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Moral Struggles in Markets

*The Fight against Battery Cages and the Rise of
Cage-Free Eggs in Switzerland*

Abstract

Practices within markets are widely regulated and sometimes contested on the basis of moral judgments. Moral entrepreneurs challenge markets and market practices while firms and industry actors defend them, leading to moral struggles opposing different orders of worth. Based on an historical case study, this paper develops a theoretical framework to study moral struggles in markets as social and political processes around commensurability. It identifies three core arenas in which moral struggles play out: ideas, where the morality of specific practices itself is contested and actors ground their moral claims in different institutional orders for legitimat- ion; the economy, where the market viability of changing moral standards is at stake; and politics, where commensuration reflects political power struggles. Through a socio-historical analysis of the fight against battery cages in Swiss egg production in the 1970s and 1980s, the study fleshes out how this moral struggle played out along these dimensions, focusing on the competing discourses, strategies, and tactics of the main moral entrepreneurs and industry associations.

Keywords: Market; Morality; Moral struggle; Commensurability; Social move- ments; Valuation.

IS AN EGG AN EGG, or does the way it is produced make a difference? Should animal welfare be a concern for the producers in this market, and how? Are consumers willing to pay more for eggs produced in “animal-friendly” circumstances, or does “grub always come before ethics”? In the 1970s, these questions were the object of passionate debates in Switzerland, opposing animal protectionists mobilized against the use of battery cages in egg production to chicken farmers vehemently defending its benefits. The moral strug- gle between these two groups addressed a question as old and contested as markets themselves: are markets moral?

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Social theorists and economists have long been divided about the morality of markets. Some celebrate their benefits for collective wellbeing and individual freedom, while others hold them responsible for the destruction of the social fabric of societies through commodification and the promotion of self-interest [Hirschman 1992; Fourcade and Healy 2007]. When anthropologists or economic sociologists look at the morality of markets, they reveal that markets are not outside of the realm of moral values; morals enable, sustain and limit markets in many ways [Beckert 2012, Fischer 2014a, Zelizer 2011]. Practices within existing markets are widely contested and regulated on the basis of moral judgments. Labor law and the welfare state, for instance, are the result of social and political struggles around the limitation and regulation of markets according to moral values [Polanyi 1944].

While the territory of markets has expanded with the neoliberal reforms since the late 20th century, the same period has also seen heightened contention around the consequences of markets, globalization and industrialization. “Moral entrepreneurs” [Becker 1997]—often social movement-like organizations advocating a common cause—fight for market regulation to set moral boundaries and develop moral categories in markets such as fair trade or green products. An increasing number of studies show how social movements contest and change markets [King and Pearce 2010; Soule 2012; Walker 2012 Weber, Heinze and DeSoucey 2008], but also how firms and industries, especially when challenged to do so, fight back to counter movement activism [Walker 2014; Walker and Rea 2014], often justifying their actions in moral terms [Zelizer 1983; Zelizer 1994].

When market practices are morally challenged, different “orders of worth” [Boltanski and Thévenot 2006] clash: the efficiency and productivity justifying actions in markets are challenged by other principles of evaluation of objects, for instance, social justice, animal rights, or ecology. At stake is the commensuration of competing and seemingly incommensurable values and goods [Espeland and Stevens 1998]. Studies have pointed to the multiplicity and antagonism of orders of worth and the discursive dimension of finding common justifications [Boltanski and Thévenot 2006], but the social and political processes through which the moral embeddedness of market actions changes in the course of moral struggles has not received as much attention. How do fights on the morality of market practices play out? How do moral boundaries become redefined? This paper

uses an historical case study on animal rights in the production of eggs in Switzerland in order to gain more general insights into the social and political processes through which the moral embeddedness of markets are contested and change. It argues that moral struggles take place in the distinct and interrelated arenas of ideas, markets, and politics, and sheds light on how commensuration is contested and negotiated in each one of them.

The emotional debates and public actions around the use of battery cages in the Swiss egg industry lasted for more than 15 years and provide us with detailed insight into a particular moral market struggle. Between the early 1970s and up to the late 1980s, animal welfare activists and the egg industry opposed each other, often vehemently, resulting in the redrawing of a moral boundary in this market through the banning of battery cages. The case can serve as an analytic lens into the functioning of moral struggles on markets. Studying moral struggles in the case of such a common and trivial good as eggs also constitutes a welcome complement to existing research on morals and markets and/or valuation, which has mostly focused on particularly controversial goods such as life insurance [Zelizer 1983], nature [Fourcade 2011], or organs [Healy 2006; Steiner 2010]. In contrast, the analysis presented here points to the relevance of moral struggles and moral categories for an everyday standard good that is only weakly differentiated. Using a broad range of sources, in particular a database of articles from the main publications of industry organizations and social movement actors as well as expert interviews with key actors, the paper develops a detailed socio-historical analysis of a moral market struggle. The study thus contributes to a better understanding of how markets are morally embedded and the processes through which the moral underpinnings of markets are challenged and change. The theoretical framework and analytic categories developed can be usefully applied to analyze a broad range of similar cases of moral struggles in markets. Finally, by studying the struggles and negotiations on the moral embedding of a given market, it also contributes to the literature on the sociology of morality by investigating morality “in the wild” [Hitlin and Vaisey, 2010: 11].

The first two short sections lay out the theoretical framework of the study. After a discussion of the case selection and methodology, the empirical part starts out with a descriptive overview of the controversy on battery cages in Switzerland. This is followed by an analysis of the moral struggle as it unfolds in the three arenas of ideas, markets, and politics.

Morals and markets

What is moral about markets? Albert Hirschman [1992] distinguished between views celebrating markets' positive consequences and views condemning their effects. In the first category, classic political economy and the "*doux commerce*" thesis see the pursuit of self-interest through markets as a liberating force bringing about individual freedom and collective wellbeing. Historically, the rise of markets was thus a deeply normative project. In this view, which also underpins modern-day economics, the morality of markets lies in their efficiency, which is said to have beneficial consequences for societies; but these desirable outcomes can only be achieved if, individually, market actors act as "a-moral" utility maximizers. On the opposite side, critical social theorists, reacting in particular to the brutal social consequences of industrialization in the 19th century, have accused markets of having destructive consequences on societies. By turning everything into commodities, markets are said to compromise the moral fabric of human relations. Polanyi [1944] famously argued that the extension of market systems to all spheres of social life led to an economic system dis-embedded from social control with devastating results. But while the celebratory and critical views of markets diametrically disagree on the consequences of markets for societies, they nonetheless share a common view of market behavior as universally driven by self-interest and as outside the realm of moral considerations.

Polanyi, however, also argued that the destructive outcomes of markets provoked counter-movements attempting to regulate and place boundaries on markets. He thus laid the foundation at a third view, widely shared by economic sociologists and anthropologists. Here, markets are not seen as outside of the moral views and struggles that take shape within societies [Beckert 2012; Fourcade and Healy, 2007; Hann and Hart, 2011; Miller 2001]. They do not constitute a separate sphere where only efficiency and self-interest rule. Instead, they are described as local orders with specific conventions, logics, or "moral economies" [Thompson 1971; Sayer 2000], which inform what practices are legitimate and appropriate and are "continually enacted in the dialectics of everyday social life" [Fischer, 2014a: 7]. This includes efficiency, but also many other values such as fairness, professional ethics, environmental justice or animal rights. Morals therefore are not just disguises for actors' material interests: people also act morally to maintain collective moral orders, that is "the shared beliefs and commitments of what is understood to be good, right and just (and not merely a personal preference, taste, or desire)" [Farrell, 2015: 11].

