



Wild boar hunting in the French Alps: between “objectivation” and “subjectivation” of animals

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Good morning everybody

First, I want to thank the organizers very much for this workshop and for the invitation. I'm very happy to be here.

Before presenting my talk, I will quickly introduce myself.

I'm a French researcher in human geography. Before my phd, I did biology studies and I used to mix with naturalists more than hunters. So, the hunting world is a real alterity for me, close to my door!

I have worked on the wild boar in the French Alps with different focuses, which are all different ways to study our relations and our living together with animals.

In my PHD, I worked on questions of conflict and "living together" raised by wild boar management (in comparison with the conflicts around the wolves' management).

For the last four years, I have worked on a project in collaboration with a departmental federation of hunters. Several surveys have been made on different subjects like hunters' knowledge, the image of hunting, especially the question of the animals' death, etc. We have also worked on the confrontation between different expertises and management strategies when the population of wild boar increases in protected areas.

I'm also a member of a scientific council of a protected area. With a colleague, we have done a survey on the way in which the problem of "reserve effect" has been negotiated by the council.

Today, my talk will be based on those different surveys and will be focused on the confrontation between hunting norms, or "hunting ethics", and wider societal norms in a context of socio-ecological transition.

Two societal norms at least can be identified through the analysis of interviews with hunters about the non-hunters they meet, naturalists, etc. and the legal framework in France:

- In a norm that I name ecological norm, the wild animal is taken as a species belonging to an ecosystem.
- In a norm that I name animal rights norm, the domestic animal is taken as a sentient animal.

The question is: how do hunters respond to these norms? How do they change their discourses and practices?

A priori, we can think that the only ecological norm concerns this practice of the wild. But we will see that the animal rights norm also impacts hunting and it is a problem for this activity, because sentience and death are viewed differently by hunters and non-hunters

I will highlight that different involvements coexist in the world of hunting. They carry different ways of thinking animals and humans, drawing different conceptions of nature and their future.

My talk will comprise of 3 parts: First, I will talk about environmental involvement with animals. Second, about the domestic involvement. And third, about the wild / passion involvement

Just a methodological point: on the location of my surveys (in a department of the french alps, l'Isère and common hunt –not private- practiced in beats – in groups) and the different corpus used for the analysis.

1. Environmental involvement

The hunting elite have led a gradual transformation of the practices of hunting, and rationalization, as a form of environmental involvement. By the way, today, through their engagement with the environment, the hunter's federations have been recognized by being awarded the status of "association for the protection of the environment".

So, hunting organizations like the national federation showcase hunting as an environmental activity and, so, respond to the ecological norm. Here you can see the posters of the new campaign. It is interesting because all the categories, all the key words of conservation of the Nature (with a big N, as thought by Lorimer) are found in their communication, with biodiversity, invasive species, zoonosis, the notion of balance or regulation.

The model of ecological balance is found in the management of ungulates. But the balance is heading towards socio-economic concerns. Hunters have a public service duty in exchange for the right to hunt: they must maintain a balance between agriculture, forestry and hunting concerns and compensate for agriculture and forestry damage.

What does it mean in relation to the animal, the status of animal, of the hunters, etc.?

- Wild boars are apprehended at the scale of the population.
- The importance is put on the finality, the death of animals, with the production of bodies of dead animals, to be turned into hunting statistics.
- Technical and scientific references determine hunting practices from a necropolitical perspective.
- This technicization and rationalization of the relation with the animal eliminates the affective and emotional dimension, as Lorimer has shown about the naturalists
- There is a distancing of animal death: They don't kill but they "cull" "they regulate".
- In fact, hunting is understood as a management tool that must have productive effects (it transforms hunting into a real work)

This environmental position leads not to a dichotomy between wild / domestic but between abundant / not abundant. And the "good relationship" with wild animals is marked by the notion of balance.

And finally, it leads to:

- A way of thinking animals as objects (with no emotional relationship with the animal).
- A way of thinking hunting and hunters as production of dead bodies.

By becoming a form of "management" or "regulation", wild boar hunting has gained a certain legitimacy in conservation world.

- But the flip side of this is, first, the loss of the legitimacy of « hunting for pleasure». This environmental position distinguishes useful hunting which manages abundance and non-useful hunting (for example, black grouse, pheasant, etc.)

- Second, the wild boar is taken as an invasive species. This, in fact, is the view of the actors of conservation. For them, wild boar are excluded from Nature, from conservation concerns (because it's a mundane species, it's a hunters' species). But, because of this, the wild boar loses its status of charismatic species for hunters. However, "ordinary" hunters have not the same discourse of the hunting elites. They talk more about their passion for this charismatic species, that engage them emotionally and bodily, than about their environmental involvement.

This tension between these two animal statuses (invasive or charismatic) is particularly visible when administrative beats are decided in case of overabundance of wild boar.

