was considered to be shameful for men, and milk milked by a man could be regarded as unclean. Men working with cattle could be even suspected of bestiality. Thus, the relationship between men and cows was ruled by taboos (Sommestad and McMurry 1998, 150-1; Östman 2000, 235).

Other explanations for the gendered division of labor have also been suggested. Firstly, household chores done by women were not mechanized, and before the second half of the 19th century, dairy products were not usually marketed outside the farm, and therefore rather insignificant in the economic sense. In peasant societies, this type of work has typically been done by women (Siiskonen 1990, 21, 24-5). Secondly, it has been suggested that in agrarian culture, cattle tending was regarded as part of food management, not a separate field of work (Siiskonen 1988, 94; Simonton 1998, 23).

⁶ The gender of the writer was not taken into account when choosing the research material. The proportion of women in my research material is 76 per cent, a slightly smaller amount than the percentage of women in the entire writing competition data (78 per cent).

As far as other farm animals were concerned, horses were regarded as more valuable than cows, because they were also used for public representation and marking social status, not only for working and food production. Horses were associated with men and belonged to the public sphere, while cows were a part of women's domestic world (Frykman and Löfgren 1990, 181-2). Many factors have certainly influenced the construction of the gender-based division of labor (see Myrdal 2008, 64-5). It is important to note, however, that it was exceptionally persistent in Nordic agriculture. Although milk started to become an important source of income for the farms in the late 19th century, the traditional division of labor persisted especially on small farms until the mid-20th century (Thorsen 1986, 139, 142; Sommestad and McMurry 1998, 151-2).

Considering the writing competition material, most of the texts are autobiographical narratives which cover the time frame between the 1930's and the beginning of 21st century. When reminiscing their childhoods, older narrators often mention the gendered division of labor in animal husbandry:

In my childhood men didn't go to the cowshed. Mother was the one who took care of and milked our cows. If she needed help, like in calving, it was one of us children who went to help her, not our father. (*Hilu*; woman 65 years of age)⁷

Those men that took care of cows were mocked and it was said that cattle tending was the (shit)work women do [*akkojen työ*]. Usually cows also hated, or, in places, were afraid of men before men started to feed them. (*Karjabullu* [Cattle crazy]; man 72 years of age)

The original phrase in the latter quotation for women's work, "akkojen työ"⁸, indicates disregard and undervaluation; cattle tending was not appropriate for men (see also Myrdal 2008, 70). The gendered division of work was apparently so self-evident that it is often also expressed implicitly in the narratives: people reminisce how their mothers worked in the cowshed or female narrators recount their own work in cattle tending, in which men did not usually participate. The fact that this division is not particularly commented on indicates that this course of action was acquired already in childhood and it was seen as "natural". In some narratives, it was

⁷ All quotations are from the texts submitted to the writing competition *Ei auta sano nauta*, stored in the Folklore Archives of the FLS. In the references, the pseudonym of the writer is indicated first, with the English translation where possible. To provide some contextual information about the writers, I report their sexes and ages at the time of writing.

⁸ Finnish word "akka" may be translated as "hag" or "harridan". It is a derogatory term used especially in reference to older women.

stated that the father did not go to the cowshed because he had his “own” work in the forests and in the fields. Thus, the working areas of men and women were rather strictly polarized and taken for granted.

It has been argued that women themselves did not accept the male denigration of cattle tending. They recognized the importance of their work and were proud of their achievements. This creates an interesting contrast: the predominant ideology defined cattle keeping and women’s work in general lower in value than men’s work, but at the same time the work process of cattle keeping challenged the male dominance. Women were the experts in this area and processed the milk, which was an economically significant product for the farms (Frölander-Ulf 1978, 83, 93-4; Markkola 1990, 21; Östman 2000, 235; see also Shortall 2000, 248).

