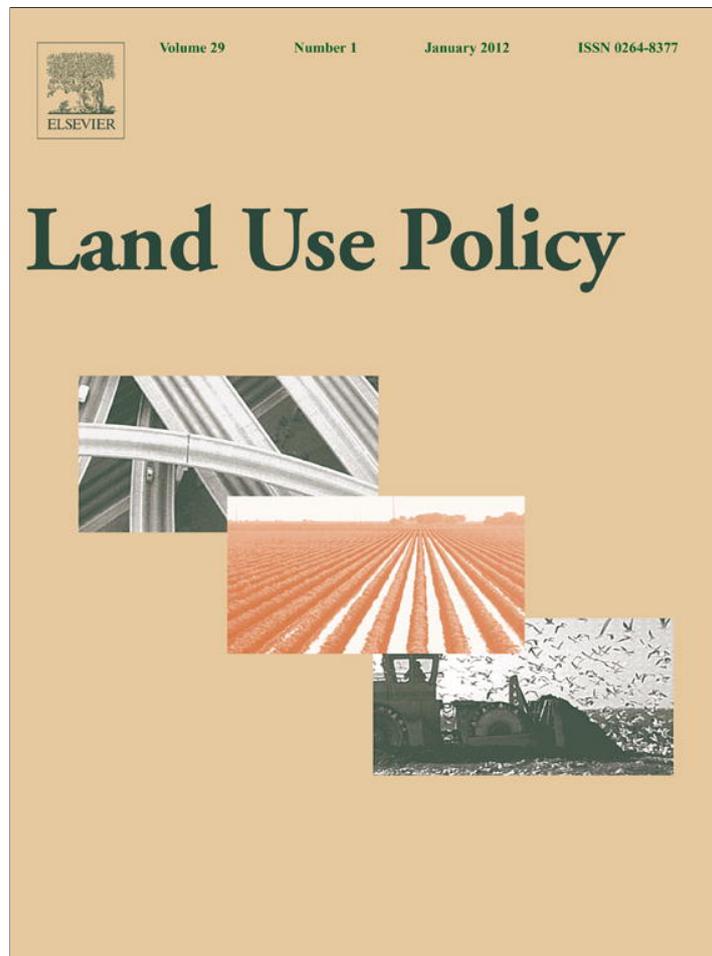


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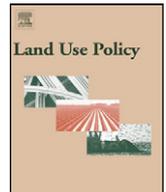
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(De)legitimising hunting – Discourses over the morality of hunting in Europe and eastern Africa

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ABSTRACT

Hunting is an activity that appears to provoke – often immediate and strongly pronounced – moral assessments, i.e., judgments of what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. A large body of literature explores these moral arguments, often from a philosophical or normative perspective, focusing on specific types of hunting. However, studies that ground such explorations in empirical, systematically analysed, yet contextualised data seem to be missing. We argue that such an approach is essential to understand conflicts over hunting and wildlife management, and present data from focus group discussions and interviews with hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics across six countries in Europe and eastern Africa.

Our findings suggest that moral arguments play an extremely important role in the legitimisation and delegitimation of hunting practices through discourse. In particular, study participants referred to the *motives* of hunters as a factor that, in their eyes, determined the acceptability of hunting practices. Moral argumentations exhibited patterns that were common across study sites, such as a perceived moral superiority of the ‘moderate’ and ‘measured’, and a lack of legitimacy of the ‘excessive’. Implicit orders of hunting motives were used to legitimise types of hunting that were suspected to be contested.

On the basis of these findings, we discuss how the moral elements of hunting discourses relate to broader discourses on environmental management, and how these are used to establish (or dispute) the legitimacy of hunting. Our analysis also suggests that there might be more overlap between moral arguments of hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics than popularly assumed, which, where required, could be used as a starting point for conflict management.

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Introduction

The morality of hunting

Hunting is an activity that appears to provoke – often immediate and strongly pronounced – moral assessments, i.e., judgments of what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘good’ or ‘bad’, and such moral arguments are often powerful ingredients in disputes over hunting and wildlife management, whether in political, public or academic realms. Numerous philosophical articles explicitly address the morality of hunting (List, 1997; Veatch Moriarty and Woods, 1997; Peterson,

2004; Bergman, 2005; Cahoone, 2009; Vitali, 2010). Some of these focus on a specific approach to hunting, often taking a normative perspective in defence of a certain hunting type, such as trophy or sport hunting (Curnutt, 1996; Gunn, 2001; Van de Pitte, 2003; List, 2004; Dickson, 2009; Kretz, 2010). Other, often historical analyses address morality questions in a more implicit fashion (MacKenzie, 1987; Steinhart, 1989; Adams, 2009). However, only a handful of empirical – e.g., psychological, sociological or anthropological – studies exist that elucidate contemporary understandings of the legitimacy and morality of hunting.

Among these, Dahles (1993) and Marvin (2000) present hunters’ views and argumentation related to the legitimacy of their practices as part of their anthropological analyses of hunting in the Netherlands and England, respectively. And, based on a wide variety of textual data, Minnis (1996) develops a “comprehensive and exhaustive” (Minnis, 1996, p. 349) list of arguments raised against hunting, and contends that debates over hunting should not be

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simplified as a dispute between hunters and 'anti-hunters', as acceptability of hunting is context-specific, dependent on hunting methods, motives, the species hunted, places and participants. Heberlein and Willebrand (1998) replicate Kellert's (1979) survey and canvass attitudes of the general public in the USA and Sweden towards three types of hunting, namely (a) traditional native subsistence hunting, (b) hunting for meat and recreation and (c) hunting for sport and recreation. Compared to Kellert's findings 20 years earlier, attitudes had not significantly changed: native subsistence hunting was supported by a large majority in both countries, followed by hunting for meat and recreation, whereas majorities in both countries were opposed to hunting for sport and recreation. While Heberlein and Willebrand's (1998) findings underscore Minnis' (1996) statement that views on the legitimacy of hunting tend to differentiate between different types of hunting (rather than to support or condemn all hunting per se) and that perceptions of hunting *motives* play an important role in shaping these views, their study also highlights the limitations of very concise questionnaire items in eliciting people's perceptions and attitudes towards moral aspects of hunting. For example, their findings provide little insight into the question how their respondents disentangled complex notions like "traditional native subsistence hunting" or "hunting for recreation *and* meat". However, in-depth qualitative research that includes the views of both hunting and non-hunting individuals and groups on moral issues related to a range of types of hunting seems to be missing. As such insights are essential to understand conflicts over hunting and wildlife management, our study sets out to address this gap.

