

## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **Of casteadores, gallos y galleras the cockfight world in the Canary Islands**

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***Of casteadores, gallos y galleras:***  
**the cockfight world in the Canary Islands**



**by Ricardo Rodrigo Ontillera Sánchez**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the**

**degree of PhD in Social Anthropology**

**Department of Life Sciences**

**University of Roehampton**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the present work is to explore the world of cockfighting in the Canary Islands, where over three consecutive years (2016-2018) a wide range of issues were researched. Given its legal status, the cockfight in the Canary Islands is not a prohibited event held in secret locations, where those who attend may be prosecuted, as is the case in the UK and most European countries. Therefore, the study was not restricted to the fights themselves, but it was also an exploration of the encompassing world of cockfighting, including breeding, training, and socialising, that brought about those public fights and performances. To achieve that, I adopted an ethnographic perspective in which participant observation and interviewing were essential methodological tools. By presenting detailed ethnographic accounts of this world, this thesis shows the importance of understanding the rearing of gamecocks to fully grasp the meaning given to the fights by Canarian breeders and aficionados. With the help of narrative fragments and quotations from my interviews, I also offer an ethnographic description of cockfights according to eight different aspects of the event. Essentially, aficionados go to watch and admire the drama of the contest, the fighting birds' performance. In the Spanish archipelago, breeders can compete both in single-date championships (*campeonatos*) and weekly leagues (*contratas*). These two methods of organisation represent one of the singularities of the cockfights in the Canary Islands where also the relatively low importance of betting, in comparison with other regions, represents another peculiarity of the event. Lastly, by introducing several quotations from the fieldwork in which breeders and aficionados give their views on roosters, this thesis demonstrates how breeders perceive fighting birds as animals of a unique nature.

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I am also very thankful to the ‘chicken people’, particularly my PhD colleagues Giovanna, Eva, Mel and Pete. This dissertation was possible thanks to the project “Cultural & Scientific Perceptions of Human-Chicken Interactions”, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. I would also like to express my gratitude to the University of Roehampton and the Royal Anthropological Institute for their guidance and financial support.

Let me proceed, from this point onwards, in Spanish. Por encima de todo, quisiera expresar mi más sincero agradecimiento a la Federación Gallística Canaria y a todos los casteadores y casteadoras. Canarios, peninsulares, cubanos, dominicanos, venezolanos..., todos me abrieron las puertas de sus casas en un momento difícil para esta práctica. En un trabajo etnográfico como el que se presenta, ellos son los verdaderos protagonistas. Es imposible nombrarlos a todos, pero han formado parte de una experiencia inolvidable.

Por otra parte, este viaje no hubiera sido posible sin el apoyo de mis amigos: los biólogos, la gente de la UAM y la UPO, Swansea, Saconia, Garden, los Griegos, los Parrillanos, los emigrados por un sistema indecente y unos políticos corruptos, etc. Mi padre, mi madre, mi hermana y Chus han sido siempre una fuente de inspiración y libertad, una profunda lección de vida. Una vida a la que se ha unido Olivia Fiona, que ya apunta maneras. Como su tía Marta, quién ha mostrado el coraje de compartir el estrés, la alegría, el amor y el aprendizaje de estos cuatro años. Gracias.



## NOTES ON HOW THIS THESIS WORKS

This dissertation is based on my fieldwork experience. As will be seen further on, participant observation, informal conversations and interviewing are an essential part of this thesis. In light of this, and to avoid misunderstandings, when quoting from a cockfighting breeder or aficionado, his/her quotation will be centred, in English, and in “speech marks” as follows:

“... so they could not say we are all dodgy”. (José 01/04/2016)<sup>1</sup>

In the case of an excerpt of an interview or dialogue with two or more interlocutors, including myself, it will be centred and without speech marks as follows:

Manuel: That is the Canarian trimming.

Ricardo<sup>2</sup>: What is the trimming?

Francisco: The trimming is a particular way of...

When quoting scholars, their quotations will be indented on the left-hand side using 1.5 spacing between the lines:

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<sup>1</sup> “... para que no digan que somos todos unos mataos”. (José 01/04/2016). When not stated otherwise, all translations from Spanish are done by the author. Rather than a literal translation word by word, I have tried to interpret the quotes as a whole. In any case, the original words in Spanish are always present in the footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> The name “Ricardo” always refers to the author of this dissertation.

...the great majority of the people calling “five” or “speckled” so demonstratively are expressing their allegiance to their kinsman, not their evaluation of his bird, their understanding of probability theory, or even their hopes of unearned income.

(Geertz, 1972:19)<sup>3</sup>

When quoting short pieces within a sentence or paragraph the quotation is enclosed in ‘single inverted commas’, e.g., ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, 1991:183).

Narrative reports will be centred, using a different font, as follows:

*Casteadores* and *aficionados* were coming slowly to the arena where fights  
take place. This ancient practice had seen better times...

Spanish words, when isolated out of the quotes, are shown in italics, as follows: *gallera*.

Notes on translation: Spanish has a masculine-feminine approach to grammatical gender, where the use of the neuter is very limited and generally restricted to abstract categories (e.g., *lo malo*). However, although English has three gendered pronouns, it lacks grammatical gender in the sense of noun class distinctions. With this in mind, and given that Canarian cockfighters usually use the masculine pronoun when referring to their roosters, in the dissertation roosters will be referred to

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<sup>3</sup> Quotes from non-English languages, when not stated otherwise, are translated into English by the author.

as ‘he’, e.g., he opened his wings. Throughout the thesis I have offered translations of key terms relating to the event, its process, and its culture. However, I have also included a translated glossary of specialist and key terms in an appendix at the end of the thesis.

Notes on writing in third and first person: This dissertation has been written using the first and the third person. I have tried to use the first person as an exercise of reflexivity and honesty, particularly when I describe my fieldwork experience.

Notes on bibliography: in order to facilitate access to the different materials cited in this dissertation, the bibliography has been organised in various categories such as news from printed and electronic press, visual and audio-visual materials and legislation. For ease of reading, when references are used for paraphrasing, in-text citations have been added as footnotes.

The cockfight is a legal event in the Canary Islands and many breeders and aficionados would have gladly appeared in the dissertation using their personal names. However, to protect the identities of those involved in areas where the prohibitionist pressure is higher, some of the locations and names shown are fictional or have been interchanged.



## WHO IS WRITING? A NOTE ON POSITIONALITY

"Did you know anything about roosters (*gallos*) or did you have to come because of your boss?".

(José, 16/01/2016)<sup>4</sup>

Quite a simple question directed at me, although a question that I did not expect and a question which forced me to explain my intentions. As some scholars<sup>5</sup> have argued, I believe it is essential to pay attention to positionality and reflexivity, especially when doing fieldwork. In this sense, Donna Haraway's concept of '*situated knowledge*' (1991:183-201) which suggests the idea that there is no unique truth out there, to be revealed, has been widely used to present researchers' contexts and backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. Accordingly, considering that all knowledge is partial and context-related, including the researcher's, it may help if I introduce myself.

I cannot claim that I always had the desire to become an anthropologist. I started my Bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences with the intention of working in a lab as a molecular biologist. It was around the third year of my studies that I started to become curious about ecology and social sciences and then I decided to undertake a MSc in Social Research applied to Environment. That interest then led me to a Bachelor's degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology and research projects on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and social networks analysis (SNA) in

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<sup>4</sup> "¿Tú sabías algo de gallos o te ha tocado venir por tu jefe?". (José, 16/01/2016)

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Nightingale (2003), Rose (1997) and Sultana (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Nightingale (2003:77)

different Spanish contexts - such as the home gardens in the Sierra Norte de Madrid to transhumant shepherds along the Cañada Real Conquense (the Conquense Drovers' Road) in central Spain.

In 2014, due to the financial crisis in Spain, I decided to travel with my girlfriend to the UK to try my luck obtaining a PhD. It was then that I applied for this ethnographic study of cockfighting in the Canary Islands and began to form a part of the AHRC funded research project "Cultural & Scientific Perceptions of Human-Chicken Interactions"<sup>[7,8]</sup>.

At first, I knew nothing about cockfighting. But then I started to live and experience the world of cockfighting from within. To immerse myself in this world I attended thousands of cockfights with breeders, I visited their breeding farms on weekdays, drank with them while discussing what had been seen in the cockpit, and had many conversations with aficionados. Therefore, part of the dissertation is written in first person and I have frequently used quotes from the people with whom I spoke. What follows is an attempt to explore and unfold, at least partially, the world of cockfighting in the Canary Islands.

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<sup>7</sup>For more information please go to <http://www.scicultchickens.org/about>

<sup>8</sup> A Santander Scholarship also funded part of my fieldwork in 2017 and the ASA/RADCLIFFE-BROWN TRUST 2018 funded part of the final submission.

**Approaching cockfighting...**



“Tú te metes ahora en la jaula del gallo y no te hace nada. Ahora, recortamos un poco la jaula y sale a matar al otro gallo. Lo de los gallos, te digo a ti una cosa, el que haya criado alguna vez gallos, sabe que algunos pollos a los 15 días o al mes ya los ves dándose cuero colega. Dándose cuero. Y la gente que no entiende dice, “no, es que ustedes los echan a pelear”. Que sí. Porque es verdad, a veces les cambiamos las espuelas, les ponemos las plásticas, les damos físico, etc. Pero es que es prácticamente lo mismo que ellos hacen en la naturaleza, prácticamente. Lo que pasa es que tú los llevas a un recinto a pelear”. (David, Gran Canaria 21/05/2016)

“If you get into the cage, the rooster won’t attack you. But if we open the cage he will go out to kill the other one. Regarding the breeding, I will tell you one thing. Anyone who has ever raised roosters knows some chicks will fight each other when only 15 days old. And people who don’t understand (what cockfighting is all about) say, “No, you are the ones who make them fight”. And I understand that. It is true that we sometimes change their natural spurs for plastic ones, we keep them fit, etc. But that is practically what they naturally do. The only difference is that we put them into the ring”. (David, Gran Canaria 21/05/2016)

## INTRODUCTION

On the previous page, David's statement shows how breeders and aficionados perceive roosters as territorial animals. By only seeing or hearing a rooster crowing, any other male would reveal its aggressiveness by attempting to attack. As Marvin states 'the cockfight is based on an observed fact of nature that two cocks in close proximity will fight and out of this "natural fact" is created a cultural event' (1984:65)<sup>9</sup>.

The main aim of my PhD was to carry out an ethnographic study of cockfight in the Canary Islands in order to try to understand how the natural, aggressive, proclivities of cockerels were shaped into cultural performances and what attracted people to participate in them. During three consecutive years (2016-2018) I explored a wide range of issues concerning the world of cockfighting (*riñas* or *peleas de gallos* in Spanish). Therefore, the research was not restricted to the fights themselves, but it was also an exploration of the encompassing world of cockfighting, including breeding, training, and socialising, that brought about those public fights and performances. To achieve that I participated in this world throughout the archipelago, mainly on the islands of Gran Canaria and La Palma.

I would like to draw attention to two differences between my research and previous ethnographic studies of cockfighting<sup>10</sup>. Firstly, a wide range of those studies were undertaken for shorter periods of time compared with mine and were not, in many instances, the main or sole purpose of the fieldwork (e.g., Cook, 1991; Geertz, 1972 and Marvin, 1984). Secondly, and sometimes linked to

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<sup>9</sup> Marvin, G. (1984) The Cockfight in Andalusia (Spain): Images of the Truly Male. *Anthropological Quarterly*. Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 60-70.

<sup>10</sup> Although researchers usually have little incentive to publish in other language than English, in this dissertation cockfighting literature in Spanish and Portuguese can also be found and seems to be very important.

the previous point, some of those fieldwork projects were undertaken in places where the cockfights were illegal and access was difficult or problematic (e.g., Geertz, 1972).

### **The Canary Islands: a good place to research on cockfighting**

The Canary Islands are a Spanish archipelago<sup>11</sup>, close to the southern coast of Morocco, which forms one of the Spanish Autonomous Communities. In this outermost region of the European Union the main islands<sup>12</sup> are Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, Lanzarote, La Palma, La Gomera and El Hierro. The climate varies from one island to the other, but the Canary Islands are often considered to enjoy the best weather conditions in the world due to its annual average temperature of between 21 to 22 °C and with winter temperatures receding no less than 17°C.



The Canary Islands. NASA image acquired December 21, 2011. NASA/GSFC/Jeff Schmaltz/MODIS Land Rapid Response Team. This file is in the public domain.

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<sup>11</sup> The term “Spanish archipelago” is used as a synonym for the Canary Islands throughout the text.

<sup>12</sup> La Graciosa, a small island located 2 km north of Lanzarote, was named the 8<sup>th</sup> inhabited island of the archipelago by the Spanish Senate in 2018.



My supervisory team and I understood the importance of finding a suitable area that would allow a wide-ranging ethnographic exploration of the topic. We wanted to find a location which provided full and open access to all areas of cockfighting where the local laws did not prohibit the activity and no serious risks<sup>13</sup> were involved in participation. The cockfight in the Canary Islands is not a prohibited event held in secret locations, where those who attend may be prosecuted, as is the case in the UK and most European countries.

Cockfighting has been outlawed almost everywhere in Europe. For example, it was banned in the UK in the 19th century but there are areas such as Nord-Pas de Calais, in northern France, and Andalusia in southern Spain, where the fights have been legalised under specific regulations. Furthermore, in some French overseas territories, with different statuses from the European Union, such as Reunion, Guiana, the Antilles and Polynesia cockfighting is legal<sup>14</sup>. In fact, this distribution gives us a hint about the origin, importance and global spread of cockfights<sup>15</sup>.

It is important to emphasise that although some people might find cockfighting distasteful, the practice is legal in the Canary Islands, open to the public, and it is subject to administrative regulations. This is in contrast with most other European countries where cockfighting is more of a clandestine event. Cockfighting was regulated by the Official Bulletin of the Canary Islands in 1991 (*Ley 8/1991, de 30 de abril, de protección de los animales*) and this legal framework makes it an excellent place for undertaking this ethnographic study. It is important to state that neither my attendance nor my work on this research project in any way promoted cockfights. These events

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<sup>13</sup> Blommaert & Jie (2010:21)

<sup>14</sup> EFE (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2015)

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2 'From Southeast Asia to the Canary Islands: a history of cockfighting'.

and practices were organised by the Cockfighting Federation and, in my role as an observing researcher, I contributed no more than any other interested member of the public.

## **Thesis Structure**

This dissertation is structured according to the two main, and interconnected steps, of the project: approaching cockfighting and entering the world of the cockfight.

The first part, the approaching, aims to give the reader a general framework of cockfighting while introducing the local context of the Canary Islands. Following the introduction and the setting, I consider that it is necessary to start with a very brief description of cockfights in the archipelago as a foretaste for the longer ethnographic description in the second part of the thesis. After this initial contact with the matter, in the research rationale I elaborate on why the topic is worthy of study and how it might make a useful contribution to the study of human animal relations; a field that is now attracting considerable attention both within and outside of academia.

At this point, I offer a short history of cockfighting from a worldwide perspective to a more specific level in the Canary Islands. I start by explaining its origins in southeast Asia and its expansion across different empires such as the Greek, Roman, British, French and Spanish. Rather than this being an extensive or systematic review, its aim is to introduce key elements of the history of the practice. I continue by introducing the history of cockfighting across the Canarian archipelago, which used to be a bridging space between mainland Spain and America. Information about the practice becomes more consistent after the middle of the 19th century and, using local literature, I set out a series of key developments. I also trace some failed or rejected attempts to ban the practice in the archipelago and some problems, regulations and controversies that were faced by

cockfighters both in the Canary Islands and mainland Spain. After presenting a historical tour of cockfighting, I describe my epistemological starting point and the methods employed, paying special attention to the ethnographic perspective proposed where participant observation, interviewing and informal talks were essential.

I begin the second part of the thesis, 'Entering the world of chickens', by presenting 'Travelling in the Canary Islands' where I give an account of my personal fieldwork experience, how it was conducted and the challenges I faced. This chapter is a prelude to the main core of the dissertation where I will deal with the key points of cockfighting in the Spanish archipelago.

In 'From the Egg to the Cockpit' my central concern is to show the major steps followed by breeders in the processes of rearing and preparation - the first days of the chicks, sparring, naming, decresting and trimming. I will also try to give the reader a deeper understanding of the concept of *casta*<sup>16</sup>. An exploration of these steps is essential to fully understand the practice as a whole. Then, in '*Riñas de Gallos*', I offer an ethnographic description of cockfights in the Canary Islands. With the help of narrative fragments and quotations from my interviews and informal conversations, the description is organised according to eight different aspects of the event. After that, I seek to present a picture of how a '*Casa de gallos*' works in the Canary Islands. Based on my fieldwork experience, different themes such as the fighting mood of the roosters, the secrecy and the role of women will be introduced. The *contratas* (leagues) played between different teams (*partidos*) in the Canary Islands are unique within the world of cockfighting.

Then, to complete the ethnographic description provided, I present an exploratory comparison of different features that might help to contextualize the practice within the world of cockfighting. As

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<sup>16</sup> In general terms, *casta* is usually translated into English as "caste". However, depending on the context, it could be translated as breed, lineage, quality, gameness or class.

will be seen, Canarian cockfights are a very particular case. Finally, I present 'Fighting Birds are not Puppies' where I try to illustrate how roosters are conceived of, and classified by, breeders and aficionados. For this purpose, I introduce several quotes from the fieldwork in which breeders and aficionados give their views on the unique natures of these creatures. On the basis of these views a brief comparison between cockfighting and bullfighting will be outlined.



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**GALLERA LÓPEZ SOCAS - LAS PALMAS**  
**SÁBADO, 19 DE MAYO DE 2018 - 16:00 HORAS**  
**GRANDES RIÑAS DE GALLOS - 15.ª JORNADA DE PELEAS CASADAS**

**GALLERA: UNIÓN GALLÍSTICA DE GÁLDAR**  
**CUIDADOR: JONATHAN Y ALEJANDRO**

N.º	COLOR	PROPIETARIO	CASTEADOR	PESO	PL. PULG.
1	MELADO	EL CAPÓN	EL CAPÓN	4 3	2
2	GIRO	SRES. DÍAZ Y REYES	SRES. DÍAZ Y REYES	4 1/2	2
3	MELADO	HERMANOS REYES	HERMANOS REYES	3 15 1/2	
4	COLORADO	HOYA VARGAS	HOYA VARGAS	3 13 1/2	
5	GIRO	HERMANOS REYES	HERMANOS REYES	3 12 1/2	1
6	COLORADO	SRES. DÍAZ Y REYES	SRES. DÍAZ Y REYES	3 11 1/2	1
7	GIRO	EL ROQUE	EL ROQUE	3 10 1/2	
8	GIRO	SALVADOR RODRÍGUEZ	PALMA ALTA LA ERA	3 8 1/2	2

**GALLERA: AMIGOS DEL SUR**  
**CUIDADOR: ATAMÁN Y JUAN MARÍA**

N.º	COLOR	PROPIETARIO	CASTEADOR	PESO
1	PINTO	PEÑA JINÁMAR	PEÑA JINÁMAR	4 2 1/2
2	MELADO	CUBA NOSTALGIA	CUBA NOSTALGIA	4 1/2
3	GALLINO	LOS DOS NIÑOS	LOS DOS NIÑOS	3 15 1/2
4	GIRO	CUBA NOSTALGIA	CUBA NOSTALGIA	3 13 1/2
5	COLORADO	JOSÉ LUIS CABRERA	HDEZ. SANTANA Y ROSALES	3 12 1/2
6	RETINTO	YONAY PÉREZ	YONAY PÉREZ	3 11 1/2
7	COLORADO	JOSÉ LUIS CABRERA	HDEZ. SANTANA Y ROSALES	3 10 1/2
8	COLORADO	FINCA CASA SANTA	FINCA CASA SANTA	3 8 1/2

**GALLERA: LOS LLANOS DE TELDE**  
**CUIDADORES: FLAVIO Y DIEGO**

N.º	COLOR	PROPIETARIO	CASTEADOR	PESO	PL. PULG.
1	GIRO	PEPE BENAVENTE	LOS LLANITOS	4 8 1/2	
2	GIRO	TINGUARO Y JONAY	TINGUARO Y JONAY	4 5 1/2	
3	GIRO	CASO CERRADO	TOSCA ARRASTRE	4 4 1/2	
4	GIRO	MASOQUISTA	DOS HERMANOS	3 15 1/2	
5	COLORADO	PEÑA HIGUERA CANARIA	PEÑA HIGUERA CANARIA	3 14 1/2	
6	MELADO	SALTA SI PUEDES	MANUEL ACOSTA LORENZO	3 13 1/2	
7	GIRO	CHINO CANARIÓN	TOSCA ARRASTRE	3 12 1/2	2
8	RETINTO	SINFÓNICO	LOS LLANITOS	3 11 1/2	

**GALLERA: TELDE - LAS PALMAS**  
**CUIDADOR: RONY MARTÍNEZ**

N.º	COLOR	PROPIETARIO	CASTEADOR	PESO
1	GALLINO	AGENTE 007	HERMANOS SANTANA ADÁN	4 8 1/2
2	GIRO	JESÚS DAVID SANTANA	JESÚS DAVID SANTANA	4 6
3	COLORADO	ÁNGELES CRUZ LEÓN	JOSÉ LUIS MARTÍN	4 4 1/2
4	MELADO	SRES. GARCÍA CUYÁS	SRES. GARCÍA CUYÁS	3 15 1/2
5	GIRO	NOAH Y LUCÍA	JOSÉ LUIS MARTÍN	3 14 1/2
6	GIRO	NOAH Y LUCÍA	JOSÉ LUIS MARTÍN	3 13 1/2
7	COLORADO	EL GALLO LILLO	HERMANOS SANTANA ADÁN	3 12 1/2
8	PINTO	NOAH Y LUCÍA	JOSÉ LUIS MARTÍN	3 11 1/2



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Daily programme of a *contrata* in Gran Canaria. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2018)

## Canarian Cockfights: A Snapshot

In the Canary Islands, cockfighting is an indoor event where roosters, two at a time, are pitted against each other in a circular, fenced, structure elevated above the floor. This pit is surrounded by seating for the audience, usually composed of a few dozen of people from various backgrounds. Handlers and judges<sup>17</sup> are seated in a buffer area around the pit to get a better view of the event. A room to keep the fighting birds locked in separate compartments and a bar serving drinks and snacks are also common facilities.

The cockfighting season runs from January to June and most of the audience is comprised of males, particularly over 35 years of age. In many events women are also present but make up a much smaller proportion of the audience. Starting times vary depending on the mode of competition and the island, but daytime programmes during weekends are the most common. A league day usually lasts around two hours while championships are commonly split into different matches over a weekend<sup>18</sup>.

Approximately an hour before the event starts, cockfighters begin to arrive at the arena, transporting their fighting birds in carrying bags or wooden boxes. After fitting the spurs, birds are then handed over to the organisation. Unlike many other places around the world, metal gaffs and steel blades are not used to arm the roosters and plastic spurs are the most common.

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<sup>17</sup> The Spanish term is usually *juez* (judge) in singular and *jueces* in plural.

<sup>18</sup> These two methods of organisation represent one of the singularities of the cockfights in the Canary Islands where breeders compete both in single-date championships (*campeonatos*) and weekly leagues (*contratas*). Both *contratas* and *campeonatos* will be discussed later in this dissertation.

Roosters are matched in advance, using equal weight as the criteria, therefore the organiser knows the number of birds competing each day. There is no opportunity for the inclusion of new birds/pairs on the day of the contest. Before every fight there is a process of weighing and cleaning the *gallo*, in front of the audience. This allows the handlers to exchange a few words and gives the audience, either from the stands or while having a drink in the bar, the opportunity of commenting on the roosters. This step has been lost in championships, where it is only conducted in the locker rooms to expedite the processing of the high number of roosters fighting in a weekend. When both fighting birds are ready, they will be faced-up to each other by the handlers, before being released. The handlers then leave the arena and the fight begins.

The birds engage with each other, attacking with spurs and beaks, at such a frenetic pace that it is hard for an outsider to gauge what is happening in terms of advantage or disadvantage, gaining or losing. Once the fight starts, only the handlers are allowed to go up into the pit, and only under certain circumstances, such as to disentangle the roosters when they get stuck. Apart from killing the other *gallo*, one of them could be declared winner by making the other flee or stop fighting. There is always the possibility of a tie, either because there might be a time limit in championships and some leagues or due to an agreement between the teams in case of fights with no time limit<sup>19</sup>.

It is impossible to describe an overriding atmosphere of the event in the singular or of a particular fight and the different emotions that cockfighters might experience. It can be expressed and verbalised in many ways. For example, there are cockfighters who cannot stop shouting and are standing while others just breathe a sigh of relief at the end of the fight. Although there is no bookmaker's booth, small bets are accorded by some individuals in the audience, changing the

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<sup>19</sup> Notions of winning, losing or a tie will be further explored in chapter 6.



odds according to the development of the fights. When the fight finishes, roosters are picked up by the handlers, checked for injuries and preliminary treatments applied. As they leave, the next pair of birds is taken up to the cockpit. When the fights are over, points will be accumulated for those cockfighters and teams competing in leagues while individual prizes will be given for those competing in championships.

This is the cockfight as a public event. Behind that event there is a whole world of breeding, rearing, caring for and preparation. In fact, cockfighters are known as *casteadores*<sup>20</sup> (breeders) putting emphasis on rearing as an essential element in the creation of the event. The main constitutive elements of that world will be explored through what follows in the dissertation.



Panoramic view of *Gallera López Socas* in Gran Canaria. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

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<sup>20</sup> From this point and onwards, I will refer to cockfighters in the Canary Islands as *casteadores*.



# 1

## RESEARCH RATIONALE

To introduce this, I need to mention again that the ethnographic study I proposed was part of a larger research project, “Cultural & Scientific Perceptions of Human-Chicken Interactions”, an AHRC-funded project that brought together researchers from a wide range of disciplines to examine the social, cultural and environmental impact of this important but under-researched species. For instance, there were other anthropology PhD students<sup>21</sup> who worked on the areas of chicken husbandry, amateur chicken-keeping, pedigree breeding and exhibition, and chickens in ritual and religious practices.

We live at a time when the massive impact and dominance exercised by humankind over the Earth’s ecosystems has been called the ‘Anthropocene’<sup>22</sup>. With a projected increase of the world population to more than 9 billion people by 2050, the rate of industrialisation and human pressures on natural ecosystems and resources are expected to rise as well<sup>23</sup>. This concept of ‘Anthropocene’ has been recognised and worked from various perspectives and academic disciplines<sup>24</sup>. Undoubtedly, the poultry industry has put chickens in a central position as a relatively cheap source of protein rich food. It is consumed worldwide and because of the correlation between population growth and poultry consumption, the domestic chicken has even been proposed to become the key

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<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Ramasawmy (2017) and Capponi (2017).

<sup>22</sup> Crutzen & Stoermer (2000)

<sup>23</sup> Millenium Ecosystem Assessment (2005)

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Bennett et al. (2016), Ogden et al. (2013a) and Trischler (2017).

fossil evidence to define the Anthropocene<sup>25</sup>. With a population over 20 billion<sup>26</sup>, chickens are by far the most abundant of all domesticated animals. As Hal Herzog highlighted, ‘The modern broiler chicken is a technological marvel (...) the birds are meat machines’ (2010:167).

Either for meat and eggs or for fighting in a cockpit, the origins and diffusion of domestic chickens (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) are still poorly understood mainly due to the scarcity of records. Recent genetic evidence<sup>27</sup> suggests Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*), with posterior hybridisation with Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*), as the ancestor of domestic chicken. Although still widely debated, Pitt et al. (2016) have commented that multiple origins of domestication in Asia are now accepted. The chronology and geography of chicken domestication are disputed, but most sources are in agreement that it developed between 8000 – 2500BC and in different areas of Southeast Asia<sup>28</sup>.

In their subsequent spread from Asia, their early domestication primarily as a source of food has been disputed, with cockfighting, medicine, magic, ritual or cosmological uses being offered as main reasons for their wide dispersal<sup>29</sup>. We know little about it<sup>30</sup>, but it is suggested, from archaeological evidence, that cockfighting originated more than 2500 years ago in southeast Asia<sup>31</sup>. This would make it one of the oldest documented sports<sup>32</sup> in the world and one that it is still a widespread practice (legally or not), particularly in South and Central America and many

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<sup>25</sup> Carrington (31<sup>st</sup> August, 2016)

<sup>26</sup> Chemnitz & Becheva (2014)

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Eriksson et al. (2008) and Girdland et al. (2014).

<sup>28</sup> In order to get fully acquainted with genetic terms and the subsequent ways of spreading, I would recommend reading *New perspectives on the ecology of early domestic fowl: An interdisciplinary approach* (Pitt et al., 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Sykes (2012)

<sup>30</sup> To learn more about the history of the practice see chapter 2.

<sup>31</sup> Dundes (1994)

<sup>32</sup> Fitz-Barnard (1983:3)

Asian countries<sup>33</sup>. For example, it is considered a national pastime in countries such as the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the Philippines<sup>34</sup>.

Anthropologists have assigned a great deal of importance to the role of animals in different cultures and societies where they represented an essential part in cosmologies and other beliefs systems<sup>35</sup>. Anthropology has always been interested in the relations of people and other species, an early indication of this would be 19th century anthropological papers such as Morgan's *The American Beaver and His Work* (1868) and many others<sup>36</sup> over the 20th century. To give more examples, Shanklin (1985:377) mentions the initial interest of Franz Boas and Radcliffe-Brown and how they raised questions about why human tales and ritual attitudes were usually attached to animals. Evans-Pritchard's *The Sacrificial Role of Cattle among the Nuer* (1953), Lévi-Strauss's *The Bear and the Barber* (1963) and Geertz's *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* (1972) are just three classic examples of this interest.

We are intimately connected with (non-human) animals in almost every single aspect of our lives and the intersubjective methodological approach of cultural anthropology makes it a good lens through which to understand the relationship between human and non-human beings<sup>37</sup>. This intersubjective approach recognises the research subjects rather than objectifying them, and it mainly consists of a holistic approach, participant observation methodology and its rejection of reductionism<sup>38</sup>. In this sense, I find particularly interesting the notion of human exceptionalism

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<sup>33</sup> Dundes (1994)

<sup>34</sup> Dundes (1994)

<sup>35</sup> McHugh (2017)

<sup>36</sup> For more information on this issue see Kirksey & Helmreich (2010).

<sup>37</sup> DeMello (2012:22)

<sup>38</sup> DeMello (2012:22)

argued against by Donna Haraway (2008:244) in her statement ‘...becoming is always becoming *with* – in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake’.

However, unlike in some of the aforementioned studies, animal agency will not be a central concern of my research. Although I am open-minded on this issue, I do not know how it could be represented in other than human terms<sup>39</sup>. Marvin (2010) states that from a humanist approach we are only equipped to study the relationships that humans have with other animals and not animals themselves. To understand animals, rather than relationships with animals, we should minimize the human perspective by turning to other disciplines such as ethology or animal psychology. But keeping in mind that these fields are also socially constructed and cannot claim to be a true representation of animals<sup>40</sup>. In Marvin’s words:

A squirrel is represented the moment when recognized by us as a squirrel. Although a living animal never is merely or solely a representation; the animal is, in the moment of our encounter, always a social and cultural animal. There is no asocial or acultural platform on which we can stand to see an animal as that animal really is. It is important to attend to these social and cultural perspectives if we are to understand how and why people look at animals and the practices that result from such viewing and if we are to understand what happens in the encounter between humans and animals when animals are present and not merely represented.

(Marvin, 2005:6-7)

Throughout my fieldwork I observed the relationships formed between humans and fighting birds based on everyday interactions through the processes of rearing, particularly in terms of feeding,

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<sup>39</sup> See Marvin’s *The Art of Fierceness* (2015:39-56) in Parker-Starbuck & Orozco-García (2015).

<sup>40</sup> Marvin (2010)

watering, medical treatments, cleaning, and care of their environment - that is to say, ‘when animals are present and not merely represented’. It is essential to consider that, without this daily attention to the needs of the birds, the relationships of humans with their birds, and to some extent the relationships of the birds with their humans, there would be no birds for cockfighting. Without this partnership there is no cockfighting.

As I have mentioned above, many ethnographies have been published<sup>41</sup> on different relationships between human and non-human animals. Three decades ago, Shanklin (1985:379) highlighted the ‘disproportionate emphasis in the anthropological literature on the larger animals’ in comparison with smaller ones, such as chickens, which were and still are the largest group of domesticated animals in the world. It is true that anthropologists, sociologists, and other scholars have recently expanded their focus and a huge variety of multispecies ethnography can now be found. Works on insects<sup>42</sup>, pests<sup>[43,44]</sup>, microbiopolitics<sup>45</sup> or cup corals<sup>46</sup> are only a few examples. In any event, it seems that larger animals and non-human primates are still disproportionally represented in this field. A quick glance at Locke and Münster’s review of Multispecies Ethnography (2015) reveals that ‘Humans and Elephants’ and ‘Humans and other primates’ are two of the most documented categories.

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<sup>41</sup> See Kirksey & Helmreich (2010), Ogden et al. (2013b) and Locke and Münster (2015) to get a broader picture of this matter.

<sup>42</sup> Moore & Kosut (2014)

<sup>43</sup> Ginn (2014)

<sup>44</sup> Nading (2012)

<sup>45</sup> Paxson (2008)

<sup>46</sup> Hayward (2010)

With regard to chickens, Ramasawmy (2017)<sup>47</sup> stressed the recent increase of ethnographies focused on issues such as the emotional subjectivity of poultry production<sup>48</sup>, the development and changes in the industry<sup>49</sup> and alternative models of consumer agency within the culture of urban hen-keeping<sup>50</sup>. Ramasawmy's work on the social role of poultry in Ethiopia, Capponi's study<sup>51</sup> of sacrificial offerings in Candomblé religion and Zoubek's analysis<sup>52</sup> of chicken-keeping in modern Britain are three recent examples of anthropological works undertaken in which human-chicken relationships are the central focus of the research.

### **Anthropology and cockfighting**

Cockfighting is a controversial event because of its, at least from outside perspectives, focus on violence, aggression, injury, and death. According to Marvin (1984:60) cockfighting lies within a group of activities such as hunting<sup>53</sup>, sports<sup>54</sup> and other games and celebrations which involve competition between animals, humans or different performances. Cultural anthropology has usually paid attention to these practices to try to understand what, and how, they express relationships between and among humans and animals<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Ramasawmy, M. R. (2017) *Do 'chickens dream only of grain'? Uncovering the social role of poultry in Ethiopia*. Doctoral Dissertation. Department of Life Sciences. University of Roehampton. London

<sup>48</sup> Hamilton & McCabe (2016)

<sup>49</sup> Striffler (2005)

<sup>50</sup> Bettany & Kerrane (2011)

<sup>51</sup> Capponi, G. (2017) *A Dialogue with Nature: a Study of Human-Environment Relations and Sacrificial Offerings in Candomblé Religion*. Doctoral Dissertation. Department of Life Sciences. University of Roehampton. London.

<sup>52</sup> Zoubek, E. (2018) *From egg to dead: small-scale chicken keeping in modern Britain*. Doctoral Dissertation. Department of Life Sciences. University of Roehampton. London.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Sánchez-Garrido (2010) and Marvin (2007).

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Del-Campo (2003).

<sup>55</sup> Marvin (1984:60)

*The Cockfight: A Casebook* (1994) by Alan Dundes is by far the most important compilation of writings about different instances of this event. The 18 chapters of the book include perspectives from fiction, anthropology, psychology and folklore and descriptions and discussions of the complex rules of the cockfight, the ethical<sup>56</sup> aspects, the emotional involvement of cockfighters and aficionados, and the sexual connotations of the sport.

The first anthropological account included in the book is the well-known *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* by Clifford Geertz (1972) which, more than anything ever written on the field, brought cockfighting to the attention of academics. Rather than being interested in the practice itself, the American anthropologist offers an interpretative approach to cockfighting as a text to be read<sup>57</sup>. Geertz's work inspired other anthropologists to continue exploring the cockfights. Guggenheim's in-depth study in the Philippines (1982) and Marvin's work in Andalusia (1984) are just two examples. In the latter case, the ethnographic research in southern Spain shows the importance of this practice as a total event, where not only fights themselves but the whole process of socialising was conducted in an exclusively male gathering, an environment devoted to maleness and masculinity where the whole experience serves to express and reinforce men's self-identity.

Although something of a foundational text for many, anthropological interest in cockfighting largely predates Geertz's work. The importance of cockfighting in southeast Asia was highlighted by many authors and it can be seen in different reports in the first half of the 20th century. For instance, the Swedish ethnographer Walter Kaudern wrote about the passion for cockfighting in the area in his *Ethnographical Studies in Celebes* (1929) and Bateson and Mead (1942) carried out

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<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., McCaghy & Neal (1974) and Wollan (1980).

<sup>57</sup> Dundes (1994:94)



a photographic analysis of different aspects of Balinese culture, which included cockfighting. It is also true that Geertz's *Deep Play* has been criticised<sup>58</sup> or even ignored by other scholars researching cockfights. As pointed out by Dundes<sup>59</sup>, the Lévi-Straussian approach to cockfighting in Martinique<sup>60</sup> offered by the French anthropologist Francis Affergan does not even cite the above-mentioned *Deep Play*.

In the second part of the casebook, two extensive examples of fieldwork conducted by female<sup>61</sup> anthropologists in Latin America are presented. Cook's and Leal's work are two of the best cockfighting descriptions and interpretations to date<sup>62</sup>. It is significant how the former describes her difficulties, as a woman, accessing this strictly male activity while researching the subject of aggression in the Venezuelan island of Margarita<sup>63</sup>. The latter, Ondina Fachel Leal, as part of her doctoral dissertation in anthropology at the University of Berkeley in 1989, interprets *The Gaucho Cockfight in Porto Alegre*<sup>64</sup> (Brazil).

Leal's work is probably the best-known among many Brazilian<sup>65</sup> scholars who are interested in the issue from an anthropological perspective<sup>66</sup>, but also from a historical-legal<sup>67</sup> standpoint. Worthy of special mention is the historian Misael Costa Corrêa whose undergraduate, Master's and PhD degree<sup>68</sup> dissertations focused on Brazilian cockfights. In Central America, the Costa Rican

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<sup>58</sup> See Dundes (1994:94) for a list of critical works on Geertz's views on cockfighting.

<sup>59</sup> Dundes (1994:191)

<sup>60</sup> Affergan (1986)

<sup>61</sup> They are not, by any means, the only women who have researched on cockfighting. Furthermore, social anthropology is not researchers' solely approach on the matter. See, for example, Bateson & Mead, 1942; Sarabia-Viejo, 1972 and 2006; Cegarra, 1988; Forrisi, 2007; Rosales-Montecinos, 2007; Jones, 2010; Redon, 2012; Pico, 2014 and Rodríguez & Alpizar, 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Dundes (1994:232)

<sup>63</sup> Cook (1991)

<sup>64</sup> Leal (1994)

<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, some of these works are not yet well known in English-speaking academic circles.

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., Bibliography Teixeira (1992, 1993, 1997), Silva (2011), Matos (2016).

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Bibliography Jatobá (2006), Marinho (2009), Escobar (2014).

<sup>68</sup> Corrêa (2017)

anthropologist Onésimo Rodríguez has recently published a series of papers<sup>69</sup> on a wide variety of issues concerning cockfighting in his country from the perspective of national newspaper on the phenomena to the different realities experienced by young cockfighters.

### **Previous anthropological works in the Canary Islands**

The lack<sup>70</sup> of anthropological studies focused on cockfighting in the archipelago is odd. It is possible that the only previous scholars to undertake any periods of fieldwork were María Luisa González Pena (1980) and the abovementioned Misael Corrêa (2017), both restricted to the island of Gran Canaria. The former presents a very brief introduction, which only includes one informant as a source of information and was written for *Narria*, a Spanish journal that focuses on the study of popular art, customs and traditions. Due to its brevity, only a few terms and a general overview are presented. Some of the information provided, such as the non-existence<sup>71</sup> of cockfighting in the islands of El Hierro and Fuerteventura in the 1980s, is questionable according to some local literature<sup>72</sup>. It is precisely within this local literature, written by the aficionados and breeders, where more detailed information regarding cockfighting can be found. These works, which are mainly compilations and historical studies, will be presented in the history chapter.

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<sup>69</sup> For example, Rodríguez (2014), Rodríguez & Alpízar (2014) and Rodríguez (2015). Onésimo Rodríguez was part of the research project titled “‘¡Se muere gallo bueno!’ Jóvenes, galleras y gallos de pelea” developed by the School of Anthropology at La Universidad de Costa Rica. Author’s dialogue with “Felo” is a splendid example of the different dynamics experienced by a young cocker (Rodríguez, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> The paucity of literature on cockfighting in the Canary Islands is not confined only to anthropology. Miguel Pérez-Corrales (2008:92), the author of the book series *Espuela y Fiscorno*, highlights the lack of books on cockfighting and the undervaluing of the issue in local literature. I also got first-hand information about the ruling to deny the discussion on cockfighting in some compilations of traditional sports and practices undertaken by Canarian Universities. I was told that the highly controversial nature of the topic was the main reason for its exclusion.

<sup>71</sup> González-Pena (1980:18)

<sup>72</sup> For example, Pérez-Corrales (2008).

The historian Misael Corrêa also spent a few days doing fieldwork in Gran Canaria in 2017. In the first chapter of his dissertation, he briefly compared the Canarian and French cockfights with the Brazilian ones. Although the prime objective of his work is the history of the practice in Brazil from 1960, he provides a brief, but informative, ethnographic description of the championship he attended.

Another scholar who has recently mentioned this practice with reference to the Canarian archipelago is Eloy Gómez Pellón with his *Conflicts of intangible heritage: use and abuse of animals in Spain* (2017)<sup>73</sup>. In this comparative study, the author is keenly critical of bullfighting and cockfighting in Spain, but he does not specify if any kind of fieldwork was undertaken. Moreover, his only reference to cockfighting in the Canary Islands is the abovementioned work by Gonzalez Pena.

With regard to the previous references and their lack of fieldwork data, both my supervisory team and I concluded that a long period of fieldwork in the Canary Islands was fully justified to provide a rich ethnographic description of the fights and other related activities such as the keeping and breeding. I believe that the value of my work is the rich ethnographic material generated during this long-term fieldwork.

Once again, it is worth noting that cockfighting has been addressed from numerous perspectives within the social sciences. For instance, the sociologists McCaghy & Neal (1974) underscore the ethical issue while the anthropologists Marvin (1984) and Hicks (2006) focus more on the construction of masculinities and gender. Others, such as Dundes (1993), propose a psychoanalytic cross-cultural consideration of the event by providing a symbolic interpretation of the cockfight

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<sup>73</sup> Gómez-Pellón (2017)

while, from an ecofeminist perspective, Jones (2010) highlights the potential of psychology for exploring the construction of human gender through roosters. Psychological perspectives are common and seem to be appealing but I certainly have to confess my own lack of knowledge on this field.

Taking into consideration the issues related to gender, as many authors<sup>74</sup> have argued, there is not one masculinity, but many different masculinities, each associated with a set of values in a particular cultural context. Moreover, my previous experience in Social Innovation and Management of Ecosystems projects has led me to understand the problem of analysing gender issues by thinking about women and men in single categories with the same interests and needs. In this regard, I am of the view that people are simultaneously subjected by race, ethnicity, class, gender and other forms of social difference which are interconnected<sup>[75,76]</sup>, therefore, we should move away from a narrow gender focus.

Although many scholars have analysed cockfighting purely in terms of gender, I have chosen not to do so. I would not wish to be misunderstood as someone who denies the gender perspective as an important factor of cockfighting. Some gender issues are discussed in the text, but the reader will not find a chapter dealing solely with masculinity as I am more interested in finding and describing other complementary issues. There are two main reasons for this.

First of all, I believe gender has been widely explored in the existing literature on cockfights. In other words, rather than allowing any specific way of interpreting the cockfights to have a heavy influence on the direction or material I focused on for my research, I decided instead to go into the

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<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Beynon (2002), Connell (2005) and Valcuende & Blanco (eds) (2003).

<sup>75</sup> McCall (2005)

<sup>76</sup> Nightingale (2011)

field with an open mind. I think that helped me to interpret, compare, and establish a more open dialogue with previous works on the matter as shown in the last part of my dissertation. In any case, recognising the fact that every research project has an opening position and preconceptions, I will share the epistemological foundations and methodology used later in chapter 3.

The second reason, and equally important, is that I did not find gender as one of the main topics present on my interviews and informal talks. Breeders and aficionados are not usually focused on gender distinctions. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the fact that having outstanding roosters is not associated with having a greater masculinity. I never heard anyone, indirectly or directly, implying such an association. It should be emphasised that human maleness is one thing and chicken maleness is quite another, therefore they are conceived of, and understood, differently. For example, one could argue that meekness is derided as a quality both in roosters and men<sup>77</sup>, at least within dominant masculinities. However, uncontrolled aggressiveness is appreciated in fighting birds but it is an unacceptable behaviour between men in the stands.

At this point, because cockfighting is largely unknown to many people, I will offer a short history of the practice from a worldwide perspective to a more specific level in the Canary Islands.

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<sup>77</sup> See Marvin (1984:65-66) for more information on the matter.

## 2

### FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA TO THE CANARY ISLANDS: A HISTORY OF COCKFIGHTING

Cockfighting has been pointed out<sup>78</sup> as one of the oldest and most widespread sports, excluding hunting. There is a dearth of robust evidence on its origins but it is suggested that cockfighting began more than 2500 years ago in southeast Asia<sup>79</sup>. It is still present in many parts of the world and enjoys considerable popularity, regardless of its legal status, in southeast Asia, the Caribbean Islands and some Latin American countries<sup>80</sup>. Although it is one of the national pastimes in a number of countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, it cannot be said that cockfighting is universal because it has never been reported to great extent to native North and South America or Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>81</sup>. According to Dundes's work<sup>82</sup> the practice has been reported in many parts of the ancient world such as India, China, Iran, Greece and Rome. In the following pages I offer a brief historical tour through cockfighting.

It is assumed that game birds today are close in appearance and demeanor to their fighting wild ancestors<sup>83</sup> which still inhabit areas of India, Southeast Asia, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. These ancestors are, in particular, the red junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) but also the green junglefowl (*Gallus varius*), the grey junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) and the Sri Lankan junglefowl

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<sup>78</sup> See, e.g., Smith & Daniel (2000:69), Dundes (1994:242) and Fitz-Barnard (1983:3).

<sup>79</sup> Dundes (1994:242)

<sup>80</sup> Dundes (1994:243)

<sup>81</sup> Dundes (1994:242)

<sup>82</sup> Dundes (1994:242)

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., Dundes (1994), Smith & Daniel (2000:27-28) and Corrêa (2017:123).

(*Gallus lafayettii*)<sup>84</sup>. This would indicate processes of domestication and dispersal throughout the world for the primary purpose of leisure<sup>85</sup>. Olivier Danaë<sup>86</sup> has suggested that such domestication processes might have occurred within agricultural and commercial civilisations of the Indus River valley.

After their domestication, fighting birds were carried across borders through military and commercial contacts between Hindu and Chinese peoples with the Babylonians and Persians<sup>87</sup>. Persian domination of India in the 4th century BC has been highlighted as a crucial moment of the introduction of cockfighting in the Near East<sup>88</sup>. In the first millennium BC, fighting birds (and other chickens) were introduced into Europe from the Near East, most probably by the trade routes used first by the Phoenicians, and then Greeks and Romans who were later responsible for the spread beyond its borders<sup>89</sup>. It is worth mentioning that from the Mediterranean basin cockfighting would spread northwards to France and southwards to North Africa<sup>90</sup>. Smith & Daniel (2000:70) note that ‘the ancient Syrians worshipped the fighting cock, and by the 4th century BC when cockfighting is first mentioned in Greek, it had certainly had a long history in India and southeast Asia’.

The first recorded cockfight dates back to 517 BC in China<sup>91</sup>, and therefore the activity would be, as stated before, at least 2500 years old. Other work frequently cited to show the ancient origin of cockfights in Asia is Manu’s Code of Law which constitutes one of the Dharmaśāstra, a genre of

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<sup>84</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:27-28) and Corrêa (2017:123).

<sup>85</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:27-28) and Corrêa (2017:123).

<sup>86</sup> Cited in Corrêa (2017:120-121).

<sup>87</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:13) and Corrêa (2017:132).

<sup>88</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:13)

<sup>89</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:13) and Corrêa (2017:132).

<sup>90</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:75)

<sup>91</sup> Cutter (1989)



Sanskrit texts which refers to the treatises of Hinduism. Examples are found both in academic<sup>92</sup> and policy-making<sup>93</sup> circles. In one of the first English versions<sup>94</sup> of the text, in 1825, it is written ‘Such play with dice *and the like*, or by matches *between rams and cocks*, amounts to open theft; and the king must ever be vigilant in suppressing both *modes of play*’ (pp. 322-323). There are some discrepancies<sup>95</sup> on the dating of the original work but most of them are in the range of II BC-III AD<sup>96</sup>. The famous book on sexual behaviour ‘Kama Sutra’, written in Sanskrit by Vātsyāyana around the 3rd-4th century AD, also contains a specific reference to cockfighting<sup>97</sup>. As has been mentioned before, the process of geographic distribution and influx of chickens around the world is not clear but it is assumed that cockfighting played a vital role in that. For example, geneticists have stated that Japanese domesticated chickens derived from the ancestors of the “Shamo”, a traditional Japanese gamecock<sup>98</sup>.

References to cockfighting flourished in the Ancient Greece and then, as many other elements of their culture, the Greek passion for cockfighting was inherited by the Romans<sup>99</sup>. A very long list of writers, philosophers, politicians and militaries referred to cockfights: Themistocles, Miltiades,

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<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., Corrêa (2017:128) and Calistri (1985).

<sup>93</sup> See, e.g., Senate gazette of the United Mexican States (2016).

<sup>94</sup> Haughton (1825)

<sup>95</sup> Yet the reference is not without controversy. There are many translations of the Manu’s Code of Law, also called the Manava-Dharmasastra (MDh) and originally written in Sanskrit. One of the early European editions was published in English by G.C Haughton in 1825 with a preface by Sir William Jones. As showed above the *italics* are comments on the text. This and other English, French and Spanish versions are based on the comments made by Kullūka Bhatta in medieval times. However, in a more recent critical edition in English by Patrick Olivelle (2005), these same comments are not present and betting refers to “living beings” instead of specifically “cocks” (Olivelle, 2005:201). Olivelle considerer Kullūka’s commentary as the “vulgar” or default standard but not necessarily the better. With the sole purpose of showing the existence of many versions and translations, I recommend the reading of the critical edition by Olivelle for those eager to gain a better understanding of the different authorships and datings.

<sup>96</sup> Olivelle (2005:18)

<sup>97</sup> Dundes (1994:242)

<sup>98</sup> Komiyama, T. et al. (2004)

<sup>99</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:72)

Homer, Diodorus Siculus, Pedanius Dioscorides, Columella, Julius Caesar, Pliny, Oppian and Aelian are only a few.

Cockfighting was certainly familiar to Greeks and Romans. For instance, cockfights were considered a lesson of courage and fortitude to young men in Athens, whose attendance was encouraged<sup>100</sup>. Regarding religious purposes, references to cocks as phallic symbols and as representations of fertility were also common in Ancient Greek and Roman times<sup>101</sup>.

Although the Romans brought chickens to Britain<sup>102</sup>, cockfighting may well have been introduced there prior to that because, in his conquest of Britain, Julius Caesar reported that people there already kept birds for pleasure and amusement<sup>103</sup>. Scott<sup>104</sup> argues the case for the Romans as responsible for the introduction of artificial spurs and organised cockfighting.

Smith & Daniel<sup>105</sup> point out the important significance of chicken in general, and cockfighting itself, in Christian rituals. For example, some cockfight representations have been found on early Christian tombs and sarcophagi<sup>106</sup>. Continuing with this overview, we come to Saint Augustine, who in the 4th century AD described a *natural* cockfight occurring in the poultry yard rather than one arranged by men<sup>107</sup>. He was trying to understand why, if God is good, he had created evil or cruelty and, in this sense, he compared prostitutes and roosters because, in his opinion, evil and goodness are binary opposites which confirm the existence of each other<sup>108</sup>. As noted by Corrêa<sup>109</sup>,

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<sup>100</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:71)

<sup>101</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:72)

<sup>102</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:16)

<sup>103</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:75)

<sup>104</sup> Scott (1983:92)

<sup>105</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:73)

<sup>106</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:73)

<sup>107</sup> Dundes (1994:3)

<sup>108</sup> Dundes (1994:3)

<sup>109</sup> Corrêa (2017:138)

this mention in the late 4th century was one of the last consistent accounts on cockfighting found in the Ancient period. As with other issues, at least in Europe, cockfighting references are scarce in the Middle Ages<sup>110</sup>.

Possible evidence of the continuity of cockfights in medieval times was found by archaeologists and biologists within the project “Cultural & Scientific Perceptions of Human-Chicken Interactions”, to which I belong. In an interview with The New York Times<sup>111</sup>, Greger Larson, an Oxford-based specialist in ancient DNA, points to an excavation of a village in Austria where archaeologists found cockerels buried with men and hens with women. In these burials, which date from the sixth to eighth centuries (early Middle Ages), cocks buried alongside the high-status men had longer fighting spurs than the ones buried with poorer men.

It is worth stressing that roosters are one of Portugal’s and France’s national symbols and chickens are widely used in Catholic religious iconography. Danaë<sup>112</sup> provides different examples of cockfighting images in medieval churches in France and suggests that the practice was more common among the non-represented classes than among the nobility.

In the 14th century, an illustration of a cockfight is found in the ‘Romance of Alexander’<sup>113</sup> (1338-1344), a book written in Flanders and composed of tales about Alexander the Great. As noted by Corrêa<sup>114</sup>, Flanders (where it is banned) and the region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France, are still important cockfighting centres in Europe. It is known that cockfighting was already a deeply-rooted practice in Antwerp and the Netherlands in the 16th century and several works by Flemish

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<sup>110</sup> See, e.g., Corrêa (2017:139-145) and Scott (1983:93).

<sup>111</sup> Gorman (18<sup>th</sup> January, 2016)

<sup>112</sup> Cited in Corrêa (2017:142-143).

<sup>113</sup> The *Romance of Alexander* is available online as part of the Digital Bodleian resources by The University of Oxford. Available at: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 04/05/2018).

<sup>114</sup> Corrêa (2017:145)

painters in the 17th century provide clear evidence of it<sup>115</sup>. For instance, cockfighting works by Frans Snyders or Jan Fyt, are on display at the Prado Museum in Madrid.



On the left, “Lucha de gallos” by Snyders (17th century). On the right, “Riña de gallos” by Fyt (17th century).

©Museo Nacional del Prado.

