

From Bambi through the Slaughterhouse to the Forest: Nation, Hunting, and Violence in Human–Animal Figurations in Poland.

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between animals, hunting, and the Polish national habitus through Norbert Elias's concept of the civilising process. Drawing on parliamentary debates, expert opinions, media coverage, and sociological perspectives, the study explores how debates on animal violence intersect with national identity, tradition, and modernity. Central to these debates are questions of justifiable violence: hunters frame violence as necessary 'nature management' rooted in tradition and identity, while critics see hunting as an outdated and decivilising practice, incompatible with evolving ethics and scientific knowledge about animal cognition. The paper situates these debates within broader global shifts in human–animal relations, where the 'Disney mentality' and the industrialisation of animal violence intersect with the nationalist politics. By framing hunting as a contested site of national identity, the study shows how Poland reflects a broader struggle to reconcile tradition with evolving ethical demands, as ideas of civilisation shift in response to climate change, speciesism, and social justice.

Zusammenfassung: Der Beitrag untersucht die Beziehung zwischen Tieren, Jagd und dem polnischen nationalen Habitus anhand von Norbert Elias' Konzept des Zivilisationsprozesses. Auf Basis von Parlamentsdebatten, Expert*innenmeinungen, Medienberichten und soziologischen Perspektiven analysiert die Studie, wie Debatten über Gewalt an Tieren mit Fragen nationaler Identität, Tradition und Moderne verwoben sind. Jäger*innen rahmen Gewalt als notwendiges „Naturmanagement“, das in Tradition und Identität verankert ist, während Kritiker*innen die Jagd als überholte und dezivilisierende Praxis betrachten, die mit sich wandelnden ethischen Vorstellungen und wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnissen über tierliche Kognition unvereinbar ist. Der Beitrag diskutiert diese Debatten zudem im Kontext von Verschiebungen der Mensch-Tier-Beziehungen, in denen sich eine „Disney-Mentalität“ und die Industrialisierung von Gewalt an Tieren mit nationalistischen Politiken verschränken. Die Studie fasst Jagd als umkämpften Ort nationaler Identitätskonstruktion und zeigt, wie in Polen ein Konflikt zwischen Tradition und sich wandelnden ethischen Anforderungen existiert, während sich Vorstellungen von Zivilisation im Zuge von Klimawandel, Speziesismus und sozialer Gerechtigkeit verändern.

Keywords: hunting; habitus; Poland; civilising process; violence; human–animal relations

Introduction

The language of civilisation shapes debates on hunting in Poland. Zoologist Andrzej Elżanowski (OTOZ Animals 2013) calls hunting a ‘dramatic civilizational regression,’ while Bolesław Kaja asks the following question in the hunters’ magazine *Łowiec Polski* (The Polish Hunter): ‘How to fight the eco-backwardness?’ (Bożek 2018). By calling hunting a civilisational regression, Elżanowski argues that it no longer fits contemporary ethical standards regarding animals (Singer 1975). In turn, Kaja sees these standards as a civilising mission that destroys traditional forms of human–animal relations, which, in his view, position humans as managers of nature (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2023). Norbert Elias examines these kinds of attitudes toward social reality through his concepts of the civilising and decivilising processes. Robert van Krieken (2024: 83) emphasises that the civilising process, ‘precisely because it is interwoven with decivilizing processes,’ is ‘a never-ending one.’ The words of Elżanowski and Kaja exemplify this ongoing process. Both of them define what one can regard as ‘civilized,’ including what kind of violence can find justification – and by whom: a moral authority, the nation, international law, or another entity. They also indicate what one should deem ‘barbaric’ or, as Kaja writes, mere nonsense.

At stake in Elias’s theory (2012) is the pacification of violence. But what exactly is violence against animals? Can one justify it by citing tradition or national culture? Through examining debates over hunting laws, we ask the following questions: How does violence against animals relate to cultural heritage? What role do animals play in the national habitus? How do the civilising and decivilising processes interact in this context?

We claim that Poland’s hunting law debate hinges on two core issues: the legal definition of violence and the value of nonhuman life. Animal advocates ask: ‘Do we want a world rife with violence against animals?’ Hunters counter: ‘Must we abandon our ancestral heritage because attitudes have changed?’ This article examines these ‘incompatible competing

claims’ (Judt 1994) by analysing how discourse constructs justifiable and unjustifiable forms of violence – and often renders them invisible – through the lens of hunting, a key element of the invented national tradition in Poland.

This article examines human–animal figurations to show how a seemingly local debate over hunting law in Poland brings together particular, regional, and universal arguments about humans, nonhuman animals, and the conditions for humanity’s survival on the Earth. We begin by presenting the research materials used in the study. Treating hunting as an invented tradition, we explore how people have conceptualised human–animal relations within postmodern nation-building processes over the past decade. Drawing on Elias’s framework, we analyse how violence against animals becomes taboo, especially in debates over children’s participation in hunts. One can understand the language surrounding this violence through the metaphors of ‘cold’ and ‘hot’ violence. Hunters seek to portray themselves as modern managers exercising cold, rational violence, while accusing critics of hypocrisy and of holding a naive, sentimental ‘Bambi mentality.’ Yet one cannot separate the justification of violence against animals from the broader context of industrial meat production and the climate crisis it accelerates. What, then, counts as ‘civilized’ in such a world? The article concludes by addressing this question.

1. Theory and Method

Emphasising the Situatedness

In 2015, the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party came to power, drawing on national traditions, cultural heritage, and nationalism. Its electoral success partly stemmed from what feminist scholars Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk (2022) describe as a convergence of a chauvinistic welfare state¹

1 A ‘redistributive, family-oriented policies that emphasise national belonging and exclude immigrants, especially immigrant men’ (Korolczuk et al. 2025: 626).

and neoconservatism. According to them, in Poland ‘ultraconservative think tanks have played the role of social policy advisors to the right-wing populist government,’ fetishizing ‘family values’ and national traditions – closely tied to Catholic norms, including the ‘traditional family’ – as pillars of social cohesion (Korolczuk et al. 2025: 626). After PiS lost the 2023 election and had to give way to a liberal coalition, nationalist arguments did not disappear from public debate. On the contrary, the Civic Coalition (KO), which formed a government in December 2023, adopted many of the nationalist narratives previously used by PiS. For the past decade, national arguments have served as a central justification for policy and government spending in Poland (Graff and Korolczuk 2022). Where is room for animals within these debates?