Moral values enable, sustain, and limit practices in markets [Beckert 2012]. Most existing studies focus on the latter. Certain goods, for instance blood and organs [Healy 2006; Steiner 2010], can be deliberately kept outside of market exchanges. But these moral limits of markets are empirically variable and susceptible to change [Steiner and Trespeuch 2014; Zelizer 1983]. Fewer studies have paid attention to the ways certain practices *within* established markets become the object of moral struggles (for an example, see Münnich 2015). But many debates on market behavior have important moral dimensions concerning producers and consumers alike. What is a fair price for coffee? Should retailers stop giving out disposable plastic bags? Should hens be kept in cages? Often, such questions about good or bad, wrong or right behavior with regard to environmental, social, or animal rights issues become codified in laws circumscribing economic activity, thus again normatively limiting market practices [Beckert 2012]. But these moral questions are also directly addressed in markets, not through laws, but through forms of private regulation [Bartley 2007], moral codes and cultures, through the rise of moral niche markets (like green or fair trade products), or on the consumer side through “political consumerism” [Micheletti 2003]. Moral concerns can thus become part of product valuation strategies where they are integrated into markets as new categories of quality [Beckert and Aspers 2011; Beckert and Musselin 2013; Callon, Méadel and Rabearisoa 2002; Gourevitch 2011]. The next section develops a framework to study moral market struggles across these different dimensions.

A theoretical framework to study moral struggles on markets

Markets are arenas of social interaction that provide a social structure and institutional order for the voluntary exchange of rights in goods and services [Beckert 2009]. Market order builds on shared conventions that are rooted in formal rules, cultural frames, and actor networks [Beckert 2010]. A given market order or “field settlement” [Fligstein and McAdam 2012] thus encompasses the formal and informal rules, and cultural understandings that coordinate the interactions of participants in a market and are followed and enacted equally by producers, distributors, market mediators, and consumers. This includes shared moral conceptions of what actions are legitimate and appropriate.

Such taken-for-granted and morally sustained agreements in markets can be challenged on moral terms. Often, social movements are the

initiators of a changing relation between morals and markets, when they act as moral entrepreneurs in markets [Balsiger 2014]. A number of studies have looked at the movements challenging corporations in “contentious markets” [King and Pearce 2004; Walker 2012] and at the economic consequences of movements. While moral entrepreneurs challenge practices in markets on moral terms, their “moral crusades” [Becker 1997], more often than not, are met with resistance [Balsiger 2015a; 2015b]. The actors whose behavior is singled out as immoral are likely to respond by defending established practices; in doing so they develop moral arguments and delve into available moral justifications of market behavior [Fourcade and Healy 2007; Haveman and Rao 1997]. In other words, when market orders are contested on moral terms, *moral struggles* develop—“power struggles [...] between competing groups and moral interests” [Massengill and Reynolds 2010: 497], which concern institutional aspects (formal rules governing production and market exchanges) and the cultural frames that guide the behavior of market participants.

The actors of moral struggles mobilize on behalf of different values and put forward different conventions—“whether self-consciously (as in the case of social responsibility) or in the name of neutrality and objectivity (as in the case of efficiency)” [Fourcade and Healy 2007: 304]. At their core, the struggles are concerned with commensuration [Espeland and Stevens 1998]. The commensuration of seemingly incommensurable goods is at stake: orders of worth [Boltanski and Thévenot 2006] clash when “outside” values such as environmental or social justice challenge the values of existing market conventions [McInerney 2014: 11]. Beyond the discursive dimension of finding common justifications [Boltanski and Thévenot 2006], commensuration is a socially and politically contentious process. While some actors seek commensuration, others defend the incommensurability of “separate spheres,” whether for strategic reasons or deeply held convictions [Espeland and Stevens 1998: 333-334]. The goal of this study is to shed more light on how such processes unfold.

Based on the empirical case study, one can identify three distinct but interrelated arenas of moral struggles within which commensuration is contested and negotiated and along which the struggles must be analyzed: ideas, markets, and politics.¹ Differentiating between these arenas helps unravel the complex web through which morality

¹ Technology is a fourth arena of commensuration revealed by the empirical study but it is not addressed here for lack of space. Actors, especially on the industry

side, sought to find technological solutions—innovative barn systems—that could reconcile productivity and animal welfare.

informs markets. Table 1 resumes the three arenas, the issues at stake in each one of them, and the main strategies actors use to address them. The first one concerns debates about morality itself, that is, the boundaries between the moral and immoral or between competing moral orders. The legitimacy of certain (market) practices, such as salaries or animal husbandry, is contested, and actors use different strategies to buttress their competing moral claims on what is right or wrong. In particular, one can observe how opposing actors ground their moral claims [Abend 2014] in different orders of worth and seek to validate them through external authorities.

The second arena is the market itself or, more precisely, the question of the “market viability” of new moral boundaries. The underlying issue is the cost of new (supposedly more moral) practices and regulation as well as the contested development of new ethical product qualities. Through moral work, moral entrepreneurs vie to establish new qualities, change consumer preferences and develop new markets. Here, valuation can lead to commensurability. Established industry actors can contest the viability of moral practices, for instance by denouncing their cost or their pertinence, but they can also embrace them as new market opportunities. The third arena, finally, relates to the politics of moral struggles. Here, the issue at stake is regulation. This arena reveals how moral struggles are also political struggles, reflecting status and power, alliances and political strategies, and the general social and political contexts in which they play out. Politics, in this sense, is a broad instance of commensuration [Espeland and Stevens 1998], as fights for moral goods are broken down into power struggles, deals and compromises that respect specific institutional rules.

Methods and case analysis

This paper consists of an in-depth socio-historical analysis of the case of egg production and animal welfare in Switzerland, 1970–1991. In this time period, a controversy emerged around chicken husbandry in the egg industry (see detailed case description below)². Studying moral issues with regard to markets for standard goods constitutes a particularly promising research strategy since it can reveal how moral issues also penetrate markets for such trivial everyday products

² 1991 is when the provision on the cage ban was finally fully implemented, after a 10-year transitional period. 1970 is a few years

before the controversy on animal rights in the egg industry started to emerge.

TABLE 1
Arenas of moral struggles in markets

<i>Arena</i>	<i>Issue at stake</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Ideas	What practices are moral/immoral	Grounding and legitimation of moral claims
Market	Market viability	Developing/contesting moral market categories
Politics	Regulation	Lobbying, coalition-building, collective action

as eggs. Most existing studies on morals and on valuation dynamics in markets look at goods and practices that are very controversial (i.e. child labor, organs, nature) [Fourcade 2011; Healy 2006; Zelizer 1994] and symbolic (i.e. art) [Velthuis 2005]. Yet very common and weakly differentiated standard goods can also become the object of moral struggles. In particular in food production and consumption, moral categories have become increasingly important [Johnston and Baumann 2009; Johnston, Szabo and Rodney 2011]. Indeed, it could be argued that for undifferentiated goods, moral qualities can be a lucrative strategy of qualification and distinction. Eggs are a characteristic example of this: an everyday good that becomes invested with new moral meaning around the question of the relation between humans and animals and the industrialization of food production [Fischer 2014a; Fischer 2014b]. Yet the development of a moral quality for eggs was, as I will show, an extremely contested process.

