INTRODUCTION

One evening in late October 1999, the people of Sørskogbygda, a small community in southeastern Norway, came out in force for a meeting at the community hall. The topic for debate was large carnivores, particularly wolves. At least two hundred people had crammed into the hall. On the stage sat a panel of three: Grete Fossum (member of Parliament for Labor and a local resident), Torstein Bilet from Our Carnivores (Foreningen Våre Rovdyr, an influential conservation NGO), and Olav Høiås, representing the regional environmental authorities. Torstein Bilet really was in the proverbial lion's den. Fossum's sympathies lay with those of most of the audience but not, it must be said, with those of her party. She was an adamant opponent of having large carnivores in the region. Høiås explained his role as that of a government official. He was impartial and did only what others decided he should do. He was an instrument of the state. The hall boiled like a cauldron.

Fossum proved a virtuoso populist. She got the audience on her side and won the debate. Many disagreed with Bilet, but that was expected. He and his organization want large, viable carnivore populations in Norway. When he said he might not oppose hunting if the populations were sufficiently robust, many were pleasantly surprised. Although the majority disagreed with Bilet, what he said was not especially provocative, because they knew where he stood. Most of the public's ire was reserved for the civil servant, Høiås. There were probably many reasons for this. First, no one believed in his assurances of impartiality. A government official with no powers? Inconceivable. Nor was the public ready to accept at face value what he called scientific evidence. For many in the audience, scientific results are merely opinions—more precisely, pro-wolf propaganda. Political statements served up as objective, neutral, and indisputable facts will obviously provoke people who disagree with them. The civil servant from the regional government agency was immediately branded as a friend of the wolf. His excuse for his self-proclaimed powerlessness—he was bound by government and parliamentary edicts along with international treaties—was blown out of the water by Fossum. Being a member of parliament gave her some credibility. The only thing to do, she told the public, was to carry on fighting—the battle against the wolf can be won. There are no

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> two ways about it. Høiås represented the real enemy—the NGO Our Carnivores does not control policy on wildlife management: that is the authorities' job.
>
> The positions that emerged during the debate were strongly anti-wolf, strongly pro-wolf, and a sort of middle-of-the-road, "responsible" position. And the enraged public primarily targeted the latter position, that of the authorities. We have seen distrust of authorities and of the science used by the government to support policy many times since that memorable evening in Sørskogbygda.
>
> (Field notes from a public meeting in Sørskogbygda, October 1999)

This particular meeting happened at an early stage of our work on wolf conflicts as a subject for sociological study, and it taught us a few important lessons. First, the mere mention of carnivores can provoke a powerful response, as the highly vocal opinions expressed at the meeting showed. Large carnivores, wolves in particular, divide opinions and create conflicts. Second, as we saw, scientific evidence does not always come across with the authority the scientists themselves and the authorities would like it to have. The audience railed against the scientific evidence, dismissing any attempt to present it as neutral, objective, and independent. Science was seen as disguised political opinions, and scientists were actively taking sides—at least, that was how most of the audience that evening saw it. The third important lesson was that the government, the parliamentary majority, and nature management bodies are the real enemies of the anti-wolf camp. The government, joined by the carnivore biologists, was to blame for the return of the wolf to Norway. This gave us an early glimpse of an essential aspect of the dispute: hierarchical social structures and power. Anti-wolf campaigners in the hall resented and resisted the government's wolf policy that, in their view, powerful players in the higher echelons of Norwegian society, far away from Sørskogbygda, were imposing on them.

The community meeting is a good example of what we have seen throughout our work on wolf disputes. The struggle is about much more than a disagreement on the carnivore management regime and the practical consequences of having wolves in the vicinity. The public directed its anger at the government representative. Since that noisy meeting, we have talked with a lot of people who were clearly more annoyed with the government and the biologists than with the wolves. And here we already approach the book's thematic center of gravity. The wolf may well make a nuisance of itself and cause problems for farmers and hunters, but it has also had the misfortune of landing in the middle of historical social cleavages that run deep in Norwegian society. The battle over what counts as reliable evidence—that produced by the scientists and used by the government or lay, practical knowledge accumulated over generations—transcends policy areas. It is not restricted to the issue of carnivores or even to the question of wildlife conservation or land management. Essentially, it is about power relations and how people perceive the world from different positions in the social order.