In October 2019, a proposed change to the hunting legislation in Poland entered the lower house of parliament. The legislative initiative of a group of citizens proposed amending the existing statutes so that minors – namely persons under eighteen years of age – could take part in hunting excursions under the permission of their parents or legal guardians. The proposal ultimately shared the fate of many other citizen-sponsored legislative initiatives, languishing in legal purgatory, with no attempts made to either categorically reject or accept it. After the change of government, the hunting law returned to public debate. The new liberal administration announced plans to strengthen biodiversity and wildlife protection, a demand long voiced by civil society organisations. The Polish Hunting Association (Polski Związek Łowiecki, PZŁ) argued that the proposed law amounted to an attack on hunters and strongly condemned the government’s plans, particularly criticizing Mikołaj Dorożala, the Deputy Minister for Climate and the Environment. Dorożala noted:

‘The hate directed at me on this issue [the hunting law amendment] is enormous. My stance as a vegetarian and someone who will never hunt is difficult for some in the hunting community to accept’ (Petryczkiewicz 2024, translated by W.R.).

The law debated in 2024 also became stalled in political manoeuvring between the opposition and the government, as well as among members of the ruling coalition, who themselves disagreed on the final form of the proposed legal changes. Nevertheless, the debates of late 2019, 2020, and 2024 provide important material for examining the place of animals within the national figuration. It is in these debates that various actors – hunters, activists, opposition politicians, and government representatives – articulated how they understand animals as part of the nation, national culture, and the Polish state. The article investigates the course of the debates surrounding amendments to the hunting law associated with the proposals of 2019 and 2024.

This article analyses the following materials:

- parliamentary debates on amendments to the hunting law. The debates took place in 2020 (Kancelaria Sejmu 2020) and 2024 (Kancelaria Sejmu 2024);
- research articles published between 2019 and 2024 (Gwiazdowicz/Matulewska 2020, Dajczak et al. 2021, Matulewska/Gwiazdowicz 2021, Gwiazdowicz et al. 2023), which articulate the hunters’ position in a clear and rational manner. These texts’ authors are both scholars and hunters, though they present themselves as objective academics rather than as representatives of the hunting community. Therefore, they strive to make their arguments appear ideologically neutral. However, the perspective from which these articles approach hunting and animals has sociocultural preconditions: they remain situated in a specific ‘civilizing process’ which shapes their content. Still, the articles themselves do not examine this situatedness;
- hunting-related conferences available on YouTube, in which the authors of the above articles participated (Gwiazdowicz 2019), as well as conferences presenting hunting from the perspective of Catholic clergy (Niedźwiedzka et al. 2023, Niedźwiedzka 2021). In Poland, the concept of the nation remains strongly intertwined with Catholicism. In examining the relationship between the nation and the issue of animals, it was therefore crucial to analyse how Catholics conceptualise animals. In this context, an import-

ant source is the 2023 report *Katolicy i Boże zwierzęta* (Niedźwiedzka et al. 2023, Niedźwiedzka 2021). The report is critical of the Church hierarchs who treat animals as objects and emphasises that animals are God's creatures as well. According to the pro-animal philosopher Dariusz Gzyra (2023), the report represents an attempt to 'extract some good' for animals from the Catholic Church as an institution – an institution that, in his view, is irredeemably unethical toward animals.

The material underwent an analysis within the framework of Elias's theory. This theory functions as a technical tool for identifying – in historical events, and in our case, the debates surrounding amendments to the hunting law – which arguments, behaviours, and expressions legitimise certain forms of violence while deeming others unjustified. In examining the relationship between the nation and animals, we paid particular attention to arguments in the hunting law debates that invoke the nation, national tradition, and national culture. In analysing the material, we also drew on Jean-Claude Kaufmann's interpretive sociology. Building on Elias and Max Weber, Kaufmann (2010) emphasises that sociology should strive to understand the speaker's perspective on their own terms – for example, we discuss what hunters mean by the 'Disney mentality' – while interpreting these categories through theoretical concepts, hence our references to concepts such as 'hot' and 'cold' violence and 'tabooization.'

The conceptual work was a collective effort. Marta Gospodarczyk from the University of Warsaw analysed the history of hunting and examined the debates over children's participation in hunts in Poland, focusing on the 2020 parliamentary debate. Gabriela Jarzębowska-Lipińska from the University of Warsaw concentrated on the impact of the animal turn on the functioning of hunting practices. Waldemar Rapior analysed the parliamentary debate on hunting regulations – including the introduction of periodic medical examinations – as well as the reactions of activists and animal rights advocates to hunters' social and political campaigns. The latter include, for example, the Polish Hunting Association's push to list hunting

traditions as national intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO) and its lobbying against the government's 2024 plans to shorten the list of huntable bird species and amend hunting laws. This article relies on a chapter the three of us wrote for a book summarizing the project² (Rapior et al. forthcoming). Here, we focus on the ways of defining violence against animals in the context of debates on hunting in Poland over the past decade.

While tracing the dialectics of civilisation and decivilisation, the text repeatedly questions and criticises the positions of social actors involved in the conflict over hunting in Poland. In some instances, we indicate specific actors for presenting themselves as objective (see the section 'Walt Disney Mentality and the Dying World'). It is therefore important to make our position explicit. Our interpretive stance draws on Elias's theory, read through the lens of animal studies. We acknowledge that humanity lives in the era of the animal turn (Cudworth 2015), and that sociological theory can no longer treat animals as insignificant elements within human-animal figurations (Cudworth/Hobden 2014). Our approach is thus non-anthropocentric, processual, and relational. We elaborate on this stance in the following section.

Human-Animal Figurations

Social science terms like 'ritual,' 'culture,' and 'tradition' often mask hunting's cruelty (Scruton 2004). While science can foster transnational dialogue, it can also shore up exclusionary nationalism (Friese et al. 2023). Yet as the animal rights movement has grown, social scientists have begun studying violence, trauma, and nonhuman rights, adopting more engaged stances toward practices like hunting (Fassin 2012, Kierans/Bell 2017). A sociology of hunting must integrate animal suffering as both a biological reality and a social fact (Cudworth 2015, Kasper 2016, Koop-Monteiro 2023; see Singer 1975, DeGrazia

2 This article forms part of Marta Bucholc's project *The National Habitus Formation and the Process of Civilization in Poland after 1989: A Figurational Approach* (2021–2025).

