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### Property and Possession: Hunting Tourism and the Morality of Landownership in Rural Norway

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# Property and Possession: Hunting Tourism and the Morality of Landownership in Rural Norway

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*As forest areas have become increasingly relevant to the public as recreational landscapes, and outdoor recreation is increasingly diverse and specialized, we explore how notions of property and issues of public access are made relevant in controversies over hunting rights in Norway. Focusing on responses of local hunters to landowners' recent promotion of hunting tourism, one central finding is that the hunters tend to engage with the hunting grounds as part of landscapes they identify strongly with. While recognizing the principle of private ownership to hunting rights, local hunters raise moral and political objections to how the ownership is performed. We conclude that taking the contextual nature of property relations into account is important when considering controversies over access to land and resources, not least in connection with development of nature-based tourism.*

**Keywords** land ownership, landscapes, moose hunting, Norway, property, tourism

Following a long-time agricultural decline and uncertain times in the forest industry, Norwegian landowners have been encouraged by the government and their own trade associations to look for new income opportunities, ranging from energy production to tourism. While hunting used to be a locally based subsistence activity, it has become increasingly integrated into the leisure industry. Together with angling it represents one of the most rapidly expanding tourist markets internationally (Newsome and Rodgers 2012, 345). In regions with large forest areas, which are the most suitable for hunting, there is consequently a growing focus on commercializing the hunting rights of landowners (many of whom are farmers) by offering exclusive moose hunting for national and international visitors. As moose hunting is highly esteemed among residents of rural communities in Norway (Flø 2008), this development has given rise to tensions. Among local hunters in particular, it is argued that an expansion of hunting tourism would endanger well-established local hunting practices.

The long-standing tradition of the “right to roam” (*allemannsretten*) was enshrined in legislation in 1957. It gave the public in Norway right to enter any

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uncultivated land for recreational purposes (Kaltenborn, Haaland, and Sandell 2001; Berge 2002), and reinforced a broad notion of Norwegian nature as open to everybody, everywhere (Ween and Abram 2012). Even though it does not include the right to hunt or angle, there are reasons to believe that *allemannsretten* influences people's views on issues related to access to hunting. Furthermore, as forests areas increasingly have become relevant to the public as recreational landscapes, people tend to think of woodland properties in terms of public goods rather than in terms of economic resources of landowners (Vail and Hultkrantz 2000; Urquhart, Courtney, and Slee 2010). Outdoor recreation has become more diverse during recent years, and conflicts of interest that arise over the use of areas (e.g., between hikers and mountain-bikers) often involve moral judgments of proper conduct (Brown 2014). As explored in this article, local hunters similarly contest the ways in which landowners perform their property rights with respect to hunting. The latter seems in particular to concern worries that a fairly wide distribution of access to moose hunting at modest prices among local hunters will be replaced by commercial offerings to up-market, urban hunters.

“Gray zones” between property rights and access are common in different property regimes in various types of societies (Sikor and Lund 2009). In the present case, such ambiguities seem to concern the perception of moose hunting as a kind of public good, while landowners' possession of hunting rights simultaneously is recognized. Such an apparent inconsistency can be seen in light of the fact that property is as much about the regulation of relations between owners and nonowners as the relationship between the owner and what is owned (Rose 1994; von Benda-Beckmann 2009). Properties have symbolic components that enable nonowners to challenge the ways in which ownership is implemented (Brown 2006; Hann 2007; Flemsæther and Setten 2009). In other words, how owners take their properties into their possession will influence the content of property relations (Rose 1994).