The moralities of land management

Previous research has explored the moralities associated to land management, such as farming, in the context of moral geographies, i.e., the question how "assumptions about the relationship between people and their environments may reflect and produce moral judgements, and how the conduct of particular groups or individuals in particular spaces may be judged appropriate or inappropriate" (Matless, 2000, p. 522). While moral arguments have to be understood in relation to their histories and geographies (Setten, 2004), the appreciation of their contextuality does not preclude us from investigating similarities and patterns of moralities *across* contexts (Smith, 2000). The four 'axes' of moral arguments identified by Brown (2007a,b) in her study on crofting (i.e., small-scale agriculture including the management of common property) in northwest Scotland could potentially provide a framework to organise enquiry into such patterns, also in relation to land management issues other than crofting: Brown (2007a,b) distinguishes between (i) identity-based (who counts as a proper crofter?), (ii) practice-based (what counts as proper crofting?), (iii) objective-based (what purposes ought crofting to serve?) and (iv) place-based (where is crofting seen as appropriate?) arguments. These four axes resonate with the types of arguments that Minnis (1996, see above) mentions in passing as underpinning the acceptance of hunting in the U.S.

Morality, legitimacy and discourse – the present study

Our study aims to provide a better understanding of what is seen as morally acceptable hunting across a wide range of cultural and environmental contexts. In this sense, it provides insights into the 'moral geographies' (see section 'The moralities of land management') of hunting. Unlike many other studies that address hunting from a normative perspective (see section 'The morality of hunting'), we are interested in the empirical diversity of moral arguments, exploring the discourse of a wide range of people, including both hunters and non-hunters.

Three concepts form the backbone of our analysis: morality, legitimacy and discourse. We refer here to moral views as evaluations of hunting that present a certain activity as right or just – or as wrong and unjust. Strictly speaking, we investigate implicit ethics, i.e., theoretical aspects or conscious reflections of morality (Smith, 2000, p. 10), as expressed in people's conversations about hunting. However, the boundaries between such implicit ethics and enacted morality, i.e., "what people actually believe and do, or the rules they follow" (Smith, 2000) are fluid.

We analyse how moral views are used to legitimise (or delegitimise) hunting in general or specific types of hunting in particular. Legitimacy can be understood as the perception that something (an act, person or institution) is "in accord with the norms, values, beliefs, practices, and procedures accepted by a group" (Zelditch, 2001 p. 33) – and legitimation, as a process, helps to stabilise social structures, while delegitimation can serve to challenge and destabilise such structures (Zelditch, 2001). The concept of legitimacy is thus closely related to morality in that it refers to what is seen as 'right', but unlike morality, can help to explain social processes of conflict and consensus building.

We interpret moral views and (de)legitimations brought forward in talk here as parts of discourses over hunting. Discourses, i.e., shared "ensembles of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena" (Hajer, 2006, p. 67), often have very strong moral components that reflect ideas of 'right' and 'wrong'. Surprisingly, however, such normative components are usually not explicitly considered in discourse analyses (Doulton and Brown, 2009; see e.g., Dryzek's, 2005 analysis of environmental discourses). By contrast, we focus here on the normative elements of discourses over hunting.

In addition, we argue that these normative components should not be treated as isolated arguments, but explored against the backdrop of wider discourses on human–nature interactions. Like Haste and Abrahams (2008, p. 381), we examine "how moral accounts are constructed, normalised and drawn upon in discourse" and at the same time, how these moral accounts fit into their culturally embedded discursive contexts. We thus consider normative notions as both contributing to and influenced by discourses.

Here, we apply these concepts to provide insights into the ways how moral arguments work as part of discourses. To do so, we take a grounded approach, analysing talk (here: interviews and group discussions) about hunting from sites across six countries, each with their own cultural and ecological peculiarities. However, we do not attempt a comparative analysis, as strict comparisons would not be meaningful, given the qualitative and grounded approach we chose.

Methods

Study sites and sampling

We conducted focus group discussions and in-depth interviews in four European and two eastern African countries. Within each of these countries, we selected study sites that together cover a wide variety of ecological and social contexts in which hunting takes place (Table 1), ranging from agro-pastoralism at the margin of the market economy in Tanzania and Ethiopia (see Lowassa et al., 2013), trophy hunting in both Europe and Africa, hunting clubs in Croatia to sporting estates in Scotland or Spain (Arroyo et al., 2012; Díaz-Fernández et al., 2012).

In each of the study areas, we targeted three broad groups: (i) people who hunted, aiming to include hunters with a variety of interests and backgrounds, (ii) people who did not hunt and (iii) organised hunting critics who engaged in animal welfare, animal rights or anti-poaching activities. Focus group discussions

Table 1
Data collection and composition of the sample.

Country (code)	Study area	Participants	Thematic focus	Number of group discussions + interviews	Number of participants
Ethiopia (ET)	South Omo Bale mountains Addis Ababa	Local residents (agro-pastoralists)	Illegal hunting, trophy hunting	9+5	105
		Professional hunters, governmental and non-governmental conservationists		3+0 4+0	32 39
Tanzania (TZ)	Western Serengeti	Local residents (agro-pastoralists: hunters and non-hunters) Conservation actors (anti-bushmeat hunting)	Illegal bushmeat hunting	8+3	79
Norway (NO)	Aurskog-Høland, Flå, Oslo, Bærum	Hunters	All types of hunting	8+15	50
		Non-hunters and animal rights activists		4+11	31
Scotland (SCO)	(Lower) Deeside	Game managers and hunters Non-hunters and animal welfare actors	Deer stalking, gamebird shooting, land management for stalking/shooting	3+9 5+0	37
Spain (ES)	Castilla-La Mancha	Game managers and hunters	All types of hunting, focus on red-legged partridge	3+0	21
		Non-hunters (rural and urban) and conservation actors		3+0	19
Croatia (CRO)	Gorski kotar	Local residents (hunters, non-hunters and non-hunters)	All types of hunting	5+8	26
		Conservation and animal welfare actors		0+3	3

often made use of existing groups, such as hunting associations, sports clubs, animal welfare groups or village committees, and were complemented by a targeted selection of participants we expected to hold specific or different views. Overall, our sampling thus aimed for diversity (i.e., theoretical sampling; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), rather than for a statistically representative reflection of different groups in our study countries. Where we refer to groups or places in our presentation of the results, we thus do not imply comparison between countries, study sites or hunters and non-hunters. Rather, we use these qualifiers to portray discourses over hunting in an as differentiated and contextualised manner as possible.