By late medieval times, cockfighting was widespread and Smith & Daniels<sup>116</sup> mention the religious authorities' attempts to restrict the activity, or mask it with Christian ritual meaning. This would be the case of some schoolboys<sup>117</sup> in England and Scotland who were allowed to fight their gamecocks in the school on Shrove Tuesday. But these attempts were not very successful, and the construction of a Royal Pit near Whitehall Palace by Henry VIII coincides in time with the beginning of a period where cockfighting flourished in England<sup>118</sup>. The Stuart monarchs were also

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<sup>115</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:480-481)

<sup>116</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:74)

<sup>117</sup> This boy's amusement is precisely one of the first reference to cockfighting in medieval England (Scott 1983:93).

<sup>118</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:77-78)

enthusiasts and cockfights became a popular pastime and one of the premier sports in England until the total ban in the first half of the 19th century<sup>119</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that, with Cromwell in power, cockfighting was forbidden in 1654<sup>120</sup>. The use of cockfights for covert meeting by Cromwell's enemies and the Puritanism of the English political leader have been pointed out as the possible reasons behind the ban<sup>121</sup>. But when the Stuarts were restored, many members of the British aristocracy continued to be aficionados and there were devoted cockers among English naval officers<sup>122</sup>. It is true that, for more than two centuries, Puritans claimed against cockfighting but:

they spoke in vain until finally the Dissenters, joined by the humanitarian reformers and then by the respectable middle classes, prevailed on the members of Parliament to declare cockfighting illegal in 1834.

(Smith & Daniel, 2000:96).

This statement might potentially give us a clue about how perceptions and attitudes to animals have shifted over time. Continuing with the historical development, it is noteworthy that English fascination<sup>123</sup> for cockfights produced several works on the issue, some of which dated back to the beginning of the 17th century. *The Commendation of Cockes, and Cock-fighting*<sup>124</sup> and *The Royal*

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<sup>119</sup> See, e.g., Smith & Daniel (2000:78) and Corrêa (2017:150).

<sup>120</sup> Although this is sometimes underlined as the first banning of cockfighting in the UK, 'in 1365, Edward III ordered the Sheriffs of London to forbid cockfighting and certain other amusements in order that leisure time be better spend on practicing shooting' (McCaghy & Neal, 1974:558-559).

<sup>121</sup> See Smith & Daniel (2000:95) and Corrêa (2017:150).

<sup>122</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:87)

<sup>123</sup> There were also critics. See, for example, *The Frauds of London detected* (1780) by Richard King (p.27 cockfighting "is a great disgrace to humanity").

<sup>124</sup> Wilson (1607)

*Pastime of Cock-Fighting*<sup>125</sup> are two well-known examples of writings before the activity was banned. *The Old English Game Fowl*<sup>126</sup>, *Old English Sports*<sup>127</sup>, *Fighting Sports*<sup>128</sup> and *The History of Cockfighting*<sup>129</sup> are four examples since the ban.

British passion for the practice was not limited to Britain. Chickens and game birds were carried to the British colonies overseas and, among other territories, cockfighting became a popular pastime in the USA<sup>130</sup>. Smith & Daniel<sup>131</sup> note several references to cockfights in Virginia, where they were frequently announced by the 1750s. Cockfighting in the USA was a practice engaged in by men of all classes but, unlike in the UK, the rich were accepted on common-men's terms<sup>132</sup>. These equal terms, with a considerable participation of Irish immigrants and freed slaves, were part of one of the justifications of the practice: its democracy<sup>133</sup>.

While cockfighting was having difficulties in the UK after being forbidden, it continued to grow in popularity and spread west in the USA, especially to the southern states<sup>134</sup>. Until the first half of the twentieth century, there was no governmental action to ban cockfights, starting with the states with fewest aficionados<sup>135</sup>. Legislation was varied and cockers were really well organised in some states, like Oregon, where they managed to stop some laws in court<sup>136</sup>. By the 1970s,

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<sup>125</sup> Howlett (1709)

<sup>126</sup> Atkinson (1891)

<sup>127</sup> Hackwood (1907)

<sup>128</sup> Fitz-Barnard (1983)

<sup>129</sup> Scott, G. R. 1957. *The History of Cockfighting*. London: Charles Skilton. For this dissertation I have mainly used the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1983) produced and published by Triplegate Ltd. SAIGA Publishing Co. Ltd. Surrey.

<sup>130</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:98)

<sup>131</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:100)

<sup>132</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:99)

<sup>133</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:103-104)

<sup>134</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:104)

<sup>135</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:105)

<sup>136</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:105)

cockfighting was illegal in forty-one of the fifty states, but it was still widely practiced, even in states with strict laws prohibiting the event such as California<sup>137</sup>.

Nowadays, cockfighting is prohibited in all 50 states but it is still permitted in some associated territories such as Puerto Rico<sup>138</sup>, U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam<sup>139</sup>. Louisiana, in 2008<sup>140</sup>, was the last state to ban cockfights in the USA but recent police raids in Oregon<sup>141</sup>, New York<sup>142</sup>, Texas<sup>143</sup>, Indiana<sup>144</sup> and Arkansas<sup>145</sup> show it has not been abandoned. This is not restricted to the USA and similar cases have been reported in many places across the UK<sup>[146,147,148]</sup>.

It has also become clear in the USA that while the interstate shipment of birds for cockfighting is illegal, cockers are traveling to Mexico<sup>149</sup>. Non-profit organisations, such as The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), have complained about the weak anti-cockfighting statutes in some states and, by lobbying, they have achieved new laws with tougher penalties<sup>150</sup>. A paradigmatic example was the U.S. Postal Service new regulations which in practice stopped or complicated the distribution of the three mayor cockfighting magazines: *The Feathered Warrior*, *Grit & Steel*<sup>151</sup> and *The Gamecock*. Immediately after this decision, in 2009, *The Feathered Warrior* ceased

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<sup>137</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:105-106)

<sup>138</sup> A recent bill passed the House of Representatives in the USA which might bring the ban of cockfighting in all territories of the USA in 2019. See, e.g., Levin & Rivera (13<sup>th</sup> December, 2018).

<sup>139</sup> Corrêa (2017:160)

<sup>140</sup> Associated Press (updated 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2008)

<sup>141</sup> Associated Press in Portland (23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2014)

<sup>142</sup> Antenucci & Fonrouge (10<sup>th</sup> February, 2014)

<sup>143</sup> FOX NEWS (9<sup>th</sup> May, 2017)

<sup>144</sup> Ryckaert (9<sup>th</sup> May, 2018)

<sup>145</sup> Álvarez (26<sup>th</sup> March, 2018)

<sup>146</sup> BBC News (14<sup>th</sup> January, 2014)

<sup>147</sup> BBC News (20<sup>th</sup> June, 2018)

<sup>148</sup> Maguire (14<sup>th</sup> June, 2013)

<sup>149</sup> El Diario (9<sup>th</sup> October, 2015)

<sup>150</sup> Markarian (18<sup>th</sup> March, 2010)

<sup>151</sup> Grit & Steel published in 1929 one of the most important books ever written on cockfighting "*Cock Fighting All over the World*" (Finsterbusch, 1929).



publication after 106 years<sup>152</sup>. At times, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, complaints against cockfighting have been directed to more symbolic questions as when the Animal rights group Peta asked<sup>153</sup> the *Ye Olde Fighting Cocks* pub to change its name for a new one to match modern sensibilities.

Regarding works of literature, Charles Willeford's *Cockfighter* (1962), the story of an American man obsessed with the sport (later it became a film<sup>154</sup>), is probably one of the best-known novels on cockfighting. It has been translated recently into Spanish<sup>155</sup>. Perhaps less well known, *Clancy's Bulba*, by Michael O'Gorman (1983), set in Ireland in the 1920s, is another novel completely devoted to cockfighting. There might not be many novels whose main theme is cockfighting but there are a large number which mention them. Alan Dundes compiled some of them, particularly the ones written in English, in the previously mentioned *The Cockfight: a casebook* (1994).

In Latin American literature, the topic is present in the works of world-renowned authors Joaquim Machado de Assis (1881), Gabriel García Márquez (1968) and Jorge Luis Borges (1970). Perhaps less well-known than these three south Americans masters was the Filipino José Rizal who, in the former Spanish colony, described the atmosphere of a cockfight in his first novel *Noli Me Tangere* (1887). There are also countless examples of the cockfights in the musical world. *La Gallera* (1989)<sup>156</sup> by Dominican singer Juan Luis Guerra is probably one of the most famous songs on this topic. Turning to the Canary Islands, *El giro real* (1983) by multifaceted writer, politician and musician Elfidio Alonso Quintero covers, among other topics, a moral dilemma of cockfighting in

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<sup>152</sup> The Humane Society of The United States (5<sup>th</sup> August, 2009)

<sup>153</sup> O'Connor (21<sup>st</sup> May, 2015)

<sup>154</sup> *COCKFIGHTER* (1974) Directed by Monte Hellman.

<sup>155</sup> Willeford, C. R. (2015 [1962]). *Gallo de Pelea* (Cockfighter). Translated into Spanish by Güido Sender Montes.

<sup>156</sup> *La Gallera* is a song from the album *Ojalá que llueva café*, Juan Luis Guerra (1989) produced by Karen Records.

the Canary Islands. The historical documentation of this novel now leads me to introduce a brief history of the practice in the Canarian archipelago.

### **The Canary Islands: a bridge between mainland Spain and Latin America**

According to Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:480), cockfighting references are vague and scarce in the Castilian late Middle Ages but it is beyond dispute that the *gallo jerezano*, from lower Andalusia, was the breed that arrived at the Canary Islands after the archipelago was conquered by the Castilian Crown. From the 15th century, the imperialist plans of the Crown of Castile would make the Canary Islands a bridge to the Americas. Even in the absence of direct references to cockfights in the Canary Islands, it is perhaps safe to assume the presence of fighting birds in the archipelago as early as the 16th century<sup>157</sup>. It is known that the Spanish fleet brought roosters to America and fights were held on ships' decks as entertainment<sup>158</sup>. The historian Maria Justina Sarabia Viejo, points out the continuous export of the *gallo jerezano*, because of its reputation as a fine fighting bird, to America since the 16th century<sup>159</sup>. From lower Andalusia, the *jerezano*, also spread to Extremadura, Catalonia and Valencia<sup>160</sup>.

In a new world of conquest, trade, missionaries and emigration, the Canary Islands became an essential stopping off point for those in transit across the Atlantic<sup>161</sup>. In this regard, it must be remembered that the archipelago was not a free agent and the commerce was strictly regulated by

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<sup>157</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:501) and Pérez-Corrales (2008:226).

<sup>158</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:480)

<sup>159</sup> Sarabia-Viejo (1972)

<sup>160</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:480)

<sup>161</sup> Stone (2014:121)

a House of Trade of the Indies, based in Seville, to ensure the crown's monopoly on trade in overseas territories<sup>162</sup>.

This trade was probably a determining factor for the introduction of cockfighting to America<sup>163</sup> where it became very popular in the 17th century. Roughly speaking, in the American colonial period, cockfighting was brought to the north by the British and to the south by the Spanish, and it spread quickly throughout the continent<sup>164</sup>. In 1685, the Spanish monarch Carlos II banned cockfighting by royal decree in the Viceroyalty of New Spain<sup>165</sup>, which included, among others, present-day Mexico, the Caribbean islands<sup>166,167</sup> and the Philippines<sup>168</sup>. The unpopular and unsuccessful measure was replaced, before long, by Felipe V, who legalised the activity under a new regulation<sup>169</sup>.

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway suggests, 'Follow the chickens and find the world' (2008:274) to highlight the importance of this bird, warrior side included, as witness and participant in the history of civilisations. Playing with Haraway's idea, I propose 'Follow the rooster and find the colonialism' to understand how cockfighting was widely spread by the British, Spanish and French empires<sup>170</sup>. But we should not think that European colonial powers were always responsible for introducing cockfights overseas. For instance, chronicler Antonio Pigafetta

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<sup>162</sup> Stone (2014:121)

<sup>163</sup> Sarabia-Viejo (2006)

<sup>164</sup> Forrasi (2007:362)

<sup>165</sup> For further information on this matter and cockfighting in New Spain, please read the abovementioned work by Sarabia-Viejo (1972).

<sup>166</sup> Riaño-San-Marful (2002)

<sup>167</sup> Vega (2016)

<sup>168</sup> Hernández-Hortigüela (2010)

<sup>169</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:482)

<sup>170</sup> Although I will not further elaborate on that issue at this point, I am sure some readers could link it to a variety of issues such as the debate on diffusionism or Sidney W. Mintz's (1986) *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*.

mentioned<sup>171</sup> native fighting birds on his trip with Magellan to precolonial Philippines in 1521. Also, cockfighting was a popular pastime in the Indian subcontinent when the British began their exploitation in the 18th century<sup>172</sup>.

Looking specifically at the Canary Islands, the first documented references to cockfighting are from the island of Fuerteventura, where the *Casa de los Coroneles*, a military institution, held cockfights at the beginning of the 18th century<sup>173</sup>. There are not many more references during the 18th century but that does not mean the absence of the activity. It has been reported that cockfights in the Canary Islands were initially held by eminent people in private houses and they were gradually moved to public cockpits<sup>174</sup>.

Between 1787 and 1795, Tenerifian civil authorities tried to ban the activity based on the alleged risks of gambling and probably influenced by the enlightened despotism of the 18th century<sup>175</sup>. By reading the files of the case, it seems that cockfighting was practiced across the archipelago<sup>176</sup> and it was one of the few pastimes widely practiced in the islands. Having a broad social participation, the drive to outlaw them provoked responses supporting the event<sup>177</sup>. In those dossiers, some of the aggrieved cockfighters stated that cockfighting had been practiced in some places, such as La Laguna, for over a century<sup>178</sup>. Therefore, it is very likely that organised cockfighting might have taken place since the 17th century<sup>179</sup>. While the previously mentioned process in New Spain was

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<sup>171</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987: 102-104) and Dundes (1994:137).

<sup>172</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:91-95)

<sup>173</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:111)

<sup>174</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:510) and Pérez-Corrales (2008:259).

<sup>175</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:483)

<sup>176</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:502)

<sup>177</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982)

<sup>178</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:501)

<sup>179</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:501)

led by church authorities and supported by civil authorities, in the Canary Islands<sup>180</sup> it was clearly led by civil authorities<sup>181</sup>. In 1795, Carlos IV confirmed the lawfulness of cockfighting in the Canary Islands<sup>182</sup>. During the 19th century, there were other attempts to ban the activity in Tenerife and Gran Canaria but never proceeded very far<sup>183</sup>.

Dovetailing with the Festival of San Pedro in 1827, Sabino Berthelot<sup>184</sup> reports that there were cockfights in Güimar (Tenerife). Mostly through private agreements between teams, it is in the second half of the 19th century where cockfighting references flourished on many islands<sup>185</sup>. As a curiosity, in 1860 a group of wealthy Canarian cockfighters boarded a ship to mainland Spain after agreeing to several matchdays in Cádiz and Madrid<sup>186</sup>.

In the 19th century, cockfights were very common in town and city squares in mainland Spain but they gradually became indoor events at cockpits designed for that purpose<sup>187</sup>. A study<sup>188</sup> has analysed the dominance of cockfighting and *pelota-mano* as two of the most widespread games in the Spain of the mid-nineteenth century. Roughly, cockfighting was prevalent in southern Spain and the Canary Islands while *pelota-mano* (Basque pelota) was preponderant in northern Spain. The Valencia region and Madrid would have been mixed areas where both practices were commonly performed. Although the greatest enthusiasm was probably located in Andalusia, cockfighting was not limited to Southern Spain or the capital. There are numerous records of cockpits<sup>189</sup> along the

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<sup>180</sup> I shall not go further into those files, but, for those interested in that question, I recommend reading *Las peleas de gallos en tenerife en el setecientos* (Béthencourt-Massieu, 1982) where the paternalism of the Enlightenment, power relations, and metropole-colony conflicts are analysed.

<sup>181</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:483)

<sup>182</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:483)

<sup>183</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:448–449)

<sup>184</sup> Berthelot (1980:94–95)

<sup>185</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987) and Pérez-Corrales (2008).

<sup>186</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:113–115)

<sup>187</sup> Zozaya-Montes (2008)

<sup>188</sup> Gómez-Díaz (2005)

<sup>189</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:116–118)

Mediterranean coast in places such as Cartagena<sup>190</sup>, Alicante or Valencia<sup>191</sup>. Special mention should be given to Carcaixent<sup>[192,193]</sup>, a municipality in the province of Valencia with a historic fondness for the practice<sup>194</sup>. Cockfights were also common in northern Spanish cities such as Bilbao and Santander<sup>195</sup>.

From a review of the local literature, the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century are probably considered the golden age of cockfighting in the Spanish archipelago. Poggi y Borsotto, in his *Historical Guide of Santa Cruz* published in 1881, mentions only the theatre and the cockpit as recreational facilities which provides an indication of the importance of cockfights at the time<sup>196</sup>.

The book series *Espuela y Fiscorno*<sup>197</sup> by Miguel Pérez Corrales, is a repository of the stories and chronicles<sup>198</sup> of that time. Specific attention should be given to the 1930s when the *Nueva Gallera del Circo Cuyás* was built in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. With approximately 1500 seats, it was in the 1930s and 1940s when it was crowded on a more regular basis due to the participation of the famous trainer<sup>199</sup> of roosters Francisco Dorta. He won 40 cockfights seasons in Tenerife, Gran Canaria and La Palma. There are many stories and anecdotes that unfold around his life and how he was both admired and feared by his opponents who, bewildered by his repeated successes, even accused him of cheating and witchcraft<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>190</sup> To see a bit more on cockfighting in Cartagena refer to Domínguez-i-Perles (2001).

<sup>191</sup> Campomanes-Fernández (1983)

<sup>192</sup> Levante-EMV (13<sup>th</sup> September, 2014)

<sup>193</sup> Valencia Bonita (2016)

<sup>194</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:118)

<sup>195</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:116–118)

<sup>196</sup> Poggi y Borsotto (1881:116–117)

<sup>197</sup> Miguel Pérez-Corrales (2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2008)

<sup>198</sup> From the 19th century up until a few years ago, journalistic chronicles on cockfighting were common.

<sup>199</sup> *Gallero* or *cuidador* in the Canary Islands.

<sup>200</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2005a)

It was precisely he who, in the early stage of his career in Tenerife, prepared the rooster *El Mulato* from 1911 to 1913. After winning 12 fights over five years<sup>201</sup>, this famous game bird was treated to a luxurious cage and a biography<sup>202</sup>, a clear example of how popular the fights were at the time.



Some of the local literature on cockfighting in the Canary Islands. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

In the 1930s, cockfighting chronicles were at their peak with almost 20 people writing reviews on a regular basis<sup>203</sup>. Those written by Alfonso Canella, and compiled by Miguel Pérez Corrales, reporting on the 1934-1939 seasons at *Circo Cuyás* are perhaps the greatest of this period. A period

<sup>201</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2005a:24)

<sup>202</sup> His owner edited a short biography in 1916, a brochure republished later by Miguel Pérez Corrales (2005b).

<sup>203</sup> Canella (2006)



of great passion for cockfighting in Gran Canaria which had another cockpit with a thousand seats in the capital and smaller ones in other areas of the island<sup>204</sup>.

After the Spanish Civil War, cockfights were banned in many places but remained legal on the Canary Islands. The support of the Spanish Minister of Interior, Blas Pérez, originally from La Palma, was crucial to counteract the arguments against cockfighting<sup>205</sup>. But, since the 1950s things began to change in the Canary Islands. The demolition of the *Nueva Gallera del Circo Cuyás* in 1966 can be offered as an example of the difficulties experienced by cockfighters in the archipelago since the second half of the 20th century. Each island would be a worthy case study on its own, but some characteristics might be shared, at least partially, across the archipelago.

Firstly, urban development often resulted in change in use of buildings where fights were held. This was the case, for example, of the abovementioned *Cuyás*, currently a theatre dedicated exclusively to the dramatic arts.

Secondly, the support of the public authorities started to decrease. For instance, provisional cockpits were used in Gran Canaria from 1967 to 1979, until a new *Gallera* was erected<sup>206</sup>.

Thirdly, cockfighting became less popular and contested by some people and political movements. At the end of the 1960s, some historic teams (*partidos* in Spanish) became defunct, such as the historic San José in Gran Canaria, which had existed continuously from 1862 to 1968<sup>207</sup>. Here again, it is important to keep in mind that each island<sup>208</sup> has its own particularities. For instance,

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<sup>204</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:263)

<sup>205</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:449)

<sup>206</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:170)

<sup>207</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:500)

<sup>208</sup> The island of El Hierro is probably the least studied one, although cockfights were reported before the Spanish Civil War and there is evidence of an increasing activity in cockfighting (Pérez-Corrales, 2008:291). Although I could not go to El Hierro during my fieldwork I had the chance of meeting people from La Guancha and La Villa who were



one of the few exceptions to all these changes and difficulties faced by some *partidos*, would be the case of Los Llanos and Tazacorte in the island of La Palma, where they have competed against each other for over a century, and uninterruptedly since 1959<sup>209</sup>. I will further explain some peculiarities of the islands of Gran Canaria and La Palma<sup>210</sup> in the section on my fieldwork challenges.

In this unstable situation where the practice had gradually diminished, a legislative proposal to ban cockfighting in the archipelago was made in 1990<sup>211</sup>. There was obviously some dispute over this issue but the law did not prosper. However, in 1991 a new regional act on animal welfare was approved and some restrictions were applied. The preamble of the law stipulates that ‘cockfights, although traditional and even cultural aspects can be argued in their defence, it is evident that they are bloody and improper traditions of a modern and evolved society. Therefore, this law promotes its natural disappearance, through regulatory mechanisms that prevent its expansion (...) not favouring the transmission of these hobbies to new generations through the requirement of being held indoors and prohibiting its access to minors under the age of sixteen’<sup>212</sup>.

Despite attempts to ban the event, Corrales<sup>213</sup> pointed out in 2008 that there were more teams, breeders, and fights in comparison with 1991. My fieldwork experience and various items of information which appeared in the local press gave me the impression that this upward trend

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competing both in a *contrata* in El Hierro and in some championships across the archipelago. It is worthy of note that a significant portion of these *casteadores* were Cuban.

<sup>209</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:324)

<sup>210</sup> For a wider historical view of cockfighting in the capital of La Palma see Lugo-Rodríguez (2001).

<sup>211</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:447)

<sup>212</sup> (Ley 8/1991, de 30 de abril, de protección de los animales (B.O.C. 62, de 13.5.1991) (1)) “las peleas de gallos, si bien pueden argüirse en su defensa los aspectos tradicionales y aun culturales, es evidente que son tradiciones cruentas e impropias de una sociedad moderna y evolucionada. Por ello, esta Ley propicia su desaparición natural, mediante mecanismos normativos que impiden su expansión (...) no favoreciendo la transmisión de estas aficiones a las nuevas generaciones mediante la exigencia de que se desarrolle en locales cerrados y prohibiendo su acceso a los menores de dieciséis años” (p.1).

<sup>213</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:460)

continues. The recent emergence of new championships, new teams, and the increasing number of roosters fought in the different leagues certainly suggests this.

Since the 1990s, there has been some conflicts regarding the legal status of cockfighting in the Canary Islands. For instance, in 2005 the Public Prosecutor's Office of the High Court of Justice of the Canary Islands took no further action on the complaint brought by the environmental group Ben Magec against the cockfights in the municipality of Telde<sup>214</sup>. One year earlier, in 2004, the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting had been founded to represent their members' interests before the courts and other institutions.

There have been recent examples of this dispute at national level, such as in 2015<sup>215</sup>, when in the reform of the Spanish Criminal Code two amendments to criminalize cockfighting promoters were not, in the end, accepted. Above all though, there has been more controversy and polarisation on a local and regional scale. Demonstrations against cockfighting in Tegui<sup>216</sup> (Lanzarote) in 2016 and the council's refusal to allow cockfights in Güimar<sup>217</sup> (Tenerife) in 2017 are two examples. The latter issue, which resulted in the suspension of the league in Tenerife, along with the regional government's plans to ban cockfighting through the approval of a new animal welfare law, have threatened the continuity of cockfights in the Spanish archipelago.

It has already been seen that cockfighting in Spain is not limited to the Canary Islands. In Andalusia the practice is supported by a law<sup>218</sup> which permits cockfights in order to improve the breed<sup>219</sup> and favour exports. The Andalusian act is strict and access to cockfights is restricted to members. Both

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<sup>214</sup> Sagastume (8<sup>th</sup> August, 2005)

<sup>215</sup> Toledo (15<sup>th</sup> February, 2015)

<sup>216</sup> La Voz de Lanzarote (4<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)

<sup>217</sup> Chijeb (30<sup>th</sup> March, 2017)

<sup>218</sup> BOJA. (2003). LEY 11/2003, de 24 de noviembre, de Protección de los Animales. *BOJA* nº 237 de 10/12/2003.

<sup>219</sup> See MAPA (2018) for the ministerial documentation relating to the breed.

the UCRIGA (the Spanish Union of Breeders of Fighting Birds)<sup>220</sup> and FADGCE (the Andalusian Federation for the Defence of Spanish Fighting Birds)<sup>221</sup>, based in Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz), are organisations founded to defend cockfighters' interests in Andalusia<sup>222</sup>. They form networks for advocacy, lobbying and legal information with the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting and other regional associations such as the Valencian Federation<sup>223</sup>. Cockfighting is forbidden in the Autonomous Community of Valencia but the Spanish Mediterranean coast has been a region with many aficionados and there have been recent attempts to protect local breeds and organise fairs and exhibitions<sup>224</sup>.

One of the things I noticed while reviewing cockfighting materials in the Canary Islands is the lack of material directed, at outsiders, to explain this world to them. Most of the available literature is written by breeders or aficionados from an inside perspective. In this literature many things are taken for granted and the use of cockfighting jargon, especially the journalistic reports on fights, makes its understanding for the uninitiated difficult. I hope that my ethnographic account of cockfighting and its world will reveal the complexities of the human-animal relationships on which it is constructed.

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<sup>220</sup> Unión de Criadores de Gallos Combatiente Español (UCRIGA).

<sup>221</sup> Federación Andaluza de Defensores del Gallo Combatiente Español (FADGCE).

<sup>222</sup> Almendros (19<sup>th</sup> February, 2017)

<sup>223</sup> Federación Valenciana de Criadores del Gallo Combatiente Español (FEVALCE).

<sup>224</sup> Navarro (7<sup>th</sup> August, 2014)

### 3

## EPISTEMOLOGICAL STARTING POINT AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

As I have briefly mentioned before, I have walked a path from my original scientific training in biological sciences to what I am doing now in terms of ethnographic research. My previous involvement in different biodiversity conservation projects<sup>225</sup> made me realise how increasingly popular it is for natural scientists to recognise the importance of social sciences in understanding the drivers of biodiversity decline. In fact, the search for new methods and techniques which helped me to understand the day-to-day relations between humans and animals was what sparked my decision to become an anthropologist. This shift towards social sciences was motivated by my perspective of how research involving humans and animals might be done. Moon & Blackman (2014) show how a researcher's philosophical position frames the research and helps readers to understand the aims, methodology, methods, and data interpretation of a particular project. Therefore, in an exercise of transparency, I will comment on the underlying philosophy of the research included in this dissertation.

My epistemological starting point was a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism arose as a perspective against objectivism, against empirical realism, and against essentialism<sup>226</sup>. In this school of thought, the reality and the truth are not discovered, but constructed, 'they are product of complicated discursive practices' (Schwandt, 1994:125). As Bruner stated, based on Nelson

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<sup>225</sup> See, for example, Oteros-Rozas et al. (2013) and Reyes-García et al. (2013).

<sup>226</sup> Valles (1999)

Goodman's *Of Mind and Other Matters* (1984), 'there is no unique "real world" that preexists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language' (Bruner, 1986:95).

While it is true that I consider that scientists should clearly state the epistemology of their research, it is equally the case that there are sufficient reasons to rule out an exact correspondence between epistemology and research techniques<sup>227</sup>. For example, there is nothing intrinsic to qualitative techniques, such as participant observation, that would disqualify them from being used within a theory testing framework<sup>228</sup>.

The ethnographic perspective I chose to use is one of the ten major qualitative inquiry perspectives that Patton (1990:88) identifies, in which interviews and participant observation are the main tools. Social anthropology is the disciplinary root of this ethnographic perspective. It is important to keep in mind that representations of reality always involve certain abstraction and idealisation. Therefore, I would like to highlight Díaz de Rada's statement where:

(...) reflexive ethnography is, in this sense, mainly constructivist. It is because the ethnographer is aware that there cannot be a purely etic or purely emic narrative of the reality. Any story is a combination of both perspectives. The argument of reflexive ethnography is, then, the following: any reality is not as it is in nature, regardless of who represents it and how they do it.

(Díaz-de-Rada, 2006: 49. In Spanish in the original)<sup>229</sup>.

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<sup>227</sup> Bryman (2001:123)

<sup>228</sup> Bryman (2001:123)

<sup>229</sup> "la etnografía reflexiva es, en este sentido, fundamentalmente constructivista. Lo es porque el etnógrafo reflexivo es consciente de que no puede haber un relato puramente etic o puramente emic de ninguna clase de realidad. Cualquier relato es una combinación pues de ambas perspectivas. El argumento de la etnografía reflexiva es, pues, el siguiente: ninguna realidad es como es por naturaleza, independientemente de quién la representa y de cómo lo hace". (Díaz-de-Rada, 2006:49)

The ethnographic perspective adopted here includes and excludes some assumptions<sup>230</sup>. For example, I do not claim to have produced a body of knowledge which could be replicable under identical circumstances (such circumstances cannot exist with ethnographic fieldwork) nor for objectivity through the collection of neutral evidence<sup>231</sup>. Blommaert & Jie (2010:17) state that in the ethnographic work, the researcher is involved in a ‘unique situated reality’ where the conditions cannot be repeated. The inability to replicate under identical circumstances does not entail that ethnographic work is exempt from certain rules<sup>232</sup>. In fact, one of the main pre-fieldwork tasks is trying to understand the several layers of contexts that coexist in every situated event<sup>233</sup>.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that I followed an open and flexible methodology design due to the fact that I had a long period of fieldwork and I was focused on issues relatively under-researched. Therefore, as some authors have highlighted<sup>234</sup>, I thought this emergent design was most likely to work for my thesis. However, despite being familiar with a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research techniques, data collection was finally based exclusively on qualitative methods. Quantitative methods such as surveys and social network analysis could have been used to gather a broader point of view of the issue in specific situations -for example in terms of age, gender, social background, and economic situation – however, they were ultimately not adopted. I believe that the methods used were suitable for the special characteristics of the fieldwork and the challenges which I will further explain<sup>235</sup>.

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<sup>230</sup> Blommaert & Jie (2010)

<sup>231</sup> Blommaert & Jie, (2010)

<sup>232</sup> Blommaert & Jie, (2010)

<sup>233</sup> Blommaert & Jie, (2010)

<sup>234</sup> See, e.g., Valles (1999).

<sup>235</sup> See Chapter 4 ‘Travelling in the Canary Islands: Fieldwork challenges’.

Prior to fieldwork, I undertook several activities that could be roughly encompassed under documentation and preparation<sup>236</sup>. As one of the first necessary steps in any academic study<sup>237</sup>, the literature review covered the scientific publications related to the field but also other literature on cockfights. Special mention should be made of local sources such as cockfighters' biographies, chronicles or history books. It was foreseeable that many of these sources would not be in university libraries or cited in indexed journals, so I had to access local library catalogues and ask *casteadores* for other materials. After discussion with my supervisory team, we were not concerned about the limited academic literature on cockfights, what is more, we thought that it boosted my creativity as a researcher<sup>[238,239]</sup>. I used the reference management software Mendeley to compile the bibliography.

Due to the ethnographic character of my study, I decided to frame<sup>240</sup> my study around research questions rather than hypotheses. These were the questions I asked myself before I started my fieldwork in the Canary Islands:

- 1) What are the values (if any) presented, and represented, in the cockfight arena?
- 2) Following part of the literature that presents this practice as a 'total event', how does this process of socialising work? Does it express and reinforce men's self-identity?
- 3) Apart from the activities taking place within the cockfight arena, what are the other activities concerning the world of cockfighting outside the arena (e.g., keeping, breeding, training, etc.)?

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<sup>236</sup> Blommaert & Jie (2010)

<sup>237</sup> Thomas (2013)

<sup>238</sup> Strauss & Corbin (1990)

<sup>239</sup> Valles (1999)

<sup>240</sup> Thomas (2013)

4) What is the role (if any) of women<sup>241</sup> in this sport?

5) As part of a larger multidisciplinary body of research, could my work give some clues to the current archaeological projects that are focused on the distribution of chickens over time?

These questions sparked my imagination at the beginning of the PhD but, as in many ethnographic research projects, my interests and views evolved over the period of fieldwork<sup>242</sup>.

Taking into consideration the fieldwork, as is commonly required in an ethnographic study, participant observation and interviewing were essential methodological tools<sup>243</sup>. Hammersley & Atkinson (1995:139) have pointed out the fuzzy dividing line between participant observation and interviewing, mostly when informal conversations take place in areas that are being used for other purposes. With this in mind, the majority of the interviews were undertaken around the cockfight arena so I experienced this fuzzy dividing line. In this sense, I used the distinctiveness of this continuum between participant observation and semi-structured interviews to gather my fieldwork data, as being complementary resources rather than a problem.

Considering the spectrum of interview types, I believed that using formal and structured interviews would have had three major problems. Firstly, I did not have prior knowledge to set the questions. Secondly, it could have been misconstrued as an intent to inspect or supervise the activity. Finally, since I was not interested in conducting a replicable study, I did not see the point in following a fixed schedule of questions which could limit the flow of conversation. Therefore, regarding

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<sup>241</sup> The role of women will be further described in chapter 7.

<sup>242</sup> See Fieldwork challenges on page 68.

<sup>243</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson (1995)



formality, I did not go further than semi-structured interviews, a tool that still allows the interviewer (and the interviewee) to introduce new ideas and questions during the interview.

After asking for the necessary consent, some interviews were audio-recorded. Specific parts of the interviews were transcribed to be analysed by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to identify the main ideas and important points for further categorisation. In the case of informal talks and casual conversations, they were summarised to highlight the most relevant information. Daily notes and fieldwork journals were also integrated into NVivo.

I used Thematic Analysis (TA) to identify and summarise the themes from the interviews. Thematic Analysis is a flexible approach used across different epistemologies and disciplines<sup>244</sup>. I am of the same view as Braun and Clarke<sup>245</sup>, that the researcher always plays an active role when identifying themes. Therefore, I understood that themes and concepts are not embedded in my interviews/notes passively waiting to be discovered. No one is free from theoretical and epistemological preconceptions but I tried to follow an inductive approach (data-driven) rather than other top-down approaches which are more driven by the preconceived theories and grouping categories of the researcher. My specific goal, from my first year of fieldwork, with TA was to create an overall table of themes.

### **You never talk alone**

It is also relevant to acknowledge that in the field I hardly ever talked one-on-one. Particularly at the cockpits, people are most of the time in groups, gathered together, so purely individual

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<sup>244</sup> For a wider analysis see Braun & Clarke (2006).

<sup>245</sup> Braun & Clarke (2006:80)

conversations or interviews were rare. Moreover, people spontaneously joining conversations without invitation is quite usual in communities where people know one another<sup>246</sup>. But I was not worried about privacy, in such a public event, what would be the point of interviewing them one by one at the cockpit? Individual interviews were more common at the farms, although sometimes farms are run by two or more friends and visitors are frequent. The reader might detect here a public-private gradient which will be important for following chapters.

Agar argues that in the ‘informal ethnographic interview’ (1980a:90) the ethnographer, instead of taking the formal role of interrogator, keeps the conversation flowing when faced with many different situations. His general idea on the different degrees of formality are linked to the concept of control. The lower formality gives more freedom for the informant to answer or even criticize or correct the questions<sup>247</sup>. I believe that this informality was essential to build rapport, especially at the beginning of the project, and differentiate myself from other people, for example journalists, who could be viewed as a threat or trying to scrutinize the activity. I was there willing to learn rather than to judge them or form an opinion after a few questions.

As Hammersley states (1998:2) in ethnography ‘data is gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones’. Why observation? It has been argued by many authors, such as Hymes (1981:84), that ‘some social research seems incredibly to assume that what there is to find out can be found by asking’. Blommaert & Jie (2010) highlight observation as one of the reasons why ethnographic data differs from other approaches. They argue ‘people are not cultural or linguistic catalogues’ (2010:3) with opinions about whatever we want to ask.

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<sup>246</sup> Bernard (2006)

<sup>247</sup> Agar (1980a:90)

My attendance to cockfights, along with participant observation at the breeding farms for example, and interviewing, was necessary to conduct my ethnographic study and try to grasp the knowledge and social relationships involved in the world of cockfighting. Being there in person, and living among the individuals who contributed to the activity, allowed me to generate material that would not have been available to me had I tried to do develop a study from only written sources.

### **Informants and consent**

Who are these *casteadores*? From whom did I obtain my information? Anthropologists tend to refer to research participants as informants<sup>248</sup>. As Agar argues (1980a:88), I am dissatisfied with such a depersonalised label for people I worked with at fieldwork. Furthermore, this term masks a variety of relationships I established within the cockfighting community. However, I will use “informants”, a term which I prefer over others used in social sciences<sup>249</sup> such as “respondents” or “subjects”. Throughout this thesis I will take into account the specificities of some of these relationships because a couple of interesting talks with a casual informant is not the same as regular conversations with a key informant.

When conducting my ethnographic research, I learnt by observing, doing, and asking. In other words, I learnt as I went along. External validity of the study is not a key concern because it was not done under controlled conditions in a lab, it was unreplicable fieldwork. I intend to lend credibility to my work by explaining how the sampling was done and how I chose my informants.

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<sup>248</sup> Bernard (2006:196)

<sup>249</sup> Bernard (2006:196)

That will contribute to its internal validity<sup>250</sup> and, hopefully, allow the reader to trust in what I am writing about these people in this piece of research.

I should mention that it was impossible to anticipate how many people I would talk with. Even though my approach to thematic analysis was only exploratory, I share some previous authors' concerns<sup>[251,252]</sup> about 'the need to indicate 'sample size' in research proposals being prepared for funding bodies and/or ethics committees' (Hammersley, 2015:687). Regarding my proposal, having a final decision on how many informants to interview, as Fugard and Potts (2015) propose, could have limited a process of interpretation of data and research questions which took place over the course of fieldwork.

A rough estimate of people I had talked to, beyond mere formalities, was 200. I did not consider this breadth to be troublesome, in fact quite the contrary. I am of the same view as Agar (1980b:36) who points out methodological flexibility, adaptation to situational demands and quality of the relationships with the informants as some of the strengths of ethnographic research. But that breadth does not mean that we, as anthropologists, are given *carte blanche* to walk away from explaining our procedures.

Prior to my project, my supervisor was in search of a place where the activity was legal and easily researchable, he managed to contact the President of the Canarian Cockfighting Federation, José Luis Martín, in the Spanish archipelago. From the very beginning, the Federation gave us its official consent to the research and the President offered his full collaboration with the study. The investigation I proposed was focused on gathering 'cultural data'<sup>253</sup> rather than study of particular

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<sup>250</sup> Bernard (2006:196)

<sup>251</sup> Hammersley (2015)

<sup>252</sup> Braun & Clarke (2016)

<sup>253</sup> Bernard (2006:146)

individuals. To this end, I had to find people who were open to conversation and with whom I could build relationships of trust, particularly of them towards me. Given the complexity of cockfighting and the composition of the audience (see page 141) it was difficult to find people who did not have at least some knowledge or understanding of the event, meaning I rarely noticed, or I was told about someone who just pretended to have knowledge about cockfighting. I was interested in the full spectrum of participants in the event rather than just the experts. A concern of mine was that I would have too much of an official view of the activity.

The President was a key informant and he gave me a preliminary list of people I should talk to. Agar argues that many groups have “stranger-handlers”<sup>254</sup> to deal with outsiders by providing them satisfactory, but harmless, information and people to talk to. With this in mind, it was hard not to think of him as a dual figure. On one hand a key informant, on the other hand the official stranger-handler. Although I had freedom to choose my informants, his help was important to gain access to breeders when I started the fieldwork.

Therefore, I was on the way to use one of the major non-probability sampling methods described by Bernard (2006) as ‘chain referral sampling’ (also known as network sampling methods). To be more specific, the snowball technique, which is recommended ‘for studying hard-to-study populations’ (Bernard, 2006:192). Because of how cockfighters perceive an outsider’s agenda, rather than specific difficulties in analysing the practise itself, would be the main reason to consider it a hard-to-study activity. In practice, whenever I spoke to someone for a while, I would ask him to introduce me to other people who might help me with my research. Consequently, the sample size quickly grew and I soon had hundreds of potential informants. I did not need to take an

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<sup>254</sup> Agar (1980a:85)

exhaustive census and I did not see the benefit in selecting people at random to interview within a statistically representative sample. My goal was to keep in mind the need to talk to a wide variety of breeders and to go beyond the official discourse towards outsiders. Therefore, I regularly talked with a wide range of people involved in the cockfights.

Bernard (2006:194) argues that snowball sampling may involve getting names of people who are not willing to talk to you. Breeders are usually gathered together at the cockpits and, by attending regularly, I increased the chances of meeting most of them face-to-face. Overtime I gradually had more invitations to farms. As an ethical guideline, although I was enthusiastic, I decided not to arrive at a farm unexpectedly without making a firm arrangement, unless I was told otherwise by the owner(s). I was also aware of possible complications when doing this way of sampling. For example, people who are well known and/or have large networks are more likely to be contacted than people with smaller networks or are less popular<sup>255</sup>.

Informed consent is also an essential requirement for fieldwork. Participant Consent forms<sup>256</sup> were written both in English and Spanish as a previous requirement for obtaining the ethics approval at the University of Roehampton. The form consisted of a brief description of the research project, what the participation involved, identity protection and the right to withdraw at any point. However, it was not feasible in practice to hand out dozens of participants consent forms every weekend at the fights. That would have been seen as suspicious, an attempt to take control over the activity. High levels of paperwork distrust have been also reported by two university colleagues who did ethnographic research in Albania<sup>257</sup> and Ethiopia<sup>258</sup>. Therefore, I decided to mainly use

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<sup>255</sup> Bernard (2006:193)

<sup>256</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>257</sup> Trajce (2016)

<sup>258</sup> Ramasawmy (2017)

informed verbal consent, being aware of the need to explain who I was and why I was there. By doing that, I was following the “Ethical Guidelines for good research practice” recommended by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA, 2011).

It may sound peculiar, but I have left what I believe to be a special participant for the end: myself. By my understanding, I was not merely a recorder nor a translator, I was an interpreter. Should not the reader know a little more in order to judge this work? That is why, after my introductory statement on *Who is writing?*, I will describe how the fieldwork was developed and the challenges with which I had to cope.

## **Entering the World of Chickens...**



## 4

### **TRAVELLING IN THE CANARY ISLANDS: FIELDWORK CHALLENGES**

As previously mentioned, a wide range of ethnographic projects previously focused on cockfighting shared some of the following characteristics: short periods of fieldwork, cockfighting as a secondary purpose and/or the unlawfulness of the practice. Along with my supervisory team, we wanted to make sure that our work would overcome these previous shortcomings. What follows is an account of my fieldwork, its challenges, strengths, and weaknesses. Here I would like to show the reader the dynamic and non-linear character of fieldwork where theory and practice are entangled and mutually influential.

Initially, knowing the time constraints imposed by a three-year PhD, I only had three months (October-December 2015) to complete my research proposal and some of the first steps, such as the preliminary literature review and the university procedures to research overseas. Despite this need to speed things up, I felt I was ready to start with the fieldwork at the beginning of the 2016 season. However, although we wanted to grasp the meaning and importance of cockfighting on the Canary Islands it was hard to determine where to start. My initial lack of knowledge was linked to a low travel budget so I had to think carefully about the logistics, not just because of the expenses but also to avoid traveling between islands without the time required to build rapport with *casteadores*.

## First season: Gran Canaria 2016

As previously mentioned, my Director of Studies managed to meet the President of the federation and he became our gateway into the fieldwork. He was a member of a team in Gran Canaria so I decided I would be based there for my first season of fieldwork. Through my fieldwork experience there, and a few short visits to other islands, I would determine what to do, and where to go, in my second year of fieldwork.

My first experience at the fights came in January 2016, when I was asked to help organise a pre-season championship promoted by the President. He asked me to double check the times of the bouts and gave me the opportunity of seeing how things work from the point of view of the management. This situation allowed me to meet, and talk to, many people.

“So much effort on your degree to end up studying cockfighting. Are you against cockfights or what?”. (Roberto 16/01/2016)<sup>259</sup>

When I first met *casteadores* in Gran Canaria, the above comments and questions were commonly asked. I believe this kind of mistrust was determined by how *casteadores* usually perceived the interest and agendas of outsiders<sup>260</sup>. Being introduced by the President was not enough to dispel suspicions about the reasons for my attendance at the fights. Anyway, the ice was eventually broken and almost everyone was both friendly and helpful.

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<sup>259</sup> “Tanta carrera pa terminar aquí en las luchas de gallos. ¿Tú es que estás en contra de los gallos o qué?”. (Roberto 16/01/2016)

<sup>260</sup> This difficulty of access, rather than of the analysis and interpretation of the practice itself, has been mentioned by Garry Marvin in other practices such as bullfighting and hunting (McHugh, 2017).

I rented a one-room apartment for six months on the outskirts of the capital (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) and I bought a very inexpensive second-hand car because using public transport was not really effective and petrol was cheap. Due to the thousands of tourists arriving for the winter season, prices for accommodation were prohibitively expensive in the city centre. Cockfights were held close to the city centre but I had planned to visit farms throughout the island so I would have to drive in any case.



The second-hand Opel Corsa stationed outside a farm in Gran Canaria. © Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

I had previous fieldwork experience, so it was not very difficult to overcome the feelings of trepidation described by many scholars<sup>261</sup> when working alone in the field. I knew time was on my side and trust would be built by spending time with the aficionados. But I had a problem which I

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<sup>261</sup> See, e.g., Blommaert & Jie (2010).

had ignored when writing my research plan; I could barely understand much of the cockfighting vocabulary. Terms relating to different anatomical features (i.e. colour and comb) and breeding lineage, to name just two, were part of this communication barrier. To tackle this issue, I started to create my own glossary, trying to refrain from asking questions that any cocker would consider obvious. Who would talk to me more thoroughly if I could not even follow the basic steps of a fight? Consequently, I spent the first month of fieldwork learning what and how to ask and, even more important, when and why a specific fight was considered a good one. I really needed that because pre-fieldwork preparation did not give me much idea of the unspoken routines and conventions of the fights.

At the beginning of my second month of fieldwork I began to understand how they talk about the fights and the roosters. That gave me the possibility of grasping something more than the explanations they frequently give to outsiders as justifications. It is assumed that those asking are against cockfighting and *casteadores* tend to use a series of statements that could be summarised in the ideas of *this as a Canarian tradition, different from the ones in South America, and far different from other blood sports or intensive livestock farming which entail animal mistreatment*. In fact, since it took me a while to build rapport with *casteadores* and being able to understand the fights, that kind of discourse for outsiders was a large part of the information gathered during my initial steps. I had the impression that everybody was telling me the same thing. But that feeling changed gradually since, through my regular attendance to the fights, I was invited to visit a few farms along the island and was given access to the breeding day-to-day management systems.

“We are immigrants. We understand each other”. (Eladio 02/03/2016)<sup>262</sup>

Eladio, a Cuban man in his fifties, was the first breeder who invited me to visit his farm to have a look at his fighting birds. He was part of *Anhelo Cubano*, a breeders’ team formed by three Cuban members which competed weekly as part of a Southern team. The three of them left Cuba a few years earlier and decided to come to the Canary Islands based on their Spanish family connections there. Eladio’s statement on immigration revealed we were both far from home and he was willing to help understanding the difficulties which that engenders. But, was I doing anthropology away from or at home?

### **At home and abroad: a privileged position**

I knew it had been argued<sup>263</sup> that doing anthropology at home implies a different set of problems than undertaking it abroad. Eladio’s statement made me think what kind of challenges I was facing while living in my area of fieldwork. Stephenson & Greer (1981:124) suggest different categories of ethnographers investigating within their own cultures, emphasising the vital distinction between knowing a cultural system and being part of the lived community being studied. In other words, and trying to understand my situation, before undertaking the study, I had lived in Madrid for 28 years but I had only been to the Canary Islands once. Even though I was working in Spain, the issues involved in my fieldwork would have been different if I had previously lived in the Canary

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<sup>262</sup> “Entre inmigrantes nos entendemos”. (Eladio 02/03/2016)

<sup>263</sup> It was published more than 30 years ago but the ASA Monographs 25 “Anthropology at home” edited by Anthony Jackson (1987) is still one of the most interesting compilations of “how differently one could interpret anthropology at home” (Jackson, 1987: preface).

Islands or, even more, had I been born in La Palma with close family connections with the cockfighting community. Regarding fieldwork at home or abroad, the following is a selection of some arguments indicating how fortunate I was to have an ambivalent position which helped me to become familiar with the world of cockfighting in the Canary Islands.

Clearly, I would not be considered an anthropologist working *at home* in a narrow definition in which the researcher ‘who through and from birth, is an active and integral member of the society studied’ (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987:192). It is in this type of experience where what is emphasised is that ‘the field can become inseparable from one’s home’ (Weil, 1987:196). Additionally, some of the at-home advantages, such as the absence of pressure on time in the field and the geographical proximity<sup>264</sup>, were not applicable to my work. But in other cases, anthropology at home is labelled according to a much broader definition, as when Hastrup (1987) groups several countries, such as Denmark and Iceland, under a Northern Civilization area which shares historical and linguistic characteristics.

Within these blurred limits, I considered myself an outsider and, although I made friends during my in-depth fieldwork, I never felt the interwoven experiences of some of those researching a familiar territory among family members, friends, or neighbours<sup>265</sup>.

Taking certain events and actions for granted may be a problem for any anthropologist but Stephenson & Greer (1981:125) highlight the increased danger of the ‘ordinariness’ when working in a familiar culture. Personally, I have to admit that doing a PhD in English and having my fieldwork in the Canary Islands was challenging enough. In contrast with some native

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<sup>264</sup> Dragadze (1987)

<sup>265</sup> Weil (1987)

anthropologists<sup>266</sup> I was far from feeling pressed by the often-mentioned need to look for the extraordinary. Whatever might have been the problems with recording my observations, I am sure they were not as a consequence of the ‘taken for granted realm’ (Stephenson & Greer, 1981:124) because the practice itself and the places were new to me.

Even though the researcher might partly share a cultural background with people who are the subject of fieldwork, it has been argued<sup>267</sup> that many scholars researching at home have been unaware of the huge regional differences and both urban and rural contexts. Personally, that was not possible because, as someone who was born in Northern Spain and raised in Madrid, I would never venture to say that I speak for my own people or consider myself Canarian.

Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987:180) on her fieldwork in Goa, on the west coast of India, formulates the reverse problem for a native anthropologist who, instead of negotiating a temporary status as marginal native, has to transcend an ‘*a priori*’ ascribed social position in the society studied. In order to make this happen, Mascarenhas-Keyes developed a varied repertoire of clothing and linguistic uses. It is true that not only anthropologists can speak or dress differently according to social occasions. Nonetheless, such a display of strategies would be of greater need when the researcher needs to escape from a previously acquired social position to deal with the whole array of native social categories. Perhaps especially in a state, such as Goa, with its linguistic and religious diversity. That was not an issue for my cockfighting research because Spanish was the only language and I did not feel religion was an important topic at fieldwork. It might seem obvious, but it must be underlined that whether or not I believed I was at home, I did not need to

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<sup>266</sup> See, e.g., Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987) and Stephenson & Greer (1981).

<sup>267</sup> See, e.g., Dragadze (1987) and Strathern (1987).

learn the language nor to hire a translator. A different question, as mentioned before, was the specific cockfighting vocabulary.

Although, at first, I was ignorant of the specific vocabulary of the fights and the cockfight world, my personal and academic background gave me an initial advantage. I was identified by *casteadores* as a heterosexual male from mainland<sup>268</sup> Spain who worked at an English university. Therefore, it was assumed that I had no idea and, therefore, it was not very strange that I asked a lot of questions or that I did not know how to behave at certain times. And I was also exempt from the expected relations and obligations arising from a permanent web of kinship and associational relationships<sup>269</sup>. Those obligations to engage in social events such as weddings or birthdays have been reported by some colleagues<sup>270</sup> working at home as a minor issue which kept them momentarily away from fieldwork.

I was new in the Archipelago, so my past was a ‘closed book’ (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987:184) and I did not have to pay the price of certain expectations resulting from kinship or previous residency in the community with the consequent circumscribed roles<sup>271</sup>. But I was not so naïve as to think that I had a total lack of constraints. I was introduced to the breeders by the President so I needed to work to get something more than informants well-connected to the President.

In controversial activities it is usual, especially when the researcher is a newcomer, to be brought to speak with authoritative voices within the community; meaning people who are accustomed to speaking to a non-specialist public and its external interests. Misael Costa Corrêa (2017:298) extensively describes this kind of voices on his research on Brazilian Cockfighting. To get beyond

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<sup>268</sup> *Peninsular* in Spanish.

<sup>269</sup> Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987)

<sup>270</sup> See, e.g., Trajce (2016).

<sup>271</sup> See, e.g., Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987) and Stephenson & Greer (1981).



these authoritative voices, or stranger-handlers, I followed a self-imposed rule of introducing myself as someone who was willing to talk to many *casteadores* and learn from everyone. By doing so, I wanted to prevent the image of someone just interested in talking to those in charge or the most prestigious *casteadores*. That also gave me a broad perspective, so I chatted with men and women from different teams and backgrounds, including the ones who only attended championships.



Two of the first farms I was invited to in the island of Gran Canaria. Thanks to *Cuba Nostalgia* and Alexis.

©Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

Although the role of a university student was known by everyone, the role of an anthropologist was far less familiar. This resulted, especially in the beginning, in a few people simply thinking I was a journalist or, as I shall describe later, an undercover journalist. My entrée into the world of cockfighting was provided by the President but that did not spare me the process of building rapport with *casteadores*. As seen before, they usually consider outsiders' agenda in conflict with their interests. That is why, I made clear that in my research, I would treat any kind of personal

data with great care to ensure that the informants will not be traced by third parties. This was not always easy to explain because most of the breeders were keen to participate with their real names.

Some of the differentiating features of the Canarian cockfights are the two modalities of fighting (league and championship) and the presence of *casteadores* from different Latin American countries and mainland Spain. In my opinion those different backgrounds were key points which led me to have what I have called an ambivalent position or a mutant identity. What I mean is, ultimately, that I found out my identity changed depending on who I talked to.