Several earlier studies have addressed how property regimes are challenged when development of nature-based tourism takes a toll on land and resources (see, e.g., Vail and Hultkrantz 2000; Pröbstl, Wirth, and Elands 2010). While the legality of landownership can be subject to political or moral evaluations of how it is performed (Rose 1994; Sikor and Lund 2009), this has rarely been studied in context of outdoor recreation practices and nature-based tourism. In light of the relational and contextual aspects of property and possession, we analyze our data by exploring how property relations are perceived and negotiated, and in particular on what grounds nonowners claim access rights to hunting. In the following, we outline the development of property and access rights, in addition to hunting rights and practices in Norway, before reviewing relevant theoretical approaches. Our data, which primarily derive from interviews with local hunters in three rural areas in southeastern Norway, are finally discussed in relation to notions and practices of property, possession, and access, in order to explore the ways in which identifications with landscapes influence perceptions of property relations.

### Property Rights and Hunting Practices in Norway

Goods produced in Norwegian forests today are mostly restricted to timber, and to some extent livestock (grazing) and sale of plots for second homes. However, these landscapes offer a wide range of public goods that are important to outdoor recreation. While the enactment of *allemannsretten* in 1957 separated the right to

access forest and mountain areas from the private ownership of land, it also represented a transformation of particular rights to commons into universal access rights (Berge 2002). Under the earlier system of commons, community members enjoyed the right to utilize resources such as firewood, pastures, freshwater fisheries, hunting, and so on. From the early 19th century on, the most productive forests and pastures gradually became extensions of private farms or groups of farms (Berge 2002). As a result, rights to hunting and freshwater fishing became legally tied to land ownership in 1899 (Søilen 1995). Landowners subsequently formed their own hunting and angling association in order to further the value of their rights to hunting and fishing. In the following decades, the issue of access to game and fish was entangled in class conflicts. Hunters and anglers who did not own land were soon to form a separate association that was closely connected to the labor movement (Søilen 1995). In the climate of social reconciliation after World War II, the two associations merged, and a system was developed in order to provide reasonably priced access to hunting and angling. Local hunters' associations have often been allowed to lease hunting on both private and public lands for nominal sums, and could subsequently sell (low-priced) hunting permits themselves. These arrangements have been seen by many as an integral part of the social democratic project, and this also resonates with a rather common understanding of *allemannsretten* as an important expression of the social equity ethos that dominated Norwegian politics throughout the postwar years.

The nonowning majority in rural communities has always engaged with the land in a wide range of ways and through various formal and informal arrangements (Berge 2002). This has its origin in the subsistence economy that did not disappear completely until after World War II. Even though today's harvesting of berries, fish, and game takes place in the context of modern leisure, people like to see it as a symbolic upholding of traditions of harvesting and resource utilization, and in some contexts it is elevated to an important aspect of local and rural identities (Skogen and Krange 2003; Blekesaune and Rønningen 2010; Øian 2013).

Although a mild commodification of moose hunting has taken place over the past few decades, owing to the general increase in wealth and the expansion of the leisure field, exclusive hunting as a product aimed at the urban elite is still a relatively rare phenomenon. This is due in part to limited demand, and in part to cultural barriers in the relatively egalitarian rural communities in Norway that have deterred landowners with small and medium-sized properties from entering such a path (Flø 2008). As explored further in this article, moose hunting is embedded in a web of cultural meaning and quest for social significance.

### **Landscape, Property, and Possession**

The term *landscape*, as we use it in the following, does not simply denote a topographic configuration sustaining a particular combination of ecosystems. It also brings to attention the combination of biophysical reality and the human uses, constructions, representations, agencies, and experiences (Vaccaro and Beltran 2008). Different aesthetics and temporalities may be attributed to the same landscape depending on different experiences and the agencies of different social actors pursuing their different interests (Brown 2006; Vergunst et al. 2012).

