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► **To cite this version:**

Ketil Skogen, Isabelle Mauz, Olve Krange. Cry Wolf! Narratives of Wolf Recovery in France and Norway.. *Rural Sociology*, 2008, 73 (1), pp.105-133. halshs-00370445

HAL Id: halshs-00370445

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00370445v1>

Submitted on 27 Mar 2009

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Cite as: Skogen, K., Mauz, I. and Krange, O. (*in press*) Cry Wolf! Narratives of Wolf Recovery in France and Norway. *Rural Sociology*.

Cry Wolf!

Narratives of Wolf Recovery in France and Norway

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Acknowledgement: The Norwegian research was funded by grants from the Research Council of Norway and from the Directorate for Nature Management. The French research was funded by Cemagref.

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Cry Wolf! Narratives of Wolf Recovery in France and Norway

Abstract

Due to strict protection through the last decades, wolves have returned to many areas from which they have been absent for a long time. This is a conservation success story, but the wolves also cause conflicts wherever they arrive. We have studied the situation in South-Eastern Norway and in the French Alps, where the conflict patterns are similar. Diverging interpretations of the situation are supported by narratives, and two varieties have become increasingly significant in both countries. Rumors about the secret reintroduction of wolves are common among wolf adversaries. Another narrative, important to the pro-wolf camp, is based on the notion that particular sheep husbandry practices (unattended rough grazing) are unique to either Norway or France – whereas there are in fact more similarities than differences. Yet, while the reintroduction-conspiracy rumors are ridiculed, the notion of unique national conflict patterns has achieved a status almost of official truth. Furthermore, the story about natural wolf recovery is itself a value-laden narrative, and not only “scientific fact”. The different status of these narratives tell us something about power relations: Given their different social basis, it seems relevant to consider the national uniqueness image and the natural recovery theory as tightly interwoven with *symbolic power*, and the reintroduction conspiracy rumors as similarly interwoven with *patterns of cultural resistance*.

Cry Wolf! Narratives of Wolf Recovery in France and Norway

Introduction

The reappearance of wolves has led to conflicts in rural areas in many parts of the world, as has been thoroughly documented (e.g. Bjerke, Reitan, and Kellert 1998; Ericsson and Heberlein 2003; Kellert et al. 1996; Naughton-Treves, Grossberg, and Treves 2003; Skogen and Thrane in press; Wilson 1997). This paper focuses on the situation in South-Eastern Norway and in the French Alps, where the conflict patterns show many similarities. Due to strict protection wolves returned to both regions around 1990. Since then they have killed sheep and other livestock. Wolves also cause problems for hunters, particularly in Norway where hunting dogs are killed. Many local people are scared of the newcomers, and it is often claimed that having wolves around reduces the quality of life. But the wolves are also welcomed by many. Restoring species to their former range is official environmental policy in both countries – as in most of the world – and wolf recovery is hailed as a conservation success. The obvious result is conflict.

Not surprisingly, the actors in this complex field have highly divergent interpretations of the situation. Economic and practical consequences may be particularly salient to sheep farmers and hunters, whereas the symbolic power of the wolf as a threat imposed upon rural communities by urban elites, or as an object of hegemonic and patronizing academic knowledge reach much further. The same may be said of the wolf as a symbol of unspoiled wilderness. The wolf's return can be seen as a potent sign that all is not lost on the environmental front.

We have studied the wolf conflicts in two different parts of Europe for the last ten years, focusing on how these conflicts are embedded in deeper societal tensions, particularly related to social change in rural areas (for example Krange and Skogen in press; Mauz 2002; Mauz 2005; Skogen 2001; Skogen and Krange 2003). Our research, as well as the media coverage of the controversies, has drawn our attention to the existence of elaborate and relatively stable narratives that support the different interpretations. However, no attempt at

analyzing the roles of these narratives in the social constructions of the “wolf field” has been made.

Two varieties have become particularly prominent in Norway and France. Stories about shady activities like the secret reintroduction of wolves are common among wolf adversaries. These clandestine operations are allegedly conducted either by extreme environmentalists, or by an alliance between environmentalists and government agencies.

Another type of story is important to the pro-wolf camp – a narrative wherein sheep husbandry practices common to Norway and the French Alps (unattended rough grazing), are depicted as being unique to each region. Norwegian wolf proponents contend that the Norwegian situation is singular, and their French counterparts make the same claim for France. In both countries there is created an image of wolf problems as originating from the local farmers’ particularly irresponsible attitudes and primitive views of nature. Conflicts with wolves are supposedly almost unknown in other countries.

Although there are similarities among the narratives, we will argue that there are also significant differences, and that these differences should be understood as manifestations of power relations. To this end, we will explore the usefulness of two theoretical perspectives: a social theory of rumors, focusing in particular on *demonic rumors* as a manifestation of cultural resistance; and a theory of *symbolic power*. By comparing two regions far apart in Europe, we will try to identify *social mechanisms* of a general nature, mechanisms that are not bound to particular regional contexts.

We will use interview data from France and Norway, supplemented by written material such as newspaper articles and websites, as the empirical basis for our analysis. We take a “grounded” approach in the sense that we will describe the narratives first and then move on to the theoretical frameworks that we see as most appropriate for the analysis. This procedure closely resembles the actual research process where narratives as such were not the initial focus, but where they in a sense materialized over time, and eventually demanded a research focus – and theories – of their own. We feel that this approach will familiarize the

reader with the subject matter of the study in a way that – hopefully – makes our analytical perspectives come across as logical and well adapted to the data.

The Studies and the Study Areas

The French and Norwegian studies were conducted separately, and data were compared after the conclusion of both projects. However, the studies are well suited to comparison, as similar methods were utilized.

France

The French project started in 1997 as a study of the role of wildlife in the symbolic construction of social relations in the Vanoise area. Hunters and national park guards were interviewed for this purpose. However, during the fieldwork things changed dramatically with the arrival of wolves. The first attacks on livestock occurred in the fall of 1997. The project was adjusted in order to focus on the role that was attributed to wolves in the social construction of nature and was eventually extended to include farmers, conservationists, and various agents of public land management (Mauz, 2005). More than 100 in-depth interviews were conducted from 1997 to 2000. A second phase, carried out in 2005 and 2006, was directed at local people's reactions to wolf management and wolf population monitoring. It included another 25 informants. Both studies generated the same type of interviews, covering issues that are relevant to the present analysis.

The study area consists of the 28 small municipalities which are partly included in the Vanoise National Park. Vanoise is the massif of the Northern Alps, which separates Haute-Maurienne (the high Valley of Arc), from Haute-Tarentaise (the high valley of Isère). Both valleys are close to the Italian border. The favorable climate of the interior Alps has allowed the development of extensive agriculture and livestock production, which for centuries constituted the region's economic backbone. Dairy farming, which takes different forms from place to place, is particularly well developed. Sheep farming underwent extensive change in the 1960s and 1970s, when small herds raised for milk were substituted by much larger herds

raised for meat. The importance of sheep farming has fluctuated, but it is currently a main economic activity in some municipalities.