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Opponents of the wolf dominated the meeting in Sørskogbygda. For several reasons, the same could be said, to a degree, of this book. Opponents are highly visible in many of the areas inhabited by carnivores, and they frequently leave their mark on the local landscape of opinions. The economic and practical features of these conflicts, such as those involving killed sheep, are easy to see and understand. For our part, though, we concentrate on other sides of the dispute that come to the fore in places where the loss of livestock is not the core issue but where there is a lot of noise all the same. This is precisely the situation in the areas where we find wolves in Norway today. We shall attempt to explain why groups with strong roots in traditional land use, and often in a working-class culture, make up the nucleus of the wolf resistance. As a rule, they are not landowners or farmers, but we think they deserve an attention they seldom get, neither in the debate on large carnivores nor in other areas of political exchange. We would go so far as to say these groups in particular can help us understand how wolf conflicts—and important features of conflicts over large carnivores in general—are woven into relations of class and power, as well as processes of change in Norwegian society. We also aim to describe these processes of change, and their effect on the controversies over wolves, in such a way that they are easily recognizable in other parts of the world, especially in the Global North and on both sides of the Atlantic.

However, we have also observed that a lot of people see the wolf in a very different light. We have spoken with many who accept or even welcome the return of the large carnivore. Some farmers and hunters have a pragmatic view of wolves. Most important, though, is the growth in population segments with no strong ties to traditional land use practices, also in rural areas. These changes have an impact on people's relationship to the natural environment and their opinions on how it should be managed. It is in these groups we most commonly find a positive attitude toward the wolf. But, intriguingly, we also encounter a type of hostility toward wildlife management agencies that in many ways resembles what we have seen among wolf opponents, an observation that arouses our sociological curiosity. It goes without saying that some people are against wolves for obvious and, sociologically speaking, trivial reasons. The wolf is the cause of tangible problems for them. But this too can merge with other conflict dimensions in different ways. Our task in this book is to address all the different strands and present a more coherent picture.

The following point is vital, however: the book deals mainly with what happens in places where the wolf roams—how people there think and act, how the wolf for them finds a place in established ways of understanding reality, and how this is integrated in wider social contexts. The book is not a comprehensive assessment of Norwegian carnivore policy and management and says little about the institutional levels and large carnivores as a matter for government policy. We do not discuss the international treaties, such as the Bern Convention, un-

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der which Norway commits itself to conserving all species native to Norway, including the wolf. The book does not aim to describe—much less analyze—all aspects of conflicts related to large carnivores in Norway. For example, livestock loss is a pivotal issue in conflicts involving other carnivore species (brown bears, lynx, and wolverines) in parts of the country where rough grazing of sheep or reindeer husbandry is more important than in the wolf areas. Scientists—wildlife biologists—do not get to play a leading role, nor do conservation organizations. They are certainly included but primarily as part of the background against which the conflicts play out in wolf territory. Scientists and managers do get their say in some interviews, but most of the time they remain part of the context. Later in this introduction, we provide a brief description of large carnivore management in Norway, and we present some results from biological studies of the wolf in Scandinavia. We also explain why Norway currently maintains low population goals for all protected carnivores and why this does not significantly affect our analysis of the wolf conflicts. All of this is meant to fill in the background for the story we really want to tell, about the people who live in the wolf areas of southeastern Norway and how they look upon a rapidly changing world—changes symbolized for many of them by the wolf, for better or worse.

ON THE RETURN OF THE WOLF

The wolf returned to Norwegian forests in the 1980s. Although the last known individual from the original population was killed as late as the 1960s, Norway did not have a wolf population in any meaningful sense in the latter half of the twentieth century. When the wolf came back, it received a mixed welcome, to put it mildly. Almost immediately, sharp lines of conflict were drawn.

Large carnivores had divided Norwegians' opinions before the return of the wolf. Bears, wolverines, and lynx had been causing problems for sheep farmers and reindeer owners for decades. The controversy over large carnivores is a long-lasting cleavage. But while the conflicts have been with us for years, they escalated to new heights with the return of the wolf—not only in areas with wolves or other large carnivores but also in political circles at the national level and in the national media—for several reasons. One, of course, is what the wolf means to people. For some it means real problems, but for others it stands as a powerful symbol of wild, pristine nature. The carnivore question obviously informs the urban-rural relationship and is therefore drawn into major issues such as centralization, depopulation, and a general shift in the balance of power between rural and urban areas. These are burning issues throughout the world but not least in Norway, where rural policy has been very active in the postwar years.

