

## Arguing Along Fault-lines: A Rhetorical Analysis of Public Divides over Wildlife Comeback

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### Abstract

Across Europe, several wildlife species are making surprising comebacks. The returnees help create conservation success stories, but at the same time are subject of commotion and conflict in many countries. This article examines public discussions surrounding the returns of the red fox and the wild boar to Flanders (northern Belgium) in various media and forums, ranging from news and social media to the Flemish Parliament. The aim of the research is to provide insights into the role of rhetoric in the continuation and exacerbation of public divides. The classical theory of stasis is used as a systematic method for locating the points of disagreement within a debate and understanding the discussants' rhetorical practices at these points. The analysis reveals a constant striving for 'logic' either to reaffirm the own standpoints or to subvert those of the opponent. The article demonstrates how the discussants' efforts to provide conclusive arguments have the unplanned result of even greater tensions and distances between groups in society. In this respect, two relevant tendencies are presented that hinder opportunities for reconciling positions and novel ideas to emerge: 1) the limited elaboration and deliberation on the issues of contention; 2) the linking of these issues to socio-political relationships.

**Keywords:** Species return, human-wildlife conflict, conservation conflict, human-wildlife coexistence, red fox, wild boar, stasis theory, public debate, rhetoric, polarisation

### INTRODUCTION

Wild animals are making a surprising comeback across many parts of Europe. In the report *Wildlife Comeback in Europe* (Deinet et al. 2013), scientists describe how, why and where 37 mammal and bird species have recovered over the past 50 years. The results have been welcomed by many as a message of hope, and taken as proof by some that nature conservation really works. However, in several areas, concerns are growing about the animals' renewed presence, as well

as conflicts about how to deal with them (Trouwborst 2010; Linnell 2013; Navarro and Pereira 2015). Sometimes even crimes of dissent occur (von Essen and Allen 2017).

One of those areas is the Flanders region (northern Belgium) where species have resettled after an absence of decades or even centuries: red fox, wild boar, cormorant, beaver, eagle-owl, otter and very recently also wolf. Their recovery invokes opposite reactions and often polarised debates in various public forums, ranging from local news and social media to the Flemish Parliament. In a recent study (Van Herzele et al. 2015) we reveal that, typically, the debates unfold along mainly three opposing lines: the animals belong versus do not belong here; they are useful and provide opportunities versus they pose a threat; nature keeps itself in balance versus we need to control populations. It is these basic contradictions that supply the 'fault-lines' along which pro and contra positions are taken, social tensions are accumulated and conflicts are generated or perpetuated (Giddens 1981; Elchardus 2007).

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From the above study we learn that apparent divides over wild returnees are not merely a manifestation of incompatible perceptions and opinions or a clash of visions, but are generated in large part by the debate itself. Results show, indeed, that several dynamics increase polarisation and complicate the resolution of conflict: the alignment of arguments along binary oppositions (dichotomisation), the scaling up and linking of issues that were previously separate, and the imposition of stereotypes and stigmas on particular groups (Van Herzele et al. 2015). The polarising dynamics are, we argue, a direct but unintended outcome of the discussants' rhetorical practices, as they interact with their opponents, (potential) allies, as well as public audiences in their striving for credibility, legitimacy and support. Yet, such processes still remain poorly understood. One reason may be that researchers are deterred from exploring them because of the methodological challenges associated with the seeming messiness of public forums. Participants in public discussions can be quite diverse, not coherent as a group and motivations for participation will vary as well, which results in diverse discourse moves (Grabrill and Pigg 2012). Moreover, participants make claims without feeling a need, or being able, to reason it out or to justify it explicitly (Van Herzele 2004). Another reason probably is that representationalist assumptions are still dominant in the wildlife literature. In that view, what people say (or how they respond to questionnaires) is taken to represent their attitude or perception toward a specific wildlife species or conservation practice, their 'wildlife value orientation' (Fulton et al. 1996), or any other predisposition or pre-existing factor. Such focus may well contribute to describing the variation in public understanding and support, but falls short for studying the constitutive power of language and the rhetoric we encounter daily in words, narratives and images.

According to Aristotle, rhetoric is the ability to find the available means of persuasion in any given case. In this sense, rhetoric includes logical argument, but it also allows for appeals to be made to the character or credibility of the speaker and the emotions of the audience. Clearly, rhetoric is inextricably enmeshed in language, societal relationships and actions (Mayhew 1997; Cheney et al. 2004) and as such it is also central, although often unacknowledged, to the practice fields of wildlife conservation. Some examples include experts writing their reports in support of the re-introduction of white-tailed eagle, beaver and lynx to Scotland (Arts et al. 2012), and Greek livestock farmers creating, as a coping strategy, incriminating rumours about the wolf and the actors around its re-introduction (Theodorakea and von Essen 2016). And, as we will see with the red fox and the wild boar in Flanders, also the spontaneous comeback of wild animals is a source of emergent rhetorical activity.

This article examines public discussions in various media and forums about two returnees to Flanders: the red fox and the wild boar. The aim of the research is to understand how rhetorical practices may help to form the contradictory basis for the revealed fault-lines, and as such may perpetuate social division over time. To address this broad research question,

we use the classical theory of stasis as a systematic method for locating the points of dissension and understanding the discussants' rhetorical efforts at these points. The results obtained will allow us to discuss the role of public rhetoric in the continuation and exacerbation of public divides.

## STASIS THEORY AND THE CONDUCT OF DEBATE

Drawing on Aristotle's physical science, Otto Dieter (1950) demonstrates how the political and rhetorical concept of stasis (or *staseis* in the plural) originates from the physical concept of stasis in ancient Greek culture and thought. In this sense stasis refers to:

... both an end and a beginning of motion, both a stop and a start, the turning, or the transitional standing at the moment of reversal of movement (Dieter 1950).

Analogous to these contrary motions, ancient rhetoricians recognised *staseis* as temporary standings in-between contradictories or contrary statements. Stasis theory was then developed as a practical method to bring to the fore the points of disagreement in a debate. The theory posits four *staseis* that help identify the types of questions that are at issue, that is, whether it concerns an issue of fact, definition, quality or jurisdiction. By way of illustration, we cite phrases from Bob Marley's famous song<sup>1</sup>: 1) 'Stasis of fact': Does it exist? Did it happen? Who did it? "I shot the sheriff, but I didn't shoot no deputy, oh no!" 2) 'Stasis of definition': What is it? What is the nature or definition of the act? "They say it is a capital offense, but I swear it was in self-defence." 3) 'Stasis of quality': What is the quality, value or importance of the act? What were the mitigating or aggravating circumstances? "Sheriff John Brown always hated me, for what, I don't know." 4) 'Stasis of jurisdiction': Who has jurisdiction in this case and what action is called for? "If I am guilty, I will pay."

