WHO OWNS WILDLIFE IN URUGUAY? CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GAME MANAGEMENT AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON WILDLIFE OWNERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates the connections and contradictions between national legal frameworks and local practices of managing wildlife in Uruguay (with a focus on hunting), with the aim of improving wildlife management and social livelihoods.

Theoretical Framework: In this topic, the main concepts and theories that underpin the research are presented. Wildlife management, environmental anthropology and legal studies stand out, providing a solid basis for understanding the context of the investigation.

Method: The methodology adopted for this research comprises an ethnographic approach. Data collection was carried out through non-structured techniques such as open-ended interviews and participant observation.

Results and Discussion: The results obtained revealed the disconnection existing between national and local practices of human-wildlife relations. In the discussion section, these results are contextualized in light of the theoretical framework, highlighting the implications and relationships identified. Possible discrepancies and limitations of the study are also considered in this section.

Research Implications: The practical and theoretical implications of this research are discussed, providing insights into how the results can be applied or influence practices in the field of wildlife management. These implications could encompass the rediscussion of the ownership of wildlife in light of the consideration of local practices.

Originality/Value: This study contributes to the literature by discussing the tensions between local practices and wildlife management, from a multidisciplinary social sciences perspective. The relevance and value of this research are evidenced by their potential impact for reframing legal corpus of wildlife management.

Keywords: Human-Wildlife Interactions, Hunting Local Traditions, Public Perceptions, Traditional Knowledge, Wildlife Conservation, Uruguay, Wildlife Ownership.

QUEM POSSUI A VIDA SELVAGEM NO URUGUAI? CONEXÕES ENTRE GERENCIAMENTO DE JOGOS E PERSPECTIVAS LOCAIS SOBRE A PROPRIEDADE DA VIDA SELVAGEM

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo investiga as conexões e contradições entre os quadros legais nacionais e as práticas locais de manejo da vida selvagem no Uruguai (com foco na caça), com o objetivo de melhorar a gestão da vida selvagem e os meios de subsistência social.

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Estrutura Teórica: Neste tópico, são apresentados os principais conceitos e teorias que sustentam a pesquisa. A gestão da vida selvagem, a antropologia ambiental e os estudos jurídicos se destacam, fornecendo uma base sólida para a compreensão do contexto da investigação.

Método: A metodologia adotada para esta pesquisa compreende uma abordagem etnográfica. A coleta de dados foi realizada por meio de técnicas não estruturadas, como entrevistas abertas e observação de participantes.

Resultados e Discussão: Os resultados obtidos revelaram a desconexão existente entre as práticas nacionais e locais de relações entre vida humana e selvagem. Na seção de discussão, esses resultados são contextualizados à luz do marco teórico, destacando as implicações e relações identificadas. As possíveis discrepâncias e limitações do estudo também são consideradas nesta seção.

Implicações da pesquisa: As implicações práticas e teóricas desta pesquisa são discutidas, fornecendo insights sobre como os resultados podem ser aplicados ou influenciar práticas no campo da gestão da vida selvagem. Essas implicações poderiam incluir a rediscussão da propriedade da vida selvagem à luz da consideração das práticas locais.

Originalidade/valor: Este estudo contribui para a literatura ao discutir as tensões entre práticas locais e gestão da vida selvagem, a partir de uma perspectiva multidisciplinar de ciências sociais. A relevância e o valor desta pesquisa são evidenciados por seu impacto potencial para reformar o corpus legal de gestão da vida selvagem.


¿QUIÉN ES PROPIETARIO DE LA VIDA SILVESTRE EN URUGUAY? CONEXIONES ENTRE LA GESTIÓN DEL JUEGO Y LAS PERSPECTIVAS LOCALES SOBRE LA PROPIEDAD DE LA VIDA SILVESTRE

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Este estudio investiga las conexiones y contradicciones entre los marcos legales nacionales y las prácticas locales de manejo de la vida silvestre en Uruguay (con un enfoque en la caza), con el objetivo de mejorar el manejo de la vida silvestre y los medios de vida sociales.

Marco teórico: En este tema se presentan los principales conceptos y teorías que sustentan la investigación. Destacan la gestión de la vida silvestre, la antropología ambiental y los estudios jurídicos, que proporcionan una base sólida para comprender el contexto de la investigación.