2009). This does not mean abandoning the questions of motivation such as ‘Why do people hunt?’, but it does demand treating animal pain as genuine, not as a tolerable byproduct of culture or tradition (Nussbaum 2024). Without this perspective, analyses reduce hunting to empty abstractions – ritual, heritage, or symbolism – while erasing the very violence at its core.

A key context for our analysis is the animal turn (Ritvo 2007, Weil 2010) in the humanities and social sciences, or, more broadly, the interdisciplinary field of human–animal studies. This field examines evolving human–animal relationships, shaped by shifts in social values, science, and philosophy (Franklin 1999, Marvin/McHugh 2014, DeMello 2021). Central to this shift is a more empathetic and ethically conscious view of animals, often critiqued in conservative discourse as the ‘animalization of humans/humanization of animals’ (Gwiazdowicz et al. 2023). Developments from Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution to modern neuroscience have blurred the once sharp divide between humans and animals.

Historically seen as mere resources, animals have gained increasing recognition for their intrinsic value, especially since the mid-twentieth century. Landmark works such as Ruth Harrison’s *Animal Machines* (1964) and Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975) spurred animal rights activism and groups like Band of Mercy and the Animal Liberation Front, which focused, among other things, on sabotaging hunts (Tester/Walls 1996). Neuroscientific advances further challenged human exceptionalism by revealing complex animal cognition and emotion (Panksepp 2005, Hatkoff/Pacelle 2009). Research has shown that animals are capable of problem-solving, self-awareness, empathy, and even culture (Preston/de Waal 2002, Rowell et al. 2021, Ramsey 2013). Studies also confirm animals experience joy, fear, grief, and love (Dawkins 2000, de Vere/Kuczaj 2016, de Waal/Andrews 2022), underscoring their sentience and the ethical obligation to treat them with respect. Why is this important? Because this is the position from which we speak, and even if hunters show no interest in these findings or do not engage with

them, this does not mean that we should ignore such findings as social scientists. On the contrary, we believe that an analysis of human–animal relations cannot proceed without a critical engagement with animal studies. Moreover, we draw on scholarly analyses of hunting written by hunters themselves – authors who do not disclose their hunter identity in their publications. Perhaps this identity is irrelevant in their view, since the texts present them solely as objective researchers describing hunting practices (Gwiazdowicz et al. 2023) or debates surrounding hunting (Gwiazdowicz/Matulewska 2020) in an impartial way. This impartiality, however, seems problematic, as it overlooks the long tradition within animal studies that challenges the way many hunters perceive animals (Cudworth 2015, Kapek-Goodridge 2023). Furthermore, hunters emphasise that they kill quickly so that the animal does not suffer. Some of them highlight that they kill in a ‘cold’ manner, to use Garry Marvin’s (2006) term. We discuss this issue in more detail below. Here, we want to stress that social research requires making one’s own positionality visible because, as Elias argues, all communication – including scientific communication – is relational: it is always a message sent from a particular position to someone who can respond if they wish. We follow Patrick Baert and Filipe Carreira da Silva (2010), who argue that we should explicitly state the assumptions on which we build our theories and conduct our research.

Erika Cudworth (2015) argues that the animal turn in sociology could, like feminism, become embedded in mainstream thought. Yasmin Koop-Monteiro (2023) outlines four research frameworks: (1) interspecies relations, (2) animals as an oppressed group, (3) impacts of animal agriculture, and (4) social-ecological networks. The first and fourth resonate with figurational sociology, which explores dynamic networks of interdependence (Kasper 2016). Debbie Kasper (2016: 7) reminds us:

‘Figurations are the dynamic networks of bonds of functional interdependence people form and are embedded in through the ongoing process of meeting general human

needs and wants in particular ways.'

We extend the concept of figuration to include animals – not by accessing their direct perspectives (de Waal/Andrews 2022) but by acknowledging them as social actors and interpreting their roles through the human–animal networks theorised by Donna Haraway (2007), Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh (2014), and Cudworth (2015).

Animals and the Nation

We assume that national identity and references to the concept of civilisation frame the modern discourse on animals, shaping the boundary between the human and the nonhuman. In this context, we identify four key phenomena that are crucial for understanding the relationship between the national imaginary and hunting.

First, recent scholarship highlights the role of animals in settler-colonial projects, which required the violent eradication of existing nations (Gillespie/Narayanan 2020). Colonialism often classified Indigenous peoples, such as Aboriginal Australians, as part of nature, denying them claims to land (Gillespie/Narayanan 2020, Palmer 2003). Nation-building is thus deeply anthropocentric: it excludes nonhuman animals as subjects while instrumentalising them for nationalist purposes (Gillespie/Narayanan 2020, Mkono 2019). Although Poland was not a colonial power, its hunting practices display colonial traits (Sowa 2015, Kojzar 2023), treating wildlife as state property and a recreational resource (Kruczyński 2021, Probucka 2020). Some hunters even portray themselves as victims of a 'civilization offensive' from the West (Żuchowski 2023, Powell 2013), a theme explored below in this article.

Second, research connects hunting and national identity to gender. Ethnographies often link masculinity to honour and hunting, while femininity is associated with shame (Hurn 2012, Herman 2003). Polish hunting culture – marked by firearms, off-road vehicles, knives, vodka, and heavy equipment designed for male bodies – remains male-dominated:

only 3,500 of the Polish Hunting Association's 123,000 members are women (Morska 2019). Campaigns like 'children on the hunt' reflect efforts to preserve patriarchal traditions (Hurn 2012, Cartmill 1996).

Third, animals often serve as national symbols of strength and cunning (Zhu/Ilsinger 2023). In the USA, for example, nationalist and alternative right groups have reappropriated the wolf symbol (Rutherford 2020). Humans increasingly weaponise animals, from military dogs in the 'war on terror' to heroic symbols of loyalty and service (Diamond-Lenow 2020, Sharp 2023).

Fourth, animals face instrumentalisation not only in right-wing but also in progressive and left-wing discourses (Message 2023, Svendsen 2023). For instance, Israeli narratives of animal protection have served to contrast Israeli 'empathy' with Palestinian 'indifference,' obscuring state violence (Alloun 2019). Similarly, British nationalism often portrays the nation as uniquely compassionate toward animals – a device that Reuben Message (2023) terms 'animal welfare chauvinism.'