Today tourism dominates the economy, and directly or indirectly provides all or part of the income for a majority of inhabitants. Haute-Tarentaise now has the largest concentration of ski resorts in Europe – the most famous being Val d'Isère, Tignes, Les Arcs, and La Plagne. Although winter tourism is more significant, summer tourism is also important. In the past, Haute-Tarentaise and Haute-Maurienne were characterized by a high rate of temporary and permanent out-migration, but this trend is now halted or even reversed. The population of the 12 municipalities of Haute-Maurienne affected by the national park appears to have stabilized, and the 16 municipalities of Haute-Tarentaise have seen a 78% population growth from 13,700 in 1962 to 24,200 in 1999.

Norway

Most of the Norwegian material stems from a study of people's relations to nature in Østerdalen, one of the large valleys intersecting south-eastern Norway from north to south. That research project went on from 1999 to 2002, and consisted of three local studies. For the purpose of this paper, we are utilizing the data from the municipalities of Stor-Elvdal and Trysil.

The Stor-Elvdal part of the study focused on land use conflicts in rural areas generally and the social and cultural factors that constitute axes of differentiation in this field. Its aim was to improve our understanding of the dynamic nature of the social production of meaning regarding land use and resource utilization within rural communities.

The municipality of Stor-Elvdal, with a population of 3,000 (down from 5,000 in 1951) is still dependent on traditional resource extraction. Logging and timber processing have always been pillars of the local economy. There are some extremely large forest properties in Stor-Elvdal, and most of the wealthy owners live in the municipality. Even today, therefore, Stor-Elvdal bears the distinct marks of a class society. Sheep farming plays a

modest role in the local economy, and is concentrated in certain small communities. Unlike the French study area and also Trysil, Stor-Elvdal has no tourist industry to speak of.

Wolves returned to Stor-Elvdal in 1998, immediately triggering fierce conflicts. There has always been some controversy over bears, lynx and wolverines, all of which are present locally, but the wolves drove the conflicts to a new level.

There were 88 informants in Stor-Elvdal. Most were interviewed individually, but we also conducted three focus group sessions. The informants represented a wide range of socio-economic, educational, socio-cultural, and age groups. Different relationships to nature, economic as well as recreational, were represented. We also interviewed three biologists at a regional research station in Stor-Elvdal. One of them were doing mainly wolf studies.

In Trysil the aim was to study changing relationships with nature in rural areas, which are presumably driven by economic and cultural modernization. This sub-project focused on young people, who were thought to be most susceptible to such forms of social change (Skogen 2001). Trysil was selected as a research locality because it is economically diverse, with a large tourist industry (mainly ski resorts) as well as traditional sectors like forestry and livestock farming. The tourist industry is concentrated in the center of the municipality, the home of half the total population of 7,000 (down from 8,400 in 1951). There are several smaller communities, which have retained close ties to traditional resource use. There were 31 youth informants altogether, representing a range of background factors, educational aspirations, and leisure interests. Most of them were between 16 and 20 years of age. In addition, eleven adult key informants were interviewed.

Trysil had no wolves living permanently within its borders at the time of the study, but, like Stor-Elvdal, the community has a long history of conflicts over other large carnivores. However, the prospect of returning wolves, which had already colonized neighboring municipalities, received much more attention in the interviews.

We have also included material from a separate study conducted in 2001 in the municipality of Våler in south-eastern Norway. This study focused on the cooperation (or lack thereof) among wildlife managers, biologists, and local people regarding wolf management.

Våler (population 4,100, up from 2,300 in 1951) is situated less than an hour's drive from downtown Oslo, and only 20 minutes from the relatively large town of Moss. Wolves arrived in this area in 2000, creating conflict, as they had elsewhere. Våler differs from the other study localities not only by its proximity to urban areas, but also because of its large-scale agriculture (by Norwegian standards) and small patches of forest. This is definitely no wilderness. Against this background, it is interesting to observe that the 17 interviews we conducted with hunters, landowners, wildlife managers, biologists, and conservationists disclosed the same conflict pattern as in the other localities (Skogen and Haaland 2001).

Samples

The French and Norwegian samples are not entirely similar. The same may be said of the three Norwegian case studies. However, we think that the large number of interviews in sum captures a satisfactory diversity of social groups, as well as positions on the wolf issue, especially when seen in combination with our general familiarity with the communities in question after several years of research.

The material from Stor-Elvdal and Trysil has a reasonable balance between women and men, although many of the strongest statements (e.g. many of those we cite) came from men. The interviews do not, however, indicate that there are systematic differences between men and women regarding their attitudes to large carnivores, or their belief in reintroduction conspiracies. The material from Våler and the French material is predominantly (but not exclusively) male. In France some women (e.g. farmers' wives) took part in interviews where they were not primary informants. The skewness may hurt the representativity of the material, but should not impede a qualitative analysis of the *social function* of the narratives.

Written Material

For the purpose of this paper, we have also reviewed written material from both countries. In Norway this was the local newspaper "Østlendingen" covering the region with Stor-Elvdal and Trysil. We have also conducted searches in the web archives of two national newspapers

(*Aftenposten* and *Nationen*), and reviewed websites and magazines published by three conservation organizations: The somewhat extremist pro-wolf “Alpha group”, the more moderate “Our Carnivores”, and the large, mainstream Nature Conservancy. We also reviewed the websites of the anti-carnivore “Alliance for a New Carnivore Policy”, the Norwegian Smallholders’ Association and the regional hunters’ organization. In France we made use of magazines and other texts published by several institutions and organizations : the official information newsletter dedicated to the wolf (*L’infoloups*), “Wolf Voice” and “The Pack Journal”, magazines published by two conservation organizations, and texts by farming organizations. We also drew on articles from the regional newspaper covering the Northern Alps, *Le Dauphiné Libéré*, and from two national newspapers, *Le Monde* and *Libération*. Systematic reviewing of these publications mainly took place throughout the duration of the respective projects, but we have been following most of them continuously in a more sporadic manner.

How Did the Wolves Get There?

In Norway the expansion of the wolf population started in the late eighties. Biologists believed that a few wolves from the native Scandinavian population had survived and multiplied. However, recent genetic analyses have demonstrated that all the wolves that are currently in Scandinavia are of Finnish extraction, and that the native population must be considered lost (Vila et al. 2003). Accounts of wolves moving in from Finland were, until recently, supplemented by explanations of how small wolf populations may undergo rapid growth given favorable conditions. Although this latter mechanism seems to be of less relevance now, it was part of the dominant “wolf reappearance paradigm” at the time of our interviews. Norway and Sweden share one trans-boundary wolf population which biologists put at approximately 170 animals. Around 40 of these are in Norway more or less permanently, according to official figures. Both the population as a whole and the Norwegian packs are concentrated in a relatively limited area along the southern part of the border.