The goal of the empirical analysis was to retrace the moral struggles surrounding animal welfare in the egg industry, studying the strategies and discourses of the main actors on all sides of the moral struggle. Through a preliminary explorative study based on a literature and press review, I identified the main actors of this controversy on which I focused the analysis: the egg industry and in particular its main industry and professional associations during the historical period under study—the *Schweizerische Eierverwertungsgenossenschaft* (SEG) (Swiss cooperative of egg distribution) and the *Verein Schweizerischer Geflügelhalter* (VSGH) (association of Swiss poultry farmers), as well as the *Schweizerische Geflügelzuchtschule* (Swiss poultry farming school). On the animal welfare advocacy side, the *Schweizerische Tierschutz* (STS) (Swiss animal protection) and the *Konsumenten Arbeitsgruppe* (KAG) (Consumer working group), a group promoting free-range

eggs. To a lesser extent, I also studied the positions and discourses of core political actors and other economic actors, in particular retailers. The analysis is qualitative and historical and builds on a broad range of sources. Most importantly, I built up a data base from the principal publications of the core collective actors in this controversy. For the egg industry side, my main source was the *Schweizerische Geflügelzeitung*³ (Swiss poultry journal), a bi-weekly (and later monthly) trade journal of the industry, edited at the Swiss poultry farming school. I reviewed all the journal's editions from 1972 to 1992 and digitalized articles relating to the animal rights issue. For the STS, my main source was the organization's publication, *Schweizer Tierschutz: Du + die Natur* (Swiss animal protection: you and nature) for which I proceeded in the same manner. Importantly, this journal also published the STS' regular three-year activity reports. For the KAG, I also consulted the organization's newsletter, publicly available from 1985 onwards. For previous years (1975-1984), the organization published only infrequent (primarily annual), newsletters, which I obtained directly from the KAG. The contents of these documents, as well as all other assembled data, were analyzed using standard techniques of qualitative data analysis. The main sources were complemented with other publications by the different organizations (booklets or brochures), some archival material that was either publicly available or provided to me by interviewees, a press review, as well as nine interviews with core past or present actors of the controversy (three from representatives of KAG, two from STS, two from the poultry industry, one from the retailers, and one from the public administration).

I will now turn to a rapid factual overview of the conflict between animal welfare advocates and the egg industry on the question of chicken husbandry in Switzerland. The following analytical section looks first at the struggles concerning morality itself (what is animal welfare), then at the struggle surrounding market acceptance of a new ethical quality for eggs, and finally at the political dimension of this moral struggle.

Egg production and animal welfare in Switzerland, 1970-1991

In the early 1970s, the production of Swiss eggs was guided by an imperative of rationalization. In the course of the previous decade or so, new systems of chicken husbandry had been developed and widely introduced. More and more, egg production was undertaken in

³ Before 1974, the journal was called *Geflügel und Kleinwied* (Poultry and Small Livestock).

specialized “farms,”⁴ with producers focusing exclusively on egg production with no other farming activities carried out. This was not the case for all egg producers, but even those who had mixed forms of agricultural production started to use newly developed systems of chicken husbandry during the 1960s. These systems were called chicken batteries and consisted of cages for up to four hens, each occupying the approximate space of a standard A4 size sheet of paper. Cages were stacked on top of each other, creating four or even more levels. In these cages, hens would lay their eggs on a grid from which the eggs rolled down on a kind of elevator, which carefully transported them to a band-conveyor on the ground floor. From there, they were carried to a screening machine. Faeces—an unwanted by-product of these laying hens—would fall down into a container below the battery, where it dried and ultimately peeled off into a defection canal. Thanks to such systems, the collection of eggs was fully automatized. Actual farmers were not needed; human activity resembled that of an automated factory, with workers checking from time to time to see whether everything was in order and supervising production. It was like a machine—an animal machine, in Ruth Harrison’s famously coined words.

In the early 1970s, this was the dominant form of egg production in Switzerland (and, in most countries, it still is) [Bittman 2015; Garner 1993]. While not all producers had the latest chicken battery models—they were, unsurprisingly, quite expensive—the large majority of them did hold chicken in batteries, and the bulk of Swiss eggs were produced in specialized units. According to statistics published in the *Schweizerische Geflügelzeitung* (SGZ), in 1973 more than 50% of all laying hens were held in broods of 2,000 or more, with 24.1% in broods of over 10,000 birds. And while there are no clear statistics about how many of them were held in cages, estimations for 1981 range from 65%⁵ to 95%⁶. Battery cages are a highly efficient way of producing eggs. Full automation means that very few workers are needed, and costs can thus be brought down significantly. Because hens can hardly move in their cages and eggs automatically roll down, the eggs are rarely damaged and do not need to be collected by human workers. And the hens cannot fight with each other for lack of space—batteries thus also have certain advantages in terms of hygiene and longevity of the animals [Garner 1993].

⁴ I put “farm” in quotation marks because the terms used to designate such facilities—farms, family farms, factory farms, animal factories, etc.—became a central issue of contention.

⁵ The number put forward by the egg producing industry; SGZ 8, August 22, 1991.

⁶ The number put forward in a report by A. Nabholz, who was director of the Federal Veterinary Ministry 1966-77; “10 Jahre eidgenössisches Tierschutzgesetz und -verordnung”, see also SGZ 8, August 22, 1991.

Batteries were not only the most efficient way of producing eggs; chicken farmers were also very proud of this highly rationalized form of production. The description above of the functioning of a chicken battery comes from the poultry industry's trade journal (SGZ). In an article with the headline "An exemplary battery plant," the author lauded the unprecedented cleanliness and efficiency of the plant. The industry's goal and its professional pride were to produce eggs that could compete with imported eggs while still paying chicken farmers a living. That was possible thanks to an "extraordinary development" in the egg industry, which had allowed producers "to make up for cost increases through heightened efficiency and performance and the rationalization of methods of husbandry and thus offer eggs to consumers for the same price as twenty years ago" (SGZ, 7, May 30, 1974).

No mention was made of how the hens might feel, trapped in these cages, and reduced to their function of laying eggs. In early 1972, when the article was published, such questions were hardly discussed, and certainly not taken seriously by egg producers. The writer praising battery plants in early 1974 could not know that, just a few years later, they would come to symbolize the damage caused by industrial food production, as the welfare of farm animals became a major issue in Swiss politics. In 1973, Swiss citizens had approved a constitutional amendment on animal protection with a large majority of 83%, making animal protection a federal competency. Animal welfare activists had been pushing for such an article for a long time, and the early 1970s were a favorable context for them. While the traditional *Schweizer Tierschutz* (STS), the largest Swiss animal welfare organization, had been around for nearly a century, its field of activity had mostly been limited to pets and wildlife, with scarce attention to farm animals. Yet the 1960s had brought about a new critique of the use of animals in industrial food production, and a new generation of activists criticizing the detrimental effects of industrialization and economic growth on various others—the environment, developing countries, but also animals [Garner 1993; Jasper and Nelkin 1992]. Ruth Harrison's book *Animal Machines: the New Factory Farming Industry* [1964], published in the UK and rapidly translated in other languages (the German translation *Tiermaschinen* was published in 1964), had a great impact on animal rights activists⁷. In this context, the

⁷ The WWF, for instance, published an illustrated book for children which featured a chapter entitled *Die Maschinen-Tiere*, picturing and juxtaposing the lives of farm

animals on traditional farms and on factory farms. The STS reprinted this chapter in its members' magazine in early 1975 (*Zeitschrift Schweizer Tierschutz*, Nr. 1/2, February 1975).

traditionally rather conservative STS became a vocal advocate of farm animal welfare.

Once the constitutional amendment was approved, animal welfare activists put pressure on legislators to draft a strong federal animal protection bill. The battery cages in which hens were held for egg production quickly became the focus of activist campaigns and public debates. Animal welfare activists accused the egg industry of animal cruelty and called for a ban on cages. An STS petition in 1973 gathered more than 200,000 signatures demanding such a ban. In parallel, activists were busy informing the public about the realities of what they called “chicken factories” or “egg factories.” From 1973 onwards, they undertook an impressive amount of activities to highlight the existence of hens held in cages and document cruelty. This included an audiovisual exhibition, brochures, articles in newspapers and magazines, documentaries, and even a fiction film. The film, called *De Grotzepuur* (1975) (a Swiss-German title meaning “The farmer from Grotze”), was financed by the STS and broadcast on Swiss public TV after being screened in movie theaters all over the country. It featured several famous Swiss German actors of the time and told the dramatic story of a grumpy animal-abusing farmer and the outrage of his city-born daughter-in-law⁸.