Whereas stasis theory is most often described as a logical template for judicial function<sup>2</sup>, it has a much wider scope of application, also including the design, conduct and research of practices of deliberation (Dimock 2009; Graham and Herndl 2011). By working through the stasis questions, the interactants can identify the issue(s) on which the case hinges and the point(s) at which they disagree or reach an impasse. Once the arguable points of issue are found, stasis may function as a temporary moment or 'standstill' from which to begin discussion and whereby the discussants can bring into focus the divergent views, mediate among them and avoid arguments that are superfluous to the debate. As such, stasis has been considered a means for creating common ground between contending parties and a guide to deliberative judgement (Dimock 2009; Graham and Herndl 2011).

Furthermore, and as we will show, stasis theory can provide insight as to how and why actual public debates take the course they do. As Fahnstock (1986) notes, "the system of ordered questions represented by stasis theory" turns out to be capable of accounting for the ways issues naturally develop in public forums. Typically, people have to be convinced that a situation

exists before they ask what kind of situation it is and move to decisions about whether it is good or bad and what should be done about it. This classical sequence – though not always in place – does suggest that the stasis questions are in some way connected to each other. One plausible explanation is an underlying logical structure. Marsh (2006) proposes that the first three staseis are structured upon a syllogistic foundation. A syllogism is a form of logical argument that joins two (or more) propositions or ‘premises’ to arrive at a conclusion. In the case of the sheriff the syllogism can be constructed as follows:

Minor premise	The defendant killed a sheriff
Major premise	Killing a sheriff is a capital offense
Conclusion	The defendant is guilty of a capital offense

The minor premise attaches its subject, the defendant (minor term), to the action of killing a sheriff (middle term). The major premise attaches the middle term to a definition or class (major term), in this case capital offence. Finally, the conclusion attaches the major term to the original subject: the defender is guilty of a capital offence. Overall, the purpose of the speech is to logically attach the major term to the minor term through the middle term.

While Marsh (2006) deals with deductive syllogism (as in the above example), which is just one but strong way to infer a conclusion, our approach is open to eliciting other reasoning modes, including but not limited to induction and abduction (Flach and Kakas 2000; Walton 2001; Govier 2010). Furthermore, to say that logical syllogisms are at the basis of stasis does not mean that discussants must argue in such syllogisms. In everyday rhetoric one can leave out whatever premises or conclusions the listener or reader can supply (as in Aristotle’s ‘enthymeme’, also called ‘shortened syllogism’ and ‘interactive syllogism’) or derive general rules from ad hoc examples without detracting from the power of the argument. What is most interesting about Marsh’s theory of the syllogistic foundation of stasis is that it goes beyond the structure of a single argument and looks to reconstruct the reasoning that links (explicit and implicit) premises to conclusions at the level of the whole debate. This enables in turn to envision a range of available rhetorical options under each stasis, which we believe is helpful for understanding the conduct of debate:

‘Stasis of fact’: the emphasis is on the minor premise. Accusers would support the attachment of the action (middle term) to the subject (minor term); defendants would remove this linkage, if possible. In the sheriff case, the storyteller who is charged by the community for the killing of a deputy denies the act: “I didn’t shoot no deputy”. In other words, he dissociates himself from the action. As a consequence, the question under discussion becomes: “Did he do it?” and we have a stasis of fact. However, the storyteller is also admitting to shooting the sheriff. Thus, the action of killing still applies and the parties in debate could move to the next stasis.

‘Stasis of definition’: the emphasis is on the major premise. Accusers would attempt to link the action (middle term) to a negative characterisation or definition (major term); defendants could consider attacking this linkage. For a syllogism to be

logical, the middle term must apply to everything that it conveys, for instance, not some killings of sheriffs, but all killings. The storyteller claims he acted in self-defence, when he suddenly saw the sheriff aiming to shoot him down. Thus, he tries to damage the attachment of killing a sheriff to the definition of capital offense by establishing a ‘syllogistic flaw’: not all killings of sheriffs are capital offense. Put another way: attacking the definition involves proving that the opponent has not put the phenomenon or action into its proper ‘class’.

‘Stasis of quality’: if both premises hold, then the conclusion logically follows. Defendants who cannot contest one of these must retreat to the stasis of quality if they still wish to escape from this negative conclusion. Because the definition is already attached to the subject, defendants can only show why that attachment is weak to somehow lessen the degree of guilt. In our example, the storyteller places the event in a broader context of hostility to him – this particular sheriff hated him for no discernible reason and was frequently harassing him – which could possibly make the killing justified or outweigh its outcomes. Thus, defendants could ask the audience to evaluate the subject in light of special circumstances or a broader perspective. Obviously, accusers then must convincingly refute that argumentation.

‘Stasis of jurisdiction’: this stasis is often employed when processes or circumstances leading to decision and action are questioned, rather than issues of content. So, it falls outside the syllogism. A good example is Kramer and Olson’s (2002) analysis of President Clinton’s self-defence in the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal: Clinton characterised his behaviour as private conduct (definition) and claimed that his family and his God were therefore the rightful judges (jurisdiction).

Even though discussants in public forums tend to utilise the full range of staseis (Fahnestock 1986), they may still choose which stasis to emphasise. They may anticipate on what the implications will be in the next staseis and shift emphasis among the staseis, when necessary, as the debate unfolds (Kramer and Olson 2002). And, of course they are free to choose their rhetorical strategies beyond the classical options mentioned above.

## MATERIAL AND ANALYSIS

The empirical material spans a period of well over two decades of public debate occurring across a wide variety of forums, starting in the early 1990s with the quick spread of the red fox in Flanders and complemented one decade later with first appearances of the wild boar (see Van Herzele et al. 2015, for background and details). These species were chosen because their return gave rise to recurring commotion and conflict, as shown by widespread media coverage and political interest over many years. Another reason was to maximise variation in the data. Since the two species get involved in different events (e.g. foxes attacking backyard chickens and wild boars destroying agricultural crops), they will add variation in terms of participants to the discussions and issues under discussion.