“You know how the Canarians are with this, they have to develop it”. (Eladio 08/05/2016)<sup>272</sup>

In practical terms, this meant I was welcomed in many conversations among Cuban *casteadores* who discussed, and sometimes criticised, the differences between cockfighting in the Canary Islands and their country. I experienced similar situations among some Canarian breeders who perceive themselves, in contrast with Cubans for example, as less involved in betting and more willing to participate at the League mode. Those situations would have been more difficult if I had been clearly identified as Canarian or Cuban, to give just two examples. Ramírez Goicoechea (2007:98) runs through the socially constructed, dynamic processes and subjective classifications of people as equals, similar or different. I will not discuss the substance of identity and alterity any further other than to emphasise them as two aspects of the same phenomenon<sup>273</sup>. When I realised

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<sup>272</sup> “Tú sabes cómo son los canarios con esto, hay que actualizarse”. (Eladio 08/05/2016)

<sup>273</sup> Ramírez-Goicoechea (2007:99)

that my ambivalent position gave me easy access to those conversations I took advantage of that but it was first achieved by good fortune rather than a preconceived plan.

Finally, another matter of conducting anthropology at home is what Weil (1987) termed, “merging”, while attempting to separate field and home. To some extent, these tensions are not exclusive and the results of having your accommodation and fieldwork in the same area could make you feel that anthropology takes control of your life and not the other way around. Nonetheless, the possibility of staying in quick and easy touch with my family and not living next to any breeders, allowed me to disconnect for a while. These relaxing moments were particularly important in my second year, when my fieldwork in La Palma, as I will describe, was much more exhausting. But first, I shall continue with my first season in Gran Canaria.

### **Continuing with fieldwork...**

Following the visit to *Anhelo Cubano*’s farm, I continued alternating my attendance at the fights (league and championships) during the weekends, with weekdays visits to breeders’ farms and team headquarters (*galleras* or *casas de gallos*) across the island. This combination provided me with two very distinct ways of gathering material.

On the one hand, the rhythm of the fights, often frantic, makes it hard to talk about anything but the immediacy of the event itself. People comment on the fights as they go on, but sometimes it is difficult to go into more detail. *Aficionados* are there to watch, and absorb, the fights; there is time to discuss the remarkable ones later. On the other hand, the vast range of activities carried out by the breeders in their daily preparation, as for example the feeding and cleaning, offers the possibility to discuss things calmly and go over previous fights or to discuss someone else’s

roosters. The continuum between the private preparation and the public performance will be discussed later.

As the season progressed, I noticed how my interests and concerns were changing. For example, I started by taking notes<sup>274</sup> of how many roosters were killed while fighting. But, as soon as I realised the rate was not far from the 10% I was told by the President, and *how* rather than *how many* was the truly interesting thing for the aficionados; I stopped counting. I felt I was starting to understand the ways they see the fights and how they talked about them. Although it was not the easiest world to get access to, I was making some friends with whom I talked in a more direct manner. But after the first half of the season, one of them warned me.

“Be careful. There are those who think that you are an undercover journalist to ban the fights.

They are posting that on WhatsApp groups”. (Paco 20/04/2016)<sup>275</sup>

I had not had that feeling<sup>276</sup> but it made me realise that no matter how well-organised my research plan might be, I had totally forgotten about my presence in social networks. And I also realised that it could be detrimental for my fieldwork at a time where a few local governments had expressed their readiness to ban cockfighting. For that reason, I adopted a more pro-active role on

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<sup>274</sup> I would like to mention how smartphone notation apps are growing in importance within ethnographic research (Gorman, 2017). The use of smartphones at cockfighting arenas is as widespread as in many other public spaces and I took advantage of that. People were under no illusion of what I was doing in fieldwork but, as long as the use of smartphones was very common, I sometimes felt more comfortable taking notes with my mobile phone rather than my field notebook. This had added benefits such as being connected with other breeders who were sending me photos of their roosters and the outcomes of other competitions held at the same time.

<sup>275</sup> “Ten cuidado. Hay algunos que piensas que eres un periodista infiltrado para prohibir las peleas. Lo están poniendo por los grupos de Whatsapp”. (Paco 20/04/2016)

<sup>276</sup> It was not until I reviewed my field notes when I realised this allegation coincided in time with the visits of two friends who went with me to the fights right after spending five days back in the UK.

Facebook, briefly describing some of the championships and farms that I visited. I took the chance of introducing myself and my research through this platform to, hopefully, silence the rumours which could prejudice my fieldwork. That worked for me and I was invited to visit many breeders.

Getting to their farms often involved practical difficulties. Most of the time, these private properties were outside urban areas and breeders took for granted the knowledge of how to access rural tracks. On other occasions, breeders met me in a nearby area and drove me to their farms because they did not want to reveal the precise location of the plot. I will comment further on this secretiveness towards outsiders (and insiders) in chapter 7. In addition to these invitations, I was offered the opportunity to travel with two breeders to a championship in Tenerife. I had been there, the preceding month, for a weekend to see the fights. This time, however, I had the opportunity to experience the whole package. This included the collection of the fighting birds early in the morning, the preparations immediately before the fights and the wide range of emotions and expressions, experienced during the day, of those taking part. These championship experiences, and both championship and league particularities, will also be described later.

Two weeks after the *undercover incident*, the President called me to say that a crew, from the Spanish National Television (TVE), was coming the next day to film a documentary<sup>277</sup> about a regular League fight. He told me they would be glad to interview me, among others. I did not have time to consult about it with my supervisory team so, knowing it was not live coverage, I accepted on the condition that they allowed me to discuss it later with them.

On that day, cockfighting aficionados were divided between those who thought it would be best to maintain a good relationship with the press and television and those who preferred to keep a low

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<sup>277</sup> Repor- Gallus Maximus (2016)

profile. What was under discussion was whether or not the media and, by extension, public opinion would understand the intricacies and complexities of the practice. *Casteadores* tend to think animal welfare/rights groups' (*animalistas* from now on) views are favoured by the press and TV. That is one of the reasons why some of them are discouraged from engaging in these reports to the outside world. Because of that, I was caught between my willingness to being interviewed and the feeling that many people would listen closely to my words. As a result, I maintained a low profile and I preferred to wait until being specifically asked by the President<sup>278</sup> rather than actively introducing myself to the tv reporters.

Some aficionados considered the TV crew as a dangerous external element most interested in the controversy around the *animalistas* complaints rather than in having a deeper understanding of the fights. Some special conditions of documentary filming did not help them to be thought of differently. First, they asked many questions<sup>279</sup> related to those complaints because they had interviewed animal welfare groups before to gather their opinions about the event. Second, they needed some supplemental footage intercut with the main shots and the interviews. For instance, they filmed me seated on the steps while pretending that I was reading a book with the President. Therefore, what might be considered important to show the audience the context of the story, was seen as something out of context. Third, and lastly, they came on a championship weekend to film a traditional league fight event. Consequently, the whole paraphernalia (e.g., scales, cleaning process, etc.) was set up just for filming, with the actual championship momentarily interrupted.

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<sup>278</sup> I would like to highlight that I was never told (directly or indirectly) how to behave or what I should tell or write.

<sup>279</sup> I was repeatedly asked if I understood *animalistas* complaints and statements and whether the event was seen in the UK as something normal or as an atrocity or act of barbarism. Nevertheless, none of my responses were finally included in the documentary.

"What about that white-haired man with the mustache who is watching us all the time? Is him a local boss?". (TV journalist 07/05/2016)<sup>280</sup>

The above question, upon completion of the interview, made me think how different my views were compared with those of the television crew. Evidently, I had the advantage of 4 months of fieldwork and, where they saw an intimidating local boss, I saw a 70-year-old aficionado with short and blurred sight. Beyond that amusing anecdote, I would not like to give the impression that I fell into the trap of romanticising the audience but to highlight the tremendous difficulty of attempting to depict the world of cockfighting in the Canary Islands, with all the prejudices about the topic, using only just a few hours of interviews. The diversity of people and practices involved in the different island competitions requires a long period of fieldwork to understand them beyond shallow impressions and stereotypes.

My first year of fieldwork was completed at four championships at the end of the season. I flew to Tenerife to attend the Canarian Championship and I had the opportunity to investigate the decline of the activity on the island which shared the capital of the Autonomous Community with Gran Canaria. Formerly an essential place for the event in the Spanish archipelago, Tenerife has become less important probably due to a variety of factors such as political barriers and internal cockfighting struggles.

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<sup>280</sup> "¿Y ese señor de abajo con bigote y pelo blanco que está todo el rato mirando mucho es algún potentado?". (Reportero de TV 07/05/2016)



After Tenerife, I was in Lanzarote for a week to learn how *El Pollo de Oro* works. In its XV edition, and despite the economic crisis, this championship for *pollos*<sup>281</sup> up to 16 months was still a major event and attracted participants from across the Canary Islands and from Andalusia. For me, the experience was most interesting because I had time to discuss issues in-depth with a few *casteadores* from Gran Canaria who were there just enjoying the long weekend and far from their daily concerns and responsibilities. A particularly engaging time was that which I spent with the veteran breeder Juan “el Mopa”<sup>282</sup> who had won all the major championships but this one.



A collage of photos showing some of the places I visited in Lanzarote. Thanks to Pedro, Daida, Rofero and *Gallera*

*Teguisse*. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2016, 2017)

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<sup>281</sup> A *pollo* is a young rooster or stag up to 16-18 months. After that it will be considered an adult rooster (*gallo* in Spanish). Sometimes the word *pollito* is used to refer to chicks. See glossary for further information on the matter and other Spanish terms.

<sup>282</sup> See Pérez-Corrales (2008:290) for more information about the veteran breeder.



Aside from the *casada* (matching) on Thursday and a fellowship dinner on Friday I had the rest of the weekdays to find out about cockfighting in the island. Since the beginning of the season many people had commented enthusiastically about this championship and consequently I made the effort of meeting *casteadores* from Lanzarote at previous events. That is how I met people from *La Geria*, a Lanzarote team at one of the championships in Gran Canaria. One of them, a local entrepreneur, offered me car ride to show me a little of the island and take me to different farms.

I had been told, time and again, that Lanzarote was the island where cockfighters were under increasing pressure from the local governments and the *animalistas*. But I did not notice anything until I realised the championship was going to take place at the outskirts of Tegüise rather than in one of the available cockpits. As I wrote it in my notes:

It was a sunny afternoon when we arrived at the agro-industrial complex.

Mario drove the pickup to the car park and we crossed the fence to get to the provisional cockpit set up for the championship. Suddenly, I noticed the demonstration had already started. There was not a real danger of confrontation because just a few policemen held the protestors and the breeders on different sides of the fence. When the insults began, she was the main target of some of them. It was curious how the swearwords changed when Davinia, breeder and mother of two children, passed close to them. Maybe she should not be there, in the middle of what they consider the epitome of the macho culture. The insults focused on male attributes ceased but the shouting was even louder:

“Motherfucker! You are sick. You enjoy fighting roosters. Murderer! Why don’t you put your children to fight?” (A protester)<sup>283</sup>

At that instant, her face totally changed but she went into the arena as the rest of the breeders to avoid any kind of confrontation in front of the policemen. Then I realised the question was not trivial and, ironically, demonstrators could be to some extent wrong. Breeders had been taking care of their fighting birds over generations.

I have selected this fragment because I was shocked to hear how the offences changed when that woman was seen entering the pit. I would like to clarify that only a minority of demonstrators were yelling insults and, in considering the whole issue, there were insults and taunting from both sides. What I found of particular interest in that incident was, leaving aside gender issues, the recurring topic of family and care, an issue that constantly arose on many talks and interviews. The chapters *Fighting birds are not puppies* and *From the egg to the cockpit* will deal with the rearing of birds and how roosters are conceived of and classified by breeders.

After that, I spent a couple of days in Fuerteventura attending a championship in the interior of the island. Although it is the archipelago’s island with the earliest historical record of cockfighting, aficionados rarely mentioned it in conversations and it seems it has had highs and lows

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<sup>283</sup> “¡Hija de la gran puta! Estás enferma. Disfrutas peleando dos gallos. ¡Asesina! ¿Por qué no peleas a tus hijos?” (Una manifestante)

historically<sup>284</sup>. I was able to meet several breeders, especially young people and including newcomers, and I occasionally talked to them in other championships. Some of them had won major trophies in the last three seasons, attracting aficionados' attention from other islands. If I had to point out a weakness of the fieldwork, it would be that of not having spent more time with this younger generation from Fuerteventura. Because of the limited budget available and the need to build trustworthy relationships on other islands I did not have much time to research more fully into that.

Finally, I returned to Gran Canaria for the end of season championship. I wanted to thank the breeders and aficionados, particularly the ones from the four teams with whom I shared more than fifteen league days and several championships. One of the issues raised by them was what was going to be my next fieldwork destination. I told them that my initial idea was to go to Tenerife for the second season or even continue in Gran Canaria. However, as on other occasions throughout the season, many of them insisted that I should go and see the fights in La Palma. I was told cockfighting was one of the main sports in La Palma, along with Canarian Wrestling<sup>285</sup>, football and basketball, and there were still places, such as bars and cafes, where cockfighting stories are shared. I had not yet been to the island of La Palma, but I had met quite a few aficionados from there while attending different championships and I had sensed how they shared, amongst themselves, their enthusiasm for the world of cockfighting. In consequence, it seemed easy to see the higher social acceptability the practice seemed to have in La Palma. An island where, according to the stories they told me, roosters and breeders were usually better while fights had a higher level

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<sup>284</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:227)

<sup>285</sup> Canarian Wrestling, together with cockfighting, have been mentioned as two traditional types of entertainment which still survive today (see, e.g., Béthencourt-Massieu, 1982:500-501 and Pérez-Corrales, 2008:328). Pérez-Corrales (2008:328-329) also highlights several cases of wrestlers who were also cockfighters. I also found various cases of shared interests during my fieldwork.

of quantity and quality. Putting it all together, I thought it was an ideal destination for the following year of fieldwork.

## **Second Season: La Palma 2017**

At the beginning of 2017 I was certain I did not want to spend my second year of fieldwork in Gran Canaria because I considered it would be more interesting to move out of my comfort zone. Consequently, I flew to La Palma to see whether these images of better breeding, roosters, teams and proud and easy-going people were really there. I had in mind the idea that many *casteadores* from Gran Canaria (and other islands) considered La Palma to be the place with the essence of the Canarian cockfights. Given the mutual confidence gradually built up during my first year of fieldwork, I also spent short periods of time in Gran Canaria in 2017 that allowed me to enquire about specific issues and explore the particularities of each island.

It was, precisely, a Gran Canarian breeder, who had become a friend, the one who helped me get to know the local *casteadores* and aficionados when he visited the island and I was merely a newcomer. Although the main reason might be other work purposes, breeders, during these inter-island visits, usually exchange, purchase and give away *pollitos*, *pollos*, *gallos* and *gallinas*, either for themselves or for friends back at home. It is considered a good opportunity to see friends' animals, visit other teams and establish and maintain networks while learning firsthand what is happening on other islands. And that is what I did. I accompanied my friend for two days, from dawn to dusk. I even remember once having to turn the mobile light on when a friend of his was showing us as many fighting birds as possible. I had some good local contacts in La Palma but I

felt my work progressed further in a couple of days visiting farms with him than in my whole first month of fieldwork in 2016.

During that time, I realised cockfighting is known about almost everywhere on the island, especially in Tazacorte, Los Llanos and El Paso. By contrast with the situation in Gran Canaria, those who are not fans or even those who are foreigners in La Palma, have heard about the activity, and it was common for someone to have a relative, friend or acquaintance who was fond of cockfighting. From that point of view, I was pleasantly surprised to hear people in bars joking and talking about *gallos*, as a common topic of discussion, such as football or agricultural activities. Some of the teams participating in the leagues had their own bars which functioned as social centers, being open almost every day during the season and sometimes the whole year.

I finally managed to rent a small apartment on the outskirts of El Paso, two miles away from Los Llanos, the second most important place of cockfighting in La Palma, and four miles from Tazacorte, which proved to be the most significant site of cockfighting of the whole archipelago. This second year, I did not acquire a car in the end because the second-hand market was more restricted and I would have more difficulties to resell it after fieldwork.

Unexpectedly, what might seem a major setback for my freedom of mobility in the field, turned into an advantageous method to engage in conversations and meet new aficionados. The *galleras* and the bars of Tazacorte, El Paso and in particular Los Llanos, where I could really experience all the stages of a regular season, became my essential places of inquiry. Public transport was not great but main towns were reasonably well connected and the distances among them were short. In addition, since many breeders spent part of their daily routine between farms, bars and team

headquarters, they often offered to drive me around. On those short trips<sup>286</sup> I engaged in conversations with the drivers and others linked to cockfighting. Oftentimes, I ended up talking to someone I did not know very well or invited to a farm I was not aware of, but always with the advantage of being introduced by someone I already knew.



Panoramic view of El Paso and Los Llanos in the island of La Palma. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

Looking back at Gran Canaria, due to the need of covering longer distances I think that way of moving around (without my own car) would have been much more difficult to achieve. Being smaller in geographical terms but most of all having ten times fewer inhabitants than Gran Canaria,

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<sup>286</sup> Trajce (2016) also describes how he engaged in unexpected, informal conversations while offering a lift to locals.

made me think of La Palma as a peaceful and cozy island where almost everyone knew one another. Indeed, I soon became to be known as “the writer”<sup>287</sup> in some quarters and many people told me about cockfighting whenever and wherever they saw me. This was certainly an advantage, but I also appreciated having rented the apartment on the outskirts because in that sense it was easier to disconnect from the fieldwork from time to time.

To return the favours I had received, and to feel that I was of some use for them, I rented a car on a couple of weekends to give some aficionados a lift to the league organised in the capital of the island, Santa Cruz de La Palma, situated on the eastern part of the island. Although the passion for cockfighting is also remarkable in the capital, it seems to be lower than the great enthusiasm I found in Tazacorte, Los Llanos and surrounding areas. However, I also took the opportunity to visit some breeders’ farms when I went to the area of Santa Cruz de La Palma with the rental car.

When the season was coming to an end, I attended, for the second consecutive year, the *Mojo Picón* championship in Gran Canaria and the *Pollo de Oro* in Lanzarote, probably two of the most important championships in terms of attendance. Back in La Palma, I went to an end of the season championship to complete my fieldwork and said goodbye to breeders and aficionados. I had been invited to eat and drink time and again, but I managed to persuade some aficionados to let me pay for their drinks as a farewell celebration.

These bars next to the cockpits or team headquarters deserve particular mention as one of the key places for my fieldwork in La Palma. Along with several *galleras*, they were open every day. That gave me an opportunity of having a plan B every time my informants postponed an appointment or in the very small number of cases when someone refused to talk to me<sup>288</sup>. Having a Plan B has

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<sup>287</sup> “*El del libro*” or “*el escritor*”.

<sup>288</sup> Although three or four people regularly postponed our talks, only one directly refused to talk to me.



been underlined by some researchers<sup>289</sup> as an overlooked issue that needs to be better considered while working with people in real social environments<sup>290</sup>. While I, as anthropologist, felt welcomed and well-regarded, I also understood I was not a top priority for my informants. Therefore, with a long list of people I wanted to talk to, bars were gathering points regardless the drawbacks I encountered. I had countless informal talks with breeders and aficionados that were unplanned but very productive.



One of the bars where the author of this dissertation spent hundreds of hours talking to *casteadores* and aficionados on the island of La Palma. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

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<sup>289</sup> Blommaert & Jie (2010)

<sup>290</sup> Blommaert & Jie (2010)



Although I spent the summer once again in the UK, this time was not only fruitful in terms of writing but also in the capacity to continue learning through my regular contact (by phone and social networks) with the breeders. I had come to know more *casteadores* on both islands and I was impressed by how they began to tell me more about particular *gallos* I had seen throughout the season. I was very pleased for that and really looking forward to returning to the archipelago.

### **Completing the fieldwork**

Once again, I went back to Gran Canaria and La Palma to spend a few weeks in November and December 2017. I wanted to see the way things are done out of the regular season, for example how breeders took care of the *gallos* at the end of the moulting period and how teams prepared for the start of the season. I also took advantage to visit a few new farms and take photographs, some of which were printed off as gifts for the roosters' owners.

After consultation with my supervisors, I decided, during this fieldwork, to focus on the nature of *casta* because I was sure it was going to constitute an important part of my dissertation. It is extremely difficult to find an adequate English term for *casta* because it is used for a complex amalgam of animal qualities. On one hand, it refers to “good blood” for breeding and, on the other hand, it also indicates the gameness, bravery or courage to keep on fighting under extremely difficult conditions. Luckily, I found the greatest willingness to participate in a group interview of four breeders from *Gallera Triana* in Gran Canaria. At that time, the Canary Islands Autonomic Government had started the drafting of a new legislation on animal welfare by which cockfighting, among other activities, would be terminated. Given this context I appreciated their willingness to be recorded and allowed me to gather deeper knowledge on the way *casta* is represented by

different people. In this sense, I was close to what Bernard (2006:197) calls ‘encourage the informant to become the ethnographer’ because I was asking them whether some analytic categories I had thought of, were correct.

Finally, in May 2018, I was able to join Danielle Giddings, a freelance filmmaker who was working on a documentary about the impact of chicken keeping around the world. She had travelled to various locations such as Ethiopia, India and Mongolia before going to the Canary Islands to film on cockfighting<sup>291</sup>.

It is now easier than ever to keep in touch with people after fieldwork. I made good friends and communications technology helped me to continue relationships. Not only have I frequently called them, but I have also used their feedback to enhance my knowledge and solve small doubts while writing the thesis. This process of merging native and academic feedback is considered by Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987:191) as a tool to reduce ethnocentrism and egocentrism. Of her USSR fieldwork experience, Dragadze (1987:159) comments that because of high literacy rates it is expected that some of the work might be read and inspected locally. Although this is something I was aware of, I would not like to overestimate the number of potential readers when it is well known that the average reading of an academic paper are rather low<sup>292</sup>. That is why I intend to write a more accessible, shorter, Spanish version of my thesis to give something back to the breeders.

Lastly, I would briefly like to highlight that although I sought to understand cockfighting from within, my interest was far from a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in the sense that I was not interested in seeking to change the activity. I was there to learn, to understand how this

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<sup>291</sup> Danielle Giddings has no contractual relationship with the University of Roehampton.

<sup>292</sup> Meho (2007)

world works and I took the position of not judging the activity. By not taking a firm stance, I knew there was the risk of being considered as a person in favour of cockfighting by people from animal welfare movements or within academia. I spoke to many people about cockfighting; however, this was not a research to collect views from all interested parties on the recent controversies regarding the legal status of the activity. My main concern was just cockfighters' views to build an ethnographic, interpretive, account of this complex world.

## 5

### FROM THE EGG TO THE COCKPIT

15/01/2017 South-Eastern Gran Canaria:

One of the first things that Juan Javier showed me at his farm was a cage with a *colorado* rooster and a hen, for breeding purposes.

Juan Javier: Come here, what do I see there? I am seeing the beginning, this does not begin when the rooster is born from an egg. It starts much earlier, there, in the *colorado* rooster I am seeing the grandfather, the great grandfather, and I know how they were, I know they were very good roosters.

Ricardo: It's like the family tree.

Juan Javier: Exactly, and I know for sure. They are not simple checks or testing grounds like when someone lends you or gives you a rooster. In that case you need to trust them and experiment, and I have some like that. But not here, here I see the couple, that's the first thing you create, love between animals. And that, coming every day and seeing it is something that is very difficult to explain, it is a very deep feeling. And then when you see him lose you are deeply saddened, you suffer. Just as you enjoy if you see him win, not necessarily kill the other<sup>293</sup>.

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<sup>293</sup> Una de las primeras cosas que Juan Javier me enseñó en su explotación fue una jaula con una pareja de un gallo colorado y una gallina casteando.

Juan Javier: Ven, ¿Qué veo yo ahí? Ahí estoy viendo el principio, esto no empieza cuando el gallo nace de un huevo. Empieza mucho antes, ahí en el gallo colorado estoy viendo el abuelo, el tatarabuelo, que yo sé cómo eran, que yo sé que eran gallos muy buenos.

Which comes first, the fighting cockerel or the egg? Neither of them, because such a rhetorical question misses the point. *Castear* (breeding) is what comes first. *Castear* is the process carried out by *casteadores* to breed *gallos de pelea*.

Many fights last just a few minutes. But considering that many fighting birds first step into the cockpit at about one year of age<sup>294</sup>, it is important to attend to what happens in the more than five hundred thousand previous minutes of its life. Breeders stress that cockfighting is much more than just the fights themselves, they regard the fights as the end of a process:

“This is condensed into the five minutes of adrenaline rush in the fights, but you are passionate about the animals since you see them being born”. (Juan Javier 03/06/2016)<sup>295</sup>

It seems clear that expressions of this sort could be motivated by breeders’ feeling that their activity is under constant scrutiny. It is also true, however, that my daily experience with breeders helped me comprehend why they use their day-to-day management to justify their personal passion and the event itself. Here I will offer an account of the day-to-day preparation of the birds.

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Ricardo: Es cómo el árbol genealógico.

Juan Javier: Exactamente, y ahí lo sé seguro. No son probaturas como cuando alguien te deja o te regala un gallo. Ahí tienes que fiarte y hacer probaturas, que alguna tengo también. Pero aquí no, aquí veo la pareja, eso es lo primero que creas, el amor entre los animales. Y eso, venir cada día y verlo es algo que es muy difícil de explicar, es un sentimiento muy profundo. Y luego cuando le ves perder te duele mucho, sufres. Igual que disfrutas si le ves ganar, no necesariamente matar.

<sup>294</sup> During my fieldwork, the age for the first bout in fighting birds varied from 8 to 24 months. But many of them do so when they are about 12 months old and that age can serve as a reference.

<sup>295</sup> “Esto se condensa en los cinco minutos de adrenalina de las peleas pero se vive con pasión desde que los ves nacer”. (Juan Javier 03/06/2016)

## First stage: an infancy together

Regardless of the type of competition a breeder prefers to enter, he has to breed and raise<sup>296</sup> the fighting birds he would like to take to the cockpit. Once the breeder has decided on the breeding couple the incubation period for chicken eggs is about 21 days. A breeder could leave the hen hatch her own chicks<sup>297</sup> but there are reasons he might decide to use a different one to act as a broody and/or surrogate mother. For example, some breeders use hens of domesticated breeds<sup>298</sup> to hatch and rear the chicks. By doing that, he will be able to mate that hen again and get another clutch of eggs while avoiding any aggressive behaviour from the fighting-bred hen. What it would be a problem for laying hens, an unfriendly or/and aggressive character, is actually a quality that is sought in the case of a *gallina fina*.

Eggs are monitored and sometimes marked so the resulting chicks can be identified in terms of their parentage. From birth, birds are identified and treated as individuals; breeders will become deeply acquainted with their characteristics. Keeping a record of all the animals in a notebook is common but breeders will also use other record systems throughout the rearing process. Wing bands, tattoos and other marks will be used to identify birds. Although there is usually a variation in rooster's colours sometimes the inbreeding<sup>299</sup> results in some being almost identical, at least to the uninitiated. My difficulties in differentiating between seemingly similar animals made me interested in reading one of these stud books. One day, when visiting the farm of a Gran Canarian breeder who had become a friend, I asked if he would submit to a playful test. I asked him to

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<sup>296</sup> Due to their technical character, I will not deal in detail with the three following issues: 1) deworming, vital in a *casa de gallos*; 2) vaccination and 3) disease treatment. Some of the most common diseases are (apart from fight injuries) *moquillo*, *boquera*, *ronquera*, *viruela*, *piojillo*, *nubes*, *sarna* and *tiña*.

<sup>297</sup> It is not the most common option, but I saw a few hatch incubators used to maximize the number of offspring.

<sup>298</sup> non-fighting breeds of hens.

<sup>299</sup> As reported by Herzog in the USA (2010:155), breeders' passion for bloodlines makes them talk endlessly about the advantages and disadvantages of crossbreeding and inbreeding.

identify particular birds while I checked this against his stud book. Not a single failure. Nor did other breeders ever fail to identify specific birds on their farms when I asked them to do so. This ability to distinguish between apparently similar animals goes beyond identifying their own fighting birds. If a line of *gallos* becomes famous, many breeders will recognise them by their different characteristics such as head shape or type of comb.

Ramón: I can tell you all the chicks that are here without looking at the records. Anyway, I also have records of all years, from 2013 and 2014.

Ricardo: That's scary (to be able to differentiate them).

Ramón: Look, this is the 2010 one with all the numbers, the mother, the father, green leg, ancestry, etc. And the last one, this year's record. Everything has been noted, even the day it is born. And if they die or if they don't produce good offspring, I cross them out. And I am all by myself here, see what I mean?

Ricardo: The curious thing is that you know it without looking at it. (Ramón 21/05/2016)<sup>300</sup>

It is essential to keep track of the chicks within their clutch as these are *hermanos de padre y madre*<sup>301</sup>. The owners breed more than one line of fighting birds using different pairings of hens

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<sup>300</sup> Ramón: Yo te digo todos los pollos que hay aquí sin mirarlos. Pero después yo tengo mi registro de todos los años, 2013 y 2014.

Ricardo: Eso es acojonante (lo de diferenciarlos).

Ramón: Mira, 2010, los números de las chapas, la madre, el padre, pata verde, de quién me viene, etc. Y la última de este año 2016. Todo apuntado, incluso el día que nace. Y si se mueren o no ligan lo tachó. Y esto soy yo solito, ¿viste?

Ricardo: Lo curioso es que tú lo sabes sin mirarlo. (Ramón 21/05/2016)

<sup>301</sup> Full-brothers.

and cocks as a strategy to reveal whether particular hens are better than particular breeding cocks or vice versa. In terms of breeding<sup>302</sup>, if a hen produces good fighting offspring with many different cocks the breeder will know she is an outstanding mother. The same applies to a *gallo* mated with different hens. Therefore, it is common to compare half-brothers or half-sisters in the case of the hens. I was told many times by the breeders I interviewed that hens are as important as roosters for breeding, if not more so. They are usually sisters of roosters well-tested in plenty of fights, but breeding, especially here when the breeding is for a fighting quality, is not an exact science. One difficulty with hens is that breeders do not see them fighting as males are the only birds to enter *la valla*. Therefore, sometimes it is difficult to obtain good hens for breeding and certainly expensive if one needs to buy one.

The climate in the Canary Islands does not change greatly in temperature throughout the year and breeders could mate hens almost anytime. However, they tend to avoid producing offspring during the moulting period and most breeders mate many of their hens between December and June. Even within that period it is a matter of personal preferences:

"Between March and June hens lay more eggs, because the weather is already warmer, and it is easier for them to lay eggs. But to get the best *pollos* the earlier the better, in January or February. Hens do not lay as many eggs, but chicks develop faster and further in those months".

(Carlos José 03/12/2018)<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> It is widely acknowledged that the mating of outstanding individuals does not necessarily mean an excellent offspring outcome, because sometimes they *no ligan bien* (literally "do not link well").

<sup>303</sup> "Entre marzo y junio las gallinas ponen más huevos, porque el tiempo ya está más cálido y les es más sencillo poner huevos. Pero los mejores pollos se sacan mientras más temprano mejor, enero o febrero. No ponen tantos huevos las gallinas, pero los pollos se desarrollan más y mejor en esos meses". (Carlos José 03/12/2018)



The fighting season runs from January to June which means that winter-hatched *pollos* will be ready to fight next season:

“We are mating the hens in December, you get the chicks in January, raise them for a year and they are ready for the fights next January”. (Javier R. 03/12/2018)<sup>304</sup>

By doing as Javier R. does, the chicks will have a whole year to go through the stages described below. However, individual breeders will adjust these dates depending on their needs and preferences. For example, the competitions they plan to take part in and the lending of a hen for a few months could alter their ideal way of proceeding.

### **I’m a breeder (The displaying)**

Within the first weeks of the chicks’ lives, many breeders share photos of them via messaging apps such as WhatsApp. *Male or female?* is a frequently asked question, as the following example illustrates.

(14/01/2017) Carlos José: Male or female? What do you think?

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<sup>304</sup> “Nosotros ponemos las gallinas en diciembre, tienes los pollos en enero, los crías por un año y están listos para pelear en enero siguiente”. (Javier R 03/12/2018)



Alberto: Female

Damián: Female

Javier R: Female

Ricardo: Female?

Carlos José: Male

Ricardo: Why?

Carlos José: Mainly because of the wattles which are more developed and thicker than in a female of his same age.

(20/01/2017)

Carlos José: It didn't take 15 days to know it. The kid (meaning the chick) is male and fierce!



Javier R: That is not a guarantee. Females also fight.

Carlos José: That is true. But this one is a male, I can see it from his head and I have separated him from the other chick four times and he keeps on fighting. (Carlos José, Alberto, Damían and

Javier R., January 2017)<sup>305</sup>



Communication via messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, has become extremely popular and the apps are used by almost everyone. Breeders take pride in their animals and this is a way to display them while allowing them to quickly seek an opinion or advice for any particular issue (diseases, championships, new products coming or bought overseas, etc). *Gallinas*, *pollos* and *gallos* are sold but also given as a present to some friends. In the latter case, there is almost an unwritten rule of keeping the original breeder informed about how many eggs the hen laid, how the chick grew up

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<sup>305</sup> (14/01/2017) Carlos José: ¿Macho o hembra? ¿Qué piensan?

Alberto: Hembra

Damián: Hembra

Javier R: Hembra

Ricardo: ¿Hembra?

Carlos José: Macho

Ricardo: ¿Por qué?

Carlos José: Sobre todo las barbas por estar más desarrolladas y gruesas que una hembra de su edad.

(20/01/2017)

Carlos José: No hizo falta 15 días para saberlo. ¡Es macho y peleón el pibe!

Javier R: Por eso no te fies. Las hembras también se fajan.

Carlos José: Sí, eso es verdad. Pero este es macho, se le ve en la cabeza y ya lo he separado 4 veces y sigue.

or how the rooster fought. This allows the giver to collect more information on their breeding lines and the possibility of asking for some of the offspring back if needed.

### **Leaving mother's protection**

After approximately two months, the chicks begin to create a hierarchical system amongst themselves and do not depend on their mother anymore. This is also a good time for the breeder to separate males and females. Unlike other poultry farms, a cockfighting breeder will keep more males than females and therefore, inevitably, some females will be discarded.

Before *pollos* reach sexual maturity, they can be kept together. There is not an exact time when breeders separate *pollos* into individual pens but most of them do so between 3-8 months. But that does not mean, as stated above by Carlos José, that *pollos* are not aggressive when they are still immature. Breeders told me, and showed me, over and over that *Ellos se fajan*<sup>306</sup> *desde pequeños* (They fight each other from the time they are little). Breeders deal with fights between animals on a regular basis and they need to be aware and treat the resulting injuries:

“The earliest I have seen them fighting was when they were 18 days old. And watch out for the hens. The other day a female was trying to fight with a male. We now apply some oil to the chicks, so they slip and notice something strange and therefore they stop fighting for a while”.

(Octavio 03/04/2017)<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> In this context, the Spanish verb *fajar* can be translated as “fight”, “come to blows” or “beat somebody up”.

<sup>307</sup> “A mí, como récord, se me han llegado a fajar con 18 días. Y ojo, también las hembras. El otro día se tiraba una hembra a por el macho. Ahora les echamos aceite a los pollos, para que resbalen y noten algo raro y no se fajen en una temporada”. (Octavio 03/04/2017)

Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that breeders talk about the unique nature of the *gallo fino*<sup>308</sup> as will be discussed later in chapter 9. When I recorded the above excerpt, the mother of Octavio was going into the house commenting on a recent fight between chicks and their killing instinct.



*Pollos* walking around pineapples (*Ananas comosus*) in a farm in the island of La Palma. Thanks to J. Almenara.

©Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

The time-range of separating *pollos* mainly depends on the breeder's facilities and the possibility of employing a *machero*. A *machero*<sup>309</sup> is an adult gamecock which prevents *pollos* fighting each

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<sup>308</sup> In the Canary Islands the terms *gallos finos*, *gallos de raza* and *gallos ingleses* are commonly used as synonyms.

<sup>309</sup> The term *machero* is both used for the rooster and the area.

other in an open area free of other cages or flying pens. But not everybody can afford having such a place.

Ricardo: How long do you have the chickens free?

Damián's father: They fight each other after three months.

Damián: And you must lock them up.

Ric: Don't you have a *machero*?

Damián: I cannot do it here. There is no room. This is rented land...the coming year, I would like to rent the land next to this one and place them there with a *machero*.

Ric: There are more people here (in Gran Canaria) raising fighting birds in their houses than in La Palma.

Damián: Sure. Everyone has some land there. (Damián and father 04/05/2017)<sup>310</sup>

Damián has his *pollos* roaming between the cages and, in this case, he cannot prevent them, before too long, from fighting each other and with the ones inside the pens. It is in these cases, without a *machero*, when breeders need to separate the *pollos* earlier.

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<sup>310</sup> Ricardo: ¿Hasta qué meses tenéis sueltos los pollos por aquí?

Padre: A los tres meses se fajan.

Damián: Y hay que encerrarlos.

Ricardo: ¿No tenéis machero?

Damián: Aquí no puedo. No hay sitio. Esto es arrendao además...el año que viene quiero alquilar esta de al lado y ponerles con machero ahí.

Ricardo: Aquí hay más gente cuidando en casas que en La Palma.

Damián: Claro. Allí todo el mundo tiene un terrenito. (Damián y padre 04/05/2017)



Ricardo: At what age are they separated? Because when they are chicks they are all together.

Pepe: When they start fighting; it depends on how you raise them, there are people who raise them with a rooster called *machero*, which hits them so they do not fight each other. Other people raise them without a *machero* and one of the chicks becomes the boss. *Pollos* must have a boss. It can be a *gallo* or one of them. I have raised them in both ways. The problem you have when there is a leader of the same age is that there will always be someone willing to face the leader, therefore they could fight and kill each other.

Ricardo: Is a rebellion more likely to happen?

Pepe: Exactly, I have experienced that. I have suffered it and I was impressed with that. (Pepe

14/04/2016)<sup>311</sup>

In my experience, although it is not seen as indispensable for rearing good fighters, open areas with a *machero* are considered an advantage because they provide stronger and healthier *pollos*. Thus, the breeder can see how the *pollo* behaves while living together with the others.

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<sup>311</sup> Ricardo: ¿A qué edad se separan? Porque cuando son pollos están todos juntos.

Pepe: Cuando ellos se empiezan a pelear, depende de cómo tú los crías, hay gente que los cría los pollos solos y un macho (gallo) que es el machero, que les pega para que no se peleen con los demás, y otros los crían sin el propio machero y uno de ellos se hace el jefe. Los pollos tienen que tener un jefe. Puede ser un gallo o uno de ellos mismos. Yo los he criado de las dos maneras. El problema que tiene cuando hay un líder de la misma edad es que siempre habrá alguno que quiere hacerle frente al líder, se pelean y se matan.

Ricardo: ¿Hay más posibilidades de rebelión?

Pepe: Exactamente. Eso lo he vivido, lo he sufrido y me he quedado impresionado. (Pepe 14/04/2016)

Ricardo: How long do you keep them loose? 6-7 months?

David: It depends on... as we have the *machero* ... Look at these here, male and females together from March. Within a month and a half (3-4 month of age by then) we take them and put them with the *machero*. And they can be there, with the *machero*, until they are at least 7 months old.

This is an advantage we have but some people can't do it. Many people have to put them individually in cages once they reach a fighting size to avoid struggles. And we don't. Look at these brothers and the open wound in the head of that one. That happened so... get by on your own. Because if I lock you up, you will be too small and crappy. It is better to have them loose.

In La Palma they always raise them loose. (David 21/05/2016)<sup>312</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that changing the *gallo* which act as *machero* makes a disturbance more likely. Breeders say the same happens when it rains because the birds cannot recognise each other easily. With or without a *machero*, the cohabitation of *pollos* becomes untenable and, sooner or later, *pollos* will be kept individually<sup>313</sup>. Jokes about the lower quality of somebody's fighting birds are not unusual and breeders sometimes tease each other in a friendly way with things such as "put them together because they won't fight"<sup>314</sup>. Joking aside, birds will have to go through different procedures that will determine, according to the breeder's view, whether they go to the

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<sup>312</sup> Ricardo: ¿Y hasta qué mes se pueden tener sueltos? ¿6-7?

David: Depende, como tenemos el machero...Mira estos de aquí, que están mezclados machos y hembras, (se oye a los pollitos) que serán de marzo, dentro de mes y medio cogemos y van para dentro (serían 3-4 meses entonces). Y allí aguantan con el machero hasta los 7 meses por lo menos. Esto es una ventaja que nosotros tenemos, mucha gente no lo puede hacer. Mucha gente lo tiene en la jaula y desde que tienen ese tamaño que se pueden pelear, lo tienen que poner ya individual. Y nosotros no. Mira, ese es hermano de aquel y mira la cabeza de ese. Se la abrió...pues búscate la vida. Porque es que si te encierro te me vas a quedar pequeño y hecho una mierda. Suelto es como mejor está. Y en La Palma es suelto como mejor siempre. (David 21/05/2016)

<sup>313</sup> This is called *recoger los pollos* (literally "to catch or pick-up the stags") usually because they were fighting each other (*porque se fajaron*).

<sup>314</sup> "Ponlos juntos que no se pelean".



pit, kept for breeding purposes, or discarded. To some extent, the *pollos* have reached this point because of the breeders' views of their parents. From here, however, every bird will have to prove its individual quality. In a general sense, from the moment animals are separated from each other, the keeping and caring stage, called *cuida*<sup>315</sup> begins, and animals will be given a special diet and controlled exercise. The most important thing at this point for the breeder is to begin to understand the qualities of the individual birds.



A *machero* surrounded by *pollos* and *gallinas* in Lanzarote. Thanks to Pablo. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

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<sup>315</sup> *Cuida* or *cuido* ('the keep' in American English, e.g. see Walker, 1986) is the whole package of caring, feeding and training provided to the fighting birds to prepare them for the fights.

## Second stage: starting to become a gamecock

From the time chicks are born, breeders pay attention to their behaviour and identify them individually. This allows them to form a tentative view of how each one might develop through the following stages. The first stage is one of pure nurture and *pollos* will have the chance to prove their condition. Breeders will continue to care for their fighting birds, but they will be required to prove themselves as fighters through a series of interventions.

“Imagine two 9-10-month-old *pollos*. The first *pecha* (spar) is gentle because they don’t know what they are doing. The second time is tougher. And the third one even harder. I do it at home three times and if I’m not satisfied I do not even bother to do the decresting. Out! But if I like it, then comes the decresting. Once the comb has healed, I perform the trimming and start the preparation. If he goes to the cockpit and I really like how he fights, then I will keep him as a father. If I don’t like it, then food for the dogs”. (Jesús 29/03/2016)<sup>316</sup>

## Sparring

Each breeder has his own way of carrying this out but, generally speaking, fighting birds will be sparred at least 3 times to check their condition. In this training, called *pechas* (sparrings), gamecocks usually wear covers over their spurs to prevent serious damage.

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<sup>316</sup> “Vamos a ver. Ponte que pecho dos pollos a los 9-10 meses. La primera pecha es una boba porque no saben lo que hacen. La segunda vez es más fuerte. Y la tercera es más fuerte. Yo los pecho en mi casa. Tres veces y si no me interesa no me molesto ni en cortarle la cresta. Fuera. Y si me gustó, le corto la cresta, la barba y la tal. Cuando se cure le atuso y le voy preparando. Va a la pelea y me gusta como tal, va para padre; no me gusta, pá los perros”. (Jesús 29/03/2016)



Leather and plastic *botanas* (muffs) to protect the spurs. *Botanas* are usually replaced by a piece of cloth and some adhesive tape when roosters have their spurs cut. Thanks to C. Acosta and Cuba Nostalgia. © Ricardo Ontillera (2016/2017)

These are tests where the breeder tries to determine whether the stags have the quality to fight in a competition. To this end, the breeder will keep an eye on many aspects. First of all, birds need to be sparred more than once, on different days, and with different adversaries. It is of critical importance to see how gamecocks react to other gamecocks and their willingness to keep on fighting under different conditions. The first sparring match is the first opportunity for the breeder to see and check the performance of the *pollo* in a pit. It is understood that these are exceptional circumstances (pit, lights, people, etc) for the *pollos* and they could have an impact in their performance. Therefore, it will not be taken as seriously as the following ones where the *pollos* are already accustomed to the artificial environment.

The second and the third *pechas* are usually longer than the first. The longer and tougher a sparring match, the more reliable the information available to the breeder. That is why occasionally, in

these sessions one or both gamecocks goes *espuela libre* or *limpia* (no covers) to check how they react under real fight conditions. This is even more important when dealing with *pollos* which proceed from new breeding lines that have not been previously tested<sup>317</sup> by the breeder. These would be the *probaturas* or testings mentioned by Juan Javier at the beginning of this chapter. It is highly unlikely that a breeder would risk his reputation by going to a competition with fighting birds whose style and performance are largely unknown. One needs to know if a gamecock *aguanta espuela y se crece en el castigo* (put up with the blows of the spurs and grows when being punished) or *no le gustan las espuelas* (doesn't like the spurs).

When assessing the performance of the roosters in the *pechas*, breeders will keep a record as part of his overall evaluation of the birds. Sometimes this record takes the form of handwritten notes on the style of fighting, a numeric scale (e.g., 7.5/10) and/or categorisation systems:

“It had a red strip, a yellow strip and a green strip. For the one who was doing really well, a green strip in the cage. For the one that spar mediocrely, a yellow strip. And I put them from left to right. So, if I had one green, one yellow and one red, that was not worth it. If it was one yellow, one green and one green, that was worthwhile. After three spars”. (Carlos José

29/11/2017)<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Sometimes, when testing new lines, breeders will not bother to test all full-brothers if the first few have a really bad performance.

<sup>318</sup> “Tenía cintillo rojo, cintillo amarillo y cintillo verde. El que pechaba bien bien, cintillo verde en la jaula. El que pechaba regular, cintillo amarillo. Y lo ponía de izquierda a derecha. Entonces, si tenía uno verde, uno amarillo y uno rojo, ese no valía. Sí tenía uno amarillo, uno verde y uno verde, ese valía. Con las tres pechas”. (Carlos José 29/11/2017)



Regardless of the method used, breeders will pay attention to trends rather than to the average performance. In other words, breeders will have much more confidence in a gamecock with three consecutive scores of 6,7 and 8 than in one with a decreasing trend of 8,7 and 6. A diminishing trend could lead breeders to think that a stag will finally refuse to fight or will fly away under the harshest conditions.



Different handwritten entries in a farm in La Palma. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

Needless to say, some behaviours, such as a continuing refusal to attack or *canta la gallina*<sup>319</sup> (literally “hen singing”) will make a breeder to discard the fighting birds quickly. No matter how

<sup>319</sup> ‘Refers to a bird which flees from its opponent whilst at the same time making a low clucking sound’ (Marvin, 1984:64).

well a stag fights if the first time he is cut he leaves the pit this is a sign of poor fighting quality. A fighting bird that flies (or runs) away will be considered a *mestizo*<sup>320</sup>.

It needs to be emphasised that sparring matches as tests are not exclusively for young birds and *casteadores* and *cuidadores* use them every season to reassess older gamecocks' readiness and willingness to fight.

## Naming

Many, but not all, fighting birds are named. Breeders normally use names indicating the qualities and attributes of individual birds rather than choosing from a pool of predetermined names<sup>321</sup>.

"This is *The Camel*, because he drinks more water than a camel, he drinks 2 pots every day. And this one *The Dromedary*, he does not drink water, but he is the brother of *The Camel*. He spars well, let's see if he is as good as his brother *The Camel* who has killed three times this year. This is *The Venetian Blind*, because it's always up there stuck to the bars. And *The Handsome Boss*, because every time I go to catch him, he attacks me". (Carlos José 10/07/2017)<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> "Dunghill" in American English.

<sup>321</sup> Although sometimes breeders use the names of well-known people such as football players (Messi, Asensio, Rakitic, Diego Costa, etc.).

<sup>322</sup> "Este es *El camello*, porque bebe más agua que un camello, se bebe todos los días 2 cacharros. Y este *El Dromedario*, no bebe agua, pero es hermano de *El camello*. Este lo hace bien pechando, a ver si es igual de bueno que su hermano *El Camello* que ha matado tres este año. Este es *El Persiana*, porque siempre está arriba pegado a las rejas. Y *El Papichulo*, porque cada vez que le voy a coger se me tira a las manos". (Carlos José 10/07/2017)

Within a famous lineage (*castío* or *linaje*), such as for example *The Wasps*<sup>323</sup>, each animal might have his own name. For example, *The Chocolate One*, *The Ugly One* and *The Perfect Weight* were all *Wasps* I saw in La Palma in 2017. Sometimes a rooster, or a group of brothers, fights so well that he/they will be selected for brood stock. When the offspring is good enough, his/their nickname could become the main name of the lineage. Therefore, if *The Camel's* sons keep on winning fights they too might all be known as *The Camels*. However, that does not imply that the breeder<sup>324</sup> forgets the different lineages (or bloodlines) converging in an individual fighting bird. Breeders are often deeply engrossed in lineage conversations and how certain animals behave and fight. There are no official pedigree certificates in the Canary Islands but fighting birds are pedigree creatures in the sense that breeders always have a record of ancestors. It is the quality of the ancestors that leads breeders to hope that certain characteristics will be inherited by the offspring of the breeding pairs. To follow these conversations one not only needs to know cockfighting vocabulary but the specific lineages mentioned.



A Giro 100% Avispa. ♀ Aldea-Zorro and ♂ Arteché espuela negra- tripa. © Ricardo Ontillera.

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<sup>323</sup> “Los Avispas” in Spanish.

<sup>324</sup> Carlos “El Manís” in La Palma was unbeatable on this.

Although some chicks might be specifically named soon after birth they tend to be known as *the chicks of* a particular hen or rooster. *The Wasp's sons*<sup>325</sup>, continuing with the example above. A *gallo* can lack a name but not a lineage, even if it is simply the one of its parents. It will probably be during the rearing process when, observing his behaviour<sup>326</sup> or his looks, the breeder will pick a name for the animal. Not only stags and roosters but also hens<sup>327</sup> are named.

Almost everyone has his preferences regarding some characteristics such as plumage colour, legs<sup>328</sup> colour and type of comb. Therefore, people might talk about how beautiful and well-proportionated a particular *gallo* is. Nevertheless, although breeders have favourite characteristics this is a matter of aesthetics and I was always told that in the end what really matters is how they fight. Aficionados are interested in the way that a gamecock fights irrespective of whether it is a fine physical specimen. Genetic studies (Orozco, 1989) seem to support this idea when pointing out *casta* as the main factor for deciding on the breeding stock. That would be the main reason for the large heterogeneity of colours because the birds themselves are heterogeneous in terms of breeding<sup>329</sup>.

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<sup>325</sup> Grandsons, great grandsons, etc.

<sup>326</sup> While sparring or at any other moment.

<sup>327</sup> Mainly (but not always) after her brother's name. For example, *El Zidane/ La Zidane, El payaso/ La payasa*.

<sup>328</sup> Sometimes called "shank" in English. *Pata verde* (green leg) and *Pata blanca* (white leg) are less common in the Canary Islands than the regular "yellow" leg.

<sup>329</sup> Colour is also described as something unimportant in other works. For instance, chapter 10 of *Cockfighter* (Willeford, 1962) begins with an anonymous English cocking poem:

The scarlet cock, my lord likes best,  
And next to him, the gray with the thistle-breast.  
This knight is for the pile, or else the Black.  
A third cries no cock like the dun, yellow back.  
The milk-white cock with golden legs and bill.  
Or else the Spangle, choose as you will.  
The King he swears (of all), these are the best.  
They heel, says he, more true than all the rest.  
But this all mere fancy, and no more,  
The color's nothing, as I've said before!



### *Una pintura de gallo*<sup>330</sup>

Fighting birds are colourful and bright. That was one of the first things that I noticed. According to the breeders, the brightness of the feathers is due to the feeding programme implemented through the rearing phase. *Colorado, giro, melado, pinto, gallino, retinto*, etc., the list of plumage colours<sup>331</sup> is long and its terminology constitutes part of the lexical richness of cockfighting at local level. One of the first topics raised by Latin Americans and Andalusians competing in the Canary Islands was the different terms used by Canarian breeders. Breeders sometimes combine two colours (*melado colorado*) or add other words to the colours to make them more descriptive, such as *blanco café con leche* (literally “white coffee with milk”).

As previously mentioned, *casta* is an essential inner quality whereas colour is a matter of surface aesthetics. However, many Canarian breeders will choose some colours in preference to others. The idea that colour is not important does not mean that all colours are regarded as having equal chances of resulting in a great fighter. When talking about plumage colours with breeders, it became obvious that some features, such as *gallino* and *colino*, will dominate over the real colour. A *gallino* (hencock) is a gamecock which has rounded saddle<sup>332</sup> feathers and lack the longest feathers on the tail (known as *gallardetes*<sup>333</sup>) while a *colino* is a gamecock with no tail at all. This means that his colour will be *gallino* or *colino* no matter the colour pattern.

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<sup>330</sup> An expression which is used for beautiful roosters – A real picture of a bird – in idiomatic English.

<sup>331</sup> To avoid any misconceptions, as the breeds are usually different in English-speaking countries, I chose to put photographs of the most common colours rather than translating the names into English. *Colorado, giro, melado, pinto, gallino, semigallo, retinto, blanco, bragado, jabado, naranjo, cenizo, canabuey, colino, terciopelo, carnaval*, etc. See Pérez-Corrales (2008) for more information.

<sup>332</sup> Saddle or back feathers are the ones covering the back before the tail. They are usually long and pointed on roosters and rounded on hens.

<sup>333</sup> Sickle feathers (*gallardetes*) are the two longest curved feathers of the rooster’s tail. Sometimes, when sickle feathers are shorter than usual, the roosters are referred to as *semigallos*.



Some colours of fighting birds in the Canary Islands. From left to right and from top to bottom: *Giro*, *gallino*, *pinto*, *melado* y *semigallo*. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

Taste regarding colours differs from that in mainland Spain and even between islands. It probably depends on many things<sup>334</sup> but, generally, I found more open-minded breeders with regards to non-habitual colours in Gran Canaria than in La Palma. Some plumage colours such as *colorado*, *giro* and *melado* are considered pure or proper for a gamecock while others such as *jabado*, *naranja*,

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<sup>334</sup> E.g, nationality, if he has competed overseas, etc.

*colino*, and *gallino* are sometimes seen as mixed and therefore more likely to have been achieved by crosses with untrustworthy gamecocks. Jokes about how *jabados* and *colinos* would fly away were very common, especially in La Palma. White roosters are also rejected by some breeders who joke about them with comments such as “you will cook a good soup for Christmas with that one, is there more than one?”<sup>335</sup>. This is, of course, only relevant in general terms, and there are those who like unusual colours.