Data collection

Our interviews and focus group discussions followed a jointly developed guideline that was pre-tested, discussed and refined in several iterations. The order of most questions was flexible and depended on the flow of the conversations, but in general, interviews and group discussions both started with a broad question about the participants' views on and relationship with the local area, land management and land use. We then focused the conversations on hunting. Where participants hunted themselves, we first probed their own experiences, preferences and histories, and then went on to learn about their views on other people's hunting activities. If participants did not hunt, we explored their views on hunting, particularly in the study area. The last part of the conversations was usually dedicated to the participants' views on wildlife management.

We aimed to establish an open atmosphere in our conversations which allowed participants to express what they might see as minority views. This was of particular relevance in eastern Africa, where hunting by local residents without permits is widespread, but illegal (see Lowassa et al., 2013).

After a joint training session in the Tanzanian study sites in February 2010, the bulk of the data collection took place in 2010 and was finalised in 2011. All conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, usually in the national language, except in Tanzania and Ethiopia where transcriptions were translated into English to facilitate joint analysis.

Data analysis

We analysed our data in an iterative and grounded approach. In a first step, each of the country teams explored their data and identified main themes and topics. On the basis of these, discussed at a workshop in November 2010, we developed a joint and relatively broad coding framework. Here, we mainly draw on data from one large coding category that captured evaluations of hunting. In a third step, we then identified the main types of moral arguments within this category in an iterative fashion. Finally, we systematically analysed all text in this coding category according to this typology of arguments. Only then did we relate our findings to portrayals of environmental discourses in the literature, and to Brown's (2007a) axes of moral geographies (see section 'The moralities of land management').

Overview: moral arguments on hunting

Talking about hunting often seemed to imply talking about a moral issue. This was particularly pertinent in our European cases, but also among conservation actors in eastern Africa: many of our participants talked, prompted or not, about their views on the legitimacy of some types of hunting, and the illegitimacy of others. Few referred to hunting at large:

I think that any kind of hunting should be absolutely prohibited, I'm sorry for those who are in this line of business, but this thing of killing lives, I think that is not right. What's the problem? I think humans believe they are superior, they are the masters of everything and they see a rabbit, they don't mind, they think a rabbit or a deer, that's nothing. ES-NH-2-M-30¹

More often, however, participants distinguished in their moral assessments between different kinds of hunting:

¹ Sources of quotes are labelled as follows: country code – hunter (H), non-hunter (NH), member of animal welfare/rights organisation (AW) or conservation organisation (CO) – identifier of discussion/interview in country – gender – approximate age. For country codes see Table 1. F: female; M: male.

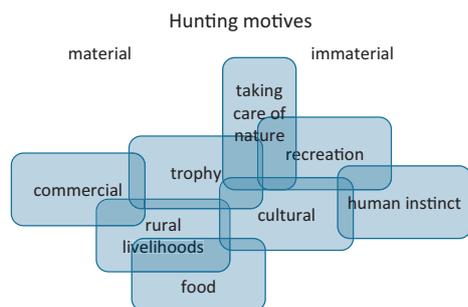


Fig. 1. Overview of motives for hunting mentioned by study participants in six countries (see Table 1) to either legitimise or delegitimise hunting. Overlapping areas denote conceptual similarities as expressed in our data, but size of overlapping areas does not imply degree of conceptual similarity. Not all motives were mentioned in all study sites. "Recreation" includes enjoyment of the various stages of the hunt, socialising, learning and being in nature. "Taking care of nature" includes stewardship, controlling game and non-game species.

Killing something for food seems reasonable. Killing something for population control seems reasonable. Killing something for fun just doesn't seem right to me. SCO-NH-14-M-40

Such more differentiated judgements typically drew on one of four main types of arguments: (i) arguments that distinguished between types of hunting based on the species hunted, (ii) arguments that referred to the techniques and approaches used for hunting, (iii) arguments related to the motives and purposes of hunting or (iv) arguments that relied on distinctions between different types of hunters, often opposing rich incomers or outsiders to local hunters.

In the remainder of this article, we focus on those arguments that referred to the motives and purposes of hunting, as these arguments provided most insight into the moralities of hunting and were strongly drawn on across all our study sites.

Motives as moral arguments: (De)legitimations of hunting

Overall, arguments that referred to the motives for hunting appeared to be the most important for our participants when discussing the legitimacy of hunting. We understand 'motives' here as the reasons, purposes or objectives of hunting as seen by the respective speaker. Eight clusters of motives emerged from our data (Fig. 1), ranging from motives with a tangible material basis, such as the provision of food, to more immaterial purposes, such as the preservation of cultural heritage.

Hunting for food

Generally, across all study sites, two major arguments prevailed. First, participants across all groups and countries maintained that where hunting was conducted out of a genuine need for food, it was legitimate. Second, it was frequently argued that for whatever other reason hunting was conducted, it was only acceptable if the meat was eaten – except where pest species, such as "ground vermin", were hunted that were seen as inedible. For some, for example in Croatia and Spain, the combination of these two maxims resulted in the argumentation that in contemporary Europe, obtaining food should not be the main reason for hunting anymore, but that if hunting was conducted, the meat should be eaten. Several hunters drew on such rationale to explain why they, as a consequence, would not hunt animals that could not be consumed – as, for example, this gamekeeper who explained why he refused a farmer's request to shoot the roe deer that were feeding on his winter turnips:

I said none of these deer, they have got no meat and are in no condition to be going on anybody's table. I would just be killing them and putting them somewhere to... I mean I can't bury them; I'm not going to dig a hole for seven deer, so what'd you do with them? So I said no. SCO-H-9-M-60

At the same time, there also was a strong view among hunters and some non-hunters and hunting critics, that game meat was tasty, 'good' and 'green' and thus to be preferred over meat from domestic livestock. For some, hunting "for the pot" – even where food could be easily bought in a supermarket – was thus an important reason that legitimised hunting.