To begin, we searched the news databases from the Research Institute for Nature and Forest and the Flemish Info Centre for Agriculture and Horticulture for items of news and opinion related to foxes and boars in Flanders between 2006 and 2015. Duplicate or similar articles were omitted from the search results. All the retrieved articles – 72 (red fox) and 92 (wild boar), of which nearly half from the periods 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 respectively – were screened and coded according to the type of event. Any judgements made about the animals in question or the way they are (not) to be handled were underlined with markers. The press database of the Belgian newspaper and magazine publishers (GoPress) was used to further extend and diversify the dataset. Additional searches focused on articles earlier than 2006 (first articles on red fox appeared in 1994, on wild boar in 2002), reader letters and online comments, and articles related to events that were less discussed in the initial dataset (e.g., poultry killed by foxes and car accidents with boars). We complemented this material with internet searches to access local news and social media, websites and online forums of local authorities, political parties and main interest groups (Bird Protection Flanders, Natuurpunt, Hubertus Hunting Association and Nature Help Centre). Furthermore, we drew on television debates, nature and wildlife magazines, agricultural media, presentations given at seminars, expert advisory reports and parliamentary sources (annals, hearings, commissions) related to fox or boar until 2017. Again, we marked text fragments representing a judgement about the matter. Together the forums observed represent a wide variety of rhetorical situations and discussants, including politicians, public officials, conservationists, scientists, farmers, hunters, wildlife rescue volunteers, chicken owners, residents and other members of the public.

We departed from the previously identified fault-lines – belonging/not belonging; opportunity/threat; control by intervention/nature controls (Van Herzele et al. 2015) – to examine the patterns of reasoning and rhetoric that cut across the variety of events, forums and discussants. For this purpose, we perform a stasis analysis at two levels: 1) Across the staseis: we examine which type(s) of reasoning is structuring the whole of the debate. Therefore, the marked text passages were screened for judgements (claims or conclusions) relating to the fault lines. Wherever this took place, we tried to grasp the naturally occurring ‘logic’ in the passage by laying out the premises explicitly and examining the ways in which they were connected to conclusions (Govier 2010). Typical reasoning patterns were identified and reconstructed by constant comparison between passages. 2) Within the staseis: we examine the rhetorical practices in the four staseis. To this end, we departed from the above reconstructions of reasonings to screen the marked text passages for words and statements in support or in opposition of them. These were coded according to the stasis to which they belonged. The four-part analytical structure of stasis was used to indicate where points of contention lie and to synthesise what rhetorical strategies were employed in each of them.

We also used these two levels of analysis to present results: by first reconstructing the reasoning of the judgements we

increase understanding of specific rhetorical strategies. Finally, instructive quotes were selected, translated into English and used to illustrate the results.

## RESULTS

### Belonging versus Not Belonging

The issue of belonging is frequently raised when animal species first move into an area and less so after they became established. The whole of this debate shows that the public judgement of belonging is conditioned by antecedent judgements of ‘naturalness’: a species’ presence within its natural range, its natural role in the ecosystem, the genetic purity of the species, and the spontaneous nature of the species’ comeback. Opposite reasonings can be reconstructed as follows:

Minor premise	Foxes (or boars) returned on their own	Foxes (or boars) were released
Major premise	Animals returning on their own is natural	Releasing animals is unnatural
Conclusion	The presence of foxes (or boars) is natural	The presence of foxes (or boars) is unnatural

The radically opposite conclusions (the presence is either natural or unnatural) proceed logically from the premises in a deductive syllogism. It is in particular the dichotomisation of the naturalness concept (natural/unnatural) that creates a strong contrast. Yet the major premises are complementary rather than contradictory. Both are based on common sense of naturalness as being spontaneous and not artificial, implying that human intervention is unnatural. Thus, the major premise operates as a shared though usually unstated principle.

The judgement of naturalness provides a subsequent, essential underpinning for the judgement of belonging: ‘natural’ is qualified as belonging and ‘unnatural’ as not belonging. However, the linkage between the two remains largely unstated and we find no mention or discussion of why naturalness and belonging are related. Yet terms such as ‘revival’ and ‘reconquering its place’ refer to a present situation in light of the past: the species come back where they belong.

Much argumentation builds on the above deductive logic with dichotomies reinforcing the reasoning. For example, informative texts and expert presentations about foxes and boars put their renewed, spontaneous presence in contrast to human-induced disappearance and subsequent absence in the past:

Minor premise	Foxes (or boars) have been absent due to overhunting
Major premise	Overhunting is an unnatural cause of extinction
Conclusion	The absence of foxes (or boars) was unnatural

Factual and definitional dichotomies work together here to support the conclusion of the initial syllogism (if absence is unnatural, then presence is natural) and to refute the conclusion of the opposite syllogism. This was nicely summarised by a fox expert<sup>3</sup>: “It is not its presence today that is unnatural, but its absence between 1850 and, say, 1990.”

Thinking of the return process as a shift from unnatural absence to natural presence facilitated seeing the return of

the red fox or the wild boar to Flanders as something positive, and evaluating the species as belonging in Flanders, which in turn may help disarm possible objections to the species' return. In what follows, we focus on the rhetorical practices within the separate stases. One important observation is that the deductive logic and its premises, as outlined above, gave much direction to both pro and con rhetoric:

### ***Stasis of Fact***

Much of the public rhetoric concentrated on the 'how' question of a species' return. The presented 'facts' were contradictory at this point: species returning on their own versus being released. Given the broad acceptance of the principle that human intervention is unnatural, the facts were much decisive for the conclusion of the deductive reasoning outlined above. Indeed a main rhetorical strategy here was to address the minor premise. One example is pointing at signs of human intervention such as ear tags and tame behaviour to destroy the linkage between the species and its spontaneous return. In most cases, however, strong evidence was lacking and attempts aimed to decrease plausibility of the linkage by spreading rumours about nature activists releasing foxes or hunters releasing wild boars. At the same time, but less conspicuously, proponents made spontaneous return plausible by pointing at relevant species characteristics (travelling long distances and being adaptive to multiple environments), favourable factors (available food resources and mild winters for piglets), and expanding populations in neighbouring countries. However, that evidence did not prevent opponents from spreading stories of release, which in turn created suspicions regarding their intended influence on the public opinion and the process of debate (see the stasis of jurisdiction).