One of these beats was studied in a protected area. Two positions taken by hunters were visible:

- Those who took part in the beat legitimized it in terms of services to humans
- Those who didn't take part in the beat considered it a denial of the meaning of hunting: They said: "it's slaughter, it's not hunting! "

In this second case, hunters refer to slaughter and slaughterhouses because they oppose a form of normalization and systematization of the act of killing. And for them, this hunting as management corresponds more to destruction, to a production of dead bodies than to a hunt. In opposite, for them, a good hunting engages animals and humans as interacting subjects.

Before presenting this "hunt passion" of wild boar, I would like to do just one quick point on another involvement: the domestic engagement

2. Domestic involvement

If most "ordinary hunters" say they are managers of nature, they put a different meaning than their elite. Regulation or management is more like a way of shaping the landscape and belonging to the landscape (or rather to the taskscape, as says Ingold).

Hunters take care of their land, and of humans and animals that live there.

- They have relationships with farmers;
- They take care of the animals' lives by giving them water points, corn kernels, etc..
- They actively make their land, preserving the paths or hedges.

Behind this attention to the land, there is a form of appropriation that is close to the logic of domestication. They refer to wild boars as "my animals" or "livestock".

This is also close to the management of a form of capital. They say that they have to "preserve the stock" (of animals).

This logic is far from necropolitics and is about taking care of life.

Humans and animals are, here, in a neighborhood, sharing the same familiar land.

This involvement is like cultivating a living-together where future humans and animals are anchored in a land that they have built (taskscape).

3. Wild /passion involvement vs animalist norms

The last logic that I want to develop here is the “hunting for passion”, the passion of meeting with the wild. This passion for the hunt has to face to animal right norms which question animal death.

The animal rights norm takes animals at the scale of the individual.

In this logic, the death of domestic animal has to be justified and very necessary to be accepted (like meat consumption) and in this case, we must be attentive to their welfare. But this domestic norm has consequences on how non-hunters see hunting.

For certain non-hunters, there is no justification of the death of wild animals. Wild animals hunted are taken as innocent victims. For these actors, hunting has only one goal, the killing of animals.

- Hunting is taken as a killing device.
- Hunters are taken as "killers", that can kill animals but also humans.

For those non-hunters, hunting makes wild animals "killable", offering only one possible future to them

"They come to me and say: "Do not shoot us ". Well, it's as if I crossed you and said "Do not spit on me! "

Faced with this strong disapproval of hunting and the animal death it produces, hunters highlight the difference in treatment of wild and domestic animals. For them, in contrast to domestic animals, wild animals can escape and there is no predefined destiny, as there is with the production of meat.

" Finally, a [domestic] animal [...] is bred to be killed, while in the forest ... he can be hunted, he can not be hunted, he still has a bit of luck , while with farming, there is no ambiguity on the fate that is reserved for him so ... They have only to go to slaughterhouses, they will see how it goes. (a hunter)

The hunters also try to make animal death as invisible as possible.

They finally strive to highlight how hunting is a relation with animals taken as subjects.

Indeed, in “hunting for passion”, animals are taken as individuals but according to a different logic than animal right norm, through their agency. What fascinates hunters is stalking and the uncertainty of its outcome.

So, if we look again at the table we can see:

- It is the "means" and not the "finality" that is the most important because it frames the relation to the animal.
- Hunting is not centered on animal death. On the contrary, it includes stalking, animal encounters, killing, sharing of meat, hunting narrative.
- All this is always situated
- This dimension is related to the place of animal agency. This agency creates unpredictability and uncertainty about the outcome of the hunt
- This agency is cared for by hunters who respect a hunting ethic that leaves "the chance to the animal". These hunters, for example, refuse to hunt in snow, because it would not be fair to the animal which would have less luck.

Furthermore, this agency frames an attention to the sentience of animal (but the hunting ethic is different between animals considered as agentive or non-agentive: for example, between wild boar or deer and pheasant)

Finally, in this logic, hunters make animals less killable than "stalkable" with all the uncertainty that it contains.

And here, humans and animals share agency.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have highlighted that different engagements coexist in the practice of hunt.

First, they carry different ways of thinking hunters and animals and their futures: These ways of thinking animals and humans make emerge different categories in conservation of environment, which change the category of wild/domestic.

Second, environmental involvement driven by hunting elites conforms ecological norms. But there is a big gap between discourses of elite and ordinary hunters. Ordinary hunters talk more about their domestic and wild engagement than their environmental engagement. Wild engagement is led by ethic hunting around chance of animal and animal suffering. But the confrontation of societal norms and these hunting ethics shows very different ways of thinking about death and animal suffering.

Domestic and passion engagement are in fact two sides of a same coin. They suppose acting together and neighbourliness in a same land. They are highly linked to the materiality of animal life, death and suffering. Animal death is a part of relation, as taking care of animals' lives.

Hunting shows also that environmental involvement, ecological norms and animal rights norms, despite of their different ethics, are based on immateriality and invisibility of animals death. They are also based on predestined future for wild animals (abundant or invasive) or domestic animals (for meat consumption). There is no uncertainty for their future, in opposite of wild or domestic engagement. Lastly, as these norms belong to the mainstream, they trend to eliminate or hide other way of thinking the nature like wild or domestic engagement in hunting.