Well, personally, hunting for subsistence, I think, is ok, isn't it? You live in the countryside, you kill a deer and you eat it, I think that is very good. And even in a, say, 'green' economy, let's say, in societies that are already 'fattened', well, it could be an activity, if it was balanced, that would be necessary, hunting wild species to supplement the diet. Sports hunting, in contrast, I don't like. ES-CO-6-M-45

The argumentation among our Ethiopian and Tanzanian participants was largely similar, but definitions of what was 'necessary' diverged. Whereas some rural residents in Ethiopia maintained that hunting was only allowed "in times of hunger", Tanzanian participants did not distinguish between hunting for food and to increase household income; in practice, both motives were undistinguishable as a hunter could keep a part of his dried meat for his own family, while he might sell another part on. And while, for example, owners of hunting companies in Ethiopia felt that local residents' (illegal) "hunting for the stomach" was acceptable, others warned that compared to trophy hunting which focused only on male individuals, hunting for food was indiscriminate and could nowadays not be considered viable anymore, given the increasing human population.

Hunting for income: rural livelihoods versus commercialised hunting

Strong arguments were also brought forward in relation to the income-generating function of hunting. Generally, hunting that supported rural livelihoods was seen as legitimate, whereas 'commercial' hunting was usually contested. Such argumentation was offered by hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics from all study areas. In many places, it was argued that hunting contributed substantially to rural economies, which ultimately benefited the "whole community" (CRO-H-3-M-42).

However, where hunting was seen to provide benefits beyond the necessary, it was widely regarded as unacceptable. This was a fine line which was not always explicitly discussed, but often, the label 'commercial' was used in a derogatory sense. 'Commercial' then seemed to imply that benefits were either not accruing locally (for example, in Tanzania, where not local hunters but well-off middlemen would reap the revenue from illegal bushmeat trade), or that the hunting was excessive and to the benefit of individuals, beyond their basic needs. For example, a gamekeeper criticised commercial pheasant shoots, as he felt the high number of birds shot did not allow the hunter to experience the shoot in an appropriate fashion:

I hate to see big shoots, big commercial shoots. [...] if you shoot more than like 15 birds for your day you don't remember half of them. I mean, I was on a big shoot one day and shot 100 and... well I wasn't counting the shoot that day but it doesn't matter, there were 190 birds shot, right, and I think I hit like 11 for my day and I remembered every bird. But talking to some of the guys later on they didn't even remember half the birds they shot yes. [...] Well, he had maybe shot 30 birds so he didn't remember. [...] but

a lot of the guys, say, they are kind of, well I suppose oil-related or ken, they are just rich people, some of them, and because they have got that kind of money they can just go and buy what they want you see, but kind of like what I am doing is more rewarding. SCO-H-11-M-50

Even where the term 'commercial' was used in a merely descriptive sense and simply denoted the generation of money, commercial hunting was often criticised, for example, because a prioritisation of hunting for business was seen to compromise other notions of hunting that were considered as more important, such as stewardship. In addition, as implied in the quote from Scotland (above), commercial hunting was seen to attract rich outsiders who were often regarded to lack the necessary skills, and who distorted the market so that less well-off local hunters were excluded. Such argumentation was thus not necessarily always directed at commercial hunting per se, but referred to its negative implications in relation to potentially conflicting motives, hunting techniques, or the people involved in hunting.

H6: *Yes, but then it is a totally different culture, it is a corporate culture, you might say – as I see it. Then it is a job. The hunting culture disappears. [...]*

H7: *If hunting is shifting in that direction, I am out.* NO-H-1-M-48

Trophy hunting

In many ways, trophy hunting was conceptually related to hunting for commercial reasons: The idea of 'commercial hunting' was obviously broader, encompassing not only the sale of the opportunity to hunt trophy game, but also small game (such as pheasant, partridges and grouse), and hunting for the sale of the meat or other animal products. Among hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics alike, hunting for trophies was often seen as an unacceptable reason if it was the only or main one.

Because people who are primarily interested in the trophy, they haven't understood, they haven't got a clue what it is about. [...] I usually have many good people coming here, and the people... I like if they come here expecting nothing but really expecting just a good time out in the scenery, and they say "oh well, I don't mind, you decide of course if you have to take out certain deer but I am not a trophy hunter" and I know we will have a great week. SCO-H-8-M-55

While many hunters thus portrayed trophy hunting as a great opportunity to enjoy nature – or to foster wildlife conservation – they also maintained that standards of good marksmanship should be observed to make this type of hunting acceptable. The use of helicopters or the hunt of essentially tame animals, as Norwegian and Scottish hunters purported occurred in other countries, was abhorred. Interestingly, also south Ethiopian residents – often themselves (illegal) hunters – criticised trophy hunting for using illegal methods, such as torch lights at night, leading to the decline of wildlife populations:

Unlike us, they are the ones who finished all the wild animals here. Because they hunt during the night using lights. They kill indiscriminately, from smaller to the bigger animals, and they are the ones who make the wildlife migrate to Kenya. ET-H (South Omo)-5-M-50

Some hunters also felt that current trophy hunting practices gave hunters a bad name, and thus threatened the legitimacy of hunting in general in the eyes of the wider public:

We hunters put ourselves in a difficult situation if we go out and show too many pornographic pictures, I would almost say, of walls

full of grouse. Lying on top of a moose and having our picture taken, smiling, old safari style. [...] We must be very careful with that, and that is because the greens grow stronger and stronger. I mean groups that do not see any reason why we should hunt. NO-H-1-M-45

While several non-hunters shared the hunters' views, especially in relation to the potential of trophy hunting for wildlife conservation, for some organised hunting critics, trophy hunting was the essence of illegitimate hunting as it was seen as the combination of two unacceptable reasons: hunting for profit and hunting for fun.

Hunting as caring for nature

A distinct set of reasons for hunting alluded to the hunters' influence on their natural environment. This included hunters' management of game species, their antagonists (e.g., predators) and other animals considered as pests or vermin, and the overall ecosystem. Such management activities would mainly consist in the culling of those species that were seen to be overabundant for a given land use (e.g., the control of large herbivores to allow forestry), but especially in Croatia, management also included feeding of game and vaccinations.

A hunter is... a hunter is a higher level of somebody who loves nature. Somebody who truly enjoys nature and loves this. [...] But not the type of hunter who only thinks about his rifle [...]

and shooting – there are so many other things that constitute a hunter. [...] This begins with supplementary feeding, observing, maintaining trails, watering holes, and salt feeding sites; there are so many things here [...]