Wolves were officially observed in 1992 in Mercantour National Park in the southern Alps for the first time since their disappearance from France around 1930. The official account states that the wolves have migrated from Italy, and that such dispersion is a natural process when wolves are not pursued by humans. There are now approximately 130 wolves in France, according to biological surveys. A transboundary alpine population shared with Italy and Switzerland may amount to 170 animals.

These explanations of why wolves have come back are based on science, and are advanced by wildlife biologists and wildlife managers; thus also by resource management agencies and eventually by the political establishment – including the national media. Such accounts naturally also have the full support of environmental organizations. However, they do not go uncontested. In both France and Norway alternative accounts of wolf reappearances flourish among those who do not welcome the returning wolves – most notably farmers and hunters with firm roots in a traditional resource extraction culture. In the next section we recount these alternative explanations in some detail.

Secret Reintroduction

When wolves reappeared in Mercantour, the park officials presented it as a welcome event. But as soon as the news was publicly known, farmers and hunters offered their own explanation: The wolves could not possibly have returned on their own; they must have been secretly introduced. We encountered the same opinions in our study area in the Northern Alps, where the wolves arrived a few years later. These views were advanced in interviews with farmers, farming organization officials, and hunters. They also appear in material published by farming organizations (for example *Chambre d’agriculture des Alpes Maritimes* 1996) In one farmer’s living room was a picture of a jubilant wolf with its tongue hanging out, riding a motor scooter. The picture was accompanied by the text: “The wolf returns from Italy on a Vespa!”. This conviction is not held exclusively by the hard-core wolf adversaries. It is shared by many farmers who generally subscribe to more moderate views and many hunters who do not take a particularly aggressive stance toward the wolves. Here is a farmer from Savoie:

We are all convinced that the wolves have been released. [...] I know they might come from the top of the mountain but they don't jump like that, don't tell me stories [meaning that they appear in one place and then in some other distant place, as if they had jumped from the first one to the second]. Why didn't they arrive ten years earlier? (Sheep farmer, Savoie).

In Norway wolves are also said to have been bred in captivity and released secretly. This version of the wolf reappearance story was encountered in many interviews, but can also be found on the websites of organizations opposed to carnivore protection and in publications by anti-wolf activists (e.g. Toverud 2001). Furthermore, it has been conveyed through media coverage of the wolf conflicts, even on national television. This is how a sheep farmer from Stor-Elvdal saw it:

Yes, I am certain of it. That they descend from wolves that were released. (...) It is a strange thing that the wolves appear exactly where the government want wolves. That is some coincidence! They draw a line on a map, and lo and behold, the wolves appear so nicely distributed inside it that you would think they had used a pair of compasses. (Sheep farmer, Stor-Elvdal)

There are two purported empirical bases for these stories: alleged observations of animals being released or fed, and alleged observations of unnatural behavior or physical appearance. Some observations are in themselves not controversial, it is only their interpretation that ties them to wolf introduction.

In Norway we heard of observations of non-local trucks carrying dog cages on logging roads after dark. And whereas popular lore often ties small aircraft appearing in remote places after dark to drug trafficking and espionage, in our study areas they are tied to the secret introduction of wolves. In France, there are stories about local people who have shot wolves illegally and found microchips on the animals – clear proof that they had been released. However, because the hunters have themselves committed crimes, they cannot come forward.

The other type of observation concerns the behavior and appearance of the animals. Whether the behavior in question is in fact something that wild wolves would not do, and whether a particular fur color is outside of the normal range, is always open to discussion.

Wildlife biologists have ready explanations, but they are rarely accepted by those who believe in an introduction conspiracy.

In Norway, the most widespread notion of unnatural behavior is related to lack of shyness. Wolves are frequently observed near houses, they have attacked chained dogs, eaten cat food on people's doorsteps, and lurked around kindergartens in broad daylight. Biologists claim to recognize these behaviors as normal for wolves, and describe the wolf as a feeding opportunist that is always on the lookout for an easy meal (not kindergarten children, but perhaps the contents of kindergarten garbage cans). But most people who are unaccustomed to wolves think of them as we see them on television: as living in – and presumably preferring – remote wilderness areas. Compared to this image, urbanite wolves may seem unnatural and frightening. Not only are they too close for comfort; they may also be unpredictable if they are raised in captivity and lack the presumed natural shyness.

And it was strange indeed that it didn't stop in Rakkestad. That's much closer to Sweden, and a much larger forest. Suddenly it surfaced here and it wasn't scared of anything. Several people had it inside their yards and that was a strange thing, don't you think?

(Farmer, Våler)

In Våler, the first wolves had to cross a large river to reach their present location. They passed through a semi-wilderness which is much more like popular images of wolf habitat than are the small forest patches where they eventually settled. All this is seen to be a clear indication that the wolves did not find their way to Våler on their own.

Just have a look at the map of Østfold: there you have the [Swedish] border, then Aremark, Rakkestad, Eidsberg, where you have the highest density of moose and roe deer this side of Oslo. Nobody can tell me that the wolves walked through that large buffet, and then swam across the big, cold river to get here. I wouldn't question the wolf development if it had started on the other side of the [river] Glomma, and then expanded in our direction. But it started in the wrong end."

(Hunter, Våler)

Biologists retaliate, however, by claiming that the density of prey is actually higher in the agricultural landscape. But this argument seems to fall on deaf ears for many reasons; one of them being that the first litter that was born here *was* actually a litter of hybrids: the Alpha female had mated with a domestic dog. Although the hybrids were eventually culled by the wildlife authorities, there are many stories about intentional breeding and that it was never meant to be known that they were not pure wolves. There are also rumors that the authorities allowed at least one of the wolf-dogs to escape the culling.

Stories explaining why wolves could not have wandered on their own the routes and distances that the biologists claim are also common in France. Genetic analyses indicate that even a wolf that found its way to the Nohèdes National Preserve in the Pyrenees was of Italian origin (*Le Monde*, 28 August 1999). But then it must have traveled a distance so great that it actually reinforces the notions of clandestine reintroduction (*Le Monde*, 8 September 1999, letter to the editor). Wolf opponents also point out that wolves have been introduced in other countries and that, in France, other large carnivores have been released officially (lynx in the Vosges, bears in the Pyrenees).

Why did people accuse us of having reintroduced the wolf? Because there is an image of an administration that reintroduces many animals. So they said: "Why not the wolf? After all, you reintroduce other animals, you won't have us believe you are unable to do that!

(National park guard, Alpes Maritimes)

There are also other French accounts of unnatural characteristics among wolves. Wolves are said to attack sheep for different purposes: some kill to eat, and actually consume their prey; whereas others merely hunt for play, and only nibble at the sheep they kill. Because such behavior is not expected of wild wolves, these "small eaters" are thought to be born in captivity.