Even when ownership of land and access to resources exist within a modern regime of private property, combinations of private, common, and public goods are often produced within one and the same property regime or in combination of

conflicting property regimes (Berge 2002; Ostrom 2003; Hann 2007). Although resources are frequently accessed in the absence of any rights or in contexts in which access rights are informal and based on relationships between social statuses, rights can be bundled in different ways within the same society. Various social groups can be allocated different rights, with the results that claims of rights often involve political ideologies and conflicts (von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann, and Wiber 2009). Furthermore, legal property rights are not always a prerequisite for accessing and utilizing resources (Hann 2007; Sikor and Lund 2009), since the formal aspect of property is just one of several ways to regulate social relations involved in ownership (Rose 1994; von Benda-Beckmann 2009). Because property implies the regulation of social relations, it can be closely tied to prestige and identity (Rose 1994; Nustad 2013).

As pointed out by Rose (1994), properties often have to be taken into possession in order to give the ownership legitimacy and authority. For instance, when non-owners start using an abandoned house or idle agricultural land, the legitimacy of ownership is contested. In other words, access rights can be claimed, obtained, legitimized, and secured by means, powers, and authorities other than those attached to legal property (Hann 2007; Sikor and Lund 2009). Moreover, to own something does not necessarily preclude allocation of user rights to another party, and it needs not include the unanimous right to alienate others (Hann 2007; von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann, and Wiber 2009). As discussed in the following, the latter seems to be the case with moose hunting in Norway, to the extent that it is a prevailing view that landowners have a moral obligation to share their rights at reasonable prices with local nonowners.

### **Ethnographic Context, Study Sites, and Methods**

Data originate from two different studies that were undertaken in parallel, both as parts of two separate larger research projects, and both dealing with hunting as a social practice.<sup>1</sup> The study sites include three rural areas in southeastern Norway. The sites are situated in a core area for moose hunting, but they were also chosen because they represent variation with respect to property structure and historical reliance on agriculture across and even within the study sites. Some areas have very large forest properties that have never been tied to agriculture. Here, logging and timber processing have comprised the economic backbone, marked by strong class antagonism between wealthy landowners and the working class (loggers and mill workers). Other areas have a property structure that is more typical of rural Norway, where farmers own the uncultivated land and most properties are relatively small.

Except for a few semi-urban centers, most people live in scattered hamlets. The number of active farms is constantly decreasing, along with employment in the forestry sector. Today, the bulk of the workforce is employed in private and public service provision and public administration, in addition to a number of crafts and manufacturing operations. Hunting and angling are important leisure pursuits for many, and in some contexts they serve as identity markers in these rural communities' relationship to urban culture (Skogen and Krange 2003; Krange and Skogen 2011; Øian 2013).

The ethnographic data are derived from interviews carried out in 2009 through 2011. In total, 52 hunters and 10 nonhunters were interviewed, either individually or in focus groups. Participants were often recruited with the help of hunters'

associations, but also through snowball sampling (see, e.g., Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam 2013). There is reason to believe that hunters who strongly oppose the idea of commercialization of moose hunting are the ones most eager to raise their voices. The views and opinions are accordingly not necessarily representative of either hunters or the nonhunting majority of the communities. As relatively few women hunt, only one female hunter participated in one of the focus groups. Although local hunters, as well as other hunters with strong ties to the study areas, made up the majority of the research subjects, some landowners were interviewed. A few were hunters themselves, while others were not. The majority of interviewees were between 30 and 60 years of age. The focus groups comprised from four to seven participants, and the interviews were carried out following a semistructured interview guide, focusing on hunting practices, the social significance of hunting, how hunting is looked upon by the wider society, and in what ways the development of hunting tourism affects the locals' hunting practices. Follow-up questions were often posed in order to clarify opinions and details of incidents and places and so on that were brought up among the participants. Most conversations were recorded and transcribed; otherwise, extensive field notes were taken. Data also stem from spontaneous conversations in semipublic spaces, such as gas stations, supermarkets, and cafés. These conversations were valuable sources of information, and some of the topics raised there were later addressed in the interviews and group discussions.

Focus groups have the advantage of dwelling on certain specific issues in an explorative and dialogic manner, in which data are largely the result of an interaction between informants (Morgan 1996), hence providing not only accounts *of* action, but also accounts *in* action (Halkier 2010, 11). Hollander (2004) argues that both focus groups and individual interviews provide insights into complex processes of meaning production and representation, without either being better or more "true."