The public campaign was initially successful: the draft of the bill included a ban on cage husbandry for chickens. But this success was not long-lived. Following the customary Swiss legislative process, the draft bill was then sent to all concerned parties (i.e. interest groups, political parties, the cantons) for consultation. In their responses, many expressed opposition to the ban on cages; in part this was certainly due to the fact that, in the meantime, the organizations of egg producers had reacted to the threat by intervening publicly and lobbying for their interests. Most notably, they launched a broad

⁸ For those who speak Swiss German: the movie can be watched on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYzrC_jeVHM (accessed April 7, 2016). A lone commentator on the movie's IMDB site says he remembers a screening of the movie at a St. Gallen movie theater: “I remember the audience's reaction to this movie in a St. Gallen cinema in 1975 when it came out. Women were crying, men were shouting that the director of the movie should be shot (the director was the committed American-Swiss animal protector Mark R. Rissi). Children uttered their wish to go to the next farm and liberate the animals.” The commentator then goes on to say that, thanks to the movie, several

hundred thousands of signatures were collected for the petition in just a few days, prompting the government to change its policies and the biggest retailer to immediately withdraw cage eggs from its shelves—facts that are clearly exaggerated. In reality, it took a long time for animal welfare activists to achieve these goals. Nonetheless, while exaggerated, the commentator's account of the public's strong emotional reaction to the movie is consistent with many contemporary testimonies—not least the strong rebuttals by egg producers—and bears witness to the vivid debates the question provoked (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0214736/>, accessed April 7, 2016).

campaign with the goal of objectively informing the public on chicken husbandry. In early 1977, at the end of the consultation process, the government decided to withdraw the cage ban from the bill and replaced it with a less stringent formulation instead. The bill that was finally voted by parliament (and widely approved by a popular majority in a referendum in December 1978) stipulated that “the government prohibits forms of husbandry clearly contrary to the principles of animal welfare.” Which forms this should entail was left to be decided in a governmental provision. The battle between advocates of a cage ban and egg producers thus continued to yet another round. Yet it became increasingly clear that the government, under pressure from public opinion and animal welfare activists, was determined to actually ban cages. The provision was finally enacted in 1981. While it prohibited conventional cages and put in place a commission charged with testing and authorizing new husbandry systems, it also gave egg producers using cages a transitional period of ten years to adapt to the new regulation.

What is animal welfare? The question of morality itself

Animal rights activists brought up the issue of animal welfare. In their interventions, they took a clear-cut moral stance: holding hens in cages is animal cruelty. Pictures and documentary movies were aimed at showing how hens suffered in such conditions. Simply seeing chickens in cages was evidence enough that this was a case of animal cruelty—it was a question of common sense. For a “normally feeling person with ethical responsibility, there can be only one answer”—it is animal cruelty and therefore cages should be banned (STS 11/12, December 195). “It is sufficient to stand in front of a cage for five minutes and to observe a hen to be seized by anger against our shallow welfare society, which does not realize the cost of its well-being” (STS 3/4, April 1975). Every “normal-feeling” person shares this immediate emotional and moral reaction and experiences a “moral shock” [Jasper 1997].

The chicken farmers contested this moral view. Instead of animal welfare activists’ emotional rhetoric, the poultry industry pleaded for what they saw as a rational, objective, calm assessment of the situation. As explained in one article heading, one needs to say “goodbye to emotions” and let allow rational arguments to guide the public debate (SGZ 6, March 17, 1977). It was with this goal in mind that the

principal organization of egg producers launched a broad public information campaign, and put in place a working group to deal with the issue. They accused activists of letting emotions guide their judgments and dismissed and ridiculed them. Using often gendered language, they presented themselves as objective, knowledgeable, (and exclusively male) specialists suddenly bothered by sentimental, irrational “old aunts in the street” who had never seen a chicken up close. While this form of blatant male chauvinism was not uncommon at the time, its rhetorical effectiveness was questionable, since most consumers were indeed women. Indeed, the categories on which the egg producers based their dismissal reflected an existing social divide between them and the activists: the latter tended to be not only more often female, but also more urban than rural.

Further drawing on the urban/rural divide, representatives of the egg industry put forward their specific professional knowledge of chickens:

We chicken farmers are in contact with our animals day in day out. We feed and water them, we take care that they are not too cold and not too warm, that they have enough fresh air without being caught in a draught, that there is enough space at the feeding trough, and that every animal feels secure in the existing social order. In short, we are professionals and have learnt how to keep animals, and yet we are increasingly confronted with accusations coming in most cases from people who only come into contact with chickens or poultry products once they are put in the pan or on the dinner table. From those people, of whom no one has learnt the profession at the poultry farming school (*Geflügelzuchtschule*), we get lectured about how to treat chickens.

Common sense, the article went on, is not enough; one needs specific knowledge about chicken genetics, behavior, husbandry, nutrition, health, and anatomy, in order to judge an animal’s well-being (SGZ 17, October 17, 1974). When properly applied, this professional knowledge (institutionalized in the professional training provided at the *Geflügelzuchtschule* where the trade journal was edited) guaranteed that good care was taken of the animals.

Poultry farmers thus put forward their specific, professional knowledge that allowed them to evaluate what qualifies as animal welfare, and the professional ethics that ensured that animals were not harmed. Animal rights activists, who argued on the basis of ethics and common sense, lacked this professional knowledge and could therefore not be taken seriously. The issue at stake here was the basis on which animal welfare could be assessed, and who was authorized to make this kind of assessment—in other words, how moral claims can be grounded [Abend 2014]. For animal welfare activists, this basis was

the moral outrage felt by every “normal-feeling person.” For poultry farmers, only professionals could have a say, because they were the only ones to have the necessary knowledge to enable them to understand the situation.

However, in this quest for objectivity, poultry farmers could not rely only on their professional competence and ethics; they also needed external validation. Since the beginning of the controversy, they had also built their arguments on scientific evidence, citing statistics and scientific findings that supported their position. According to the egg industry’s interpretation of scientific data, evidence actually indicated that chickens were faring particularly “well” in cages. Compared to other types of husbandry, cages led to lower rates of chicken mortality and higher rates of performance (i.e., the hens laid more eggs). For the industry officials, this meant that hens in cages were doing well: “Empirically, one observes that hens in cages perform better while consuming less food than hens in barns, *and from this one must conclude that they also feel better*” (SGZ 4, April 18, 1974) (my emphasis).

How does one measure animal welfare? Up to the 1970s, most studies on farm animals were applied studies often funded by the agricultural industry and carried out in laboratories close to industry. They researched productivity rather than actual wellbeing, but now productivity indicators such as performance and mortality were interpreted as indicators of animal wellbeing: if hens live long and lay many eggs, this surely must mean that they also feel good. But the 1970s were also a time when new approaches were developed to measure the welfare of farm animals, “with experiments focusing on the effects of single factors under controlled circumstances,” which allowed the new discipline to be established as a science [Carenzi and Verga 2009]. In Switzerland and other countries, scientists developed an approach that defined wellbeing as a function of the satisfaction of needs and the reduction of harm (*Interview with former government official*). This led to a very different way of measuring welfare than through performance and mortality; it was about observing whether animals could satisfy their natural needs in modern husbandry systems, and thus tended to give support to claims made by animal welfare activists.