These examples show how animals face exclusion from and instrumentalisation by national projects, which remain both anthropocentric and speciesist (Cudworth 2015). Polish hunting discourse reflects these dynamics, simultaneously excluding animals from and incorporating them into the national habitus and the idea of civilisation. Below, we explore these ambivalences, resonating with Elias's work.

2. Interpretations

Invented Tradition

We do not aim to recount the long history of hunting in Poland (Konczal 2017), but we want to emphasise that, following Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), we view hunting as an 'invented tradition.' One saw the production of this tradition especially after 1989, when the Polish Hunting Association began actively erasing the history of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) from hunting traditions. The Association's website states that it 'has been active

since 1923' and 'carries out its tasks on the basis of the Act 'Hunting Laws' of 13 October 1995.' However, the Polish Hunting Association actually formed under Article 26 of Bolesław Bierut's decree of 1952 (Sowa 2013). The hunters' silence regarding Bierut's decree is understandable in the Polish context. Philosopher Mikołaj Ratajczak (2025: 39) writes that the 'only hegemonic ideology of the Third Polish Republic [the Polish state after the political transformation that began in 1989], uniting practically all political forces,' is 'anti-communism.' Poles perceive communism as the greatest evil, and hunters do not want anyone to associate them with it. A hunter and scholar, Gwiazdowicz (2019) argues that the criticism of hunters relies on highlighting that hunting is a communist legacy. He believes that movies from the PRL period, in which hunting creates humorous situations for the characters, has reinforced stereotypes that hunting is 'an elite affair, reserved for those in power' (Gwiazdowicz 2019).

In the feudal era, hunting was the exclusive privilege of the nobility, while peasants – denied legal rights – resorted to poaching to feed their families or protect their livestock, often at great personal risk (Mielnikiewicz 2018). Over time, however, hunting evolved from a subsistence activity into a sport and even a form of diplomacy. During the PRL's existence, Polish forests hosted Soviet leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, as well as Western dignitaries, generating both hard currency and prestige (Długołęcki 2018, Potaczala 2023). Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union, shot a deer in Poland, while Josip Broz Tito, the leader of communist Yugoslavia, hunted bison there. According to Polish Prime Minister Józef Pińkowski, Erich Honecker, who served as the leader of the German Democratic Republic from 1971, returned from hunts in Poland 'in an excellent mood' (Długołęcki 2018). Krzysztof Potaczala (2023) states that Western hunters 'had been coming to Poland since the 1960s, but the biggest boom occurred in the 1970s and 1980s.' A frequent guest was the President of France, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, described as an 'avid hunter' by Jerzy Waszczuk, chief of staff to First Secretary Edward Gierek between 1970 and

1980 (Długołęcki 2018). Piotr Długołęcki notes that Gierek 'did not hide his admiration for the French president's marksmanship,' while expressing irritation that Giscard d'Estaing was interested mainly in hunting rather than in exchanging political views.

Today, hunting remains popular among mayors, councillors, the military, and the clergy; even former President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski enjoyed hunting (Sowa 2013). Hunters reject the label of an 'elite pastime' – considering it an outdated stereotype from the PRL era – and insist that it is a genuine national tradition embraced across all social strata (Gwiazdowicz 2019).

Hunters today span priests, entrepreneurs, scientists, and NGO leaders – hardly a peasant cohort. The clergy champion the practice from the pulpit, researcher-hunters boast that 'hunters have research,' and NGOs promoting hunting frame this activity as a societal good (Kancelaria Sejmu 2024). Together, they have reshaped hunting into a modern tradition. As Agata Konczal (2017) observes, today's cult of Saint Hubert bears little resemblance to its historical forms; post-1989, the Polish Hunting Association has actively reinvented its heritage.

Vulnerability: Children and Animals

In October 2019, a citizen driven bill reached Poland's Sejm, proposing that the state should allow minors to join or watch hunts with parental consent. Instead of advancing or facing a decisive rejection, the bill stalled, yet the parliamentary debate itself offers a vivid case study in how national habitus frames two inequalities: childhood and animalhood.

Hunters and MPs of the right wing party Konfederacja (Confederation) argued for tradition and 'European civilization,' portraying hunting as a timeless facet of Polish identity. They warned that barring youth would strip them of essential skills and weaken the nation's defenders. As MP Dobromir Sośnierz put it, city raised 'weaklings' needed 'tough protectors, shooters, and hunters' ready to face any threat. Even far right Grzegorz Braun framed hunting as a patriotic duty, insisting that to oppose it was 'madness and

national treason’ (Kancelaria Sejmu 2020: 8, translated by W.R.). Opponents – from the centrist KO to Zieloni (the Green Party) and child welfare experts – cast hunting as a ‘drag effect’ of an earlier civilising stage. Gabriela Lenartowicz reminded her MP colleagues that ‘slavery used to be tradition, as was wife beating,’ and traditions evolve. Centrist Klaudia Jachira condemned pleasure driven kills: ‘Hunters kill because they like it... We do not live in the stone age’ (Kancelaria Sejmu 2020: 5, translated by W.R.). Green MP Małgorzata Tracz warned of cruelty’s toxic socialization: ‘We must protect children from hostility [toward animals]’ (Kancelaria Sejmu 2020: 6, translated by W.R.). Few sought a compromise, and most of the debate splintered along binary lines: rural versus urban, tradition versus modern ethics, necessity versus desire, and justified versus gratuitous violence. Hunters insisted that controlled killing was ‘natural’ and even beneficial as a shield against media driven virtual brutality, while critics saw it as an obsolete relic of uncivilised impulse. Though the amendment died in the committee, the clash of metaphors – defenders as gardeners or warriors, opponents as civilising missionaries – reveals how deeply Poland’s collective identity and its boundaries of acceptable violence remain contested.

Violence Tabooization

From a sociological perspective, the tabooization of violence toward animals forms part of the broader civilising process described by Elias. Although animal studies scholars have criticised his theory for its anthropocentrism and lack of interspecies perspective (Franklin 1996), it revealed and described an important shift in meat eating habits at the dawn of modernity. Serving entire animal bodies, once placed on tables during feasts and publicly carved, became increasingly rare in the eighteenth century and almost vanished from Western culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Witnessing the act of cutting a whole body into pieces – perceived as normal, perhaps even mouthwatering, until the early modern period – became increasingly disturbing and unset-

ling. Consequently, such practices ceased to be appropriate for ‘civilized’ social events (Elias 2012: 118–119). This modern disembodiment and concealment of violence toward animals may seem an expression of humane sensibilities. However, considering that the vast majority of society is neither vegan nor vegetarian, it may also suggest a significant degree of cognitive dissonance, or even outright hypocrisy. Protecting children from witnessing interspecies violence while expecting them to consume animal products may be a case in point.