Método: La metodología adoptada para esta investigación comprende un enfoque etnográfico. La recopilación de datos se llevó a cabo mediante técnicas no estructuradas, como entrevistas abiertas y observación de los participantes.

Resultados y discusión: Los resultados obtenidos revelaron la desconexión existente entre las prácticas nacionales y locales de las relaciones entre humanos y vida silvestre. En la sección de discusión, estos resultados se contextualizan a la luz del marco teórico, destacando las implicaciones y relaciones identificadas. Las posibles discrepancias y limitaciones del estudio también se consideran en esta sección.

Implicaciones de la investigación: Se discuten las implicaciones prácticas y teóricas de esta investigación, proporcionando información sobre cómo se pueden aplicar los resultados o influir en las prácticas en el campo de la gestión de la vida silvestre. Estas implicaciones podrían incluir la rediscusión de la propiedad de la vida silvestre a la luz de la consideración de las prácticas locales.

Originalidad/Valor: Este estudio contribuye a la literatura discutiendo las tensiones entre las prácticas locales y el manejo de la vida silvestre, desde una perspectiva multidisciplinar de las ciencias sociales. La relevancia y el valor de esta investigación se evidencian por su impacto potencial para reformular el corpus legal de la gestión de la vida silvestre.

Palabras clave: Interacciones entre humanos y vida silvestre, Tradiciones locales de caza, Percepciones públicas, Conocimiento tradicional, Conservación de la vida silvestre, Uruguay, Propiedad de la vida silvestre.
1 INTRODUCTION

Hunting is an activity that generates much social debate, as there are various arguments for and against it in economic, moral, ecological and social terms (Byrd, Lee, & Widmar, 2017; Fischer et al., 2013; Kelly & Rule, 2013; Knezevic, 2009). The management of this activity is a topic of growing interest as it involves multidimensional aspects in very diverse geographical and cultural contexts (Bragagnolo et al., 2019; McHenry, 1993). One of the fundamental aspects of the success of sustainable hunting management systems is the legal definition of the ownership of wildlife. The scope of national hunting regulation and the design of ecological and economic sustainability strategies depend on what can be done with wildlife, what obligations exist, and whether it can be defined as a private, state or nobody's property (Rosser, 2009).

Our case study focuses on the connection between hunting management and the ownership of wildlife in Uruguay. Hunting in Uruguay is regulated by criminal, civil, and administrative law. Civil law establishes a relationship between the ownership of land and the ownership of the hunted animal, with wildlife considered res nullius. The figure of res nullius, a Latin expression meaning "nobody's thing", is taken as the axis of regulation, and private land property is defined as the object of protection. This conception of nature derives from Roman law, which allowed all citizens to hunt unless the landowner deliberately expressed that hunting on his property was forbidden (Martin-Mateo, 1997). Criminal law identifies the right to hunt as an attribute linked directly to the property owner, with the protection of property law being the norm's primary aim. Article 357 of the Criminal Code identifies the right to hunt as an attribute linked directly to the property owner. The main framework that regulates hunting is Administrative Law. The Wildlife Act (Act No. 9,481 of 1935), which is regulated by administrative law, prohibits hunting of zoological species within the national territory, with some exceptions for alien species. The act was updated in Decree 164 of 1996, which established different hunting categories to regulate the hunting of certain species. In general terms, the logic of the regulations establishes that native species or zoological species cannot be hunted, while exotic species can.

In this paper we focus on the relationship between national hunting regulation and local
hunting practices in Uruguay. Our case study is located in Paso Centurión, a small and remote rural town in north-eastern Uruguay, where conservation interventions are challenging local narratives and practices of hunting. The main question of our research is how the hunting national regulatory framework affects local hunting practices, conceptions of poaching and the theft for consumption of domestic animals (under the private property regime)? Through ethnographic work, we noticed that, in Paso Centurión, animal ownership plays a critical role in the social regulation of hunting. The socioeconomic situation of the rural inhabitants shapes the legitimacy of taking animals from the forest for food or domestic use.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hunting has been a big field of study in social sciences. From the ecological anthropology and archaeology of the first half of the 20th century, hunting has been very studied from the point of view of the “caloric role” of animals in hunting-gathering societies (Harris, 1968; White, 1959). In fact, hunting has become an explanatory category in itself for much of the history of mankind. To talk about hunting societies or hunter-gatherers where subsistence hunting was one of the main structuring activities, not only implies talking about a productive activity aimed at obtaining food, but also about a form of social and political organization (Lee & Devore, 1968; Price & Brown, 1985; Service, 1966). More recently, social sciences have focused on the study of sport hunting as a type of interaction between humans and animals closely linked to environmental management, land ownership, and rurality, among others (Cooper, Larson, Dayer, Stedman, & Decker, 2015; Daigle, Hrubes, & Ajzen, 2002).