Such research was increasingly carried out at Swiss universities and also gained clout in the federal veterinary administration that was in charge of overseeing the animal protection legislation (*Interview with former government official*). Animal welfare activists, sensing that they could not solely rely on emotional outrage but also needed to ground their arguments in science, began funding comparative research with

the goal of scientifically proving that barn systems were superior to cages in terms of animal welfare. "In the absence of other arguments, we animal protectionists are repeatedly accused of sentimentality and professional incompetence by our opponents. This is why we are eager to substantiate our arguments by professionals and prominent professors of veterinary studies. We have realized that so-called scientifically backed statements can only be confronted by even better scientific counter-evidence" (Yearly report, STS, 11/12, December 1975).

Each side thus tried to ground its moral claims in scientific studies, and it proved very difficult to empirically assess animal welfare once and for all, without any persisting doubts. For the egg industry, the inconclusiveness of scientific studies could only mean that it was better to wait; as long as scientists could not say whether or not cages were bad for animal welfare, or if the proposed alternative systems were any better, it was best not to ban cages yet. In December 1976, the industry called for a "truce" with animal rights activists until the scientific controversy was settled. "Only polemical articles but never serious examinations have found animal cruelty in impeccably managed battery systems" (SGZ, 25, December 9, 1976). But while the egg producers' experts tended to be practice-oriented and had close ties to industry, in particular through the research facility at the poultry farming school, the scientists working at independent research institutes tended to be on the side of animal welfare activists.

In sum, producers denied the moral claims of their opponents. Chicken batteries were not immoral; on the contrary, they respected animal welfare just as much as alternative forms of chicken husbandry. By putting forward their own professional competence to evaluate animal welfare and pointing to the lack of scientific proof, producers hoped to create a rational and objective account that would reveal the groundless nature of activists' moral outrage. In response, animal rights activists also grounded their arguments in science in order to foster their credibility. However, they did not deny that theirs was also an emotional appeal, a moral reaction that was just as legitimate. "How could one confront the misery of animal cruelty in an objective way?" (STS, 4, December 1977).

Grub before ethics? The "market acceptance" of moral practices

Egg producers did not only object to the authority of animal rights activists to speak on matters of animal welfare; they did not only

question the very fact that battery cages qualified as animal cruelty. Actually, their most powerful argument was not about how to define animal welfare: it was about economic issues. More precisely, it was about the economic costs of a cage ban and about the “law of the market” that demanded that the most rational production methods had to be adopted. In other words, for producers, the issue was one of economic, not moral, judgment. Even if there were more animal-friendly production methods, the reality of the markets could not accommodate them.

Yet the economic argument itself built on a moral justification of the existing market order, which the industry rendered explicit in reaction to the challenge by animal welfare activists. In the industry’s understanding, the market for eggs was moral in the sense that it provided consumers with the affordable eggs they demanded. This was not just rhetoric but was a view grounded in the historical role of Swiss agriculture and constituted a core element of the egg producers’ social identity. In their eyes, they fulfilled a social function, which was to provide the Swiss economy with eggs and thus maintain at least an appearance of national food sovereignty. They were more than just market actors; they occupied an important role in the country’s independence and survival. References to the WWII war economy were frequent and the importance of having an agricultural production that could fulfill the basic needs of Swiss consumers was one of the goals of agricultural policies and a source of pride for producers. At the same time, the government was wary of overproduction and its effect on prices, and thus tried to limit production outputs, too. These contradictory goals had led to a complex market regulation based on three pillars: limits to the size of production units (through a system of mandatory authorization for production facilities of over 2,000 hens, which was, however, hardly ever enforced), a tax and an obligation for importers to sell an equal amount of imported and Swiss eggs, and a regulated price for the eggs exchanged within this system. These eggs, called “system eggs,” were sold through several regional eggs cooperatives (the main one being SEG), which collected and then redistributed eggs from the different producers. Besides these system eggs, there were also so-called “grey eggs,” for which there was no regulated price and no purchase guarantee. Those eggs were sold directly to intermediary traders, and most of the time came from the specialized chicken farmers who had the biggest production capacities, almost exclusively using cage systems.

In the producers' view, production had to be rationalized (i.e. industrialized) because consumers were not willing to pay more for eggs. Confronted with rising costs, the only way to keep prices down was this rationalization. According to the egg industry, intensive animal husbandry developed out of economic survival needs, not out of greed, as animal welfare activists sometimes claimed. For instance, one of its main organizations, VSGH, said in a press release that its "task [was] to produce a cheap egg for the whole population, which [was], as proved by inquiries, only possible with modern cage husbandry" (SGZ 21-22, December 19, 1974). The higher costs of alternative, cage-free systems would lead to higher prices for consumers, or else producers would lose money and ultimately be driven out of business. Swiss eggs might even disappear from the market altogether, to the profit of cheap imported eggs. In other words, the economic and social costs of a cage ban would be significant: poultry farmers would be driven out of business, jobs would be lost, and Switzerland could no longer aspire to food sovereignty. Only cages could guarantee profitable production and they were thus necessary in order to maintain a functioning, efficient market for Swiss eggs.

For egg producers, the demands for a cage ban thus endangered the economic efficiency of egg production; alternative husbandry forms lacked economic feasibility or, as they frequently put it, "market acceptance." Egg producers were convinced that consumers were driven by narrow self-interest, meaning that they would always buy the cheapest products. They might claim otherwise and even sign petitions demanding a ban on cages, but when purchasing eggs at the supermarket, "grubs first, then ethics" would always prevail. The egg industry believed in the economic theory of consumers as self-interested actors, not moral beings.

In the eyes of animal welfare activists, something was wrong with a market whose goal was to produce cheap eggs for self-interested consumers. Was it really so important to produce cheap eggs if the price to pay was animal cruelty? The activists' answer was clearly no: "The probability that Switzerland decays from a lack of egg white is smaller than the danger that it be doomed by a lack of decency" (STS 3/4, April 5, 1975). The imperatives of profitability and cheap prices had removed all other concerns from this market, in particular issues of animal rights or environmental justice. The animal protection bill should enable these ethical concerns to put limits on profitability, so that purely economic and material interests would not rule animal husbandry. But at the same time, the STS as the leading animal welfare organization wanted

to make it clear that it did not advocate a nostalgic, unprofitable form of chicken husbandry. Rather than just lamenting the dominance of profitability to the detriment of animal welfare, the activists wanted to demonstrate that animal welfare could in fact be compatible with markets.

The STS thus decided to start an experiment that “will point at a practicable way for an animal friendly chicken husbandry [...] [O]nly the demonstration of a feasible alternative solution could provide the basis to fight credibly for a ban on cage husbandry” (STS magazine 11/12, December 1975, annual report). This led the way for a distinctively market-based strategy: the STS would try to build up a market for cage-free eggs as a viable alternative to dominant egg production⁹. First, the STS organized a market test in the city of Winterthur. Collaborating with a farmer who had a cage-free production facility, eggs were sold on the local market with a label clearly designating them as cage-free, for a price that was approximately 15% higher than the regular price. The egg industry admonished the farmer for taking part in the experiment. At the start—perhaps slightly fearful of what would come to light—they “distance(d) themselves from this short-term experiment, which does not give indications neither on chicken husbandry nor on market behavior of a broad range of consumers” (SGZ 21-22, December 19, 1974). Later, however, egg producers rejoiced at the test results: they indicated that only a rather small percentage of consumers were prepared to buy the animal-friendly eggs. For the industry, this was clear evidence that consumers did not put ethics before cost. “Around 90% of consumers were not ready to support the postulates of the animal welfare activists financially, through the price premium of the eggs.” Consumers, they said, had proven that one could not negate economic necessity and that the use of emotional, yet not objectively founded arguments could not dupe them: “the idealism of the majority of consumers stops at the price” (SGZ 5, March 4, 1976).