“You only find these *gallinos* in the cages of those who like *gallinos*. Other people nothing but *colorao* and *melao*. That white *gallino* is beautiful mate ... it is just that it is such a strange colour for a *gallo* with many fights. I had a white *gallino* last year who won his first fight comfortably. It was quick, quick. But, unluckily, he was hit in the eye. I don’t even know exactly at what point because I told you it was quick. He did it well”. (Carlos José 03/12/2017)<sup>336</sup>

One would never hear such a statement about a *colorado*, *giro* or *melado* in the Canary Islands. But one might hear something similar about a *jabado*. When seriously hurt, a *jabado* would be, for many, more suspected of flying away than a *colorado*, a *melado* or a *giro*. If this *jabado* is also *colino* it would be doubly more suspicious<sup>337</sup>. One of the reasons for this mistrust might be the fact

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<sup>335</sup> “con ése haces buena sopa para Navidad, ¿hay más de uno?”.

<sup>336</sup> “Esos gallinos sólo pueden estar en las jaulas de lo que nos gustan los gallinos. Otros na más que colorao y melao. Ese gallino blanco está precioso muchacho...lo que pasa que vaya color raro para ser un gallo de muchas peleas. Bueno, el año pasado yo tuve un gallinito blanco aquí que ganó la primera bien. Rápida, rápida. Y la putada fue que me le apuñalaron un ojo, no sé ni en qué momento...porque ya te digo que ganó rápido. Lo hizo bien”. (Carlos José 03/12/2017)

<sup>337</sup> Again, this is only in general terms and there are those who likes *colinos* and/or *jabados*.

that *colinos* and *jabados* have never been common in the Canary Islands and, consequently, their lines are difficult to trace.

*Colino* roosters are a case in point regarding regional tastes. They are not allowed to compete in many *contratas* and the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting has been discussing lately about the possibility of extending this prohibition to championships in an attempt to regulate more specifically the standard of the Canarian variety of *Combatiente Español*. One certainly does not see many *colinos* competing on the Spanish archipelago. However, they are more abundant, and better considered, on mainland Spain.



*Colino Jabado*. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

*Gallos* can change colour, due to the moult in the summer months, from one year to another. To complete the colour theme, the idea that I would like to convey is that, on one hand, many breeders have their own preferences, especially when birds' qualities are regarded as similar. But, on the other hand, no one would discard a bird, with unaesthetically pleasing plumage, whose performance (while sparring) is outstanding.



### The decresting (*el decrestado*)

If a breeder is convinced by the performance of a *pollo* in the sparring sessions, he will undertake the decresting<sup>338</sup>. Decresting, sometimes referred to as ‘dubbing’ in the literature, is the procedure of cutting off the comb, wattles and earlobes tight to the head. Even if the *pollo* is thought of for fighting in a *contrata*, this procedure is usually undertaken by the breeder (or a friend) before<sup>339</sup> taking the birds to the *gallera*.



Two fighting birds with two types of combs. Thanks to Jose Luis Martín. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

The *descrestado* is, again, another way to check the quality of the animal and breeders will look carefully at how the bird reacts to pain. The reasons for this procedure are related to hygiene and

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<sup>338</sup> It is not very common nowadays, but a few breeders do the decresting to some of their fighting birds before the spars. That could be the case with *gallos* competing in *contratas* and belonging to a line with a proven track record. A breeder could decide, due to lack of time and/or having a great deal of confidence in the *cuidador's* skills, to leave the sparring just in the *cuidador's* hands. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the breeders I met in the Canary Islands undertake the decresting after the spars to check first if they are good at fighting.

<sup>339</sup> On the other hand, the trimming is usually done by the *cuidadores* when gamecocks fight in a *contrata*.

the development of the fight. As one might anticipate, the comb and the wattles are easy targets during the fighting and bleed profusely when damaged. All the gamecocks I saw fighting in a *contrata* or a championship had been decrested.

Ricardo: At what point do you undertake the decresting?

Pepe: Since you see that he ceases to be a *pollo*, when he is already a *gallito*. From that moment onwards. When they are 4-5-month-old you can cut his comb. But my view is that the later the better. He keeps his naturalness and he will be stronger to deal with the amount of blood lost during the procedure. If he is very *pollito*, he is going to be more affected by the bleeding.

Ricardo: Why is the comb removed?

Pepe: It is part of the Canarian trimming, without comb.

Ricardo: Some people told me about the parasites.

Pepe: The trimming is of the feathers, but it is also the head, no comb and no wattles. Clean head. When it comes to healing you know where the wound is. It's a question of healing more than anything else. (Pepe 14/04/2016)<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Ricardo: ¿En qué momento se les corta la cresta?

Pepe: Desde que tú veas que deja de ser pollo, que ya es gallito ya. Desde ese momento o más tarde. A un pollo con 4-5 meses ya se la puedes cortar. Pero yo soy más partidario de cuanto más tarde mejor. Mantiene su naturalidad y luego están más fuertes para la sangre que pierden. Si es muy pollito le va a afectar más la sangre que va a perder.

Ricardo: ¿Por qué se le quita la cresta?

Pepe: Forma parte del atusado canario, sin cresta.

Ricardo: Hay gente que me dice que por los parásitos.

Pepe: El atusado es la pluma, pero también es la cabeza, sin cresta y sin barba. Cabeza limpia. A la hora de curarlo sabes dónde está la herida. Es cuestión de curar más que otra cosa. (Pepe 14/04/2016)

Different breeders will have different preferences regarding when and how the decresting should be undertaken<sup>341</sup>. However, October, November and December are usually a good time to carry it out with slightly cooler temperatures helping with a quicker healing. It is also worth noting that fighting birds have a variety of combs<sup>342</sup> and breeders sometimes use the names for these to refer to individual birds, usually combined with other characteristics like the colour (e.g, *Colorado cabezacarnero*<sup>343</sup>). As commented by Pepe, the decresting can be considered the first step of the Canarian trimming.



Two decrested fighting birds. On the left, *Naranjo cabezacarnero*. On the right, *Naranjo crestudo*. Thanks to Peña

El Paso. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

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<sup>341</sup> For instance, I was told a few times about the supposed effect of moon phase, and time of day, on the bleeding. A group of Cuban breeders who had been competing in the Canary Islands for more than a decade gave me some documentation about that.

<sup>342</sup> For instance, *sierra*, *rosa*, *cabeza carnero*, etc.

<sup>343</sup> See Pérez-Corrales (2008:569) for the story of the *villegas*, probably the most famous line of *cabezacarnero* gamecocks in La Palma.

## Canarian Trimming (*El atusado canario*)

Once a breeder has decided that a *pollo* is ready to fight in the near future, he will trim it. The trimming<sup>344</sup> is the procedure by which part of the plumage is shaved or cut away. The aim is to create a defence against the opponent (long feathers can be held onto by an opponent) and ease the curing of the wounds after the fight. But above all, it is a matter of aesthetics and part of the specific culture of Canarian *casteadores*. I was repeatedly told that the Canarian trimming<sup>345</sup> is different from the styles on mainland Spain and Latin America. In the vast majority of competitions, all breeders are asked to trim their animals according to the traditional Canarian style. However, the exact nature of trimming depends on the taste of each breeder and there are some foreign variations allowed<sup>346</sup>. For example, completely shaved thighs are commonly accepted.

What follows is a brief illustration of how two *cuidadores*<sup>347</sup> from the island of La Palma usually perform the Canarian trimming. It is worth mentioning that there is not a fixed sequence followed by everyone and many have their own procedural tricks and preferences (individual or by pairs).

After sharpening the scissors<sup>348</sup> and sitting comfortably on a small stool or chair, the first step is to put foam rubber between the legs of a bird before tying them together. This is to ensure that neither the man nor the animal gets hurt. As shown in the pictures, the fighting bird is placed between the thighs.

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<sup>344</sup> *Atusar* in Spanish.

<sup>345</sup> See Pérez-Corrales (2008:77) for more information.

<sup>346</sup> I noticed that, at least in the cases of La Palma and Gran Canaria, trimming rules are usually more flexible in championships than in *contratas*.

<sup>347</sup> I would like to thank *Gallera La Libertad* for giving me the opportunity to attend to this process on 3rd April 2017 and *Gallera Los Halcones* (Francisco and Loli) on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

<sup>348</sup> Scissors of various sizes are used.





Before and after of the trimming in a *Giro Carey*. Thanks to César and Nerín. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

- 1) Head: all feathers but the small ones covering the ear are removed.
- 2) Neck: all trimmed.
- 3) Wings: usually begins by removing the first layer of feathers *para que no quede fea*<sup>349</sup> and then the feathers underneath, just attached to the bone *a la alita de pollo*<sup>350</sup>. In some cases, for aesthetic reasons, some feathers are cut out in a square-shaped manner at the tip.
- 4) Then the thighs, where in the upper part a triangle shaped area (sometimes called *corchete*) will be less trimmed.
- 5) After that, the *cuidador* lifts the feathers on the back to determine how to cut them (see next figure). In the Canarian tradition the back is less trimmed than in the Andalusian or the Dominican. Care must be taken not to harm the *aceitera*<sup>351</sup> which provides grease for the feathers.

<sup>349</sup> "so that it doesn't look ugly".

<sup>350</sup> "to the chicken wing".

<sup>351</sup> The uropygial or the oil gland.

- 6) After the back, the abdomen will be done and then the tail (if needed).
- 7) The shaving of *pelillos de la barbilla*<sup>352</sup> underneath the head will finalize the trimming.
- 8) When completed, the trimmed area must be sponged with a liquid solution which includes rosemary, arnica and other plants. This is very important to prevent infections.



Different steps of the trimming performed in different birds. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

After the trimming the bird will have lost about two ounces. It is also worth noting that, due to the moult, fighting birds are trimmed<sup>353</sup> once a year. Sometimes, to give the animal a better look, incipient feathers are removed a couple of days before the fights. This is usually called *retusar*.

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<sup>352</sup> Literally “small hairs (feathers) of the chin”.

<sup>353</sup> Only the ones that fight that season. If they are kept for other purposes, such as a brood cock, they are not usually trimmed.

### Third stage: the preparation

Up to this point, the steps followed by breeders are the same no matter the modality of competition. The clear majority of them breed their animals on their farms. As has been mentioned before in this dissertation, breeders consider gamecocks as animals of a unique nature. That is probably why they talk about *cuido* (caring) or *preparación* (preparation) rather than *entrenamiento* (training<sup>354</sup>). At this stage, diet and exercising are essential to have fighting birds in peak condition.

One of the features which makes the Canary Islands unique in the cockfighting world is the fact that, in the *contrata* mode, a huge part of this *cuido* and preparation is provided by *cuidadores* at the *casa de gallos*<sup>355</sup>. The *cuido* and preparation given to fighting birds by a breeder who only competes in championships will be similar to the ones provided in a *casa de gallos* but on a smaller scale in a breeder's farm. In order to better illustrate how a *casa de gallos* works (chapter 7) I will first present an ethnographic description of the cockfights (chapter 6) which will help me to discuss some emerging issues and the differences between *contratas* and *campeonatos*.

But first, to close this chapter, let me comment in more detail on the concept of *casta* because it is vital to fully understand not only the rearing phase, but the whole world of cockfighting on the archipelago.

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<sup>354</sup> The English term "conditioning" is widely used in English-speaking countries: "conditioning pens", "peaks of conditioning" (see, e.g., Walker (1986)).

<sup>355</sup> The *Casa de Gallos* or *gallera*, is the place where a *partido* (team) keeps and prepares its fighting birds. Although there are breeders who only compete in one of the modalities described, many of them will do it in both. For breeders, it is not unusual to keep some gamecocks for *contratas* and others for championships. In addition, I also saw a few roosters competing in both. In any case, fighting birds which just fight in championships will go through a similar process.

## ***Casta*: some notes on a difficult term to translate**

What are we talking about when we talk about *casta*?<sup>356</sup> (Damián 29/11/2017)

It would be difficult to find a better example than the above-mentioned to illustrate the several meanings of *casta* for a Canarian breeder. It is challenging to find an adequate English term for *casta* because it is used for different things and not everyone conceived of it in the same way. On one hand, *casta* refers to the lineage of a rooster, that is to say, his bloodline. The Spanish noun *castíos* or *castas* are used to describe the different lineages obtained by a breeder through the process of *castear* (breeding). Sometimes this specific meaning can be translated into English as “good blood”<sup>357</sup>. On the other hand, *casta* refers to a complex amalgam of animal qualities that we could try to translate into English as “gameness”<sup>358</sup>. In the English literature on cockfighting, gameness has been defined as ‘their desire to fight to the death’<sup>359</sup>. This second<sup>360</sup>, but equally important, meaning of *casta* is by far the most important trait for breeders:

Damián: The first thing you want when you have gallos is the *casta*.

Alberto: The *casta*. The endurance.

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<sup>356</sup> ¿De qué estamos hablando cuando hablamos de *casta*? (Damián 29/11/2017)

<sup>357</sup> See, e.g, Willeford (2015:66) where “good blood” is translated as *casta*.

<sup>358</sup> Sometimes, the English term “gameness” is translated into Spanish as *bravura* (Willeford, 2015:71). However, *bravura*, a common term in bullfighting, is not widely used in the Canarian cockfights. Therefore, in the Canary Islands one will often hear *casta* for both the abovementioned “good blood” and “gameness”.

<sup>359</sup> (Herzog, 2010:155)

<sup>360</sup> In the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (Real Academia Española) both lineage (*ascendencia* or *linaje*) and quality (*calidad*) are definitions of *casta*. Available at: <https://dle.rae.es/?w=casta> (Accessed:27/10/2018).

Damián: To know how far the animal can go. (Damián and Alberto 29/11/2017)<sup>361</sup>

According to breeders, it is only in difficult or trying situations that the true *casta* is revealed. Only under extremely difficult conditions a breeder can determine the *casta* of a fighting bird. A breeder may be reluctant to admit the *casta* or excellence of roosters whose victories have been, to some extent, easy.

“I have the feeling that these *gallos* won’t be that ferocious if they lost the eyes. It’s the feeling that I have. But it’s true that I also have the feeling that they are not *mestizos*. Because they fought 6 times as *pollos*, in some cases they were hurt in the neck and after 15 days they fought and killed another one”. (Carlos José 11/29/2017)<sup>362</sup>

We could be tempted to believe that there are just two types of fighting birds, with and without *casta* (*mestizos*). Nothing could be further from the truth because we should think of *casta* as a point between two poles. On one side, fighting birds which are already scared when they face their opponent and, on the other side, the ideal *gallo* which will fight till win or to the death no matter

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<sup>361</sup> Damián: Lo primero que se busca cuando tienes gallos es la casta.

Alberto: La casta. El aguante.

Damián: Saber hasta dónde puede llegar el animal. (Damián y Alberto 29/11/2107)

<sup>362</sup> “La sensación que yo tengo es que no son gallos que a lo mejor les quitan los dos ojos y van a ser igual de fieras. Es la sensación que yo tengo. Pero es verdad que tengo la sensación de que mestizos no son. Porque el subir 6 veces de pollo, en algunas ocasiones le han dado por el pescuezo y a los 15 días han peleao y han matao a otro”. (Carlos José 29/11/2017)

what. But breeders recognise that perfection is wholly unrealistic, and it is commonly said that every rooster has an opponent that could beat him or even make him flee.

"Obviously I want mine to not run, pecking at the top, cutting every time he uses the spurs, and when his eyes are lost, I want him to keep on fighting and cutting... but few are like Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo". (Carlos José 29/11/2017)<sup>363</sup>

In fact, breeder's work is to try to have most of their cockerels close to the ideal pole. However, for that to happen, the correct selection of the breeding couple is essential because *casta* is perceived as something that breeders cannot really boost because it is an innate characteristic of fighting birds. Breeders feel that a cockerel that is likely to fly away, meaning a mestizo, will eventually do it no matter how much training it has. What they can really do, through the taking care process (rearing, preparation, food, etc) is to help them to bring out, and reveal, the *casta* they have. Expressions such as *saca lo que tienes dentro* ("bring out what you have inside") would go in that direction. I shall explain how the cockfights work shortly (see chapter 6) but the essential point here is the importance of the previously described steps to start assessing the quality of a fighting bird.

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<sup>363</sup> "Evidentemente yo quiero que el mío sea que no corra, que pique por arriba, que cada vez que tire meta las espuelas, y que cuando le quiten los ojos, pelee y siga metiendo las espuelas... pero Messi y Cristiano Ronaldo hay pocos". (Carlos José 29/11/2017)

“I believe that in order for you to determine that a *gallo* has great *casta*, that must be looked at in many small things. I don’t know, from having a mother with plenty of fighting spirit to a father with a lot of attitude but always gentle, not cantankerous, and without pecking when handled (by the breeder), not being scary ... There are many little things. From the time the clutch is born and they fight among themselves and tear themselves apart. Eh ...that’s what I mean when I say there are many things. His attitude later in the *machero* with 3, 4 or 5 months when he is already with other male *pollos* and he is dominant. So, I think that's one thing, at least what quality is, the *finura* (keenness) of fighting to the end is demonstrated by many small things. I think you should seek these small things to say, at the end, that he is a *gallo*... or he can be a *gallo*...then he has to prove it". (Carlos José 29/11/2017)<sup>364</sup>

This process of testing, proving, and demonstrating is indeed a substantial part of the following chapters where I present an ethnographic description of cockfights and a picture of how a *casa de gallos* works in the Canary Islands. Returning to Carlos José’s words, an outsider might be surprised to find that being gentle when handled (*manso en mano*, literally “tame in hand”) is considered a sign of quality in a fighting bird. It should be recalled that the aggressiveness associated with *casta* is related to the behaviour of roosters when interacting with each other rather than with the breeders or even other animals.

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<sup>364</sup> “Yo creo que para denominar tú a un gallo de mucha casta, eso se debe mirar en muchas pequeñas cosas. No sé, desde que la madre es una gallina peleona, desde que el padre es un gallo con mucha actitud, de estar manso (en mano) siempre, no ser picón (con el casteador), no ser arisco (hacia el casteador) no ser espantadizo...Son todo un montón de pequeñas cosas. Desde que nace la camada y se pelean entre ellos y se despedazan. Eh...a esto me refiero que son muchísimas cosas. La actitud después cuando está en el machero y es dominante. Con 3, 4 o 5 meses cuando ya está con otros pollos macho y es dominante. Entonces, yo creo que eso es una cosa, por lo menos lo que es la calidad, la finura de pelear hasta el final, se demuestra en muchas pequeñas cosas...Yo creo que lo que hay que intentar es que tengas muchas pequeñas de esas cosas para tú al final decir este es un gallo...o puede ser un gallo...después lo tiene que demostrar”. (Carlos José 29/11/2017)



Closely linked with the concept of proven *casta*, I think it is worth mentioning what happens with some outstanding fighting birds at the end of their fighting career. As seen in this chapter, when reaching a certain point, no breeder will keep an animal whose fighting skills are not appreciated. However, on the other hand, either because they have fought many times or because their injuries prevent them from fighting anymore, some roosters are at times kept on the farms because *se lo han ganado* (they have earned it). These are heroes who gained the respect of the breeder up in *la valla* and deserve a retirement<sup>365</sup>. If the rooster is still able to produce offspring, the breeder might try to breed him to produce descendants. Although it is not easy for a fighting bird to reach this status, I usually found one or two in most of the farms I visited<sup>366</sup>.

Expanding on the concept of *casta*, as pointed out by Hartigan<sup>367</sup>, since the 15th century, a few of the earliest Spanish dictionaries<sup>368</sup> and agricultural texts refer to the concept of *raza*<sup>369</sup> or *casta* when dealing with the methods and techniques used by breeders and farmers with the aim of improving their stock. In this use of *raza*, breeding is important but, rather than referring to a natural quality, it stresses the caring aspects when altering the species being. The agricultural contexts in which the word was originated would show that ‘*raza* is not used to name natural species but rather domesticates, ones that are cultural forms as much as they are life forms’ (Hartigan 2017:35). In that sense, it also challenges the assumption that race is fundamentally

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<sup>365</sup> That was sometimes a matter of disagreement, especially when some breeders thought that others were using really good roosters for unpleasant tasks such as *cachiporros*.

<sup>366</sup> This idea of retirement after working hard, has also been reported (Zoubek, 2018:317-318) in small-scale chicken keeping in modern Britain where some laying hens are kept after stopping their production.

<sup>367</sup> Hartigan (2017:34-35)

<sup>368</sup> For example, *raza* is defined as ‘la casta de caballos castizos’, or ‘the caste of thoroughbred horses’ in *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* written by Covarrubias in 1611 (cited in Hartigan, 2017:34).

<sup>369</sup> Interestingly, Brazilian breeders use the term ‘*raça*’ (race) to talk about both breed and gameness (see, for example, Corrêa (2017:125,132,165,298)).

about humans while emphasising the parallels, rather than the otherness, product of great intimacy across species lines<sup>370</sup>.

This great intimacy is at least partially responsible for the differences between uneducated and educated eyes when caring and selecting<sup>371</sup>. ‘A species as an object of care’ (Hartigan 2017:38) is the key point here to understand the “many little things” previously described by Carlos José when determining whether a *gallo* has great *casta*. Breeders’ accuracy of eye would most likely go unnoticed by outsiders. Outsiders, including academics, who tend to focus on the public side of the practice, that is to say the cockfights.

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<sup>370</sup> Hartigan (2017:31-35)

<sup>371</sup> See Hartigan’s mention of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (Hartigan, 2017:38-42).

## 6

### ***RIÑAS DE GALLOS (COCKFIGHTS) DESCRIBED***

What follows is a detailed ethnographic description of cockfighting based on my fieldwork experience in the Canary Islands. I regard this description of how the event unfolds as a necessary stage for the issues that will be analysed in the last part of the dissertation. Therefore, with the help of narrative fragments and quotes from the interviews and informal talks, the description is organised according to eight different aspects of the event:

- The *Reñidero* (Cockpit) - physical features
- The Audience at *las riñas* - reflections on sex, age and class
- *La casada* (The Pairing)
- Organisation of Cockfights: *Contrata* and *Campeonato* (League and Championship)
- Weighing, cleaning, and pitting - the ritualised steps in *contratas*
- The fight
- After the fights
- Betting

### 8<sup>th</sup> day of fieldwork. First Day in the league of Gran Canaria

It was 3pm when I met the first to arrive at the *reñidero* (cockpit); three Cuban men who drive every weekend from south to north to participate in *la Contrata*. Eladio took the carrying bag out of the car and complained about the high temperatures we were suffering in January. They needed a minute to treat their *gallo* and put him under the shade of a tree. Eladio cut a couple of feathers to preen their fighting bird, who was standing upright when he got him back again to the carrying bag. These were difficult times to carry roosters by hand outside of the building. The media pressure to ban cockfighting was increasing rapidly and the Federation had asked the *casteadores* (breeders) to strictly follow the current regulations.

*Casteadores* and aficionados were coming slowly to the arena where fights take place. This ancient practice had seen better times, where hundreds of people attended every weekend to support one of the competing teams or place a bet on a famous rooster. But still, cockfighting aficionados attending the fights could be counted by dozens. The variety of bags used to carry the birds went from cloth bags to wooden boxes, all having holes to breathe and comfortable floors to rest. And it was not unusual to read slogans on these bags or even on their t-shirts and caps; they seemed deeply proud of their passion.

When I entered the *reñidero* I was talking to Jose Carlos, a Canarian breeder who had been involved in other indoors sports held in that local sports centre, such as Canarian Wrestling and Boxing. Thanks to my previous meeting with the President of the Canarian Federation of Cockfighting, it was easier to introduce myself to other breeders who were having a drink at the bar. That was the beginning of the way to understand how a regular day works at the fights.

- Are you writing a book in favour of or against the fights? - I was asked by a group of guys who treated me to a beer. They told me how was the first *casada* (pairing) of the year for their team, formed by a group of *casteadores* placed in southern Gran Canaria. Actually, two of them were fighting the lightest and the heaviest roosters of the evening, with 3.8 and 4.8 pounds respectively.

With less than an hour to start the fights, another team was setting up *la valla* (the ring), a circular fence structure elevated over the floor. And there I was at the stands, watching the flow of people greeting each other, fitting the spurs, handing their roosters in, quietly speaking about bloodlines, etc. Engrossed by my first day at the league I barely listened to Jose Carlos, - don't worry about the fights because it will take you a few weeks to understand what is going on down there -. But, even so, I felt quite confident writing in my notebook and chatting with the *casteadores*.

Around 4pm I took a seat while the audience gazed at *la valla* when four people went up to weigh and clean the first pair of fighting birds. Then, they faced each other and released them. The stopwatch was pressed and I was eager to learn how fights work. After twelve minutes, when the chronometer was stopped and the *jueces* declared *tablas* (a draw) I was keener than ever. Why? Well, I had understood almost nothing of the event itself.



Two Cuban breeders heeling a rooster in Gran Canaria. Thanks to *Cuba Nostalgia*. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

## The *Reñidero*<sup>372</sup> (Cockpit) - physical features

The place where the fights take place is called *reñidero* or *gallera*. The former constituted by a process of metonymy and the latter when the facilities were built with the sole purpose of holding cockfights, as in the case of *Gallera López Socas* in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria<sup>373</sup>. In any case, *casteadores* often use the two terms interchangeably so from now on, I will use *reñidero* to avoid any misunderstanding with the *gallera* (also called *casa de gallos*), the place where the *partidos* (teams) keep and prepare their roosters.

Although the earliest cockfighting references<sup>374</sup> in the archipelago mentioned outdoor fights, such as in the courtyards of the mansions of the aristocracy, the construction of cockpits began to take place gradually to host the event. The above-mentioned López Socas was opened in 1980 and it is still open for competitions while sharing the facilities with other sports competitions such as Canarian Wrestling, Boxing or Muay Thai.

Political pressures and declining audiences, particularly in Tenerife, have lately resulted in pushing the event away from local sports centres in some cities, even if they were built for cockfighting. In such cases, other buildings such as old factories, garages or industrial premises have been bought or rented to host the competitions. Whatever the overall building might be, the internal structuring, for cockfights, is consistent.

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<sup>372</sup> The Spanish verb *reñir* can be translated into English as “telling off”, “quarrel”, “fight”, “struggle”, etc. Therefore, a *reñidero* is a place where *riñas de gallos* (bouts) are held.

<sup>373</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:229)

<sup>374</sup> See, e.g., Béthencourt-Massieu (1982).



Any *reñidero* is basically a roofed building with seats or stands around the ring (*la valla*). *La valla* is a circular fenced structure, elevated above floor level, with two opposite ladders to get the *gallos* in. There are no standard dimensions but all of them are about 3.5 m diameter, with 1 m high vertical bars, 10 cm apart. This structure reduces the roosters' chance of escaping but still allows the birds to fly away, flying or slip between the bars.



The president of the Federation and two of his collaborators setting up *la valla* in the *Gallera López Socas*.

©Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

It is worth mentioning that this elevated position<sup>375</sup> of *la valla* is a distinguishing feature of the Canarian fights in contrast with many other places around the world, including Andalusia (mainland Spain), where the arena is at floor level. In the case of a shared facility, the responsibility for setting *la valla* is shared by rotating teams and takes between 10-15 minutes. Firstly, if the venue is also used for Canarian Wrestling it is necessary to place a canvas cover on the main floor to protect it. Secondly, the metal structures, the wooden planks for the floor and the ladders will be added. Finally, a special carpet<sup>376</sup> (usually green) will be fitted and wiped clean and an advertising banner is placed to cover the circular space between the carpet and the floor. Cleaning the carpet is considered essential to avoid a dusty atmosphere that could disturb the animals. During this construction process, jokes on the laziness of the assemblers or the roosters' quality are common.

Alongside the ladder, there are seats for *cuidadores* and *presidentes de valla*, two main characters of the event in the league mode (see The fight on page 164). It is noteworthy that there is no a secondary pit<sup>377</sup> where roosters could be moved in case a fight takes longer than usual or lose the

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<sup>375</sup> Although arenas at floor level are by no means popular in the Canary Islands, I am aware of the existence of at least one place with such feature. I did not see any competition promoted by the Canarian Federation in that arena.

<sup>376</sup> Until a few decades ago, the floor of *la valla* was made of soil and sawdust. See Pérez-Corrales (2008:230,561).

<sup>377</sup> In contrast to other places such as Brazil (Leal, 1994:219) or the USA (Forsyth, 1996:22) there are no secondary or drag pits in the Canary Islands. These smaller pits are used to continue a prolonged fight after a specified period of time, leaving the main pit for a fresh pair of roosters. As I have described earlier, championships, and some leagues, are timed in the Canary Islands. Corrêa (2017:198) points out the absence of secondary pits in northern France and the Canary Islands where fights are shorter than in other areas. It might seem easy to infer that the longer the fights the more likely it is to find secondary pits. But not necessarily. As Corrêa (2017:198) highlights, differences among cockfight traditions are not determined by a single cause. For example, Herzog (1985:120), in his study in Southeastern USA where secondary pits are common, reported an average duration of 12 minutes within a range from 8 seconds to 58 minutes. On the other hand, in Andalusia there are no secondary pits and fights are limited to 30 minutes with an average duration (Personal communication by Andrés (Andalusian breeder), 3rd June, 2017) of 18 minutes. In the Canary Islands, the average time is way below 10 minutes but some *contratas* have no time limit and I saw a few bouts over 25-30min. Once again, only the timing or the presence of secondary pits give us limited information.

attention of the audience. These kinds of secondary or drag pits are customary in other places such as the USA and Brazil.

There is also an area with individual lockers, guarded by a person in charge, to keep the birds before the fights. Close to a corner, or in the changing room, a sink is used to wash and treat the gamecocks after the fights. Finally, any *reñidero* has a bar connected to the arena or next to *la valla*. Before, during and after the fights, people spend time there drinking and socialising while commenting on what has been seen in the *reñidero*. But this is also a time for having a drink together, no matter the outcome of the fights.

## The Audience at *las Riñas* - reflections on sex, age and class

An in-depth analysis of the audience composition to obtain a complete picture according to age, sex and class would have involved a complex data collection through questionnaires which was far beyond the capacity and the scope of this research. In addition, there are no statistics of any kind, therefore, the following points will be based on general impressions from my ethnographic fieldwork.

As mentioned earlier, there is a regional law<sup>378</sup> which prohibits the attendance of children under 16 years old, accompanied or otherwise. This is the only restriction, and anyone over 16 who purchases a ticket may attend. It does not mean that I did not see any children at all because there are different venues and sometimes premises are shared with other cultural and sports activities. However, the recent pressure from *animalistas* to ban the event has forced the organisers to comply with the regulations. This restriction has commonly resulted in young aficionados staying at home or trying to peek at the fights from the door or through the windows. Likewise, some breeders told me they did not understand why they could not attend with their children and pointed this out as one of the main reasons for the declining engagement of the younger generations.

It is clear that cockfighting has been described as a “male” game, sport or event all around the world<sup>379</sup>. Attending once in the Spanish archipelago should be enough to realise that usually over 85-90%, if not more, of the audience is composed of men, particularly over 35-40 years of age. However, unlike in other places and/or times<sup>380</sup>, women have a public role in the archipelago’s

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<sup>378</sup> B.O.C. (Ley 8/1991)

<sup>379</sup> See, e.g., Dundes (1994).

<sup>380</sup> See, e.g., Béthencourt-Massieu (1982) and Marvin (1984).

fight. Not only as wives or girlfriends<sup>381</sup> but also unescorted and leading or co-leading the rearing process.



*Casteadores* and aficionados in a *contrata* in Gran Canaria. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

Prices to attend went from 5 to 10€ (a cup of coffee costs about 1€) depending on the importance of the competition. However, in many competitions, especially in championships, there is no entrance fee for those whose rooster(s) is fighting. I was told there used to be a few numbered seats around *la valla* for season tickets holders in *contratas*, but the more limited attendance made them

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<sup>381</sup> Marvin (1984:63)



useless. As a curiosity, women have free entrance to many facilities<sup>382</sup>, an entrenched custom in countless leisure establishments such as discos and nightclubs in Spain.

The formerly crowded event, with hundreds or even thousands of people, has given way to a few dozens, with infrequent attendances over 100 people. In terms of audience, one of the main differences between cockfighting and other popular fighting sports in the Canary Islands, such as mixed martial arts or Canarian Wrestling, is that in cockfighting most of the people are not just viewers. It was very rare to find aficionados who were not involved, either directly or indirectly, in the rearing process. They are commonly breeders whose birds fight at the event; *casteadores* who experience passion and distress while the event takes place.

### **An entertainment for a wide range of people**

“There are many young people in Gran Canaria who would be messing around if they were not involved in cockfighting...with the risk of social exclusion”. (Elías 20/05/2017)<sup>383</sup>

As we can see from Elías’s statement, *los gallos* are seen as a way to bring people together. He referred specifically to Las Palmas, the capital of Gran Canaria, where the unemployment rate<sup>384</sup> was above 30% in 2015. However, the problem of high unemployment may well be called a national problem in Spain where the unemployment rate<sup>385</sup> was over 23% at the beginning of 2015.

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<sup>382</sup> In other places, such as Bogotá (Colombia), it has also been reported that women get free tickets as a courtesy (Arias-Marín, 2012:190).

<sup>383</sup> “En Gran Canaria hay mucho chaval joven que si no estuviese en los gallos estaría por ahí... con mucho riesgo de exclusión social”. (Elías 20/05/2017)

<sup>384</sup> Bandera et al. (2015)

<sup>385</sup> Spain. Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2015)

It seems that cockfighting in the Canary Islands has been represented, or at least has been seen by some authors, as an unusual place of amicable coexistence for people of all social classes. For example, there are references to this joint involvement in Tenerife<sup>386</sup> in the 18th century and in Gran Canaria<sup>387</sup> in the 19th century. In this respect, the nobility and the upper class would have given honour and legitimacy to the activity and kept lower classes away from inappropriate behaviour<sup>388</sup>. And they were also the owners of the most famous roosters<sup>389</sup>. But times changed and...

"The profiles of people attending cockfights have changed a lot, it's a matter of ... how would I say, of ... I do not want to talk about social class, but the cultural profile". (Ernesto

18/03/2016)<sup>390</sup>

As this reputable lawyer, and cocker, outlined, there is a general perception that the gentlemen's sport has been opened to a wider range of breeders. Some *casteadores* are clearly nostalgic and hold to the notion that *cualquier tiempo pasado fue mejor* (all the past was better). But this feeling and open access are not equally perceived and shared in every island. Many *casteadores* I interviewed still identify Tenerife as the most upper-class place, where younger generations and immigrants have encountered the most difficulties in gaining access to the league competitions.

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<sup>386</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982)

<sup>387</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987)

<sup>388</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982)

<sup>389</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987)

<sup>390</sup> "El perfil de la persona que está en los gallos ha cambiado muchísimo, es una cuestión de...como te digo, de...no quiero hablar de clase social pero sí del perfil cultural". (Ernesto 18/03/2016)



I had the opportunities to experience the event with a wide range of *casteadores* throughout the archipelago. Small-scale farmers, peasants, construction workers, policemen, businessmen, civil servants, lawyers, surgeons, architects, doctors, hospitality workers, entrepreneurs, unemployed and workers outside the formal economy are only a few examples. There were respected breeders from all walks of life. This range and variety is not an exclusive feature of the Canary Islands. For example, in other countries such as the USA, it has been found that ‘there is no typical cockfighter’ according to the standard demographic variables (Herzog & Cheek, 1979:37). As in the case of the USA<sup>391</sup> it is also noticeable that cockfighting, for most breeders and aficionados, is a costly pastime rather than a source of income. I was told that the great majority do not cover expenses unless they are lucky enough to win regularly. The amount of money involved in the archipelago’s fights seems to be considerably lower than in other cockfighting areas. This implies that other than indirect business opportunities (e.g., the provision of food, medicines, travel, accommodation and hostelry) there are only two ways to constantly make money.

Firstly, some league teams, especially in La Palma, hire one or two employees to take care and keep the teams’ roosters for the season. These men are called *galleros* or *cuidadores*<sup>392</sup> (literally “caregivers”). But at other times, the breeders, no matter whether they are part of a team or not, are the ones who keep and train their own roosters during the whole year and there are no salaried employees, a decision possibly influenced by economic incomes. Yet even though this job involves long working hours and usually last for 5 or 6 months, *cuidadores* must find a different income for the out-of-season period. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the robust growth of the Spanish

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<sup>391</sup> Herzog (1985)

<sup>392</sup> Although *cuidador* and *gallero* are used interchangeably in the Canary Islands, I will mostly use the former to avoid any misunderstanding regarding the use of *gallero* in some Latin-American contexts.

economy<sup>393</sup> allowed some teams chaired by well-to-do people, particularly in Lanzarote, to offer excellent wages to the best Canarian and overseas *cuidadores*. Given the posterior, and current, economic depression in Spain, wages for most *cuidadores* are now not higher than any unskilled worker.

Secondly, there are a few prestigious breeders who have had relatively successful birds for years and, consequently, their roosters are sought by many *casteadores*. Therefore, they can have some steady income from sale of roosters. But of those whom I met and talked, this was the case for fewer than 10, and selling was never their main source of income. Furthermore, certain characteristics of the fights in the archipelago could make this income even lower. It seems quite common in the Canary Islands to give a *gallo* to a friend as a gift and to attend the championships in different islands as a mark of respect and friendship. Additionally, poor results could undermine buyer confidence and oblige the breeder to seek for new “broodcocks” with the resultant expense of money and resources. It is worth noting the lower development of the merchant market in the archipelago compared with the one in Andalusia, in mainland Spain, where the association UCRIGA managed to register the breed standards and regulate the activity with special emphasis on production from an international trading perspective.

Overall, I think there is a misconception of the event among the outsiders belonging to certain circles in urban areas, especially in Tenerife and Gran Canaria, who do not know the legal basis for the sport and ascribe it to the lower classes. A mischaracterisation of lower classes, rural-urban migration and the progressive involvement of Latin Americans might be at the base of this misconception. The question of how social class affects the perception of cruelty in cockfighting

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<sup>393</sup> Etchezarreta et al. (2011)

has been analysed by some academics<sup>394</sup> but I will not dwell on class further here; I will return to the topic in chapter 8.

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<sup>394</sup> See, e.g., Herzog (2010:149-173).

## *La Casada* (The pairing)

I have mentioned above where the fights take place and some hints about the audience but, instead of coming directly to the fights, I would like to call the attention of the reader to what happens two days before the fight itself. Oddly enough, the first game is played by the *cuidadores*<sup>395</sup> or *galleros*, the men who take care of, and prepare<sup>396</sup>, the fighting birds. Speaking in sporting terms, they would be the coaches.

"Of course, the pairing is a strategy. At first, only with the weights, it is more difficult to know what *gallos* they will pick, but then, as the days go by, it becomes more predictable and we know more or less what the other brings". (Mateo *Cuidador* 09/02/2017)<sup>397</sup>

Fundamentally, *casar* (to pair or to match) is to agree the weight of the roosters<sup>398</sup> that will be face each other in *la valla* on the following day's league event. There are several ways to *casar*. In La Palma, most of the teams which fight eight<sup>399</sup> *gallos* per week do so as follows.

Each one brings a list of birds with 12 different weights from 3.8 to 4.8 pounds<sup>400</sup>. The first six pairs of equal weights are matched. Then, each team freely pick one to complete the eight weights

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<sup>395</sup> The different steps followed by *cuidadores* throughout a season will be further discussed in the chapter *A season in a casa de gallos*.

<sup>396</sup> *Preparar gallos* in Spanish.

<sup>397</sup> "Por supuesto que la casada es una estrategia. Al principio, con el peso sólo, es más difícil conocer que gallos te traen, pero luego, según pasan las jornadas, se va haciendo más previsible y sabemos más o menos lo que lleva el otro". (Mateo *Cuidador* 09/02/2017)

<sup>398</sup> The number of pairs fighting was traditionally seven but in some leagues is now eight.

<sup>399</sup> For many years, 7 was the number of roosters fought per team and per day. An extra bird has been recently added to many leagues. However, this is occasionally a controversial issue, since some aficionados have seen that as something that could lead to a lower quality of roosters due to a less intensive selection.

<sup>400</sup> From 17 possible (half-ounces are not valid). The higher (4.8) is called *peso libre* (literally "free weight"), goes up to 4.12 and can be paired within this range. Every weight agreed, including the lighter (3.8), can be matched from below. Needless to say that this is not very common. Although Spain has for long used kilos and grams as standard

required. This point is particularly different from Gran Canaria<sup>401</sup>, where in the case that the eight pairs of weights could not be paired, each team would take alternatively a weight<sup>402</sup> from the other's list until completion. As mentioned above, there can be different *casadas* and every league has the power to agree its procedure.

“We recently agreed the free weights in La Palma so that you could always fight at least one *gallo* you want. Therefore, they can't play the trick of avoiding a specific weight. Here we want the good *gallos* to fight”. (Amador 09/02/2017)<sup>403</sup>

### **Before, during and after the pairing**

Early on the morning of a *casada*, the *cuidador* and his assistant<sup>404</sup> (*ayudante*), in addition to their everyday work, *pasan los gallos*<sup>405</sup>. For a couple of hours, a number of roosters are quickly tested in the training *valla* to determine the weights that will be presented later at the *casada*. With the spurs covered to protect them from injuries, they are faced in pairs and released to simulate a fight for only a few seconds. After 3-4 blows they will be separated and might be given extra time with

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units for weights, *libras* (pounds) and *onzas* (ounces) were, historically, used in the Canary Islands and in mainland Spain.

<sup>401</sup> Gran Canaria's lists have usually only two additional weights than required (e.g, 10 weights for 8 fighting birds or 9 weights for 7).

<sup>402</sup> This is known as *tomar un peso* (to take a weight).

<sup>403</sup> “En La Palma se pusieron los pesos libres para que tú pudieses pelear siempre al menos un gallo que quisieras. Así no se puede hacer la putada de que no te lleven un peso aposta. Aquí los gallos buenos queremos que peleen”. (Amador 09/02/2017)

<sup>404</sup> The attendance of respected aficionados is also common, particularly in La Palma.

<sup>405</sup> This process of looking over the roosters is also called *volar los gallos* (to fly the roosters).

a *mona* or *cachiporro*<sup>406</sup>. The aim is to check which fighting birds should be included for the upcoming match day. After this test, the provisionally selected roosters are placed in adjoining lockers<sup>407</sup> to have an over-view of the batch and the weights are written down on a piece of paper which is folded. Every detail is meticulously thought through by the *cuidadores*.

The *casada* is usually held somewhere near both teams' headquarters (*galleras*). Bars are probably the most usual places and *cuidadores* are often accompanied by the president of the team and/or other relevant members. Generally, after a quick coffee, the two *cuidadores* take a seat in an adjacent room or at a table far from undesired eavesdroppers. Seated opposite each other, they start to unfold<sup>408</sup> the sheet and read out loud the weights alternately, while writing down the other's weight. There is an atmosphere of secrecy in the room, they are face-to-face just reading the weights. Meanwhile, no one talks to them, no one distracts them. The first weight to appear on the two sheets is the first match. This continues until they pair six weights and then each one openly picks a weight of his choice to complete the eight bouts.

“The ones listed at the beginning are the ones you most want to fight, because they are more likely to match. The free weight is picked in a rotational basis but it is better to choose in the second round so you already know the other's decision. It might be one you already wanted and then you put another one that you want”. (Carlos 10/02/2017)<sup>409</sup>

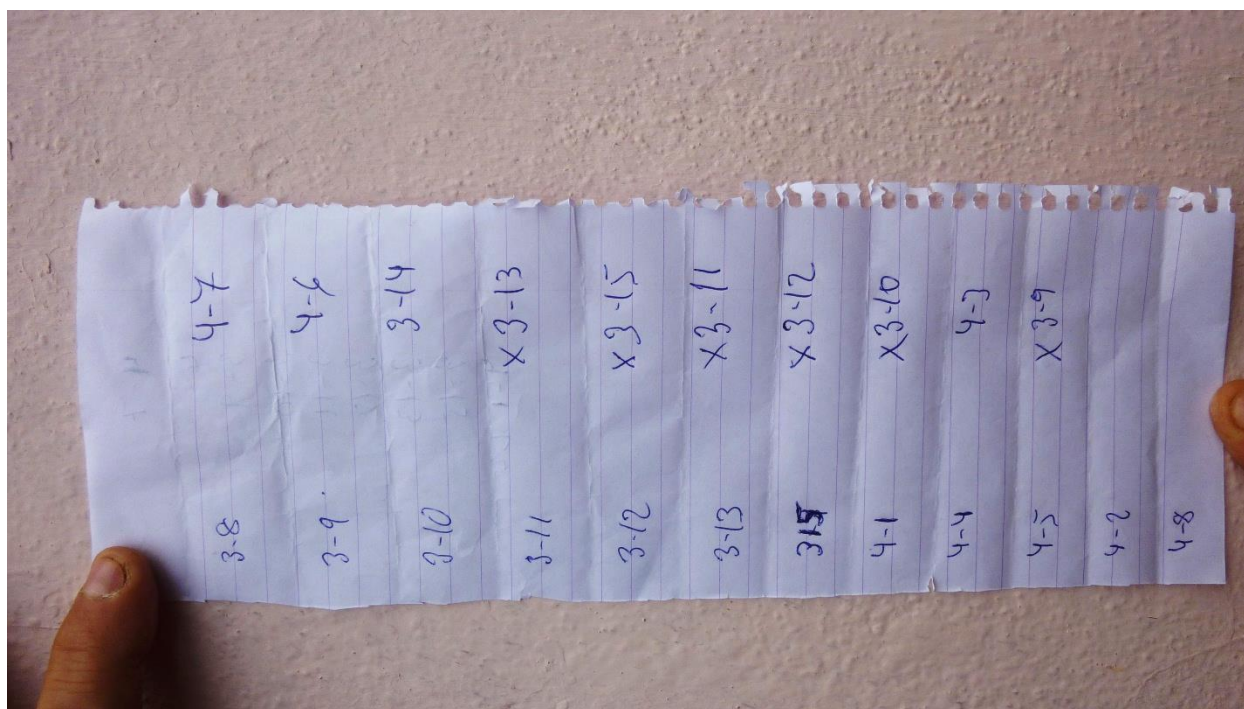
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<sup>406</sup> *Mona* and/or *cachiporro* can be roosters that are used to train the others or just dummies for the same use, that resemble real roosters. Sometimes they are used as derogatory terms to refer to fighting birds who run from their opponents, or make a poor showing in combat.

<sup>407</sup> *Casilleros* or *jaulas*.

<sup>408</sup> In Gran Canaria, the sheets are turned over at the same time to match the weights.

<sup>409</sup> “Los de arriba son los que tú más quieres, porque siempre casan más. El peso libre elige uno primero cada vez, va rotando. Pero es mejor elegir el segundo. Así puedes rebatirle y ya sabes cuál ha elegido él. Que puede que sea el que tú ya querías y así metes otro más que quieras”. (Carlos 10/02/2017)



Los Llanos's sheet for a *casada* in 2017. Note that only same weights are matched. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

Once the eight weights are picked, the *casada* is over but there might be time to exchange some words. A *cuidador* could try to undermine the opponent's morale by saying he is bringing a good batch, or that he spotted something on the edge of the regulations the previous day, etc. It might mean sapping the adversary's self-confidence because the way *la casada* is performed could have an impact on the weekend fights provoking the change of a *gallo*, nervousness when calling for a draw, etc.

With the weights agreed, each team returns to its headquarters and finally decide the roosters for the weekend. Teams will later share the colour, name, owner, *casteador* and previous fights on the league of every rooster, to print the programme for the fights.



## ***La Casada in championships***

Although the term came originally from the leagues, it is also used for the championships<sup>410</sup> where the process is less complicated and only involves the matching of same-weight fighting birds. All participants are allowed to witness the *casada*. This does not mean that it is not important or is exempt from grievances or complaints. For example, people do not like fighting their *gallos* against those of friends or with *casteadores* from the same island when competing in a different one. The organisers might modify the matches if requested (and agreed to) by the participants. However, the easiest way to avoid competing against a friend is by having birds of different weights from those of his birds. In addition, *casteadores* are normally allowed to choose whether to compete in the morning or in the evening session. And every session has its own pairing.

Some championships have popularised the use of a random computer-generating pairing to try to avoid the complaints. However, there were always concerns about the pairing in every championship I attended, especially by participants from other islands. As in leagues, the first thing *casteadores* look at the programme is who is the rival.

Before further describing the fights, I will dwell on the differences between league and championship mode in the following section. It will be fundamental for a thorough understanding of the following chapters.

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<sup>410</sup>The pairing procedure for the Canarian Championship is unique because it favours matches between teams from different islands rather than same-island fights. In the Canarian Championship, the participants are *galleras* (teams) formed by breeders. Each *gallera* picks five different weights among the following: 4-8, 4-6, 4-4, 4-2, 4-0, 3-14, 3-12, 3-10 and 3-8. Same weights are not allowed and 4-8 is also considered a free weight.

## Organisation of Cockfights:

### *Contrata and Campeonato (League and Championship)*

These two methods<sup>411</sup> of organisation represent one of the singularities of the cockfights in the Canary Islands, where, besides championships, many breeders compete weekly by teams. In fact, the regular form of competition around the world, including Andalusia, is through championships. But the oldest championship in the archipelago, not counting the Canarian Championship, has been held fewer than 20 times. However, there is documentary evidence relating to the formation of *partidos* (cockfighting societies or teams) for over 150 years. For example, the one called San José, in Gran Canaria, was founded in 1863 and organised *contratas* (leagues) for more than 100 years until it merged with others<sup>412</sup>.

“There were not so many championships before. Only the Canarian one”. (Francisco

26/01/2017)<sup>413</sup>

In my three years of fieldwork I attended more than 2,000 fights in league and championship mode, mostly in Gran Canaria and La Palma. The season runs from January to June in order to respect

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<sup>411</sup> Apart from *contratas* and championships I also found, to a much lesser extent, *peleas sueltas* and *desafíos* in the Canary Islands. In *peleas sueltas* (literally “loose fights”), animals whose way of fighting is uncertain are given the chance to fight and show their quality in smaller events. In a *desafío* (a challenge) two breeders challenge each other to one or more fights according to prearranged conditions, including a bet. Many of these *desafíos* involved various fights, rather than just one, to diminish the “luck” factor. *Desafíos* are usually a more private affair than *contratas* and championships.

<sup>412</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987)

<sup>413</sup> “Antes no había tantos campeonatos. Sólo el regional”. (Francisco 26/01/2017)

the moulting period of the cocks and there are currently more than 40 cockfighting societies<sup>414</sup> belonging to the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting. All the islands, except for La Gomera<sup>415</sup>, are represented in this Federation.

The recent flourishing of championships has led some people to think that regular seasons are being replaced by the championships. And tensions and conflicts emerge in accordance with many variables such as country of origin, island or age. Some still argue they do not like to compete regularly in the championships and prefer the league format while others underline, as stated earlier when describing the audience, the difficulties of joining and participating in some leagues.

However, in both cases, breeders compete individually against each other and the audience always knows to whom the fighting birds belong. The main difference, apart from *la casada*, is that in league mode, rather than competing just on their own in a single weekend to win the prize<sup>416</sup>, each breeder will form, jointly with others, weekly *tandas* (batches) of 7 or 8 fighting birds per team. In championships there can easily be more than 50-60 fights over a couple of days, and it is not uncommon to find a few, especially in Gran Canaria, with more than 100 fights over the weekend. This difference in the format may be the cause of how some people experience the fights differently depending on the mode of competition. There are approximately 20 championships each season, but no breeder competes in all of them, therefore, breeders usually attribute greater importance to *contratas* when discussing the regularity<sup>417</sup> of someone's roosters.

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<sup>414</sup> *Asociaciones gallísticas*

<sup>415</sup> I found no references to cockfighting in La Gomera neither during my fieldwork nor in the local literature. In fact, I occasionally heard breeders joking about someone else's roosters coming from La Gomera to highlight the low quality of those roosters.

<sup>416</sup> In championships, there are usually prizes for the top three breeders.