Physical contact with cows was especially intimate in hand milking, which was the usual way of milking before the 1960’s on small family farms. Many writers state that a special relationship developed between the milker and the cows. Although milking by hand was strenuous work, the narrators often recount that they liked being near the cow when milking. As Haraway (2008, 36) has pointed out, touching is a significant aspect in the formation of affectionate human-animal relationships. It is self-evident that the cow’s udder and teats are being handled while milking, but the procedure often includes other kinds of touching as well, such as patting and stroking. In many descriptions of hand milking, leaning one’s head against the cows flank is mentioned.

The warm scent of the cowshed is welcoming. The cows honor Anni by getting up when she comes in. Anni clears the manure away and brushes the cows. Mesikkä [a cow] licks her ear. She sits on a milking stool and wipes the udder. Her forehead leans against Mesikkä’s flank. Milk spurts into the zinc bucket. They are one – Mesikkä and she. (*Venla*; woman 67 years of age)

Using Barad’s terminology, such depictions of bodily connection may be seen as expressions of intra-action. There seems to be something more than mere interaction: the milker and the cow act together seamlessly. In many cases, milking seems to strengthen the emotional bond between the cattle tender and cows. In fact, it has been suggested that bodily contacts between human beings and farm animals contribute to positive emotional relationships (Porcher 2006, 61-5; Wilkie 2010, 126). It is important to note, however, that the bodily encounters formed in milking are not always pleasant and harmonious. Cows have their individual characteristics, and some are easier to milk than others. In addition, they may kick and swing their tails at the milker, which may cause distress and fear, even anger. Many narrators also recount instances in which physical injuries were inflicted by a cow.

Although children could transgress the gendered boundaries of work, and boys could also help their mothers in cattle tending, it was girls who were instructed to milk cows: the skill was passed on from mothers to daughters (see also Thorsen 1986, 139-40). As a narrator in the writing competition material stated: "Milking was automatically a basic skill for every country girl" (*Kaunikki*; woman 67 years of age). There are some mentions of men who milked by hand, and some of them also seemed to like the work and were not ashamed of it. They were, however, exceptions in the community. In addition, according to some writers, hand milking seems to have been relatively difficult for men. A woman recounts about her husband, who tried to learn hand milking, but according to her, he was too "heavy handed", so the cows did not like him and "held back" their milk (*Pikkupiika* [Little maidservant]; woman 73 years of age). In this case, the male body is represented as unfit for this task. Milking was seen as naturally suited for women and female bodies.

According to a common view, it was the introduction of milking machines which caused men to start working in the cowsheds. In the narratives, this is usually dated in the 1960's and 1970's. For example, one narrator writes that when she bought a milking machine, her brother "came to the cowshed as if attracted by a magnet and started to take care of milking work" (*Kyllikki*; woman 63 years of age). The situation may be interpreted also the other way around, as one woman writes: "As the family grew, men had to go to the cowshed, too, and so machines also started to appear there" (*Hellikki*; woman 79 years of age).

In other words, it was not necessarily the mechanization of milking which led into the increased participation of men; on the contrary, it may be argued that it was men who brought the mechanization process into the cowsheds. In any case, using machines is represented as natural for men, unlike milking by hand. Using technology and machines has been commonly related to the identities of male farmers (e.g. Simonton 1998, 209; Saugeres 2002; Brandth 2006, 20-1).

It may be argued that mechanization changed the characteristics of milking and handling the milk: the use of an intermediary machine made it possible for men to touch the udder and the teats of the cow (see also Wilkie 2010, 48). In addition, at the same time as the work in the cowshed was mechanized, the formerly self-sufficient small farms started to specialize only in one form of production, such as dairy farming. The professionalization and increasing economic importance of milk production was probably another issue that encouraged men to take part in cattle tending, including milking.