Because the interviews produce not only dialogues, but even streams of thought that would hardly come about otherwise, there is a methodological problem of reflexivity. When asked whether similar conversations took place between themselves in different situations, most admitted that this rarely occurred, and that some statements articulated insights that were not as clear before the interviews. Nevertheless, their arguments did fold themselves into preexisting narratives and cultural models of broad themes such as social equality, the moralities of hunting, and rural identities.

### **Moose Hunting, Landscapes, and Communities**

In most mountains and forest areas, there are extensive networks of roads constructed to serve the needs of landowners for logging and other economic pursuits. Since many of these roads are open to the public, as self-service toll roads, they are widely used for leisure activities, such as to access cabins, hunting grounds, or rivers and lakes for angling. A second-home owner whose parents were born and raised in the local community told us, "This area is perforated by paths, roads and buildings." The landscapes are in other words in the eyes of many infused with history. Every hill, brook, pond, and marsh is named, and they are often connected to histories of individuals, families, or particular incidents. Previous research in rural Norway has shown that local hunters' identification with the land is rooted in experiences from childhood and youth and that strong attachment to the landscape often is linked to socialization into a life with fishing, hunting, and other harvesting activities (Krangle and Skogen 2007; 2011).

The sun is up, and then the whole valley floor is like a white blanket of fog, you know, it happens around six o'clock in the morning. Of course, you have to get out to see it. But, that is the kind of thing that you experience—an experience of nature! It isn't just the hunting. If you are lucky, then you get something, and if you are unlucky, well, then you don't. But, it means so much just to be out there, and . . . but then maybe we are a little special, because we have our own valley actually. We are alone, without any hunting neighbors. Well, I mean they are a few kilometers away. But, anyway, we are in a privileged situation. (Hunter)

This hunter was not a landowner, yet he talked about “having” a valley. Many people like to think of these landscapes, and their own engagement with them, as continuations of past practices in which diverse nature resources were elements in the subsistence economy (Øian 2013). Although the harvesting aspect of hunting is often accentuated in order to legitimize the practice and connect it to local traditions, thus expressing a contemporary local identity (Fischer et al. 2013; Øian 2013), the meat also takes on an important symbolic meaning as an object of exchange between friends and relatives (Brottveit 1999; Flø 2008; Øian 2013). Additionally, local practices of hunting appear to be deeply embedded in the social relations of the communities. Indeed, hunting is sometimes spoken of an instrument whereby eroded social networks can be revitalized, as this excerpt from a conversation in a moose hunting team shows us:

Hunter 1: There has been tremendous change over the last 15–20 years. When I was a boy and went around selling lottery tickets for the sports club and so on, I knew absolutely everybody who lived in the houses I visited, and I knew everybody's name. And most of them worked at home. Now there are almost no one left, now they work in [town]. . . . It has changed a lot; I don't know all the neighbors anymore.

Hunter 2: That's why it is so good to have the moose hunting!

The notion of moose hunting as cement in the local community, or at least as a very significant event, has often been put forward in Norwegian media. There are many accounts of whole communities shutting down during the first and most intense days of the season. While this is surely exaggerated, it is to some extent borne out by our interviews. Here is what we heard in a focus group with nonhunters:

Woman 1: I am born in [study site N] and I have my roots here, but I lived many years in Oslo. I moved here . . . in '88, I think it was. I was totally shocked when I realized how much hunting means to this community, because I had never imagined . . . even if I am from these parts, and have very strong ties, I had no notion of what it was like. It was a quite dramatic experience.

As we can see from this exchange in a group of moose hunters, the social significance ascribed to moose hunting appears to strongly influence the actual performance of the hunting:

Hunter 1: Our meals last long. We may sit at least two hours around the campfire, and then we meet our neighbors. . . . So it is very important, the social life around the campfire.