### ***Stasis of Definition***

The prevailing deductive reasoning owes much of its strength to a broadly accepted principle: human intervention, such as releasing animals and hunting to extinction, is unnatural. However, this premise usually is implicit and uncontested. Not surprisingly, therefore, rhetorical options in the stasis of definition were mostly left unused. A notable exception is a scientific report<sup>4</sup>, which recognises that some fox releases exist (signs are sometimes obvious: a fox with a flea collar), but circumvents the definition of an 'unnatural phenomenon' by stating there is on one hand the general phenomenon of fox return and on the other a handful cases of fox release, which are of all times and can therefore not be considered an explanation for change. By excluding cases of fox release from the definition of a phenomenon, a syllogistic flaw is established: foxes can be released without being a phenomenon. And, these cases are reduced to single incidents with no general significance: "At best they can occasionally offer an explanation for a single animal's isolated appearance in time and space."

This strategy of opposing the general against the singular defines that only the former counts as phenomenon. Thus, if something is not a phenomenon it cannot be an unnatural phenomenon. However, due to the lack of elaborating

discussion in the stasis of definition it remains unclear why the issue of species return was often defined in terms of naturalness.

### ***Stasis of Quality***

Belonging is not a fixed quality: it may be lost after a long absence of the species, through changes in the environment, because of the species' behaviour (damage risk) or other circumstances (e.g. uncontrollable population growth). It was frequently argued that we don't have the appropriate environment for them:

Wild boars need vast forests, which are rare here.<sup>5</sup>

This species [the red fox] does not belong anymore to our modest-sized Flemish biotopes and densely populated society.<sup>6</sup>

So the foxes and boars were placed in the present urbanised circumstances, which were deemed an unsuitable environment for them. This was sometimes further emphasised by contrast with the natural not-yet-urbanised environment of the past, like saying that the Flemish landscape is very different to when fox or wild boar last roamed this country. A typical response strategy by conservationists was not to deny the lack of appropriate environment but to consider it a duty to provide it, as, for instance, the director of the Natuurpunt organisation states in a newspaper opinion article:

It is necessary to create large, continuous nature areas.

These offer a safe place to live for all large animals, such as deer, otters, beavers and of course wild boars.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the pressing issue of environmental circumstances was reformulated in a positive way: that of being something good we can and even should provide for our wildlife; a right to habitat in some sense. As a result, answering the question of what should be done (stasis of jurisdiction) was no longer about whether or not to eradicate, but how to provide space for those animals.

### ***Stasis of Jurisdiction***

Judgements of belonging and habitat availability formed the basis for jurisdiction, at least initially. The government, for instance, first called for complete eradication of wild boar, but now accepts its 'controlled presence' in areas with a sufficiently largely connected habitat. Elsewhere a policy of 'zero-tolerance' is pursued. Legislative argumentation in Parliament shows that this shift in policy was motivated by practical considerations about inability to control immigration from abroad and the expected lack of public support for eradication. Moreover, both hunter and nature conservation associations pointed at being presented with a *fait accompli*, thus placing the issue of belonging outside the scope of the discussion:

It's much too late! We will never succeed in removing the wild boars completely. There will be no other option than living with their presence.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the processes leading to decisions were strongly challenged by insinuations about those trying to influence the judgement of others. So it was said that hunters

sought to turn public opinion against the fox by spreading false stories of release and escape, leading people to judge the presence of foxes as unnatural. At local news forums, we find some attempts at questioning the public’s legitimacy as a judge: “Who are we humans to determine which species belong or not?”<sup>9</sup>

### Opportunity versus Threat

Damage and risk are dominant themes in debates about wild returnees. They are discussed most intensely at the occasion of incidents. And, as incidents increase in frequency, we also see increasing attempts to highlight the species’ benefits. Hence the fault-line grows sharper. The main argumentation is that the species is a threat to people and/or biodiversity and requires immediate action. Deduction may be used to characterise a species in terms of threat or benefit (the latter usually in response or anticipation of the former):

Minor premise	Foxes kill vulnerable ground nesting birds	Wild boars root up the forest soil
Major premise	Predation of vulnerable species is a threat to biodiversity	Rooting provides a fertile seed bed for native flora
Conclusion	Foxes are a threat to biodiversity	Wild boars benefit native flora

Such generalisation by way of deduction often goes together with induction. Unlike deduction, which merely applies an established principle, induction creates principles from observation. These are drawn (or induced) from examples or cases, e.g. each subsequent case of predation contributes to the definition or principle that foxes are a threat. Typically, after describing a number of damage cases, the species concerned is classified as harmful, nuisance or at the very least, a problem species. The listed cases can be either incidents of the same type (numbers of chicken attacks in recent weeks) or different types (wild boar destroying crops, causing a traffic accident, attacking people and spreading diseases). The final step to a general principle or classification is not necessarily taken, but the idea that foxes or boars might be generally classified as vermin or pests is what their defenders were most afraid of. Hence, they sought to rescue the species’ image or ‘reputation’ by assigning it to a favourable class (useful species, beautiful animal, etc.).

### Stasis of Fact

Defenders and accusers respectively minimised the species’ harmful actions and denied the useful ones, thus anticipating judgement in the next staseis. A frequent strategy was to make the cases (brought by the counterparty) less relevant and even implausible or non-existent.

Factual evidence took many forms and rhetorical force was more important than mere information. There were frequent appeals to experience (“I personally do not know anyone who has ever had such an experience or even has a friend to whom this happened”) and popular wisdom (“wild boars are very shy of humans and will not attack them”) especially in readers’

reactions to news. The following argument (on a discussion forum for do-it-yourselfers) is remarkable as it represents foxes as making a deliberate choice between easy (but harmful) and tiresome (but beneficial) actions, the former making the latter implausible:

The fox will not tire itself out with controlling rat, rabbit and frog populations, but simply steal people’s chickens, ducks and bunnies. So the fox is a nuisance and nothing more.<sup>10</sup>

Where the linkage between the species and the harmful action cannot be denied, defenders may still have options to minimise and distract attention from it or identify an alternative perpetrator. For example, the mammal working group of Natuurpunt argued on its website that the fox is not the sole predator of the ground nesters and that poor land use policies are the real problem: “The problem is not so much the fox, but the impoverished landscape that offers little coverage.”<sup>11</sup>

### Stasis of Definition

Accusers of foxes or boars, as well as the popular press, tended to define the action or situation in terms of threat, damage and risk. So it was common practice in news articles to depict fox predation on poultry by using the language of criminal cases, i.e. theft, robbery and murder. A favoured strategy by defenders, on various forums, was to de-emphasise the species’ agency by promoting an alternative definition: instead of stealing the chickens, the fox is actually receiving a meal (‘a free buffet’). Likewise, maize fields were called ‘a set table’ for the wild boar. The animals’ involvement in the damage is not denied but the new definition – stated in culinary terms - enables taking away the responsibility from them and put it on the complaining victims (chicken owners and farmers).