The European transition from subsistence to sport hunting marked one of the most important changes in human-animal relations in the Middle Ages, but it was also a process of territorial, social, and legal ordering. Parallel to the emergence of sport hunting in much of Europe, a privatization of hunting was generated. In the Middle Ages, due to the influence of Germanic law, hunting rights were considered a privilege of the feudal lords. At that time, the penalties for poaching were especially severe. In medieval and Renaissance England, hunting was an aristocratic privilege and commoners had no right to it. The land was owned by aristocrats, feudal lords or the Church. Wild animals were in fact property of the aristocracy. The right to hunt was a sign of status and prosperity (DeMello, 2012).

One of the social demands of the French Revolution was linked to the abolition of these privileges that implied the imposition of severe punishments on those who violated these limitations (Estève, 2004). The figure of res nullius is taken as the axis of regulation, and private
land property is defined as the object of protection. This conception of nature derives from Roman law, which allowed all citizens to hunt unless the landlord deliberately expressed that hunting in his property was forbidden. Wildlife was considered res nullius, that is, "thing without an owner." Wildlife was not linked to the owner of the place where it was found, so that hunters, when hunting, seized the prey and thus made it their own. In the 19th century, it was decided to privatize the rights over wildlife by assigning it to the landowners, based on the principle of accession, which states that everything on that land belongs to the landlord. At the beginning of the 20th century, a new perspective emerged, emphasizing the biological values of wildlife. The path of legislation on threatened and protected species began, driven by international treaties, with the most remote precedent being the 1902 Paris Convention on the protection of birds (Ossorio, 1992).

The study of the connection between wildlife management and traditional rural lifestyles in places where hunting is engaged in deep environmental relations is an important aspect of the management of nature-culture interactions (Dickson, Hutton, & Adams, 2009; Maldonado, 2010; Maldonado-Chaparro & Blumstein, 2008; Vega, Carpinetti, Duarte, & Fa, 2013). To consider the plurality of the forms of these interactions is key to a better management of the territory (W. Adams, 2017). Throughout the world, there are numerous variants of the relationship between human beings and nature (Descola, 2001; Ingold, 2002; Viveiros de Castro, 2004) and particularly between animal ownership and hunting (Naveh & Bird-David, 2014). These different ways of conceiving animal ownership have strong implications in wildlife management and in the legal regulation of hunting as an activity that directly impacts wildlife (Child & Chitsike, 2000) but, on the other hand, it has a series of cultural implications that go beyond modern concepts of environmental management or game management (Blaser, 2009).

3 METHODOLOGY

This work arises from an ethnographic case study we conducted between 2013 and 2018 in Paso Centurión (Figure 1). This small rural town is located in the northeast of Uruguay, in the department of Cerro Largo. It is within the Merin lagoon basin and borders Brazil following the Yaguarón river. It has a population of about 200 inhabitants, which tends to age and decline, mostly with meager socioeconomic rates, making it the target of various state social programs. Livestock breeding serves as the foundation for the economic and productive activities in this region. The distribution of land and wealth presents high levels of inequality. In addition to
working in the productive tasks of livestock, women are generally responsible for reproductive work such as childcare and parenting, household chores, and caring for the elderly.

**Figure 1**

Map of the study area.


The area is considered very relevant from the point of view of environmental uniqueness. It combines natural grasslands of the north of the country, riparian forests, and forests characteristic of the Atlantic forest, a relict representing the southern limit of this biome at the continental level. Regarding fauna, half of the entire group of species registered for the country is found there (SNAP, 2018). Almost half of the mammal species reported nationally are present, as well as rare and new species for Uruguay, such as the *Puma yagouaroundi* and many others that are under some category of conservation, such as the small anteater (*Tamandua tetradactyla*), the *paca* (*Cuniculus paca*), the *tatú de rabo molle* (*Cabassous tatouay*), the *coendú* (*Sphiggurus spinosus*), the *cuica de agua* (*Chironectes minimus*) and the *aguará guazú* (*Chrysocyon brachyurs*) (Grattarola et al., 2016).