In nature, when [the wolves] go hunting, they attack an animal and they kill it, normally. Here, they killed four [sheep], they wounded some and they ate half a kilo!
(Farmer's wife, Savoie)

The wolves that arrived at the Glandon pass, those surely came from Mercantour through the Hautes-Alpes but these ones [that we have got here], they are no real wolves, they are released wolves (...) because they don't attack the same way. They hardly ate anything. And in the droppings [the scientists] found chamois, only chamois [i.e. the wolves killed sheep, but ate only chamois].

(Sheep farmer, Savoie)

Some informants also claim that the released wolves are a different color than Italian wolves. The same point is made in the Norwegian interviews, as well as in written anti-wolf material (e.g. Toverud 2001). The native Scandinavian wolves, now extinct, were “stone gray”, whereas the newcomers are yellowish (supposedly an adaptation to the colors of the Estonian forest floor) or red-brown, allegedly like Russian wolves (Toverud 2001 76-77).

Who Are the Culprits and What Are Their Motives?

The actors who are supposed to be responsible for reintroductions are not always identified. French wolf opponents often use impersonal expressions such as: “one has released them” or “they have been released”. When collective culprits are indicated, conservationists are frequently accused, as are government foresters who are thought to have joined forces with conservationists. Some informants accused a former Director of the Directorate for Nature Protection, who is known as a “wolf lover”. Old statements made by conservationists and foresters have been exhumed. These statements concern releasing of large carnivores as an efficient means to regulate ungulate populations, thereby reducing forest damage.

In Norway, there are similar accounts of how plans made in the 1970s for wolf reintroduction in Sweden, and later officially abandoned, were actually implemented secretly. Much is made of the fact that the person who was in charge of the proposed plans now occupies an elevated position in the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. However, this type of sophisticated reasoning concerning the actual planning and organization was rare in the interviews, and is more common in written material distributed by anti-wolf networks (e.g. Toverud 2001) and on the Internet (e.g. http://www.rovdyr.org/arkiv/pro_varg/). Our

Norwegian informants spoke in the same general terms as did the French, pointing to “those” who have released wolves. When asked to elaborate, most informants incriminated extremist environmentalists, but resource management agencies were also frequently mentioned, as were politicians. Even a former Minister of the Environment was held by some to be personally involved.

I am sure they know a lot more up at Stortinget [Norwegian parliament] than we get to know here. Because I think this is run from the very top. But things like that are almost impossible to prove. Then somebody in those circles would have to blow the whistle(...) People have seen wolves being released. A lot of people claim that they have seen it. But they don't dare to come forward. There are powerful forces behind it, so people are afraid of their health if they tell about it publicly. (...) These things have been carefully planned for a long time. Many years. It seems like they have formed alliances with people in high places, maybe even right at the top – people who are pro-wolf, or neutral people who they have persuaded. (...) Because there is so little interest in establishing whether these are pure wolves, I think it is pretty clear. There are obviously strong forces behind it all.”

(Hunter, Våler)

In France, many wolf adversaries are convinced that wolves had been reintroduced primarily to accelerate the depopulation of the French countryside.

There is nothing we can do. They want to destroy the farmers. The wolf is a means to destroy them. All these politicians, these fat men who earn a lot of money – and we are the puppets. There's nobody left in the countryside. In the village, there will be no more farmers within five years. What is it going to look like?

(Farmer, Hautes-Alpes).

They consider the wolves to be “biological weapons” and see themselves as victims of a plot contrived by powerful groups who loathe rural people and the rural way of life. The same image was drawn by Norwegian informants and is found in written material in Norway, but more modest versions of the story are more common. The harm caused to rural areas is seen not as the chief goal behind the introductions, but as a side effect of a strategy aimed at

reconstructing a scenic wilderness as a playground and esthetic object for city people. In any case, it affects only backward country people with primitive views of nature.

Who Tells the Stories?

In both countries, these narratives are found primarily among farmers and local hunters, but they also exist in other segments of the population. The basis for the farmers' engagement is to a large extent self-evident, as livestock production in particular is affected by the presence of large carnivores, and farmers are closely tied to traditional land use and resource extraction. A few words about the hunters are in order, however.

In Norway, hunters who are hard-core wolf adversaries are usually men with a working-class background, strongly attached to their community and to the land. In several respects they maintain a traditional way of living that has been typical of men in rural areas, which entails largely manual work and a somewhat rough interaction with nature. They are firmly rooted in what might be termed a production-oriented culture: cultural forms that are typical of workers and farmers, and placing a high value on practical work, technical ingenuity, and masculine toughness, with a deep skepticism towards academic knowledge and intellectual pursuits (Dunk 1994; Krange and Skogen in press; Skogen 2001). Many of these men seem to have a clear image of themselves as the successors of earlier generations of hunters and woodsmen.

In the French study area as well, hunters are predominantly local and virtually all male. One is not regarded as a proper hunter unless one hunts chamois – a goat-like antelope typical of the Alps. Some women and some outsiders do hunt, but they are always considered to be exceptions, and there are several tricks to exclude them. The exclusion of outsiders is particularly severe in communities with large ski resorts, such as Val d'Isère, as if hunting chamois remains the only way to prove that, despite tourism, the inhabitants still possess and master these places. Put briefly, hunting is a way of stating: "I belong to this place and I am a true mountain man".

Whereas traditional hunters form a stronghold of wolf resistance in Norway, this picture is somewhat different in France. Many hunters are skeptical of the wolves, but most of them appear to be more open-minded than their Norwegian counterparts. There may be several reasons for this, but one striking difference between France and Norway is the fate of the hunters' beloved dogs. In Norway and Sweden, but not in France, many hunting dogs have been attacked and killed by wolves. Knowing the affectionate relationship between hunters and their dogs and the tremendous amount of time and money that many hunters invest in training them, it is no surprise that the wolves are not popular (see also Naughton-Treves et al. 2003). Indeed, the typical Scandinavian hunting methods, which entail the use of untethered dogs, are now seen as impossible in areas with wolves. Because many hunters regard the cooperation with their dog as more rewarding than the actual kill (Krange and Skogen in press), the loss of this form of hunting is all the more aggravating. So far, their French counterparts have not undergone these experiences with the wolves.

Another factor is the historical development of hunting. Hunting as a relatively common leisure pursuit appears to have a shorter history in France than in Norway – although in Norway as well some forms of hunting that are important now have only recently become mass phenomena (Aagedal and Brottveit 1999). Nevertheless, hunting appears to have firmer roots in rural communities in Norway.

However, in Norway and France alike, there has traditionally been and continues to be a number of tensions and conflicts of interests between farmers and hunters: economic, cultural, and practical. There are conflicts of interest regarding access to hunting, since farmers are often land owners and may want to maximize profits from hunting. There are also conflicts between hunting and sheep: sheep are collected with shepherd dogs and a lot of commotion in the prime hunting season. Hunting dogs chase sheep now and then, and can be shot legally by farmers. In France, wild boars are attractive game to hunters, but cause serious crop damage and are seen as vermin by farmers. In Norway, many farmers own forest properties, and young pine trees in particular are eaten by moose – the number one prestigious game species.

