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The Weight of Beastly Traits: Biopolitics and Imaginations around Wild Boar Hunting in Uruguay

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of wild boars as beasts of the Anthropocene by examining their physicality and the policies focused on controlling their populations. Considering the labeling and perception of the species as a beast, the study investigates the sociopolitical implications of such categorization. Specifically, it examines how wild boars have been described and portrayed as intimidating, dangerous, and threatening within Uruguay's hunting and conservation communities. By analyzing the processes that frame the lives of wild boars and render them legitimate targets of eradication, this article sheds light on the semiotics and naming of wild boars' changing corporeality throughout history. It reveals how the hunting community motivates their practices by portraying themselves as guardians of biodiversity and agricultural production rather than mere leisure hunters. I argue that the notion of beastliness is instrumental in wildlife management strategies employed for wild boars.

Keywords

wild boar – recreational hunting – biopolitics – biosecurity – beastliness

Life in the Anthropocene is characterized by scenarios of extinction, ecological destruction, and social marginalization (Rose, 2013). The growing vulnerability posed by environmental shifts is a predicament that humans share with many other species. Climate change is also changing human-animal relations as habitats are destroyed and altered, intensifying contact and competition between wildlife and humans (Mathur, 2021). More-than-human anthropology has played a key role in expanding our understanding of multispecies coexistence and frictions in the Anthropocene (Kirksey & Helmerich, 2010; van Dooren et al., 2016). Through concepts such as more-than-human kinship and multispecies justice, this line of scholarship seeks to place humans within the environment, not outside of it (Haraway, 2003; Wolfe, 2010). By inserting humans into vital multispecies assemblages, the scholarship challenges anthropocentrism, the division of the world into nature and culture, and ideas of human domination and control (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; Haraway, 2008). The shift in perspective has ignited intellectual and ethical curiosity in the life projects of nonhuman species and the unpredictable processes and relations they set in motion.

Ferality is a concept that has gained traction in this scholarship. By studying ferality, a range of new concepts to think through relations and alternative coexistence have emerged: symbiotic, hybrid and inappropriate/ed others (Haraway, 1992), cyborgs, FemaleMen, pests, and monsters (Haraway, 1997; O’Gorman & van Dooren, 2017; van Dooren, 2015). Being unruly and unpredictable, wild boars are a prime example of ferality (Keil, 2023). In the rural sector, they are considered a threat to sheep production by attacking newborn lambs (Mayer, 2009). Additionally, as they share landscapes and species biographies with domestic pigs (they can crossbreed), they spread fluids, viruses, and genes. In this framework, for the pig industry, wild boars are one of the main threats to biosecurity and global trade (Cwynar et al., 2019; More et al., 2018). Adding another layer to their rogue reputation, wild boars in the Americas are considered an invasive alien species (Barrios-Garcia & Ballari, 2012; Somervill, 2009) and despite substantial population control efforts, their proliferation persists (Massei et al., 2011). Their remarkable mobility renders newly constructed fences ineffective in deterring them (Laguna et al., 2022). In Uruguay, wild boars were declared national pests in 1982 and are now a leisure hunting target (Dabezies et al., 2023; Herrero & Fernández de Luco, 2003; Lombardi et al., 2015).

But they are more than that. I argue that due to their physicality as well as their invasive status, they have become beasts of the Anthropocene. By focusing on the labeling and imagination of a species as a beast or beastlike, the piece is interested in what such label does socio-politically. The article explores the process of configuration of wild boar beastliness as part of a biopolitical

negotiation in which ecological, economic, and symbolic arguments are interwoven. This is supported by the notion that, beyond institutional narratives that define what a pest is (based on ecological and economic arguments), there is a symbolic dimension that underlies political decision-making. There is a differential valuation of certain beings, which places them in specific places in the politics of life regulation (Clark, 2015; van Dooren, 2011). These locations are historically configured based on multispecies interactions in which the semiotics of bodies play a key role (Kohn, 2013). However, I propose that the moral valuations and ethical taxonomies (Smith, 2004) involved in these qualifications generate a series of narratives and practices that are entangled in the meanings of animal bodies.