Throughout history, hunting has been an integral part of the relationship between people and animals in the forests of Paso Centurión. In Centurión, hunting has traditionally constituted a source of food for several families, a way of controlling animals regarded as dangerous or harmful, and an activity linked to recreation and interaction with nature. The most hunted animals are *mulita* (*Dasypus septemcinctus*), *tatu* (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) and *capybara*
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(\textit{Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris}). These native species are mentioned as the most common for subsistence and commercial hunting at the national level (SNAP, 2013:184). Under current regulations, all these species are considered native zoological species and hunting them is prohibited. From a legal perspective, this situation places these families under the category of "poachers", opposing hunting regulations to a series of practices deeply rooted in the systems of use and meaning of nature.

The area where Paso Centurión is located was declared a Departmental Reserve in 2007 and was recently incorporated into the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP), the State's nature conservation system managed by the National Directorate of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (part of the Ministry of the Environment), colloquially known as DINABISE for its acronym in Spanish. Likewise, several research and conservation interventions are being carried out by non-governmental organisations. The most relevant ones considering their trajectory and local engagement are a civil association called Julana (Playing in Nature) and an NGO called Coendu (Conservation of Native Species of Uruguay). Although both organisations are relevant actors regarding hunting, conservation, and human-animal relations in Centurion, in this work we focus on the impact of Coendu as the most radical group that has worked in the area.

Coendu focuses on conserving native flora and fauna through poaching control, ecotourism development, and environmental institutionalisation. With a vital work component based on social networks, the NGO has made Centurion one of the central work locations: one of its primary goals has been to incorporate the area into the National System of Protected Areas. At that time, a couple of Coendu members bought some land and settled permanently among the local people. In addition, one was appointed as a Municipal Environmental Inspector, a new position created as part of the Departmental Administration of Cerro Largo. This organisation postulates a kind of conservationism that we will call \textit{stricto sensu} (Süsskind, 2010). Its ecocentric perspective stems from the fact that nature and society are mutually exclusive and from the presumption that there is a natural order governed by natural laws whose “delicate and perfect balance is kept until humans come with all their ignorance and arrogance” (Foladori, 2005:87).

3.1 APPROACH

In this study, we employed an ethnography approach. Ethnography is an open-field research method that includes surveys, non-directive techniques such as informal
conversations, participant observation, and open-ended interviews in a prolonged residence with the informants. Through fieldwork, anthropology constructs knowledge strongly based on experience, with the ethnographer as the main device for producing knowledge. Ethnography aims to describe "what people do from the perspective of the same people," focusing on both practices and the meanings that these practices acquire for those who perform them. The perspective and scope of ethnography concerning other types of description lie in articulating these two dimensions (Restrepo, 2016).

Regarding this study, ethnography was very helpful for accessing issues of daily life that are normalized or naturalized in everyday practices, such as the case of human-animal interactions. The focus on a great depth and density case study aims to learn such local practices and perceptions from the inside (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2001). To do so, we used traditional techniques of ethnography: open interviews and informal conversations with the inhabitants of Paso Centurión. We did not quantify these interactions as they were embedded in an everyday coexistence, where usually the moment when we were doing an interview, chatting about a topic relevant to this work, or chatting about a priori unrelated topics, were interconnected. In a casual conversation with our informants, an unrelated topic can become a new topic of interest or be a moment in which bonds are strengthened, opening doors to other deeper interpretative layers (Guber, 2001). On many occasions, we had conversations around activities on the margins of legality, but which are morally permissible and culturally crucial. An outsider cannot participate in these types of activities. After gaining the necessary trust, we could participate in these activities. We also shared family meals with the hunters and other local people. At the end of each day and regularly, we kept reflective notes on conversations and observations in a "field diary," a fundamental tool of ethnographic fieldwork (Sanjek, 1990).