A more classical but frequent rhetorical move was to make invalid an inductive generalisation by introducing an opposite case, for instance, native plants being destroyed by (instead of benefiting from) wild boar rooting. Furthermore, introducing principles that were somewhat different but still generally accepted enabled deducing an opposite conclusion, for instance, that prey populations are likely to benefit from foxes (instead of being threatened by them), as we know that predators eliminate the sick and weak animals.

### Stasis of Quality

The accumulation of damage cases and their circulation through news and social media offered considerable opportunities for generalisation, evaluating the species in question as unwanted. By repeatedly drawing public attention to instances of damage and risk ‘the problem’ was becoming increasingly serious. Further, the alarming potential of numbers was used to make the most compelling case for intervention, for example in Parliament:

INBO [Research Institute for Nature and Forest] estimates the fox population at 30,000 (...). The fox needs a prey every day: multiply that by the population, so you know how things stand.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, defenders tried to weaken any unfavourable evaluation. A popular move was to argue by analogy, that is, to perceive a similarity between situations to use it as a basis to infer a further similarity: what was learned in the old case can be applied to the new one. For example, to change public perception of the wild boar being a threat in the local forest, Natuurpunt's local division chair used the well-known case of a popular holiday destination:

Every year hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people go hiking in the Ardennes where, so to speak, it is black with wild boars. Nowhere in the Ardennes is anyone discouraged from enjoying nature because wild boars would roam. I dare to conclude that a wild boar is not such a big threat.<sup>13</sup>

Another strategy was to put a new perspective on cases (for example, making a damage case less relevant by placing it in the context of our country's wealth). A popular rhetorical option was to see the situation from the animal's perspective to make the harmful action unavoidable and even justified. A nice example is this argument by a fox expert: "Every henhouse is, in principle, in a foxes' territory"<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, seen from a fox's perspective, it would be silly not to eat those easy-to-catch chickens, especially in circumstances of wild prey shortage. A listener to a radio programme made this point by posing the rhetorical, empathic question "What would you do for food when all you have left is a chicken coop?"<sup>15</sup>

### Stasis of Jurisdiction

In general, opinions regarding damage management options were linked to how the situation was defined and evaluated in the previous staseis. If foxes or boars were mainly presented as damaging animals or vermin, it seemed more acceptable to shoot them than when damage cases were presented as bad practice and negligence. The latter interpretation was supported by making references to available technical solutions, such as the 'fox-proof henhouse' and electric fences against wild boar. However, placing responsibility on those suffering damages was actually a much-contested issue, sometimes referred to as "the world upside-down"<sup>16</sup>.

In addition, processes leading to decision-making were openly criticised. Often, hunters were targeted for not being open about their interests when they strived for fewer hunting restrictions. For example, a guest blogger for Knack Magazine criticised that hunters stand up to defend the chicken owners, which he called an 'abuse' of the chickens and their owners, and a smokescreen to hide their true motivation: "The hunters do not care about the chickens, but about the legally, and especially the illegally released reared pheasants that are heavily attacked by the fox."<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, in response to increasing complaints about foxes, nature conservationists launched the slogan that people must learn to live with foxes: "Coexisting with fox? Yes we can!".

### Control by Intervention versus Nature Controls

Population density and control are among the most divisive issues once the wild returnees become established. Claims

for intervention – i.e. measures to control the growth and spread of populations – often arise directly from the events and information reported in the news media. Besides that, we find an intense discussion about why population control is needed or not needed. The arguments proceed from seemingly contradictory deductions:

Minor premise	Foxes have (except humans) no natural enemies anymore	The fox acts as a top predator
Major premise	Natural enemies keep animal populations under control	The numbers of top predators are regulated by prey abundance
Conclusion	The fox population is out of natural control	The numbers of foxes are naturally regulated

Following the first line of reasoning, it would be humans' task to regulate the fox populations in the absence of other natural enemies. The second, by contrast, makes us believe that intervention is unnecessary and even undesirable. Whereas the two conclusions are in contradiction, the premises are not necessarily. The first conclusion is deduced from the broadly shared concept of 'natural enemy' (therefore the major premise was unstated). The second reasoning, however, serves to dismantle the deductive logic of the first. This is classically done by means of establishing (implicitly) a syllogistic flaw: not all animals are controlled through natural enemies.

An alternative logic frequently applied in this debate is to reverse the deductive reasoning, that is, to start from the conclusion – the population is growing out of control – and to treat it as an observation that calls for an explanation. Such reasoning is commonly called 'abduction' and goes from given data to a 'best explanation'. The passage from the observed data to the explanation (e.g. foxes lack natural enemies) can be mediated by a general rule or principle (e.g. natural enemies function to control populations).

The abductive reasoning mode is most clearly apparent when people are faced with new evidence or a situation they had not encountered before. A typical example is the public reactions to a news article<sup>18</sup> reporting on a controlled hunt aimed at curbing the wild boar population. The result was that the hunters finished the day without one kill, an observation that led to a lively discussion. In sum, the public comments produced two plausible explanations: either the numbers of wild boar are highly exaggerated or the hunters are great bunglers (and the boar is much smarter). These explanations in turn gave rise to new observations, again requiring an explanation. For instance, the explanation that the numbers of wild boar are an exaggeration was transformed into the perception that the hunters exaggerate numbers, which was then explained by hunting interest:

Minor premise	110 hunters did not shoot a single wild boar	The hunters overstate the number of wild boar
Major premise	You cannot shoot what is not there!	Hunters constantly search for opportunities to hunt (and display their masculinity)
Conclusion	The wild boar population is much overestimated	The hunters have an interest in overstating wild boar numbers

### ***Stasis of Fact***

The facts of the situation create pressure to act. In several forums, including the Flemish Parliament, the mere factual report of increase in population numbers sounded an alarm for action. Still it remained unclear how many foxes or boars are actually out there and whether the available estimates are realistic. In these circumstances, abduction (see above) appears a tentative reasoning well suited for dealing with incomplete and uncertain information and drawing conclusions from it. The reasoning starts from what is known (or presumed to be known) to find a plausible explanation, but it may be given up or altered later when new evidence is brought to light. In the above example, the presumed observation that the hunters exaggerate the numbers of wild boar was rejected by the fact that it's not the hunters who count and estimate the number of boars (i.e. the linkage in the minor premise between the subject and the minor term was removed).