Since the 1970s, it has become common for the couple owning the dairy farm to also work together in the cowshed as equal partners. As a result of

the decrease in the number of household members and the increase in the sizes of the cattle, farmer and farmwife together usually carry out all the work on the farm. Therefore, the division of labor has become a division between these persons, not necessarily between men and women (Siiskonen 1988, 93-5). This is also visible in the writing competition material. In the narratives that are situated in the 1980's or later, milking men are not commented on. Milking is done by both women and men, and the feminine associations of milking have disappeared. The same kind of industrialization and masculinization process has occurred in dairy farming throughout the Western world during the last 200 years (Shortall 2000, 247-8; Wilkie 2010, 45-9)⁹. In Finland, however, the development has been somewhat slower, and women have not totally disappeared from dairy production, as is reported to be the case in some other countries (Simonton 1998, 124-5; Shortall 2000, 248).

5. IDENTIFICATION WITH THE COWS

In addition to the division of work, there are other aspects of cattle tending in which gender and embodiment emerge in the narratives. One instance is identification with cows. Women seem to identify with cows also in those autobiographical narratives which are situated on contemporary farms. For example, they compare calving with their own experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. This is illustrated in the following two quotations:

But what brought back the feelings of the “cow-mother”? My own pregnancy. I often felt like a cow. In a positive sense. Being pregnant with twins is tiresome and you're feeling ample. I often felt that I could only chew over. When your stomach gets smaller, the food inevitably comes back up. I often wondered if that was how cows feel! (*Utaretulehdus* [Mastitis]; woman 38 years of age)

I look at the strongly heaving flanks of the cow that is preparing for calving. I feel its breathing in me, I feel its tide-like wave of pain that squeezes it with every contraction. (*Pakkaskukka* [Frostflower]; woman 26 years of age)

These narrators seem to argue that having experienced something similar enables them to understand the experience of the cow (see Wilkie 2010, 58). In these passages, the narrators reflect on their bodily sensations and compare them to the situation of the cow, or even state that they are able to feel the pain of the animal in their own bodies. This may be seen as a form

⁹ On the social and economic contexts of this shift in different countries, see Simonton 1998, 122-5, 209-11; Sommestad and McMurry 1998; Shortall 2000.

of bodily or kinaesthetic empathy, in which human beings empathize with the movements and positions of other creatures as if experiencing them in their own bodies (Ruonakoski 2009, 211; see also Donovan 2006, 322). Interspecies kinaesthetic empathy or “corporeal compassion” has been discussed by some scholars, who argue that it is possible to empathize with the bodily experience of the animal, if the situation is familiar enough to the human being (Ruonakoski 2011, 136-40, 156-7; see also Shapiro 1990; Acampora 2006, 19, 23-4, 76-9).

In accordance to these views, the quotations above seem to suggest that shared experiences – pregnancy, giving birth and the concomitant pain – make it possible to understand the animal without a shared language. Similar points have been proposed in some branches of ecofeminism. It has also been argued that women have a closer relationship to nature and animals due to their bodily processes (see e.g. Ortner 1974; Merchant 1995, 10-1). This kind of essentialist conceptions have been criticized widely (e.g. Merchant 1995, 13; Gruen and Weil 2012, 480). Nevertheless, these ideas seem to be reflected in the writing competition material. Although men may also write quite emotionally and empathetically about cows, they are not able to identify with the bodily experience of giving birth in the same way as women who have personally experienced a similar situation.

In some narratives, a more general level of identifying with cows also becomes visible. Women who have worked with cattle for their whole lives might see their position as quite similar to the position of cows:

I don't think, and neither do those who are closest to me, that I'm a real “cattle-person”, getting up early, efficient and tireless, I wasn't like that even when I was younger. But I have tried my best and felt compassion for this traveling companion, the cow. The others enact the laws for both of us and we only have to obey. (*Kesäheinä* [Summer hay]; woman 70 years of age)