By exploring how wild boars became and continue to be described as beasts among Uruguay's hunters, veterinarians, and conservationists, I am interested in the processes that frame the life projects of wild boars as intimidating, dangerous, and threatening, and turns these animals into legitimate targets of eradication. The focus on beastliness serves to illustrate how current wildlife management of wild boars relies not only on a semantic framing of the animal, but also the semiotics and naming of wild boars' changing corporeality throughout history. The figure of the beast provides insight into how the wild boar hunting community motivates their hunting practice: They portray themselves as guardians of biodiversity not leisure hunters (Holsman, 2000; Kaltenborn et al., 2013). Through the language of biosecurity and wildlife protection, hunter narratives draw heavily on the figure of the beast and associated characters to render the killing of wild boars both ecologically relevant and excitingly dangerous.

The article is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Making Boars into Beasts," analyzes the symbolic grounds of the development of boar beastliness, considering the communication of boars' bodies and the development of a hunting culture that feeds on the symbology of risk. In Part 2, "Beastly Pests," the focus of analysis is the process of pest declaration and landscape management and the instrumentalization of hunters as public servants. Part 3, "Hunting Beasts," turns to hunters and their motivations for hunting wild boars. Together, these parts underlie the connection between cultural imaginations, biopolitics, and biosemiotics in deciding which animals will live and which will be killed.

Methodology

This article builds on ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2001) carried out from 2017 to 2019 with boar hunters, veterinarians related to biosecurity, conservation NGOs, animal rights advocates, and wildlife managers – the

primary boar-hunting stakeholders in Uruguay (Dabezies, 2019). The interpretative frameworks for understanding sport hunting in Uruguay emerge from their dialogues, practices, and interactions (Dabezies et al., 2023).

The approach combines open-ended interviews, focus groups, informal discussions, and participant and direct observation. Parts of this article draw on research carried out in cooperation with three anthropologists (Magdalena Chouhy, Leticia Poliak, and Antonio di Candia), two biologists (Lorena Rodríguez and Alexandra Cravino), an Environmental Management student (Facundo Rodríguez), and one hunter (Pablo González). As part of this project, we conducted 77 open-ended interviews and three focus groups¹ together. Interviews focused on tensions between hunting, conservation, and biosecurity in Uruguay. They were also a fundamental tool for the primary identification of actors. We initially interviewed actors with the most public visibility in the debates that were taking place. Actors who participated in media interviews or had strong social media visibility were willing to participate in the interviews and make their points of view known. Using snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 2016), we increased the map of actors until we achieved a certain redundancy of institutions and people's names. In the focus groups, 5–10 people engaged in dialogue based on a set of topics regulated by a moderator (Steward & Shamdasani, 1990). These included discussions surrounding hunting regulations such as poaching, hunting ethics, and social perception of hunting, which shed light on the management of invasive species and the role of hunters.

In addition to the interviews and focus groups, this article also draws on my individual research. I shared various academic and day-to-day activities with people linked to conservation and biosecurity from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, and academia. As a researcher connected to the largest university in Uruguay, it was easy for me to interact with these persons linked to biosecurity and conservation. I participated in lectures and academic events throughout the country which allowed me to share hotels, bars, and meals with them. This informal socialization provided insights into the dynamics and processes linked to the concept of pests and invasive alien species.

To gain insight into the hunting community, I participated in hunting trips, wild boar festivals, and informal talks with hunters. Although I am not a hunter, I have had close contact with hunting throughout my life and can participate in hunts and interact with dogs, pigs, boars, and horses. During the research period, I accompanied hunters on hunting trips lasting from one night to a

¹ Interviews and talks were conducted with participants' consent. Participants cited in this work have been anonymized.

week. I helped them load equipment and restrain animals during slaughter. Hunting trips were not only about hunting but also socializing, sharing stories, and camping life. This enabled me to observe how hunters understood their hunting practices related to the boars. An important aspect of the research with the hunting community was participation in wild boar festivals, where competitors' goal was to hunt as many wild boars as possible within a weekend (Di Candia & Dabezies, 2020).

The interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and analyzed in depth. Audio recordings were analyzed directly on the timeline using QSR NVivo 11 software. However, the products of the more spontaneous and less structured activities were part of interpretations recorded in a field diary and were subject to future subjective reinterpretations. This combination of techniques and analytical processes mirrored ethnographic approaches in which there are no predefined recipes for data collection and no clear separation between data collection and interpretation, but rather a back-and-forth process in which interpretations are interwoven with theoretical concepts, personal background, field observations, and post-field analysis (Guber, 2001).