– all those shooting stands, observation posts, hunters make all those things and then take care of [animals], although not only in that strict sense, but even regarding diseases. Listen, regarding rabies – among foxes – only hunters do the, let's say, dirty job [of vaccination] [...] – all those things hunters did without any compensation being given to them! CRO-H-9-M-54

Consequently, many hunters across all countries – except the African (illegal) resident hunters² – labelled themselves as conservationists or stewards of the land. An extension of this argument was that without hunting, certain species and habitats of conservation or iconic importance would not exist anymore (e.g., in Spain, Croatia and Scotland), or that the land now used for hunting and thus kept natural would be converted to agricultural use (Ethiopia).

Hunting was thus presented as an essential instrument of nature conservation and, hence, as a legitimate and important reason for hunting – and this was also shared by some non-hunters and hunting critics:

In principle I agree with hunting, not so much the sport hunting for antlers counting or what have you, but definitely I think there's a huge problem with the deer and pest species and they should be completely culled back to stop other environmental damage. SCO-NH-14-M-20

You know, it used to be the animals themselves who [kept the balance]. The weak ones were taken and that was that. Now there are hardly any predators left and then the animals suffer. An animal with, for instance, a bad hip will keep walking around, suffering, because it is not killed by a predator. But luckily a hunter may come and see the sick animal and put it out of its misery. NO-AW-12-W-60

² Interestingly, residents of the Bale mountains (Ethiopia) did consider themselves as stewards of wildlife, and felt that hunting outfitters who organised trophy hunting in their area did not sufficiently appreciate this.

Some, like the Croatian hunter quoted above, felt that their contribution was not recognised by the wider public. But while many non-hunters and also some hunting critics did appreciate the role of hunters in ecosystem management, they tended to be more critical, particularly where illegal and unselective methods like snares or poison were used and caused unnecessary animal suffering. For hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics alike, the key issue was here the role that hunters ought to play in nature – a system that humans had already interfered with anyway.

We have been doing it for such a long time that I don't think nature will be able to achieve a balance on its own. Definitely not. NO-H-2-M-48

While some thus saw it as human responsibility to maintain the balance in an ecosystem, others, among them also hunters, cautioned that game managers should not “act like God” (SCO-H-8-M-55), and that culling large numbers of deer just to allow reforestation was, essentially, “assassination” (SCO-H-1-M-65). The exact definition of good stewardship was thus much debated. However, hunters' views across many countries coincided that the essence of hunting was stewardship and taking care of nature.

Hunting for recreation

A further cluster of motives concerned hunting for recreational purposes. This included motives such as wanting to be in nature, learn about nature, developing one's skills, enjoying the challenge or thrill (of pursuing an animal and of the kill itself), or socialising, and was exclusively discussed among the European hunters. Overall, most arguments that alluded to recreation were seen to be acceptable, at best, as a secondary motive. The idea of hunting for “fun”, “pleasure” or “excitement” – which usually meant a mix of recreational motives that included the thrill of the chase and the actual kill – was most controversial. Many hunting critics and non-hunters argued that hunting (and especially killing) for fun could never be legitimate:

I'll be honest: I think playing tennis is a hobby, football is a hobby, playing with your playstation, but not hunting. For me, hunting is almost a crime. ES-NH-2-F-25

Hunting to socialise – and this often included a meal, sharing game meat – was widely seen as an important reason for hunting, at least in European contexts:

H2: *My son lives just over the ridge there. And they gather there a lot. [...] So they are a really tight group. But just look at those who sit inside staring at their computers! If they go out, it is Saturday or Sunday, and they go to a pizza bar or something like that. That is not very social!*

H1: *I can give you an example, from the first day they were tracking lynx [this season]. My son came along, and he brought another one, and also a landowner who owns the forest up there [...]. And then yet another one came along, a guy who had been tracking from the other side. And all these people came [to our home] and my wife made a pile of waffles for them, for the whole gang. So that was a social thing.*

F: Yes, I see.

H1: *So that runs very deep.*

H2: *Yes, it does, it certainly does. And that is a good thing!* NO-H-3-M-72

In the Spanish case, however, socialising was not viewed as a legitimate motive for hunting where its main aim was business networking and thus not directly related to hunting as such.

Others suggested that hunting might be enjoyable but that this ought not to be a motivation, or at least not the sole or primary one. Many hunters subscribed to this latter view, and pointed out that they might hunt largely for recreational reasons, but that to them, the killing of animals was the least important element of the hunt:

But I never go in the woods, let's say, the rifle is with me – [I don't go] with an intention, plan to bring back something in my backpack – the main purpose somehow is to relax [...], observe nature, to enjoy the peace, silence, and each and every hunter, whoever is a hunter – in hunting there is always something new, something that has not been experienced so far. [...] Being a hunter is not about shooting just some large carnivores: The hunter enters into the soul of everything that surrounds him. CRO-H-9-M-54

Implicit in this argumentation was sometimes the notion that hunting, by virtue of the intimate relationship with wildlife it allowed, was a way to obtain better knowledge on nature than non-hunters could ever achieve:

I think a hunter, compared to others who don't hunt, is more interested in animals. Hunters are most interested in the animals they hunt themselves. But they know a lot about other things as well, even if they have specialised knowledge about [those animals] that they are most interested in. NO-H-4-W-42

The excitement that the actual killing could provide was thus presented very differently by different hunters. While some described how hunting success made them proud – of their own skills, or the performance of their dogs – others said that hunting gave them a thrill, but toned this statement down by adding that the actual kill was not necessary to feel this thrill, but that it largely resulted from becoming “one with nature and with the quarry you hunt” (SCO-H-8-M-55). Several non-hunters could understand this sentiment, but felt that to make such hunting legitimate, the animal had to have a fair chance of escaping, or argued that while they appreciated that hunting was done for recreational reasons, the suffering of the animals was too high a price to pay, given that other activities might offer similar recreational effects:

I have this good friend that is a keen hunter, especially large game, and he talks about the adrenaline of waiting for the deer, of shooting... and I say “mate, go bungee jumping”. ES-NH-2-M-30

Hunting for cultural reasons

Another common group of moral statements argued that hunting was legitimate where it fostered the cultural heritage of a place or a family lineage. In southern Ethiopia, hunting was so integral to local traditions that, for men, *not* hunting was seen as negative, and the current youth was criticised for losing the skills necessary for the hunt. Elsewhere, both hunters and non-hunters drew on similar, but less generalised, arguments:

I think the other thing which is really important to remember is that the vast majority of the people that are working the estates are not doing it for the money. They do it because it is a way of life, and it is part of their culture and heritage, and you know, we are being pushed all the time by [the governmental conservation agency]. When or if the sporting interest deteriorates or starts to fade away in parts of Scotland, part of our heritage will be lost. SCO-H-3-M-35