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Based on the public debate on carnivore management, one would think that almost all rural people are against the government's current policy on large carnivores: rural people appear to want smaller populations, or at least no increase. They are presented as the ones with firsthand experience of killed livestock, decreasing game populations, and the sense of personal fear. But what carnivore policy really affects, it is often said, is the sheer quality of rural life. At the same time, the idea of protecting carnivores is said to be typical of people in urban areas, whose idea of nature is often romantic: they want it to look like the wilderness on television and to be where they can enjoy outdoor recreation. From a certain rural perspective, these values appear to be on the offensive, as can be seen from the growing number of protected areas and in the management of carnivores, based on the central principle of protection of all species.

But many who identify with a modern and possibly urban culture see all this from the opposite perspective. Out in the country is where primitive peasants and hunters live: people too insensitive to appreciate biological diversity and wild nature, who only think of making a buck and getting as much as possible from the natural resources. As usual, the media fan the flames of conflict and provide ample space to both perspectives on the carnivore conflict as a purely urban-rural conflict. We would not be revealing any secrets if we called this presentation both an oversimplification and misleading. In this book, we shall explain why.

Norway's rural policy has been based on an understanding of agriculture as essential to the survival of rural communities, and this has been emphasized more here than in most other countries. Agricultural interests and organizations in Norway are powerful and exert a considerable influence on national policy and the wider political agenda. Given that livestock production in many areas is based at least partly on rough grazing, the industry can hardly be expected to extend a welcome to large carnivores. Sheep and cattle are vulnerable to attacks when they graze without supervision, and the same goes, of course, for the semidomesticated reindeer. The Sámi reindeer industry is naturally preoccupied with carnivore-related questions, which has helped turn the carnivore issue into a sizzling political topic that also touches on aboriginal rights. As we discuss in chapter 3, these powerful forces have also managed to define the carnivore problem as the property of the grazing industries and have succeeded in equating farming interests and wider rural interests (and the reindeer industry with Sámi interests). The equation is misleading, and it is one of the main themes of this book.

Many people outside agriculture worry that large carnivores kill game and that wolves also attack and kill hunting dogs, issues that are seen as threats to hunting, particularly in areas with wolves. Many people are anxious about being outdoors or even afraid that they risk meeting a wolf or bear, which can fuel negative perceptions of carnivores. But after our years of research, we are

convinced these sentiments only explain parts of the opposition to the current carnivore management regime.

In this book we shall concentrate on the wolf, for several reasons. First, the wolf is an even more controversial species than the other three large carnivores in Norway (bears, wolverines, and lynx). Therefore, conflicts centered on the wolf are particularly good at shedding light on certain important patterns. In areas with a more or less permanent wolf presence today, there are not many sheep, and there is no reindeer husbandry at all. In fact, wolves in Norway have not killed many sheep (or other livestock, including reindeer). Nonetheless, conflicts are at least as intense as in places where farmers have actually lost large numbers of livestock to lynx, wolverines, and bears. Farmers make up a tiny part of the population in Norway today. Even in rural areas, most people work in nonagricultural jobs. The center of gravity of anti-wolf sentiment is found in groups outside the agricultural sector but who nonetheless identify with traditional land use and resource extraction. Furthermore, the primary enemies are no longer the predators themselves but rather people who favor larger carnivore populations in Norway. Carnivore conflicts have one important thing in common with other conflicts: they are conflicts between people.

Having wolves in Norwegian forests is simultaneously new and old. Humans and wolves have been in conflict from time immemorial, while conflicts between people over the wolf are relatively new. According to much recent evidence, the cleavage is becoming a permanent feature of what we might call the "rural state of affairs" in Norway. The reason can be found in social cleavages that penetrate far deeper than any dispute concerning carnivores. Since 1999, we have been interviewing individuals and groups about their attitudes toward large carnivores and their experience with them. We have interviewed several hundred people in the counties of Hedmark, Akershus, and Østfold—not only about carnivores but also about work and everyday life, future prospects, and the social structure of local communities. Everywhere we have been, we have heard more or less the same stories, and the conflict patterns have been the same. We are thus convinced that these controversies are not merely local and so we have a more universal story to tell. Studies of wolf conflicts offer a platform for saying something of wider significance about processes of change in rural Norwegian communities and modern societies in general.

As we have mentioned before but must stress again, wolves have real consequences for people. Only a tiny fraction of all lost sheep can be blamed on wolves, but they can ravage some herds if given the chance. Farmers receive economic compensation for lost animals, but they are also concerned because the animals suffer and attacks create practical problems in running the farm. The animals need more attention, breeding plans are disrupted, and so on. The media have published many images of mutilated sheep, with their legs and udders

ripped out, some of them still alive. Owners say they suffer with their animals, and there is no reason to doubt them.