This work of coexistence with the local community, from which we generate the field information presented here, was carried out by one of the authors in the framework of a previous project on society-nature relations in Centurión during 2013 and 2018. We analyzed the data generated in this fieldwork in Paso Centurión in the framework of other hunting, conservation, and biosecurity projects, in which we worked with policymakers from 2018 to 2020. For this new analysis, we carried out several working meetings and public presentations in the framework of conferences and presentations of results in university extension and knowledge transfer activities with policymakers.
4 RESULTS

4.1 HUNTING AND ANIMAL OWNERSHIP IN CENTURIÓN

Mulita and tatu meat are very appreciated in Centurión. These animals are hunted with the help of dogs and traps placed at the entrance of their burrows. Men usually hunt them, but women occasionally do it and often participate in the transformation of the prey into food. Another very appreciated game meat is *paca* (*Cuniculus paca*). Those who try it tend to hold it in very high regard, and it is often said that it tastes like piglets. According to the locals, paca is scarce nowadays. Pacas are usually hunted using a trap with baits such as oranges and sweet potatoes. Oranges and other citrus fruits (such as limes or lemons) are commonplace in Centurión gardens. Local inhabitants state that family horticulture was much more widespread in previous generations. Thus, growing sweet potatoes was ordinary when pacas were seen and eaten more frequently.

J. is a local inhabitant of Centurión whom everyone regards as a person "who knows all about critters”. We interviewed J. several times, and we shared many informal talks. Among other jobs, J. works as a fencer, so he spends several days camping, usually far from any town or city. He says he loves camping and proudly claims there is no critter he does not know. He speaks openly about hunting (its conception and practice), how he learned his techniques, motivations, and the ethos and ethics of subsistence hunting.

J. explains the legitimacy of hunting wild animals because they are not anybody’s property. For him, unlike cattle, these animals move through fields, forests, hills and watercourses. They are not circumscribed to a territory or a property, and do not belong to an owner. It contrasts with the native/exotic distinction, the protection of native species that governs the administrative regulation on hunting, and the activist conservation of Coendu. Nevertheless, it aligns with the regulation of civil and criminal law in Uruguay, which responded to the conception of hunting after the French Revolution when the figure of *res nullius* was removed. As we have already mentioned, this conception of nature comes from Roman law, which allowed all citizens to have the right to hunt unless the owner of a property deliberately expressed that hunting was not allowed in that place. Wildlife was considered a common good; it was private property that was protected. Hunting animals not from anyone is a morally acceptable practice among neighbours. According to R. (a friend of J.’s that shared an interview with us), “Capybaras, for example, do not belong to anyone; today they are here, tomorrow they are gone. They move around. Instead, sheep are property. For instance, if I had
a piece of land, I wouldn't mind if he hunted capybaras, because capybaras are not mine” (Field Diary, 2017). The contrast between hunting and illegal slaughter and cattle raiding is very frequent in Centurion's narratives. Ethics are defined by a sense of a property that draws the line between what may or may not be hunted: this is based on the private ownership of animals, whether bred for production or kept for company.

A. only eats the meat of hunted capybaras. He lives in the forest, like J. and R., and does not have productive animals. His neighbours claim that he never sells hunted meat, no matter how much you insist, but he does exchange hunted meat with neighbours for other foods or space in the refrigerator to keep the meat refrigerated. He is often mentioned in conversations about hunting, serving as an example to discuss why hunting constitutes a fundamental food source. E., A.’s neighbour, vindicates this case of poaching for food. She says, “I know that he is a person who hunts capybaras, but he does so to eat”.

Hunting for food is considered a legitimate economic activity (although it is considered poaching from the legal point of view). It is not morally condemnable, while cattle raiding is socially condemned. This logic supports hunting as long as it does not violate animal ownership, not focusing on the species but on a relationship of ownership: that is, what makes them liable to being hunted is the fact that they do not have an owner, which means the native/exotic distinction, which is the predominant criterion in administrative law regarding hunting, makes no sense. On the contrary, current national regulations prohibit the hunting of native species in general (with a few exceptions). Yet, both criteria coincide in penalising with greater severity the killing of privately owned animals, that is, domesticated animals. This motivates part of the criticism of Coendu conservationists, for whom hunting should also constitute a crime and be punished as such.