As we noted above, explanations can be transformed into observations in the course of interaction. And, deductive characterisations (the situation is out of control, there is an overpopulation) can be treated as a factual observation too. The interplay of all these 'facts' makes it hard to determine what is precisely the point of contention in this stasis. Also, it often happened that when new facts emerged, they were seized upon and used by discussants to put forward their pre-existing favourite explanations.

Furthermore, predictions of future facts, specifically what the effects of a particular intervention will be, created arguable cases. For instance, a frequently used argument from expert opinion against the extension of fox hunting was that it will have the adverse effect of that intended: new foxes (maybe infected with tapeworm) will rapidly move into the emptied territories. More specifically, it was predicted – referring to the self-regulating mechanisms within fox populations – that the killing of foxes will result in a reproductive reaction: more females will participate in reproduction and their litters will increase.

### ***Stasis of Definition***

The discussions were filled with principles and theories. As mentioned, these were used to describe and predict (by deduction) or to explain (by abduction) situations, in particular changes in populations and effects of intervention. However, such principles were rarely discussed in public. At best one may try to raise doubts over them, as in the case of the self-regulation of fox populations. For example, the Hubertus hunting association's spokesman questioned the real consequences of relying on such theory in Parliament:

There is a theoretical model where, without intervention, the population will stabilise. The question is at what level it will happen, if it happens at all. The neighbours all intervene. Does Flanders dare to wait until the theoretical, never tested stabilisation model becomes reality?<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes analogical arguments were used to demolish the established belief or principle that hunting is needed to prevent population explosion, for instance, a Dutch fox expert in the same parliamentary hearing:

There is everywhere in Europe an increase in the number of foxes, regardless of the hunting intensity. So measures to intensify hunting do not lead to population decrease or disappearance from certain areas. That's what researchers have demonstrated everywhere.

The apparent firmness of principles was particularly evident in popular moral wisdom principles, often expressed at local news forums, such as "Every animal has the right to exist", and "Mother Nature should not be patronised but she herself ensures balance"<sup>20</sup>. Arguments of this kind tended to block any further discussion. Scientists, too, may try to popularise their universal theories with lay audiences, for instance, by referring to the reproductive reaction in a fox population as "pruning stimulates blooming", a principle often recited by fox defenders in various forums.

### ***Stasis of Quality***

The issue of control is closely linked to the question whether there are too many foxes or boars. Some opponents of intervention sought to minimise or normalise the situation so as to make it more acceptable, but on the whole, there was little discussion on this question. For those who thought that nature itself ensures balance it was not an issue at all. The same goes for defenders of animals' rights. They all kept to their positions. But also, those in nature administrations may push the question aside, for instance, a leading official interviewed in the newspapers:

Limburg has too many wild boars, there is no discussion about that. Hunters should be given the appropriate means to hunt as efficiently as possible because the cull figure must go up.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly issues of population density and growth – although often expressed in quality-related terms like 'overpopulation' and 'explosion' – were hardly discussed in terms of what can be considered an acceptable population size. Parliamentarians, for example, would rather employ population estimates one-sidedly to highlight the severity and urgency of the situation, and to question government policies and achievements in this regard. This regularly put the Minister in a defensive position and, typically, she was also relying on numbers: "The fact that across Flanders already more than thousand wild boars have been shot in 2017 is a proof that there is action on the ground."<sup>22</sup> An opposition party promptly challenged this positive interpretation: "The fact that a thousand are being shot today can be a warning signal that there is huge population and therefore the shooting is somewhat easier".

Further, different parties shared the perception that wild boar control is difficult in the current circumstance of landowners, especially nature conservation organisations who use their property right to prohibit hunting on their land.

### ***Stasis of Jurisdiction***

Most of the debate involved either a call for (mostly unspecified) interventions aimed at controlling fox or boar populations, or a contest against specific interventions as proposed in legislative proposals or implemented in practice.

Discussants relied on diverse principles, ranging from animals' rights to scientific and other ideas about balance in nature. Those calling for population control mostly referred directly to actual (or expected) instances of damage. But there was much uncertainty about how this should be done, for example, can hunting effectively reduce or halt population growth? Focusing on such issues as population control raised crucial questions concerning legitimacy and expertise to oversee, judge and handle the situation. These questions (voiced and unvoiced) also remained unanswered in Parliament. Instead of clarifying the differences of opinion, the discussions concentrated on criticising the processes of decision-making. For instance, insinuations were made about the Minister's decision to ease restrictions on fox hunting, which was said to be influenced by hunting interests: "Minister, I find it scandalous that you, as environment minister, apparently allow yourself to be involved and that you do not have the backbone to resist the hunting lobby!"<sup>23</sup>

It was striking, how quickly, in various forums, criticism of decision-making and intervention evolved into a rhetoric of shaming and blaming. Apart from occasional 'ad-hominem attacks' (like above on the Minister's character), this form of rhetoric also involved the continued repetition of narratives that portray dissenters in a bad light. Hunters, in particular, were the target of discrediting practices.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, this research shows that the debates over wildlife comeback evolve on the basis of a continuous alternation of participants reaffirming their own standpoints and subverting those of the opponent. The rhetoric to do so is hands-on, practical and often somewhat messy, however, our analysis shows a constant striving for 'logic', meaning that participants engage in debate by producing premises and inferences that would make their reasoning solid and conclusive. In a first level of analysis we have reconstructed typical patterns of such reasoning on both sides of the fault lines. The results are more or less in line with Marsh (2006) who observed syllogistic patterns underlying crisis communication. But whereas Marsh restricts to deduction (i.e. applying a shared principle to draw a logical conclusion from the facts at hand), we also revealed other types of inference (for example, inductive classification of wild boar into harmful or dangerous animals and abductive explanation of any failed attempts to control them).

The logical reconstructions were crucial for our subsequent understanding of rhetorical practices in the second level of analysis. Here we revealed that discussants in various public forums were using, among others, the classical rhetorical options available in each of the four staseis to subvert these logical structures. All this suggests that in their efforts to build a solid argument, participants in public debate do also recognise and act upon the logic of their opponents.