Hunter 2: That is something we notice already in the morning when we meet, because we almost have to tell people to move out to their posts, he-he. Everybody has so much to talk about.

Hunter 1: Yes, and then we go through a new area, a new pursuit, and then we eat again. Out come the frying pans and all that, and we are often a little afraid that we will finish too soon. One moose a day is more than enough. One year I tried to give each hunter only one bullet, but that didn't work.

It was emphasized in many interviews that the ticket to moose hunting is not money, but having a relation to members of a hunting team or a landowner (see also Brottveit 1999; Flø 2008). A young moose hunter who had grown up in a family where all the adult men hunted commented:

Being a moose hunter here is very much about who you know, who your relatives are and so on. We have to admit that. If you move up here, you can't just say: "Hey, I want to go moose hunting!" . . . Perhaps it shouldn't be like that. But, it is something that creates social cohesion, and I think that is a good thing!

One of his hunting mates followed up by praising what he saw as the egalitarian structure of local hunting teams. A few years earlier, he had joined a team comprising his father-in-law, and a friend of his uncle's, who also happened to be his employer. As a result, he claimed that the strained relationship with his father-in-law improved, and his employer became a close friend: "When we go hunting, we are all equal. We forget about who is who in everyday life. It gives us the chance to know each other in ways that is not easy otherwise."

According to these accounts, the moose hunting not only represents a different experience from the relations of everyday life, since participation also seems to function as a sign of inclusion in the local community. Paying one's way to the hunting grounds is consequently seen as a morally questionable practice. In a sense, it is actually impossible because you cannot buy the localized social dimension of hunting.

### Hunters as Stewards of the Landscapes

For many hunters, the idea of caring for the wildlife and the land appears to be crucial to their understanding of what hunting is about (Fischer et al. 2013; Øian 2013). As the following excerpt illustrates, the basic premise is that if humans are to be part of nature, humans should not only engage with it as predators, but also as caretakers or stewards:

And, as I always say, you must have respect for the game. And you do become interested in the animals, in their behaviour, as the animals they are—you develop an interest. You learn a lot and you read a lot, how they behave and how they live, and everything. Obviously . . . you become

interested not only in the animals, but also in their habitats, in what is needed [to know] for us to have game at all. (Hunter)

A group of moose hunters said:

Hunter 1: 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.

Hunter 2: And certainly not when it comes to the ungulates. They absolutely need to be controlled.

Interviewer: And if they aren't controlled, what happens then?

Hunter 1: Well, if we allow it to come too far there will be disease, and then they will die off.

Another hunter voiced related concerns, but focused more on preventing damage from wildlife populations out of control:

When I go hunting, it shouldn't only be for the fun of it. . . . We are taking care of nature around here. If it wasn't for us moose hunters, the moose stock would grow too large, out of control really, and the moose would inflict much damage on the forest and the fields around here. [Jokingly:] Actually, we should be paid to hunt!

The idea of hunters as stewards contributes to the moral justification of hunting, and resonates with the strong attachment to the landscapes where hunting takes place. It is also a test for landowners' responsibility and what we might term their "worthiness" as possessors of their land. Here is a group of hunters responding negatively to the interviewer's question of whether the landowners are doing any predator control:

Hunter 1: They can't be bothered with such things. [Big landowner X] doesn't do it either, on his land, it's [the local hunting association] that keeps an eye on all such things. And we don't shoot many roe deer because there are few of them around here now. We feed them, but the lynx kills many. We [the hunting association] lease the hunting from [big landowner X] and we pay for a certain number of animals, but we don't shoot them. We sell only a few licenses, maybe five licenses in a year or so.

Interviewer: Because there aren't that many . . .

Hunter 1: Because we try to . . . because there aren't many, as you say. . . . [We charge 1500 NOK for a license] per animal, yes. But, we pay much more to [the landowner]; it's quite a lot of money because we want to keep the hunting, so he doesn't sell it to somebody else. So we pay a lot for something we don't get. Plus we feed them and organize lynx hunting to protect the roe deer population.