In Norway these tensions seem to have been subdued by the arrival of the wolves, and we have seen the emergence of a new (probably fragile) alliance among hunters, sheep farmers, and land owners (Skogen and Krangle 2003). This has not happened in France; to the contrary, our impression is that the relative lack of open hostility toward the wolves among French hunters can be attributed in part to their reluctance to join forces with farmers.

Unique Conflicts, Lazy Farmers, and Outdated Attitudes

Conservationists in both Norway and France often claim that modern sheepherding practices in their region have characteristics that increase depredation problems, and that the farmers in their country have particularly primitive attitudes toward the utilization of natural resources and the value of biodiversity. It is contended in both France and Norway that sheep farmers in other countries herd their sheep or take other measures to prevent attacks. Therefore, the conflicts between sheep herders and wolves are unique to France say the French conservationists – or unique to Norway say the Norwegians. People in other regions of Europe are said to be astonished to hear about the fierce conflicts in Norway – or in France.

The national media seem to have picked up on these stories, and generally convey the same picture – which seems to have been disseminated throughout significant parts of the population in both countries. The sheep farmers rarely contest the uniqueness of their situation, but rather choose to defend it as necessary given local conditions, and as desirable for the environment and for animal welfare.

Regarding the herding methods, the most important issue is the practice of leaving sheep in the mountains and forests without human supervision except for sporadic inspections. Conservationists claim that the sheep are vulnerable to attacks and to other accidents in rough terrain, and this is often attributed to the laziness of modern farmers and to part-time farming. Sheep farming is construed as “easy money” because it is heavily subsidized:

It's a pity that today 90% of farmers of the Southern Alps and even of the Northern Alps are only subsidy hunters; grass subsidy, meat subsidy, subsidy for this, subsidy

for that, it must be stopped. Subsidies make up 70% of their income. That really is a problem.

(Conservationist, Alpes de Haute-Provence)

Current practices are seen as fundamentally different from the affectionate relationship that is believed to have previously existed between farmers and their animals, and which entailed herding the flocks through the grazing season :

There used to be many small herds, people lived on farms and they had many herds but (...) there were always two or three children or the wife who would guard them. Nowadays, it's completely different. It's really an industrial herd and it is practically never looked after.

(National park guard, Savoie).

In France, this is presented as the product of an unfortunate combination of current agricultural policy and primitive attitudes towards domestic animals and nature that are characteristic of the French. Indeed, the wolf supporters changed their argument as the wolves moved north: As long as Mercantour in Southern France was the only affected area, wolf supporters accused farmers from the South of being afflicted by the well known defects of southern folk: laziness and propensity to exaggerate and to cheat. When wolves arrived in the Northern Alps and triggered controversy there as well, the French in general, and French farmers in particular, were said to be characterized by their permanent contesting of the established order, their propensity to disobey laws, and their rejection of nature conservation. The idea is regularly repeated that “all this is very French; everywhere else things are fine, people live with wolves and there are no problems”. Farmers from Eastern Europe (particularly Rumania and Bulgaria) are admired because they allegedly live with much larger carnivore populations but have few problems – and if they have problems, they accept the carnivores as “natural” and “valuable” anyway.

In Rumania, a sheep is much more valuable than it is in France. If the wolf gobbles up a sheep there, it's bankruptcy. Here, well, it's OK, between insurances and compensations and all; they can almost earn more if their sheep are wolfed down than

if they lead them to the slaughterhouse. There, they manage to live, there are approximately 5000 wolves, in a country which is about the same size as France, 5000 wolves they manage to live with, they manage to live with around (...) 3000 bears, they manage to live with maybe at least 1500 lynx, without this raising problems, only because shepherds do their job. There are predators so there are problems, so they organize themselves accordingly. There are guard dogs, there are people staying all the time with their herds in the mountain, leaving the herd unattended when dusk comes is unthinkable, herds are gathered next to the shepherd's shelter, animals are not abandoned, and it works.

(Conservationist, Alpes de Haute-Provence)

A similar picture is painted by their Norwegian counterparts; in fact, the interview material contains statements regarding the idyllic situation in Eastern Europe that might have been translated directly from French:

In Rumania there are 2,500 wolves, and probably more sheep than here. But there they have hired shepherds to look after the herds. I think they could do that here too, instead of shooting the poor wolves. I think the wolves should be left in peace.

(High school student, Trysil).

The Norwegian discourse is dominated by images of current herding practices as something that could happen only in Norway, because sheep farmers receive such generous subsidies and because Norwegians are accustomed to using nature as they please for their own benefit, but have lost touch with the traditional ways of sustainable resource utilization.

[The sheep] is not an animal that is adapted to a life in Norwegian nature. No matter how much that statement provokes farmers, it is a fact! (...) Except for reindeer, we don't have domesticated animals that are adapted to a life on their own in the backcountry, and we should act on that knowledge. If we are going to produce meat, then we must use animals that are adapted [e.g. older sheep breeds] and the others we must take care of in other ways. (...) People who have assumed the responsibility of owning an animal also have an obligation to know the fate of that animal. And to do everything that is possible to prevent it from suffering. (...) I cannot accept a form of

husbandry where animals are sent on their own into an environment that they are not adapted to, with the result that close to 150 000 animals die, often in great pain, during the four month grazing season. I don't think that is ethically acceptable.
(*Conservationist, Stor-Elvdal*)

Along with farmers from other countries, farmers from the past are used as positive examples. The old-time farmers are supposed to have had much closer relationships with their animals. Their active shepherding allegedly prevented carnivore attacks, so that the relationship between farmers and large carnivores was much less strained than it is today – much like the somewhat mythical situation in contemporary Rumania.

People knew that the wolf is an animal that is very easily scared. It killed livestock, OK, but it did not kill more animals than the number of natural deaths in a herd.
(*Conservationist, Isère*).

However, this idyllic picture was shaken by the elderly people interviewed for the French study. They said that the sheep were not always looked after, that there were no guard dogs, and that large carnivores were as unpopular in earlier times as they are today. We have no data on the relationship between farmers and predators throughout history in the Norwegian study areas. However, historical literature generates a similar impression: things were not as idyllic as the conservationists would have people believe. For example, historical documents indicate that fear of wolves was common (c.f. Snerte 2001), and even that wolves were frequently accused of killing people (which they have indeed done, the last definite case being in 1806 (Linnell and Bjerke 2002)).

Farmers that are distant in space *or* time are held as models for modern sheep herders. This approach has the obvious advantage of avoiding too close scrutiny, particularly if those who are targeted generally have limited access to information that *could* have thrown some light on these rather simplistic notions of harmony. Such counter-evidence does exist. For example, a French study concluded that current and historic wolf damage to livestock in different countries varies according to herding practices and hunting pressure, and that the situation in the Alps is in no way unique (Garde 1998). But this is generally not known to the

people who would need the evidence to build their argument. Why this is so is a question we will return to in the final section of the paper, because it can tell us something about the power relations that are at play in this field.