Hunting with dogs is a strong tradition in Norway. Dogs are trained to hunt birds, moose, and hare. In Scandinavia, the use of untethered, free-ranging, but highly trained dogs is also the norm for big game like moose. Now, hunters are increasingly wary about hunting with dogs in areas with wolves because the dogs are put in danger. Since wolves returned to Norway and Sweden a few decades ago, they have attacked several hundred hunting dogs and killed many of them. Such assaults are disastrous for the hunters, both because they love their dogs and because working together with the dogs is more important for many of them than the outcome of bagging the game. The time it takes to train a good hunting dog, as well as the fact that many dogs represent valuable breeding stock, does not make it easier.

People frequently tell us they are afraid of wolves and that this fear affects the quality of life in wolf areas. They may not let their children go to school alone, and old people are said to be afraid to go out and pick berries. These are tangible consequences. As long as sheep graze the land, game is to be had in the forests, and hunting dogs are on the loose, the consequence of having wolves in Norway will be the loss of livestock, reduced hunting success, and killed dogs. All of this represents a crucial and substantive—though not the only and possibly not the most important—reason why the conflicts remain as stable as they do. The number of wolf opponents and the temperature of the conflicts cannot be explained by the wolves' material impact alone. We therefore need to take a closer look at how people understand the arrival and presence of wolves in particular ways, and we do so against a backdrop of processes of societal change strongly felt in rural areas.

Before moving on, we need to stress again one of the main findings of our studies: local opinions are extremely diverse. In this book, we pay the most attention to opponents of the current management regime, who are extremely visible in many communities near carnivore habitats and likely to put their distinct stamp on the local "landscape of opinions." As mentioned initially, we have also interviewed people who are pleased the wolf is back. Importantly, however, they do not usually belong to the same social groups as the people who want the wolf removed, although there are exceptions. Quantitative studies (surveys) complement the picture. Arild Blekesaune and Katrina Rønningen (2010) found that Norwegians who live on a farm are more likely to dislike carnivores than others are. Also, independent of where one lives as an adult, a rural childhood tends to correlate with a skeptical attitude toward carnivores. But factors such as income, education, and access to cultural resources (often termed "cultural capital") also correlate with views on carnivores—the higher the score on such measures, the more likely it is that a person will accept carnivores, regardless of where that

person lives (Blekesaune and Rønningen 2010; Skogen and Thrane 2008). The same pattern was found in Sweden (Krange et al. 2017). Tangible problems created by carnivores are important, but other factors have a powerful effect on opinion formation. By and large, surveys tell us that a considerable proportion of those living in wolf areas have positive opinions of the wolf and other large carnivores (see Tangeland et al. 2010).

In our qualitative studies, opinions vary within all social groups, but the studies have primarily revealed a tendency for people without cultural roots in traditional land use and the resource economy to express a positive attitude toward carnivores. Like their more skeptical neighbors, they are often deeply attached to nature where they live, but they have nothing against seeing it as a wilderness where humans play second fiddle and large carnivores naturally belong. Some of these people are hunters, but their outdoor activities often have nothing to do with harvesting. Like many of those with a traditional view on land use, they have often chosen to settle—or stay—in rural areas because of the natural environment. We have also seen an effect of social status, education, and cultural orientation: A "middle-class culture" appears to predispose positive attitudes toward carnivores, in rural as well as in urban areas.

Also important is to emphasize that many people, including in rural areas, have no interest in the carnivore issue at all. We have never had an opportunity to assess the degree of engagement statistically, but we would not be surprised to discover a silent and indifferent majority in many communities. Our clear impression, though, is that people who make little use of their natural surroundings are less likely to care about the carnivore question. And quite a few are in that category, also in rural Norway. In the following chapters, we will try to cast light on several aspects of the wolf conflicts as they play out in wolf country. One of the main themes in this book is that wolves have become entangled in conflicts deeply rooted in Norwegian society, indeedin all modern societies. We contend that the conflicts are about much more than the wolves and the actual problems they create. Livestock interests are there, but we claim they play a modest role. Our position stands in contrast, then, to what has become the prevailing discourse in politics, government administration, and the wider public debate.

WOLVES AND SOCIETY IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE ENEMY GAINS FRIENDS

The original Scandinavian wolf population was completely lost by the early 1970s, when the very last individuals had disappeared. In other words, it is entirely possible for humans to exterminate the wolf. Now that it has staged a comeback, the wolf lives here at the mercy of humans. What people decide to

do is critical to the development of a carnivore population, and those who want wolves in Norway currently have the upper hand. This has not always been so. The fact that people perceive carnivores as a threat is nothing new. The pro-wolf mindset, however, that has been gaining ground is new. In this contradiction we find the potential for conflict today. It is therefore reasonable to say the aspects of the conflict that occur *between* people—the most important ones in our view—are also new and set modern conflicts *over* wolves apart from traditional conflicts *with* wolves.