Making Boars into Beasts

To understand the life and killing of wild boars in Uruguay, I focused on the figure of the beast. Monsters and feral beings have recently gained attraction in academic analysis. In many cultures, monsters are figures or phenomena with supernatural powers who are to be feared. Humans can rarely control monsters who have the capacity of moving between mythical and natural worlds (Stella & Kleisner, 2009). In connection with the Anthropocene, monsters have been used to underline the intertwined history of feral beings and human projects as a way of capturing the eerie sense of unpredictability, threat, and potential damage of a life-force out of control (Swanson et al., 2017). The figure of the beast is a concept that overlaps with both these concepts, and it is within the intersection of these terms that we can understand why boars' beastliness makes them killable targets.

To start with, beasts and monsters are overlapping but distinct concepts. Like monsters, beasts are cultural projections. The term "beast" can refer to nonhuman animals or monsters, but it is the mixture of the two that fosters complexity. In comparison to monsters, beasts are mostly beings of this world. Whereas monsters come in all shapes, beasts are intimidating precisely because of their corporeality: They are big, powerful, and ferocious, thought to act according to the lowest of animal instincts. This rendering of beasts – as

raging, aggressive, and fearless – carries strong resonance with masculinity and testosterone and provides a dark mirror to the male human animal. Even if this imagination of the beast draws on corporeality and animal behavior, some beasts do have mythical capacities and can be categorized as monsters. The magic dimension is when these animalistic natural behaviors are freed from worldly restraints. Werewolves, for example, are figures whom we find on the verge of monster and beast. These beings embody the primal and wild nature of the beast while also incorporating elements of the monstrous. Werewolves tap into our primal fears and instincts; they represent a loss of control and a surrender to our animalistic side. No matter mythical or worldly status, corporeality and animal behavior permeates the beast – and this seemingly small detail has come to haunt wild boars.

Wild boars are feral beasts. Intertwined in historical, natural, and cultural processes, wild boars have a history of living close to humans (Kohn, 2013). Wild boars display both corporeal and behavioral characteristics that can be interpreted as beastly: They are strong, untamed animals who can pose threats to humans while living alongside them. Violent encounters have been one element of human-boar relations, and a threatened boar can cause severe injury to their surroundings. But what brought the beastly features of the wild boar to the fore is their cousin, the domesticated pig.

Wild boars and domestic pigs are two different animals. Differences in looks and behaviors stem from a domestication process that took thousands of years. Domestic pigs lack manes and tusks; these beastly characteristics of wild boars attract attention because of their absence in domesticated pigs (Darwin, 1868). From the perspective of biosemiotics, appearance, or what is on the surface, should not be treated in a superficial way. Morphology, color, and texture are forms of communication; they are a way of establishing relationships and must be understood in the context of interconnected practices, representations, and interpretations among humans and other animals (Kohn, 2007, 2013).

In contrast, a summary of the scientific literature rendered the wild boars' communicative and functional aspects, their body surfaces, and morphology as the antithesis of their domesticated relatives with the cultural assumptions that follow wild and tame. Even the boars themselves were described as one of "the wild beasts of the world" (Finn, 1909, p. 116). This cultural understanding of wild boars as partly beasts is key to understanding current human-boar relations in Uruguay, both with regards to hunting practices and biosecurity issues.

Historically, wild boars have been one of the most popular hunting targets. Since ancient Persia, Greece, Rome, and Scandinavia, wild boar hunting has generally been associated with a public display of courage, regarded as a difficult yet adrenaline-filled task. Although hunters obtain a lot of meat and a

small yet impressive trophy (tusks and head; Yamamoto, 2017), the dominant tropes in wild boar hunting are danger and risk. The narrative of danger is underpinned by the idea of wild boars as beasts: relentless, aggressive, and unmerciful. Simultaneously, the image of the boar is used to frame the hunt in terms of fair play and equal risk between hunter and prey which constitutes the base of modern recreational hunting (Ortega y Gasset, 1948; Posewitz, 1994; von Essen, 2018). From this perspective, the boar should ideally be killed from a close distance, preferably with a knife rather than a shotgun.