Rumor as Cultural Resistance

The origin of the wolves has also interested social scientists, at least in France. They have focused on the reintroduction narrative and its supporters, and have noticed that it strongly resembles other phenomena that have been studied in the last few decades (Campion-Vincent 2004; Campion-Vincent 2005b). It is not the first time people have claimed that undesirable species have been released – accidentally or deliberately. Many New Yorkers, for instance, are convinced that there are alligators in the city’s sewers (Campion-Vincent 2000; Kapferer 1990). In several French regions, there is a widespread conviction that helicopters drop boxes containing vipers and foxes (Campion-Vincent 1990). Some informants explicitly established the connection, and said that wolves are being released, *exactly like vipers*.

Such stories are often labeled rumors, which is commonly considered a derogatory term equaling “gossip”. But the term may also be given a useful scientific meaning. We first introduce a definition developed by Kapferer (1990): A rumor is the emergence and circulation of a collective interpretation of a problematic event that official sources deny or have not yet confirmed. People tend to repeat a rumor, to contribute to its transmission, or even to nourish it, because they are seduced by its content, and particularly because pre-existing opinions and interpretations are reinforced. Rumors are not necessarily false, but they are unverified. Rumors are counter-narratives, providing alternative explanations that are less open to scrutiny than the official story, while being more exciting and disturbing. Rumors are rarely simple if they can be complicated. Obvious interpretations are often rejected and replaced by more convoluted reasoning. Rumors are often “black”, according to Kapferer, in the sense that they present a negative interpretation of events considered to be problematic; they tend to attribute what actually or fictively happened to persons or collective agents in such a way that they are discredited or dishonored. Rumors are flexible; they spread rapidly,

and are likely to turn objections and denials from the authorities into new arguments in support of the interpretations represented by the rumors (Campion-Vincent 2005a).

The wolf reintroduction narrative is clearly in opposition to the official account. By incriminating state services and scientific institutions, wolf opponents launch resistance against the power of the state and its associates, the urban conservationists. It is indeed “black”, as it denounces the scandalous existence of a wolf reintroduction network or even a secret alliance comprising people in high places. And further, objections and arguments supporting the official version often do nothing but strengthen it. Hence, wolf opponents’ reintroduction stories possess all the characteristics of rumors outlined by Kapferer. They are among those particularly stubborn rumors which are almost impossible to refute. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove that something did *not* happen (Fine and Turner 2001; Kapferer 1990). How could it be shown, for example, that no wolf has been intentionally or accidentally released? The question therefore, in a strictly logical sense, remains open.

Coombe (1997) introduces the concept of *demonic* rumors. The term “demonic” does not mean that such rumors should be understood as comprising elements of the supernatural, but rather that they establish the existence of malevolent forces responsible for everything from mild social tensions to economic decline and the spreading of AIDS. Coombe focuses on rumors that target multi-national corporations like Phillip Morris and Procter & Gamble, as well as more modest brand-name companies. In late modernity, capital is “disembedded” and tied to neither place nor personal actors in recognizable ways. Brand names are omnipresent and play a more important part in people’s lives than ever before. But the actual production is unseen; it is hard to discover where it takes place; and, in any case, it is probably on the other side of the globe. No personal actors seem to be associated with the products, and if such actors are known, they, too, are usually distant and inaccessible. At the same time, the ever-increasing presence of brand-name products in people’s lives makes it clear that those who produce them exert tremendous power. Yet there seems to be no way to confront this power, as there is never anybody to confront.

Rumors that incriminate such operations flourish predominantly among people who have limited access to traditional political power and who stand to lose the most as a consequence of current processes of economic and social change (Fine and Turner 2001). Coombe contends that stories about the malevolent intentions of the huge corporations, in particular efforts to hurt certain disadvantaged ethnic or social groups through poisoning, spreading of disease, or associations with the Ku Klux Klan, efficiently serves two purposes: They connect power to agency by introducing purpose and planning, thus making sense of an otherwise vaguely felt association between strenuous social conditions and the omnipresent, yet unapproachable, economic conglomerates. At the same time, central characteristics of rumors (difficult to trace, even more difficult to come to grips with, always developing in new directions, and deftly absorbing counter-evidence) are similar to the way in which the presence of these conglomerates is felt in people's lives. Thus, demonic rumors could be seen as a way of turning the "weapons" of the corporations against them, as they appear to be almost as defenseless against the rumors as ordinary people are against the economic presence of the corporations. Rumors have actually forced giants like Procter & Gamble to use enormous resources to counter them, without success, and smaller companies have been forced out of business (Coombe 1997).

Coombe's focus is on the economic forces of modern capitalism, and how demonic rumors constitute one way of relating to them which may fill important functions for people who otherwise feel powerless. This understanding can be extended to the way people grapple with the modern state, or indeed – in our case – perceived alliances between the state and the environmental movement. The state exerts power in ways that are seen by many as incomprehensible and arbitrary, or, worse, as part of a strategy to depopulate rural areas. To some groups – particularly people rooted in traditional forms of resource utilization and consumptive outdoor recreation – modern policies of nature conservation are prime examples.

In summary, rumors can be seen as narratives that interpret and explain disturbing aspects of the world – aspects that are otherwise perceived as incomprehensible, diffuse, or

explained in unsatisfactory ways. Champion-Vincent (2005a) claims that they constitute a “folk social science”. To the extent that they challenge hegemonic paradigms and interpretations made by powerful groups, they may also be seen as forms of resistance (Samper 2002).

The stories about wolf reintroduction are quite often elaborate, and include chains of reasoning that cannot always be dismissed outright. Some of them are based at least partially upon real observations and upon extensive knowledge of the areas in question. Nevertheless, they are ridiculed by wolf supporters and claimed to be folklore or preposterous fabrications. People who subscribe to these stories are rejected either as dimwits or conspiracy theorists with hidden agendas.

We now turn to a brief discussion of the narratives that thrive in the pro-wolf camp, and try to discern why these enjoy a different position.

The Natural Recovery Theory and the Notion of National Uniqueness: Pro-Wolf Narratives with a Strong Message

We say narratives in plural, because if we consider the natural recovery theory as a background of “solid scientific fact”, against which the oppositional introduction rumors are played out, we would be overlooking its function as a narrative and as an interpretation. The natural recovery theory is a narrative that carries significant cultural *meaning*.

First, it cannot be verified in a strong sense. Even if reintroduction is considered to be unnecessary and controversial, definite proof that it has never happened does not and cannot exist. Thus, a rejection of the reintroduction stories is no less value-based or normative than their support – both are based on a valuation of the credibility and status of the storyteller.