An article published by Statistics Norway (SSB 2004) illustrates the point. The article, "From Bounties to Conservation and Irregular Killing" (Fra skuddpremier til fredning og irregulær avgang), shows that carnivores and carnivore management have been subjects of political dispute for a very long time. Norway adopted a hunting law in 1845, the Act Relating to the Extermination of Carnivores and Preservation of Other Game (Lov om Udryddelse af Rovdyr og Fredning af andet Vildt), to facilitate the hunting and eradication of carnivores without any value, that is, species whose behavior made them a threat to domestic animals and useful game. The idea was also that hunting wolves and bears would have other benefits. More than other forms, the hunting of carnivores required "bravery," "skill," and "perseverance" and therefore offered the best form of soldier training in peacetime. Certain types of carnivore, whose diet consisted mainly of snakes and rodents, were considered beneficial. The authorities did not introduce incentives to hunt badgers, for example. The same applied to numerous species of birds of prey. The fox, which could be a problem in the henhouse, had valuable fur, in addition to being a rodent predator. To introduce more incentives for the public to hunt foxes was unnecessary while bounties were used to encourage people to hunt and trap large carnivores. On the list of animals deserving to die—eagles, bears, lynx, and wolves—the wolf came first.

It must have been a successful campaign. According to Statistics Norway (SSB 2004), the wolf was almost certainly on the verge of extinction in southern Norway at the start of the twentieth century. As early as 1860, the amount paid out in bounties had fallen dramatically. In the same period, rural doctors were reporting a sudden fall in the number of children employed as shepherds. Larger livestock herds increased the area used for grazing in this period as well, probably because carnivores now represented a lesser threat.

More than 160 years have passed since the game preservation act, and as far as we know, the law, the bounties, and the goal to exterminate wolves and bears did not create even the smallest controversy. On the contrary, city people and rural folk all appear to have applauded the fight against carnivores. The men behind the law lived in Christiania (today's Oslo) and belonged to the absolute elite of Norwegian society. The bill was tabled by the liberal MP and university history don Ludvig Kristensen Daa and penned by Head of the University Mu-

seum Halvor Heyerdahl Rasch. Rural people did their bit by hunting and trapping. There is, however, evidence of a cleavage between center and periphery on another level, as the authorities became aware of widespread bounty fraud. Regarding the law's primary objectives, there was probably no dissent. We could say the law expressed a goal that center and periphery shared, which found support in all social strata. In those days, the carnivore conflict really was between humans and animals.

Unlike in the mid-1800s, this is only one aspect of the wider conflict today. Norway is not a country of farmers anymore. Farmers make up only a small minority of the population. They are also in a minority within the anti-carnivore camp. Opposition to carnivores is concentrated in groups at the margins of the primary industries but which nonetheless feel a strong sense of identification with the traditional use of the land and its resources. And the main enemy is no longer the carnivores themselves.

OUR SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

This book addresses the controversies sparked by the wolf's return to the forests of southeastern Norway. Since conflict and sharp divisions of opinion often mark the situation, the subject here will be these conflicts and why they play out as they do. We have stated the obvious fact that wolf conflicts are conflicts between people. But as we have also seen, such was not always the case. Given this point of departure, we see two things. First, opinions about the wolf vary among individuals and groups. Second, opinions about the wolf have changed throughout history. From this emerges a delimited object of study—opinions about the wolf—created, or we may say constructed, by people. Our research concerns, then, the social construction of the wolf, and we consequently adopt the perspective of social constructivism.

To many people, a social constructivist approach may seem alien and controversial. Saying that nature is a social construction would strain the credulity of even the most benign biologist. An explanation is called for. The simple point is that all ideas about nature, including scientific ideas, derive from human thought processes, which never take place in a vacuum but rather in a particular social context. Collective ideas about reality can be of immense significance out there in the physical world. American sociologists William Thomas and Dorothy Thomas put it like this: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (see Merton 1995). An example is often drawn from the 1929 economic crisis. Certain banks were rumored to be hovering on the brink of bankruptcy. People rushed to withdraw their savings, which in turn led to