<sup>417</sup> At the end of the season, the *casteador* who has won the most points in championships will be recognised for his achievement. However, *casteadores* do not usually give much importance to this recognition since the participation in championships is uneven and the points do not necessarily correspond to the difficulty of the championship. Many times, the best *casteador* of a well-known *contrata*, such as Los Llanos-Tazacorte, is recognised more widely than

# RIÑAS DE GALLOS

Temporada 2017

## 14 de Mayo 15.00h

GALLERA LOS LLANOS Cuidadores: OLIVER MONTELONGO Y CARLOS BARETO					
Pesos	Pesos	Color	Nombre	Propietario	Casteador
1	4-8	COLORADO	.	JORGE PLASENCIA	LA LUCHA
2	3-15	MELADO	.	NIÑO DARRELL MONTELONGO	P. EL TAJO
3	3-14	MELADO	EL LEGIONARIO	PEPITO GRACIA	EL NIÑO
4	3-13	MELADO	.	P. ARGUAL	P. ARGUAL
5	3-12	BLANCO	.	DAMA BLANCA	DAMA BLANCA
6	3-10	SEMIGALLO	.	NESTOLI LORENZO	HNOS. PADILLA GLEZ.
7	3-9L	GIRO	EL AS DE ESPADA	JOSE CARLOS RODRIGUEZ	NIÑA LAURA
8	3-8	COLORADO	Y SU PERRA	ADELTO PLASENCIA	NIÑA LAURA

GALLERA TAZACORTE Cuidadores: SAMUEL ACOSTA Y DAIBEL "BELO"					
Pesos	Pesos	Color	Nombre	Propietario	Casteador
1	4-8L	GALLINO	PSICOPATA	HNAS. HERNANDEZ	MIGUEL LORENZO
2	3-15	MELADO P	37 ESTORNUDOS	LUIS ORTEGA Y ANTONIO GOMEZ	HNOS. GLEZ. FERRAZ
3	3-14	MELADO	.	VALENTINO ELVIRA GOMEZ	HNOS. ELVIRA
4	3-13	COLORADO P	.	CAMACHO PEREZ	CAMACHO PEREZ
5	3-12	COLORADO P	EL TEJA RODADA	AGUSTO ACOSTA	SANTIAGO CONCEPCION
6	3-10	GIRO	EL MULETA	FLORO HERNANDEZ	MIGUEL LORENZO
7	3-9	GIRO	.	JOSE PEDRO RGUEZ	PRIMOS MARTIN
8	3-8	GIRO	.	RUBEN PEREZ LORENZO	MIGUEL LORENZO

TORNEO GALISTICO Memorial D. Domingo Martín 2016 27 y 28 de Febrero Gallera Lopez Socas - Gran Canaria DOMINGO 19.00 am									
FUERA	FECHA	PELO	COLOR	CAPISTAN A	ISLA	FECHA	PELO	COLOR	CAPISTAN B
1	3-13	Melado	Peña Jinamar	Gran Canaria	3-13	Colorado	Casa Santa	Gran Canaria	A
2	3-14	Reflejo	Manuel Acosta Lorenzo	Gran Canaria	3-14	Melado	Tami y Jery	Gran Canaria	A
3	3-12	Colorado	Los Mosqueteros II	Gran Canaria	3-12	GIRO	El Agujero I	Tenerife	B
4	4-1	Colorado	Los Primos	Gran Canaria	4-1	Reflejo	Brayan y Santi	Gran Canaria	A
5	3-15	GIRO	Jaime Almenara I	La Palma	3-15	Melado	Hnos. Acosta Arias	Gran Canaria	A
6	3-14	Colorado	Jonay	Gran Canaria	3-14	GIRO	Amigos del Sur II	Gran Canaria	A
7	3-11	Colorado	El Patrón II	Fuerteventura	3-11	Colorado	Dos Hermanos II	Gran Canaria	A
8	3-8	GIRO	Sergio Dominguez	La Palma	3-8	Colorado	El Cortijo	Gran Canaria	A
9	3-10	Gallino	Antonio y Juvenal	La Palma	3-10	Semigallo	Pachi I	Gran Canaria	A
10	3-11	Gallino	Cuba Nostalgia I	Gran Canaria	3-11	Melado	KZepi - Zape El Fuerte y Adry Padron	Gran Canaria	A
11	4-2	Melado	Tami y Jery	Gran Canaria	4-2	GIRO	T.K.	Fuerteventura	A
12	4-8	Reflejo	Miguel Lorenzo La Herradura	La Palma	4-8	Melado	Virgilio Suarez Los Dos Niños	Gran Canaria	A
13	3-11	Colorado	Los Llanitos	La Palma	3-11	Reflejo	Zepi - Zape El Fuerte y Adry Padron	Gran Canaria	A
14	3-12	Colorado	La Costa El Ranchito II	La Palma	3-12	Colorado	Los Kikeres	Gran Canaria	A
15	3-6	GIRO	Fiury I	Gran Canaria	3-6	Melado	Eduardo Santisteban I	Fuerteventura	A
16	3-8	Gallino	Gallera El Revolucionero I	Gran Canaria	3-8	Colorado	Gallera Los Dos Niños	Gran Canaria	A
17	3-11	Melado	Sany Armenteros	La Palma	3-11	Colorado	Hermanos Rivero	Gran Canaria	A
18	4-5	GIRO	Majo y Limpio I	Gran Canaria	4-5	Reflejo	El Paredón	Gran Canaria	A
19	4-2	Melado	Brayan y Santi	Gran Canaria	4-2	Colorado	Hnos. Pérez Viña I	La Palma	A
20	4-4	Melado	La Geria II	Lanzarote	4-4	Melado	Eduardo Santisteban II	Fuerteventura	A
21	3-14	Reflejo	Francisco Santana	Gran Canaria	3-14	Melado	Peña Jinamar	Gran Canaria	A
22	4-0	GIRO	Rancho La Mora	Gran Canaria	4-0	Puerto	Gallera Anaga I	Tenerife	A
23	3-12	Melado	Gallera El Morro	La Palma	3-12	Melado	La Costa El Ranchito I	La Palma	A
24	4-1	GIRO	Salvador Dorta	Tenerife	4-1	Melado	Amigos del Sur I	Gran Canaria	A
25	4-0	Colorado	Tosca Arrastre	Gran Canaria	4-0	Colorado	Hdez. Santana y Rosales II	Tenerife	A
26	4-3	GIRO	Gallera Anaga I	Tenerife	4-3	Melado	Amigos del Sur I	Tenerife	A
27	4-4	Reflejo	Niño Unai	Gran Canaria	4-4	Reflejo	Miguel Lorenzo La Herradura	La Palma	A
28	4-1	Colorado	Gallera El Morro	La Palma	4-1	GIRO	Salvador Dorta	Tenerife	A
29	3-12	GIRO	Agujero I	Tenerife	3-12	GIRO	Majo y Limpio II	Gran Canaria	A
30	3-11	Colorado	Fiury I	Gran Canaria	3-11	Colorado	Gallera Los Halcones	Gran Canaria	A
31	3-9	Colorado	Antonio y Juvenal	La Palma	3-9	Colorado	Peña Verona Guedes	Gran Canaria	A
32	3-13	Gallino	Jaime Almenara II	La Palma	3-13	Colorado	Jo Vega y Comandante I	Gran Canaria	A
33	3-11	Gallino	Gallera Los Dos Niños	Gran Canaria	3-11	Melado	Gallera El Revolucionero II	Gran Canaria	A
34	3-7	Colorado	Francisco Santana II	Gran Canaria	3-7	Colorado	Sergio Dominguez	La Palma	A
35	3-14	Melado	Espuelas Negras	Gran Canaria	3-14	GIRO	Agujero II	Tenerife	A
36	3-10	Colorado	Fiury II	Gran Canaria	3-10	Melado	Finca Gomar	Tenerife	A
37	3-14	Melado	Jonay	Gran Canaria	3-14	Melado	Gallera Anaga II	Tenerife	A
38	3-14	Melado	Hoya Vargas	Gran Canaria	3-14	Naranja	El Patrón II	Fuerteventura	A
39	4-1	Canigay	Ernesto Dominguez e Hijo	Gran Canaria	4-1	Colorado	Los Primos	Gran Canaria	A
40	4-1	Colorado	Gallera Longueiras	Gran Canaria	4-1	Melado	Agujero I	Tenerife	A
41	3-11	Colorado	La Geria I	Lanzarote	3-11	Colorado	Fiury II	Gran Canaria	A
42	3-13	Colorado	Gallera Anaga II	Tenerife	3-13	GIRO	Hnos. Acosta Arias	Gran Canaria	A
43	3-15	Colorado	Jaime Almenara II	La Palma	3-15	Canigay	El Cortijo	Gran Canaria	A
44	4-0	Colorado	Pachi I	Gran Canaria	4-0	Colorado	Los Kikeres	Gran Canaria	A
45	4-8	Colorado	La Geria I	Lanzarote	4-8	Melado	La Guagira	Fuerteventura	A
46	4-3	Melado	Finca Gomar	Tenerife	4-3	Colorado	Gallera Guantánamo	Gran Canaria	A
47	4-2	GIRO	Ernesto Dominguez e Hijo	Gran Canaria	4-2	Canigay	El Patrón I	Fuerteventura	A
48	3-8	Gallino	El Llanero Solitario	Gran Canaria	3-8	Colorado	Gallera El Revolucionero II	Gran Canaria	A
49	3-14	GIRO	Hnos. Pérez Viña II	La Palma	3-14	GIRO	Jaime Almenara I	La Palma	A
50	3-15	Colorado	El Patrón I	Fuerteventura	3-15	Gallino	Gallera Los Dos Hermanos	Gran Canaria	A
51	4-3	Colorado	Gallera Guantánamo	Gran Canaria	4-3	Colorado	La Geria II	Lanzarote	A
52	4-5	Colorado	La Guagira	Fuerteventura	4-5	Colorado	Majo y Limpio I	Gran Canaria	A
53	3-14	Colorado	Espuelas Negras	Gran Canaria	3-14	GIRO	T.K.	Fuerteventura	A
54	3-7	Melado	Gallera El Revolucionero I	Gran Canaria	3-7	Colorado	Saray Armenteros	La Palma	A
55	3-13	Colorado	Hnos. Rivero	Gran Canaria	3-13	Gallino	Amigos del Sur II	Gran Canaria	A
56	3-15	Colorado	Brayan y La Parcela	Gran Canaria	3-15	Colorado	Majo y Limpio II	Gran Canaria	A

On the left, a programme for the most prestigious *contrata* in La Palma. On the right, Sunday's programme for a championship in Gran Canaria; taking into account the fights held on Saturday, the championship had 116 bouts in a weekend. ©Ricardo Ontillera

There are personal preferences and not everyone likes to belong to a team, mostly because of the tensions relating to decisions about which birds should fight at, and which will be excluded from, a weekend fight. It is also admitted, by most casteadores, that the performances of their birds are more important than the team's overall result.

somebody else who just competes in championships. In my view, Corrêa (2017:82-84) paid considerable attention to the importance of championships in the Canary Islands. However, the Brazilian author only visited Gran Canaria for a championship and did not attend to any *contratas* in other islands.

“I’d be lying if I claimed that I prefer to beat the other team by 6-2 but losing my two *gallos*.

That would be a lie, I prefer to win mine”. (Carlos 05/03/2017)<sup>418</sup>

However, voicing such a view publicly would be reproached as a barrier to teamwork. Having understood these two methods of organisation it is time now to describe a particular procedure which precedes the fight itself in leagues.

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<sup>418</sup> “Yo te mentiría si dijera que prefiero un 6-2 con mis dos gallos perdidos a que me ganen mis gallos. Es mentira, prefiero que ganen los míos”. (Carlos 05/03/2017)

## **Weighing, cleaning, and pitting - the ritualised steps in *contratas***

Before each fight there is a process of weighing and cleaning the *gallo* in *la valla*. Each team will weigh and clean the opponent's rooster in front of the audience. Therefore, each team can check first-hand the weight and whether any substances have been applied on the opponent's feathers or beak. These ritualised stages also allow the *cuidadores* to exchange a few words and give the audience the opportunity, either from the stands or while having a drink at the bar, of commenting on the *gallos*. Although I do not see cockfighting as a ritual, I think we can consider this part of *contratas* as ritualised stages<sup>419</sup>. To some extent, these steps are a custom and they are performed following a fixed order which is clear for those who perform it while attracting people's attention<sup>420</sup>. However, these stages have been lost in championships due to the high number of roosters fighting in a weekend. Consequently, in championships, fighting birds are weighted and cleaned in the locker room area before being released up in *la valla*.

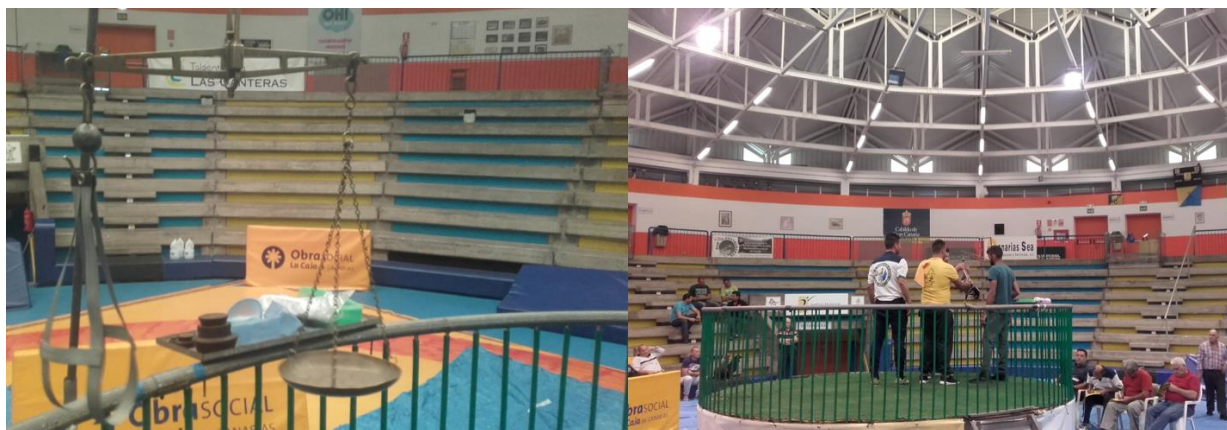
Returning to Leagues, on the way to *la valla* roosters are carried by the *cuidadores*, sometimes covered by a towel to keep them warm. Then, the *gallo* is fitted to a harness while the weights are placed on the scale plate. Fighting birds are weighed in pounds and ounces, conventionally in a range of 3.8 pounds to 4.8 pounds. As I mentioned earlier, the contending sides have agreed, a couple of days before, the weights of the birds through the *casada* (pairing). In each fight, gamecocks must not exceed the agreed weight.

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<sup>419</sup> Some local works (e.g., Pérez-Corrales, 2008 and Federación Gallística Canaria, 2017) also mentioned cockfighting as a world with ritual characteristics.

<sup>420</sup> For a fine interpretive account of ritual and performance see Lewis, G. (1980). *Day of Shining Red: An essay on understanding ritual*.





On the left, scale, weights and cleaning products. On the right, two teams weighing and cleaning the cockerels in Gran Canaria. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

When both *están en peso* (within the allowed weight) the *cuidadores* hold their animals while being cleaned by the other team. Wings, spurs, heads and beaks are cleaned with a lemon or a piece of lemon-soaked<sup>421</sup> cotton wool , which is sometimes used to put a few drops into the rooster's mouth to prevent the application of poisonous substances<sup>422</sup> on the fighting bird.

The cleaning process is described by some at the audience as a *paripé* (pretence) because it is not exhaustive<sup>423</sup>. *Cuidadores* take care of their *gallo* all the time through this process, especially while the opponent is weighed and cleaned. They sometimes put the bird on the carpet and make him move back and forth while opening the arms and snapping the fingers so that the *gallo* stays active and moves.

<sup>421</sup>Lemon is common in La Palma while acetone is widely used in Gran Canaria. Rum and water are also used in some places. I was told by people from Gran Canaria that lemon's acidity could boost some substances.

<sup>422</sup>Any kind of substance for external use, except for the traditional cleaning, is prohibited by regulations. Nothing is said about the supply of doping substances for internal use.

<sup>423</sup>In any case, teams can ask for a more exhaustive cleaning.



“He should not be cuddly up in la valla”. (Amador 17/02/2017)<sup>424</sup>

After the cleaning and weighing, when both birds are ready, comes *la suelta*<sup>425</sup> (the release and pitting). They are faced to each other twice<sup>426</sup> while being held by the *cuidadores*, on the floor and in the air, just before being released on the carpet leaving a space between them. This is a first statutory contact to check that both birds are willing to fight. Every *cuidador* has his own particular way to pit the *gallo* but a few touches on the wings and sounds imitating a fighting bird are common. Gamecocks are territorial animals and almost always attack each other promptly and do not have to be persuaded to fight. Once they attack, the fight is declared and the countdown, if required<sup>427</sup>, starts.

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<sup>424</sup> “Que no se ponga mimoso en la valla”. (Amador 17/02/2017)

<sup>425</sup> A person specialised in *la suelta*, the *soltador* (handler) used to be the one in charge of this, but nowadays it is performed by the *cuidador* or his assistant, in the majority of cases. The current lack of a specialised *soltador* has been seen by many as a loss for the Canarian fights (Pérez-Corrales, 2008).

<sup>426</sup> Only one (on the floor) in La Palma, where *los gallos no se pican arriba* (roosters are not allowed to peck at each other on the air while being held by the *cuidadores*). This pecking at the onset of a fight is called “billing up” in American English (Herzog, 1985:124).

<sup>427</sup> There is always a timer on championships.

### 184<sup>th</sup> day of fieldwork. Starting in La Palma

There I was again. Starting my second year of fieldwork, this time in the island of La Palma. We had seen the fights in the capital, Santa Cruz de La Palma, and we were heading off to a pit in Los Llanos de Aridane. The western part of the island, the Aridane Valley, was the mecca of cockfighting in the archipelago. Bananas, tourism, football and *gallos*. I had been barely a week there but those were four main topics heard in the bars. Yes, bars as gathering places where people conversed about cockfighting. It had nothing to do with Gran Canaria or Tenerife, where this legal activity was more covert and, in a way, unknown. Nacho, a *casteador* from Tazacorte, was driving the pick-up while I was telling him about my research.

- It must be difficult for you, I mean travelling the whole year. Do you have a hen? - he asked me.

I did not quite understand for a few seconds. But something rang a bell. *Gallo, pollo, gallina...* I had heard those expressions just before while having a coffee. That was the way they called themselves! How odd and what a coincidence for an anthropologist, I thought. To be honest, I was not sure about spending the whole season in La Palma when I planned my schedule. Although I was told it was by far the best place for cockfighting in the archipelago, the event in Gran Canaria was going to have two leagues involving eight teams in 2017. And I already knew people there. But five

leagues, ten teams and more championships in La Palma, with a population ten times smaller, was something I could not afford to miss.

With no time to see the prologue, we paid for the entrance fee, took the programme and bought a raffle ticket. The *cuidadores* were weighing the *gallos* when I had a seat next to Cefe in the front row, just behind the seats for the *cuidador*, *ayudante* and *presidente de valla*. They were my second fights on the island and I was still surprised by that quiet atmosphere. The ones in Gran Canaria were not the madness that an outsider would imagine after watching a couple of films but here it was different, it was almost as calm as a theatre play. At least, that is what I thought when Cefe, a *casteador* and the son of a respected *cuidador*, made a gesture indicating that we should stop talking and watch the fights.

So, with the *gallos* released, I had a look at the programme and I recalled that was the eagerly awaited fight of the weekend. A first match of 4:7 cocks. The white *Simeone* for Los Llanos and the speckled *El Percutor* for Tazacorte. The two most famous teams of the island. I had talked to *Olmo*, who was the *cuidador* of Los Llanos, the previous day and he told me *Simeone* had shown slight symptoms of rhinitis, nothing dramatic but a little bit worrying because they did not have a lot of roosters in that weight category.

- These two are trying to cut and kill each other - Cefe told me at the early stage of the fight. The fight had begun with Los Llanos asking for *tablas* several times, given the malaise of their bird. But after seeing how he was beating his opponent, the offer of *tablas* changed sides. - ¿*Tablas*? No, ¿*Tablas*? No - that was the dialogue between the *presidentes de valla* for two or three minutes.

*Simeone* cut his rival more frequently but *El Percutor* was not losing face. Curiously, after a couple of minutes, when the initial frenzy of the cocks began to subside, some gamblers started to offer 20-to-10 on the White. They were excited about the quality of the fight. But only a couple of them were accepted because many people were merely spectators; La Palma was not the best place to bet lots of money.

Cefe emphasised again the quality of the fight. - These two are trying to cut and kill each other. They are both fighting with only one eye now and they are cutting to kill. To kick the other out of the fight -. I was still amazed about how quick some aficionados were aware of the injuries.

Suddenly they both collapsed to the ground and things heated up. The *cuidadores* climbed rapidly to *la valla*, but it was not a decisive moment, the *gallos* just got hooked. They just disentangled the spurs, removed a couple of feathers from the roosters' eyes and beaks and returned to their seats. It was difficult to tell but the *casteadores* of the gamecocks appeared to be living

a mix of enjoyment and distress. One leaned on a pillar and encouraging his *gallo*; the other seated but trembling.

The fight was over in 9 minutes and, although it seemed won for *Simeone*, *El Percutor* was able to cut his rival close to the beak. That was a good blow.

- Look at this fight. This is the meaning of *gallo inglés*. I kill you or you kill me - an old aficionado told his friends. Sitting close to *la valla*, we could see that small feather whirl raised by the fighters.

With the general feeling that the fight was approaching its end, both teams trusted in fate. *Simeone*, due to its cut close to the beak, had started to become red-tinted. The team of Tzacorte relied on the thought that, as time went on, *Simeone* would collapse due to the bleeding. Yet, whilst it seemed he had lost part of his strength, he continued fighting. *El Percutor* was not in much better condition, quite damaged under the wings, but he was not heavily bleeding.

- They are both wounded but they are facing each other. They will not flee away. They are *gallos ingleses* - continued Cefe. When the audience was just waiting to see which one would collapse first on the floor, or an unlikely draw, *Simeone* cut his opponent with a lethal stroke. *El Percutor* could not stand again, not even with the help of his *cuidador* who went up to *la valla* in a last attempt. He collapsed while he was holding his wings up. It was over.

## The fight

The high points of cockfighting as a total event are obviously the fights themselves. Not all fights entertain the audience as much as the one previously narrated but all of them run in accordance with some of the following elements.

The fight may last up to 10 minutes in championships, the maximum allowed by the *juez*<sup>428</sup> (judge or referee) who sets the countdown when the roosters start fighting. But, excluding Gran Canaria<sup>429</sup>, there is no time limit<sup>430</sup> in league mode, where *cuidadores* and *presidentes de valla* play a key role in the fights. Here, there is a feeling in the audience that judges are secondary.

“The only *jueces* are up in *la valla*, the *gallos*. And there should not be any problem”. (Aday

19/02/2017)<sup>431</sup>

This aficionado meant that roosters do not know the modality they are fighting in or the role of the judges, if any. Therefore, after the *suelta* the true protagonists enter the scene. After being released,

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<sup>428</sup> Both “judge” (Marvin, 1984) and “referee” (Herzog, 1985) are used in the English literature for people with similar responsibilities. I will use the term judge because it refers to the most common term in the Canary Islands which is *juez*. Sometimes the *juez* or *jueces*, particularly in *contratas* with more than two teams, are referred to as *la mesa* (“the desk”).

<sup>429</sup> A maximum of 12 minutes has been recently set in Gran Canaria.

<sup>430</sup> The pressure suffered by cockfighters has led to the standardisation of some rules across the Canary Islands. Since 2019 most *contratas*, along with championships, have also implemented a time limit. On one hand, this prevents fights to be extended unnecessarily over the time limit. Yet the time limit is not without controversy. Some *casteadores* told me this measure would make the agreement of *tablas* before the time limit difficult.

<sup>431</sup> “Aquí los únicos jueces que hay están en la valla, son los gallos. Y no debería haber ningún problema”. (Aday 19/02/2017)

gamecocks first meet by standing in front of each other, usually stretching the neck out towards the opponent<sup>432</sup>. The first attack is not long in coming, usually a *revuelo*, where the roosters leap into the air without using the beaks to grab the other. It is unlikely, but every once in a while, this first onslaught hurts the opponent or even kills him with the spurs.

Hereafter, the fighting birds move around each other at a frenetic pace, each attempting to land blows, with beak and spurs on the opponent. The former, pecking (*picar*), mainly at the head, neck and chest is seen as contributing to the weakening of the rival. But it is the latter, spurring, which leads to the main damage and occasionally death. The bird grabs his opponent's feathers with the beak<sup>433</sup> and leaps, maintaining balance by wing flapping, while extending his legs forward, trying to cut with the spurs. This move is generally called *tirar* o *batir* (to hurl or the flurry) and specifically *cortar* or *herir* (to cut or wound) when it really cuts and hurts the opponent.

Yet despite the flurry of pecking, flapping and spurring, the aficionados distinguish many features and styles of fighting. The most valued roosters are the ones that *pelean de frente, sin virar la cara* (facing towards without hiding themselves). Such fighting birds keep on fighting even if they are seriously injured. What is more, this style is only perceived properly by the *casteadores* after a relatively tough and long fight.

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<sup>432</sup> Due to the special *atusado* (trimming) in the Canary Islands, a viewer will not see the characteristic picture of the birds with the feathers raised on the neck. For further information on *atusar* see Pérez-Corrales (2008:77).

<sup>433</sup> Usually on the neck or chest.



“The first one won so fast, there was no time to see how it was. However, there was time to see that the second one kept on fighting when he was wounded. I liked that *gallo*”. (Faustino

27/04/2017)<sup>434</sup>

The quality of continuing to fight whatever its injuries is something that is what is greatly admired and appreciated by the owners and other aficionados. This is an essential aspect of, and a revelation of, their *casta*.

“The *gallo* has to know how to strike but also put up with hard strikes”. (Aday

19/02/2017)<sup>435</sup>

Another way to fight, also well considered, is known as *salidor* where the *gallo* suddenly stops fighting and starts running away but then turns to strike, catching its opponent unaware. This way of *entrar y salir* (“entering and leaving the fight”) is regarded by many as one of the main characteristics of the Canarian breed of *gallos* and constitutes one of the most important differences between the cockfighting tradition in the Canary Islands and Andalusia<sup>436</sup>. It is usually seen as a

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<sup>434</sup> “El primero ha ganado rápido, no ha dado tiempo a ver cómo era. El segundo si ha dado tiempo a ver que seguía entrando estando herido. Me gustó el gallo”. (Faustino 27/04/2017)

<sup>435</sup> “Hay que saber dar pero hay que saber encajar”. (Aday 19/02/2017)

<sup>436</sup> ‘(A bird in Andalusia) which uses the technique of fleeing so that its pursuer follows and then suddenly turns on it with its spurs, is not admired’ (Marvin, 1984:67). Although a *gallo salidor* is usually well considered in the Canary Islands, it is also true that there are some breeders who do not like them, especially those who have connections with other cockfighting traditions. In general, in mainland Spain aficionados are keener to see roosters whose fighting style is more *derechón* (constantly facing towards each other) rather than the Canarian *salidor* (See also Pérez-Corrales, 2008:161,497). However, a very *derechón* rooster could well be disliked by a Canarian aficionado if he considers that the rooster is too exposed to the adversary. It is worthy of note that the current flow of gamecocks from mainland Spain into the Canary Islands allows breeders to choose fighting birds according to their particular

sign of intelligence, fighting resources and being less exposed to the rival. But running around ahead of its rival for too long is considered a sign of cowardice and those roosters are referred as *correlones*<sup>437</sup>. That is why the quality of these roosters is sometimes disputed by the audience according to their personal interpretations. The characteristic of running for too long, together with others, such as sheltering the head under the wings of the opponent (somewhat akin to boxers in a clinch) and, obviously trying to flee or avoid the fight, are not well regarded and gamecocks doing that are classified as *mestizos* or *ruines*.

### **How to understand a fight**

“Pay attention to the other’s reaction, staggering if he is hurt, rather than how the one you are looking at strikes”. (Javier R. 28/03/2016)<sup>438</sup>

Just for experts! That is what José implied when I first asked which bird was winning. The easiest way to see if a particular bird is winning is by observing the reaction of the one which is staggering. The longer the bird fights without touching the floor with the wings, the more fit and unhurt he is. Being supported by the wings to rest or keeping the balance is a sign of fatigue or being hurt. And in both cases the other would be leading the combat.

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preferences. Due to this interchange, it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between *peninsulares* and Canarian roosters.

<sup>437</sup> Literally someone who really likes to run. *Correlones* are more likely to get a draw.

<sup>438</sup> “Fíjate en la reacción del otro, tambaleándose si le hieren. No en como tira el que estás viendo”. (Javier R 28/03/2016)

An observer should not be carried away by the frenzy of sounds caused sometimes by the flapping wings of the roosters while attacking. That was certainly my mistake, in the early days of my fieldwork, when I thought a *pinto* (speckled cockerel) was clearly beating his opponent.

“No way! This *gallo* only hits, hits and hits. But doesn’t wound. The one who really cuts doesn’t make a loud sound”. (Javier R 28/03/2016)<sup>439</sup>

The roosters that have a good aim with their spurs are referred to as *espoleros*<sup>440</sup>, while the ones which hit many times with the legs but without cutting with the spurs are named as *paleros*. In this way, *casteadores* look out for the efficacy of cutting rather than the frequency of the hits. An indication of which bird is landing serious blows on the other is the colour of the spurs and the adhesive tape<sup>441</sup>. This colour is staining from the blood of the opponent.

“Perhaps he is really good at striking, but dude, he does not cut. And if he does not cut...there are no second chances at the pit. Because you will be killed”. (Alex 01/05/2016)<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> “¡Qué va! Ese gallo solo palos, palos y más palos. Y no hiere. El gallo que es espolero, el tiro casi ni se le oye”. (Javier R 28/03/2016)

<sup>440</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the term *espolero* can also refer to a *gallo* that cuts with his spurs more often than others, but it is really a *mestizo* and, therefore, would eventually flee if he takes a lot of punishment. The crucial attribute for someone to be considered a good spotter is to discern the fighting bird that is cutting with his spurs and the one which is just hitting with his feet or legs. That is why the term “cutter” is sometimes used in the English literature.

<sup>441</sup> Adhesive tape could be used to fit the spurs but also to differentiate the contenders, especially in championships, by applying a tiny portion around the legs.

<sup>442</sup> “A lo mejor es muy bueno tirando, pero no corta tío. Y si no corta...aquí no hay segundas oportunidades. Porque te matan”. (Alex 01/05/2016)

## Winners and losers

If roosters are still fighting after 10 minutes, in championships, or there is agreement by the *cuidadores* during the fight in leagues, there is a draw and it is announced as *tablas*<sup>443</sup>. Every competition has its own rules about winning and losing and I found slight differences across the archipelago. However, the several ways for a bird to win a fight share many common elements. Undoubtedly, by killing his opponent, a rooster automatically wins the contest. This can result, for example, from a lethal cut on the head, in a localised area known as *matadero* (the killing place). This is not the most common outcome of the fights because metal gaffs and steel blades are not used to arm the cocks. In this sense, as has also been highlighted in Andalusia<sup>444</sup>, some birds will have the chance to fight a few times over the years and learn how to fight against other birds. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for aficionados to know whether they are watching two experienced birds, particularly in *contratas* where the previous fights are shown in the daily programme.

Breeders consider that the most shameful and reprehensible way for a bird to lose a fight is by fleeing; even worse if it is done while making a clucking sound known as *canta* or *canta la gallina*. It is worth noting that *canta la gallina* is best translated as ‘singing like a hen’ – something that a proper fighting bird should never do. It is quite common that a *gallo* suffers what is called a *tiro de espanto*, when aficionados understand that the bird is dazed or deprived of senses for a brief time (e.g., due to a blow on the ear) and could run madly or even fly away from the ring...but he

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<sup>443</sup> It is unlikely, but *tablas* could also be declared because of a “manifest inability”, when both gamecocks are willing to fight, but due to their severe injuries (e.g., both blind) the combat cannot carry on without the continuous assistance of the handlers.

<sup>444</sup> Marvin (1984:67)

will fight back quickly completely recovered. The handlers are permitted<sup>445</sup> to put the fled bird back into *la valla* and he is usually given three chances of showing his willingness to fight by being almost close enough to peck his opponent. If he refuses to fight back again, he loses the fight.

The third way to lose a fight basically consists in ceasing to fight. This represents the more frequent outcome in the archipelago's contests. Many rulebooks have criteria to pick out a fair winner in order not to prolong the fights unnecessarily, which would be detrimental to the spectacle. For example, in those cases where, for any reason, with the exception of the aforementioned *recurso de salida*, a gamecock stops pecking and fighting as usual, due to his wounds, the *jueces* may decide to apply a time of one minute. At the end of this minute, if the gamecock has not pecked and flapped twice<sup>446</sup> with the intention of fighting, the contest will be lost. In the event of pecking and flapping twice, the minute will be interrupted, and it may start over again as often as the judges deem appropriate.

One such type of situation may be the case of a *gallo* voluntarily *echándose* (lying down naturally), meaning placing his chest on the floor; something that is considered a sign of submission. In some championships, lying down naturally would not even need the minute, and the rooster will lose straight away. But he should do it naturally, of his own accord, without being forced to the floor by its opponent or by any other setback such as getting stuck.

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<sup>445</sup> It is also believed that loud sounds or even strangers may frighten the roosters; especially when fighting in public for the first time.

<sup>446</sup> Depending on the competition, sometimes only one time is needed.



Two roosters up in *la valla* in the Canarian Championship in La Palma in 2017. Accessed 04/04/2019 <https://www.accionnaturaliberica.com/gallo-combatiente-espanol/>. © Nicolás Lezcano (2017)

When one of the cocks gets stuck, handlers are allowed to enter *la valla* to correct this, but without doing anything to frighten or injure the roosters. This can happen for a variety of reasons such as the spurs become entangled in the body of one of the fighting birds, one of them stepping on the other, the head stuck under the wing, or even got trapped between the vertical bars of the fence. If by any chance a spur is broken or untied it cannot be replaced or cut off by the handlers during the fight.

Lastly, the fourth main way to lose a fight is a distinctive feature of the Canarian Leagues where a *cuidador* can decide anytime to give up the fight. If this is done when the combat has only just started and there are no signs of serious injuries on the animals, the *cuidador* is usually rebuked by the audience. That would be seen as a lack of respect for those who have paid for the tickets to see the birds' performance.

### **No time for a break**

Time-outs to give cockfighters time to restore their birds during a fight are common in many places<sup>447</sup>. However, there are no intervals or time-outs during a bout in the Canary Islands. Neither in *contratas* nor in *championships*. Pauseless bouts are not unique to the Canary Islands since other places such as mainland Spain and Northern France also lack intervals.

As explained above, in the Spanish archipelago, once the fight begins, the handlers can go up into the pit only under certain circumstances such as to disentangle the roosters when they get stuck and check if they are still willing to fight. That should be done quickly, and the handlers are just allowed to withdraw adhered feathers on eyes and beak. Indeed, if a handler raises his *gallo* off the ground it will be seen as an acceptance of defeat. Therefore, the fight will be automatically terminated. Other resolutions<sup>448</sup> to revive an injured cock like blowing water into his mouth and sucking blood from the bird's mouth are forbidden. They would be seen as an unacceptable help for the rooster.

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<sup>447</sup> Such as Bali (Geertz, 1972:9), East Timor (Hicks, 2006:10), the USA (Herzog, 1985:120), Brazil (Leal, 1994:222 and Corrêa, 2017:88) and Mexico (Velázquez-Rojas, 2014:96).

<sup>448</sup> See Hicks (2006:10) to get a wider picture of some resolutions to revive an injured cock.



## Refusing to fight

In all the *riñas* I attended I never saw it happen but if the two gamecocks refuse to fight right after being released the combat will be declared null. What I did see a couple of times, was one of the *gallos* refusing to start fighting after three attempts. In those cases, the opponent won the contest automatically. Such birds were considered unworthy of fighting again.

The abovementioned examples are very obvious even to the untrained eye. But it is of the utmost importance to understand how *casteadores* perceived whether a gamecock is refusing to fight or not. Rather than two closed categories, the willingness to fight could be considered a point between two poles. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find differences of opinion on whether a rooster *está huido*<sup>449</sup>, is fleeing, or not. For example, the aforementioned *recurso de salida* might be considered differently according to personal taste. The willingness to fight is linked to the concept of *casta*, a term that will be more fully considered later. It is important to note that cockfighting in the Canary Islands is more than just a matter of winning or losing. In some cases, the quality of a winning rooster could actually be called into question depending on how he behaves up in *la valla* and through the rearing phase.

## What people do while the roosters fight

One of the things that surprised me the most when I first arrived in Gran Canaria was the apparent tranquillity of the audience during the event, especially in leagues. Most of the time people were seated and quietly talking, if at all. Except for a few people loudly betting and some *casteadores* encouraging their fighting birds, it was not that common to hear people shouting. Maybe I was led

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<sup>449</sup> Literally “to be on the run” or “fleeing”.

by prejudices but, in that sense, it was not at all what I expected. I was even more surprised in my second year of fieldwork where I could appreciate the quietness of the event in La Palma. What was behind that tranquillity? How were there people experiencing the event in diverse ways? How important was the betting? These were the kind of questions I had in mind.

As I stressed earlier, the pairing marks the beginning of every single encounter between two teams in the leagues. But the peak points, obviously, are the fights themselves, where the figure of the *cuidador* stands out again above all others.

“It is not the same to be seated up there as down here. The pressure is different. Down there, as a *cuidador*, you have everyone on your shoulders and, if you lose, they will say it is your fault.

That is a brutal pressure, at least until you win the league”. (Cefe 15/04/2017)<sup>450</sup>

In some leagues, especially in La Palma, there is an important figure who has been briefly mentioned: the *presidente de valla*. They are, one for each team, the highest authority of the event and the ones in charge of rebuking any misbehaviour in the stands or discussing any issues up in *la valla* during the fights or through the process of weighing and cleaning. They usually decide, along with the *cuidadores*<sup>451</sup>, when to agree a draw or take a *gallo* out off *la valla*.

Once the fight starts, only the *cuidadores* are permitted to go up into *la valla*, for example to disentangle the roosters if they become stuck. But the *presidente de valla*, *cuidador* and sometimes

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<sup>450</sup> "No es lo mismo estar arriba que estar ahí abajo. La presión es diferente. Abajo tienes todos a tus espaldas y, si uno pierde, dirán que es culpa tuya. Esa presión es brutal hasta que ganas la contrata". (Cefe 15/04/2017)

<sup>451</sup> As happened with the figure of *soltador* (see the release), some *cuidadores* have also taken the role of the *presidentes de valla*.

an assistant, talk to each other to share their opinions on how the fight is going on. Usually whispering unless they want the others to hear what they have to say. Though it may seem trivial, each team tries to play its cards right by manoeuvring the situation to its benefit. And sometimes that entails trying to take advantage of the other's team nervousness. For example, by asking for a draw right after its fighting bird hits the other. A team might agree *tablas* if they are worried about losing another bout.

“The draws have a psychological impact and benefit the team which have a head start. You need to know how (and when) to ask for a draw”. (Jorge 12/02/2017)<sup>452</sup>

The anxiety of losing a fight can, for several reasons, make a team to agree a draw when it is leading the fight. Certainly not everybody lives the fights in such a way. However, *casteadores* whose *gallos* are fighting, have an even more intense experience. Experiences that are difficult to verbalize and hard to understand for an outsider. By the end of my first year of fieldwork, a *casteador* from Gran Canaria shared with me his sensations, right before one of his *gallos* started to fight:

"The whole process is condensed in the 5 minutes of adrenaline rush of the fights. But you live with passion since the fighting birds were born. Look at him (the commentator's father), he doesn't see, but he is suffering". (Juan Javier 03/06/2016)<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> “Las tablas son psicológicas y favorecen al que va ganando. Las tablas hay que saber pedir las”. (Jorge 12/02/2017)

<sup>453</sup> “Todo el proceso se condensa en los cinco minutos de adrenalina de las peleas. Pero se vive con pasión desde que los ves nacer. Mira cómo está el Mopa, está ciego ya, sufre”. (Juan Javier 03/06/2016)

I shall return to this point later but, as an initial approach, I think it should be taken as an experience where *casteadores* go through a mix of emotions (distress, enjoyment, etc) expressed in many ways. From *casteadores* who cannot stop talking and are unable to sit still to the ones who just breathe a sigh of relief at the end of the fight.

*Casteadores* and aficionados are calmer when watching someone else's rooster fight, both in championships and leagues. However, a good fight, as the one narrated earlier between *Simeone* and *El Percutor*, is capable of entertaining the audience and bringing people to their feet and even raising betting passions (see betting shortly). I never met a *casteador* or an aficionado who was solely interested in his own fights.

As previously mentioned, some people prefer the league mode while others prefer the championships. Beyond such preferences, there are some characteristics, in my view, which make the championships a more festive environment. First, the competition format makes the number of fights that a championship usually hosts several times higher than the 7-8 bouts that a day of league has. Therefore, no one is expected to closely follow the development of dozens of fights without going to the bar for a drink, talking with friends or even having a meal away from the premises. In leagues, at least until there is a season winner, every fight is important for the final classification while in championships there are fights that are no longer very interesting for several reasons, such as they will not make any change at the top of the rankings.

Secondly, the handlers<sup>454</sup> usually change after a few fights and their work is strictly guided by the *jueces*, so there is no such strategy of the game between teams as the one previously described. Perhaps this lies behind the friendlier atmosphere where people tend to joke more than in leagues.

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<sup>454</sup> This work is usually done by friends of the organisation with previous experience on pitting.

In fact, the only one who really needs to pay attention to all fights is the *juez* designated by the organisation.

Thirdly, *casteadores* from other islands usually come to the championships, meeting friends and taking an interest in the competitive level of their fighting birds. Moreover, every championship I attended had participants who, for one reason or another, do not compete regularly in the leagues, and had been preparing their roosters exclusively for that event. In view of the above, and the opportunity to win the prize and the recognition of being the best of the championship, the fights which can determine the winners usually give rise to greater enthusiasm.

To sum up, emotional peaks and troughs are more common in championships where people move around the stands more and tend to socialize differently by the absence, at least momentarily, of their team allegiances.

### **What people come to see**

At this point, it is essential to understand what is important to those participating and watching the event. First of all, as described in the previous sections, the event is held in specific indoor locations and according to the rules provided by the different competitions. A cockfight is not a random event involving any pair of roosters and people would complain if the characteristics and processes previously described are not followed by the organisers.

But above all else, including the modality of competition, breeders and aficionados come to see ‘pure’ performance<sup>455</sup>. In essence, they go to watch and admire the drama of the contest, the fighting birds’ performance. In this contest, breeders and aficionados recognise different styles of fighting. As previously mentioned, roosters’ quality to keep on fighting regardless of the severity of the injuries suffered is greatly appreciated by *casteadores*. This is seen as a way of revealing their unique nature, in fact, as the only way to truly reveal roosters’ *casta*. A fighting bird could fulfil every single requirement at the rearing phase, but a breeder will always be waiting to see a tough and long fight to confirm the bird’s quality. Actually, it could be argued that aficionados come to see the culmination of the rearing, that is to say, whether the expectations they have placed on the birds are met.

These expectations are not necessarily linked to a victory. Needless to say, everybody wants to win and a breeder could eventually hide a bad performance of his gamecock with a lucky triumph. However, a bout is always considered in its entirety and breeders comment on the overall performance of the birds. The same good memory breeders have when identifying their birds in the rearing phase applies when it comes to remembering fights. Especially the good ones. Personally, I found astonishing that some of the most memorable fights in *contratas* ended up in *tablas*<sup>456</sup> and concluded with both *cuidadores* holding up the roosters while the audience applauded their performance.

An outsider could easily be intrigued by the fact that some bouts that ended up in *tablas* were much appreciated by breeders. It is true that the uncertainty of the outcome generates excitement and

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<sup>455</sup> Although there are styles of fighting, it should be noted that roosters are not strictly “performing”, at least not as a matador performs in a bullfight or a football player in a game. They are unwittingly performing a role defined by breeders (Marvin, 1984:67).

<sup>456</sup> I even remember a few *gallos* which, although lost the fight, were also cheered after a good performance.

emotion among those watching the bouts. However, a bout is not just a matter of winning or losing but a way of fighting. In this sense, the use of plastic and natural spurs, rather than metal ones or blades, is essential because it reduces the element of luck involved when dealing with lethal metal blades<sup>457</sup>. Cockfighting in the Canary Islands is much more than a good first blow. In the Spanish archipelago breeders and aficionados go to see, and admire, a contest between two fighting birds. Therefore, the best contest that can be seen is the one in which both birds show their willingness to keep on fighting, when both try to cut and kill each other even after being severely injured. That is when people get excited, when they recognise two *gallos finos* up in *la valla*. Either in a more relaxed *contrata* or in a festive championship, such a bout will create enthusiasm among breeders. People will discuss that fight for days, much more than one in which a rooster gets a quick victory or one with a higher bet. When both *gallos* behave like that in the cockpit, the drama perceived by the audience far outweighs the importance of a victory and the amount of money bet, if any.

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<sup>457</sup> For more information on the spurs, including a brief overview of the ones used elsewhere, see chapter 8.



## After the fights

In championships, at the end of each fight the gamecocks are picked up by the handlers and given to the owners. The first thing that caught my attention, while they go to heal their animals, was how the *castedores* look at both sides of the head and the neck, looking for the most severe wounds, placing the index, thumb and the middle finger around the head. An examination of the chest, legs, back and tail follows; extending the wings to check if any feathers are broken. Stroking the rooster's tail to calm him down is very common.

After checking the most severe injuries, fighting birds are washed and cleaned with an antiseptic formula. Suturing wounds and applying medicaments to stop the bleeding are preliminary treatments when needed. The administration of antibiotics and a small amount of food (e.g., a hard-boiled egg) are also usual procedures before returning them to their bags or travelling cases. While this is happening, the next matched gamecocks are being taken up into *la valla* for the championship's smooth progression.

However, in leagues the process is more complex. If there is a draw, the handlers, usually the *cuidadores* themselves, quickly pick up their team's roosters to go as fast as possible to the designated area to try to save the rooster's life applying the aforementioned first aid<sup>458</sup>. Before long, the *cuidadores* will take the next two gamecocks into the arena.

On other occasions, when a *cuidador* admits his defeat, he climbs the ladder and gets into *la valla* to pick up his *gallo*<sup>459</sup> or, more commonly, the rooster of the other team to hand him over to the

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<sup>458</sup> In leagues, roosters will be treated first in the cockpit and later, more deeply, in *la gallera*.

<sup>459</sup> This is known as *levantar el gallo*.

assistant. This is a sign of courtesy but also a smart move to plan ahead, taking advantage of a few seconds of respite.

"The *cuidador* is looking at yours. He will have time to look at his *gallo* later. He knows that if yours is in bad condition he will probably not see him back for 21 days, even though he will be expecting him after 15 days". (Jorge 12/02/2017)<sup>460</sup>

By examining the bird's wounds, especially the eyes, they will be able to evaluate whether that rooster will fight again and when. As has been mentioned previously in *la casada*, *cuidador* and *ayudante* are planning which *gallo* will fight in the next days after the fights finish. Certainly, a gamecock with undamaged eyes is more likely to fight again. But not only that, the condition of the eyes is one of the most crucial factors to understand how the *casteadores* perceive the development of the contests. By the way they fight, aficionados can tell whether a *gallo* is blind in one eye or totally blind. During the fight a gamecock can become temporarily blind<sup>461</sup> as a result of the injuries sustained, and yet recover his sight during the course of the contest or later. That is why it is also the first thing they check.

"You have to check the (bird's) eyes to know if he will be able to fight again against you".

(Daniel 03/04/2016)<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> "El gallero lo que está mirando es el tuyo. El suyo ya tiene tiempo de mirarlo. Sabe que si el tuyo está mal probablemente no lo vea de vuelta hasta dentro de 21 días, aunque desde los 15 ya está atento, te lo está esperando". (Jorge 12/02/2017)

<sup>461</sup> This is known as *estar ciego en pelea*.

<sup>462</sup> "Hay que mirar los ojos para saber si te puede volver a pelear contra ti". (Daniel 03/04/2016)

Along with the eyes, the variety of injuries that a gamecock can suffer is wide, with the *puñaladas* (literally “stabs”) being the most serious. For instance, blows to the neck are especially dangerous because they can cause major internal bleeding<sup>463</sup>, swelling of the neck, and posterior suffocation of the fighting bird. Sometimes, these *puñaladas* do not lead to bleeding but allow the air to enter the affected area<sup>464</sup>, with consequent swelling.



Arnoldo cleaning a rooster's neck and head in La Palma. ©Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

Whatever the injuries are, when all the fights are over, team's roosters are returned to their boxes, usually large travel cases with capacity to accommodate four birds in separate sections. Back in *la gallera*, roosters are treated again: a small incision to push air out of the body, a protective ointment

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<sup>463</sup> *Envenado*.

<sup>464</sup> *Puñalada de aire*.

for the eyes, a few small stitches, anti- inflammatory and/or antibiotic therapy, etc; medical care with an intent of saving<sup>465</sup> the animals' lives. With some exceptions, of course. On one hand, even if they have fought bravely, a *casteador* might decide to kill a gamecock to avoid its unnecessary suffering when badly hurt. On the other hand, a *casteador* will not bother to keep roosters who have fought in a cowardly manner and they will be discarded, killed, sold<sup>466</sup> or given away. In any case, I never saw in my fieldwork someone willing to keep moribund animals for pleasure.

*Cuidadores* have been traditionally the ones who decide the killing, either for a deficient performance or for being gravely injured. But the declining importance of *cuidadores* in decision-making is changing things in favour of *casteadores*. One of the things that have somewhat diminished the importance of *cuidadores* is the increasing number of teams, something that allows a greater mobility of *casteadores* among teams. And the teams depend on the support, including the economic support, of *casteadores*, who are usually partners.

"They have to fight those of their partners. They are the ones who maintain them but ... the partners should understand that it would be best to classify the *gallos* in order to have better ones. Not only fight their *gallos* one way or another. But what is happening now? If they don't fight their *gallos*, they get angry and take them to another team". (Cefe 18/02/2017)<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> The expression *a ver si escapa* (let's see if he can make it) is often used.

<sup>466</sup> Birds can be sold to other breeders or to pet-shops. Curiously, I found (mainly, but not only, in Gran Canaria) people linked with Santería (Afro-American religion) who were interested in buying roosters of specific colours from the breeders.

<sup>467</sup> "Ellos tienen que pelear los de sus socios. Son los que los mantienen pero...los socios deberían entender que lo mejor sería clasificar para tener mejores. No solamente que les peleen sus gallos sí o sí. Pero, ¿qué pasa ahora? Que si no les peleas sus gallos, se enfadan y se los llevan a otra gallera". (Cefe 18/02/2017)

That is what a *casteador* from La Palma told me when he was explaining to me that a *cuidador*'s word is not final anymore while a few decades ago they were completely in charge of the killing, even just for breeding goals. So far, I have outlined what happens before, during and after the fights. I will now explore another aspect of engagement with the fights; betting.

## **Betting**

Betting and cockfighting. Cockfighting and betting. Do they always go hand in hand? Although it is not easy to measure the importance of betting on cockfighting in the Canary Islands, different aspects such as its legality, how bets are placed and audiences' views on betting, are explored below.

As mentioned before, there are two different modes of competition: league and championship. Although it depends on the island, and other factors, I will further explain that the number of people who usually bet is normally higher in championships where many people do it. However, at every cockfight I attended, there were people who didn't bet at all. And those who did, usually placed small bets (from 5 to 20 euros) and were interested in the development of the fights rather than just the outcomes. Contrary to practices elsewhere, the format of the competition allows breeders to fight *gallos* without betting.

### **The legality of betting**

As already mentioned in the introduction, cockfighting was regulated by the Official Bulletin of the Canary Islands in 1991. Without attempting to analyse that law in detail, it is appropriate to highlight a few elements. Firstly, in the non-operative part of the law, cockfighting is depicted as an exception to the animal welfare regulation, encouraging its natural disappearance by prohibiting public subsidies and the construction of new facilities. It also promotes its disappearance by not permitting the participation of younger generations through demanding closed premises and denying access to under 16 years of age.

In the operative part of the law, the Article 5.1 specifically regulates the event but do not mention the betting. In this sense, in principle, betting is unregulated and we would have to resort to exploring the legality, or not, of clandestine betting and gaming. What I mean here is that, contrary to popular opinion, there is no specific legal regulation that prohibits betting at cockfighting.

### **Understanding how the betting works**

There are no betting shops or booths, nor are there bookmakers at cockfight. Small bets are agreed by, and between, individuals in the audience. These peripheral bets are generally shouted by a bettor (e.g., *¡van 10 al giro!* “ten on the *giro*”) and they are accepted (*¡van!* “taken”), or not, by one or more aficionados. Most bets, if made, are made immediately before the particular bout or as soon as the fighting itself begins. Sometimes bets are made during the fight, changing the odds according to how it develops. Most bettors offer their bets while seated, others while walking around *la valla* and facing the audience trying to find someone to bet. Sometimes bets are made between people sitting next to each other, mainly tiny amounts or even paying for the next round of drinks, just *para ver la pelea* (literally “to see the fight”).

Although there are some, individual bets over 20 euros are infrequent. When higher, they are usually a common pot of a group of friends. In addition to individual bets at the fights, there are others accepted before the season begins. These are generally group bets made by the teams to challenge each other for the whole season through *contratas*<sup>468</sup>. Pérez-Corrales, a professor of literature at the University of La Laguna (Tenerife) and a cockfighting aficionado, also described

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<sup>468</sup> Not every member of the team or *partido* is obliged to equally contribute towards the payment of this bet or even place a bet at all.

the betting as a playful element where the bets are small and only a minority is involved<sup>469</sup>. He also highlighted the unpredictable factors in the fights which make it very difficult to have a winning streak<sup>470</sup>. I also had that feeling that no one won many bets in a row or made money consistently.

Cárdenes-Rodríguez, cocker and chronicler in Gran Canaria, proudly described how the bets are done in the Canary Islands and how the payment is made<sup>471</sup>. Immediately after the fight, the loser stands and takes the money to the winner's seat<sup>472</sup>. It has been stated, not only by some authors<sup>473</sup>, but also by many aficionados I had the chance to talk with, that cockfighting is a responsible tradition where the police are not needed and there are no disturbances. I have heard of some occasional problems and, as I have mentioned before, some people told me that this is not a gentlemen's sport anymore. However, in my time in the archipelago's fights I only saw a police officer three times and it was always to check if the legal paperwork was in order. I never saw any problem regarding the payment of the bets and no incident came to blows.

Nobody bets on all fights, some do it every day on a specific combat, others sporadically and some not at all. So, there is betting but betting is far from being the main ingredient of the fights or the primary motivation for the majority of the audience.

Herzog describes, in his research on cockfighting in USA<sup>474</sup>, another form of gambling where at some pits, arbitrary numbers given to each cocker were auctioned off to the highest bidder and with the winner (of the lottery money) being the person who purchased the number of the

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<sup>469</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:59-60)

<sup>470</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:59-60)

<sup>471</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:183)

<sup>472</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987:183)

<sup>473</sup> See, e.g., Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987) and Pérez-Corrales (2008).

<sup>474</sup> Herzog (1985)



champion. When I saw raffles at pits in the Canary Islands, they were not associated with the fighting of the roosters or the entries fees. They were lotteries to fund the teams by selling 1-euro raffle tickets, giving a prize to the weekly winner.

To ponder the significance of betting in the Canarian fights I would consider what Garry Marvin (1984:66) stated on his article on Andalusian (mainland Spain) cockfighting ‘there is betting, and the betting does indeed create interest and excitement among those involved in it, but there are also very many people at any cockfight who do not bet at all’.

It is difficult to generalize the overall thinking of the Canarian aficionados about Andalusian cockfighting. From conversations about it, I sensed three main views: more money was involved, high-quality *gallos* generated betting interest, and there were more problems regarding illegal fights and robbery. I did not have the chance to attend any cockfights in Andalusia, but I have met *casteadores* from Andalusia competing in the Canary Islands and they told me that betting is generally higher in mainland Spain than in the Canary Islands.

Taking into consideration both the informants views and Marvin’s statement, we have a scenario where the Canary Islands are, by far, one of the cockfighting areas where betting is of very little importance and yet it is something that happens at every event. One of the most eminent breeders of Lanzarote told me once about the betting:

“It is not the most important thing but probably there would not be cockfighting without betting”. (Gerardo 02/06/2016)<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> “No es lo más importante pero quizás no existirían las peleas sin apuestas”. (Gerardo 02/06/2016)

Apart from the local aficionados, there were people from South and Central America (mainly Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Venezuela) in every cockfight I attended. *Los sudamericanos*<sup>476</sup> are perceived by many locals as pro-betting and pro-championships in contrast with the Canarians who perceive themselves as less involved in betting and trying to dignify the League mode. The experience gained throughout my fieldwork made me think there are different ways of betting, some of which could be connected to a process of competitive masculinities in the sense of men competing with other men through, and in terms of, betting. However, and to close this point momentarily, a statement by a Cuban cocker, competing in Gran Canaria, shows us the low level of betting in the Canary Islands:

“Look, here in the Canary Islands, they fight the *gallos*. While in Cuba we play (meaning betting) the *gallos*. Bets are ten times higher in Cuba and salaries are 100 times lower. Moreover, If I don’t bet for my *gallo* I will feel he is going out there unprotected”. (Eladio 02/03/2016)<sup>477</sup>

He was possibly exaggerating but, what I would like to stress here is the suggestion that cockfighting in Latin America is an event which involves betting at a completely different level

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<sup>476</sup> Making the distinction between locals and foreigners could be, in some cases, ambiguous. It is worth mentioning that the Canarian archipelago has been thought of as a continual interaction scenario, an area of contact where several narrative discourses were used to build collective identities (Gil-Hernández, 2011). Since the conquest of the Canary Islands by the Crown of Castile in the 15th century, the archipelago was a continuous passage of people and goods within military campaigns as a significant driving force of the colonisation (Gil-Hernández, 2011). The variety of people’s background found at the fights were very long, especially regarding the ancestors’ comings and goings to Latin America and mainland Spain. The case of some Cuban men previously referred to on page 72 is a clear example of this hybridity.