Contrary to the reintroduction rumor, which incorporates new elements as wolves colonize new areas and as the allegations are met with “facts”, the official explanation itself does not change appreciably. Expansion of populations is a normal phenomenon which need not be elaborated. It is not “black”: it blames nobody and reveals no conspiracy. The natural recovery theory does not qualify as a rumor as we previously defined it, but it is certainly

what Campion-Vincent (1976) terms an “exemplary story”. For centuries, wolves have been fought with every available device with their total destruction as the goal. Yet they have been the strongest in the long run.

”It’s an animal that has always been persecuted and finally it has stood up against everything and finally it comes back with force (...) and this is a strong image for me. No matter how hard we tried to destroy it, there it is: it is back. And I think it will always come back, whatever we do.”

(Conservationist, Isère).

The wolves are powerful symbols of wilderness, and if they can recover, wild nature may not be doomed after all – even in our dismal times.

Like the reintroduction rumors, the official version is subjected to little scrutiny by its followers. Although there is no proof that wolves have been released, neither is there proof of their spontaneous return. The explanation is accepted and repeated, not because its veracity is certain, but because it is seductive: it is, like its rival, a satisfying explanation, reinforcing preconceived notions of the wolf – and of its human adversaries. The natural recovery theory and the reintroduction rumors are different in several respects, but they also share some features. They are desirable explanations that their followers do not want to question and which may function as exemplary stories: one story about a malevolent conspiracy against rural interests, and one success story where a former loser is rehabilitated and returns as “the victorious victim”.

The theory of natural recovery and the image of national uniqueness appear to share a hegemonic position that is unlike the position of the introduction rumors. We will extend our discussion of the function of the national uniqueness narrative later. Suffice it to say here that it too is a narrative with a powerful message. It is definitely not a description of “reality”; it is based on a valuation of certain husbandry practices in relation to a desired environmental state - and indeed of farmers as a social group. Like the natural recovery theory, it is not a rumor in the sense we have used the term. It is, however, a strong value statement – but one that does

not need to make use of the features characteristics of rumors, and one that originates outside of social segments where oral traditions are still important, albeit in rudimentary forms. The narrative of national uniqueness contains components that are demonstrably false. Yet it is met with alternative accounts to a very limited degree, and is widely accepted to the extent that sheep farmers also propagate central aspects of it. The narrative of wolf reintroduction, which cannot logically be demonstrated to be completely false, is ridiculed and overrun by a dominant, official story – but one that is as value-laden as the introduction conspiracy narrative itself. The introduction rumors can be seen as cultural resistance against this dominant narrative and the power structures that sustain it, but the struggle is an uneven one: research reports, government white papers and national media are pitted against oral history and home-made web-pages. Why is the situation so unbalanced? The answer must have something to do with power.

Symbolic Power

The concept of *symbolic power*, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (c.f. Bourdieu and Thompson 1991), seems to hold some promise here. Power is exercised in many ways, some of which are extremely subtle. Indeed, says Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991:164), “we have to be able to discover [power] in places where it is least visible, where it is most completely misrecognized – and thus, in fact, recognized. For symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it.” And further (1991:196): “As instruments of knowledge and communication, ‘symbolic structures’ can exercise a structuring power only because they themselves are structured. Symbolic power is a power of constructing reality, (...)”, and in such a way that even the dominated take it for granted. Thus, symbolic production is an instrument of domination, but not in the sense that it mechanically reproduces and reinforces capitalism’s economic power structures, although there is a strong link here. The field of symbolic production enjoys a relative autonomy, and there is a struggle within “the dominating classes” over the “hierarchy of the principles of

hierarchization” (1991:168). Different groups of specialists have always played a lead role in symbolic production. In our present epoch, this means that we have the new middle class in an influential position. The symbolic producers will emphasize the superiority of their own specific assets (or “capital”, to stick to Bourdieu’s terms) within the field of symbolic production. Today, this will include some perspectives on nature that depart from the utilitarian ones that still enjoy a strong position in the current phase of modernity.

Studies conducted in several countries during the last thirty years have concluded that the environmental movement derives its fundamental support from those groups within the middle class that are highly educated; employed in “non-productive” sectors; and have incomes in the medium range (Cotgrove and Duff 1980; Kriesi 1989; Skogen 1999; Strandbu and Krangle 2003). A plausible interpretation is that the exploitation of nature is an integral part of the global process of modernization and rationalization, which opens up new fields of conflict (e.g. over the environment), not least because of the relative independence from the material production process and related core processes in capitalism experienced by growing parts of the population, particularly by the new middle class (Eder 1993). These social segments’ relatively limited influence on important economic factors leads to an increased emphasis on alternative values (Eder 1993; Skogen 1999). Whether or not they actually pursue anti-materialist lifestyles is another matter, but it has become an ideological beacon for many of them. These perspectives, however, also tend to include the notion that all forms of resource extraction are essentially detrimental, and that nature should be protected against human activities as far as possible. In this context, conservation of all species, including large carnivores, is an absolute imperative.

Bourdieu may be criticized for drawing a too deterministic picture of power relations, not only through the theory of symbolic power, but also through other core concepts, like that of habitus. All this internalization of power relations and dominant worldviews – the worldviews of the powerful – seem to leave little room for change. Regardless of whether Bourdieu can be read in this way, it seems obvious to us that the concept of symbolic power cannot exclude the concept of resistance. For the acceptance of dominant worldviews is not

complete. Indeed, it is probably more typical that various counter-interpretations thrive in the background. Scott (1990) claims that subordinate groups create a secret discourse that represents a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the powerful – what he terms “hidden transcripts”. When the situation calls for it and when conditions allow, the hidden transcripts are brought on-stage and spoken directly in the face of power. This is the case with the reintroduction conspiracy narratives: They may flourish first and foremost among farmers and within the rural working class, but they are also promoted actively in open defiance of the official and dominant accounts.

What is the social basis of symbolic power in the field of nature management and, more specifically, wolf protection? Narratives of natural recovery and national uniqueness originate within a conglomerate of biological science, resource management agencies, and the environmental movement. The middle-class basis and corresponding cultural profile of the environmental movement means that these narratives originate among what Bourdieu and Thompson (1991) has termed specialists in symbolic production – who also share central discourses with science and the state. They thrive primarily within class fractions that master and even mold hegemonic cultural forms and are inextricably bound to higher education and academic knowledge. This is a powerful source of domination; and thus of conflict (Dickens 1996; Dunk 1994; Skogen 2001).

Why is it important for wolf supporters to stress that farmers are both primitive and isolated? It is tempting to suggest a strategy of “divide and conquer”, but we have no basis for claiming that such strategic thinking lies behind the development of this narrative. Nevertheless, it obviously serves a purpose: if local farmers are different from farmers elsewhere, and are inordinately incompetent and careless, then it is all the more obvious that they must change their ways, and that there is nothing wrong with the wolf. However, this chain of reasoning is repeated ceaselessly without much scrutiny. Those who present it are rarely willing or capable of investigating its empirical basis. Many rank-and-file conservationists probably believe as fact that French or Norwegian sheep farming *is* unique, as they have no alternative information. But within the environmental movement at large,

with its international network and efficient information flows, there must be *some* awareness of the larger patterns. Therefore, it does not seem entirely unjustified to assume a certain degree of deliberation when it comes to the construction of the national uniqueness image.