the actual collapse of some banks. Something similar happened in the United Kingdom during the 2009 financial downturn when the savings bank Northern Rock tumbled and fell. A third example is the impact of hoarding. If rumors say the stores are likely to run out of certain goods (because of a strike, for instance), they do run out. There may not be any immediate danger of shortages because of the strike itself, but goods become scarce because people act on what they believe. And the shortage of goods confirms, in many people's eyes, the truth of the rumor. Both the collapse of banks and the shortages in stores are examples of self-fulfilling prophecies, a special instance of a wider phenomenon: that people's interpretation of a situation leads to actions with extremely tangible repercussions. Therefore, to understand how particular interpretations of reality emerge is not only interesting but also important. Clearly, neither people's actions nor their thoughts lead carnivores to cause damage, but people's ideas about the wolf and its place in Norwegian nature guide their choices of action, the consequences of which may be large for wildlife management and for the wolf itself.

We can turn to another classic sociological contribution to explain what we mean, namely *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967). Its perspective is wide, and a good deal of sociological literature begins by explaining the book's main points. Yet, the way of thinking advocated in the book represents a clear demarcation against the notion that reality can be observed and described "objectively." Since we are writing about a subject dominated by natural science, it might be useful to take a brief look at the book's main ideas. Readers well versed in sociological theory may find it odd to blow dust off this rather ancient contribution, but we find it useful for two reasons: it is considerably more pedagogic than most later contributions on the subject and—importantly—it draws a clear line between constructivism and idealism.

What we first need to explain concerns precisely the status that reality acquires when we adopt a social constructivist approach. This is crucial because it is a topic that tends to provoke reactions from people with a background in the natural sciences, such as biology. So let us say once and for all, constructivism does *not* imply idealism. Berger and Luckmann do not claim that ideas or thoughts "constitute" reality. On the contrary, they affirm the obvious and indisputable existence of a reality independent of the human mind. Nature, species, and ecological processes have real substance and exist completely independent of human consciousness. Employing a social constructivist approach is in no way in conflict with the science of biology, which studies and reveals nature as it exists in reality. But as far as meaning—opinions, understandings, and interpretations—is concerned, that is another matter. Meaning is created through social processes. Our ideas of the world are collective, shared by others—a banal

prerequisite for communication. As there is necessarily a collective dimension to the production of meaning, we can say our understandings of all phenomena are socially constructed. The wolf, for example, has an existence completely independent of anything human, but the meaning the wolf has for us depends on our ideas and thoughts. The wolf is out there anyway, but our ideas of it are socially constructed.

That we must observe science from the same perspective can be discomfiting for us researchers. The scientific production of knowledge obviously has some important distinguishing features linked to the philosophy of science and methodology. But science has a lot in common with all production of meaning. Scientific studies are also conducted in the social world, and the knowledge produced emerges through social processes. The paradigms that at one point enjoy hegemony in science change over time. A simple example is the prevailing scientific view of the shape of the earth. It was once believed that the earth was flat, but today this view is marginalized, to put it mildly. Such changes are clearly influenced by the social, cultural, and economic context in which they occur. Therefore, scientific knowledge about a natural phenomenon, such as the wolf, is only one of several forms knowledge. There are many different opinions of the wolf in Norway today, and this is not simply a matter of being for or against. Knowledge about population numbers, dispersion, and behavior is produced in different ways in different social groups. Scientists' conclusions are challenged by other producers of knowledge, such as hunters and farmers on one hand and wolf enthusiasts on the other. Their type of knowledge can often be very different from scientific knowledge and has many adherents among lay people.

This brings us to another potentially controversial issue. By stressing the social origin of people's opinions, social constructivism leads to a form of relativism. We are asking how meaning originates in a societal context, for example, in different groups and institutions. The perspective per se is not of much use for ascertaining the veracity of different forms of knowledge, but it does not deny that some forms of knowledge do represent reality more truthfully than others. This might seem trivial but must be said, as there are many misconceptions on this point. A social constructivist perspective does not deny that at any given time a number tells us how many wolves are in Norway, that this number is correct, and that, consequently, all other numbers are wrong. The case may well be that scientists' population estimates are more likely to be correct than those of lay people, but that is irrelevant for the study of meaning production. Then we are interested in how different opinions of the size of the wolf population are formed and enjoy support in different social groups. All opinions need to be treated equally seriously. By not taking sides in such disputes, social constructivism may seem to relativize everything but only because its mission is not to uncover facts about wolf numbers, reproductive rates, and behavior. Put differently, a social constructivist perspective cannot be used to determine whether

the earth is flat or round, but it does tell us that both ideas are created by people. This allows us to study the dispute between the two views of the earth's shape. We could try to say something about why one side was proved right without judging which of them *is* right. It is not certain that the side proved right is also actually right. These issues are usually strongly influenced by (shifting) power relations.