As empathy for both children and animals has grown, violence against animals has become deeply taboo. Until the eighteenth century, animal slaughter was public and culturally embedded; with urbanisation and industrial farming, it moved to hidden slaughterhouses, and humans currently consume meat in a sanitised, packaged form – stripped of any visible connection to the living creature (Vialles 1994, Pachirat 2011, Blanchette 2020). Whole carcasses disappeared from our tables (Elias 2012), and killing animals came to appear as ‘uncivilized.’

This disembodiment extends to language and imagery: terms like ‘beef’ and ‘pork’ obscure animal origins, while meat advertising presents a sterile commodity devoid of suffering (Trampe 2017, Glenn 2004, Bjørkdahl/Syse 2021). The result is an ethical paradox: we profess compassion yet continue mass meat consumption, allowing collective moral disengagement. In the hunter’s magazine *SEZON* (Season), ‘one looks in vain for even a trace of a drop of blood’ (Bożek 2015), while Zenon Kruczyński (2017) shows how hunters cleanse their discourse of violence with neutral terms – in hunter’s dictionary, *farba* (paint) means blood traces. Barbara Niedźwiedzka (2021) challenges professor and hunter Andrzej Witkowski’s portrayal of hunted animals’ deaths as spiritually sacred, exposing the fusion of biological loss and religious rhetoric. Together, these examples reveal a broader cultural drive to erase gore and deploy euphemisms that mask political motives (Cudworth 2015, Hammad 2024), a tactic Martha Nussbaum (2024) likens to Roger Scruton’s comparison of hunting to ‘cathedrals in ancient Byzantium.’

In this light, the fight over children at hunts becomes emblematic of societal hypocrisy. Liberal progressive voices condemn youth participation as a violation of the violence taboo (Kulisiewicz 2020), while conservative perspectives argue that exposure to violence is inevitable and necessary. Ultimately, these debates pivot on how modern society conceals – and simultaneously perpetuates – animal violence.

Cold and Hot Violence

In 2021, Polish hunters killed roughly 2.5 million wild animals amid the global annual toll of 1.23 billion (Niedźwiedzka et al. 2023: 3). Yet public opinion is overwhelmingly against hunting: a 2019 survey found that 94 percent of Poles opposed bird hunts (67 percent favour a total ban) and only 10 percent supported recreational hunting (Jurszo 2019). In mid-2024, 76 percent opposed commercial hunting (Stosunek 2024). Despite this, hunters defend their practice as cultural heritage and even lobby UNESCO for intangible heritage status.

Public debate remains dominated by a ‘culturalist’ frame – arguing over who represents ‘authentic’ hunting – while sidelining discussions about social or ecological justice and animal agency. Hunters cast themselves as an oppressed minority besieged by activists, demand unity against perceived ‘hate speech’ (Matulewska/Gwiazdowicz 2021), and compare their conservation model to ‘wise stewardship’ (cf. Donaldson/Kymlicka 2023). They insist killing is a rational duty to manage wildlife, likening themselves to gardeners (cf. Bauman 1992) who prune nature for the common good, even as critics warn this mindset masks a refusal to confront the inherent violence of hunting.

Hunters claim they act for both people and wildlife – safeguarding crops, shielding urban children from wild boars, and managing nature to prevent threats to life and property. Their argument, echoing a colonialist slippery slope logic, holds that without their lethal interventions the ‘wild’ would overrun civilisation (Norton 2024). In this light, they cast themselves as modern guardians. Progressive hunters –

like Marcin Możdżonek (cf. Polski Związek Łowiecki 2024) and Dariusz J. Gwiazdowicz (cf. Gwiazdowicz et al. 2023) – present hunting as a modern, dispassionate practice: ‘cold,’ devoid of passion, and undertaken in the name of the state and the rational management of national resources.

Hunters frame their activity as a national project that needs defending by someone and for someone (Konczal 2017). They portray animal advocates as enemies, since greater public oversight threatens their freedom to manage wildlife (Konczal 2017). Catholic hunters lambast activists as ‘irresponsible’ and ‘self indulgent’ for prioritising animal welfare over human need (Niedźwiedzka et al. 2023: 55).

The terms we use for killing animals reveal competing worldviews. ‘Euthanasia’ as opposed to ‘slaughter’ (Jepson 2008, Cudworth 2015) both appear as unemotional, objective, ‘cold’ killings – similar to medical or industrial methods (Marvin 2006). By contrast, many cast hunting as ‘hot,’ driven by emotion and pleasure. Yet hunters strive to rebrand their practice as a modern, ‘cold’ form of violence – precise, controlled, and therefore more civilised. They champion night vision gear and shot placement to minimise suffering, invoking a ‘civilization offensive’ that casts hunting as methodical stewardship.

This may seem controversial, but from Elias’s point of view as we see it, ‘cold’ violence – controlled and passionless – marks true civilisation. Elias, of course, complicates this position. In *The Loneliness of the Dying* (1985), he asks whether the civilising process – based largely on the medicalisation of life – may in fact lead to suffering rather than liberate us from it. We could argue that the animal rights discourse moves in a similar direction. Today, this discourse emphasises that the most uncivilised brutality is the detached, state-supported violence of slaughterhouses and factory farms, which breed, kill, and process animals out of sight. By referring to Elias’s book on dying in hospital, we do not mean to equate a hospital with a slaughterhouse. Rather, the point is to illustrate a mechanism of the civilising process. While hospitalised himself (Bucholc 2013), Elias observed that isolating a patient from family

and friends and placing them in a room full of medical equipment does not necessarily signify civilisational progress – only technological advancement.

Hunters might protest at this point and demand the right to involve children in hunting on a similar basis: that prohibiting children from participating destroys families and condemns hunters to loneliness. This argument is unconvincing – after all, some hunters prefer to hunt alone – and, more importantly, it reflects a misunderstanding of Elias's argument. Elias emphasises the dialectical nature of the civilising process (van Krieken 2024), which is simultaneously a process of decivilising. What initially appears to represent progress – such as creating slaughterhouses that conceal the suffering of animals and of the people working there (Dunn 2015) – ultimately turns out to be decivilising. Animal rights advocates condemn both industrial farms and hunting practices – such as baiting wild boars or raising birds for release and shooting – as equally brutal. Kruczyński (2024) highlights the 'hecatomb of injuries' in the field: hunters merely wound roughly 25 percent of large game, while countless birds suffer crippling wounds and prolonged agony.