The wild boars' beastly features affect their status as a species. While ecological and economic aspects should underpin wildlife management, studies indicate that biopolitical projects are influenced by symbolic aspects and cultural values (Biermann & Mansfield, 2014). Biosecurity and conservation policies are based on an "ethical taxonomy" (van Dooren, 2011) that promotes the life of certain beings and the death of others (Meuser et al., 2009). Charismatic species, such as panda bears or orangutans, are turned into conservation "flagship species" (Clucas et al., 2008). Pests or uncharismatic species inhabit the other end of the spectrum (Bocci, 2017). Here we find species who are culturally coded as unpleasant (e.g. spiders, snakes, or bats in Western societies), pestiferous (including alien species), and uncharismatic species (Lorimer, 2006).² Wild boars often fall into both of the two first pariah categories.

Some authors analyzed the relationship between charisma, disgust, phobias, and fear, proposing that there is a genetic basis in the aversion generated by these animals (Kendler et al., 1992). In opposition to these works focused from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, other works approach it from a more cultural perspective, analyzing the relationship between myths, advertising, education, literature, and filmography, among others (Muris et al., 2008; Prokop et al., 2009). Although I agree with this last approach, I argue that historical coexistence shapes the surfaces, but the narratives of these interactions build frameworks to interpret signs and bodies. In other words, form, texture, and colors are key elements in communication between bodies. It is also fundamental to analyze the cultural and political frameworks that shape the scope of communicative understandings in multispecies coexistence. Human-boar interaction is reconfigured today by public policies of conservation and biosecurity, where tusks that once challenged hunters' skills and courage are now part of a new narrative in the context of policies that, for example, perceive boar bodies as disease vectors.

2 Aesthetic charisma is not always likable. Some organisms, found in unfamiliar places, can evoke negative emotions (Lorimer, 2006). In this context, a wild boar also possesses charisma, but in a rather beastly way.

Compared with domesticated pigs, wild boars are the archetype of feral and are regarded as pests in several countries. The International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG, n.d.) ranks wild boars among the prime invasive alien species globally. With this labeling, control and eradication policies are sanctioned (Davey, 1994; Prokop et al., 2009). Wild boars' sheer size, proximity to humans, and representation as aggressive and dangerous make such efforts less contentious. With the recent wave of African Swine Fever, they have been targeted as transboundary spreaders of diseases who challenge pig production (Jurado et al., 2018). Fences have been erected in various European countries (i.e. Belgium, Denmark, Germany, among others) in response to agencies' framing of wild boars as a biosecurity concern, but the measurements were not as effective as expected since wild boars transgress and outsmart borders and barriers (Laguna et al., 2022). This transgressive ability has further strengthened the species' reputation as untamable and relentless.

Beastly Pests

Wild boars were introduced to Uruguay by European colonial settlers in the early 20th century for hunting purposes. Over the next century, the boar population grew steadily to such an extent that the species was declared national pest in 1982, authorizing free hunting with no quota restrictions (Decree No. 463/982). Forty years later, wild boar hunting became the most widespread recreational hunting modality in Uruguay (Herrero & Fernández de Luco, 2003; Poliak & Dabezies, 2021). The main arguments leading to the pest declaration emphasized the negative economic impacts of wild boars. Decree No. 463/982 identified the species as a source of significant harm, particularly concerning agricultural crops and sheep herds. Furthermore, the interbreeding between wild boars and domestic pigs was highlighted as a contributing factor, leading to the degeneration of established breeds (Section 1, Article 3). Yet despite the pest declaration, wild boar populations continued to grow. According to a survey of the Uruguayan Wool Secretariat (a public-private institution that watches over the interests of the wool sector), the deaths that wild boars caused in new-born lambs reduced the national sheep stock by 3.4%. Therefore, in 1996, the Uruguayan Government requested technical assistance from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to develop a national strategy to control wild boar expansion. The project's main concern was to limit the damage wild boars inflicted on sheep flocks, and by extension, the wool industry. The project proposed the professionalization of

boar hunting, creating hunting associations, using traps, and developing feeding places to attract wild boars for culling purposes (Leranoz & Castein, 2002). Local hunting associations and hunting technique trainings were successfully created, but these activities were not sustained over time and eventually faded away.