<sup>477</sup> “Mira, aquí en Canarias pelean los gallos. Nosotros en Cuba jugamos (apostamos) los gallos. Las apuestas son 10 veces más altas y el sueldo medio es 100 veces más bajo. Además, yo si no apuesto a mi gallo siento que va solo, desprotegido”. (Eladio 02/03/2016)

from that in the Canarian archipelago. Marvin gathered similar opinions in this matter regarding mainland Spain and Latin America<sup>478</sup>.

### **Audiences' views on betting**

As a general rule, it is something well accepted. I did not see anyone upset or complaining about the betting, except in rare instances. Once in La Palma, I saw a drunk bettor protesting the decision of *tablas* agreed by the *cuidadores*. He was quickly rebuked by the *presidente de valla* who warned him not to behave like that or he would be expelled. Many *reñideros* across the archipelago have notices displayed communicating the compliance with legal regulations for the unlikely event that they need to expel someone.

Betting has been argued by Pérez-Corrales as a barometer of the general enthusiasm; meaning the better or more intense the fights, the higher the betting<sup>479</sup>. I agree with him in the sense that the fights that create the most expectations, and attract the most bettors, might not necessarily be the best in terms of how the actual fights develop. Intensity is also generated by fights where both roosters are quickly perceived as *gallos finos*.

Betting at cockfighting has been analysed by some authors, such as Geertz (1972), as something deeply connected into a network of hierarchy of status rivalries between groups. That would not be the case in the Canary Islands, at least not as a generalised pattern or a very complex network of relationships. Pérez-Corrales (2008:60) pointed out the predominance of an 'apostador simpaticante'<sup>480</sup> (loyal bettor) over a real bettor who would eventually bet on the best roosters no

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<sup>478</sup> Marvin (1984:66)

<sup>479</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:59-60)

<sup>480</sup> As opposed to turncoat.

matter who the owner. It is true that betting against your team is unlikely and not well looked upon in league events and people usually bet on their friends' roosters rather than those of their opponents. But two things are changing this element. Firstly, there are no teams at the championships, where everybody competes individually. Secondly, mobility among teams is much more common now than 15 or 20 years ago and consequently people feel less attached to a particular team.

Betting will be one of the features further developed in chapter 8 in which I will situate the Canarian fights within the world of cockfighting. Now, after the long ethnographic description provided, I will present how a *casa de gallos* works in the Canary Islands.

# 7

## A SEASON IN A CASA DE GALLOS

“Traditions are learned in leading *galleras* with good *gallos* and great *cuidadores*. Not in championships”. (Ezequiel 04/05/2018)<sup>481</sup>

As mentioned before, a *gallera* or *casa de gallos* is the place where a team or *partido* keeps its fighting birds during the season. A *casa de gallos* is run by a *cuidador* and his assistant, sometimes with informal assistance from other aficionados. In order to understand how a cockfighting season develops within a *casa de gallos*, one first has to look at the end of the previous one. Once a *contrata* ends, *casteadores* will be talking about transfers, particularly about the future of the *cuidadores*. For the vast majority of the breeders I spoke to, it was essential to know in advance who was/were going to be in charge of the preparation of the fighting birds in a *casa de gallos*. Each *casteador* will have his particular preferences about the quality and characteristics of the different *cuidadores* available. Hardworking, docile, picky, grumpy, loyalty and ability to work under pressure are only a few of the attributes discussed. For example, there are breeders who feel that a specific *cuidador* would give priority to his own friend's gamecocks or would only be willing to work with top-quality fighting birds.

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<sup>481</sup> “Las tradiciones se aprenden en galleras grandes con gallos buenos y grandes galleros. No en campeonatos”. (Ezequiel 04/05/2018)

If breeders aren't happy with the reputation of a *cuidador*, they might choose to change all, or at least some of, their roosters to a different *casa de gallos*. In my experience, even some breeders who had a relatively good season in a winning *casa de gallos*, decided to change team<sup>482</sup> because they disagreed on the number (or times) that their cockerels were used by the *cuidador*. During my fieldwork I witnessed how this sort of disagreement can lead to the founding of new parties by a few dissatisfied breeders. As seen before, the number of cockfighting associations have recently increased<sup>483</sup>, involving a higher number of *contratas*<sup>484</sup> held in the Spanish archipelago. This, together with the growth of the championships<sup>485</sup>, has weakened the power of cockfighting parties and increased the mobility among them.

“Nowadays people are persuaded by the *cuidador*, people do not really belong to a party anymore”. (Pablo 06/06/2017)<sup>486</sup>

Not only are parties competing for the signing of the best *cuidadores*, but also for attracting *casteadores* with good fighting birds. Sometimes presidents offer better conditions for some breeders, such a lower membership fee or a more significant role for their birds. The main point here is that *casteadores* are attracted by *cuidadores* with a good reputation and vice versa. The

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<sup>482</sup> It is true that there are *casteadores* who have remained loyal to a *casa de gallos* for decades regardless of the different *cuidadores*, but they seem to be the exception under the current trend.

<sup>483</sup> Sometimes they use the names of renowned parties that were shut down in the last decades but not all of them are currently competing in *contratas*.

<sup>484</sup> For example, competition between teams from Fuerteventura and Lanzarote is currently common.

<sup>485</sup> As aforementioned, *casteadores* can compete in championships throughout the season regardless of whether they belong to a party or not.

<sup>486</sup> “Ahora es el cuidador quien arrastra, la gente ya no es de los partidos”. (Pablo 06/06/2017)

signing of a *cuidador* (and sometimes his assistant too) could even determine the length, meaning the number of dates, of a particular *contrata*.

“People (meaning *casteadores*) will not assure you the number of weeks until they know who is the *cuidador*. They will assure you a number of weeks depending on the one hired”. (Manuel,

08/10/2018)<sup>487</sup>

Although I visited 5 islands in the Spanish archipelago, La Palma has, by far, the most *contratas* and some of them extend over 15 weekends<sup>488</sup>. For example, the *contrata* between Tazacorte and Los Llanos had 17 dates between January and May 2017.

What follows is a journey through different steps and challenges faced by a *casa de gallos* in one season. Based on my fieldwork experience, particularly in *casas de gallos* on the island of La Palma, I will also discuss some issues, such as the secrecy and the role of women, that attracted my attention and which I consider important to understand how this unique modality of parties<sup>489</sup> competing in *contratas* works.

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<sup>487</sup> “La gente hasta que no conozcan al cuidador no te aseguran las semanas, según el gallero así te dan semanas”. (Manuel, 08/10/2018)

<sup>488</sup> During my fieldwork, La Palma and Gran Canaria were the islands where longer *contratas* were held, usually from late January to May. These two, along with the once-thriving Tenerife, has been depicted by local authors (e.g., Pérez-Corrales (2008) and Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987)) as the three islands where *contratas* have been traditionally more important. A lower level of aficionados (Pérez-Corrales, 2008:226-227), but also climatic differences (Pérez-Corrales, 2008:305-306) has been mentioned as the causes for shorter *contratas* in Fuerteventura and Lanzarote respectively.

<sup>489</sup> At least in the island of Gran Canaria, there are teams or *partidos* which are organised without *cuidadores* and *casa de gallos* which significantly drops the costs of their internal running. In this case, breeders will decide on the roosters competing at the weekend. One of these teams, Los Llanos de Telde, won the 2016 *contrata* in Gran Canaria.

### ***Apertura* (The opening)**

Every *casa de gallos* I visited in the Canary Islands had a building, or a series of buildings, with different rooms, sometimes called *salones*, and outdoor spaces. The nature of the rooms varies from one *casa de gallos* to another but *apartado*<sup>490</sup>, infirmary and training *valla* are vital for the smooth-running of the proceedings. Rooms and materials are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before the place is ready to receive the fighting birds.

The *casa de gallos* opens its doors in December to receive the roosters of the *casteadores*. This is known as *encerrar los gallos*<sup>491</sup>. At the opening, *cuidador* and assistant write down the tag numbers in a notebook and gamecocks are dewormed. Deworming is vital because a *casa de gallos* will host fighting birds from many different farms. Maintaining a good temperature is also essential due to the fact that roosters do not tolerate a cold environment. People are especially worried about abrupt changes in temperature and draughts and it is fairly common for *cuidadores* to wash roosters with a sponge and then put them in the sun.

The roosters coming in are, in most cases, far from unknown by the *cuidador*. Even if they are just stags, he will probably know the lineage. In addition, a *cuidador* will have visited some farms before the opening of the season and will know some of the roosters from the previous season.

"That *gallino negro* fought against my brother. My brother was a *cuidador* in Argual and Arnoldo in El Paso. And that rooster fought against my brother and lost a fight and got a draw in

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<sup>490</sup> The room in which the batch of roosters that will fight at the weekend is kept. *Apartar* means to separate.

<sup>491</sup> Literally "to enclose the roosters" (in a particular *casa de gallos*).



another one. I did not like the *gallino* at all in the two fights I saw, the *gallino* did not hit the other with the spurs". (Leo 03/12/2017)<sup>492</sup>

On this first day, many *casteadores* gather together with the hope of having a good season and talk about the fighting birds arriving to the *casa de gallos*. There is generally an optimistic mood in the overall discussion of the roosters that will compete in the first part of the season. Bars next to the *casas de gallos* are a good barometer for gauging this initial enthusiasm.



Cages and flying pens. Thanks to *Gallera Los Llanos*. © Ricardo Ontillera (2017)

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<sup>492</sup> "Ese gallino negro, peleó en contra de mi hermano. Mi hermano cuidando en Argual y Arnoldo cuidando en El Paso. Y ese gallo peleó contra mi hermano y perdió una pelea y entabló otra. A mí el gallino no me gustó, no dio con las espuelas y las dos peleas que le ví era un gallo malo, no me gustó para nada". (Leo 03/12/2017)

### ***Trabajar los gallos***

Stags and roosters will commence soon with the most important part of the preparation for a fighting bird, known as *correr los gallos*<sup>493</sup>.

“At the beginning it is normal that you have to be a bit on top of them, but they must understand that they are here to train. This one is still starting, he’s been running for 3 minutes and is already very hot and opening the beak and gasping”. (Juan Javier 15/01/2017)<sup>494</sup>

This is comparable to the running exercises performed by a human athlete. The running time is gradually increased to give the rooster the needed fitness for the fights, which can last over 10 minutes. But more than following pre-set times, the *cuidador* pays attention to the beak of the animal, that is to say, how long it takes to open the beak, gasping, exhausted by fatigue.

In many cases, this is followed by flying exercises to improve the balance and the strength of the rooster’s legs. The animal is placed on a padded area and thrown into the air. This twisting motion makes the rooster flap his wings and work his legs when landing on the ground. These movements will be vital when spurring in a real fight up in *la valla*.

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<sup>493</sup> Similar exercises (“walk and flies”) are described by Walker (1986:30) in the USA.

<sup>494</sup> “Al principio es normal que tengas que estar un poco más detrás de ellos para que corran pero deben entender que están aquí para entrenar. A este todavía le falta mucho, mira lleva 3 minutos y ya está muy caliente y abriendo el pico y jadeando”. (Juan Javier 15/01/2017)



A sequence of the abovementioned flying movements. Thanks to *Gallera Telde*. © Ricardo Ontillera (2016)

The sum of all these movements and exercises is known as *trabajar los gallos* (literally “to work the roosters”). *Casteadores* and *cuidadores* see this as a process of acclimatisation to the conditions of *la valla*. Although fighting birds are naturally aggressive, there is a needed period of adaptation; not to make them fight but to make them familiar with the artificial environment. They naturally come to blows but they are not used to do it in *la valla*. As one would expect, this is not only tiring for the animals but for the *cuidador* and his assistant. Going around in circles within *la valla*, doing different exercises with the *mona* or *cachiporro*, is a hard work.

Pepe: The basic thing is the running, just the *gallo* with *la mona*. You put him in *la valla*, from one side to the other to exercise, to lose weight.

Ricardo: *La mona* is ...?

Pepe: *La mona* is made of plastic, a fake *gallo* but looks like a *gallo* and the *gallo* attacks it because he thinks it is a *gallo*. There are *gallos* that do not chase *la mona*. Then you have to put a real *gallo cachiporro*. But most of them chase *la mona*. (Pepe 14/04/2016)<sup>495</sup>

These workers clean the facilities every morning and spend countless hours performing many tasks. Although on some occasions they will be helped by aficionados<sup>496</sup>, most of the time they do their work without any extra help.

### ***Pechas***

After some time, the first spar in the *casa de gallos* will be undertaken. *Cuidador* and assistant will form similar-size pairs of fighting birds and the first spar will give them an idea of the current condition of the animals. These first *spars* do not usually last long because they are the first ones done at the *casa de gallos* and *cuidador* and assistant must check many animals in a short time. It is understood as a first contact. But the *cuidador* is already thinking about the animals that would be in optimal conditions to fight on the first dates. It should be noted that while a *casteador* can

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<sup>495</sup> Pepe: Lo básico es correrlo, el gallo solo con la mona. Le pones en la valla de aquí pa allá para hacer ejercicio, para bajar kilos.

Ricardo: La mona es...?

Pepe: La mona es de plástico, el gallo de mentira pero que parece un gallo y el gallo lo ataca porque se cree que es un gallo. Hay gallos que no persiguen la mona. Entonces les tienes que poner a un gallo cachiporro. Pero la mayoría siguen la mona. (Pepe 14/04/2016)

<sup>496</sup> Sometimes this help is provided by women. I will further discuss women's role in cockfighting later in this chapter.

decide when, and with how many roosters, to compete in a championship, a *cuidador* must prepare a number of fighting birds weekly for several preestablished weeks. Therefore, he must keep in mind not only the *casta* but also the weight, current physical condition and number of gamecocks available for the short (and long) term.

On many occasions after a spar or workout, a fighting bird is taken to a relaxation area (*revolcadero*) with loose soil where it can roll or wallow. It is also common to treat roosters with a small item of food, such a slice of mandarin, after the exercise. About one week later, a second and tougher spar might be undertaken to reveal how the fighting birds have evolved and to see how they respond in a new fighting test. This will enable the *cuidador* to organise the birds in different batches, called *tandas*, according to their performances and team's needs. By this time the *cuidador* has a good idea of the quality of the roosters he has available and will prepare a specific programme for each of them. As stated earlier, fighting birds are treated individually.

On La Palma, for example, the first sparring sessions in Tzacorte and Los Llanos attract the attention of many *casteadores* and aficionados. I was told that, traditionally, Canarian *casteadores* brought their stags to a *casa de gallos* without any previous spar<sup>497</sup>. However, I could see that currently this is not always the case. Therefore, although a *cuidador* will have a similar plan for each animal at the beginning of the season, a *cuidador* might face the issue of having stags with diverse experience<sup>498</sup>.

Beyond the particular procedures followed by a specific *cuidador*, due to the first *pechas* one might find the first frictions between *cuidadores* and *casteadores*. A potential good fighter for a

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<sup>497</sup> I was told that one of the tricks used by a famous *casteador*, who began to stand out in the 1970's in Gran Canaria, was *pechar* his fighting birds before bringing them to the *casa de gallos*. That gave him a competitive advantage and a better knowledge of their condition.

<sup>498</sup> This is another reason to evaluate the first *pecha* in a *casa de gallos* with some caution.

*casteador* could be a useless one for a *cuidador*. Either for having better roosters within that range of weight or simply because the animal's fighting style is not appealing enough for the *cuidador*. Therefore, some roosters will be rejected and given back to the owner, at least temporarily. Others will stay at the *casa de gallos* but might not ever be fought during the season. This may lead to tensions in the relationship between the *cuidador* and the *casteadores*.

During my fieldwork I heard countless examples of roosters that were rejected in a *casa de gallos* but finally won several fights in a different one and/or in championships<sup>499</sup>. Or fighting birds which were accepted one season but rejected by a new *cuidador* in the following season.

“That one fought twice as a stag, in a championship and in the *contrata* of Tzacorte. But it was rejected the following year”. (Anibal 19/10/2017)<sup>500</sup>

The important point here is that each *casteador* will have their own expectations before the season begins. Therefore, a *cuidador* will be dealing with many hopes but he cannot please all of the people all of the time. Although the *contrata* modality has a few exceptional characteristics, it should not be forgotten that this is still a very individualistic practice in which one is not only competing against the members of the other team, but also within the team. Internal competition could be even tougher due to the fact that one's rooster should be chosen according to his

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<sup>499</sup> Some breeders expressed concerns about the impact of the increasing number of competitions on the quality of the roosters. Some of them believed that the abundance of competing possibilities has a negative effect on the selection of the roosters.

<sup>500</sup> “Ese peleó 2 veces de pollo, en un campeonato y en Tzacorte. Y al siguiente año lo rechazaron”. (Anibal 19/10/2017).



performance against the other members of the party. Sometimes there are also individual prizes within a *casa de gallos* such as the best *casteador* of the party<sup>501</sup>.

### **The beginning of the *contrata***

As described in chapter 6, two days before the fights *la casada* takes place and, early in the morning, *cuidador* and assistant *pasan* or *vuelan los gallos*. This *pase* will be brief because the last thing a *cuidador* wants is to hurt a *gallo* before the weekend or reducing the rooster's desire to fight because of a very long test. Therefore, they do it with fighting birds that have been previously selected for the best batches and just to see which ones are in the best condition to fight at the weekend. Pepín, a well-known *casteador* from Los Llanos, made a number of specific comments as regards the different dimensions of these tests to see the quality of an animal.

“I like to see the one on Mondays, which is when they are sparred. On Thursdays and Fridays they only *vuelan los gallos*. And with only that it is hard to see...”. (Pepín 09/03/2017)<sup>502</sup>

During my fieldwork in Los Llanos, about 20 animals were checked every Friday to generate the 12-weight list for the *casada*. It is worth emphasising that roosters are not simply put to fight straight away. While their spurs are being covered, fighting birds are scrutinised to examine the

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<sup>501</sup> This prize is usually given to the *casteador*, among the party members, who owns the fighting bird that has won more bouts during the season.

<sup>502</sup> “A mí me gusta ver la de los lunes, que es cuando los pechan. Jueves y viernes los vuelan nada más. Y con eso no se ve bien...”. (Pepín 09/03/2017)

state of their feathers, legs, beak, comb, eyes, etc. For instance, the tail is often wetted to prevent damage of the feathers.

After the test, the scrutiny is more intense. *Gallos* are washed and any small wound<sup>503</sup> is treated while reviewing their performance and condition for the weekend. The decision-making process for the list is generally a matter of considerable debate, certainly between the *cuidador* and *ayudante*. And *casteadores* eagerly await it. Including a variety of roosters, in terms of ownership, is sometimes seen as a deft touch to keep most of them happy<sup>504</sup>.

On the day of the fights, roosters are generally taken from the *casa de gallos* to the *reñidero* in a van in which wooden carrying boxes with separate compartments are placed. When the *cuidador* steps out of the van there will always be someone taking care of the birds and keeping them out of the public eye. When the fights are over, the same route is taken back to the *casa de gallos*, where animals are washed and cleaned by the *cuidadores*, sometimes helped by *casteadores*. Special attention<sup>505</sup> will be paid to their eyes and serious wounds that might require incision or stitches. The cleaning is also a time to start assessing the individual performance.

“This one didn’t spar really well here but woke up down there (in the actual fights) when he was severely hit in one eye...”. (Demetrio 05/02/2017)<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Beak and comb are particularly sensitive areas and iodine antiseptic solutions (e.g., Betadine) are commonly used.

<sup>504</sup> This is particularly important for those *cuidadores* who are in their first season in a *casa de gallos*.

<sup>505</sup> Some of them, especially if they have quickly won their bout, will not be badly hurt and might only need the cleaning.

<sup>506</sup> “Éste que aquí no pechaba muy bien, pero despertó allí abajo (en las peleas) cuando le dieron fuerte en un ojo...”. (Demetrio 05/02/2017)



This assessment is of central importance for deciding how to proceed in the near future and it is particularly important with regard to the animals fighting for the first time. Depending on its performance a rooster will be put again in the cockpit soon, kept for a future fight or just discarded. The fight day is over but the *cuidadores* are thinking about the ones to come. Therefore, the first weeks of the season are vital for discussing the general condition of the fighting birds.

### **To be or not to be... in fighting mood**

From a *cuidador's* perspective it is one thing to be a very good fighting bird and another thing to *estar de pelea* (to be in fighting mood). Fighting is in their nature but a *cuidador's* job is to have his weekly batch in the perfect fighting mood. There are two basic tools for this purpose: *correr* and *pechar*. But apart from that, the fact of having many roosters in a close environment can also be made use of. There is physical separation between them, but their instinct can be boosted. That is something I realised when I was giving a hand with some tasks, such as placing a few cages outdoor under the sun.

Daniel: Turn it around. Put the windows in front of each other. Let them eat facing each other.

Ricardo: Is that so they can see each other while eating and get into a fighting mood?

Daniel: Sure. So they are active. (Daniel 19/04/2017)<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Daniel: Dale la vuelta. Pon las ventanas de frente. Que coman de frente.

Ricardo: ¿Eso es para que se vean mientras comen y cojan celo de pelea?

Daniel: Claro. Que estén activos. (Daniel 19/04/2017)

Everyone has their own theories about when, how and for how long animals should have visual contact. Just as at some moments it is enhanced, in others it is discouraged. A similar strategy is usually played with hens. When fighting birds are in *cuido*, not only males are separated from each other but also from females. Unlike in other practices, it is not a total isolation. Sometimes they will be shown a hen and during the season some roosters could have a cooling-off period on the farm where hens would be available. The way a rooster reacts to the presence of another male, food<sup>508</sup>, or a hen is closely evaluated by a *cuidador*. Being reluctant to eat and/or not showing interest for the hens would be considered a bad sign.

In any case, *cuidadores* do not think about *estar de pelea* as a matter of exercising as much as possible before the fights. Too much work or even too much keenness (*celo*) over an extended period of time could be detrimental.

“Carlos's rooster went out asleep. He insists on allowing his roosters to spar a lot, but sometimes too much and that takes away their desire”. (Daniel 19/04/2017)<sup>509</sup>

I was told many times that *los gallos tienen un tope*, meaning that roosters have a limit no matter how much you work with them: a ceiling to their performance that cannot be exceeded. Overworked roosters, as a rule, would tie up<sup>510</sup>, rather than continuously increase, their fighting spirit.

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<sup>508</sup> Maize and other cereals and seeds are the main food given to fighting birds.

<sup>509</sup> “El de Carlos salió dormido. Él se empeña en foguetear mucho los gallos, pero a veces demasiado y eso les quita el deseo”. (Daniel 19/04/2017)

<sup>510</sup> A *muy duro* or *requintado* rooster will have too much muscle and will lack flexibility and freshness. Therefore, according to the views expressed by many *cuidadores*, will have more difficulties to cut and hurt the opponent.

The vocabulary used (*celo*, *deseo*, *estar de pelea*, etc.) gives a clue to cockfighters' beliefs about the fighting spirit in roosters as something that can be developed to some extent, but at the same time, as being part of their nature. Part of the *celo* is an inner characteristic of each individual. I was told over and over that it is one thing to be willing or eager to fight, and something else to keep on doing so after receiving a few hard blows. This has to do with the *casta* of the rooster.

“A *gallo*, if he's good, he will not fade if you keep him active. After a good *pecha*, if he is *fino*, it is when he reveals his keenness (*se encela*)”. (Carlos 17/02/2017)<sup>511</sup>

The capacity of fighting birds to learn is acknowledged by *cuidadores*. This is precisely what makes the first *corridas* and *pechas* so important. But apart from that, it is common to see bouts between stags and roosters or between two roosters with different experience. For example, due to the previously mentioned overwork, stags' freshness along with their natural inclination towards fighting can be sometimes seen as an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

A *cuidador* should know when to choose some roosters that are not the best but, due to the high number of pre-agreed bouts in a *contrata*, will have to fight sooner or later. A rooster can be mediocre but keen to fight (*estar de pelea*) or the other way around. The quality of its fighting spirit is regarded as something given while *estar de pelea* is thought of as resulting from a mix of hard work and *cuidador's* expertise. But not everyone can discern a rooster performance at the same speed:

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<sup>511</sup> “Un gallo, si es bueno, no se pasa si le mantienes activo. Tras una buena *pecha*, si es *fino*, es cuando se *encela*”. (Carlos 17/02/2017)

"Good *cuidadores* have a gift. It seems that they see it in slow motion and exactly where they hit. Vito *vuela un gallo* and soon stops and tells you the one that is ready for Saturday. And you have not seen anything special and you get a 6-1. But Vito and Manuel are lazy, they don't work hard but take advantage of knowing exactly how to choose the animals when they *están de pelea*. The *mona* is for Álvaro and Mateo. Look, do not think that the *mona* is easy to use. Many do it at the top without bending the back down. And by doing that you will have the rooster looking up, and when he enters a fight he is watching the clouds and gets killed. The *mona* must be lowered and moved between the legs like a basketball. It's hard". (Gaspar 16/06/2017)<sup>512</sup>

Gaspar's views could be linked to the *cuidadores*' characteristics previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Within this topic of *estar de pelea*, doping could be included. I will not go into detail about this very complex issue, but I would like to make a few observations starting with Pérez-Corrales statement on the matter:

The use of stimulants for roosters has a totally adverse long-term, and not that long, effects. In a society that it is specialised in all kinds of drugs, its use in the cockfighting world was inevitable. Some *cuidadores* have made an intelligent use of stimulants, but others are overusing chemical products, with the consequence that *castíos* (lineages) are destroyed. A

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<sup>512</sup> "Los cuidadores buenos tienen un don. Parece que lo ven a cámara lenta y dónde dan exactamente. Vito vuela un gallo y al poco lo aparta y te dice que ese va para el sábado. E igual tú no le has visto nada especial y te mete un 6-1. Pero Vito y Manuel son vagos, ellos no son de trabajar mucho los animales sino de aprovechar cuando están de pelea. La mona y eso es para Álvaro y Mateo. Y ojo, no te creas que la mona es fácil. Que muchos la trabajan arriba, sin doblar el lomo para abajo. Y haciendo eso tienes al gallo mirando para arriba y cuando entra a pelear está mirando a las nubes y lo matan. La mona hay que bajarla, moverla entre las piernas como una pelota de baloncesto. Es duro". (Gaspar 16/06/2017)

rooster with an excessive intake of stimulants is faster, but fights madly; it has more strength, but less resistance. And no drug can ever replace a well-bred and well-kept rooster.

(Pérez-Corrales, 2008: 208)<sup>513</sup>

In chapter 6 Cefe, when referring to the cleaning before the fight as a *paripé* he added that nowadays all suspicious substances are injected. However, he was of the view, as are many others, that it is not easy to know what and how much should be injected to get a better performance. Therefore, many times, when injected, roosters are like *monos con pistolas*<sup>514</sup> (“monkeys with pistols”) fighting madly but lacking self-control. In fact, I found people worried about the possibility of causing a rooster to fly away due to the administration of stimulants. However, doping is sometimes used to increase the fighting mood of a rooster.

It is worth noting that almost everyone talks about drugs, but hardly anyone openly acknowledges their use. Some *cuidadores* (and breeders too) are sometimes accused<sup>515</sup> of drugging roosters but in the majority of rulebooks I had the opportunity to read I could not find any specific reference to ban doping. What I always found clearly specified was the prohibition of applying any substances to a rooster’s feathers for different purposes such as making the opponent’s bite difficult. A matter that also creates some controversy.

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<sup>513</sup> “El uso de estimulantes para los gallos es completamente negativo a largo, e incluso no muy largo, plazo. En una sociedad especializada en todo tipo de drogas, era inevitable su llegada al mundo gallístico. Algunos galleros han hecho un uso inteligente de los estimulantes, pero otros se exceden en productos químicos, con la consecuencia de que destrozan los castíos. El gallo con excesivos estimulantes es más veloz, pero pelea alocadamente; tiene más fuerza, pero menos resistencia. Y ninguna droga podrá nunca sustituir a un gallo bien criado y bien cuidado”. (Pérez-Corrales, 2008:208)

<sup>514</sup> The Spanish expression *más peligro que un mono con dos pistolas* refers to an individual who is out of control and/or takes hasty decisions.

<sup>515</sup> There are expressions such as *ese pincha mucho a los gallos* to highlight people who often give roosters a shot of doping substances.

It is true that complaints are notably frequent when one of the teams is not achieving the desired results. An excuse for some, a dirty trick for others, issues of this kind were gossiped about in almost every *contrata* (and championship) I attended. In any case, without going any further into this, the idea I would like to highlight is that stimulants and other drugs are not uncommon but there is a widespread belief that they do not represent<sup>516</sup> a direct substitute for a proper breeding and preparation. For that reason, it is usually attributed to lazy *cuidadores* and breeders or simply to the ones who have not enough time to take proper care of their animals.

### **The season continues**

After a few dates of the *contrata*, the *casada* starts to become more predictable according to previous fights.

“If they bring high weights and we bring low ones...the central ones will always be matched. Anyway, they did not bring a 3.13 avoiding yours Jorge, nor a 4.4 avoiding the one from Albilla. They brought you a 4.6 in case you wanted to match it on top”. (Carlos 17/02/2017)<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Whether I underestimated the role of doping or not, I believe, based on my fieldwork experience, that cockfighters in the Canary Islands are far more interested in breeding and searching *gallos finos* rather than finding the state-of-the-art doping substances. In any case, for those interested in researching this matter, it could be helpful to know that many of these drugs are imported from the Caribbean region. In addition, according to testimonies by former *cuidadores*, there was some experimentation with amphetamine-type stimulants in cockfighting since the 1970s when the use of these substances was also common for different human purposes (studying, recreational, etc.). Although it might sound odd, it was difficult for me to draw a line between stimulants/drugs and vitamin supplements.

<sup>517</sup> “Si ellos traen pesos altos y nosotros bajos...van a casar los del centro siempre. De todas formas, ellos no trajeron 3,13 huyendo del tuyo Jorge, ni 4.4 huyendo del de Albilla. Te trajeron 4.6 por si querías casarlo por arriba”. (Carlos 17/02/2017)

It has also become common practice for teams competing in a *contrata* to organise a championship once a year. On those weekends there will not be a *contrata* date although a few parties usually set their championships in the preseason or after the *contrata* concludes. This break could buy some time for the team achieving poorer outcomes. On some occasions, in order to avoid suspicions about the credibility of the championship, the organisers do not participate<sup>518</sup>.

If the season continues and the results are very bad, new roosters will be sought desperately by the underperforming team. *Casteadores* always try to bring more fighting birds to the *casa de gallos* but bad results will make this a pressing need. In this situation, a *cuidador* could even consider asking for other breeders' roosters<sup>519</sup>, which might lead to complaints from the party's members. Sometimes, the more well-off members decide to buy fighting birds from other areas or teams. However, this is not always well received by all of them. First of all, because it reduces the chances of participation of the roosters that are already in the *casa de gallos*. But it is also worth noting that there are some *casteadores* who show their reluctance to obtain great results by buying lots of fighting birds.

Ricardo: Sanchez has good *gallos*.

Jerónimo: In my opinion, Sanchez has a problem.

Ricardo: He buys many *gallos*, many from mainland Spain.

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<sup>518</sup> However, this limitation could be easily overcome by registering one's roosters under someone else's name, generally a close friend.

<sup>519</sup> Although the animals are chosen from various backgrounds, buying or renting roosters from the Aridane Valley, due to the abundance and quality of roosters in that area of La Palma, is a fairly common practice, and I saw that happening a few times during my fieldwork.

Jerónimo: Yes. But when you buy so much out there ... I'm not going to sell you the machetes to keep the sheaths for myself. Look, I'm not going to sell you the best. I'm going to sell you something averagely good. Unless I am struggling, and I am forced to take the money. But it is not usually the case.

Ricardo: Sure. This is not like going to buy the best television at *El Corte Inglés* (a famous department store chain in Spain). There, if you have money you always buy the best. In cockfighting it is uncertain, there is no price tag.

Jerónimo: Exactly. Maybe they sell you a daughter, a brother of the father, or a half-brother with a different mother. They rarely sell you both parents. (Jerónimo 17/03/2017)<sup>520</sup>

Even if buying were the fastest way towards a victory, it is not seen by everyone as the preferred choice.

Ricardo: Now *La Casera* (a fictional party) will be given even better *gallos*. Everyone wants to get on board to beat Manuel (a famous *cuidador*). It is prestigious. For example, Señores Velázquez brought an outstanding *gallino* recently. I did not know them, and Carlos told me that

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<sup>520</sup> Ricardo: Sánchez tiene buenos gallos.

Jerónimo: Para mí Sanchez tiene un problema.

Ricardo: Él compra muchos gallos, y le traen muchos de la Península.

Jerónimo: Sí. Pero cuando tú compras tanto por ahí...Yo no te voy a vender los machetes para quedarme las vainas. Mira yo no te voy a vender lo mejor. Yo te voy a vender lo medio bueno. Salvo que me pilles muy apurado por el dinero y tenga la obligación. Pero ese no suele ser el caso.

Ricardo: Claro, esto no es como ir a comprar la mejor televisión al Corte Inglés. Ahí con dinero siempre compras la mejor. En los gallos no se sabe, no hay etiquetas.

Jerónimo: Exactamente. Igual te venden una hija, un hermano del padre, o un hermano de padre, pero no de madre. Es raro que te vendan la pareja de padres. (Jerónimo 17/03/2017)



they were some of the ones who buy *gallos*. So, from now on they'll bring a couple a week if they're happy.

Jorgito: Yeah, but that's buying ... The beauty of this is to breed, if not, you will miss the beauty of it.

Ricardo: The other day Alba appeared in the programme as the owner. Not as a *casteadora*.

Jorgito: But that was because she was given the egg. But if you buy it, it's yours. If you buy it you can be shown as a *casteador*. But...

Ricardo: But it's a lie.

Jorgito: Obviously (he laughs). I do not like buying a lot (of roosters). Even if I had lots of money. They should be watched from the time they are chicks. (Jorgito 17/03/2017)<sup>521</sup>

Jorgito's opinion was in line with Juan Javier's views at the beginning of chapter 5 about "seeing the beginning" of a breeding pair. It is not that they are not willing to buy fighting birds, if they can improve their lines they will do so, or even start a line buying a new breeding pair. This is a world where everybody is always looking for roosters to avoid falling behind. Means of transport and delivery services have increased the possibilities of getting roosters from any point of the

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<sup>521</sup> Ricardo: Ahora a La Casera (un partido ficticio) le van a llegar mejores gallos aún. Todos se quieren apuntar al carro de ganar a Manuel (un famoso cuidador). Da prestigio. Por ejemplo, los de Señores Velázquez, llevaron un gallino impresionante hace poco. Yo no les conocía y Carlos me dijo que eran de los que compran gallos. Así que a partir de ahora llevarán un par por semana si están contentos.

Jorgito: Ya, pero eso de comprar...Lo bonito es castear, si no te pierdes lo bonito.

Ricardo: El otro día Alba aparecía como propietario en el programa. No como *casteadora*.

Jorgito: Pero eso era porque le regalaron el huevo. Pero si lo compras es tuyo. Si lo compras puedes ponerte como *casteador*. Pero...

Ricardo: Pero es mentira.

Jorgito: Claro (se ríe). A mí eso de comprar mucho no me gusta. Aunque tuviera muchas perras. Hay que verlos desde pequeñitos. (Jorgito 17/03/2017)

archipelago and other regions. But this new blood is generally sought to boost the broodstock; the vast majority of people involved in cockfighting in the Canary Islands are more than just lovers of the fight. Their passion for breeding and rearing is remarkable.

That does not mean that parties will not seek out new birds, trying to overcome the situation in the final dates. However, that is not the continued strategy. At the end of the day, *contratas* are duels between breeders. I was told, time and time again, that the primary goal was to breed better fighting birds than the opponent. Simply put, it would not make sense to sign a *contrata* when one of the parties is basically buying roosters and the other one is just breeding them.

Although it may seem odd for the uninitiated, cockfighters in the Canary Islands are really proud of being breeders. They are, above all, *casteadores*<sup>522</sup>. This fervour for breeding was constantly present on my interviews and informal talks.

Look, sometimes when I am working I remember I should put this *gallina* with that *gallo*...and I forget all my troubles. I get home tired, I get into the *gallos* and I forget about everything else. Even if they ban cockfighting, I would not stop doing it. I would not give up, I am telling you.

(Yeray 07/06/2017)<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> The Canary Islands are not an exception regarding the great significance of breeding in cockfighting. For example, Marie Cegarra (Cegarra, 1988) also highlights how fervently cockfighters follow the rearing process in Nord-Pas-de-Calais (France).

<sup>523</sup> “Mira, yo a veces trabajando, me acuerdo y digo tengo que poner a esta gallina con este gallo...y se me olvidan los problemas. Es llegar a casa cansado, entrar en los gallos y se me olvida el resto. Aunque prohíban los gallos yo no lo dejo. Yo no lo dejo, te lo digo”. (Yeray 07/06/2017)

For many of them, breeding and rearing are the aspects they enjoy most. For those aficionados with higher incomes it would be possible to skip these steps and buy a few roosters each year to have more time for themselves<sup>524</sup>, particularly during the summer. However, this is not very common.

During my fieldwork, I had the chance of visiting the farm of a couple of people who were regarded by many *casteadores* as buyers rather than breeders. In both cases, although they talked to me about their chicks, they told me they were raised in a different location. No one ever told me that he did not rear fighting birds. Either chicks were really raised elsewhere or the *different location* was a screen to hide behind. This led me to think about the secret aspects of cockfighting.

### Two sides of secretiveness

“This is a world of secrets and tricks. No one tells you the truth, even less the first time you ask”.

(Jesús 31/03/2016)<sup>525</sup>

As my fieldwork progressed, I started to consider “the secret” as something quite important in cockfighting. It is not uncommon to find references<sup>526</sup> within the cockfighting literature worldwide to the seclusion and secrecy of the activity, even in places where it is totally legal. The secrecy is

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<sup>524</sup> There are cases, particularly in Tenerife, where wealthy individuals hire a private *cuidador* to be in charge of providing the daily care of their animals for the whole year. However, most of these wealthy individuals were also really interested in overseeing and paying attention to the daily issues.

<sup>525</sup> “Esto es un mundo de secretos y trampas. Nadie te dice la verdad, y menos de primeras”. (Jesús 31/03/2016)

<sup>526</sup> See, e.g., Leal (1994:220—221).

also a recurring theme in many works on other activities such as fishing<sup>527</sup> or hunting<sup>528</sup>. This caught my attention and I will therefore try to lift this veil of secrecy.

I consider two sides of secretiveness. The first one, the outward facing secret, is the one stopping breeders from spreading or sharing any cockfighting information with other people who are not aficionados mainly because they are afraid of social reprisals or stigmatisation. What follows are two examples from *casteadores* in Gran Canaria and Tenerife who regularly compete both in *contratas* and championships:

“I don’t say a word at my job (environmental company) to save time and worries.

Are you crazy? If they knew about the fights my colleagues would make pressure to fire me”. (David 21/05/2016)<sup>529</sup>

“When I first date a girl, I never say a word about the fights because she wouldn’t understand it. In addition, I am now selling clothes to different shops which would never buy me the products if they knew my involvement on cockfighting”. (Pedro

03/06/2016)<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> See, e.g., Palmer (1990) and Florido-del-Corral & Maya-Jariego (2018).

<sup>528</sup> See, e.g., Montero-Cruzada (2019).

<sup>529</sup> “Yo no digo ni una palabra de esto en mi trabajo para ahorrarme tiempo y complicaciones. ¿Estás loco? Si ellos supieran de las peleas mis compañeros presionarían para echarme”. (David 21/05/2016)

<sup>530</sup> “Cuando quedo con una chica por primera vez, nunca digo una palabra sobre las peleas porque no lo entendería. Además, ahora estoy vendiendo ropa a diferentes tiendas que nunca me comprarían los productos si supieran mi participación en las peleas”. (Pedro 03/06/2016)

These breeders were concerned about keeping their love and passion for the activity within a close circle of breeders and aficionados. However, it must be acknowledged that there are those who do not mind about speaking openly about their hobby in any context although they are not a majority in the Spanish archipelago. I believe that this outward facing secret is quite changeable depending on the island<sup>531</sup> and the social position of the breeder. As mentioned in chapter 4, La Palma is the island with the greatest number of breeders and I experienced how they shared their enthusiasm for the world of cockfighting. In fact, the higher social acceptability of the practice has even caused some frictions within the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting. For example, at the entrance to one of the most-well known *reñideros* in Los Llanos there is a prominent sign announcing the activity held there. Due to the political atmosphere in their islands, having that sign would be unthinkable, and counterproductive, for some aficionados in Gran Canaria and Tenerife. The existence of an official discourse towards outsiders could be also thought of as a consequence of this outward facing secret. And the same is true for the recommendations of some competitions about not recording and uploading the fights to social media.

The second<sup>532</sup> side of secretiveness, and present in a similar manner on every island, is what I call the inward secret, meaning that a *casteador* is not likely to share all his information with other *casteadores*. Even spreading false information or rumours is quite usual. Obviously, part of this inward secret is inevitably caused by the competition. For example,

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<sup>531</sup> For example, for the 2016 Canarian Championship, organised in Tenerife, the venue was not openly publicised to avoid the protests (and possible confrontations) of *animalistas*. The organisers knew that “word of mouth” would work among *casteadores*. This secrecy would be unthinkable for a Canarian Championship organised in La Palma.

<sup>532</sup> Some topics, such as the previously mentioned doping, could be grouped both as inward and outward facing secrets. For example, a breeder could keep what he considers a very effective substance secret (inward secret) while avoiding the broad topic of doping when asked by an outsider (outward facing secret).

just as two football managers would not share their strategies for a game, two *cuidadores* will be careful to keep some privacy for *la casada*. They will also try to adapt the *casa de gallos* according to their desire for privacy.

However, this inward secret goes far beyond simply avoiding giving clues to rivals. For instance, there are secrets between partners within a *casa de gallos*, and even between friends sharing some facilities and/or animals. Sometimes certain things are kept to oneself. When I was shown animals at farms or *casas de gallos*, I was told quite often to keep the secret about the origins or lineage of a particular fighting bird.

“And the one you see there you cannot tell anyone. That is a *sumatra* hen. It comes from a purebred. The mother was purebred *sumatra*”. (Diego 04/05/2017)<sup>533</sup>

This secrecy is quite common when having or getting animals from outside the islands.

"I will tell you a secret. Between you and me, but you cannot tell anyone until I begin to make an impression. If I do. I have a hen that Fulanito Remero gave me, one of the best Andalusian *casteadores*". (Alba 19/03/2017)<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> “Y esa que ves ahí no se lo puedes decir a nadie. Esa es una gallina sumatra. Viene de pura. La madre era pura sumatra”. (Diego 04/05/2017)

<sup>534</sup> “Te voy a contar una cosa en secreto. Aquí entre nosotros, que no puedes contar hasta que despunte. Si es que despunto. Yo tengo una gallina que me regaló Fulanito Remero, uno de los mejores casteadores de Andalucía.” (Alba 19/03/2017)

And also, when *casteadores* seek to renew their animals by introducing new blood in their farms.

“We are going later to buy a Dominican rooster, it is a half-secret meeting because I have not told anyone. I am looking for two bloods and that's why I will get the Dominican to build some broodstock. In South America it is said that after 5 generations you can consider it your own broodstock. I want to have very good roosters in a few years again. There are many people who tend to think in the short term, just this year. But here I am thinking in 2-3 years”. (Rigoberto, 23/03/2017)<sup>535</sup>

It is likely that some of the behaviours that I have grouped as inward secrets are a response to a variety of issues such as the strategy, changing teams and partners, the feeling of being overly cautious with some breeding crosses and the individualistic approach of the practice. Moreover, the precautions taken against thieves cannot be ignored. Although as mentioned in chapter 6, the problem of robbery<sup>536</sup> is probably higher in other places, many breeders and *cuidadores* usually take their own precautionary measures. Security cameras, guard dogs and misleading names or instructions on the pens and cages are not unusual. But nothing is more secure than an undisclosed location.

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<sup>535</sup> “Después vamos a ir a comprar un gallo dominicano, medio en secreto que no se lo he dicho a nadie. Estoy buscando dos sangres y por eso me voy al dominicano y quiero crear algunos pies de cría. En Sudamérica se dice que cuando llevas tú casteadas 5 generaciones propias, se puede decir que es neutra, no es de nadie, ya es tu pie de cría. Yo quiero en unos años tener gallos muy buenos otra vez. Hay mucha gente que piensa a corto plazo, en este año. Pero yo voy a 2-3 años”. (Rigoberto, 23/03/2017)

<sup>536</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the small size of fighting birds makes them an easy target for thieves, in comparison with other animals such as fighting bulls and riding horses.

“I've told him, but he does not want anyone where the animals are. Few people know where my father's *gallos* are. He told me he does not know you and that he does not know your intentions”.

(Danielito 25/05/2017)<sup>537</sup>

That's what Danielito told me when I asked him about visiting his father's fighting birds. Even Danielito acknowledged that he had, along with a friend, another small location elsewhere to keep the best ones and where he does not want to take anyone. He also had a third place, really close to the one in his house, with a 10-year-old rooster and a few hens.

“I can't fool anyone with that third place so if the animals are stolen, I'd rather prefer it to happen there”. (Danielito 25/05/2017)<sup>538</sup>

It is difficult to find a better example to describe a common case where someone has his animals dispersed in various locations. This is a common practice, especially, but not only, in La Palma where small-scale land tenure is more usual. Rather than seeing this as absolute secrecy, it should be understood as a way to avoid being an easy target for thieves. At the end of my year in La Palma, Danielito finally took me to his father's farm under a promise of saying nothing.

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<sup>537</sup> "Se lo he dicho, pero no quiere a nadie en los animales. Los gallos de Papi poca gente sabe dónde están. Me dijo que no te conoce y que no sabe las intenciones". (Danielito 25/05/2017)

<sup>538</sup> "Ese tercero ya no engaña, así que si me roban que me roben ése". (Danielito 25/05/2017)



## **The *contrata* comes to an end**

On many occasions, a *contrata* usually goes into the final date with everything to decide. Then tension is in the air and one can feel that *casteadores* and *cuidadores* are really excited. An aficionado from Gran Canaria, on a short trip in La Palma those days, partially described the final date of a *contrata* in the following words:

“They are three ahead of them, therefore two wins and 1 *tablas* would be enough...The first one was *tablas*. His rooster was about to win but he got weaker and weaker and the other was not hitting but they had to agree *tablas* because he could not even raise his legs... If you saw the faces of the guys from the party...very nervous and with the face distorted. Like when we had everything at stake in the Canarian Championship. Even worse. What a set of faces mate!... A woman just came and gave the *cuidador* a hug and he began to cry. The tension is... the man was crying down there”. (Carlos José 30/05/2017)<sup>539</sup>

On the abovementioned occasions, when one of the parties finally wins the *contrata* the team members' shout for joy and one can notice how important this mode of competition still is for some breeders. When the winner is determined the tension of the competition decreases even though there can be some bouts left. Immediately after the victory, winners are greeted with

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<sup>539</sup> “Llevar 3 de ventaja por lo que 2 ganadas y una tabla sería suficiente...La primera *tablas*. Su gallo iba a ganar pero se aflojó, se vació, se vació, y ya el otro no tiraba pero estaba más fuerte. Y le tuvieron que dar las *tablas* porque ya ni levantaba las patas...Si ven las caras de los *soltadores*, de los chicos estos del partido...desenajaos todos la cara de los nervios. Como nosotros cuando nos estábamos jugando las peleas en el Campeonato de Canarias. Peor todavía. Unas caras muchacho...Ahora vino una mujer y le dió un abrazo al *cuidador* y se echó a llorar. La tensión es...el pive llorando ahí”. (Carlos José 30/05/2017)

applause by breeders and aficionados from both sides. The *cuidador* from the losing party might raise his opponent's arm as a mark of respect for the winner party. At the end of the day it is quite common in La Palma to have a display of fireworks<sup>540</sup> to celebrate the final victory.

If there were a few dates left, *cuidadores* will start trying different roosters and/or giving opportunities to breeders whose roosters have competed less often<sup>541</sup>. It might also be convenient for some breeders to keep their best roosters for the late-season championships. For the party, the main work is done and, as seen at the beginning of the chapter, parties will start thinking about next season. One should not, however, think of the remaining fights as something devoid of interest and meaning for aficionados.

I especially remember a fight, the date after having a season winner in one of the *contratas* in La Palma, in which one of the teams decided to try its luck with a rooster that did not seem a bad one but, mysteriously, had shown certain doubts when sparring. On the day of the fights, the rooster was placed up in *la valla* but, at the beginning, refused to start fighting. Although the rooster finally began to fight and won the bout, his behaviour was seen as something really strange and there were voices, even within the winning team, about whether or not he should be discarded for future fights.

After conducting some tests in the *casa de gallos*, it was checked that the rooster was willing to fight everywhere (outdoors for example) but not in *la valla*<sup>542</sup>. If he had run away when the fight had already begun that would have been seen as a clear sign of cowardice, but he finally entered

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<sup>540</sup> See "*voladores*" in Pérez-Corrales (2008:572) for more information.

<sup>541</sup> However, even when a *contrata* is decided, there are usually other things at stake such as the best breeder of the season (within the *contrata* and within a particular team). These individual prizes are also really appreciated by breeders who will try to have the bird with the most wins of the season.

<sup>542</sup> I was told that the rooster might be afraid of the carpet by some reason such as the colour, texture, etc.

into the fight and hit and cut. However, that behaviour was not much appreciated. The refusal (or doubts) to start fighting, regardless of the victory, was particularly strange for the vast majority of aficionados. The important point here is that *cuidador* and breeders do not always discuss purely in terms of winning or losing a bout. The main thing is how gamecocks fight and breeders take that seriously, even if the outcome of the bout does not matter for the competition.

Although there are some championships for breeders until the end of June<sup>543</sup>, the most prestigious late-season championships are probably the Canarian Championship and *El Pollo de Oro*. There have been changes<sup>544</sup> in its format but the former still marks the end of the season for cockfighting parties. The latter, as previously mentioned, is a major event for *pollos* and usually had a high turnout of breeders from across the islands. Both were competitions where I had the chance to meet female breeders or *casteadoras*. It is time to say something about women's role on cockfighting in the Canary Islands.

## Women and cockfighting

“I do not know where my passion (for cockfighting) comes from. The point is that I liked *gallos*.

I do not know, the other day I was looking because they say that bravery ... things that I read online about how brave, masculinity ... I do not consider myself a masculine person, but I defend myself. I have my character. I don't go out of my way looking for trouble, but I defend myself

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<sup>543</sup> Some *casteadores* expressed to me their complaints about championships in late June when some fighting birds have already started the moulting period. Apart from the obvious animal welfare, many of these complaints also focused on the aesthetic appearance.

<sup>544</sup> The first edition of this championship, originally called *Campeonato Regional* took place in 1987 in La Palma. Rather than the current format where each party can compete independently, it was originally a competition between the four main islands (La Palma, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria and Tenerife). See Pérez-Corrales (2008:105-113) for a deeper understanding of its first editions and some complaints about recent changes.

and I do not like people walking over me. But there are other people, specially women, who feel intimidated... my neighbour when I told her that I was going to Lanzarote, we were talking, and she told me that she would feel unable to do that. That may be my nature and having been brought up with such repression". (Alba 13/06/2017)<sup>545</sup>

It is not easy to depict the actual role of women in the Canarian cockfights. It could be said that there is an increasing female presence in a predominantly, but not exclusively, male sport. But beyond the clichés, I think it is important to emphasise that there are individual women with their own stories and, as with men, it cannot be said that there is a typical female breeder.

I have already presented a few comments on women throughout the text. Historical sources do not provide much information on the topic but Béthencourt-Massieu highlights that women did not attend to cockfights in the 18th century in Tenerife<sup>546</sup>. More recently, however, women can be found in some of the cockfighting chronicles<sup>547</sup> written in the first half of the 20th century. Therefore, at least it is known that they were not banned from entering the event.

When interviewing people, I often had the opportunity to go over many old photos and videos, particularly from the 1980s<sup>548</sup> and 1990s and I found women both in *casas de gallos* and *reñideros*.

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<sup>545</sup> "Yo no sé de dónde me viene la afición. La cuestión es que a mí los gallos me encantaban. No sé, el otro día estaba mirando porque dicen que como la valentía...cosas que leo yo por internet que cómo la valentía, la masculinidad...yo no me considero una persona masculina, pero me defiendo. Tengo mi carácter. Yo no voy por ahí haciéndole la guerra a nadie pero me defiendo y no me gusta que me avasallen. Pero hay otra gente, sobre todo mujeres, que se achan...mi vecina cuando le dije que me iba a Lanzarote, estuvimos hablando, y me dijo que ella era incapaz. Eso puede ser mi naturaleza y haberme criado con tanta represión". (Alba 13/06/2017)

<sup>546</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:504)

<sup>547</sup> See e.g. Canella (2006:29).

<sup>548</sup> The final date of the *contrata* between Los Llanos and Tzacorte in 1988 congregated around 1000 people (Personal communication by Pepín, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017). I was often told that the late 1980s was a time where the average attendance was much higher than today.

However, when reviewing these materials, I was told that women were predominantly accompanying their husbands and were not really interested in the public side of cockfighting<sup>549</sup>. The TV series *Senderos Isleños*<sup>550</sup> also showed women in both contexts in the late 1990s. Therefore, neither a *casa de gallos* nor a *reñidero* were, and are, off-limits to women. Pérez-Corrales mentions a few women<sup>551</sup> who have been involved in cockfighting in different ways since the 1970s. From *casteadoras* to *aficionadas* and artists who have included cockfights on their agenda. It is also worthy of note that from my conversations with a veteran breeder in Tenerife, it transpired that it was not very rare to find women involved in different tasks regarding some of the care for roosters. He remembered that his wife's grandmother was the one in charge of treating animals after being injured. Thus, it seems that the participation of women, at least in some tasks, is not an entirely new phenomenon.

Women's involvement in cockfighting, with a variable degree of participation, is not unique to the Canary Islands and it has been reported in other places such as Colombia<sup>552</sup>, Nord-Pas-de-Calais<sup>553</sup>, Brazil<sup>554</sup> and the Philippines<sup>555</sup>. It is certainly interesting to compare Cegarra's (1989) and Corrêa's (2017) works in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. In the former case, the role of women is predominantly circumscribed to the private and care sphere and very limited in the cockpits while, in the latter, women of all ages have a more active role at the cockpits. Regarding the Spanish territory, I was told by Andalusian breeders that some women are involved in mainland Spain and,

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<sup>549</sup> For those interested in having a look at one of these photographs see Pérez-Corrales (2008:76).