In this quotation, the narrator ponders how she has succeeded as a cattle tender: she has not been “efficient and tireless” as an ideal “cattle-person” is supposed to be. She has, however, felt compassion for cows and describes them as “traveling companions”¹⁰. The last sentence of the passage may be read as an expression of powerlessness, which may refer to the narrator's family relations, or more broadly, to the social and cultural codes that determine the position of women in the countryside, or even to agricultural politics, which impact the profitability of the livelihood. In any case, the narrator sees her lack of power as similar to the position of the cow. In the

¹⁰ In general, these narratives frequently represent cows as workmates or even as friends that listen to one's worries (Kaarlenkaski 2012).

same way, in feminist human-animal studies it has been pointed out that what connects women and animals is their subordinate position in male dominated society and culture (Gruen 1993, 73-4; Adams and Donovan 1995, 1-3; Donovan 2006, 306).

Identification may be regarded as an integral way of representing cows in the writing competition material, that is, they are seen as “fellow females”. I refer to this as *interspecies female solidarity*. It has been suggested that human beings tend to identify with animals that are of the same sex and gender as they are themselves (Andersson and Eliasson 2006, 68). This argument is supported by my material, in which women seem to find a degree of reminiscence between themselves and the cow and tend to project their own experiences as women onto it. But it is important to note that not all women in my material do this and that many of them do not have a personal relationship with cows. Genderization may also be indicated on a more general level, as will be shown in the next chapter.

6. THE CULTURALLY GENDERED COW

In the narratives, cows are also frequently culturally gendered. This means that the gender of the cow is emphasized and its problems are placed within the realm of female experience. Femininity is often related to production animals, which are bred to be docile and are confined to their stalls. In fact, many forms of animal production depend on the exploitation of female reproduction, such as milk, beef and egg production (Davis 1995, 193-4, 196; Dunayer 1995, 13). In addition, the cow may be seen as a symbol of motherhood and care (Carlson 2001, 47, 60-2). When calving is described in my material, the cow is frequently called “a mother” and the calf “a child”. Some writers use the cow as an example of maternal love and present it as an exemplary, caring mother.

Aada turns to look at her calf with an enormous amount of love and care in her eyes, she gets up and murmurs quietly to the calf. While Aada is licking the calf with her big, furry tongue, the almost entirely dark red calf lifts its head for the first time. (*Pakkaskukka* [Frostflower]; woman 26 years of age)

Emphasizing the motherly characteristics of cows is interesting, considering the fact that on dairy farms the calf is usually taken away from the dam shortly after the birth. Some narrators state that they feel pity for the cows for this reason.

The fact that the writing competition included the fiction category also enabled the respondents to write from the cow’s point of view (see

Kaarlenkaski 2012, 179-88). This viewpoint was not suggested in the writing instructions of the competition, which indicates that the interest in imagining the experiences of the cow was based on the writers' own initiative. Interestingly, this writing technique was mainly used by female writers. Changing the perspective to the animal's viewpoint may be regarded as a rhetoric strategy that is used to engender empathy in the reader, to consider how it would feel like to be an animal (Beierl 2008, 215). Typically, these narratives compare and parallel the life of the cow to the life of the human being. The narratives are generally situated on contemporary cattle farms, and they describe the circumstances in which dairy cows live. The writers have considered, for instance, how it would feel like to give birth each year without the possibility to take care of the infant. One of the "cow-narrators" captures the life of the cow as follows:

Once again I have been thinking about the meaning of being. I guess that, in all simplicity, it is all about producing offspring and then forsaking them. It is not painless, though. The life of a cow isn't easy, no matter what the vet said. (*Lojunta Raubala*; woman 33 years of age)

The unpleasantness of artificial insemination is also often mentioned in these narratives. This highlights that cows are not able to influence the processes of their own reproduction. Moreover, cows are represented as emotional creatures who feel grief, happiness, envy, and even romantic and sexual emotions. The writers of these narratives have pondered the cows' bodily experiences of reproduction and criticized the practices related to it in animal husbandry. These points are somewhat similar to the notions presented in feminist animal care theory, which emphasizes the importance of taking into account emotions, both human and animal (Donovan 2006). This is highlighted frequently also in the narratives. Although the writers do not necessarily express strong ethical comments regarding animal production, many of them seem to have adopted an attitude which allows them to identify with the animal. The writers of these narratives have, in a way, given voice to production animals and their experiences of reproduction, which are normally silenced.