Walt Disney Mentality and the Dying World

As noted above, some hunters are also researchers. They publish peer-reviewed articles on hunting, arguing that children's participation in hunts is a long-standing tradition (Gwiazdowicz et al. 2023) or emphasising that animal rights activists display aggression toward hunters online (Gwiazdowicz/Matulewska 2020). As a hunter and researcher, Gwiazdowicz claims neutrality, yet by framing hunters as victims of activists, he weaponises the appearance of 'objective' science to advance a political agenda – an interventionist move he never acknowledges (Cousin/Rui 2011, Matulewska/Gwiazdowicz 2021). Although Gwiazdowicz comments on social issues, his articles omit current methodological, ethical, and theoretical debates taking place within the social sciences. The status of animals in social theory frameworks is one such debate (Cudworth 2015, Koop-Monteiro 2023).

Gwiazdowicz neither discloses his own research assumptions nor the fact that he is a hunter. His texts criticise animal rights advocates for 'animalizing' humans and 'humanizing' animals (Garber 1999):

'What we increasingly observe in social media is the anthropomorphization of nature, personification of trees, humanization of animals and animization of men. Such a narrative becomes more and more emotional and some celebrities, politicians and journalists are involved in it (Gwiazdowicz et al. 2023: 2).'

This anthropomorphism allegedly reduces hunting to the 'stereotypical killing of innocent animals':

'The anthropomorphizing of the animal world and nature, in general, leads to limiting some activities such as hunting to the stereotypical killing of innocent animals. The more distant people become with respect to nature, the more limited environmental knowledge they have and the more stereotypically they perceive various phenomena.' (Matulewska/Gwiazdowicz 2021: 391)

Hunters use terms like 'anthropomorphization of nature' and 'humanization of animals' to separate 'friends,' namely those rooted in the landscape, from 'enemies,' namely urban animal activists deemed naive and manipulable. They dismiss advances in neuroscience showing cognitive and emotional continuities between humans and animals. In light of scientific insights into animal cognition, Lorne Hammond (1992) criticises Keith Tester for conflating anthropomorphism with empathy. As Hammond puts it, 'Tester fails to see that concern for animals may simply reflect social awareness of our industrial relationships with them' (Hammond 1992: 155). Meanwhile, many countries have enacted animal welfare laws, regulated animal use industries, and advanced conservation efforts. Hammond concludes that 'Tester confines himself to the urban–rural divide, ignoring the more significant factor of economic dependence.' This critique encapsulates the heart of contemporary Polish hunting discourse. In their article, Gwiazdowicz et al. (2023) do not engage

with the broader discussion of the ‘anthropomorphization’ concept. They fail to provide its etymology or examine the arguments that have appeared in academic literature and public debate in Western countries (Singer/Lynch 1989).

Gwiazdowicz (2019) describes what he calls the ‘Walt Disney value system,’ which he defines as ‘a fairy-tale image of nature, mutual love and harmony between different species of animals’ that gives rise to the so-called Bambi Syndrome (Gwiazdowicz et al. 2023: 2). Disney’s fairy tales depict hunters as villains or losers, like the hunter who kills Bambi’s mother. This ‘Disney mentality’ tabooises animal suffering and the human relationship with the land. Hunters’ discourse echoes the ‘grand theory of alienation’ and Theodor W. Adorno’s critique of the culture industry, resembling old school sociologists writing in the style of Pierre Bourdieu from the 1970s. According to these sociologists’ line of thought, the Disney paradigm represents a cosmopolitan taste – a good taste that embodies a disinterested, aesthetic view of animals, contrasting with the hunters’ lifestyle, which ‘false universalists’ consider a bad taste. According to Gwiazdowicz, the Disney taste is the dominant urban ideology – detached from real animals, real landscapes, and the necessary violence of wildlife management. In studies of Disney fairy tales, one frequently emphasised theme is Disney’s fixation on death (Lammon 2023). Marissa Lammon (2025) argues that Disney coined the ‘dead-mother plot.’ Lammon analyses the exceptionally traumatic death of the mother in *Bambi*.³ A. Waller Hastings (1996) writes that *Bambi* is one of the most mythical and powerful movies Disney has ever produced. The movie features ‘slob hunters’ who most likely shoot out of season and do so recklessly (Hastings 1996: 54). ‘Among hunters, “Bambi-lover” has become a pejorative term for hunting opponents’ (Hastings 1996: 54).

Hastings cites Matt Cartmill (1996: 180), who writes: ‘Many hunting writers seem to think that if *Bambi* and other Disney products could somehow be suppressed, opposition to hunting would evaporate.’ Hunters accuse ‘animal lovers’ of hypocrisy, noting that they condemn hunting yet consume industrially produced meat (Sowa 2013). According to an animal rights researcher, this is their ‘most serious argument,’ even though they offer no solutions for the billions of animals factory-farmed each year. Meanwhile, some animal rights activists adopt a Marxist stance, claiming to liberate hunters and farmers from ‘false consciousness.’ One activist remarks: ‘Farmers don’t have time to read books, and we’re lucky to be able to explore these issues,’ implying that farmers’ ignorance of future climate change effects stems from a failure of state education (D’Eramo 2024).

Polish hunter-scholars emphasise the influence of many factors on the negative perception of hunting in Poland, focusing mainly on cultural ones. Yet they rarely address economic or class concerns, portraying Polish society as a network of families – echoing a Thatcherite vision that obscures forests as a common good (Morska 2019, Konczal 2017, Deneen 2018). An analysis of their texts and statements (Gwiazdowicz/Matulewska 2020, Gwiazdowicz 2019, Matulewska/Gwiazdowicz 2021) reveals the worldview they present. On the one hand, hunters are a rationally thinking social group surrounded by ‘animal lovers’ or simply by the majority raised in Bambi culture, who are oversensitive to animal suffering. By linking this oversensitivity to *Bambi* or to the anthropomorphisation of animals, hunters reproduce a deeper cultural trend that associates oversensitivity with children, women, and emotions (Donaldson/Kymlicka 2023). On the other hand, hunters are ‘hated’ (Gwiazdowicz/Matulewska 2020, Matulewska/Gwiazdowicz 2021). Animal rights activists attack, insult, and threaten hunters, and address them using vulgar language. Certainly, vulgar attacks on hunters online are a real phenomenon, similarly to hateful attacks by hunters on animal rights supporters (Petryczkiewicz 2024). However, their writings do not offer an in-depth analysis of the economic, demographic, technological,

3 In Poland, Disney’s biggest hit was *The Lion King* (1994), followed by *Pocahontas* (1995). During Youth Climate Strikes, young people sung a song from the latter movie, which depicts the love between a Native American woman and an English soldier who does not understand the natural world.

or power relations that motivate – or help explain – the criticism directed at hunters (Hastings 1996, Hurn 2012, Kapek-Goodridge 2023).

