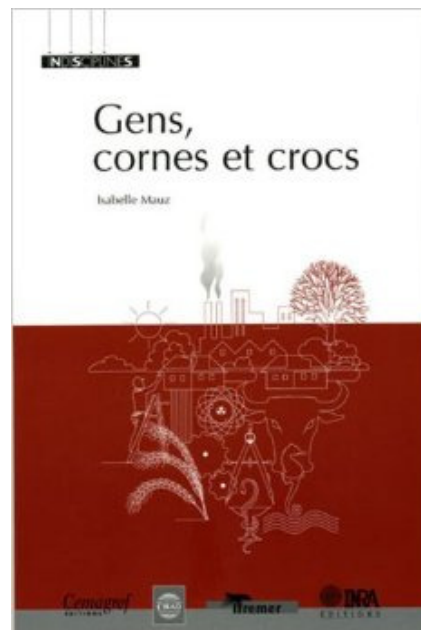


Céline Granjou

Horns, Fangs, and People

Isabelle Mauz, *Gens, Cornes et Crocs*. Paris: Cemagref, Cirad, Ifremer, Inra, 2005. 255p. € 25.40 pb; € 16.99 pdf; € 16.99 e-pub.



Isabelle Mauz is a French sociologist with a background in agronomy and forestry; she works at the Research Institute for Environment and Agriculture (IRSTEA) in Grenoble, and has published a number of scientific articles in environmental and animal studies, especially on protected areas' history. The book she published in 2005 presents her sociological research on the relationships between mountain people, chamois, and ibex in the Vanoise French National Park at the time of the return of wolves to the French Alps in the 1990s. Mauz carried out more than one hundred interviews with hunters, farmers, tourism professionals, local inhabitants, park managers, scientists, and environmental activists, backed up with participant observation of activities involving people and animals, including hunting, farming, and nature conservation. She is herself an Alpine inhabitant.

Scrutinizing concrete and situated entanglements of humans and animals, Mauz documents the ubiquitous presence of animals in people's lives and shows convincingly

the role they play in shaping biographies, knowledge, and history. Written a couple of years after Latour's innovative insights into the proliferation of bio-social "hybrid" entanglements¹ and two years before Haraway's influential book on multispecies entanglements,² her book can be considered a forerunner of multispecies ethnography. While it is not available in English translation, her work is of interest not only to scholars in animal studies but also to wildlife managers, hunters, and farmers, as well as to everyone interested in the history of mountain societies. The style of writing is especially lively, easy, and accurate at the same time, making the book truly enjoyable.

Introduction. Wolves were exterminated in France and completely disappeared from 1930-1940 onwards. When some wolves were observed in the Southern Alps in Mercantour National Park in 1992 for the first time after this long period of absence, they were applauded by environmentalists and denounced by farmers' representatives. Since then wolves have progressively re-colonized the French Alps, causing some damage to sheep herds and triggering political measures in an attempt to reconcile the predators' presence with the mountain farmers' activities. Mauz began her inquiry in the Northern Alps in the Vanoise National Park at a time when there were no wolves in the area. She was then able to document how the return of the wolves disturbed and re-shaped the previous entanglements of mountain people and mountain animals (ibex and chamois), as well as her own research work.

Part I. Human worlds and wild animals. Drawing on the results of the inquiry, Mauz distinguishes between two groups of people that are also two social worlds. The first group is composed of farmers, hunters, and the former Vanoise park managers. These people spoke in terms of nature and distinguished between wild nature and domesticated nature. Drawing on personal memory and older relatives' stories, they explained that wildlife was becoming less and less wild, while domestic animals were becoming wilder and wilder. They recalled, for instance, that people, sheep, and cattle no longer stayed in the same house as they once used to; they remarked that today, when cattle and sheep have been grazing for many weeks in mountain pastures during summer, approaching them has become very challenging. They also noted that ibex and chamois do not hesitate to come and stand close to people and to the people's houses. This group of people expressed the view that there is currently more and more wildlife, but that wild and domestic animals are in fact less and less different. The second group includes scientists, environmental activists, and the more recently arrived park managers. They spoke in terms of the environment and distinguished between the natural environment and the artificial one. Drawing on personal memory, scientific literature, and the media, they argued that nature has been constantly deteriorating

since a remote golden age, when there were only a few hunter-gatherer people and plenty of wildlife. Only very recently has there been improvement linked to wildlife protection measures, so that fauna and flora have slightly rebounded.

Mauz found that chamois and ibex were markers with which people apprehend history and the world they live in. People explained that the first time they saw for instance a chamois standing near their pastures was for them the beginning of a new era, in which wildlife was no longer really wild. For both groups of people animals mark a dynamic of decline, but for different reasons: decline due to nature (livestock) becoming wilder and wilder according to the first group, and to a dynamic of degradation of the environment according to the second.