On a more general level, there have been, and there still are, pronounced feminine connotations related to cows in many cultures (e.g. Carlson 2005, 46-62; Sharpes 2006, 62-8). Calling a woman "a cow" is disparaging, and this is known in several languages and cultures. Joan Dunayer has pointed out that the "exploitation of the cow for her milk has constructed a gender-specific image" (Dunayer 1995, 13). Because cows are confined to their stalls and milked there, and because they are kept pregnant constantly, they are seen as passive, dull and fat. The cow

becomes a symbol for these traits, and this metaphor can easily be attached to women (Dunayer 1995, 13).

In my research material, this works also the other way around: cows are frequently called “girls” and “ladies”. Using these kinds of words emphasizes the gender of the animal; male calves may also be called “bull-boys”. In a wider view, the genderization of animals is quite common in cultural representations, such as nature documentaries, but also in scientific contexts. This means that the characteristics that are considered feminine or masculine in human beings are also perceived similarly in non-human animals (Ganetz 2004; Andersson and Eliasson 2006).

It is important to note that the gendered images of cows are not always negative in the narratives. The stupidity and passiveness of the cow is often contradicted in the texts written by both women and men. Narrators also describe the cow in a positive sense: it can be seen as a personal, wise and compassionate animal. In many cases, the relation between women and cows is not rejected but celebrated in the writing competition material. As the citations demonstrate, both positive and negative aspects of genderization are expressed.

7. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have analyzed representations of gender and genderization in written narratives that discuss cows and cattle tending. It turned out that gender, embodiment and emotions are often intertwined in the practices of animal husbandry. In Finland, before the 1950's, milking by hand was almost exclusively women's work and milking men were exceptions that caused astonishment. Due to the gendered division of labor, taking care of cows was regarded as unmanly.

I have argued that one reason for these conceptions was the bodily relationship with cows, which was allowed for women but not for men. This corporeality was accentuated in hand milking, which requires very intimate contact with the cow. The mechanization of animal husbandry, on the other hand, was linked to masculinity: the introduction of milking machines was represented as being connected to the increased participation of men in cattle tending. At the same time, in the 1960's and 1970's, Finnish farms started to specialize in one form of production, such as dairy production. Men's interest in dairy farming increased as a result of this professionalization process.

Although the procedures of animal husbandry and also the gendered division of labor have changed remarkably on the farms during the last sixty

years, women working in cattle tending still seem to link themselves and their identities to cows. In other words, a typical way for women to represent cows is to emphasize their gender and to articulate solidarity between females. This becomes visible in the narratives in which women express identification with cows and even kinaesthetic empathy with the bodily experiences of the animals. Empathizing was also expressed by writing from the cow's point of view. In addition, a more general level of genderization may be detected in the narratives. For example, cows are described as exemplary mothers and referred to by human female epithets. In the narratives, the boundaries of species are frequently symbolically transgressed. It seems that "intersections of sex, gender, and species", as Susan McHugh (2012, 631) has put it, are constructed in everyday human-animal relationships and thinking.

Although many writers indicate empathy towards dairy cows and at least implicitly criticize the practices of contemporary animal husbandry, the position of cows as production animals is not explicitly challenged in the narratives. This demonstrates the contradiction in human-cattle relationships. As production animals, cattle are a means of profit for human beings, but at the same time they are creatures that people may become attached to and empathize with. Although dairy cows are often perceived as subjects emotionally similar to human beings, they are simultaneously objects under human dominion. Emotional and instrumental attitudes are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they constantly coexist in animal husbandry. This foregrounds the ambivalent position of production animals as gendered subjects and objects.

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