In 2004, yet another label was added to the wild boars. This time they were declared a specific pest for agriculture. Framed in terms of agro-productive change, the decree (No. 96/004) required rural landowners to combat wild boars as part of the systemic fight against national pests. It was motivated by structural changes in the agricultural industry that had altered the landscape from which wild boars had come to benefit. Since the Uruguayan independence in 1825, extensive livestock production dominated the agro-economic sector. Restructuring of meat production over the last 30 years has, however, changed the use of landscape and land. With the construction of several pulp mills to produce cellulose, thousands of hectares of land have been freed up. Eucalyptus became the crop of choice in these areas. Another change was increased cultivation of cereals, such as soybean, corn, and wheat, improving the living conditions for wild boars.

Local hunters explained the favorable conditions as a combination of two factors. The new emphasis on cereal production became an extra source of nutrition, and the eucalyptus plantations functioned as safe havens because hunting was prohibited there. Decree No. 96/004 altered these conditions, forcing forestry companies to develop control plans for wild boar populations. Because of this decree, forestry companies created systematic hunting plans, hiring hunters to control wild boar populations. According to observations during my conversations and hunting trips, these control plans have not significantly impacted the wild boar populations that inhabit these eucalyptus plantations. These properties are usually large extensions of several thousand hectares, in which the control plans fulfill an almost administrative function. However, hunters who have managed to engage in this type of control activity present control plans and report on the effectiveness of their work. This has led several hunters to become more professional, using better weapons, security measures, and more detailed control plans (Broz et al., 2021).

The eradication of boars in the name of ecological and agricultural protection was further advanced in 2012 when wild boars became classified as an invasive alien species in Uruguay (Aber et al., 2012). The labeling was related to another bio-management discourse concerned with cross-border biosecurity, which had identified wild boars as potential disease transmitters across borders. The interest in controlling transboundary wild boar movements can be seen as an effect of institutional changes in animal health surveillance networks. From

the late 20th century, zoonotic diseases were to be addressed at a global level to create a standard to ensure that alive and dead flora, fauna, and microbes did not carry disease. Through this scaling up, biosecurity was put on the agenda of different international organizations: those regulating human health issues (e.g., World Health Organization), those overseeing animal health and rights (e.g., the FAO and World Organization for Animal Health) and those responsible for commerce and trade (such as the World Trade Organization).

Wild animals, however, often escape biosecurity controls and regulations (Hinchliffe, 2013). Animal mobility is therefore a core element of several spatial management policies on wildlife conservation and biosecurity (Hodgetts & Lorimer, 2018). Surveilling and limiting animal mobility in biopolitical terms has become a key element in policies aimed at controlling the spread of zoonotic diseases and management policies to protect wildlife (Dobson et al., 2013). Climate change has increased the range expansion of several species. In the case of wild boars, this increased population mobility has been one of the fundamental reasons for their invasive expansion (Markov et al., 2019). This coupled with their great individual physical mobility (i.e., their speed and ability to hide in dirty or inaccessible places), make them ideal sport-hunting targets, as we will see in the next section. However, in addition to material mobilities, their symbolism as a monster of the Anthropocene, as an animal capable of entering the domesticated world to meet their pink cousin, sharing viruses and genes, is what interests us most in this work. This articulation between material and symbolic liminality is part of the argument I want to present here, showing how the politics of life control are intertwined with historical multispecies symbolologies.

After attending several health surveillance events and becoming involved in various spaces of academic exchange, I noticed that Uruguay's narrative strategy followed the European case. Several European countries recently became concerned about the zoonotic surveillance of wild boars. This was mainly due to the growing number of wild boars in Europe (Veličković et al., 2016) and their link with the spread of the African Swine Fever (ASF; Cwynar et al., 2019). The European Commission and the European Food Safety Authority began working closely with hunters to stop the spread of ASF (Guinat et al., 2017). Hunters were considered a key element to solve this issue, being in frequent contact with boars and, in many cases, constituting their only predators.

Uruguayan sanitary surveillance systems are based on international networks in which Uruguayan veterinarians share information and protocols with European and international organizations such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). In this framework, the Uruguayan government and the academic biosecurity surveillance system have strengthened dialogue

with hunters, following what was done in Europe. In 2017 and 2018, several workshops were held throughout the country where speakers discussed the zoonoses transmitted by boars, and other issues related to the impact of boar hunting on native wildlife, such as the importance of promoting good hunting practices (especially regarding the use of weapons). The workshop's objective appeared to convey a sense of imminent danger and a need to be prepared for the possibility of a zoonotic pandemic (Lakoff, 2008).