### **Visiting Hunters and Local Hunters**

A substantial number of external hunters come from urban or semi-urban areas in the same regions where our study sites are situated. Many are returning every

year and quite a few have a relationship to the communities through kinship. In the eyes of local hunters, this category of visiting hunters complies with the unwritten rules of how moose hunting should be performed. Faced with the prospects of increasing numbers of visiting hunters—who are expected to be more affluent and have a more distant relationship to the local community, local traditions, and the land—local hunters worried that such a development would be at odds with the highly valued social dimension of local hunting, as well as with their own attachment to the landscape. However, the skepticism many hunters feel toward commercialization also stems from concerns about more expensive hunting. Affordable hunting is held to be crucial for recruiting new hunters, especially younger ones. This again is seen as essential to preserve the unique quality of life in rural areas that could motivate younger people to stay (Krange and Skogen 2007; 2011). Moreover, local hunters worry that wealthy visiting hunters would tempt landowners to maximize profits instead of trying to attract skilled hunters.

The hunters appeared to share the view that many visiting hunters, particularly the wealthy ones, do not possess acceptable ethics and skills. For example, they were seen as inclined to shoot their quota without regard for management responsibility and ethics.

Hunter: We have had quite a few incidents in connection with hunts where there have been auctions in advance. When people pay so much they think they must get the animals at any cost, and they fire at whatever turns up, instead of sparing maybe one or two females. Have to shoot them, because they need to fill their expensive quota, because they have maybe paid 12–13,000 [NOK] per moose. So there is something there . . . this auction system, that is certainly the downside of [hunting as a business].

Interviewer: Exactly, so there is no management . . .

Hunter: No, you don't get any management responsibility. That's the right way to put it. They don't give a shit about that! And, then you might shoot animals that you wouldn't shoot, if you were [more responsible].

While the ideal of management responsibility in these examples primarily refers to controlling the moose population, this was not only confined to the technicalities of hunting regulations. It was also linked to the general ethical dimensions of hunting:

In my book it is those who are accustomed to being in the forest, and who are able to wait a long time and then kill an animal with one good shot, and who generally pull their load . . . it is those who earn my esteem. If a guy appears here with a fancy gun and classy clothing and wants to shoot an animal, and then . . . “now my job is done, now you must butcher it” . . . that's a type I can't stomach. (Hunter)

Admitting that some visiting hunters are just as skilled and considerate as local hunters are, a local hunter argued that many visiting hunter nonetheless first and

foremost are after trophies. The following statement received applause from his hunting buddies:

Some of them pay big money for one week of hunting. Some of them have this thing about the trophy. To us the most important thing is the meat. . . . Of course, friendship, excitement, experiences of nature, getting away from everyday life for a while, all that is important. But, I think the meat is the main reason why we hunt. This is part of our tradition. . . . I think that hunting should not only be for the fun of it. If it wasn't for the meat, I would probably not hunt at all. . . . The meat is not only for me and my family. I always provide relatives, neighbors and friends with some as well. . . . I have heard about some city guys who hunt at the large estate further up here. If they put down a big bull; they sometimes just leave, even if they were supposed to hunt for several more days. That is one of the reasons, I think, why not all hunters from down there fill their quotas like we do.

The widespread view of visiting hunters as incompetent and unethical in their trophy-oriented hunting is raised as two almost opposite concerns: Some argued that visiting hunting teams represent a management problem because they did not always fill their quota. Others claimed that irresponsible shooting occurred, as hunting tourists had a drive to fill their quota since they pay a lot of money for a relatively short period of hunting. In either case, visiting hunters are seen as lacking commitment to the wildlife and the landscape (cf. Øian 2013).