For some, the need to maintain this heritage even called for legislation that protected hunting as a threatened practice of a cultural minority:

People in other parts of the world have indigenous rights, I mean like the Inuit and the Aborigines, and although there is no such thing as an indigenous people in western. . . , well there are in northern Scandinavia, but not here, but I sort of feel the same thing should apply, it is part of our way of life. [. . .] The opportunities that we have get seen to be endlessly diminished and legislated against, and we do feel, and we have the conversation a lot between us and various friends of ours, that we just feel more and more under siege, under scrutiny almost. SCO-H-2-M-45

This speaker thus actively used the term 'indigenous' to legitimise hunting in Scotland. In eastern Africa, some conservationists drew on similar ideas of 'cultural' hunting, contrasting traditional hunting techniques with spears or bow and arrow (deemed as legitimate) with the (illegitimate) modern use of snares or even automatic rifles. For European contexts, this sort of reasoning was disputed by some non-hunters and hunting critics, who felt that the fact that an activity could be considered as cultural heritage did not necessarily mean that it should not be abandoned.

However, hunting for cultural reasons that were seen as not genuine or as "showing off" was generally seen as unacceptable by hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics. Recurrently, and across all European sites, participants gave examples of 'pretend-hunters' whose alleged main aim was to show off their gear, vehicle, firearms, or wealth in general. Such motives for hunting were heavily criticised.

Hunting as part of human nature

By comparison, hunting was relatively rarely portrayed as a part of human nature.

Something in us, in our genetic code because we used to be hunters. . . for a long, long time. . . And then we stopped being hunters, but it stayed in us; in some more, in some less. CRO-H-5-M-53

While none of our participants explicitly used this argument as an overt legitimisation for hunting, where it was used by hunters, it was usually set in a positive context, implicitly creating an image of hunting as naturally human. By contrast, participants from animal rights groups flatly dismissed this notion, providing elaborate arguments why such legitimations did not hold:

I used to hunt and fish myself [in my youth], so I know that excitement. OK, call it an instinct, the drive to capture your prey. But that "instinct" has also led to a lot of excitement [without hurting animals], because I have the same intense feeling as a nature photographer, when I am close to capturing the perfect image. When I have been lying still for hours, waiting for a bird to appear, exactly where I expected it. I don't think that instinct or whatever you call it is unique to hunting and fishing. And even if it was, I don't think following that instinct can justify an activity that is ethically questionable. Humans have many strange instincts, and some of those have horrendous consequences if we live them out. So I don't think that can be an argument for hunting. It might help to explain why people hunt, but it can never justify hunting. NO-AW-15-M-35

Motives of hunting: discursive patterns

While the different groups in our different study sites diverged in the detail of their argumentation, we could discern discursive patterns that were used across countries and backgrounds.

One core element of our participants' talk about hunting was that motives were frequently played out against each other, usually spontaneously and unprompted by our questions. Hunting motives were not only compared across categories (e.g., the legitimacy of

LEGITIMATE		ILLEGITIMATE
Genuine subsistence	Hunting for food ↔	Where meat could be obtained otherwise → hunters as "butchers"
Earning needed money in a somehow underprivileged place to support rural livelihoods, deserving beneficiaries	Hunting as a livelihood ↔	"Commercial", luxury, greed
Caretaking, stewardship, conservation	Hunting as caring for nature ↔	Playing god, assassination, interference
Enjoyment, learning, connection to nature	Hunting for recreation ↔	Solely for excitement, thrill, adrenaline release
Passing on heritage	Hunting for cultural reasons ↔	Showing off
Measured, moderate, controlled Providing wider benefits to nature and society		Excessive, uncontrolled Self-centred, focused on the individual
←----->		

Fig. 2. Overview of gradients formed by moral arguments on hunting motives, used to (de-)legitimise hunting, based on data from all six study areas. Notions shown on the left side were usually evaluated as legitimate reasons for hunting, whereas notions shown on the right were largely seen as not legitimate.

hunting for food compared to hunting for recreation), but also within these categories. Strikingly, there seemed to be an underlying spectrum within each cluster of motives (Fig. 2), and most motives could be interpreted as both legitimate and illegitimate, depending on what side of the spectrum a specific case was seen to be on. For example, hunting to earn a livelihood was usually seen as acceptable if the beneficiaries were known and seen as underprivileged or in need – and such argumentation could apply to both European and African countries. However, where hunting was considered as excessive, 'commercialised', benefiting well-off and greedy businesspeople or landowners, it was illegitimate. Similarly, where hunting was seen as considerate, care-taking stewardship, it could be legitimised – by contrast, if hunters were perceived to force themselves on nature, it was unacceptable. Overall it seemed that all these gradients were underpinned by notions of the moderate, considerate and controlled as the acceptable end of the spectrum, and the excessive, uncontrolled on the other end (Fig. 2). Such gradients were sometimes even explicitly expressed by our participants:

It is awful. It is horrible. I know, my neighbour – I will not mention his name or what but – he catches, he brags about catching a few hundreds of dormice in one season and... [there is a difference] if somebody catches 5 or 10 dormice for food because it is tasty and if somebody catches 200, 300, 400 and makes ointment and freezes that... CRO-NH-18-F-29

And while our participants might have diverged in their attributions of such motives to specific cases of hunting, the underlying values seemed to concur: all participants appeared to agree that if a motive was excessive, it could never be acceptable, whereas the same motive in moderation could form a legitimate reason for hunting. In addition, the gradients underpinning these moral arguments often (but not always) seemed to follow a continuum from the self-centred to the societal. Hunting for motives that solely considered the benefit of the individual (e.g., for the thrill, financial revenue, showing off, dominating nature) appeared to be regarded as less legitimate than hunting for reasons that took community or wider societal benefits into account.