The collaboration with veterinarians monitoring wildlife and "being prepared" for zoonoses opened a window of opportunity for hunters to position themselves as public servants combating a threat to biosecurity and conservation. A similar situation occurred with the European hunters who participated in keeping ASF under control (Emond et al., 2021). The recently created Uruguayan Hunters' Association began to collaborate with veterinarians, building a strong alliance in Uruguayan wildlife surveillance. Members regularly sent samples to analyze disease prevalence in wild boars, while other regional groups developed a "brand image" where the word "hunter" was substituted with "controllers" to improve their public social image.

At the Wild Boar Festivals, the predominant discourse was to combat the "pest." As hunters returned with prey or while awards are given, an announcer usually made comments about the best prey while echoing phrases such as "Thanks to these fighters who help us fight a common enemy of all rural producers," or "Thanks to all the hunters who combat this pest." In this sense, discourses of pests permeate, promote, and legitimize wild boar hunting as a control mechanism. For hunters, wild boars are, above all, game, but they are increasingly becoming a threat that must be controlled. These new narratives on pest and zoonosis control (framed in biosecurity and conservation policies) are central aspects to wild boars' construct as beastly creatures. Although it was environmental infrastructure projects that changed Uruguay's ecosystems and laid the ecological foundations for wild boars' population growth, categorizing them as pests and invasive species ultimately outlined a monstrosity that resonated with the biosemiotics of a beast.

The narratives of combating the pest coexist with the display of the prey as trophies upon the hunters' return. The biggest animals are exhibited on the hoods or roofs of cars or trailers, with a stick that keeps the mouth open to show the tusks (Figure 1). The exaltation of the head and tusks is reflected in the Uruguayan Hunters' Association's logo, an institution that promotes the legitimization of hunters as allies for conservation and biosecurity. The iconography at the wild boar festivals on the flags, shields, and hunting teams' t-shirts is built around the beastliness of wild boars (the tusks, head, mane, and aggressive attitudes are highlighted). The final narrative draws on both

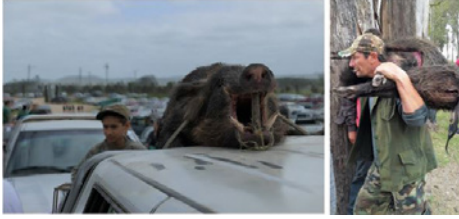


FIGURE 1
Hunters returning with their prey to a
Wild Boar Festival

these debates: Hunters can articulate their role as public servants who protect wildlife from the invasive beasts who destroy their surroundings; at the same time, the hunting practices are framed as a dangerous but just endeavor of man against beast.

Hunting Beasts

Carlos tells me how big game hunting is much better than small game hunting because it has a certain risk, a certain danger. For him, the elite of hunters are those who hunt dangerous animals such as lions or elephants. He says that there are hunters who pay fortunes to hunt those dangerous animals.

HUNTER CARLOS, *field notebook*, November 2017

In Uruguay, wild boar hunting usually occurs during winter and fall and consists of several phases: the preparation before going to the countryside; the move from home into the wild; the actual hunt; and, finally, the slaughter, processing, consumption, and distribution of the meat. Tracking the boars, interacting with the dogs, being in the field, and listening carefully to the sounds are also fundamental aspects of hunting. Hunting wild boars is much more than killing the animals; it is part of a particular hunting atmosphere made up of all these aspects (Keil, 2021); it is part of a process in which many skills, practices, and experiences are interwoven (Marvin, 2010). As previously discussed, to underline sportsmanship, hunters must kill the boar with a knife or a firearm at close range. It is a risky moment filled with adrenaline.

The drama-filled moment of man-versus-beast is an exception to the larger hunting atmosphere. Hunters rely on different sensorial registers to locate potential prey. In Uruguay, this is called “lifting,” a term which has a double meaning: On one hand, because wild boars tend to lie flat while hiding, and on the other because these shelters are usually in lower terrains. “Lifting” a wild boar means forcing it to move. Hunters search for visual signs, such as

footprints or movements in the distance, that indicate boar presence. In my walks with hunters, I observed the most obvious traces were either marks left at the base of tree trunks when boars sharpen their tusks or trampled or foraged soil.