### **Reluctant Landowners**

Thus far, commercialized hunting has mostly taken place on large properties (some locally owned), while smaller landowners have been reluctant or ambivalent. Quite a few farming landowners identify strongly with farming and forestry, and believe that a proper farmer should not engage in competing activities (Brandth and Haugen 2011). Besides, quite a few landowners are hunters themselves, hunting with local nonowners. Selling expensive up-market hunting and closing areas to the local public could accordingly impair their relationship with neighbors, friends, and relatives. A landowner who had headed his own hunting team for many years used to include two urban, visiting hunters in the team. He referred to a case in which two inexperienced visiting hunters had required extensive supervision. As a result, his own hunting experience was impaired, and a bad mood had spread among the remaining team members who were local and allegedly experienced and knowledgeable hunters. Consequently, he now selects his visitors with care, emphasizing the importance of making sure that the visitors are actually skilled hunters and able to comply with written and unwritten rules.

Some landowners even think of making money from hunting as morally wrong, since they believe it belongs to the local community. One farmer and landowner said that the idea of making moose hunting into a source of income had never struck him before, though lately he had started to look at it differently:

We have to understand that the moose hunting is our [landowners'] property. It is only natural to make money from it, just as we do from

forestry. In the end, it will benefit the community, since it will contribute to the viability of the farms around here.

The question of the sovereignty of the landowners raised by this farmer is complicated by the fact that many landowners live in the communities where their property is located. A different landowner said:

In a way, I find it interesting, since we farmers really need not look in new directions to make a living from our land. . . . However, I also depend on good relations to people around here. I really do enjoy hunting with people I have known for ages. It is one of the real highlights of the year. . . . Maybe the attitudes will change in some years. . . . As things are now, I think most people feel that the moose hunt primarily belongs to them.

As this excerpt shows, the opportunities of the landowners to alienate others from the right to hunt is restricted because people tend to see moose hunting just as much as a public good as a privately owned right.

### **Performance of Property Rights**

The hunters claimed that it is a widely shared opinion that Norwegian hunters do not want to pay for exclusive hunting, but instead want to join local hunting teams and at modest prices. The big market for commercial hunting simply does not exist, it was often argued. On these grounds, some local hunters, as illustrated by the following excerpt, said they suspected the motives of landowners were just as much about demonstrating the property relations as about generating an income.

Some of the landowners are not actually serious about it. It is more as if they want to show us that they are the owners. I do not think much will change, except the prices [go up], since that is what they are always thinking of—to extract money from their properties. It has always been like this, always looking for ways of restricting people's opportunities, because, this is the way they make money.

This hunter comes from a study site where more big landowners already sell their moose hunting to the highest bidders, compared to the other two sites. As mentioned earlier, this property structure has historically been reflected in a fierce class antagonism, which still simmers beneath the surface and is discernible in many everyday situations (cf. Skogen and Krange 2003). The opinion that the sovereignty of the landowners should be restricted by a responsibility toward the landscapes nonetheless appears to be widespread in all three study sites:

Yes, of course, they are the owners. Still, they cannot just do whatever they like. . . . It is we, ordinary folks, who live here, who are the hunters. It would not be fair if the price increases so that we cannot afford it anymore. . . . This is the area we know, better than anyone else does. I have been around here all my life. Some of the landowners . . . they are not much around really, at least those who do not hunt themselves . . . and the really big ones, they live elsewhere, they are not part of this

community. . . . So, I do think there are some differences. Landowners who take part in moose hunting, together with us local hunters, they understand better what moose hunting means to this community. (Hunter)

Another hunter raised a point that seemed to be widely shared, as he questioned whether the commercialization of the hunting right was the morally right thing to do (as we have seen, this is in line with some of the landowners themselves):

The landowners, all they think of is making money. At least, this is the case with some of them. I know there are several around here who think about other things too. . . . I spoke to one of them the other day, and he agreed with me . . . that it is important to make sure that local hunters keep the moose hunting. Not all landowners do really care about that.