We may say that social constructivism according to Berger and Luckmann is a perspective on, not a theory of, mechanisms and causal relationships in society. The perspective points toward a specific type of research object, that is, those that concern meaning, such as knowledge, culture, laws, institutions, and power. Social constructivism, as we present it here, makes no assumptions about phenomena outside of human societies. Studies of the social construction of nature deal with the cultural significance assigned to nature, the institutions created to manage it, how laws are formulated, and how different segments of the public act in this social landscape of meaning and power. But the perspective per se says nothing about who gets power, which opinions and forms of knowledge get to dominate, or what counts as true. To do that we need other theories that say something about the links between people's interpretations of reality and what actually happens out there—for example, how different opinions about carnivores are linked to power structures in society and certain aspects of societal change. This is where our research contribution is located.

CULTURE

We have emphasized how the production of meaning—the social construction of reality—does not unfold in the minds of isolated individuals. Production of meaning is essentially social because language and the concepts we think with are social and because all communication is necessarily social. Frames of understanding, values, concepts, and symbols are shared by larger or smaller groups, they have a certain stability over time (despite always evolving) and a form of internal logic. This brings us to the concept of "culture." Culture, says the British cultural theorist Stuart Hall, is "the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society. [It also means] the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped to shape social meanings" (1996: 439).

Culture, then, is made up of collective social constructions—culture is basically a shared understanding of reality. Culture is not a separate sphere of social life, limited neither to literature and art nor to national costumes and culinary traditions. Culture is simply the dimension of meaning and interpretation in all social life; it is present virtually everywhere, in signs and symbols that all members of a group (maybe even a whole society) can understand. Language is one such system of symbols, as are traffic signs. Opinions of right and wrong, pretty

and ugly, important and trivial—culture impregnates every aspect of our everyday lives. Paul Willis, another British cultural theorist, says, "It is one of the fundamental paradoxes of our social life that when we are at our most natural, our most everyday, we are also at our most cultural; that when we are in roles that look the most obvious and given, we are actually in roles that are constructed, learned, and far from inevitable" (1979: 185).

Culture is always shared, but the size of groups sharing particular cultural traits can vary considerably. Some culture elements may be shared by a whole nation, or even larger entities, while others are limited to smaller groups. When we talk about cultural differences, it is easy to think about differences between large categories, often nations or ethnic groups. Norway's culture is different from India's. However, it is obvious that India with its 1.2 billion people spread over a subcontinent is culturally heterogeneous. But so is Norway, despite its much smaller population and size. Since interpretations that create meaning constitute the essence of culture, culture obviously needs something to interpret and invest with meaning. What would that be unless it was precisely the world as it appears from people's own vantage point? Obviously, if the reality surrounding people looks different, as it will to people in different social positions, it will also result in different cultural patterns and sometimes in cultural conflicts: different modes of understanding or values are pitted against each other. Culture evolves as a consequence of changes in people's material conditions insofar as what people need to understand, explain, and relate to is also evolving. Clearly, culture can also influence people's actions, which in turn affects the material and social conditions of their lives; culture can lead to change but cannot be understood independently of such social conditions. In this book, the intersection of social class and place of residence (urban or rural) is particularly important when we examine the relationship between culture and socioeconomic context (and, of course, the consequences for the conflicts surrounding the wolf). Economic and social processes of change that are sweeping across rural areas, but that originate in globalization and what we might term general economic modernization, constitute a crucial backdrop to the cultural friction we can observe.

THE LARGE AND THE SMALL

Studies of culture and social constructions touch on one of the more central themes within the social sciences, namely the relationship between interpersonal relations on one hand and large societal structures on the other. As an everyday experience, the two levels are usually completely separated. We live our lives in interaction with family, friends, and colleagues. We also randomly interact with strangers, such as people on the street and assistants in shops. But

this type of micro social interaction takes place within a larger, dynamic societal structure. This has to do with how the economy is organized, how work is regulated, national and international politics, institutions such as the educational system, and changes that occur at this highly aggregated level.

Interactions at the micro level, as well as the meaning and knowledge created there, are not independent of changes at the macro level. Thus, an important task for social science to understand individuals' actions and attitudes in the much bigger context, in relation to macro structures and change. The subject of wolves is no exception. Our studies have followed precisely such a program. We wanted to see opinions about the wolf in relation to the narrower as well as the wider contexts of the lives people live out there. When we look at the conflicts about the wolf against the background of modernization, class antagonisms, cultural conflicts, and power, this is precisely when we can hope to grasp a wider and deeper understanding of what is taking place.