⁹ At the same time, another such development was under way: the build-up of an exchange circuit (a “circuit of commerce,” Zelizer 2011) around free-range eggs. This went much further in terms of animal welfare than the cage-free eggs from the STS. It significantly contributed to the development of alternative, animal friendly categories and forms of valuation on the market and to the rise of consumer consciousness. But it could not constitute a viable economic alternative

for mainstream producers. It was a much more far-reaching critique of industrial farming, and the organization behind it was very critical of the type of husbandry promoted by the STS. The latter was designed precisely as something that conventional large-scale producers could switch to quite easily, and could accommodate the industrial nature of egg production by allowing for concentration and significant quantities.

For the STS, however, the test only proved that consumers were not yet sufficiently informed about the cruelty of cage husbandry. In April 1976, they teamed up with a major Swiss-German women's magazine, called *Annabelle*. Over several months, the magazine would publish (often quite graphic) reports on the egg industry, revealing the cruelty of cage husbandry. In parallel, eggs from cage-free producers were put on the market with the label "Annabelle-Ei" (Annabelle egg), certified cage-free by the STS. Again, the eggs were sold for a slightly higher price than regular eggs. For a few months, the magazine published lists with grocery stores where they could be purchased—a list that contained dozens of stores, including *Jelmoli*, one of the largest and most fashionable department stores in Zurich. In the course of the *Annabelle* campaign, the STS made over 80 contracts with egg producers, covering around 250,000 hens (STS, 1, March 1978, annual report 1975-77).

Through this action, the STS and *Annabelle* crafted a message that managed to reach out to many consumers, most of them women. For the STS, it was a crucial step in its effort to show the market potential of cage-free eggs.

The goal of [this action] is to rebut the claim of chicken farmers [that consumers will purchase the cheaper egg if the price difference is 3 to 5 *Rappen*, even if they know that it was produced under conditions of animal cruelty] [...] This action *must* be a success. Opponents haven't succeeded in convincingly attacking animal welfare arguments advocated by activists from animal welfare, conservation and environmental organizations. If, in addition, we succeed in breaking into the economic front and to demonstrate that consumers are willing to pay a premium price, an additional essential step toward a ban on cages will be done (STS, 3/4, April 1976, emphasis in original).

"Breaking into the economic front" meant showing that ethical concerns could be part of consumers' purchase decisions and were not opposed to such decisions. If animal welfare advocates could both scientifically show that cages amounted to animal cruelty *and* demonstrate that consumers wanted cage-free eggs, the egg industry would have few arguments left.

With their activities on the supply side (labeling products) and on the demand side (informing consumers with the goal of changing their preferences), the activists thus launched a process of qualification [Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2002] and valuation [Beckert and Aspers 2011] in the egg market. Qualification and valuation were themselves part of the moral struggle. Moral entrepreneurs tried establishing moral quality as a criterion for distinction, choice, and valuation. An egg would need to be seen as more valuable if it came

from cage-free hens. The campaign in the *Annabelle* magazine was explicitly designed to do so. A letter by the editor-in-chief of *Annabelle* to the Swiss Minister of Economic Affairs, published in the *STS* magazine (5/6, May 1976), explained the campaign in the following words:

The eggs regulation pushes producers to promote, in particular, “the quality [of eggs]”. With an information campaign running over several months, we would like to show that there is also a non-palpable, ethical quality [...]. Maybe we will succeed in creating a need for an ethical quality with regard to eggs, a modest and yet so important food product.

The goal was thus to expand the notion of what egg quality entails: not only freshness, taste, or size, which were the qualities usually associated with eggs, but also the ethical aspect of conditions of production—the issue of chicken husbandry. It was about creating new needs in consumers, needs of a moral order; making consumers realize that when they want eggs, they don’t just want fresh eggs, they also want eggs from hens kept in animal-friendly conditions.

The egg industry vehemently contested such attempts of moral qualification. For the industry, there could be no difference between cage, cage-free, and free-range eggs: they were all one and the same.

Annabelle concedes that there is no identifiable quality difference between cage and cage-free eggs. What will be the reaction of consumers when they find out? Two kinds! First, the majority of them will hardly be willing to pay 15% more, as the market test [...] clearly showed. Second, they can become suspicious of the declaration and think that they have been conned when they find out that a so-called *Annabelle* egg or a free-range egg does not differentiate itself at all from a regular egg, possibly from cages and 5 cents cheaper. No difference from the inside or the outside, in taste, smell, or appearance (scz 8, April 15, 1976).

The author of these lines refuses to acknowledge the point made by the advocates behind the *Annabelle* campaign. The only qualities of eggs that might justify a higher price were taste, smell, and appearance; chicken husbandry could not. Further on, the author argues that the problem with husbandry is that it cannot be controlled, and therefore should not be declared on packages. But why should it not be possible to control husbandry? And how can the aspects that are admitted as qualities—taste, smell—be controlled? The distinction and the argument made by the egg industry is a consequence of its strong stance in favor of battery cages, which are not, in the industry’s eyes, contrary to animal welfare. Just as the animal welfare advocates were trying to “create a need for ethical qualities” and establish this new category on the market, the producers, fearing not just

a legislative ban on cages but perhaps even more consumers' changing preferences, were trying to prevent this category from emerging. This struggle carried on well into the 1980s, when cage-free activists lobbied for a government-backed declaration clearly distinguishing cage-free eggs, and egg producers fought against it.

In spite of this resistance by the egg industry, the "market acceptance" of cage-free eggs started growing with the campaigns of the STS. Consumers bought the "moral" eggs and paid a premium for them. An indicator of the emergence of this moral market was the fact that producers increasingly tried to take advantage of the segment of consumers demanding cage-free eggs. In spite of the egg industry's political opposition, declarations that implied in one way or another that eggs were held cage-free or even free-range, started to appear: the official STS label and the free-range eggs certified by KAG, but also many other declarations, started to circulate. At the beginning of the 1980s, one could find on the market names such as "Sunn-Ei" (sun-egg), "Nest-Ei" (nest egg), Landei (land-egg), Kikeriki, or simply "eggs from the farm."¹⁰ These names suggested that the chickens somehow had more space than those in cages. They refer to the outdoors—sun, land, the natural habitat of chickens (nests, or farms), and packaging often made explicit reference to free-range or cage-free production modes. All this suggests that the categories cage-free and free-range had gained acceptance and importance on the market. For some producers, that represented an added value. The egg industry organizations had thus been wrong about consumers' mere self-interest: many of them proved willing to pay more for cage-free eggs. However, reaching that point required the moral work of animal welfare organizations and the establishment of new moral categories of quality and valuation.

The political struggle: factory farms or family farms?

Why did the egg producers lose the moral struggle and why did cage-free eggs become so popular as to hasten a change in markets even before the regulation took hold? Certainly, the moral work undertaken by animal welfare activists was an important factor. This included the information campaigns and the efforts made to develop

¹⁰ The KAG criticized these names and published a list in its newsletter in 1981, from where these examples are taken.

a viable alternative that would be made available through labeled products and public campaigns. But we also need to look at the other side and analyze the failure of egg producers to impose their own point of view and their alternative morality, thus contextualizing the moral struggle.