A second striking discursive feature was the role of an implicit hierarchy of motives. Repeatedly, participants argued that a certain motive ought not to be the primary reason for hunting, but that it might be acceptable as a secondary motive. Motives that were typically considered as 'subordinate' included hunting for trophies (in all European sites) and recreation, particularly with regard to hunting for fun or to socialise:

I think providing the meat must be most important. You need a good reason. You can't just go around shooting all that moves; it has to be about providing food. And then there is the need to manage the stock, but I don't think hunting is primarily about experiencing nature, because then. . . well, of course it is that also, but if you need a gun and a dog to get out in the forest, I think that sounds stupid. If you just want to get out you can buy a poodle and a walking stick.
NO-H-7-M-45

Often, however, none of the motives was clearly pronounced as a legitimate 'primary' reason – rather, the acceptability of certain motives as a primary reason emerged by inverse inference. The 'necessary condition' for hunting thus often remained unclear – despite the important role that such implicit hierarchies of motivations played in the argumentation. In a continuation of this argumentation, the positive effects for the hunters personally, such as recreation, were sometimes implicitly portrayed as a well-earned reward for their contributions to the greater good, such as wildlife stewardship. This way, the combination with morally 'superior' motives legitimated hunting for morally 'inferior' ones, and, in a win–win situation, created favourable outcomes for the individual hunter, nature and society at large.

In addition, it seemed that some cases could be exempt from moral considerations of legitimacy altogether: Where people were not seen to have a choice other than to hunt in order to survive, no further examinations of their hunting activities were attempted: "We tend not to want to impose our values on cultures and societies that don't have the choices that are available in the West" (SCO-AW-17-W-50). Hunters' agency was thus a precondition for moral evaluations of hunting.

Several motives were seen – also by many hunters – as particularly problematic, among them commercial and trophy hunting (see sections 'Hunting for income: Rural livelihoods versus commercialised hunting' and 'Trophy hunting'), and hunting for fun and excitement (see section 'Hunting for recreation'). However, our sample also included hunters who practiced hunting for such reasons. How did these hunters portray and evaluate their own activities? Again, it seemed that there was a repertoire of discursive patterns. These included, first, the argumentation that they did conduct hunting for a certain reason (e.g., for trophies, fun or business) but that this was, in fact, not their main motive. Instead, their hunting was really about nature conservation, or a close connection to nature. Here, as in many other instances (see above), the order of motives was used to legitimise hunting. Second, in a variation of this pattern, some trophy hunters argued that their hunting activities prevented land uses that were even less desirable (such as uncontrolled poaching by local residents, or agriculture), and thus legitimate and, in fact, beneficial. Third, it was argued that also hunting for trophies, business or fun could be acceptable if certain standards were observed, for example, concerning animal welfare and 'fair chase'. Fourth, some hunters downplayed the moral relevance of their trophy or commercial hunting activities: they maintained that their trophy hunting was only a very small part of their hunting overall, or if they were running activities that could be called commercial, that these hunts were actually not very lucrative and the income generated was just sufficient to cover the costs. Such discursive patterns were employed very frequently,

and it seemed as if hunters were aware of or anticipated critique by others, even though these others were not present at the time of the interview.

The moralities of hunting in the context of global environmental management discourses

Many of the moral arguments raised in our conversations over hunting bore striking resemblance with argumentations elsewhere. Here, we explore relationships between the normative building bricks of hunting discourses identified in our data and broader discourses on environmental management (Arts et al., 2012). Rather than providing an exhaustive analysis of such relationships, we aim here to point out some prominent links.

Among the multitude of recent studies on discourses of environmental management (e.g., Dryzek, 2005), the analyses by Adger et al. (2001) and Svarstad et al. (2008) are potentially most useful to contextualise our findings. Both analyses concur in that they identify (a) a managerial type of discourse, expressing a faith in science and institutional solutions, in particular, in "win–win" approaches that are beneficial both economically and ecologically and (b) a populist type of counter-discourse that defends the rights of local people, and fends off interventions by external 'managerial' actors.

In our data, the win–win rationale of modern conservation (Svarstad et al., 2008) seemed to be reflected in the argument that hunting could provide a range of benefits at the same time, for the individual hunter as well as for society, and in conservation as well as in economic terms. This was particularly striking where (trophy) hunting was explicitly seen as good as, through its contribution to the economy, it 'put a value on wildlife', and thus kept habitat destruction and uncontrolled illegal hunting at bay:

E: Basically I support sport hunting. [. . .] its main objective is sustaining the wildlife by the income generated from the wildlife. [. . .]

F: Basically, legal hunting, apart from its economic benefits, I believe is an approach that can help the survival of the wildlife. Because if they had not been kept as wildlife conservation areas with a lot of effort, these areas would have by now been used for agricultural purposes. ET-CO(Government)-4-M/M-30/55

On the other hand, the populist (Adger et al., 2001) discourse appeared to resonate in the argumentation of many hunters in Europe. Often, their position seemed to be defensive, portraying the legitimacy of their hunting as challenged by the moral views of the wider public, including actors at the international and national level. In Norway, the anti-hunting argument was seen to come from animal welfare organisations, whereas in Scotland, the anti-hunting sentiment was regarded to pertain to institutionalised conservation (see quotes in section 'Hunting for cultural reasons'), supported by the increasingly urbanised moral views of the general public. As a response to the perceived attack on their rights to hunt, hunters all across our European study sites seemed to emphasise moral arguments and legitimacy considerations in their conversations with us, even without prompting. Motives such as stewardship, the attainment of intimate knowledge of nature and the continuation of cultural heritage were brought forward to create an image of hunters as the people on the ground, with a culture based on resource use and physical interaction with nature that was under threat from an expanding new culture disconnected from their natural environment. In this context, terms such as 'community' and 'cultural' were repeatedly used by those who considered themselves as community members to denote something valuable that demanded protection. Such argumentation thus aligned itself with other populist and traditionalist discourses elsewhere in the world that emphasise the importance of indigenous knowledge and rights (Adger et al., 2001).

Discussion

The morality and legitimacy of hunting

Our conversations with hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics in six countries showed that the morality of hunting was not only an issue debated in philosophical essays (see section ‘The morality of hunting’) but very much so also in everyday talk about hunting. While moral arguments often related to motives for hunting (see section ‘Motives as moral arguments: (De)legitimations of hunting’), they could also refer to hunting techniques, species hunted, and to a lesser degree, questions on the identity of the hunter (see section ‘Overview: moral arguments on hunting’). And although we certainly found a huge diversity and complexity in the argumentation, striking patterns could be discerned (see section ‘Motives of hunting: discursive patterns’). Some of the moral arguments used in our conversations on hunting reflected wider discourses on land use (see section ‘The moralities of hunting in the context of global environmental management discourses’). Our findings thus imply that debates over hunting are not isolated, but embedded in more general negotiations of the ‘right’ way of managing the land or engaging with nature.