4.2 CONSERVATION IN PASO CENTURIÓN

The creation of protected areas installs a new regulation in the traditional practices of human-environmental relations that often give rise to conflicts between local people and conservation managers. According to the park ranger H. C. “many times I’ve been told: ‘I’ve been here for 50, 60 years, and now you come and tell me that I can’t light a fire here in the forest or that I can’t hunt, which I’ve done all my life?’” The change in the practices that define a protected area is a growing topic of study in anthropology (Cortés Vázquez, 2012). The changes in spatiality and hunting practices imposed by these processes are vital aspects of
understanding hunting reconfigurations. In Paso Centurión, the fact that the area is now protected has also affected local practices.

The first conservation proposal that included the area of Paso Centurión came about in 1997 with the Biodiversity, Conservation and Sustainable Development Programme in the Eastern Wetlands (PROBIDES). It included Paso Centurión as part of the Eastern Wetlands Biosphere Reserve. Since then, Paso Centurión has been part of this non-mandatory category that places the area within the framework of UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme (MaB). It means that the area must be considered a priority for conservation research. However, it does not imply any legal actions at the protected territory level, so in the area, it was not seen as a project with material consequences in everyday life.

Based on this proposal, in 2007 the Departmental Administration of Cerro Largo, in coordination with various NGOs, began to outline the first ideas regarding the possibility of creating a more specific and binding conservation area. Within that framework, the Departmental Board of Cerro Largo (the legislative branch of departmental government) declared part of the area as a Departmental Ecological Reserve (Decree 24/7, JDCL, 2007). In 2010, PROBIDES agreed with State research bodies to draft a proposal to include the area within the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP). In 2018, the proposal was brought to public attention and introduced to the local population by the SNAP authorities. Finally, it was approved by presidential decree Nº 198 in 2019.

These various regulations and interventions focused on the conservation, assessment and investigation of biodiversity form an environmentalization process constituted by the State and civil society. This process implies that conservation actors came to the area with a new language linked to the conservation of the environment expressed in terms of biodiversity and ecology following a biocentric ethic, thus establishing the concept that we are in an area where biodiversity conservation should be the priority, a concept that is not entirely clear for the local people. The knowledge, speeches and actions that aim to resignify the landscape and the elements of nature must then dialogue with the local livelihoods, the existing knowledge on the territory, and the environment. According to these conservation proposals, the main regulatory criteria for hunting are those related to the administrative law on the regulation of wildlife, related to the exotic versus native.

As a result of this environmentalization process, some of the new actors began to question certain traditional activities, such as subsistence hunting. Posters in public spaces stating the prohibition of hunting native species, condemnation in the form of social control, and the control on the access road (mainly aimed at foreign hunters) are some of the
mechanisms in which this questioning is felt among the locals. Conservation interventions, which were locally legitimised until now, are being questioned. In a talk, J. told us: “I have always been poor, and I will die poor. I always hunted to eat. The day they don’t let me hunt anymore I’ll have to hunt sheep”. This comment illustrates a warning about a possible shift in the limits of what kind of hunting is legitimate and which is not. He also told us that he grew up eating mainly mazamorra and bushmeat. Limits had so far been established by referring to private property. However, this attempt to implement a conservationist logic regarding the protection of forest animals implies their inclusion within the sphere of property, which is seen as an affront to the poor as well as something meaningless from the point of view of local ontology (Escobar, 2016).

In this sense, wild animals are closer to what has been conceptualised as res nullius expressed in the national Civil Code, far from human shelter. This is clearly defined in the differentiation between slaughter and hunting. Locally, it is understood that domesticated animals are not hunted but slaughtered. In this difference between slaughtering and hunting lies the difference in the ways of appropriating wildlife. However, the criteria used in administrative law, which currently prevails in national discourses about hunting regulation, play a minor role in the perception of the local forms of hunting. However, the concept of res nullius not only refers to the concept of "nobody’s thing", but also considers certain spheres related to wildlife as common property. As R. states some lines above, he (like many other settlers) has no problem in letting someone hunt a capybara (a native animal whose hunting is prohibited). This comment refers to a feeling of shared property defined by a particular way of rural life, involving a series of human-animal relations which differ from urban life. In this sense, local people differentiate themselves from wild boar hunters who do sport hunting in the area.