<sup>550</sup> See *Riñas de gallos 1* (1998) and *Riñas de gallos 2* (1998).

<sup>551</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:90,100,136,157,247,308,337)

<sup>552</sup> Arias-Marín (2012:190) and Pico (2014:97).

<sup>553</sup> Cegarra (1988) and Corrêa (2017:104).

<sup>554</sup> Corrêa (2017:253)

<sup>555</sup> See, for example, the case of Robie Panis, the first female gaffer (the one who puts the knife on the rooster) in the Philippines (VICE, 2015).

in fact, they are included in some editions of the Andalusian magazine *Casta Ibérica*<sup>556</sup>. However, Domínguez (2001) was unable to verify the presence of women at cockpits during his fieldwork in Cartagena (south-eastern Spain).

Returning to the Canarian case, it is important to mention that marriage or domestic partnership was a topic of discussion in many of my talks with *casteadores* at their farms. When living as a couple, many men highlighted the importance of having a woman (wife, girlfriend, etc.) who likes or at least understand this special hobby.

David: Do you know the problem here? The relationship with our wives. For example, I leave work at 3pm and come, without having lunch, to the farm. And I go home around 6:30 or 7:00pm. So, go figure, everyday like that. And then on Saturday your wife tells you to stay a little longer with your family. And I say no, because I must take care of the animals because I am going to the fights that evening. It requires dedication.

Ricardo: anything involving animals...

David: And thank God I share this with Alberto so I never go when we have fights on Sundays. I never go on Sundays. To me, Sundays are devoted to my wife. I come here, I look after the animals and I leave. Otherwise, you can't have a family (David, 21/05/2016)<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Available online at: [castaiberica.com](http://castaiberica.com)

<sup>557</sup> David: ¿Sabes el problema? El problema son las mujeres. Yo, por ejemplo, salgo del trabajo a las 3 y vengo, sin almorzar, a la finca. Y llego a mi casa a las 6 y media o las 7. Imagínate, todos los días así. Y llega el sábado y te dice tu mujer que te quedes un rato más con la familia. Y digo que no, que tengo que atender a los animales porque por la tarde tengo la pelea de los gallos. Esto es sacrificado eh.

Ricardo: todo el tema de animales...

David: Y eso que, gracias a Dios, yo estoy con Alberto y cuando hay peleas los domingos yo nunca voy. Yo nunca voy los domingos. Los domingos para mí son sagrados para mí mujer. Vengo aquí, atiendo a los animales y me marcho. Si no, no puedes tener familia. (David 21/05/2016)

It is worth mentioning that a time- and money-consuming practice could create tension at the family level<sup>558</sup>. Therefore, some breeders try to justify their hobby after winning a championship's prize.

Ricardo: What will you do if you win the prize?

José Alberto: I would first call my wife and brother to tell them, so they can no longer tell me I am losing money and time with the *gallos*. (José Alberto 24/04/2016)<sup>559</sup>

The demanding loop workplace-*gallos*-home-workplace is one of the reasons why a good number of breeders share at least part of their facilities<sup>560</sup> with a close friend. Moreover, I was frequently told by *casteadores* that a few breeders were able to take care of their animals thanks to their wives' support. This assistance may constitute a vital help for some when dealing with the steps described in the chapter *From the egg to the cockpit*.

Nonetheless, numerically speaking a researcher attending some cockfights in the Canary Island will soon realise that the audience is mostly composed of men while women, if any, rarely represent more than 5-10% of it. As mentioned before, women still get free entrance to many *reñideros*. This is thought to encourage their presence along with their husbands. In other words, as a matter of

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<sup>558</sup> See Cegarra (1988) for a description of similar issues within the family unit in Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

<sup>559</sup> Ricardo: ¿Qué vas a hacer si ganas el premio?

José Alberto: Yo lo primero llamaría a mi mujer y a mi hermano para decírselo y que dejen de decirme que pierdo dinero y tiempo con los gallos. (José Alberto 24/04/2016)

<sup>560</sup> Although I found cases where some friends share their *casteos* under the same name, even when sharing facilities/farm each of the breeders tends to have its own lineages.

courtesy for those women who would not otherwise attend the event. On the other hand, this generates a certain degree of controversy when women have a more active role.

“All women coming on Sundays (small championships) do it because they like cockfighting. It might be on Saturdays (*contrata*) when women are more likely to be just accompanying their husbands or boyfriends. I'm eager to make them pay for the tickets. Don't we want equality with women? ". (Romualdo 31/03/2016)<sup>561</sup>

I believe Romualdo's statement reveals the difference between a companion and an *aficionada* or female breeder. During my time on Gran Canaria, where Romualdo was in charge of organising a *contrata* and some small championships, I found, and spoke to, more women in those championships than in the *contrata*. One of these female breeders was Laura, who was there with her husband Paco, also a breeder. When I visited them on their farm, both Laura and Paco were usually doing the variety of tasks required to provide a good *cuido*. Although she was not always present at the championships in which their roosters took part, she knew perfectly the ancestry and origins of every animal in the farm.

Despite the increasing participation of women in *reñideros*, their active role is still quite unusual for many breeders and it is often commented by some of them. After a female breeder came to a championship in Gran Canaria, a veteran breeder said the following:

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<sup>561</sup> “Todas las mujeres que vienen los domingos (pequeños campeonatos) es porque les gustan los gallos. Quizás lo de acompañar a maridos o novios pase más los sábados (en la contrata). Yo estoy loco por cobrarlas la entrada. ¿No queremos igualdad con las mujeres?”. (Romualdo 31/03/2016)



“It was spectacular how she was experiencing it. I might be feeling something similar, but I do not express it that way. But she could not contain herself, that's why she expressed it, overflowed. We're not used to seeing a woman so crazy with the *gallos* (in Gran Canaria). And so intensely. But that happens in La Palma, you can find everything in La Palma”. (Pepe 14/04/2016)<sup>562</sup>

Pepe<sup>563</sup> had been an experienced *casteador* in Gran Canaria since the 1970s and I took the opportunity to ask him about the role of women in the island. He mainly depicted women as secondary actors with neither the time nor the desire to fully dedicate themselves to cockfighting. Pepe's views still represent the idea of women as having a minor role in the public side of cockfighting, that is to say merely accompanying their husbands/boyfriends at the *reñideros*. However, during my fieldwork I had the feeling that things are gradually changing.

Regardless of the number of women participating in cockfights on the different islands and competitions, I found women who prepared roosters, picked breeding pairs, did the *atusado* and *descreste*, regularly attend to fights, and the heeling of their roosters. Some of them also hold different positions within the organisational charts of cockfighting societies. The only roles where I did not find any women were *jueces* and leading *cuidadores*<sup>564</sup>. It is true that on all the above-mentioned roles women are a minority, but they cannot be ignored.

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<sup>562</sup> “Es un espectáculo, lo vivía, lo vivía. Yo lo puedo vivir igual pero no lo expreso de esa manera. Pero ella no podía reprimirse sus sentimientos, por eso los expresaba, desbordados. No estamos acostumbrados a ver a una mujer tan alocada con los gallos (en Gran Canaria). Y tan intensamente. Pero eso pasa en La Palma, en La Palma hay de todo”. (Pepe 14/04/2016)

<sup>563</sup> I had the opportunity to meet and interview him before he passed away in 2016.

<sup>564</sup> In 2018, one of the *casas de gallos* in the Aridane valley (La Palma) hired a woman as an assistant. She was not the first one to perform this job in the Canary Islands because in 2003 Guadalupe Santos was, along with José Pérez, a *cuidadora* in the *casa de gallos* of *El Norte* (Tenerife).

For the last few years, the organisers of a championship in La Palma have decided to include *casteadoras* on its promotional poster. In its 2019 edition, the *Campeonato de Casteadores Gallera El Morro* included a photo of female breeders from six different islands of the Spanish archipelago. Some of these women, with the support of some men, have recently advocated for the inclusion of women in the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting.

“The inclusion of women on the board is our right and I personally see it as a step forward for our Federation, because it would be a benchmark and a great opportunity to demonstrate that our sport is consistent with the century in which we live”. (Margarita 19/05/2018)<sup>565</sup>



IV Campeonato de Casteadores Gallera El Morro. Thanks to Gallera El Morro.

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<sup>565</sup> “La inclusión de la mujer en la directiva es algo de derecho y personalmente lo valoro como un paso adelante para nuestra Federación, pues sería un referente y una gran oportunidad de demostrar que nuestro deporte es coherente al siglo en el que vivimos”. (Margarita 19/05/2018)

What I wanted to highlight with Margarita's<sup>566</sup> and Alba's statements is the fact that some women's discourses and participation can be thought of as fighting to make a space for themselves rather than just accepting the way things have traditionally been.

In summary, although it is very difficult to describe the role of women in the world of cockfighting in the Canary Islands it must be said that they are present in both the private and public spheres of the activity. Their role is quantitatively greater at the farms<sup>567</sup>, but it seems that their active role in *contratas*, but particularly in championships, is becoming more important, specially in the case of female breeders under 60 years old. However, whether this indicates an overall increasing tendency to the incorporation of women and their public participation would require further investigation<sup>568</sup>.

### **Closed from June to December**

As seen before, *casas de gallos* are only opened during the cockfighting season but that does not mean the world of cockfighting stops. The last thing to be done in a *casa de gallos*, before it closes, is the same as the first one; the facilities are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected again. The remaining fighting birds will be given back to the breeders.

During the summer, roosters will go into the moulting period and, for the rest of the year, breeders will undertake the steps previously described in chapter 5. Normally working from dawn to dusk during the season, *cuidadores* will try to find a different job for the rest of the year. In some cases,

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<sup>566</sup> As stated previously, I have used false names to respect the privacy of the informants.

<sup>567</sup> Corrêa (2017:89) highlights the low presence of women in his visit to a Canarian *reñidero* in contrast to the high presence of female breeders when he contacted the Canarian cockfight community online. During my fieldwork, I also found a few girls, generally breeders' daughters or nieces, helping at the farms.

<sup>568</sup> For example, I only found a case where a farm was exclusively run by a female breeder. It would be interesting to know if more women become breeders and set up new farms without the participation of men.

they will be given small jobs related to the daily care of fighting birds in farms and, later in the year, help breeders with different procedures such as the spars, decresting or trimming. On other occasions they will find different employment, mainly in the agricultural, building industry, and service sectors.

In my conversations with them, this situation of uncertainty and precariousness was often present and some of them, although they were really fond of cockfighting, were willing to get a permanent job somewhere else. I also knew a couple of *cuidadores* who tried their luck in other cockfighting areas outside the Canary Islands. Therefore, the pool of available *cuidadores* in the Spanish archipelago is diminishing and that might constitute a difficulty for the future operation of this modality of competition.

In the last three chapters, I have analysed the breeding, rearing, preparation and competing side of this practice and it is now the moment to contextualise the case of the Canarian fights within the world of cockfighting.

## 8

### **THE CANARY ISLANDS: A VERY PARTICULAR CASE WITHIN THE WORLD OF COCKFIGHTING**

The most common form of cockfight involves a one-on-one confrontation between two equally matched cocks, a battle that may be interspersed with standard periods of respite. Yet there is considerable variation within the one-to-one scenario.

(Dundes, 1994:244)

As Dundes correctly points out, there is a good deal of variation in that one-on-one scenario. In his compilation, Dundes complains<sup>569</sup> about the descriptive nature, rather than analytic, of many cockfight accounts. He considers that an anti-symbolic stance among social and cultural anthropologists prevents them from seeing the existence of clear-cut symbolic data<sup>570</sup>. In his psychoanalytic cross-cultural consideration of the cockfight<sup>571</sup>, Dundes presents dozens of works to (purportedly) support the worldwide presence of an unconscious element in the participation of cockfighting.

My goal in this chapter certainly is a less ambitious one. Rather than looking for cross-cultural explanations on cocker's behaviour, I will present some characteristics to support my view of Canarian cockfights as a singular case within the world of cockfighting. I would like to make clear,

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<sup>569</sup> Dundes developed a symbolic interpretation of the cockfight (1994:241-282). This text incorporates Dundes's critics on the (supposed) anti-symbolic stance embraced by social and cultural anthropologists.

<sup>570</sup> Dundes (1994:272)

<sup>571</sup> Dundes (1994:241-282)

however, that what follows is merely for informative and exploratory purposes and under no circumstances may it be considered a systematic comparison of all the relevant literature; an unusual literature that merits careful consideration.

First, it is worth mentioning that literature on this issue has been published in different formats, languages and angles of approach. For the basic search in indexed journals and university libraries, search results are clearly incomplete. That is one of the reasons why it is difficult to track. Second, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, a wide range of cockfighting projects have been undertaken in short periods of fieldwork and/or in areas where the legal status hampered the development of the research.

The section below contains a brief comparison of five variables which might provide illustrative examples of a practice which I believe does not follow some of the patterns described by Geertz and other scholars. Furthermore, knowing that Dundes's compilation was made more than two decades ago, I wanted to include some of the more recent literature on cockfighting, particularly that published in English and Spanish. I believe this is an important contribution, especially for those who research on this topic elsewhere and those eager to know the wide variety of ways in which cockfights are conducted.

### **A matching game**

Taking Geertz as a reference point, I was intrigued by the fact that, in many of the cases examined around the world, fights were arranged on the same day by cockfighters and thus had something of an *ad hoc* or improvised quality to them. Even with several dozens of fights a day, each one must be agreed individually:

Each match is precisely like the others in general pattern: there is no main match, no connection between individual matches, no variation in their format, and each is arranged on a completely ad hoc basis.

(Geertz, 1972:8)

This way of proceeding results in what Geertz calls ‘atomistical structure’ where each fight, with its matching, betting and group allegiances, ‘is a world unto itself’ (Geertz, 1972:24). A similar matching process to the one in Bali is described by Guggenheim in the Philippines<sup>572</sup>. The responsibility for matchmaking rests on cockers who will each, individually, look for a good match depending on their preferences. Not only the weight, but also the amount bet, spurs, colour, breed, style of fighting and physical appearance, among others, can play an essential role in this process. Consequently, cockfighters are free to choose their opponents and thus there is a possibility of not finding an adversary that meets their expectations.

On the other hand, there are other events where cockfighters are required to register in advance the weight of the rooster(s) they would like to fight. This is the case in derbies and some tournaments around the world (for example France<sup>573</sup> and the USA<sup>574</sup>) and also in both *contratas* and championships in the Canary Islands. The important point here is that there is no process to match the birds on the day of the fights as described by Geertz in Bali<sup>575</sup> and Guggenheim in Philippines<sup>576</sup>. I find it particularly important whether or not a cocker knows with certainty that his rooster(s), or at least specific weights, will fight in a competition. This is the case in the Canary Islands where *casteadores*, no matter whether it is for leagues or championships, are committed to

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<sup>572</sup> Guggenheim (1994:150)

<sup>573</sup> Corrêa (2017:101)

<sup>574</sup> Herzog & Cheek (1979:38)

<sup>575</sup> Geertz (1972:8)

<sup>576</sup> Guggenheim (1994:150)

fighting a precise number of roosters registered with a specific weight<sup>577</sup> that must not be exceeded. Failure to do so may result in a small fine or the loss of participation fees. There are very few occasions where one of the gamecock's weight is over the limit and that usually causes a great stir among the audience.

In the Canary Islands, since the only factor deciding the pairing is the weight, the only way to avoid unwanted matches is to give different weights from those of the birds one would like to avoid. This is done, for instance, by some relatives and friends who do not want to face each other in championships. Without the power to match the roosters themselves, breeders usually look forward with eager anticipation to knowing who their opponents will be. A day or two before the cockfights, WhatsApp and bar conversations focus on the programme of the event. Here, where matches are pre-arranged by the organiser, cockfighters can complain (or celebrate) about their luck in the pairing. However, in the above-mentioned cases, such as Bali and the Philippines, of same day agreements, exclusively between individual cockfighters, each is fully in charge of snaring a good match.

In recent studies in Latin America, Corrêa<sup>578</sup> describes how cockfighters in Brazil choose the adversary they want to fight against among those who attend cockfights. Within the various factors to be taken into account, roosters' weight, height and bet amount are essential. There are documented examples in which even the holding of the event, due to the difficulties of matching,

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<sup>577</sup> Weights are usually given two or three days before the event. In the case of leagues (*contratas*) the number of fights that will be done throughout the year are arranged before the start of the season. During my fieldwork, some of these leagues had around 15-17 dates with the consequent preparation of hundreds of birds (e.g., 17x8= 136 fights per team).

<sup>578</sup> See Corrêa (2017:101,197,224,268).



is uncertain. To put this in perspective, it is worth reading a first-hand account by Vélazquez-Rojas in northeastern México:

There was music in that place where people were waiting while having a drink. When everything seemed like a cancellation, a man about the age of 60 arrived ... with a rooster in his hands ... Being cautious is a matter of outmost importance when it comes to clandestine cockfighting. People began to discuss about the roosters... they talked about possible fights, but the weights did not match and nobody gave in; a lot of calls were made but the weights remained unmatched ... Time passed, and people kept waiting. Besides continuing to discuss the weights, nobody wanted to lose, nobody wanted to draw, everyone wanted a chance of victory ... drinks made the waiting a little more bearable ... Phones kept ringing ... People kept coming ...And when that seemed a total waste of time, all of a sudden, everything changed... there was a rooster on the way to fight, but despite great efforts, it was more than obvious that people felt nervous, desperate and helpless for not being able to agree the fights...

As the time passed by, the sun was hiding and the lights went on. On the radio, there were joyful songs by regional bands. People kept on drinking, cooling themselves. There were people in circles, everybody was talking about the same thing. We were still observing that atmosphere of nerves and despair ...When everything seemed a waste of time, a man aged about 65 arrived holding his carrying box... The judge was chosen among the members of the attending audience ... The owner of the *Ventaja* party talked to the rival and they both discussed about the bet, the judge... Everything was agreed.

(Velázquez-Rojas, 2014:105-107)<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> 'La música sonaba en aquel lugar, donde las personas esperaban mientras bebían sus tragos. Cuando todo parecía una cancelación, llegó un personaje de alrededor de unos 60 años...con un gallo entre las manos... El ser cauteloso es la verdadera importancia de lo clandestino. Los demás asistentes iniciaron con la improvisación del redondel para iniciar las arengas con los gallos...hablaban de posibles peleas, nadie daba su brazo a torcer, pues los pesos no coincidían, por más llamadas que se efectuaban, los pesos no eran mutuos...El tiempo transcurría, las personas seguían aguardando. Además de seguir discutiendo los pesos, nadie quería perder, nadie quería empatar, todos quería una posibilidad de victoria...las bebidas hacían más ameno el tiempo de espera...Los teléfonos sonaban...Seguían llegando personas...Cuando aquello parecía una total pérdida de tiempo, todo cambió en un

This illustration contrasts with the situation in the Canary Islands where the place and the number of fights are pre-set by the organisers. Therefore, usually two days before the fights, the programmes for the events are ready and every cocker knows the order of the bouts that will take place. The interconnection of these bouts is discussed below.

### **Atomical or Interconnected Structure**

Another way of thinking about cockfights is the extent to which individual bouts are interconnected. Geertz's and Guggenheim's depictions of cockfighting can be classed as "hackfights". As I will develop below, forms of competition far from the one described by Geertz in Bali can be found in the Canary Islands.

Geertz<sup>580</sup> contrasted the atomistic structure of Balinese fights with other modalities which flourished in Britain<sup>581</sup>. Perhaps the most important were *mains* where an uneven number of fights were pre-agreed between two teams (or men) and the score was kept. There was a prize for the winner of the main but also individual prizes for each bout<sup>582</sup>. Without wishing to play down the importance of individual battles, it is quite obvious that this format placed value on the event as a

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instante...había un gallo en camino para pelear, pero a pesar de grandes esfuerzos los nervios, la desesperación e impotencia de no pelear gallos era más que evidente...

El tiempo seguía transcurriendo. El sol se ocultaba, las luces del centro de reunión se encendían. La radio sonaba con canciones alegres de grupos regionales. Las personas bebían, refrescaban sus gargantas. Había pequeñas esferas de personas, todas hablan de lo mismo. Nosotros seguíamos observando aquella planicie de nervios y desesperaciones... Cuando todo parecía una pérdida de tiempo, arribó un señor de alrededor de unos sesenta y cinco años, portando en mano su caja transportadora... El juez fue elegido entre los integrantes del público asistente...El propietario del partido de la Ventaja se dirigió con el contrario. Dialogaron con el dueño de la casa, para decidir la apuesta, el debido juez... Todo estaba pactado'. (Velázquez-Rojas, 2014:105-107)

<sup>580</sup> Geertz (1972:35)

<sup>581</sup> See Scott (1983), Fitz-Barnard (1983) and Ruport (1949) for a wider analysis of British cockfights (Mains, Devonshire Main, Welsh Main, Concourse, Battle Royale, etc.).

<sup>582</sup> Scott (1983:72-73)

whole. There were other competitions, such as the Welsh main, with a knock-out pattern in which winning cocks moved forward to the final.

Another method of conducting cockfights which has been popular in the USA since the 1920s is the derby<sup>583</sup>. Here, each cocker pays an entry fee to enter a set number of roosters between the bottom and top weights<sup>584</sup>. A record of each entrant's wins and losses is kept and the one(s) with most victories collects the pooled money. Tournaments were also popular in the USA and they also involved the participation of a pre-set number of roosters but, rather than a wide range of weights, cockers usually have the obligation to enter one cock at each one of the specified weight categories. Herzog describes tournaments and derbies in the USA as round robin<sup>585</sup> competitions. Nevertheless, in the USA and in the rest of the world, there are regional varieties of competitions. This causes some translation difficulties because an American tournament may not automatically be translated into Spanish as a *torneo* (tournament).

Except for some *peleas sueltas* and *desafíos*, cockfights in the Canary Islands can be classified under *contrata* or championship modality. Both, *contratas* and championships, challenge Geertz's concept of *atomical structure*. Obviously, in championships every fight will count towards the final classification and contestants are not allowed to agree a draw because that could help a third party and undermine the integrity of the competition.

Within the cockfighting world, *contratas* might be the furthest point from the above-mentioned atomical structure. In this mode, two or more *galleras*, formed by groups of breeders, compete

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<sup>583</sup> Ruport (1949)

<sup>584</sup> See Herzog (1985) and Ruport (1949) for more information.

<sup>585</sup> See, for example, Herzog and Cheek (1979:37) and Herzog (1985:118). Round robin usually refers to a competition in which each contestant plays/meets each of the others. This rotational manner contrast with the elimination pattern of other competitions.

over several months to decide the season's champion. In a *contrata*, not only each bout counts at the end of the day but each date counts for the final classification (e.g., it is not the same to win 5-3 than 8-0). Throughout the season, each day's results are added up to decide the champion. Therefore, all fights are important, at least until a winner is determined. To my knowledge, this type of format is unique in the world of cockfighting<sup>586</sup>.

What I would like to stress here is that these *contratas* and championships (along with derbies and mains in other countries) have a differential factor of competition in comparison with hackfights<sup>587</sup>. Whilst recognising the separate identity of individual bouts and the value that *casteadores* attach to them, they are a part of one whole. However, in hackfights there is not competition beyond the individual matches.

### **Does money make this world go around? Different ways of betting.**

Whatever the social, psychological, or political reasons why people attend cockfights, any cocker will say the main reason he goes is to bet. And bet they do.

(Guggenheim, 1994:155)

Guggenheim's statement on cockfighting in Philippines shows very clearly the importance of betting there. In all the case studies around the world<sup>588</sup>, there are two types of bets<sup>589</sup>: 'central'

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<sup>586</sup> In any case, it is worth noting that structures of competition are not indissolubly linked to specific countries and different formats can coexist. Examples of such coexistence might, for example, be found in Mexico, near the Texas-Mexico border (Tippette, 1978), and in the Philippines where hackfights and derbies have been reported (Cockfighting Sabong, 2012).

<sup>587</sup> Hackfights are sometimes referred to as "brush fights" or "one on one".

<sup>588</sup> See, e.g., Geertz (1972), Guggenheim (1994), Affergan (1986), Leal (1994), Corrêa (2017), Arias-Marín (2012) Rodríguez (2014), Morell-Vega (2016), Domínguez-i-Perles (2001) and Marvin (1984).

<sup>589</sup> They are sometimes given other names: central and lateral, on the list and behind, etc.

and ‘peripheral’. The former is usually the official/formal one and it is agreed by cock’s owners as a previous requirement for the fight. It sometimes involves coalitions of bettors around the owner, as described by Geertz<sup>590</sup>. The latter is usually made individually by members of the audience, sometimes while the fight is taking place, without any (official) mediation<sup>591</sup> and it generally involves smaller stakes.

When one of the factors for arranging a fight is the money being betted, there will always be some kind of central betting between the cockfighters. Regardless of the agreed amount, it seems an intrinsic requirement at hackfights. But, according to the above-mentioned literature, this is also a very common feature in other formats such as tournaments and derbies.

A minimum bet, apart from participation fees, is frequent in many forms of cockfighting. In some cases, as described in Northern France by Corrêa<sup>592</sup>, a small default bet is a requirement imposed on cockfighters. Central betting means that the owner, no matter the format, will get some money by winning his individual bouts. However, let me turn now to a conversation which took place somewhere in the Canary Islands right after a championship.

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<sup>590</sup> ‘In the first place, there are two sorts of bets, or *toh*. There is the single axial bet in the center between the principals (*toh ketengah*), and there is the cloud of peripheral ones around the ring between members of the audience (*toh kesasi*). The first is typically large; the second typically small. The first is collective, involving coalitions of bettors clustering around the owner; the second is individual, man to man. The first is a matter of deliberate, very quiet, almost furtive arrangement by the coalition members and the umpire huddled like conspirators in the center of the ring; the second is a matter of impulsive shouting, public offers, and public acceptances by the excited throng around its edges’. (Geertz, 1972:11)

<sup>591</sup> ‘There are two kinds of bets: the *Central* betting with a pre-established price which is done only between the owners of the two cocks that are fighting. It is also “central” in the sense that it is “centralized” by “the house” (the *rinshadeiro*), with the rules of the cockers’ association defining prices. “Lateral” betting is done between any two individual in the audience, without any sort of bureaucratic intermediation’. (Leal, 1994:221)

<sup>592</sup> In northern France cockfighters register their birds in advance using the weight as the only factor, and with the organisation being in charge of doing the pairing (Corrêa, 2017:101). However, in contrast with the Canary Islands, there is a small default bet to be paid in each individual fight (Corrêa, 2017:100).

Manuel: You have won with three roosters and you lose 200 euros.

Paco: There were people who won with their three roosters in the championship and came back here with 400 or 500 euros of travel expenses. That has to be looked at.

Manuel: My friends asked me how it was when I went to the championships and I answered that I won with three roosters. They told me that I made a fortune and I answered that I lost 200 euros and they did not believe it.

Paco: Hahahaha it's like that.

Manuel: A minimum bet on the roosters should be a requirement so at least those whose birds win, don't lose money. So, they can cover the participation fee.

Paco: All year long raising these animals that give a lot of expense and preparing them and when you go to fight them you do not get any kind of benefit.<sup>593</sup> (Manuel and Paco 04/04/2018)

It is the absence of a compulsory minimum bet in individual fights that makes a discussion like the one above possible<sup>594</sup>. This might be a surprise to those who think about betting as a central

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<sup>593</sup> Manuel: Te ganan tres gallos y pierdes 200 euros.

Paco: La gente que ganó sus 3 gallos en el campeonato y se vienen para acá con 400 o 500 euros de gastos de viaje. Eso hay que mirarlo.

Manuel: A mí me preguntaban amigos míos cuando iba a los campeonatos cómo me fue y yo les respondía que gané los tres gallos. Me decían que me jarté y yo les respondía que perdí 200 euros y no se lo creían.

Paco: Jajajaja es que es así.

Manuel: Los gallos deben llevar un mínimo de apuesta encima para que por lo menos al que le ganen los gallos no pierda dinero. Que puedan pagar la inscripción.

Paco: Todo el año criando estos animales que dan un montón de gasto y arreglándolos para cuando vayas a pelearlos no sacarle ningún tipo de beneficio. (Manuel y Paco 04/04/2018)

<sup>594</sup> In most championships in the Canary Islands, part of the fees paid by breeders to compete will make part of the final prizes given to the top three breeders of the event (the ones winning more bouts in less time). However, as stated by Manuel and Paco, a breeder can win all his bouts and have no prize at all because the total time of his fights is higher than others. According to the cockfighting literature worldwide, this is exceptional.

feature of cockfighting. That widespread perception might be justified from the academic and non-academic literature on cockfighting. There are abundant references to fights where a betting agreement is needed to proceed. Puerto Rico<sup>595</sup>, Costa Rica<sup>596</sup>, Haiti<sup>597</sup>, Mexico<sup>598</sup>, Colombia<sup>599</sup>, Indonesia<sup>600</sup> and the Republic of the Philippines<sup>601</sup> are just a few examples. However, I think these betting references should be considered in a wider context. Central betting does not necessarily mean that the bet amount is the most important factor nor the first one to be agreed. Typically, the first phase of the arrangement, involves a deep consideration of potential adversaries according to animal conditions and personal beliefs.

(...) the breeders hold their respective *gallos* and, according to the conditions of each animal, decide if they want to agree a fight. The aim of the *careo* (face-off) is to establish if the *gallos* are on equal terms, trying to ensure a good fight- which, of course, is not always the case-. If the fight is agreed, then the sum of the central bet is agreed, that is to say, the bet between *galleros*, which is never lower than 500 thousand pesos.

(Arias-Marín, 2012:194-195)<sup>602</sup>

What is important is that matchmaking, when it is in the cocker's hands, is something much more complex than two cockfighters holding two roosters and willing to bet the same amount. For those interested in the different factors involved in matchmaking and betting in a specific context, I

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<sup>595</sup> Dinwiddie (1899) and Morell-Vega (2016:9).

<sup>596</sup> Rodríguez (2014:53-54)

<sup>597</sup> Nordhoff & Hall (1940)

<sup>598</sup> Tippet (1978)

<sup>599</sup> Arias-Marín (2012:195)

<sup>600</sup> Geertz (1972)

<sup>601</sup> Guggenheim (1994)

<sup>602</sup> (...) los gallos están sujetos por sus respectivos criadores, quienes, de acuerdo con las condiciones de cada animal, deciden si los enfrentan. El objetivo del *careo* es establecer la igualdad de condiciones de los gallos para tratar de asegurar una buena pelea —lo cual, claro está, no siempre se da—. Si se pacta la pelea, se acuerda entonces la suma de la apuesta central, es decir, la apuesta entre *galleros*, que nunca es inferior a los 500 mil pesos. (Arias-Marín, 2012:194-195).

would recommend the detailed discussion of *ulutan* and *parada* provided by Guggenheim in his analysis of the hackfights in the Philippines.

The nature of betting in the Canary Islands is atypical within this world. Peripheral betting is more important than central betting. Although there are cases where *casteadores* agree to bet on their individual bouts, that is not a requirement in the Canary Islands. Therefore, the money that a cocker would like to bet on his bird (if any) is not a prior requirement for arranging a fight in the archipelago. As I have already explained before, cockfighters are not involved in the matching and, when a cocker registers for an event, he is never asked how much he wishes to bet on his *gallo*.

In other parts of the world, apart from participation fees, a minimum bet in each fight will be a requirement by the promoter who will make the match-ups. Although this can be seen as *betting in the dark*<sup>603</sup>, this ensures that any owner winning an individual fight will get some money even if he does not win any of the tournament prizes.

The particular nature of the Canarian betting makes a conversation like the one between Manuel and Paco possible. Both middle-age breeders complained about the possibility of winning your individual matches in a championship but not making any financial gain while having the expenses of participating. The increase in championships across the Canary Islands has raised these questions.

Another factor to bear in mind, at least in some countries, is the concerns, expressed by cockfighters, with the people who just gamble recklessly without understanding their tradition. An example can be found in Bali, where “true cockfighters” consider them fools who miss the point

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<sup>603</sup> Maybe some academics do not consider this (real) betting.



of cockfighting<sup>604</sup>. Some cockfighters in Brazil express their concerns on the newly-rich from Bolivia buying their bankiva cocks just for gambling. In their opinion, such attitudes, also connected to illegal fighting bird trafficking to the USA, could end up making cockfighting little more than a big business<sup>605</sup>. In the Canary Islands, as long as it does not cause a problem in the course of the fights, betting is considered a personal matter. However, I remember an amusing case where a *cuidador* from La Palma could not stop laughing while remembering how he sold the same rooster twice<sup>606</sup> to the same person in Lanzarote in the early 2000s. He was just a bettor who made money out of urban speculation and, although he was fond of betting, he did not know much about day-to-day cockfighting.

Hierarchical gambling is masterfully depicted by Geertz in Bali where ‘the solid citizenry around whom local life revolves’ dominate the larger matches<sup>607</sup>. In this sense, for the Balinese, cockfighting would be a symbol of moral import<sup>608</sup> connected to the everyday politics of prestige<sup>609</sup>. Consequently:

...the great majority of the people calling “five” or “speckled” so demonstratively are expressing their allegiance to their kinsman, not their evaluation of his bird, their understanding of probability theory, or even their hopes of unearned income.

(Geertz, 1972:19)

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<sup>604</sup> Geertz (1972:16)

<sup>605</sup> Leal (1994:215)

<sup>606</sup> The buyer was only interested in betting, so he bought a rooster from the *cuidador*. After winning the fight, he was told the rooster was not in the best condition. Therefore, he gave him away and bought another rooster in a few weeks from the same *cuidador* who, knowing that this guy was just a bettor, and the rooster was fully recovered, decided to sell him the same fighting bird. Pérez-Corrales (2008:60) also comments on the higher prominence of betting in Lanzarote in the early 2000s.

<sup>607</sup> Geertz (1972:17)

<sup>608</sup> Geertz (1972:16)

<sup>609</sup> Geertz (1972:21)

In the case of Bali, even when the two cocks fighting are far from someone's social and hierarchical circle, a cocker will not ask a relative or a friend whom he is betting on to avoid being called upon to bet on the same rooster<sup>610</sup>. This kind of *I-did-not-know* strategy, as also described by Guggenheim in the Philippines, even goes so far as hiding oneself in the stores outside the cockpit to avoid being called to support a bird you do not trust<sup>611</sup>.

On the contrary, in Brazil Leal finds 'no regularities in the allegiances among men in the audience (for betting)' but 'there is a sort of fidelity between men and cocks: when the same cock fights again the same men are expected to bet on the same cocks' (Leal 1994:220). As seen before in chapter 6, I did not find in the Spanish archipelago any kind of regularities<sup>612</sup> in the allegiances or a special fidelity between men and roosters in terms of betting.

Finally, in Bali<sup>613</sup> and the Philippines<sup>614</sup> it has been highlighted that amounts bet, even in the smallest fights, are usually higher than weekly wages. Betting amounts are reported to be high in Latin America, where Mexico and Dominican Republic may be good examples of that. During my fieldwork, I was told by many *casteadores* that Mexico is the place with the highest bets in the world of cockfighting. Jesse L. Walker, a cocker who undertook a MSc dissertation on cockfighting, also points out Mexicans as the largest bettors he has ever seen<sup>615</sup>.

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<sup>610</sup> Geertz (1972:20)

<sup>611</sup> Guggenheim (1994:149)

<sup>612</sup> The format of competition might be one of the reasons for this. For instance, if an aficionado were "obliged" to repeatedly bet for a team in a *contrata* in which one of the teams is obtaining bad results over the year, he would lose a considerable amount of money in the long term. It is worth remembering that the use of plastic and natural spurs reduces the element of luck involved when dealing with lethal metal blades. Therefore, cockfighting in the Canary Islands is much more than a good first blow.

<sup>613</sup> Geertz states that 'this is clearly serious gambling, even if the bets are pooled rather than individual efforts' (1972:11).

<sup>614</sup> Guggenheim (1994:155)

<sup>615</sup> Walker (1986:49)

In some European countries, a few authors have highlighted the secondary importance and the lower amount of betting. For instance, Corrêa discusses about bets in France and the Canary Islands as lower and less varied than in Brazil<sup>616</sup>. Marvin also highlights the greater weight of betting in South America than in Spain<sup>617</sup>. But even within the Spanish context, the case of the Canary Islands seems to be unique. Marvin's work in Andalusia and Domínguez's in Cartagena<sup>618</sup> point to the existence of central betting as a previous requirement to pair the birds. Both also highlight the informal and small role played by the side betting among the audience.

To conclude, I think the peculiarity of betting in the Canaries is important. This does not mean that bets are unusual or unimportant and anyone attending cockfights will notice, at least, the peripheral betting. However, I believe the Canary Islands are, to date, the place where betting has the least importance within the world of cockfighting.

### **An example of the meeting of classes**

As I explored in the history chapter, cockfighting has often been depicted as an event in which people of all social classes participate. For example, in the USA it was a practice engaged in by men of all classes but, unlike in the UK, the rich were accepted on common-men's terms and that was used as one of the justifications of the practice: its equal terms and democracy<sup>619</sup>. In the Spanish archipelago, Béthencourt-Massieu<sup>620</sup> notes the importance of the participation of the aristocracy to justify and to maintain the legal status of the activity in the 18th century Tenerife. However, the Spanish historian also recognises that cockfighting was a popular entertainment for

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<sup>616</sup> See, e.g., Corrêa (2017:88,105).

<sup>617</sup> Marvin (1984:66)

<sup>618</sup> Domínguez-i-Perles (2001)

<sup>619</sup> Smith & Daniel (2000:103-104)

<sup>620</sup> Béthencourt-Massieu (1982:502)

people from all strata of society. Other recent local works<sup>621</sup> point out Canarian cockpits as a place of amicable meeting of people of all social classes. Nonetheless, I would like to briefly discuss this in the context of studies from other parts of the world.

Leal highlights the spatial distribution of the audience in Porto Alegre (Brazil), where people who can afford higher bets sit closer to the pit<sup>622</sup>. Distributions patterns, around the pit, related to social status, betting and ticket prices have also been reported in Bogotá<sup>623</sup> (Colombia). In Puerto Rico, cockpits are organised in different categories according to variations in the average amount bet and the entrance fees<sup>624</sup>. These categories are also common in Dominican Republic where there are arenas with luxurious facilities where bets are usually \$ 10,000 or more and much more humble venues with typical bets around \$ 10<sup>625</sup>. Substantial differences between cockpits have also been reported in the USA<sup>626</sup> and the Philippines<sup>627</sup>. Many Cubans I met during my fieldwork told me about similar stratifications in their country.

From my understanding, the hierarchical betting described by Geertz in Bali and Guggenheim in the Philippines can also be understood in terms of class. In other words, they might be all together at the cockpit but the set of expected responsibilities for a city mayor and a peasant are far from equal. Small, medium and large matches are a clear example of different participation according to personal status:

(...) there are those who fight cocks in small, or occasionally medium matches, but have not the status to join in the large ones, though they may bet from time to time on the side in those.

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<sup>621</sup> See, e.g., Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987).

<sup>622</sup> Leal (1994: 221)

<sup>623</sup> Arias-Marín (2012:192)

<sup>624</sup> Morell-Vega (2016:9)

<sup>625</sup> Forrisi (2007:363)

<sup>626</sup> Forsyth (1996)

<sup>627</sup> Guggenheim (1994:150)

And finally, there are those, the really substantial members of the community, the solid citizenry around whom local life revolves, who fight in the larger fights and bet on them around the side. The focusing element in these focused gatherings, these men generally dominate and define the sport as they dominate and define the society.

(Geertz, 1972:17)

I did not find such stratification or spatial distribution at the cockpits in the Canary Islands. In *contratas*, the audience is sometimes distributed by *galleras* but I did not see a clear class distribution among the teams in the stands. Perhaps, the lower attendance, compared with other countries, might be an important factor for this. Also, there are not many cockpits on each island and they are normally used to host both *contratas* and championships. Only in very few places, small championships and *peleas sueltas* are held outside the official calendar provided by the Federation<sup>628</sup>, and these are generally events in which untested and lower-quality roosters are fought. Those attending these smaller events also go to the larger championships and *contratas*, therefore they are not groups which are clearly distinguishable from each other. These events are more a matter of testing new breeding lines and roosters whose high performance is called into question than a socioeconomic status. It is worth mentioning that in the Canary Islands a higher socioeconomic status does not necessarily correspond with better fighting birds. As seen before, money gives choices, not certainty, to buy roosters but there is a strong honour factor regarding the breeding.

Evidently, money is required for those willing to bet but the non-existence of compulsory betting and the formats of *contratas* and championships might make things less dependent on money and

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<sup>628</sup> Not going through the Federation does not mean illegal cockfighting. Anyway, some of these places are opposed by the Federation in its attempt to group together all participants and competitions.

other resources. In the Spanish archipelago, there is no need to have a *padrino* (godfather or supporter) who can sponsor you with the bookmakers, as the one depicted in the Mexican film *El Gallo de Oro* (1964). It would be a great mistake to think of betting as the most important economic factor for breeders in the Canary Islands. Rooster breeding requires to cover the expenses of food, vitamins, medicines, equipment, competition fees, etc.

I do not wish to give the impression that cockfighting in the Canary Islands is free of class issue. Among those breeders who I spoke to, especially in Tenerife, I found some complaints about the limited access to *contratas* due to the barriers imposed by their management board, sometimes referred to as *caciques* (local bosses). From their perspective, membership fees, among other issues, were keeping younger generations and immigrants from participating in *contratas*. Local literature<sup>629</sup> highlights how *galleras* have been historically led by elite characters who could have prevented humble people to access some competitions. However, the number of *galleras* has increased in recent years giving way to a variety of internal structures and more competitions, including championships. Undoubtedly, this is a complex issue which would probably require a diachronic approach rather than the synchronic study I undertook.

What needs to be stressed here is that it is likely that championships in the Canary Islands have played a similar role as derbies in the USA<sup>630</sup>, allowing individual cockfighters with a small number of roosters to compete several times a year. These championships allow greater flexibility for breeders and they do not have to rely on an organisational structure to compete.

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<sup>629</sup> See, e.g., Pérez-Corrales (2008) and Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987).

<sup>630</sup> Herzog & Cheek (1979) and Herzog (1985).

## Spurs

According to the Oxford English Dictionary<sup>631</sup> a spur, in the context of cockfighting, is ‘a steel point fastened to the leg of a gamecock’. This however, is a narrow definition that does not encompass the whole variety of spurs (also called heels) used around the world. Within the class of steel spurs, gaffs and slashers (also called knives) are probably the most used<sup>632</sup>. Gaffs are usually curved with no sharp edges while slashers have both the edges and the points sharpened. Gaffs are the main spurs in the USA<sup>633</sup> but Mexican and Philippines knives have also become popular with the arrival of Latin American and Pacific cockers<sup>634</sup>.

Normally, gaffs are fitted to both feet while slashers are tied on only one leg of the rooster, usually the left foot. The former, bayonet-type heels, are a product of the western tradition and were the spurs used in Britain<sup>635</sup>. The latter, as described by Walker (1986:7), ‘not only make a puncture wound going in, they make a wicked cut coming back out. Needless to say, slasher fights usually do not last long’. Therefore, as a general rule, bouts where birds are fitted with gaffs will tend to last longer than those where birds are equipped with slashers. This is unsurprising given that 3 inch/7.5cm spurs, Mexican ones for example, are not uncommon<sup>636</sup>.

Among the non-steel cockfighting, naked-heel and other materials can be found. A gamecock which is not fitted with artificial spurs is called naked-heeled or bare-heeled. However, in naked-

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<sup>631</sup> Available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/spur> (Accessed:27/10/2018).

<sup>632</sup> For further information see, e.g., Herzog (1985:116), Scott (1983:188-193), Walker (1986:7-8), Smith & Daniel (2000:84-86,114-118) and Fitz-Barnard (1983:79-103). Sometimes “gaffs” relates to all metallic spurs in the English language. For those interested in spurs, Rolando V. Mascuñana, in his *Blacksmiths and Gaffs in Dumaguete* (1989), analyses the importance, stylistic variation, method of manufacture and economic value of metallic spurs in this area of The Philippines.

<sup>633</sup> ‘Any length of heel that is round from socket to point is fair, although tradition and predetermined agreement may call for a short heel, 1 ¼ to 1 ½ inches, or along heel, longer than 1 ½ inches’ (Harris, 1987, cited in Dundes, 1994:12).

<sup>634</sup> Walker (1986:7-8) and Herzog (1985:116).

<sup>635</sup> Walker (1986:8)

<sup>636</sup> Walker (1986:8)

heel fighting ‘the spurs of dead cocks are sometimes fixed to the legs of cocks whose own spurs have not grown to their mature length’ (Smith & Daniel, 2000:85). Many different materials have historically been used to make artificial spurs. But perhaps turtleshell or *carey*<sup>637</sup> has been the most used, especially in Latin America<sup>638</sup>. However, the use of natural materials is declining because of the emergence of plastic spurs. These ones are also replacing naked-heel cockfighting in many places in the Caribbean such as Puerto Rico<sup>639</sup>. Naked-heel fighting is still practised in many places, particularly in Spanish-speaking countries. In Andalusia, as described by Marvin (1984:61), ‘birds are not fitted with the razor-sharp metal spurs, spikes or blades which are used in other parts of the world; they use only their natural spurs’. It should be pointed out that different spurs, as well as some of the characteristics discussed above, are not mutually exclusive. The USA and Cuba<sup>640</sup> are examples of places where different spurs and modes of competition have coexisted.

It is important to highlight that in the Canary Islands, fighting birds are not fitted with gaffs or knives, which, as seen above, are widely used in other regions of the world. Although fights with steel spurs are mentioned, at least on Tenerife in the first half of the 19th century, it is considered that they have not been used for more than 150 years because they were gradually discarded by the enthusiasts who preferred the natural ones<sup>641</sup>. Over the past few years, however, this model has changed, and the vast majority of gamecocks are equipped with artificial plastic<sup>642</sup> spurs 30mm in

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<sup>637</sup> The *Carey* turtle usually refers to Hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) which is a critically endangered sea turtle with a worldwide distribution. Likewise, *carey*, by extension, also refers to the shells of other sea turtles used for handicraft production. As a result of this endangered status, *carey* spurs were banned in Venezuela in 2009. See, e.g., Galleros de Oriente (2009).

<sup>638</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:213)

<sup>639</sup> Morell-Vega (2016:10)

<sup>640</sup> Scott (1983:134)

<sup>641</sup> Cárdenes-Rodríguez (1987) and Pérez-Corrales (2008:213).

<sup>642</sup> Mainly, but not only, model E-30 provided by the Federation. 40mm spurs were allowed for a few years but the Federation decided to decrease their length to 30mm in 2017.



length, even though there is a small number of cases where they fight with their natural spurs. Exclusively at the Canarian Championship the rules are different and only a rooster's natural spurs<sup>643</sup> are permitted, either their own or those from other roosters which are reworked through a complex handcrafted process<sup>644</sup>. This could be considered a matter of respect for the past, a way to remember the old fights in the archipelago.



A collage of photos showing a few sets of *postizas* spurs and the different tools used in their manufacture in the Canary Islands. Thanks to *Hermanos Plasencia* and *Son de la Huerta* for their hospitality and openness. © Ricardo

Ontillera (2017)

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<sup>643</sup> *Espuelas de gallo* in Spanish.

<sup>644</sup> These spurs are called *postizas* or *postizas de gallo* in Spanish.

I was told by many informants that the principal reasons for the introduction of plastic spurs were financial and egalitarian. A pair of handcrafted natural spurs might cost more than 40 euros while a pair of plastic spurs cost less than 4 euros. Low cost and time saving, they are also easier to clean and measure<sup>645</sup>. To attach artificial spurs, natural ones are removed. Sometimes a short stub is left to help anchoring the artificial spur securely on the leg, but this is a matter of personal choice. There are no standardised rules and each organiser might introduce minor alterations, but *contratas* and championships in the Spanish archipelago expressly prohibit materials other than plastic. Most of the time<sup>646</sup>, plastic spurs are fitted using a metal socket<sup>647</sup> which mates perfectly to the rooster's leg. Cord, glue and adhesive tape are commonly used to ensure that they do not fall in the middle of a fight.

Everyone knows how to heel but not many are considered great heelers. Heeling is more than just a technical matter; angle and orientation will vary depending on rooster's style of fighting<sup>648</sup>. However, heeling in the Canary Islands does not seem to be such a specialised and complex job as in Bali<sup>649</sup> and the Philippines<sup>650</sup>, where knife-tying<sup>651</sup> has been described as an extraordinarily difficult task.

Each cockfighting tradition has its own preferences regarding the spurs and the specific breeds of fighting birds. For example, the spurs and breeds used in Brazil have nothing to do with the ones

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<sup>645</sup> Of course, it is not an issue without contention. Different performance capacities and tradition are just two points of this debate.

<sup>646</sup> But not necessarily. I would like to thank Francisco and Loli (Los Halcones) who spent a few hours teaching me how to heel a plastic spur without a socket (only with glue and adhesive tape on the stub).

<sup>647</sup> *Casquillo* in Spanish. The spur is fitted on the outside (*por fuera*) of the socket.

<sup>648</sup> See "*Espuelas*" (in Pérez-Corrales, 2008:213-215) for more information on the matter.

<sup>649</sup> Geertz (1972:8)

<sup>650</sup> Guggenheim (1994:153)

<sup>651</sup> See, e.g., Guggenheim (1994:153) and Walker (1986:7).

used in the Philippines<sup>652</sup>. The significance of the spurs' characteristics (materials, length, shape, etc.) for breeders cannot be overstated because spurs are essential to understand rooster's performance. For instance, I was often told in the Canary Islands that a *salidor*<sup>653</sup> style, was possible because of the major length of the Canarian Spurs in comparison with the ones in mainland Spain.



On the left, natural spurs in La Palma. On the right, artificial spurs for a championship in Lanzarote. © Ricardo

Ontillera (2017)

In the Spanish archipelago, the length of plastic spurs was decreased to 30mm in 2017 and many breeders commented on how that change influenced the average time of the bouts. Final blows

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<sup>652</sup> Corrêa (2017:166)

<sup>653</sup> Where the *gallo* suddenly “stops fighting” and starts running away but then turns to strike, catching its opponent unaware (see page 166 for more information).

were less common and bouts became, to some extent, closer to the ones in mainland Spain. The important point here is that any change in the spurs' characteristics has its consequences even if it goes unnoticed for the untrained eye.

### **A very particular case**

I hope the five points (matching, structure, betting, class and spurs) analysed in this chapter have provided a general overview of the Canarian cockfights as a very particular case within the world of cockfighting. Stated briefly, in the Spanish archipelago there is no a direct pairing arranged by roosters' owners, there are two modalities of competition with no compulsory betting, cockpits are opened to everyone and metallic spurs are not used.

Every cockfighting tradition has its peculiarities but the sum of all the abovementioned serve as a baseline to suggest that the Canarian one is far from the paradigmatic cases described by some authors such as Geertz, Guggenheim and Leal. I would also like to highlight that I found no evidence to support Dundes's idea<sup>654</sup> of cockfighting as a symbolic phallic duel. In this sense, following Leal's words (in Dundes, 1994:213), I also 'wonder if the equation cocks = penises is not an oversimplification specific to English-speaking people' since the same homonym does not occur in Spanish.

At this point, I should like to turn my attention to different issues that I have considered relevant on the relationship established between Canarian breeders and roosters.

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<sup>654</sup> Dundes (1994:250-251)

**FIGHTING BIRDS ARE NOT PUPPIES**

21/05/2016 Garachico (Tenerife):

Elías: Anyway, the argument of the tradition is something that I would remove from our discourse. It is a path that leads nowhere.

Ricardo: Well, I don't know.

Elías: And, in fact, Jose Luis was careful not to mention it the last time he addressed the media because they expect you to say that and then attack you. In all debates they wait to strike you out. Goat throwing from the top of a church or burning people in the squares were traditions. Or El Toro de la Vega, which is barbaric, these are traditions.

Ricardo: Perhaps, using other words, as part of the Canarian culture...

Elías: But it should not be the main argument. In this case, I would rather say that we are as *animalistas* as anyone. The fact that our roosters fight maintains the breed. The fight is just the final stage.

Ricardo: I have been with people who seem to love animals very much, not just roosters.

Elías: Yes. They have put us all as a type of vampires who are all thirsty for blood. Comments on *animalistas* websites, when they post

photographs of roosters, and say that animals such and such, and maybe they are photos from Puerto Rico, although fights in Puerto Rico are quite similar. And, of course, these are people who... a fighting cockerel is not a kitty nor a doggy, and they insist that all animals are to wear these ridiculous dresses that they put on their puppies or animals you can place beside you and watch TV on the sofa. That is, roughly, the concept *animalistas* have. They don't conceive that you can love an animal and fight it. Well, regarding dogfighting I can understand them, because I have seen them, and they are shocking. It is not a natural instinct for a dog to kill another dog. They are dogs that you need to prepare in special way to have an unnatural aggressiveness<sup>655</sup>.

The above excerpt from one particular interview encouraged me to pay attention to ways of thinking about the nature of fighting cocks that came up in many conversations. Fighting birds are

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<sup>655</sup> Elías: Yo, de todas maneras, el argumento de la tradición es algo que quitaría de nuestro discurso. Porque por ahí no se va a ningún lado.

Ricardo: Bueno, no se va...

Elías: Y, de hecho, José Luis se cuidó mucho de decirlo la última vez que intervino porque además están esperando que vayas por ahí para cogerte. En todos los debates están esperando para trancarte por ahí. Tirar cabras desde los campanarios, quemar gente en las plazas era una tradición. O lo del toro de la vega ese que es una barbaridad, eso son tradiciones.

Ricardo: A lo mejor elaborarlo de otra manera, como parte de la cultura canaria.

Elías: Pero no debe ser el argumento principal. En este caso yo tiraría más porque somos tan animalistas como cualquier otro. El que nuestros gallos peleen estamos manteniendo una raza. La pelea es un final...

Ricardo: Yo he estado con gente que se le ve que quieren muchísimo a los animales, no sólo a los gallos.

Elías: Sí. Nos han puesto a todos como una especie de vampiros que estamos todos sedientos de sangre. Los comentarios de las páginas de internet animalistas cuando ponen fotos de gallos, y dicen que animales y tal, que a lo mejor son fotos de Puerto Rico, aunque las peleas de Puerto Rico son bastante parecidas. Y claro, son gente que...un gallo de pelea no es un gatito ni un perrito, y claro, se han empeñado en que los animales son todos para ponerles los vestiditos esos ridículos que les ponen a los perritos o unos animalitos que tú puedes llevarte a ver la tele al sofá. Es un poco el concepto que tienen los animalistas. No conciben que tú puedas querer un animal y pelearlo. Hombre, yo puedo entender que unas peleas de perros, porque yo he visto peleas de perros, impresionan, y no es un instinto natural de un perro matar a otro. Son perros que tienes tú, que preparas de una forma especial para que tengan una agresividad que no es natural.

not puppies. There is a general perception among many *casteadores* that outsiders to the cockfight world, more particularly people within animal welfare movements, do not understand what a *gallo de peleá* is. This led me to ask them about how they perceived the nature of these birds. In many of the informal conversations that I heard during my fieldwork, I noted a critical undertone regarding that point but, what is a fighting bird for them? How do breeders classify roosters?