And here is where symbolic power enters the picture: the sheep farmers seldom question the assumption that they are different, that their herding practices are unique. In fact, in the Norwegian material, some of the strongest accounts of national uniqueness came from people associated with farming rather than from wolf supporters. Sheep farmers had accepted their singularity as a truism, and this is an important dimension of symbolic power: the subalterns *accept* the dominant view.

A lot of things could be said of our grazing practice, but I think it is close to perfect. There are lots of people who think it is horrible – only in Norway do we have this strange and unreasonable form of sheep husbandry – but I say we should be damn glad of that; that we don't do it in any other way.
(Sheep farmer, Stor-Elvdal)

The negative picture of farmers is not official in a strong sense. The state supports sheep farming economically, compensates losses, supports preventive measures, and attempts to accommodate the interests of sheep farmers when wolf protection policy is being shaped. However, the image of rural backwardness and lazy farmers with primitive attitudes may still enjoy a hegemonic position. Indeed, it may demonstrate the somewhat schizophrenic attitude of the state regarding rural development – protecting, to some extent, the interests of the farmers on the one hand and implementing numerous measures to “modernize” agriculture and adapt it to a globalized economy on the other. As a consequence, many small farms in marginal areas typical of the French Alps and large parts of Norway are forced to develop new sources of income – something that is strongly encouraged by the authorities. Thus, the image of farmers who insist on continuing sheep herding in a productionist framework as anti-modern and stubborn is on one level in accordance with official policies concerning rural areas, in the sense that it is a picture of the type of rural resident the state no longer wants:

someone who clings on to a “mode of production” that is inflexible and outdated – blocking creative adaptation to a new era. This image is also well adapted to a typical new middle class position on conservation, and thus also on large carnivore protection, which is based on a view of nature in which human activities are generally seen as harmful. From this perspective, downscaling of agriculture and traditional resource extraction could indeed be seen as contributing to conservation.

So why is the national uniqueness image not countered by alternative explanations in the same way as the natural recovery theory is? At least two factors could reasonably be thought to play a part. First, seeking support and documentation in distant places is not near at hand as a strategy for people who are closely tied to a particular locality and who may have such local attachment as a core element in their identity projects (Krange and Skogen in press). The reintroduction stories – while sometimes expanding into the realms of national politics – are always about activities that allegedly take place precisely in the areas where these people live. To the extent that they are based on observation and “data”, these are accumulated locally or recounted by local people. Seeking information about conditions elsewhere in the world to counter images drawn by people who are known to be well connected internationally, would require quite different data collection techniques. It would also require that someone had a suspicion that there was something fishy in the dominant narrative. The type of literary liberties that are obviously permitted in the reintroduction conspiracy stories could probably not be tolerated, as postulates about husbandry practices in other parts of the world could actually be checked quite easily (that “the other side” dares to discount this possibility says something about the power relations at play here).

Second, the image of local uniqueness is not necessarily an unpleasant one to people who identify strongly with a particular place, and who may deliberately construct their identities in opposition to current social forces of urbanization and globalization (Krange and Skogen in press). Also, the argument may be turned around in yet another way; by denigrating livestock production elsewhere, describing it as industrialized, inhumane,

unsustainable, and unable to provide healthy food. Local practices are seen as the opposite of all this, and should thus serve as an example to governments and farmers in other countries.

The mortality rate is higher in other countries, if they graze in fenced-in pastures. If you are going to do that, then you get parasite problems. Then you have to vaccinate, and they do that in other countries. In Australia and New Zealand and in the USA there is anti-parasite treatment of the wool and the meat all the time, they use antibiotics and medicines of all kinds all the time, and we don't do that so much. (...) So, on the whole, (...) I see it as a very sensible and rational way to do sheep farming. (Sheep farmer, Stor-Elvdal)

Conclusion

Our analysis has shown that rumors about wolf reintroduction may be seen as “folk social science” (Campion-Vincent 2005a) or “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990) in that they help people make sense of a troubled situation where power structures are difficult to grasp, and seem impossible to confront. The rumors may be taken one step further, to open defiance, and serve as means of *cultural resistance*, actively challenging the dominant wolf recovery paradigm. In this capacity, the rumors are part of a well-stocked cultural resistance toolbox, whereby some subordinate groups challenge social trends perceived as economically and culturally threatening. Other tools in the box are the challenging of scientific knowledge (Skogen 2001), the symbolic construction of tight rural communities (Skogen and Krangle 2003) and the social construction of an urban onslaught on rural ways of life (Krangle and Skogen in press). These forms of resistance are effective insofar as they provide a sense of autonomy and help bolster “rural pride”, but they have very limited impact outside the cultural level. They do not result in the political influence that would be needed to change the course of development in rural areas – or even the carnivore management regime (Krangle and Skogen 2003; see also Willis 1977).

The symbolic power that the resistance rumors are up against effectively reinforces the hegemony of the official, science-based version of the wolf story, and thus also contributes to a solid fundament for the current management regime – which is indeed based on a

perspective on human relations with nature that is different from a traditional rural view. The alternative accounts are relegated to a realm of popular lore and conspiracy theory, whereas the notion of nationally unique husbandry practices gains a semi-official status and the natural recovery theory is typically seen as undisputable scientific truth.

The social function of different narratives of wolf reappearance may be of considerable interest in its own right, but our ambition has been to identify mechanisms of a more general nature, which may help us to understand the dynamics, not only of land-use conflicts, but also of other social tensions – in any area where subordinate cultural forms are transformed into vehicles of resistance against more or less diffuse power structures. This we have attempted to do by showing that the mechanisms operate in two European regions that are far apart. Although they are commonly seen as very different, these regions share many characteristics, e.g. concerning the relationship between people who live there and the authorities and dominant social groups. If such conditions exist, processes like those we have described here will most likely occur, regardless of geographical location. That means, among other things, that attempts to deal with conflicts over wolves and wolf management – and all similar conflicts – will run into trouble and cause unnecessary frustration unless procedures, practices and not least ambitions are adjusted according to the type of insights outlined here. Precisely what that may mean is a topic for debate in many fora, but also for future research: we need to find out how such knowledge can guide management agencies and policymakers in developing realistic mitigation strategies, and how it can help NGOs overcome the destructive divide that has developed between the environmental movement and many people who live in the areas environmentalists care so deeply about. And we need to ask to what extent wildlife management, as well as other environmental policy issues, can be dealt with in isolation from power relations and societal structures of a more general nature – factors that management agencies and conservationist NGOs have very limited power to influence.

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