Most of all, hunters rely on dogs to find prey. Present-day Uruguayan boar-hunting practice is an advanced multispecies endeavor wherein dogs are key players (Poliak & Dabezies, 2021). Dog breeds used for hunting are very diverse. Some hunters say that the breed is significant and that the best dogs are Dogo Argentinos, who are strong and resistant. In these cases, being strong dogs, they use small packs of 4–6 dogs. Other hunters, often more associated with rural contexts, prefer to use dogs without any breed. In these cases, they often use packs of more than 10 dogs since they are usually smaller and cannot resist wild boars' strength. Still other hunters use a combination of both types of dogs, giving rise to a great diversity of crossbreeds and pack sizes. During hunting, dogs track the boars and hunters listen carefully to their barking. After tracking down the boar, the dogs' task is to keep the animal at bay until the hunter arrives. This often entails gripping the wild boars who will desperately seek to defend themselves. When the hunter arrives to perform the final act of sportsmanship, the prey is often already exhausted and severely injured.

Hunting dogs are essential both to keep boars at bay and because they can locate and access the places in which wild boars tend to hide. These are typically near small streams or mud wallows covered by grasslands and occasionally thorny vegetation, out of reach for humans. The dogs can access these secluded locations to track and chase wild boars out of their shelters. The hunting endeavor can be described as a multispecies and ecological entanglement between wild creatures, ecosystems, dogs, humans, and technologies (Keil, 2021).

The hunt usually concludes in the proximity of a boar shelter, after the prey has been encircled by dogs and the hunters make their way to the scene. Despite being gripped by the dogs, the prey is rarely totally neutralized, meaning that if the boars managed to free themselves, the hunters could be attacked and injured by the animals' large tusks. Dogs are also injured and even killed in these fights with wild boars. Hunters value the dogs for their courage and bravery in these moments of tension and adrenaline. This relationship between risk and danger also involves the hunter and his dogs, who at the time of hunting are considered hunting companions.

Sometimes boars manage to escape the dogs, resulting in a chase. Wild boars can run at high speeds and are often difficult to catch for humans on horseback since they can traverse all kinds of terrain. The need for faster dogs has led Uruguayan wild boar hunters to crossbreed Dogo Argentinos with

faster greyhounds to match the speed of the boars. In the case of hunters who use packs of small dogs, one advantage is their speed and ability to access the “dirt” where wild boars hide (difficult-to-access places with, for example, many branches, mud, weeds, and thorns). Wild boar mobility is thus intertwined with the physical and perceptive capacities of dogs and the ability of hunters to predict past and future movements dependent on the boars’ tracks and traces. A large part of hunting wild boars consists precisely of understanding and limiting the mobility of the prey, and thus outsmarting them.

At the same time, the chase is part and parcel of the hunt, and adds to the excitement. According to Manuel, a hunter interviewed at a Wild Boar Festival in 2017: “Hunting with dogs generates a lot of adrenaline because the dogs are your allies, your companions. If we had not stabbed that pig, it would have killed a dog. I mean, we must help the dogs.”

Although boars roam and breed freely in the wild, and the hunt takes place in open spaces and not in captivity, not all wild boars have the same value for hunters. It is boars with the most beastly characteristics – big studs with large tusks – who evoke the most excitement. But an understanding of the species adds another dimension to what is considered desirable prey. In Uruguay, boars can be pure or crossbreeds between wild boars and domestic pigs. The hunters wanted to hunt pure wild boars. A pure wild boar can be identified from their dark brown skin, thick mane, and relatively short legs, and are said to be fiercer and faster than crossbreeds. Their wild and animalistic nature, rather than size, underpin this preference. Crossbreeds are usually larger than wild boars, valued for their intimidating size. Hunting crossbreeds has different connotations for Uruguayan hunters. It is “not the same” as hunting pure wild boars. After sending hunter Carlos a photo on WhatsApp of a hunted wild boar weighing 226 kilos, he illustrated this point:

Author: Look! What a beast!

Carlos: Wow, what a nice beast! Those are really nice to hunt.

Author: Yes, impressive!

Carlos: Still, you can tell it is a crossbreed.

The same reasoning applies to domestic pigs who escape confinement. These animals’ history of domestication and tameness disrupts the hunting narratives.

Whether pure or crossbreed, however, hunting trophies are not the prime motivation of wild boar hunting. Alone or attached to a trophy head, boars’ tusks are considered to be the most striking feature of a trophy, and their size matters. When hunters photograph their prey, they often use a stick to keep the boar’s mouth open to highlight the size of the tusks. In this regard, even after

death, tusks semiotically allude to wild boars' beastliness. Boars use their tusks to attack and defend themselves. As such, trophy tusks make tangible the risk and danger that hunters face; it is the final taming of the beast.