Although this process of alternating affirmation and subversion points to both a surprisingly rational reasoning and a certain mutual interaction between the participants, it does

little to stimulate new ideas and develop common ground, but rather sharpens and mirrors existing divisions along the fault lines. We suggest this is due in considerable part to inherent tendencies and associated practices within the debate itself. Especially relevant here are 1) the limited elaboration and deliberation on the issues of contention, and 2) the tendency of linking these issues to wider socio-political relationships.

### Limited Elaboration on the Issues of Contention

Frequently discussants used the staseis to quickly work their way towards a preferred judgement conclusion. Hence, factual statements often remained with little or no evidence to support (or reject) them, definitions appeared to stem from implicit principles and assumptions, and quality judgements were represented as principles beyond discussion or dismissed as irrelevant. Sometimes, facts (and especially numbers) were employed to make a jump directly to the stasis of jurisdiction. Due to the lack of elaboration and/or discussion in the respective staseis, many disagreements were insufficiently addressed and crucial questions remained unasked. The participants in debate follow the steps of stasis, but they barely stand still to elaborate and discuss on the issues of dissension. All this contrasts markedly from the original conceptualisation of staseis as temporary standings in-between contradictories or contrary statements (Dieter 1950).

We propose the pursuit of deductive logic a crucial factor in the lack of 'stand-still'. The use of deductive reasoning or judgement made from general principles was common practice in the debates over wildlife comeback. As we noted in the analysis, shared principles – including popular beliefs, common-sense wisdom and scientific theory – were usually beyond discussion and often taken as self-evident universals. Aden (1994) suggests that arguments in our postmodern age "function deductively, relying upon audience agreement of what's already 'known' to create further argument". We notice that, very often, arguments were based on unstated principles, leaving the audience to fill in the blanks. These may be simply the audience's beliefs which are implicitly appealed to and used as support for one's position. In this way, stating a single fact (e.g. returned foxes lack natural enemies) can be enough to attain a wanted conclusion (e.g. their population should be controlled). We do find attempts to challenge such beliefs – in particular advancing an alternative principle (e.g. self-regulation of fox populations) – but overall the opportunities to elaborate and deliberate were limited.

Another factor is the frequent use of logical opposition, in particular dichotomies. For example, the evaluation that a species belongs in Flanders involved defining its presence as a natural phenomenon and its absence as an unnatural situation caused by past human intervention. In former work, dichotomies have been mainly discussed because of their polarising effect, emphasising contradictions and incompatibilities between the poles (Dascal 2008), also in situations where gradations between the poles deserve to be explored (Govier 2009). Our stasis analysis brings to light how

dichotomies work in the debate by revealing their function in constructing and reinforcing the logical structures underlying the staseis, and invigorating arguments at both sides. By forcing a choice between two alternatives, dichotomies can facilitate the transition between the staseis, the movement or flow from one stasis to another. However, by doing so, dichotomies can rule out important alternatives without discussing and elaborating on them. Moreover, they may obscure the complexities that are necessary for full understanding (Berlin 1990). We observe here that judgements were based on a rather limited set of dichotomies that themselves remained unquestioned. This also rendered it difficult to open up possibilities for reconciling positions. Yet, on some occasions, attempts were made using the staseis to re-define the situation and put a new perspective on it, which ultimately made the dichotomy (e.g. harmful/beneficial species) superfluous.

### Linking of Issues to Socio-political Relationships

The second trend is discussants going ‘off-road’, away from the four steps of stasis and the core issues of contention, to make linkages to social and political relationships. As a result, the debate is no longer oriented to the returning animals, but instead gets mixed up with, among others, issues like political lobbying, confusing responsibilities, unequal power relations, and the presumed motives of those with a deviant opinion. This lateral move of relationship linking is likely to further intensify relational tensions as, almost inevitably, the debate gets focused on the characteristics and behaviour of those engaged in it (more on this below). In addition — just like the fast-forward move toward judgement conclusion described above — it impedes opportunities for novel ideas to emerge as the issue that needs to be addressed is forced into the background (see also Heidlebaugh 2008). All of this makes it difficult for policy decision-making: the issues are never quite clear and, in the end, decisions (for example, to ease restrictions on fox hunting) are reached out of confusion rather than out of an issue-focused argument and reasoned judgement.

Our analysis reveals that such link-making practices tend to operate from the stasis of fact and the stasis of jurisdiction. In the latter, procedural questions are addressed which can be about any aspect of the process that led to the judgement or action. In the wildlife comeback debates we see that the legitimate or illegitimate roles of politicians and social groups (conservationists, hunters, farmers) in the decision-making process were a frequent topic that, however, extends in many directions. As a result, the stasis of jurisdiction may multiply to such an extent that it becomes impossible to address, as in Dimock’s (2009) ‘fragmented stasis’. But what is more, these relational matters also pave the way to crossing what Burnett and Olson (1998) call ‘the line of social appropriateness’. Discussants attempt to secure their relational position and just want to win, without concern for the larger bearing on societal relationships. We observe that discrediting persons and groups was an important target of rhetorical effort, from questioning their competence to accusing and blaming them.

Such discrediting practices undermine possibilities for those being discredited to engage in further discussion and they (further) damage relationships, also beyond the debate.

The other important starting point of relationship linking in wildlife comeback debates is the stasis of fact. We exemplified how participants in Internet discussions used abductive reasoning to explain surprising facts. These explanations were shared and turned into new facts to be explained, and so forth. While this dynamic reasoning is well suited for dealing with uncertain situations, leaving much to be explored jointly, it may easily turn the debate into an attack of one particular group of people (e.g. conservationists, hunters, dog owners) for their condemnable habits and alleged role in the event. All of this adds to the polarisation and fragmentation of the public debate.

### CONCLUSION

The above-discussed tendencies and practices in the debates over wildlife comeback are likely to contribute to the rhetorical power applied by the participants, however, with the unplanned result of even greater divides between them. The application of stasis theory offers good insight into how rhetorical strategies develop around fault-lines, and thus how they unwillingly add to the continuation and exacerbation of the conflict. Thus, instead of making the occurrence of dissent problematic — the conventional consensus approach — stasis theory starts from dissensus: contrarily thinking, speaking and acting are not considered problematic, but as a source of rhetorical invention focused on ‘the issue’ that must be addressed prior to moving from the stasis. Recent applications rightly conceptualise staseis as points of possibility, the opportunity at which discourse can be transformed (e.g. Graham and Herndl 2011). Indeed, if conflict is played out as a discursive power struggle, we should find ways for de-escalation and fruitful exchanges that characterise more dialogical communications.