### **The *gallo de peleá* (gamecock) in the Canary Islands**

#### **Technical aspects**

As mentioned toward the beginning of this dissertation, the red junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) is a tropical member of the family Phasianidae and it is considered the primary progenitor of the domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*), including the meat and eggs production breeds and those bred for fighting. There are various subspecies of *Gallus gallus*, apart from *Gallus gallus domesticus*, and they are all cross-fertile<sup>656</sup>. The Spanish nomenclature can be confusing because both *Gallus gallus* and its subspecies *Gallus gallus bankiva* are sometimes called “*gallo bankiva*”.

There is a huge variety of gamecock breeds around the world. In Spain, the *gallo combatiente español* is a livestock breed recognised by, and registered<sup>657</sup> with, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is considered a breed that resembles the wild red junglefowl, mentioned

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<sup>656</sup> The classification of *Gallus gallus domesticus* is sometimes controversial: ‘(...) a taxonomic distinction is commonly made between wild and domestic forms. For example, the scientific name of the domestic chicken is given as either *Gallus domesticus* or *Gallus gallus domesticus*, whereas *Gallus gallus* refers to its wild ancestor, the jungle fowl. The debate is whether the domestic stock represents a separate species or subspecies. Those favoring separate species status typically argue that wild and domestic forms are morphologically, behaviorally and/or ecologically distinct. Those favoring subspecies status acknowledge that wild and domestic stocks are capable of interbreeding and are not genetically distinct. In most of these cases, inter-stock fertility has been demonstrated in captivity without any attempt to confirm interbreeding in nature’. (Price 2002:3)

<sup>657</sup> See MAPA (2018) for the official information.



earlier, as one of the ancestors of domestic chickens. There is no a single theory regarding its origin<sup>658</sup>, but it has been postulated that it was introduced in mainland Spain by Phoenicians and Carthaginians 3,000 years ago.

Two varieties are recognised within the classification of *gallo combatiente español*: *Jerezana*<sup>659</sup> and *Canaria*. However, most of the information relating to the breed characterisation and the stud book is based on the *Jerezana* variety rather than the *Canaria*. Perhaps a greater recognition of the Canarian variety is necessary to avoid animal welfare groups' complaints when considering it a native breed<sup>660</sup>. In Spain, some of the environmental responsibilities are delegated to the Regional Parliaments of the Autonomous Communities, therefore political collaboration might be as important as scientific factors to register a breed.

There are local and international sources which provide some information on the morphological characteristics and fighting style of the *gallo canario*<sup>661</sup>. Briefly, the Canarian is slightly taller, weighs a little more, and tends to have a less direct<sup>662</sup> style of fighting than the *Jerezano*. It is assumed that the Canarian is a breed of *Jerezano* and Old English Game<sup>663</sup> although it has been reported that the English influence could be overstated<sup>664</sup>.

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<sup>658</sup> See the above-mentioned ministerial documentation and also Orozco (1989).

<sup>659</sup> In the Canary Islands it is sometimes known and referred to as *gallo peninsular*.

<sup>660</sup> See, for example, "Parte 2, quinta cuestión, punto H" in Federación Gallística Canaria (2018).

<sup>661</sup> See, e.g., Pérez-Corrales (2008:235,293) and Orozco (1989).

<sup>662</sup> 'Se dice del gallo canario que es *jugador*, y suele contrastárselo con el gallo peninsular, que es, al contrario, *derechón*. El gallo canario juega para que no lo coja el otro, para evitar sus golpes y batidas y para atacar sorprendentemente, con prontitud y viveza. Es más rápido y sus espuelas son mayores, por lo que las peleas canarias duran menos'. (Pérez-Corrales, 2008:235)

<sup>663</sup> For those interested in knowing more about the standards of perfection for the Old English Game, see Scott (1983:179).

<sup>664</sup> Pérez-Corrales (2008:293)





On the left, *Gallo jerezano* (*Padrote Colorao 5 Estrellas*). Available at: <http://antoniocalvogallos.com/5estrellas.html> (Accessed 04/04/2019). On the right, an outstanding *pollo canario colorao* weighing more than 4 pounds. © Ricardo Ontillera.

### ***Gallo de pelea or gallo para pelear?***

As explained in the methodology, during my fieldwork in the Canary Islands I was interested in cockfighters' experiences and opinions rather than in building a balanced approach of those who were pro and against cockfighting. But, inevitably, I came across some people who were clearly against the activity and I watched and read some of their material to extend my knowledge.

In my second season of fieldwork, the one that I spent in La Palma, I certainly found less critical voices than in my first year in Gran Canaria. But one day, a man on his early sixties saw me reading a cockfighting book while travelling on a bus and ask me about what I was doing in the island. He was surprised by the topic of the study and he undoubtedly took a stand against the event. I noticed that he used the term *gallos para pelear* (birds for fighting) rather than *gallos de pelea* (fighting birds). I was intrigued by that and, from then on, I decided to pay more attention to these two expressions. I slowly realised that *gallos para pelear* was often used in discourses against

cockfighting and generally used by people who had little knowledge of the activity. However, I never heard it from a breeder. It may sound trivial, but in my view in *gallos de pelea* “**de**” implies that those roosters are thought of as intrinsically fighters. On the other hand, in *gallos para pelear* “**para**” does not necessarily imply more than a purpose of use. It might be argued that this difference in wording lies in a different understanding of the characteristics of gamecocks. They do not keep birds for fighting, they keep fighting birds.

For a breeder, a gamecock has nothing to do with a barnyard<sup>665</sup> rooster; not to mention an intensively-farmed broiler chicken. Therefore, in their view, fighting birds are not poultry. A breeder will be attentive to some morphological features:

“This one has a bit of *mestizo*. I do not mean directly leading him to flee, but ... Look at the peak and the head, more rounded. Less elongated than those of *de pelea*. It has a shorter and rounder beak, like the *gallos de la tierra*”. (Jorge 25/05/2017)<sup>666</sup>

But a gamecock goes far beyond morphological characteristics and specific aspects of the keeping. Otherwise, it would be enough to display several roosters and select the closest to the Canarian standards. Following on the above discussion:

Jorge: And he also has a big round head. We tested him 20,000 times.

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<sup>665</sup> In the Canary Islands, barnyard roosters are sometimes referred to as *gallos de la tierra*.

<sup>666</sup> “Ese tiene algo de *mestizo*. No directo que se vaya a huir, pero...Mira el pico y la cabeza, más redondos. Menos alargados que los de *pelea*. Tiene el pico más corto y redondo, como los *gallos de la tierra*”. (Jorge 25/05/2017)

Ricardo: More than one with a standard *de pelea* appearance?

Jorge: Sure. Even the owner did not trust him, but ... he undertook the decresting, but he kept saying that he wouldn't be a good fighter because he looked like a *mestizo*. And I said, "do you give him to me?" He nodded and I took him home. And the first time he was sparred was without muffs. He did it so well that I gave him the benefit of the doubt. (Jorge 25/05/2017)<sup>667</sup>

Morphological characteristics are not the features that define the nature of fighting cocks. This is not an exhibition or a pedigree contest. Breeders look for fighting qualities rather than a specific physical appearance. There is a predominance of behaviour over morphology.

"Look at the other one in the cage. That one is a *gallo fino* with his tail up and walking straight, it seems that he is stepping on insects. In my opinion that one is special although it might disappoint me later...". (Jorge 21/04/2017)<sup>668</sup>

A gamecock's behaviour is thoroughly analysed on a daily basis. From birth, their aggressiveness is observed by the breeders.

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<sup>667</sup> Jorge: Y además es cabezón redondo. Le hicimos 20.000 pruebas.

Ricardo: ¿Más que a uno normal de pelea?

Jorge: Claro. Incluso el dueño no se fiaba, pero...él lo descrestó, pero me decía que no servía por la pinta de mestizo que tenía. Y yo le dije "¿tú me lo das?". Y me dijo que sí y me lo llevé. Y la primera vez que lo peché fue a espuela limpia . Y le di el beneficio de la duda por lo bien que lo hizo. (Jorge 25/05/2017)

<sup>668</sup> "Mira ese otro de la jaula. Eso es un gallo fino con la cola así pa' arriba y andando recto, que parece que está pisando insectos. Ese para mí es algo especial, aunque luego igual me llevo un chasco...". (Jorge 21/04/2017)

“They were called *The Piranhas* because they bit each other, they were very difficult to raise, with a lot of *casta*. Killing each other when they were chicks if you were careless”. (Carlos

03/12/2017)<sup>669</sup>

A bird’s behaviour along with its physical development will be scrutinised but, above all, the breeder will look at its way of fighting and its willingness to keep on fighting under harsh conditions. In this sense, it is useful to make some comments about the categorisation of fighting birds and their comparison with other animals, particularly the iconic fighting bull<sup>670</sup>.

### **The difficulty of finding a category for gamecocks**

As pointed out by Marvin, it is not easy to place these rather special birds in terms of general categories because:

The fighting cock is not a wild bird in the sense that it is captured in the country and put in a cage; it is bred domestically. Some men have only a few birds and are intimately acquainted with their characteristics; they know them as individuals but they are not treated as pets.

(Marvin, 1984:61)

One of the best-known classifications of English animals is the one provided by the social anthropologist Edmund Leach (1989). By combining different factors, such as proximity and edibility, he describes main four categories: pets, farm animals, field or “game” and wild

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<sup>669</sup> “A los pirañas los llamaban así porque se comían entre ellos, eran muy difíciles de lograr, con mucha casta. Se mataban de pollitos si te descuidabas”. (Carlos 03/12/2017)

<sup>670</sup> As discussed further below, note that, unlike in mainland Spain, bullfighting was never really popular in the Canary Islands.

animals<sup>671</sup>. Although there is not a Spanish word which perfectly translates the English term “game”<sup>672</sup>, Leach’s classification can be used in the Spanish context for guidance purposes. Within this framework, pets are the closest to humans and strongly marked as inedible<sup>673</sup> while farm animals are tame but not that close and edible under some circumstances regarding their sexual condition<sup>674</sup>. Game animals are also edible in hunting season but, although they live under human protection, they are not tame. Finally, wild animals are remote, out of human control and, unless marked as game, are regarded as inedible. Regarding these four categories, gamecocks present an ambiguous and contradictory situation. They do not easily fit into any category.

According to Franklin<sup>675</sup>, three of the most important distinguishing features of pets are their admission into the human household, their individual personal names and their inedibility. Some breeders might have their fighting birds in their patios next to their homes if they do not own another piece of land. One would not find a gamecock living inside the house with the family and treated as a pet. Many (not all) fighting birds are named but usually with generic names which refer to qualities and attributes. Although gamecocks are not commonly eaten at the present time<sup>676</sup>, there is no taboo regarding their eatability.

Given the above, would not be possible to classify gamecocks as livestock? The main obstacle for this is the notion of tameness. Gamecocks are not tamed, at least not in the conventional sense of the word. Tameness is usually link to meekness, a desired quality in livestock, that has been

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<sup>671</sup> Leach (1989:158)

<sup>672</sup> As I will develop later in the chapter, *animales de caza* is probably the closest Spanish term for the English “game”.

<sup>673</sup> As a social convention because in actual fact, of course, many pets are perfectly edible.

<sup>674</sup> Mostly when immature or castrated.

<sup>675</sup> Franklin (1999:84-104)

<sup>676</sup> This is mainly due to the hardness of its meat and the use of antibiotics and other substances throughout the rearing. I spoke to a few breeders who recall eating this tough meat in chicken broths a few decades ago and I personally witnessed its use to feed other animals such as dogs.

selected for during processes of domestication. Fighting birds are selectively bred and raised by humans but breeders do not consider them domestic neither tamed animals. In this respect, they share these characteristics with the fighting bull (*toro bravo*)<sup>677</sup>. As Marvin points out on his Spanish bullfight research:

There is a fundamental ambiguity about the *toro bravo* which should not be ignored. It is not simply an animal captured from the wild, it has been created by humans; human will and control have been exercised to create this 'wild' animal; it has been shaped for human purposes. People have selectively bred the animals for this quality of 'wildness' and thus have actually created something which is regarded as natural, given by nature; the *toro bravo* is culturally rather than naturally wild.

(Marvin, 1988:90)

The nature of the breeding and selection of the *gallo fino* also presents some ambiguities, perhaps greater than with the *toro bravo*. Both are raised in environments managed by humans and are the product of selective breeding. But in the case of the *toro bravo*, the environment of pastures, ranches and farms is thought of, at least generally, as a natural or semi-natural habitat. For the bullfighting enthusiast, the *toro bravo* lives in the countryside, even if it is managed and controlled by humans. On the other hand, the situation of the *gallo de pelea* in the Canary Islands is different. Due to the aggressiveness of male adults, breeders keep individual *pollos* in separate compartments before they are fully matured. On their farms, every breeder has open spaces for hens, chicks and

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<sup>677</sup> Marvin (1988:88-90)

adult gamecocks<sup>678</sup> to roam freely. One would be more likely to find more and bigger free-range areas in La Palma, particularly in banana plantations, than on the other islands<sup>679</sup> where land use patterns and higher populations make it more difficult. However, no one thinks of gamecocks as living in a semi-wild state before being taken to the cockpit. The work and care of gamecocks is probably more intensive and individualised and the breeding and raising of gamecocks are an integral part of everyday conversation for those fond of cockfighting. However, in bullfighting:

Most people are only interested in the bull when it is in the arena of the *plaza de toros* being engaged by men. Few are interested in it simply as a fine zoological specimen and few travel to the countryside to see it in its natural habitat, because the bull on its own is not important; in the fields with other bulls it merely represents the bull it will become in the arena.

(Marvin, 1988:86)

Similarities and dissimilarities between *toro bravo* and *gallo de pelea* have been used in the Canary Islands according to various contexts and with different aims. For example, Cárdenes-Rodríguez<sup>680</sup>, in the late 1980s, tried to draw a dividing line between cockfighting and bullfighting to defend themselves from the accusations made against them:

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<sup>678</sup> Individually and/or with hens and chicks. A breeder will never put two adults together in an open space because they will hurt each other. By open space I mean a big area where a fighting bird can walk and spend some time out of its cage. Needless to say, that these areas are limited within the breeder's land.

<sup>679</sup> Although there are a few people in Tenerife who own vast stretches of land for breeding. Gran Canaria, but specially the islands of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, have drier climates than Tenerife, La Palma and El Hierro. I could not go to El Hierro but I have been told it is not far from La Palma in terms of raising fighting birds.

<sup>680</sup> Note that, unlike in mainland Spain, bullfighting was never very popular in the Canary Islands where the last *corrida de toros* was held in 1984. Cárdenes-Rodríguez's book was written in the late 1980s, when the Canarian Parliament was debating an Animal Welfare Act. There is some controversy about the current legal status of bullfighting in the Canary Islands. For more information, see EFE (24<sup>th</sup> October, 2016).

The *gallo de pelea*, free in the field, when he feels another *gallo* crowing, he goes for him: both come closer by locating the crow even if they are 300m away. Then, a raging tempest begins<sup>681</sup>. The fight is inevitable; one must win and the other has to die. Their instinct to struggle is led by a biological law. Is this a vital circumstance in the bulls? No, the bulls live and grow up in herds on ranches until one day when they are taken to the corral to face the men. (...) We insist that the *gallos* can only be raised and live with their mother while they are a few months old. And if they get wet because of the rain, they will kill each other from the time they are a month old. Genetics determines that they cannot live with another bird of the same breed. (...) There are grounds to testify that the instinct of the *gallo combatiente* is to face a male of the same breed and although that fight is held in a cockpit, it cannot be remotely compared to the cruelty of the death of the bull (...).

(Cárdenes-Rodríguez, 1987:200-201)<sup>682</sup>

In the quote above, not only gamecock's behaviour but also the practice itself are naturalised. However, this does not mean that breeders automatically relate the *gallo de pelea* to the red junglefowl as if they were the guardians of the wild species. What they love and care for is the *gallo de pelea*. And gamecocks are thought closer to the wild species because of their aggressiveness, a characteristic perceived as natural but with the knowledge that it needs to be selected by humans to keep the fighting breeds.

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<sup>681</sup> A similar description can also be found in one of the episodes of the TV series *Senderos Isleños*. See Riñas de gallos 2 (1998).

<sup>682</sup> 'El gallo de pelea, libre en el campo, cuando siente el canto de otro gallo, lo va a buscar: se aproximan ambos por la localización del canto aunque estén a mas de trescientos metros y surge la tempestad. Es inevitable la pelea; uno tiene que vencer y otro morir. Es la ley biológica la que los lleva por instinto a la lucha. ¿Se da esta circunstancia vital en los toros? No, los toros viven y se crían en manadas en los cortijos hasta que llega un día en que los llevan al corral para enfrentarlos al hombre. (...) Insistimos en que los gallos de pelea sólo se pueden criar y vivir detrás de su madre únicamente mientras tengan meses y con la salvedad de que si se llegan a mojar por efecto de la lluvia, se matan desde que tengan un mes de nacidos. La Genética determina que no puedan vivir con otra ave de la misma raza. (...) Hay pues argumentos para testimoniar que el instinto del gallo combatiente es el de enfrentarse a un macho de la misma raza y aunque esa lucha se celebre en un circo gallera, ni remotamente puede compararse a la crueldad de la muerte del toro (...)' (Cárdenes-Rodríguez, 1987:200-201)



Juan M: There is no *gallo fino* in nature (meaning wild), Eladio. Otherwise they would kill each other and there would be none left.

Eladio: (Laughing) The one that manage to reproduce in nature is the one that goes with the hens while the other fights. The smartest. (Juan M and Eladio 26/01/2017)<sup>683</sup>

It is worth mentioning that comparisons with bullfighting are often made when talking about the *animalistas* trying to ban cockfighting. This should not be taken as a criticism of bullfighting, even less as a support of prohibitionists' positions. Most breeders respect a wide spectrum of activities which involves human-animal interactions. Their aim is to point out that the fight in a cockpit is done under equal forces and it is not against the will of the animal.

"I'm pretty pissed off with the *animalistas*. I was in Lanzarote painting an acquaintance's house and a friend of his labelled me as an animal abuser. He told me, "Hey, look, now they're going to ban cockfighting, they say you mistreat them." Look, I explained that we give them corn, fish, fruits, vaccines. And he almost did not believe it. The *gallos* are born to fight. I cannot teach them to fight. I can only train them to keep them fit. I prepare them physically. Even some hens fight each other when they are put together. And I do not like bullfighting, but I respect it. They do not dare to put themselves in front of the bull when it has one hundred percent of its abilities

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<sup>683</sup> Juan M: En la naturaleza no hay fino, Eladio. Si no, se mataban todos y no quedaba uno.

Eladio: (Entre risas) Allí el que se reproduce es el que se va con las gallinas cuando el otro pelea. El más listo. (Juan M y Eladio 26/01/2017)

and that's why they have to diminish it and leave it at 30% of its full abilities. Even so, I would not be standing in front of a bull". (Fran 01/12/2017)<sup>684</sup>

Sometimes, this comparison expands its focus to other animals. Mainly with the aim of asking, rhetorically, whether other practices, apart from cockfighting and bullfighting, involve animal abuse and would, therefore, be banned.

Juan M: And the sled dogs, that will be abuse too. Those who does not like gamecocks should leave cockfighting alone. If the fights are banned, fighting cocks will be fucked. And racehorses, they are hit with the stick. Because if you let them go they will not run at that speed, they will run their own way. You are forcing them. And homing pigeons, another crime. Because you send 3000-4000 pigeons 700km away or more, and they all drown. Everything is a crime or animal abuse. We are losing everything. But I mean that everyone focuses only on the bull and the rooster. And the laying hens producing eggs around the clock and after a year they no longer serve any purpose. But they just want to ban cockfighting and bullfighting.

Ricardo: There are no bulls here (in the Canary Islands).

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<sup>684</sup> "Ando bastante mosqueado con lo de los animalistas. Estuve en Lanzarote pintando la casa de un conocido y un amigo suyo me trató de maltratador. Me dijo, "oye mira que ahora van a prohibir los gallos, que dicen que los maltratan". Mira, le expliqué que le echamos el millo, pescaíto, fruta, sus vacunas. Y él casi ni se lo creía. Los gallos han nacido para pelear. Yo no los puedo enseñar a pelear. No los puedo entrenar nada más que para mantenerlos físicamente. Los trabajo físicamente. Ni las gallinas, algunas si las pongo juntas se fajan. Y los toros no me gustan, pero los respeto. No se atreven a ponerse delante del toro al cien por cien y por eso tienen que mermarlo y dejarlo al treinta por ciento. Aun así, yo tampoco me ponía delante". (Fran 01/12/2017)

Juan M: They were never popular. (Juan M 03/06/2016)<sup>685</sup>

Comments on the distinct power of networks and lobbying capacities are also common:

David: In all the Autonomous Communities cockfighting is banned and they still say, “is it legal in the Canary Islands? Go get them”. Imagine, they beat us. Cockfighting is not bullfighting, keep that in mind. Bullfighting is a great deal of money, but does cockfighting move money?

Ricardo: A good bull costs a lot of money, buying a Miura for a bullfight... thousands of Euros.

David: Not a *gallo*, forget about it. And the people behind it. Formerly, there were politicians, wealthy people, but all of them are gone.

Ricardo: Well, there are still some.

David: Not really, there are some lawyers and some doctors. Just a few. This is complicated.

(David 21/05/2016)<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>685</sup> Mopa: Y los perros de trineo, eso será maltrato también. Al que no le gusten los gallos que los dejen tranquilos. Si se prohíben las peleas, los gallos de pelea se van a tomar por culo. Y los caballos de carreras, dándoles con ese palo. Porque si tú los sueltas ellos no van a correr a esa velocidad, van a correr a su manera. Los estás obligando. Las palomas, otro crimen. Porque mandas 3000-4000 palomas a 700km o más, y se ahogan todas ellas. Todo es un crimen o maltrato animal. Se pierde todo. Pero me refiero yo a que todos se enfocan solo al toro y al gallo. Y las gallinas noche y día poniendo y al año ya no sirven. Pero solo quieren quitar los gallos y los toros.

Ricardo: Aquí no hay toros.

Mopa: No gustaban. (Juan M 03/06/2016)

<sup>686</sup> David: En todas las Comunidades las (peleas de gallos) han eliminado y todavía dicen “ah ¿que en Canarias y en Andalucía aún están? a por ellos”. Imagínate, nos hunden. Los gallos no son los toros, eso tenlo claro. Los toros mueven dinero, los gallos ¿qué mueven?

Ricardo: Un toro bueno vale una millonada, comprarte un Miura de esos para una corrida...miles y miles de euros.

David: Un gallo olvídate. Y la gente que está detrás. Aquí antiguamente había políticos, gente de pasta, pero ya todos esos se fueron al traste.

Ricardo: Bueno, queda gente.

David: Nada, queda algún abogado, algún médico. Contados. Esto es complicado. (David 21/05/2016)

Beyond that defensive posture, when breeders and aficionados make comparisons between *gallos* and *toros* it is usually from the perspective of admiring their qualities. For example, my friend Jesús, after seeing how a *gallo* kept fighting after being hit hard, suddenly exclaimed:

"Did you see how he came back? Like a bull, with two balls, what blood he has!". (Jesús

12/06/2016)<sup>687</sup>

Comments of this kind are countless. A rooster named *toro* because he moves his right leg as a bull charging when he was taken out of his cage and a *gallo* as strong as a *toro*<sup>688</sup> are just two examples.

Returning to Leach's classification, Marvin (1988:89-90) uses the English category of "game" to highlight the difference between a fully wild animal and a fully domestic animal. However, as Marvin aptly points out<sup>689</sup>, there is no Spanish term for the English term "game" and he does not claim the *toro bravo* to be a game animal. Usually game animals are defined<sup>690</sup> as wild mammals or birds that can be pursued or taken in hunting for sport or food. Although it might sound strange for an English speaker, I would not classify gamecocks as game animals, at least in the Canary Islands. Regardless of the different terms used in each language, the English "game" or the Spanish

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<sup>687</sup> "¿Viste como volvió? Como un toro, con dos cojones, ¡qué sangre tiene!". (Jesús 12/06/2016).

<sup>688</sup> Spanish expressions such as *estar como un toro*, *estar hecho un toro* and *ser un toro* are equivalent to the English one "as strong as an ox". I am aware that, in English, one can replace ox with the name of another large animal, for example horse or bull. Anyway, it is worth quoting Marvin's comment on general conversation in Spain where 'one can assume that in the majority of cases when the word *toro* is used the speaker is referring to a *toro bravo* and not just any male of the bovine species' (Marvin, 1988:105).

<sup>689</sup> Within the Spanish term *animales de caza*, *caza mayor* and *caza menor* can be found; 'the former would be best translated big game hunting (...) and the latter refers to the hunting of smaller animals' (Marvin, 1988:196).

<sup>690</sup> See, e.g., <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/game> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/game> (Accessed 15/11/2018).

*animales de caza*, is a term completely link to hunting and gamecocks are not hunted. Marvin, in his work on Andalusian cockfighting, also comments in this regard:

It is significant that the controlling organization distinguishes between gallos de pelea (fighting cocks) and aves deportivas (literally "sporting birds" but could be translated as "game birds"). The latter, when bred by men, are released into the wild and should react as though they were "naturally" wild birds. The fighting cock is raised by man (...) and are bred for wildness which is perceived to be a natural or inherent characteristic of the creature. It is expected to reveal this wildness in an artificial, cultural setting rather than back in the wild like game birds.

(Marvin, 1984:62)

The discussion of animal categories has been made to bring out the complexities of assigning a clear classification for fighting birds rather than clarifying what their position would or should be. In my view, not only breeders' thoughts on them but also technical classifications made that difficult. Both the *toro bravo*<sup>691</sup> and the *gallo de pelea* are raised by humans but neither are considered tame nor domesticated animals by those who breed them. It should be noted that although cockfights and corridas have been highlighted as events which celebrate male qualities, 'they are not completely analogous because in one, a male human being confronts a male animal, whereas in the cockfight two animals of the same species confront each other' (Marvin 1984:61).

Evidently, the direct involvement of the torero in the bullring provides distinguishing elements. The torero is the architect of a process of domestication in the corrida where 'the *toro bravo* beginning as a wild animal is symbolically transformed and converted into a tame or domestic

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<sup>691</sup> See Marvin (1988:89).

animal and as such it is killed and subsequently eaten' (Marvin, 1988:105). According to this framework, an outstanding bull can be (symbolically) tamed by the performance of the bullfighters. However, a gamecock is supposed to keep on fighting until the end of the bout, regardless how tough the conditions are. Therefore, to some extent, a gamecock will be required to behave in a wilder, and more ferocious, manner than a *toro bravo*.

As has already been said, it is really challenging to pick a category term for gamecocks based on breeders' views. They do not easily fit into any of the main options available, neither in Spanish<sup>692</sup> nor in English. It might be helpful to acknowledge that selective breeding is not necessarily linked to domestication, at least not in the sense of achieving tameness, meekness, or docility. In analytic terms, creating a category for "fighting animals" could sound appealing but my experience in the Spanish archipelago makes me think breeders regard fighting birds as animals of a unique nature<sup>693</sup>. I believe that the terms "blood sports" and "fighting sports" have just served to either highlight the (supposed) cruelty or the role of some male attitudes and qualities<sup>694</sup> linked to these activities. I think they do not contribute a great deal in analysing the whole world behind the practice and how animals are thought by those involved. In my view, activities such as fox-tossing, rat-baiting, goose-pulling, bear-baiting and cock throwing are radically different<sup>695</sup> from others which require the breeding and raising of specific animals or breeds.

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<sup>692</sup> However, that should not preclude the understanding of the technical and legal reasons provided by the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting to consider the *gallo de pelea* a livestock breed (Federación Gallística Canaria, 2018).

<sup>693</sup> Curiously, a few breeders told me that they had seen on the internet an Asiatic fish which is very aggressive and, apparently, has the natural instinct of fighting other males. I suppose they meant the Siamese fighting fish (*Betta splendens*), usually known as the betta, which are known to be highly territorial. See, e.g., Verbeek et al. (2007) and Arnott et al. (2016) for more information.

<sup>694</sup> See, e.g., the foreword of *Fighting Sports* (Fitz-Barnard, 1983).

<sup>695</sup> Here I am referring first and foremost to the perspective I think it should be adopted by a social anthropologist undertaking a long period of fieldwork within those involved in the activity. Obviously, this is not the only valid way of doing ethnographic fieldwork. I am not dealing here, for instance, with the views from the animal welfare movement.

But even within those activities which require a complex preparation and breeding process, perceived disparities can be huge. I have given examples earlier of how some aficionados and breeders think of other animals involved in the so-called blood sports. In the Canary Islands, this distinction is especially marked between fighting dogs and *gallos de pelea*. Comments such as “dogs are not made for fighting”<sup>696</sup> or “they need to be incited to fight, they don’t do it naturally”<sup>697</sup> are commonly used to differentiate<sup>698</sup>, not only between the practices, but also between the nature of the animals. It is not possible to decouple these kinds of statements from breeders’ attempts in defence of an activity which has been broadly questioned for the last three decades. This is not unique to the Canary Islands; Corrêa has recently reported (2017:303-305), among Brazilian aficionados, similar views of distinguishing dogfights from cockfights and the uniqueness of gamecocks.

At this point, given all the above, it is time to examine aspects of the draft of the *Protection and Ownership of Companion Animals Law*<sup>699</sup> which is intended, among other things, to ban cockfighting in the Spanish archipelago. Breeders and aficionados themselves do not consider gamecocks companion or domestic animals. They are not pets. This was clearly shown in many conversations I had with some of them about the abovementioned draft which would ban the activity. For the purposes of this law, “companion animal” is understood to be any animal intended

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<sup>696</sup> “Los perros no están hechos para pelear”.

<sup>697</sup> “Tienen que azuzar a los perros para que se peguen, que no lo hacen de forma natural (como los gallos)”.

<sup>698</sup> I have observed that sometimes media reports have used the police raids carried out against dog fights as the starting point for debates on animal welfare and legislation. The *Presa Canario* (also known as Canary Mastiff), one of the official natural symbols associated with the island of Gran Canaria, is a breed of dog which is sometimes used in surreptitious dog fighting rings. However, unlike it has been suggested in some media, during my fieldwork I did not find any evidence to support that these two practices were specially linked nowadays. I was not intrigued nor willing to research on dog-fighting and I assume its aficionados are a much smaller group than cockfighters.

<sup>699</sup> Gobierno de Canarias (2017). *Anteproyecto de Ley de Protección y Tenencia de Animales de Compañía de Canarias* (13/11/2017). The first draft of the Law was open for public consultation and by May 2019 had not yet been approved by Parliament.

for the accompaniment, recreation or assistance of certain tasks, which is owned by, or depends on, the human being, provided that its possession is not intended for consumption or use of their productions. Among other practices, livestock farming, pigeon fancying, hunting, angling, zoos and aquariums are excluded from the scope of the law. Under the current law (Ley 8/1991), cockfighting is permitted but is classed as an exception in terms of the animal welfare regulation, encouraging its natural disappearance by prohibiting public subsidies and the construction of new facilities. For the purposes of the law which is still in force, ‘domestic animals are those depending on the hand of a man (*sic*) for their subsistence. Companion animals are all those domestics which, maintained by man (*sic*), are lodged mainly at home, without any lucrative intention’<sup>700</sup>. Therefore, this political line of classifying *gallos de pelea* as companion or domestic animals is not new and breeders complain about it.

Osmar: Everything can be appealed. In addition, the draft bill is for domestic animals. And *gallos* are not pets. They are manipulating the information. And *gallos* will never be pets.

Davinia: We have to fight to avoid being bracketed with other companion animals, as we currently are in the draft. For example, draught animals were removed from the bill because they are not supposed to be pets. I do not see anyone walking a *gallo* down the street.

Pedro: Well, a cow is more domestic than a *gallo*.

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<sup>700</sup> ‘Artículo 2: Se entiende por animales domésticos, a los efectos de esta Ley, aquellos que dependen de la mano del hombre para su subsistencia. Son animales de compañía todos aquellos domésticos que, mantenidos igualmente por el hombre, los alberga principalmente en su hogar, sin intención lucrativa alguna. Ley 8/1991, de 30 de abril, de protección de los animales’. (B.O.C. 62, de 13.5.1991)



Osmar: The preliminary draft is for pets. And I do not see anyone sleeping in the house with a *gallo* in his bed. The bill is wrong from the beginning. Domestic animals? Who does walk a *gallo* on a lead to shit or piss on the street? (Osmar, Davinia and Pedro 05/05/2018)<sup>701</sup>

As previously mentioned, based on ministerial documentation, the *gallo combatiente* is a livestock breed. Regardless of the inclusion of the Canarian variety within the *gallo combatiente* breed, I think political authorities will have difficulties in arguing that gamecocks are not livestock in the Canary Islands whereas they are in mainland Spain. That is probably why, in support of its appeal, the Canarian Federation for Cockfighting claims that gamecocks are not companion animals and advocates for its consideration as a ‘production animal which is bred and reared for their natural potentialities’<sup>702</sup>. In that sense, gamecocks would be beyond the remit of this legislation. For those who raise *gallos de pelea* it sounds rather strange that an Animal Companion Law is not applicable to laying hens, dairy cows and homing pigeons but bans cockfighting. However, trying to legally classify gamecocks as livestock is one thing, but to consider that they share fundamental similarities with other farmed livestock is quite another.

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<sup>701</sup> Osmar: Todo se puede recurrir. Además, el proyecto ese es de animales domésticos. Y los gallos no son animales domésticos. Las cosas las están manipulando. Y los gallos nunca serán animales domésticos.

Davinia: También digo que hay que luchar para que nos saquen del saco en el que se nos incluyen como animales de compañía que es así como estamos en el anteproyecto. Los del arrastre ya lo sacaron es decir que no están en ese saco porque se supone que no son animales de compañía. Yo no veo a nadie paseando un gallo por la calle.

Pedro: Pues una vaca es más domestica que un gallo.

Osmar: El anteproyecto está puesto para animales de compañía. Y yo no veo a nadie que duerma en la casa con un gallo en la cama. Desde el comienzo ya está mal. ¿Animales de compañía? ¿Quién saca a la calle un gallo amarrado para que cague y mee? (Osmar, Davinia and Pedro 05/05/2018)

<sup>702</sup> ‘(...) el gallo de pelea es un animal de producción, por ser un animal que se cría y reproduce por sus potencialidades naturales’ (Federación Gallística Canaria, 2018:7).

At this point, it is necessary to note that, despite the increasing number of studies on domestication across a broad array of disciplines, there is a lack of consensus on how to define domestication<sup>703</sup>. Zeder offers a wide definition of domesticatory relationships which is not restricted to humans and domestic crops and livestock:

Domestication is a sustained multigenerational, mutualistic relationship in which one organism assumes a significant degree of influence over the reproduction and care of another organism in order to secure a more predictable supply of a resource of interest, and through which the partner organism gains advantage over individuals that remain outside this relationship, thereby benefitting and often increasing the fitness of both the domesticator and the target domesticate.

(Zeder, 2015:3191).

However, domestication has been traditionally defined from the perspective of the human domesticator and highlighting human mastery over the whole life cycle of the target domesticate<sup>704</sup>. When reading about animal domestication by humans, one usually finds definitions like the one provided by the animal behaviourist Edward O. Price who defines domestication as ‘that process by which a population of animals becomes adapted to man and to the captive environment by some combination of genetic changes occurring over generations and environmentally induced developmental events recurring during each generation’ (Price, 1984:3).

When talking about selective breeding (also called artificial selection) in animals, the selection for tameness, even unconsciously<sup>705</sup>, has been highlighted as one of the major points. Therefore,

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<sup>703</sup> Zeder (2015)

<sup>704</sup> Zeder (2015:3191)

<sup>705</sup> Frankham et al. (1986) cited in Price (2002:43).

taming is usually linked to domestication. The Oxford English Dictionary defines domestication<sup>706</sup> as ‘the process of taming an animal and keeping it as a pet or on a farm’. In the same source, tame (of an animal) is defined as ‘not dangerous or frightened of people; domesticated’.

Synonyms of tame: domesticated, domestic, not wild, docile, tamed, disciplined, broken, broken-in, trained, not fierce, gentle, mild, used to humans.

(Source:<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/thesaurus/tame>) (Accessed: 10/11/2018).

In the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (Real Academia Española) similar definitions can be found<sup>707</sup>. Tame is, perhaps, the best English translation for *manso*, a Spanish term for an animal which is not wild, but it also relates to a quality of meekness. Its opposite is *bravo*<sup>708</sup>, which refers to a quality of wild or unruly. Is, then, the *gallo de pelea*, an animal that is *bravo*?

Certainly, a breeder would accept this notion and during my fieldwork I realised how fierce and aggressive gamecocks are. It should not be forgotten that, as mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, ‘the cockfight is based on the fact that two cocks which are strangers to each other will fight if they come into close proximity’ (Marvin, 1984:61). Therefore, when two male gamecocks are close to each other, there is no need to ill-treat them to make them aggressive and willing to attack. To my mind, a different perception of this “natural willingness to attack” is

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<sup>706</sup> Available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/domestication> (Accessed: 10/11/2018).

<sup>707</sup> Available at (RAE): <https://www.rae.es/> (Accessed: 10/11/2018).

Domesticar: reducir, acostumbrar a la vista y compañía del hombre al animal fiero y salvaje.

Amansar: domesticar, hacer manso a un animal.

Manso: (dicho de un animal) que no es bravo.

<sup>708</sup> Bravo: (dicho de un animal) fiero o feroz (RAE).

fundamental to the different notions of *gallo de pelea* or *gallo para pelear* discussed earlier in this chapter. This topic might recall the longstanding debate about nature vs nurture<sup>709</sup>. Is a breeder forcing a *gallo* to be aggressive and attack in the cockpit? Is that possible? Is it merely a matter of training? What is the nature of a gamecock's pool of genes? Are fighting birds essentially different from laying hens or broilers? These are all interesting questions.

Animal behaviourists have conducted many tests between different breeds of *Gallus gallus domesticus* (e.g., White Leghorn layer hens<sup>710</sup>) and their wild counterparts (e.g., red junglefowl, *Gallus gallus*). For example, in one of these tests, with different choices of feeding available to obtain seeds, red junglefowl spent more time ground-scratching and exploring the ground while layers hens were more engaged in energetically low-cost behaviours<sup>711</sup>. The characteristics of layer hens and broilers for meat production have been thoroughly studied for the importance of their rapid growth and high feed efficiency<sup>712</sup>. It would be interesting to know whether certain traits of behaviour of fighting birds are closer to layer hens and broilers or to their wild counterparts<sup>713</sup>. That might provide useful guidance to the understanding of the selection process of gamecock breeds. Cockfighting, rather than food use, has been cited<sup>714</sup> as one of the first reasons for the domestication and geographical spread of chickens. This is hypothetical and speculative, but it

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<sup>709</sup> Perhaps it might be interesting to look at the definitions of gamecock provided by the Oxford and Merriam-Webster dictionaries. Which one would a breeder pick?

Gamecock (also gamefowl): 'A cock bred and trained for cockfighting; a fighting cock'. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/gamecock> (Accessed 20/10/2018)

Gamecock: 'a rooster of the domestic chicken trained for fighting'. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gamecock> (Accessed 20/10/2018)

<sup>710</sup> See Schütz et al. (2001) cited in Price (2002:79).

<sup>711</sup> For further information see "pleiotropy" and "resource allocation theory" in Price (2002:79-80).

<sup>712</sup> See also Price (2002:84-85).

<sup>713</sup> A somewhat similar assessment was carried out by Verbeek et al. (2007) with the Siamese fighting fish (*Betta splendens*). The researchers tried to 'uncover the key aspects and proximate cause of aggression in teleost fish by systematically comparing wild-type fighting fish with domesticated strains selectively bred for fighting contests' (2007:75).

<sup>714</sup> Sykes (2012)

would be possible, in theory at least, that some of the selected traits in gamecocks were (and still are) radically different from most of the traits selected for in layer hens and broilers where high feed efficiency is essential.

Certainly, for those involved in cockfighting, barnyard chicken and laying hens are thought to be radically different from gamecocks. Obviously, the different breeds involve very distinct know-how and culture-specific management. *Casteadores* are not a group of people who take any barnyard rooster and meet weekly to take pleasure in tormenting the birds to fight. The breeding processes and practices for gamecocks are utterly different in nature from those for free-range chicken, laying hens or intensively farmed broilers. In those cases, the products (eggs and meat) are quantifiable and easy to measure while in cockfighting breeders are looking for *casta*/gameness. Marvin points out a similar contradiction when breeding *toros bravos*:

In the case of livestock farming, the farmers are generally breeding for qualities such as powerful shoulders on a draught animal, thick wool from sheep, or milk or meat from cows. These are measurable, they are quantifiable. Although the breeders of fighting bulls are also attempting to breed good physical specimens, they want to preserve the very qualities of wildness and resistance to manageability which other livestock producers wish to eradicate; they wish to avoid domestication.

(Marvin, 1988:88)

In his reasoning, Marvin quotes Tim Ingold who, in his study on the *Reindeer Economies and their Transformations* (1980), points out that selective breeding does not automatically result in a lineal process where full domestication is sought. While not equating the breeding and raising of

gamecocks with bulls and reindeer, I think is vital to understand selective breeding and domestication as being a far more complex set of processes than a linear perspective would suggest. In this sense, I find attractive the call for a more case-by-case analysis of domestication processes proposed by some authors<sup>715</sup>. Otherwise, we may be in danger of adopting a very narrow perspective on domestication and artificial selection. In the case of the Canarian breeders, the selective breeding carried out seeks to maintain certain traits which are seen as opposed to those generally considered domestic or tame. The selection of wildness does not mean the domestication of that wildness. It is, to some extent, quite the opposite<sup>716</sup>.

A gamecock is never a gamecock because of its morphology or purity breed. This is not enough<sup>717</sup>. Certain characteristics and a precise knowledge of its ancestors might be a good indication of its potential as a fighting bird, however it is the interaction with other gamecocks what allows the birds to reveal their true nature as *gallos finos*. A breeder will look at how chicks behave from the time they are born and several steps in the rearing will provide indications of their qualities. None of them will be definitive. A cock needs another cock to reveal its character. Sometimes not even sparring with another bird will show whether a *gallo* is *fino* or not. Their true *casta* will only be revealed through a tough fight. Fights are the moment of truth for revealing *casta* and why those who raise them are *casteadores*.

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<sup>715</sup> See, e.g., Terrell et.al. (2003).

<sup>716</sup> I find it fascinating how can we toy with the idea of “domestic vs wild” on gamecock’s behaviour and breeding.

<sup>717</sup> Animal behaviourists and zoologists might disagree on this approach, however, what is important for my research is the perception by those who breed gamecocks and those who are generally involved in cockfighting.

## CODA

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, based in large part on ethnographic fieldwork, I have described and discussed the cockfight world in the Canary Islands. My aim was to explore this world as a whole and, in order to do so, I have presented a complex picture of the practices, attending to a wide range of issues including breeding, training and the fights themselves. This thesis is the first in-depth ethnographic study of cockfighting in the Canary Islands and I believe it makes a contribution, from an anthropological perspective, to the growing interdisciplinary field of Human-Animal Studies (HAS). Together with other anthropological works recently carried out as part of the project “Cultural & Scientific Perceptions of Human-Chicken Interactions”, this thesis aims to present a work in which human-chicken relationships are the central focus of the research.

It offers insights into the relationships that breeders and aficionados have with fighting birds, from the egg to the cockpit, in a practice in which the breeding and rearing steps have usually been under-researched. My findings revealed the difficulty of understanding the public performances at the *reñideros* without attending to the previous steps undertaken in private farms and *casas de gallos*. To conclude this thesis, I think it is important to elaborate a little more on the current situation of cockfighting in the Spanish archipelago and how it might evolve. In addition, I will describe what the main research limitations were and what future research opportunities could be.

It should be noted that, unlike in other areas of the world such as Southeast Asia and the Caribbean where the importance of the activity cannot really be disputed, cockfighting is not one of the major pastimes in the Canary Islands. First of all, it is hard to measure its role as a whole, since the

archipelago's population is over 2,100,000 and approximately half of the championships and leagues<sup>718</sup> are played in the island of La Palma with a population below 90,000. Within La Palma, the three municipalities of Tazacorte, Los Llanos de Aridane and El Paso include a large proportion of the Canarian breeders. Therefore, this western part of La Palma could be considered a very important spot of the Spanish cockfights. After La Palma, the island of Gran Canaria was the one which held more *contratas* and championships during my fieldwork in the Canary Islands. If La Palma held half of the competitions, Gran Canaria held about 25% of the total.

Interestingly, during my first year of fieldwork I noticed that most local people did not know anything about cockfighting in Gran Canaria and Tenerife, which are the islands with larger populations in the archipelago. Many of those I spoke with actually believed that cockfighting was a prohibited activity. The same did not apply on smaller islands such as Lanzarote, and particularly La Palma where the majority of the locals knew about the activity. However, it is likely that the recent controversy involving the drafting of a new Animal Welfare Act in the archipelago will bring cockfighting more into the spotlight.

While it is true that cockfighting cannot be defined as a central activity in the Canary Islands, its relevance in specific areas of the archipelago should not be overlooked, especially on the island of La Palma. As explained in the history chapter, it seems that there is a rebound in the activity in the archipelago since the 1990s, but the near future of the practice remains an open question due to a variety of factors, in which the new regulations could play a vital role. Who benefited/benefits from the different legal status would provide another interesting approach, especially in the Canary Islands where the consequences of the new Animal Welfare Act are difficult to predict. Not only

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<sup>718</sup> In 2018, 13 out of 25 championships and 6 out of 12 *contratas* were held in La Palma.



legal regulations but also changes to rulebooks, modalities of competition and spurs could have a major influence on the future of the practice. I was told by some breeders that the increasing tendency of organising championships, along with the implementation of time limits both in *contratas* and championships, could lead to some changes in the near future regarding roosters' characteristics. For instance, roosters' speed of fighting could gain importance over *casta*/gameness in the process of selection.

With regard to the limitations of the research, I would like to point out that although I was able to meet breeders and aficionados from every archipelago's island, my fieldwork was mainly focused on the islands of Gran Canaria and La Palma. Therefore, I believe that in-depth ethnographic research in other islands would improve the general understanding of the practice in the archipelago. I also believe that women's involvement in cockfighting is an exciting topic worthy of further investigation, particularly by female anthropologists whose access to female breeders and *aficionadas* would perhaps be easier. A deeper understanding of women's role might also challenge Dundes's views of cockfights as a symbolic phallic duel<sup>719</sup>.

Moreover, in an increasingly connected world it may be appropriate to pay more attention to different cockfighting traditions which have met and mixed. Walker depicts this mixing process in Southwest USA where 'the cockfighting styles of East and West will continue to blend' (Walker, 1986:8). In the Canary Islands, certain characteristics of the trimming and the introduction of championships could also be understood under this blending process. However, such process is not something new. I was told by many *cuidadores* that Cubans were vital for the introduction of improvements in the craftsmanship of spurs since the 1930s. At present, low-cost flights and parcels

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<sup>719</sup> Dundes (1994:250-251)

are also increasing the chances of competing on various islands and abroad while enhancing the exchange of breeding stock, medicines and drugs. It would be particularly interesting to accompany Canarian breeders when competing abroad in international competitions.

Although the scope of a PhD research project is limited in nature, I hope that the present work might become a basis for future research projects. For example, thinking beyond the thesis, further research addressing the similarities and differences between fighting bulls and fighting birds could provide a better understanding of both practices and shed some light on the interesting concept of *casta*. But for now, as part of the research on human-chicken interactions, I would like this thesis to be seen as a contribution to build an ethnographic, interpretive, account of the cockfight world in the Canary Islands.

## **APPENDIX**

### **GLOSSARY OF BASIC COCKFIGHTING TERMS<sup>720</sup>**

***Ala:*** wing.

***Atusado:*** the trimming is the procedure by which part of the plumage is shaved or cut away. The aim is to create a defence against the opponent and ease the curing of the wounds after the fight.

***Campeonato:*** championship.

***Casa de gallos:*** a *casa de gallos* or *gallera* is the place where a team (*partido*) keeps its fighting birds during the season.

***Casar:*** to pair or to match the weight of the roosters.

***Casteador:*** breeder.

***Contrata:*** a weekly league between two or more teams (*partidos*) formed by breeders. The term *contrata* technically refers to the agreement, including the rulebook, signed by the teams. These leagues are also called *peleas casadas* (paired fights).

***Cuidador:*** a person who prepares gamecocks for a team. *Cuidador* and *gallero* are used interchangeably in the Canary Islands.

***Descrestado:*** the decresting (or dubbing) is the procedure of cutting off the comb, wattles and earlobes tight to the head.

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<sup>720</sup> For those working in English speaking countries, Scott's (1983:188-193) and Herzog's (1985:124-126) glossaries are a good starting point.

**Espolar:** to affix or attach an artificial spur to a gamecock's leg.

**Espuelas:** spurs.

**Gallera:** see *casa de gallos*.

**Gallero:** see *cuidador*.

**Gallina:** hen.

**Gallo (de pelea):** *Gallo* or *gallo de pelea* means gamecock. If not stated otherwise in this dissertation, gamecock, rooster, fighting bird and cock are used as synonyms. I have done this to avoid repeating the same English term throughout the whole text. However, it should be noted that any of these terms could have its specific meaning and connotations:

The English Word “cock”, meaning both rooster and phallus, is the subject of wit among cockfighters in the United States. According to Hawley (1982), “One Florida informant was heard to say ‘My cock may not be the biggest, but it’s the best in this county.’” Apparently such double meanings were so common as to make older cockers use the term “roosters” in mixed company.

Dundes (1994:252)

It is noteworthy that when citing and quoting a specific reference I have used the original term while in the case of the Canarian context, I have mainly used the Spanish term *gallo*.

**Gallo de la tierra/de corral:** barnyard rooster. The term is used to refer to non-fighting breeds.

**Gallo fino:** a gamecock whose performance is outstanding. They are also called *gallos ingleses* or *gallos de raza*.

**Huido:** runaway rooster.

**Mestizo:** a fighting bird showing signs of cowardice during the fight, usually by fleeing or making a poor performance in combat. It usually implies that it is not a pure gamecock and has some “non-fighting breed” in its bloodline.

**Partido:** a cockfighting team or party, usually competing in a *contrata*.

**Pecha:** a spar.

**Picar:** to peck.

**Pico:** beak.

**Pluma:** feather.

**Pollo:** a *pollo* is a young rooster or stag up to 16-18 months in the Canary Islands. After that it will be considered an adult rooster. Sometimes the word *pollito* is used to refer to chicks. Within cockfighting literature the upper limit to be considered a stag is quite varied (10-18 months approximately).

**Reñidero:** the place (building) where the fights take place. When the facilities were built with the sole purpose of holding cockfights it is also called *gallera*.

**Tirar:** to attack with the spurs.

**Valla:** the ring. *La valla* is a circular fenced structure, elevated above floor level, with two opposite ladders to get the *gallos* in.

## **ETHICAL APPROVAL**

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference LSC 16/148 in the Department of Life Sciences and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 01.03.16.

Sample participant consent forms in English and Spanish are included in the following pages.

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (English)

**Title of Research Project:** Chicken Cultures and Male Identities in the Canary Islands

**Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:**

The main aim of this research is to carry out an ethnographic study of cockfight in the Canary Islands. I will explore a wide range of issues concerning the world of cockfighting (*riñas de gallos*) and the construction of male identities. In this regard, this study will help to understand this ancient practice in the Canary Islands. I will carry out my research mainly through participant observation, attending to the cockfights and gathering opinions from my informants. Participants will not be involved in any specific task and are encouraged to carry out their normal activities during the research project. Confidential statements will not be taken into account for my research. **You may be interviewed** formally or informally, and the interviews may be audio recorded or not. The eventuality and modes of interviewing will be always discussed with the participants beforehand. The number of participants will be higher than 100 and the interviews will take place at the cockfight arena. Interviews will last less than an hour. Anonymity will be guaranteed, unless clearly stated in the present form (see below).

The results will be presented in national and international publications, conferences and seminars.

**Investigator Contact Details:**

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**Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research, and I am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason; in that case, the information I provide will not be used or published. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Comments (Please indicate if you want to appear in the research with your full name, or if you agree to appear in video/photographic material related to the research. Please attach a copy of the video/photographic material to this form, if applicable).....

.....  
.....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

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## **FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO (Spanish)**

**Título del proyecto de investigación:** Cultura de Gallos y Masculinidades en las Islas Canarias

### **Breve Resumen del Proyecto y la participación:**

El objetivo principal de este proyecto es llevar a cabo un estudio etnográfico sobre las riñas de gallos en las Islas Canarias. Por lo tanto, exploraré una gran variedad de temas relacionados con el mundo de las riñas de gallos y la construcción de las masculinidades. En este sentido, este estudio ayudará a comprender esta práctica ancestral en las Islas Canarias. La investigación se hará, principalmente, a través de observación participante, asistencia a las riñas de gallos y recogiendo la opinión de los asistentes (informantes). No será requerida ningún tipo de actividad extraordinaria a los participantes más allá de su normal participación en los eventos. Las informaciones estrictamente confidenciales no serán tomadas en cuenta para la investigación. Podrás ser entrevistado de manera formal e informal pero siempre se te consultará con antelación los distintos aspectos de la misma (grabación de voz, toma de notas, etc.). El número de participantes será superior a 100 y las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en la gallera. Las entrevistas tendrán una duración de menos de una hora. El anonimato está garantizado, a menos que el participante lo indique de forma expresa (ver más abajo).

Los resultados serán presentados en publicaciones nacionales e internacionales y en distintas conferencias y seminarios.

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### **Declaración de consentimiento:**

Declaro mi consentimiento informado a participar en esta investigación, conociendo que, en cualquier momento y sin necesidad de dar ninguna razón, puedo abandonar la misma. En caso de abandonar el proyecto, mi información no será usada ni publicada. La información obtenida será tratada de forma confidencial por el investigador y mi identidad protegida en cualquier tipo de publicación, siendo los datos recogidos y procesados de acuerdo a "Data Protection Act 1998" y las políticas de protección de datos de la Universidad de Roehampton.

Nombre y apellidos .....

Firma .....

Fecha.....

Comentarios (Indique expresamente si quiere aparecer en esta investigación con su nombre y apellidos o quiere aparecer en algún material audiovisual relacionado con la misma. Por favour, adjunte cualquier material video/fotográfico que considere relevante).....

.....

Nota: si tiene algún tipo de pregunta o problema relacionado con algún aspecto de su participación, no dude en hablarlo con el investigador (también puede contactar con el Director de Estudios). Por otra parte, puede contactar de forma independiente con la Jefa del Departamento si así lo desea.

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