Our analysis suggests that moral views on hunting had two main discursive functions. First, they were directly used to legitimise or delegitimise specific hunting activities, inferring legitimacy from the moral goodness of, for example, a certain motive for hunting. Second, and connected to this, moral views were also used as moral imperatives, stipulating ethical requirements for hunting to be legitimate. For example, many of our participants expressed the imperative that game meat should be eaten and not discarded, in order for hunting to be morally acceptable. By meeting such imperatives, hunting conducted for motives that were widely seen as morally inferior (see section ‘Motives of hunting: discursive patterns’), such as recreation, also became legitimate.

The importance of moral considerations for our participants seemed to reflect a pervasive demand for moral responsibility expressed by hunters, non-hunters and hunting critics alike. While it might be futile to gauge if this demand was more strongly expressed in relation to hunting than other land uses (Setten, 2004; Brown, 2007b), there might be several reasons why in the context of hunting, morality and legitimacy were particularly pertinent issues – especially for our European participants and those representing conservation organisations in eastern Africa. First, hunting generally implies the taking of animals’ lives, and, at least in Western contexts and at first sight, tends to necessitate more legitimisation than, for example, small-scale crop cultivation. Second, as we argued in section ‘The moralities of hunting in the context of global environmental management discourses’, hunters in many places saw themselves in a defensive position, having to legitimise their activities, a phenomenon that Bergman (2005) also reports from the United States. Interestingly, where local residents of the Ethiopian and Tanzanian countryside had been exposed to conservation awareness campaigns, they appeared to draw more heavily on legitimacy arguments (e.g., suggesting that illegal hunting helped them to pay their children’s school fees) than those who had been influenced by such campaigns to a lesser degree.

In our data, moral arguments were thus used through discourse to legitimise, i.e., stabilise, or delegitimise, i.e., destabilise hunting practices. Such processes of discursive (de)legitimation can be considered as a “mechanism that mediates between the structure of groups and the action of the individual, on the one hand, and between the actions of the individuals and structure of groups on the other” (Zelditch, 2001, p. 50/51). References to broader discourses beyond hunting, for example, to a win–win logic or indigenous rights, reinforced credibility as these increased

the likelihood that the audience understood and subscribed to the arguments and thus accepted the hunting practice in question as legitimate.

Theories of legitimacy have been classified as belonging to (a) a “consensus” approach that posits that legitimacy arises from shared values and beliefs, or (b) a “conflict” approach that assumes that, as the real interests of people diverge, there is no consensus, and those in power need to *make* those that are not *believe* that they share the same values and beliefs, in order to obtain legitimacy (Zelditch, 2001). In concrete terms, this results in the question whether discursive legitimations are genuine expressions of the speaker’s beliefs and values, or if they are put forward mainly for strategic reasons. Interestingly, this distinction can often be found implicitly in the literature (e.g., Jost and Major, 2001), but is hardly ever theorised. For example, Woods (1997) suggests that hunters might refer to societal functions of hunting (such as wildlife management) to actively legitimise hunting, whereas personal objectives (such as recreation) might be seen as less legitimate, but ultimately as the real motivation for hunting. However, in our data, the distinction between ‘strategic’ and ‘genuine’ was empirically difficult to make, and our observations (see section ‘Motives of hunting: discursive patterns’) did thus neither support nor refute the “conflict” approach to legitimacy.

Moral geographies – motives of hunting

We found that study participants referred to similar types of moral views as Brown (2007a,b) described in her study on crofting in Scotland (see section ‘The moralities of land management’). Practice-based arguments referred to the techniques and approaches used for hunting (see section ‘Overview: moral arguments on hunting’), and what Brown (2007b) terms ‘objective-based’ corresponded well with our category of ‘motives’. Identity-based aspects, albeit often mentioned in more general contexts, were not very often raised as moral arguments in a strict sense, but could be found in references to rich outsiders whose hunting was seen to be less acceptable than that of ‘real’, often local, hunters. Place-based arguments (Brown, 2007b) were hardly mentioned in our debates about hunting. By contrast, characteristics of species appeared an important element in our conversations that portrayed the hunting of, for example, abundant species or pests as more legitimate than the hunting of rare species (see section ‘Overview: moral arguments on hunting’).

Overall, our participants gave very high importance to hunters’ motives. This seems interesting from an empirical philosophical point of view, as it implied that the morality of hunting was predominantly judged by the hunter’s intentions, rather than by the outcome of the hunting act. References to the motives of hunting can also be found elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Kellert, 1979; Woods, 1997; Heberlein and Willebrand, 1998, see Section ‘The morality of hunting’), including in non-normative contexts such as Bennett and Robinson (2000) who differentiate between hunting for nutrition, the economy, culture and recreation. However, our analysis shows that conceptualisations and moral evaluations of motives that appear homogenous at the surface (such as ‘hunting for pleasure’) can include a broad spectrum of notions with very different moral implications (such as ‘being close to nature’ as opposed to ‘hunting for the thrill of the kill’). This suggests that questionnaire-based surveys that make use of such general concepts might miss out on essential differentiations within such categories.

Conclusion

Not surprisingly, the moral views identified in our data corresponded well to the various arguments that can be found in

the philosophical literature (see section ‘The morality of hunting’). However, our approach was distinct from these pieces as it took an *empirical* perspective on the *diversity* of argumentation, including abstract and generic as well as concrete and contextualised views, identifying moral arguments in a systematic (rather than ad hoc, as in Woods, 1997) manner.

In contrast to studies that focus on a particular type of hunting or elucidate a specific argument in great depth, our approach offered a broad, grounded overview and thus allowed us to identify larger patterns. In Walzer’s (1994) terminology, our “thick”, i.e., contextualised interpretations of moral views provided insights into “minimal moralities”, i.e., the “thin” principles common to discourses across places and social groups, and thus “facilitated encounter” between argumentations of hunters, non-hunters and organised hunting critics.

And indeed, our findings suggest that there might be more similarities in the moral views of these groups than is commonly thought, at least at the local level, as our conversations with animal welfare actors in Norway and previous research with game managers and professional conservationists in Scotland (Fischer and Marshall, 2010) illustrate. Further, differences in evaluations of hunting practices were often not due to fundamental disagreements on moral values, but lay in the question to which degree these were observed in real life. Recurrence to common, “minimal moralities” that capture a consensus on what constitutes legitimate hunting (and what does not) could be used as a starting point to manage disputes between hunters and other actors in wildlife management.

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