From a dialogue perspective it has been suggested that the more opponents in a discussion aim at arriving to one single truth, the more they will clash (Bohm 1990). In a dialogue, people accept differences and diversity and participants to a dialogue should thus be ready to openly discuss diverging viewpoints, including underlying assumptions, norms, fears and interests. The notion of the relevance of capitalising on differences and diversity for effective decision-making is not at all new. Some hundred years ago, Mary Parker Follett, for instance, argued in her famous book *The New State*, that to be a democrat “is to learn how to live with other men” (Follett 1918: 22–23). Also, political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2000) considers conflict and diversity as the main starting point for what she calls radical democracy, arguing that, when accepting that we live in a society in which people are free to have their own opinions, it is unavoidable that opinions clash. It is thus not conflicting opinions that are the problem, but the way people communicate about them in different interaction contexts. As such, rhetorical practices applied in seemingly unimportant day-to-day discussions have important consequences for the course of the discussions themselves, but also for relationships

in the wider environment, resulting in an increasing tension and polarisation between groups in society. In the end, they shape societal structures and developments in ways that no one may have intended (Kim and Kim 2008). Serious investments in the development of dialogical skills and rhetorical awareness may help effectively communicate wildlife comebacks (and other conservation issues as well) by means of constructive dialogue.

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### NOTES

1. I Shot The Sheriff (1973): the song's meaning is subject of much public speculation, but for simplicity we take the phrases literally.
2. This applies in particular to the criminal judge for whom the staseis constitute a series of fixed points on which judgement must be made: is the fact proved? if so: is the fact punishable? if so: is the offender punishable? if so: what sanction should be imposed? (Braet 1987).
3. Koen Van Den Berge in: "Mensen moeten leren leven met vossen" [People should learn to live with foxes], November 25, 2008, Vlaams infocentrum land- en tuinbouw. [http://www.vilt.be/nl\\_BE/news](http://www.vilt.be/nl_BE/news). Accessed on November 15, 2013.
4. Koen Van Den Berge: "De Vos *Vulpes vulpes* in Vlaanderen: inventarisatie en synthese van de belangrijkste knelpunten" [The Fox *Vulpes vulpes* in Flanders: inventory and synthesis of major bottlenecks], *Communications Institute of Forestry and Game Management*, 1995/1, 71–100.
5. Jan Rodts (Bird Protection Flanders) in: "Is de jacht weer open?" [The hunt is open again?], *De Morgen*, May 29, 2012, 12–13.
6. Wildlife Management Unit Flemish Ardennes. "Moeten er nog vossen zijn" [Is there still a need for foxes], March 21, 2013. <http://www.wbe.be/vlaamseardennen/2013/03/21/moeten-er-nog-vossen-zijn/>. Accessed on May 31, 2013.
7. Chris Steenwegen, "Maak plaats voor de oerkracht van de natuur: de everzwijnen moeten blijven" [Make space for the primal power of nature: the wild boars must stay], *De Standaard*, October 29, 2012, 22.
8. Jef Schrijvers (Hubertus Hunting Association), "Everzwijnen: samenleven of verdrijven?" [Wild boar: coexist or expel?], presentation at symposium on the wild boar in Diepenbeek, September 25, 2010.
9. Public reactions on "Everzwijnen vallen jogger met hond aan" [Wild boars attack jogger with dog]. 2012. <http://www.hbvl.be/reageer/limburg/houthalen-helchteren/everzwijnen-vallen-jogger-met-hond-aan>. Accessed on November 26, 2012.
10. "Samenleven met de vos" [Living together with the fox]. 2010. <https://www.bouwinform.be/forum/off-topic/off-topic/samenleven-met-de-vos?page=1>. Accessed on June 11, 2013.
11. Zoogdierenwerkgroep, "Naar een verantwoord vossenbeheer:

wat voorafging" [Towards sound fox management: what came before], accessed June 11, 2013, <http://zoogdierenwerkgroep.be/zorgen/beschermingsacties-vos-1>.

12. Ivan Sabbe in "Hoorzitting over de jacht en de problematiek van schade door vossen, ganzen, duiven en everzwijnen" [Hearing about hunting and the issue of damage caused by foxes, geese, pigeons and wild boars], Flemish Parliament, Piece 814-1 (2010–2011), November 18, 2010, 14.
13. Steven Degraer, "Voorwoord: everzwijnen in het Drongengoed" [Preface: wild boars in the Drongengoed], *Bos & Hei*, December, 2009, 1-3.
14. See note 3 above.
15. Public reactions on "Vos straks vogelvrij?" [Fox soon outlawed?], Radio 1, April 6, 2010. <http://www.radio1.be/programmas/peeters-pichal/vos-straks-vogelvrij>. Accessed on June 11, 2013.
16. "Meer dan 4 hectaren weiland omgewoeld door everzwijnen" [Wild boars ravaged over four hectares of pasture], *Het Nieuwsblad/Regionaal: Limburg*, February 4, 2017, 4.
17. Karl Van Ginderdeuren, "Moeten we tegen de vossenjacht zijn?" [Should we oppose fox hunting?], *Knack, Vrije Tribune*, February 3, 2012. <https://www.knack.be/nieuws/moeten-we-tegen-de-vossenjacht-zijn-karl-van-ginderdeuren/article-opinion-44298.html>. Accessed on October 26, 2012.
18. "110 jagers schieten niet één everzwijn" [110 hunters did not shoot one single boar], *Het Belang Van Limburg*, April 15, 2013, 19.
19. Jef Schrijvers in the Flemish Parliament: see note 12 above.
20. Public reactions on "110 jagers schieten niet één everzwijn" (see note 18 above) unpublished and kindly provided by the newspaper's editor, April 24, 2013.
21. Bert Vanholen in "Populatie: 2000. Af te schieten: 2000" [Population: 2000. To cull: 2000], *Het Belang Van Limburg*, February 2-3, 2013, 16-17.
22. Joke Schauvliege in the Commission for Environment, Nature, Land-use Planning, Energy and Animal Welfare., Flemish Parliament, Piece 332 (2017-2018), November 7, 2017, <https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/commissies/commissievergaderingen/1200618/verslag/1204573>. Accessed on February 23, 2018.
23. Hermes Sanctorum in the Commission for Environment, Nature, Land-use Planning and Heritage, Flemish Parliament, Commission meeting C126-LEE20, February 7, 2012, 12.

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