Hastings (1996) emphasises that *Bambi* is a commodity produced for capitalist profit. He writes that in the case of *Bambi*, it is not the creator who becomes alienated from the product of his labour, but the presumed audience – rural, mostly white, and largely conservative. ‘As Cartmill’s history of hunting suggests, the hunting has always been an activity of either the aristocracy or the rural worker – never of the bourgeois, the middle-class city dweller’ (Hastings 1996: 58). In their video clips (e.g. Polski Związek Łowiecki 2024), hunters address the middle class, for instance by featuring Możdżonek, a former volleyball champion who now heads the National Hunting Council (Naczelna Rada Łowiecka). Możdżonek’s image as a successful athlete certainly aligns with middle-class values (Gdula/Sadura 2012). The same applies to Gwiazdowicz’s (2019) call for strategic reputation management. He highlights the societal costs of banning hunting and warns against a ‘spiral of hatred’ that corrodes public support (Krajewski 2020). Some hunters themselves admit that ‘the mistake made by hunters was a stubborn refusal to dialogue with society at large, especially with those who oppose hunting’ (Kojzar 2024, cf. von Essen 2019). Gwiazdowicz (2019) urges a cost-benefit approach, namely showing the social costs of banning hunting. Yet in forming tactical alliances, the Polish Hunting Association directs its message primarily toward farmers, foresters, and nationalist politicians.

Polish hunters deploy populist tactics – naming activists, the ‘rotten West,’ and the ideology of ‘animalisation of humans / humanisation of animals’ as enemies (Mouffe 2018). Niedźwiedzka (2021) notes: ‘The cacophony of arguments ... serves one purpose: to name the enemy.’ To counter negative perceptions, Możdżonek warns hunters that if they allow ‘disarming’ or attacking their traditions, ‘they will lose everything’ (Kojzar 2024). Chief Hunter Eugeniusz Grzeszczak has even joined farmers’ yellow vest ‘Be visible!’ protests, though alliances have frayed over disputes like boar culling fees. Hunters

build coalitions across political lines – emphasising nationalism under PiS and patriotism under KO (Rapior/Koczanowicz 2021, Roś 2024). In 2024, General Mirosław Różański proposed mobilizing an ‘army of 120,000 hunters’ for defence (Ćwieluch 2024, translated by W.R.), while Defence Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz praised hunters’ ‘patriotism in their hearts’ just before the European elections (Roś 2024, translated by W.R.), blurring the lines between nationalism and patriotism (Ash 2017).

Even Warsaw’s liberal mayor, Rafał Trzaskowski, resorts to culling wild boars. However, Sowa (2024, translated by W.R.) argues, ‘the solution does not have to be their mass extermination.’ Critics contend that today’s crises – poverty, climate change, and pandemics – stem from ineffective institutions, not natural limits (Nussbaum 2024). Yet the debate fixates on a small group of hunters defending their way of life. Ultimately, the stumbling block is not just the Disney fantasy or the siege mentality of hunters, but our broader inability to cooperate on a planetary scale. As Chakrabarty (2021) argues, we confront not multiculturalism but ‘multinaturalism’: a plurality of ‘we’s,’ each with its own claims and values. This tension makes us return to Elias’s notion of civilisation – that is, how we negotiate shared existence amid competing worldviews.

3. Discussion: The Human–Nonhuman We?

In the introduction, we noted that the language of civilisation appears in debates about the rights and responsibilities of hunters. Elżanowski describes hunting as a ‘civilizational regression,’ while Kaja refers to people like Elżanowski as exhibiting ‘eco-backwardness.’ Neither of them, however, reflects on the concept of civilisation itself, on the civilising process – not only in Elias’s sense – or on the nature of the civilisation in which they operate. Both Elżanowski and Kaja function within the civilising process described by Elias (2012), a process that unfolded in Europe. The environmental and ecological principles originating in the continent – also among Europeans

themselves – face increasing criticism (Descola 2014, Moore 2015, Carton/Malm 2024). As Miriam Lang et al. (2024: 3–4) argue, even though global powers – the EU, the USA, and the non-Western China – frame decarbonisation as part of a sustainable future, such ‘green’ policies often reproduce green colonialism. Under the banner of sustainability, they shift ecological burdens onto the Global South, triggering a new wave of environmental dispossession. This harms not only local communities but also millions of animals and other sentient beings, as their habitats and vital ecosystems face degradation in the process.

In Elias’s theory, we can understand the clash over ‘cold’ versus ‘hot’ violence as a debate over whether emotional detachment makes killing more humane or merely hides its brutality. This clash concerns the very notion of civilisation itself, as well as the question of whether animals and nature belong within the human world. Erica Cudworth and Stephen Hobden (2014: 474) write:

‘The core of our argument is that the ‘standard of civilisation’ is primarily based on a notion of separation, or detachment, from nature – with those societies that are perceived as being most detached being regarded as the most civilised, while those that are mired in nature are perceived as in some ways as less civilised.’

They (Cudworth/ Hobden 2014: 756) further explain: ‘The civilised European subject was to expunge their animality via self-discipline.’

The concept of civilisation ‘entered the history of ideas at the same time as the modern sense of the word progress’ (Starobinski 1993: 4). However, as Bruno Latour and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2020: 30) observe, it is now challenging to distinguish between human history and the history of the nonhuman:

‘The morally “good” side – the liberal democratic West thought so highly of their own moral triumph that they could not see where the world, environmentally speaking, was headed.’