This excerpt illustrates that local hunters identify strongly with the land where they hunt. As discussed in the following, they seem to perceive their hunting grounds, and indeed nature in general, more in terms of landscapes that belong to communities than in terms of property rights.

### **Taking Possession of Landscapes**

No hunters in our study said that they did not recognize property rights. What they resented was the way in which landowners took, or aspired to take, their properties into possession (cf. Rose 1994). Many local hunters talked about their own hunting in terms of a personal commitment to the land and the particular form of sociality the hunt represents; something they perceive as a contrast to recent changes in people's lifestyles due to economic modernization and cultural urbanization. In some contexts, moose hunting is even elevated to represent the core values of rural life in terms of commitment to the local communities and the landscape (Øian 2013). In other words, the controversies over commercialization do not concern property rights as such. Rather, they reflect worries that landowners will manage their hunting rights in ways that could restrict access to land that local hunters have a close and intricate relationship to. The hunters not only resented commercialization because they feared they would be displaced by wealthy urban and foreign hunters. A different concern was that hunting tourism could change the way moose hunting is performed, and that landowners who pursued the commercialization path would take advantage of their property rights in ways that are seen as irresponsible toward the sociality of the local communities as well as the landscapes that comprise the hunting grounds.

As the public is entitled to access privately owned land, people do not generally engage with the woodlands as properties, but rather as indiscrete landscapes that belong to the local community (Øian 2013). From such a perspective, the game itself does not occupy a specific space within the boundaries of properties. The game belongs to a landscape that includes many properties, implying that moose hunting is considered as much as a public good as a private right.

Seen from one perspective, landowners do take possession of their land when they temporarily transfer their hunting rights to visiting hunters, or when they share their rights with neighbors and friends. In the former instance, the legal sovereignty of private property is demonstrated, while a moral obligation to share

with fellow community members is at the core in the latter case. While the principle of sovereignty makes abstract and universal virtues of market relations the relevant context of meaning, local hunters evoke the principle of sharing by stressing that the property should be seen as part of a landscape belonging to the community.

When considered in relation to its social and symbolic aspects, an object (such as a necklace or a house) can be of an alienable or inalienable nature (Mauss 1954). While land is a commodity that can be sold on the market, farmland may also embody investments in family relationships to the extent that it becomes a highly emotional representation of kinship, home, and belonging (see, e.g., Flemsæther and Setten 2009). In that sense, land can be an inalienable possession. However, the relevance of the concept of inalienability is not limited to property only. People sometimes identify with, and can be identified with, objects they do not own, such as when a particular building comes to be perceived as an essential part of a city or when ancient farm buildings contribute to the sense of place in a community. In instances like these, the property aspect of the buildings is ousted in favor of a sense of inalienability that emphasizes the buildings as a public good, something that belongs to the community. In other words, the buildings are taken into possession by nonowners (cf. Rose 1994). While a piece of land may involve personal identities and emotions to an extent that it becomes inalienable from the owners, the local hunters' strong attachment to the landscape, and their complex engagement with it, indicate a similar inalienability. The local hunters have taken the hunting grounds into their possession, not as properties, but as landscapes.

## Conclusions

We have seen that local hunters in particular, but even quite a few landowners, are inclined to think that it is immoral to transform the right to hunt into a commodity. The reason seems to be that the landscapes are engaged with as inalienable possessions of the communities. A perception of moose hunting as a public good—in spite of the fact that the right to hunt is subject to private ownership—is thus reinforced. A general conclusion we can draw from this is the importance of taking into consideration the ways in which people create moral and political boundaries that affect market and property relations.

The uneasiness of the local hunters demonstrates that property is as much about relationships between people as it is about relationships between the owner and what is owned. Therefore, properties often have a performative dimension, in the sense that ownership becomes entangled in social and symbolic interaction with nonowners. This underscores the significance of taking the contextual nature of property relations into account when assessing controversies over access to land and natural resources, not least in connection with development of nature-based tourism.

## Note

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