Strikingly, the interviewees spoke at the same time of their own life events and of changes in ibex and chamois population and behaviors. Animals play an important role for people in building their biographies. Men discussed for instance how participating in chamois hunts marked different steps and shifts in their lives, from their childhood when they listened to their fathers' stories of the hunt, to the first time they went hunting and then became very good at hunting, up to the end of their lives when they only watched chamois from the village. In the same way, the farmers' life stories were entangled with changes in dealing with cattle: most farmers claimed that today they no longer take enough care of their animals, suggesting a tendency to idealize the past.

Mauz found that talking about chamois and ibex also allowed people to claim a mountain identity, to make judgments, and to produce social ordering. For instance, hunters told her that hunting was an opportunity to assess and criticize other hunters' skills (i.e. their ability to walk quickly and easily in the mountains, their ability to put themselves in the place of the chamois, and think like them) and to value their own skills. Furthermore, hunting chamois is an important way for men to affirm their differences from women, who are not supposed to participate in hunting. Hunting also allows hunters to affirm themselves as field experts of animals, in comparison with academic experts on animals. Mauz provides another example about ibex: while the former park managers were first and foremost committed to protecting ibex, for the new managers ibex is but one of the many species to be protected, and they criticize their older colleagues for having devoted too much effort to ibex to the detriment of other species.

Mauz argues that animals not only express the distinctions between mountain people and the people they consider as strangers (including people from the nearest village), former and new park managers, men and women, field and academic experts: animals also play an active role in producing these distinctions and in making them obvious and long-lasting. For instance, seeing and getting close to a chamois is more challenging than seeing and getting close to an ibex: that is why chamois hunting, more than ibex hunting plays an important role in defining mountain people's identity.

Part II. The wolves' arrival. The second part of the book addresses the return of wolves in the Vanoise National Park from 1997 onwards. The return of wolves affected the two former groups and tended to blur boundaries. While the first group considered wolves as a most violent and savage animal, the second one considered them as an emblem for biodiversity and environmental protection. Consequently, when the return of wolves was disclosed, it triggered a strong clash between people who supported their return and considered it to be a success for biodiversity protection, and people who saw it as a major issue for farmers and sheep or even as a conspiracy set up by ecologists. There were wolves' promoters and wolves' despisers, and extreme and moderate opinions among each of the two former social worlds.

Wolves put the distinction between the natural and the artificial environment into question: for instance, should one consider the wolves that were suddenly back in the Alps after a long absence as being more "natural" than the farmers' sheep? And they also put the distinction between wild and domesticated nature into question. As wolves had attacked and killed sheep, doubts were raised over the farmers' practices: were they taking enough care of their sheep? In order to manage wolves and sheep together, people and animals were led to tinker, to innovate, and to learn new ideas and practices. For instance, farmers had to learn to use guard dogs, while guard dogs had to learn to live with sheep, and sheep to live with guard dogs.

Conclusion. As a conclusion, Mauz stresses that the return of wolves created disorder and put an end to the fragile balance between the two former groups; but it also triggered new exchanges and dialogue between people, as well as a dynamic of coproduction of new management practices. She argues that the coexistence of groups and visions is definitely better than the domination of one of them, as coexistence means social diversity and political pluralism. The notions of diversity and pluralism are indeed at the heart of Mauz's research work: documenting peoples' opinions and stories in a very accurate way, she makes clear that there is no point trying to

distinguish between belief and knowledge, because the boundary is in fact thin and porous. She thinks it more important to document the plurality of opinions and to enable the reader to understand their various rationales.

Strikingly, Mauz also endeavors to pay attention to animals' characteristics in a similar way as to people's characteristics. She provides the reader with descriptions of the animals' biology and behaviors, stressing for instance how, unlike wild bears and lynxes, wolves tend to come very close to the people's houses, they have a specific way of killing their prey, in a specific manner. Yet Mauz explicitly claims not to do biology, but rather to pay attention to people and their words. Her book is about a number of lively stories in which hunters watch chamois, approach them, kill them, prepare and eat the meat, as well as about more unexpected stories like the story of a hunter who was used to making tattoos of his preys on his skin, the story of inhabitants who built an ibex sculpture in the center of the village, or the story of a couple who disagreed on the taste of chamois meat. Isabelle Mauz above all demonstrates how much people can tell about animals if you ask them and are ready to listen to them.

Notes

1. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature. How to bring the sciences into democracy*. Trans. by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999; Bruno Latour, *We have never been modern*. [1991]. Trans. by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, Harvard, 1993.
2. Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet (Posthumanities)*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2007.