To do this, we need to take a closer look at the agricultural sector and the position of chicken farming within it. Often, agricultural interests have strong networks reaching deep inside state administrations, and Switzerland is no exception. However, within the field of Swiss farming, the position of egg producers was actually quite unique. As primarily highly specialized production units, they differed from most farmers in other sectors who relied on more diversified and much less intensive and industrialized productions. Indeed, chicken farmers—in their majority egg producers, since poultry meat production was never an important economic sector in Switzerland—were by far the most industrialized sector of Swiss agriculture. The rationalization of egg production, the concentration, specialization, and size of these production units had no equal in other segments of Swiss agriculture such as dairy production, cattle or even pork. As such, chicken farmers were outliers within Swiss agriculture—especially those most vocally opposed to the cage ban: those represented by the VSGH who were specialized egg farmers. This weakened the egg industry. Their business model made them especially vulnerable to the rising critique of industrialized farming, a critique that was even shared, at least in part, by the Swiss farmers association. For many, not least for fellow farmers, they were not real farmers. This critique crystallized around the term “factory farm”: animal rights activists, but also sometimes fellow agricultural producers, accused egg producers of running factory farms, a label the egg industry strongly rejected.

The controversy around the moral treatment of animals was thus part of a much larger debate around the right way to do farming. Should the goal be an ever more efficient, industrialized type of farming, which would mean concentration in ever bigger and more productive farms? This model had characterized Swiss agricultural policy in the post-war years, with subsidies depending on farm sizes. But it was now increasingly criticized, building on different points of view: not only an animal rights perspective, but also an environmental perspective and what could be called a conservative perspective, favoring traditional small-scale family farms rather than the development of a concentrated agro-business. Egg producers found

themselves in an uneasy position within this battle. They came to represent the business side of agriculture, a role they struggled with and refused to identify with. But the egg producers' position was contradictory: they were proud of their efficient and specialized production units that allowed them to compete on "free" markets. They ridiculed the "egg nostalgia" of animal welfare activists, who wanted hens to go back to picking corn in open fields and "renounce well-balanced food in sufficient quantity, a secure and hygienically immaculate house with sufficient protection from foxes and other animals" (SGZ 13, August 22, 1974). Yet the egg producers strived to be perceived as family farmers—as typical, traditional farmers who were close to their animals and struggling to make ends meet. They embraced efficiency and productivity, but they refused to be called factory farmers.

Appearing as family farmers rather than factory farmers was thus a strategic identity [Bernstein 1997] in the moral struggles around cage bans. It was not only the industry's main opponents—the animal welfare activists—who contested this label. It also came under increased criticism by members of their own trade. Not all farmers identified with the quest for rationalization, and many reproached egg producers as not being real farmers. Already in 1974, the pages of the poultry journal complained about "incomprehensible and misplaced friendly fire from our own side" when the agricultural press agency published an article highly critical of factory farms attacking, in particular, poultry farmers (SGZ 8, June 13, 1974). Letters from individual poultry farmers published in the journal repeatedly criticized the intensification and rationalization that was driving the egg industry.

These internal conflicts indicate that, in reality, neither the farmers at large nor the smaller group of poultry farmers were unified categories. Farmers were divided into different production sectors and also between large-scale and small-scale farmers. This distinction also characterized the egg industry, where a great number of small producers, supplying the protected market for "system eggs" with broods of often far less than 2,000 hens, faced a much smaller number of large, specialized producers mostly selling directly to traders and retailers on the so-called gray market. The latter were the most vociferously opposed to cage bans. They had a strong and combative professional identity, having managed to develop a successful business model at the margins of the regulated agricultural sector. Inside the circles of the egg industry, they were called "the wild ones," in

reference to their maverick status (*Interview with representative of egg industry*). But now they were the ones who had the most to lose from a change in the system, because making a transition would be more costly for them than for the smaller producers. And they were the ones most frequently singled out by opponents, since they corresponded to the image of factory farmers, whereas smaller producers resembled more the image of traditional farmers (although both groups used cages). They were therefore criticized not only by animal welfare activists, but also by other farmers who thought that they were not really farmers anymore. In quite a few instances, the pages of the SGZ show that egg farmers experienced the attacks and the moral devaluation [Farrell 2015] of their profession in a very personal manner. In a letter to the editor, one poultry farmer complained that, in the movie *Grootzeppuur*, “a whole profession is devalued. [...] I learned the profession of poultry farmer in 1959/1961 when batteries were already common. Since then batteries have kept improving, and today, when a great many have built up an existence, they are publicly stigmatized” (SGZ 15, July 21, 1977).

The long-time president of the vSGH complained in an editorial (SGZ 22, November) that the “monument that animal welfare activists are building for themselves [...] is constructed at the expense of a whole profession and does nothing good for the animal. They are pointing fingers at us: look at these animal abusers!” The moral struggle undoubtedly touched upon the core professional identity of poultry farmers and hurt their professional pride; more than just an attack on their economic interests, the moral struggle was experienced as a condemnation of their very self [Farrell 2015]. It would seem that this perception of being unfairly singled out and publicly stigmatized reinforced the professionals’ attachment to battery cages and their fighting spirit long after the battle was lost.

In the end, the divisions within farmers, along with the announced structural changes in agricultural policy away from a strategy of promoting size, specialization and concentration towards rewarding differentiation and small-scale farms [Schmid and Lehmann 2001; Wilson 2011], helped establish cage-free eggs on markets. For smaller producers, transitioning to cage-free systems was less costly. Selling cage-free eggs could be a business opportunity for them, especially in the early stages. The producers participating in the Annabelle campaign and then searching certification from the STS were such small-scale poultry farmers that they could quite easily transition, or that had never adopted battery cages in the first place. In addition, with its goal

of production diversification, a new federal policy subsidized so-called replenishment productions, which further favored the rapid development of cage-free systems. Many of the producers advertising cage-free eggs were thus new on the market; they had never had cages and began directly with cage-free production facilities. Together with egg traders and the egg distribution cooperative, coop builders approached small farmers, inciting them to build cage-free systems and supply a market characterised by increasing demand.

In sum, this meant that the relatively rapid transition to cage-free systems was also favored by a division within the poultry industry and new policies advantaging small-scale producers. The powerful major egg producers were on the losing side of a much broader shift that was under way. The moral struggle they were involved in did not just concern the question of animal welfare, but more generally the direction that Swiss agriculture would take. The battle on the ban of chicken cages unfolded on the background of a paradigm shift in agricultural policy, from a productivist paradigm towards one of diversification, ecology, and animal welfare. In the end, the egg industry could not resist the change. They tried out certain technological innovations—the so-called enhanced cage systems—but they were all rejected by the commission responsible for applying the new law (*Interview with former government official*). When the major retailers switched to a cage-free only policy a few years *before* the official transitory period ended, all producers were forced to give up the cages. But in contrast to their ominous predictions, and in spite of the lack of any accompanying measures such as import restrictions, they actually fared very well by all accounts. This had to do with circumstantial factors—a generally favorable market situation with high prices at the time—but also with the fact that Swiss consumers largely favored cage-free eggs. The egg industry fully acknowledged the new animal welfare quality of Swiss eggs when, in 1992, it launched an advertising campaign under the slogan “The Swiss egg, a taste of liberty!” They now proudly embraced what they had fought so obstinately for more than ten years (SGZ 7, July 16, 1992).

Discussion and conclusion

It has been widely established that markets are also morally embedded [Beckert 2012; Fourcade and Healy 2007]. The moral

boundaries of markets and market practices are contested [Steiner and Trespeuch 2014; Zelizer 1983]: established and morally sanctioned market conventions can be challenged by moral entrepreneurs—something which has arguably taken place at an increased pace since the 1970s as social movement actors single out corporations and markets as targets of moral and political protest [Soule 2009]. But how do struggles on the moral embeddedness of markets play out? The focus of the theoretical approach developed in this paper is on moral struggles as social and political processes through which moral boundaries and commensuration are contested and negotiated. Analyzing the historical case of the battle about battery cages in the Swiss egg industry, the study attempts to reveal the defining characteristics of moral struggles in markets.