5 DISCUSSION

In Paso Centurión, hunting animals categorised as native species is not immoral, unlike cattle raiding, which is socially condemned. According to this logic, which contrasts with current regulations, hunting is legitimate as it does not violate the principle of private property as long as the wild animals "are not owned by anyone" (Dabezies & Taks, 2017). In this way, the private property regime affects the moral regulation of relationships between humans and animals, shifting the ownership limit towards the acquisition of animals that are privately owned.
The dominant approach in the current national hunting management system is administrative law. This approach has gained popularity among conservation groups operating across the country, advocating for a hunting practice that differentiates between exotic and native species. However, the local practices discussed in this article do not consider this criterion as a fundamental aspect. Local people define wildlife as something that belongs to no one, much closer to what is understood in civil and criminal law as res nullius. The limits of what can be hunted and how to hunt are marked by stories shared between the people of Paso Centurión and wild animals. On the other hand, domestic animals are someone’s property. These animals cannot be hunted. To eat these animals, you must slaughter them. Those animals are exotic, but more than anything, they belong to someone; they are private property.

Rethinking the administrative criteria dominated by the exotic/native distinction (which are still essential criteria) is important to think of criteria that consider local forms of human-animal relationships where animal ownership is vital.

Nevertheless, new regulations derived from creating a protected area in Paso Centurión are influencing the established ways of acquiring wild animals. It refers to a clear top-down process of creating protected areas, where a hegemonic and central logic is imposed. The pressures of implementing new forms of relating to the environment lead people to rethink the forms of access to wildlife through hunting. The imposition of the native/exotic distinction can break the limit between wild and domestic. In the relationship between conservationists and local communities, different ways of conceiving hunting and the sustainability of animal populations are at stake.

Subsistence hunting is the most widespread hunting practice in Latin America (Bragagnolo et al., 2019; Ojasti, 1996). In this sense, it is necessary to contemplate local ontologies where hunting acquires not only a food value but also a symbolic and social value (Blaser, 2009; Petriello & Stronza, 2020). Specifically, hunting regulation must contemplate the different ways of conceiving the ownership of nature and wildlife, such as the one we saw in Paso Centurión. Dialogue with these other realities is a way of respecting local traditions (W. M. Adams, 2009; IUCN, 2012) but also can lead us to think of different ways of implementing hunting management. The power of this type of ethnographic work based on qualitative case studies is its ability to challenge naturalised aspects of normative relations (Mathews & Barnes, 2016).

Based on the study of specific cases aimed at rethinking norms and policies involving wildlife management, anthropological imagination must seek bridges of dialogue with the administration to generate a productive dialogue (Barreiro, 2003). That is why we propose a
series of measures aimed at rethinking the place of wildlife ownership in regulations as a starting point and as a theoretical inspiration to review aspects of practice.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The presence of multiple regulatory frameworks (civil, criminal, and administrative) creates a complex landscape for hunting and wildlife management. It is necessary to review and redefine these frameworks and establish a clear philosophical approach to the object of regulation to address these issues. This involves considering the State's perspective on the elements that comprise the biosphere, including who has ownership and how they can be used, acquired, or related. While these considerations may seem extremely theoretical, they are fundamental to designing regulations. It's also important to consider exceptions to general regulations, that account for the various human-environment relationships, without imposing global conservation values based solely on Western and anthropocentric criteria.

When focusing on hunting regulations, it is essential to clearly define the scope of regulation. This means deciding whether the regulation will target hunting as a human practice that has an impact on wildlife, or if it will target the wildlife itself as an object that is being appropriated and used. This may impact the management of regulations and administrative competencies, which may fall under either cultural or environmental domains. Finally, it's important to consider how other natural resources subject to appropriation and use, such as fish, forests, minerals, or water, may also be impacted by these discussions. These considerations are particularly important for local populations whose social life is intertwined with environmental elements and should be given due consideration in regulatory design.

This case contributes to rethinking the logic of ownership of nature, which are essential for thinking about Latin American regulatory frameworks that regulate hunting. As we have seen, the essential conservationist criteria of conservation biology, which govern wildlife management policy in Uruguay, but have a much broader scope, are not recognised locally, where the morality of private property is much more powerful. While in this paper we have focused on subsistence hunting, the lessons learned can generate inputs for much larger fields on the discussion of nature ownership, natural resource management and the promotion of cultural diversity.
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