Recently, Adrianna Kapek-Goodridge (2023) exa-

mined human attitudes toward animal suffering and posed the question: ‘What does it mean to be civilised in the 21st century?’ Maybe this is a misplaced question. The civilising and decivilising process remains a simultaneous one, even for animals. Van Krieken (2024: 83) describes how indigenous people in Australia integrated into the white European community:

‘It is based on a developed form of we-identity (Elias 2010 [1987]), to the extent that an empathic emotional response to Aboriginal experiences has become a central aspect of the Australian national habitus.’

He explains the situation as follows (van Krieken 2024: 82):

‘The shift was precisely from an almost complete absence of mutual identification to an increasing disposition towards a recognition of mutual similarities and shared experience.’

Over 50 percent of Poles identify with their pets, while almost no one identifies with industrially produced animals. The human species has established a presence on a planetary scale, effectively colonising the nonhuman environment. Van Krieken (2024: 82) notes that the colonisation of the natives took place under the banner of the civilising process:

‘The history of the removal of Indigenous children in Australia is, therefore, an important example of the ways in which civilizing processes have simultaneously constituted decivilizing processes.’

Van Krieken (2024) advocates the concept of meta-civilization: particular civilising offensives and the possibilities for their reflexive meta-civilization – or their ‘decolonizing civilizing’ (Van Krieken 1999: 311). He indicates that Elias understands the civilising process as ‘a never-ending one,’ ‘because it is interwoven with decivilizing processes’ (Van Krieken 2024: 83). The analysis of the controversies over the right to hunt in Poland in the planetary age (Chakrabarty 2021) demonstrates two issues. On the one hand, the

civilising/decivilising process does not end, because we – whomever this ‘we’ denotes – will never reach a global we-identity or a ‘human-nonhuman we.’ On the other hand, this process may end once and for all with a climate catastrophe.

Proponents present hunting as a part of the national identity, but we must remember the context of feeding eight billion people and the annual slaughter of 2.8 trillion land and sea animals, including more than 80 billion land animals slaughtered for meat every year (Rosado 2024, Niedźwiedzka et al. 2023; see also Patterson 2016). In such context, the process of civilising hunting appears as a necessary yet pointless task. The issue is no longer only ecological; it has become a matter of survival for the civilisation as a whole (Latour 2020). The concept of civilisation, in the narrow sense of a project invented in the eighteenth century, has become abandoned for good (Latour 2020: 6). Martin Savransky (2022: 367) suggests:

‘Learning to die in the wake of ecological devastation requires making life outside the modern coordinates of progress, which is to say living without the ideal of civilization.’

Fighting for animals is not just a struggle for ‘more efficient protection or guarantee of their rights.’ Instead, it is ‘a de facto battle for our shared technological future’ (Krzykowski 2019: 138). We can conclude that hunters believe that the civilising process has gone too far. Even though they control the vast resources of the Polish state’s forests and wildlife, some of them see themselves as an ‘indigenous people’ repelling the civilising offensive. By contrast, Cudworth reminds us that civilisation is too anthropocentric, and we can see it as a process of negating the animal in the human. However, the civilising process does not happen by itself; it is the fight that matters. What do we do when hunters see themselves as victims, insist that they are expressions of ‘otherness,’ and demand inclusion in the civilising process, but on their own terms, while most people see nothing wrong when ‘the most basic interests of animals are sacrificed for the most trivial interests of humans’

(Donaldson/ Kymlicka 2023: 624)?

4. Conclusion

This article has unpacked how hunting in Poland sits at the crossroads of national identity, tradition, and the evolving civilising process. Once the exclusive prerogative of nobility – an emblem of power and masculinity, hunting has become a defended link to land and heritage, even as urbanisation and industrial farming erode direct contact with animals. Hunters cast themselves as rational ‘stewards’ wielding controlled, ‘cold’ violence for conservation, while critics depict hunting as an anachronistic, decivilising practice that glorifies unnecessary bloodshed and desensitises its participants – especially children – to cruelty. Framed through Elias’s lens of civilisation, the debates reveal a persistent ‘drag effect,’ where older, more violent habits linger despite the growing empathy toward animals. The civilising process – and the modernisation process, which interweaves with the former – is hardly linear. Consequently, tension may develop between larger civilising tendencies and the individual or smaller-group habitus, creating a ‘drag effect,’ wherein competing versions of the desired state of affairs emerge and may disrupt the civilising process. According to Stefanie Ernst et al. (2017), the core of the drag effect concept is the situation where the social – or, in this case, national – habitus lags behind the changes in power relations.

By invoking national references, hunters attempt to show that national tradition faces the threat of global processes and colonisation by a ‘Disney mentality.’ They fail to notice that their own approach is colonial in itself, because nationalism has often classified Indigenous peoples or animals as part of the surrounding nature (Gillespie/Narayanan 2020) – nature that humans must manage. This colonial and national mode of managing nature faces increasing criticism today (Moore 2015). Elias’s theory gives us tools to move beyond the accusations of a Disney mentality on the one hand and of colonialism and nationalism on the other. Elias analyses social reality as a human–natural reality, rejecting the nature–society dualism.

More importantly, he sees social reality as a process and a figuration – that is, as ever-changing relations between various elements, including natural ones. Elias's theoretical framework allows us to recognise that the civilising process is dialectical and also produces decivilising tendencies. Therefore, it is crucial to examine how social processes intertwine, who supports each of them, and who has interests – and of what kind – in amplifying certain tendencies while silencing others. Importantly, however, Elias emphasises that long-term social processes are not intentional and that their shape depends on many social actions.

The public debate in Poland presents hunting as a part of a tradition which clashes with new developments in the treatment of animals, and as a normalization of public, unnecessary violence. Proponents warn that restricting or abolishing hunting entails a risk of creating an over-sanitised society, one ill-prepared for life's harsh realities – a society marked by a 'Bambi syndrome' and a 'Disney mentality.' Opponents respond that genuine progress requires rejecting violence and prioritising universal compassion over parochial tradition. As Poland – and the world – confront climate and biodiversity crises, this clash highlights the urgent need to rethink human–animal relations, balancing respect for cultural memory with ethical and ecological responsibility. The debate over hunting law in Poland reveals something crucial for the future of environmental discussions, policies, and struggles for a more ecologically just world. The national level and the nation–state do matter, because they serve as the point of intersection for debates from different scales – global, regional, and local. The nation remains one of the fundamental political spaces: democratic yet chauvinistic – a phenomenon Elias would call 'Janus-faced.'

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