First, the case shows how moral market struggles are fought in such distant fields as the science of animal welfare and how debates on morality inform questions of market practices and regulation. While activists denounced the cruel treatment of animals, egg farmers denied such claims and pointed to their own impeccable professional ethics. Both sides thus developed essentially moral discourses, grounded in different moral orders. Furthermore, in an attempt to legitimize their accounts, both sides also made appeals to scientific measurement as an “unbiased” way of settling the question. While this was superficially about commensuration, the recourse to science was also strategic; it could not solve the underlying moral conflict. Each side produced and relied on its own scientific expertise (for a similar observation in the case of environmental conflict, see Farrell 2015).

Second, the struggle also took place directly in the market arena, around the question of the cost of higher moral standards and thus their compatibility with the “law of the market.” The moral work of animal welfare activists aimed at making their moral views compatible with markets; to do so, they attempted to change consumer preferences and establish a new (ethical) quality for eggs and their valuation. But commensuration *qua* markets was contested by the egg industry. Since for them, cage systems were legitimate and there was thus no moral difference between husbandry systems, eggs could not have an ethical quality and claims of morally superior eggs were therefore rejected. But increasingly, some egg producers also came to see this new quality as a business opportunity. They embraced it by selling eggs under labels and designations that referred to the improved conditions of chicken husbandry. In these instances, the struggle for market share created a breach in the position and strategy of the

industry association. More and more egg producers followed this path, as the demand for cage-free eggs grew.

Finally, moral market struggles are also political struggles: moral boundaries of markets are also decided through political rule-making. Power and status struggles [Gusfield 1984 [1963]] also inform moral struggles and serve to achieve commensuration between competing values. Egg producers felt unjustly singled out and devalued in their professional identity, which can account for their long-lasting persistence in the battle. But, as highly specialized producers, egg farmers *were* isolated within the field of farming and could not count on the full support of traditional allies. Many other Swiss farmers were themselves critical of the specialized, industrialized business model championed by the egg industry. In addition, the tide was turning in favor of a different kind of agricultural policy, away from the production model of the specialized egg producer. The battle surrounding battery cages turned out to be a forerunner of the upcoming changes in agricultural policy towards integrated and sustainable production.

Struggles around the (im-)morality of certain practices, their market acceptance and political battles around new regulations can be found wherever the moral embeddedness of markets is contested. For instance—to continue with the egg example—a battle around battery cages for egg production is currently being fought in the US. The people of California accepted a ballot measure in 2008 effectively banning battery cage systems, and the law took effect on January 1, 2015 [Bittman 2015]. This moral struggle plays out in the same three arenas identified in the Swiss case. A cursory look at the arguments and strategies of the egg industry shows for instance how the American egg industry questioned the animal welfare benefits of alternative barn systems, defended its professional knowledge on animal welfare, and brought in scientific experts to compare and evaluate animal welfare. It also reveals how market viability was at stake as producers raised economic arguments about rising prices for eggs, consequences for consumers, and the danger of driving egg production out of the US to countries where control is impossible (Promar International 2009; United Egg Producers undated). By distinguishing between different dimensions in which moral struggles play out, and characterizing the stakes within each, the analytical framework developed in this study should prove helpful for further analyses of similar cases of moral market struggles and processes of market moralization.

More generally, the case is exemplary in showing how the moral embeddedness of markets is not only fought out in different arenas

but also concerns all aspects of markets: production technology as well as product categories, regulation and issues of product declaration, producers, consumers, and the many intermediaries that populate markets. It crops up in issues of market coordination around value, competition, and coordination [Beckert 2009], and structures the social networks, institutions, and cognitive frames that constitute market fields [Beckert 2010]. In short, it is all over the economy. This becomes especially visible in cases of moral contestation and change, when taken-for granted conventions are questioned and contested on moral grounds, and when moral boundaries of markets are renegotiated. But this does not mean that morality was not present *before* moral entrepreneurs entered the stage; simply, the underlying value-mix was of a different kind, and largely invisible because taken-for granted. Once market actors are challenged on moral grounds, they are forced to justify their economic actions, and thus to render explicit their moral underpinnings. Moral struggles are thus a powerful strategy for revealing how the economy is “shot through with values” [Fischer, 2014a: 5].

The Swiss battle around battery cages strongly suggests that, even in a case that at first sight seems to clearly oppose moral activists to an “immoral” industry that exploits chickens, one cannot do justice to the latter without acknowledging that their actions also had other motives than mere economic interests. As this analysis makes clear, morality cannot be reduced to being simply an after-thought to or a disguise for economic or political interests. Not only did it motivate actions on both sides of the argument; it had a direct influence on the changing outlook of this market, inscribing itself in law, technology, and market categories. But this morality is in turn entangled with wide-ranging political and economic processes and interests, from which markets are not separated. Struggles on power and status as well as the pursuit of economic interests both underlie struggles on moral boundaries and are affected by them.

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Résumé

Les pratiques dans les marchés sont largement réglementées et parfois contestées sur la base de jugements moraux. Des entrepreneurs moraux remettent alors en cause des marchés et des pratiques marchandes tandis que des entreprises et des associations industrielles les défendent, ce qui résulte des luttes morales opposant différents ordres de grandeur. Sur la base d'une étude de cas historique, cet article développe un cadre théorique qui étudie les luttes morales dans les marchés en tant que processus sociaux et politiques autour de la commensurabilité. Il identifie trois arènes-clés dans lesquelles se jouent les luttes morales. L'arène des idées, où la moralité de certaines pratiques en tant que telles est contestée et les acteurs ancrent leurs jugements moraux dans différents ordres institutionnels afin de les légitimer ; l'économie, où l'enjeu est la viabilité marchande des standards moraux changeant ; et l'arène politique, où la commensuration reflète des luttes de pouvoir politique. À travers une analyse socio-historique du mouvement contre les batteries d'élevage dans la production des œufs en Suisse dans les années 1970 et 1980, cette étude décrit comment cette lutte morale se décline le long de ces dimensions, en focalisant sur les discours, stratégies et tactiques utilisés par les principaux entrepreneurs moraux et associations industrielles.

Mots-clés : Marché ; Morale ; Lutte morale ; Commensurabilité ; Mouvements sociaux ; Valuation.

Zusammenfassung

Marktpraktiken sind umfangreich reglementiert und manchmal umstritten aufgrund von moralischen Urteilen. *Moral entrepreneurs* fechten Märkte und Marktpraktiken an, während Firmen und Industrieverbände sie verteidigen. Dies führt zu moralischen Kämpfen wo sich unterschiedliche Wertordnungen gegenüber stehen. Basierend auf einer historischen Fallstudie wird in diesem Artikel ein theoretischer Ansatz entwickelt zur Untersuchung von moralischen Kämpfen in Märkten als soziale und politische Prozesse um die Frage der Kommensurabilität. Es werden drei Arenen identifiziert, wo die moralischen Kämpfe stattfinden. In der Arena der Ideen ist die Moralität der Praktiken an sich umkämpft, und Akteure verankern ihre moralischen Forderungen in unterschiedlichen institutionellen Ordnungen zur Legitimation. In der ökonomischen Arena der Märkte geht es um die "Marktakzeptanz" der sich verändernden moralischen Standards. In der politischen Arena schliesslich wird Kommensurabilität erreicht durch Regulation als Resultat von politischen Machtkämpfen. Eine sozio-historische Analyse des Kampfes gegen Batteriehaltung in der Schweizer Eierproduktion in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren verdeutlicht die Prozesse dieses moralischen Kampfes in jenen Arenen. Dabei werden die sich konkurrierenden Diskurse, Strategien und Taktiken der *moral entrepreneurs* und Industrieverbände in den Vordergrund gestellt.

Schlüsselwörter : Markt; Moral; Moralische Kämpfe; Commensurability; Soziale Bewegungen; Valuation.