This tusk-centric representation of boar beastliness is not an isolated sign; rather, it is part of experiences and narratives developed among hunters, wild boars, and dogs. When hunters narrate incidents involving wild boars, they generally refer to tusk injuries inflicted on humans or dogs. Boar trophies are especially valued if a hunter or dog was injured or killed. Baron, a veteran wild boar hunter, referenced tusks frequently:

Wild boars have killed 23 of my dogs in all my life as a hunter. ... When a boar is fighting with the dogs, attacking with its tusks in every direction, you can't kill it with a knife and you have to use a firearm. ... If it hits you badly with those tusks it'll gut you. ... It hit me right here with its snout but didn't reach me with its tusks. He ran over me but didn't hit me with its tusks. ... I could have dozens and dozens of heads and tusks on my walls, but I've given many away. These ones here and those there are special. ... This one right here is the one who hurt this dog.

Alejandro, another wild boar hunter, said, "I don't keep many trophies, just the heads of the boars that killed any of my dogs. ... I also keep the head of the first one I killed with my .25-06 rifle."

For hunters, wild boars represent the embodiment of untamed wilderness. However, they are not simply another component of the natural world. Neither are they just another element of the wild world. They are exceptional, dangerous, and historically co-produced inhabitants with an opposite existence to their domesticated counterparts who occupy ecologies of human production and control. Thus, hunting boars symbolizes the human ability to venture into the wild and assert dominance over the beast, aligning with the principles of equality, sportsmanship, and fair chase. It signifies the human capacity to penetrate the wild, face the challenges it presents, and demonstrate control over the untamed forces of nature. By pursuing wild boars, hunters assert their position as agents within the natural world, engaging in a primal struggle that encompasses both the physical act of hunting and the symbolic conquest of the beast.

Conclusion

The expansion of the wood industry and agricultural plantations is linked to the uncontrolled wild boar population in Uruguay. Human infrastructure projects

that change a country's economic and environmental models are examples of feral existences. Wild boars highlight the feral effects of these huge human projects. *A priori*, these effects are neither good nor bad. They usually surface when they come into contact with human spheres: Monocultures depend on the action of wildlife for their existence, yet those same crops can cause significant social inequality, biological invasions, or very high levels of pollution, among other issues (Tsing et al., 2021). In this sense, wild boars are good *and* bad, hated *and* loved, representing a threat to the productive sector and environmental institutions but an opportunity for hunters to carry out the practice that defines them.

By considering the figure of beastliness, this article highlights how biosemiotics and biopolitics had significant roles in producing wild boar ferality. The culture of wild boar hunters in Uruguay relates to the domination of the beast. Just as conservation narratives are built upon a symbology that values charisma, pest control narratives feed on risk control. In this context, hunters legitimize themselves as public servants capable of defeating the beastly creatures who threaten wildlife and agriculture alike. These aspects are part of semiotic frameworks in which meanings, surfaces, mobilities, and historical practices are articulated. Therefore, it is important to think of the wild boar's appearance (what their body communicates) as something that has a strong component of ecological indexicality (Kohn, 2013). In other words, it conveys a message that is not only based on the relationship between visual perception (i.e., tusks) and possible real effects (injury), but also on historically interlinked cultural and natural processes. The interpretation of these meanings also depends on frameworks that are being re-signified from a biopolitical standpoint in relation to conservation and biosecurity.

The case of wild boars in Uruguay allows us to think about the connection between meanings, historically shared ecologies, and politics of life. Historical, natural, and cultural processes converge in the perception of wild boars as beasts of the Anthropocene. The narrative of boars as mythological or monstrous beasts (Yamamoto, 2017) has been a constitutive element of the indexicality of certain parts of their body (those that externally differentiate them from their domestic pig counterparts). Likewise, the beastly character of wild boars as beings between humans and monsters, the domesticated world and the wild world, loved and hated at the same time, allows us to reflect on the multiple ethical taxonomies (van Dooren, 2011) that coexist in the Anthropocene. These taxonomies in turn help us appreciate some of the feral or beastly effects of members of a species that seems to thrive in the Anthropocene.

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