The large and often global processes of change constitute the wider context of wolf opposition. Although we have studied local communities, our empirical data are influenced by general structural changes in society. Our contention is therefore that historical changes at highly aggregated levels affect the local and indeed the interpersonal. That is to say, wider global processes change social structures and social relations in rural Norway. The entire Western world has undergone economic modernization as the center of gravity has shifted from primary industries and manufacturing to service provision. In Norway, we have also seen a growth in public service provision and employment up until now. As a consequence, there has been a realignment of the class structure. The working class peaked in the 1960s, and in recent decades we have seen a rapid expansion of a highly educated middle class. Today, this middle class exerts a powerful influence in many areas of society, not least in the field of environmental policy and wildlife management. This field has expanded alongside the increasing proportion of the population with higher education. The new middle class filled the new jobs, and the mindset of its members gained a powerful influence in many areas of politics and government administration. Environmental policy and wildlife management officials—that is, the people whose job it is to deal with the management of wolves—are no exception. The Ministry of Climate and Environment, the Norwegian Environment Agency, and County Governors' environmental departments are bursting at the seams with university-educated employees. The same can be said of the environmental officers in the municipalities and about many others working in government at different levels.

When the wolves returned to the forests of eastern Norway, they came to areas where these changes were strongly felt. We can take Stor-Elvdal, a municipality where we collected much of our data, as an example. Local population

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figures peaked in the late 1950s. Timber, the municipality's most important natural resource, gave work to many people in the forests and at the sawmills. There were also jobs in agriculture. The number of active farms was higher back then, and there were jobs in the local dairy. The national rail service was an important workplace, and the railway station was manned. Stor-Elvdal was a class society of the "classic" type, with a large working class that sold its labor in the resource-based industries. On the other side of the class divide, a few big forest owners dominated. Much of this has changed in the wake of general modernization processes. The property structure is more or less the same, but forestry technology has advanced tremendously, and the industry employs far fewer people. The dairy is gone, and the railway station is no longer manned. The population has nearly halved. The local council administration is the biggest employer by far, being responsible for schools and primary health care. Many public employees have manual jobs or jobs that require limited education, but the council also employs an increasing number of people with college degrees. Many in the latter group are newcomers to Stor-Elvdal. Despite the growth in the public sector (until recently), the council is fighting with its back against the wall. As the population declines, cuts must be made to vital social services such as education and health. Stores and gas stations are already gone. When the wolf turned up, it came to symbolize a development that comprises these unpleasant things, as well as changes in environmental policies that affect traditional land use, seen by many as part and parcel of the same trend. This certainly exacerbated a conflict that otherwise came to encompass tangible things such as the loss of sheep, dogs, and game.

Generally, what we have written above can be read as a model of how we work sociologically. For example, we wanted to understand people's opposition to wolves and quickly discovered it has to do with much more than the loss of livestock and game. In this sense, the study of the carnivore turned into a wider study of Norwegian society, a kind of focal point for a discussion of general social dynamics. That is why this book is about not only wolf conflicts but also important aspects of contemporary society. The two levels cannot be understood independently of each other.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

First, it is necessary to provide a basic understanding of the complexity of the conflicts over wolves and, indeed, the complexity of factors that lead to an apparent united front against current wolf management in some small rural communities. To this end, we present the somewhat fragile but sociologically interesting anti-wolf alliance in Stor-Elvdal (in chapter 3). Thereafter, we will

quickly zoom in on some of the social mechanisms we see as driving the conflicts—beyond directly affected economic interests, which are clearly a strong force behind some groups' stance on the wolf issue but just as clearly absent in the case of others. We will show there are dynamics at play that—for the social groups situated in the core of the conflict—only indirectly, if at all, involve livelihoods at risk or other threatened material interests. Unless such dynamics are properly understood, the totality of the conflicts over wolf conservation—indeed, over conservation in general—cannot be fully grasped.

Social groups with different "stakes" in the issue may follow different paths to a stance on the specific issue of wolf management that unites them in a form of alliance and shared discourse that bridges other, sometimes deeper, tensions. Therefore, we cannot disregard these other bases for engagement. Economic loss and practical challenges are certainly the most visible driving forces, not least in the media and in public debate, but our task is to explain that they are not major factors in the popular engagement with what we may term wolf politics.

In this book, and in our research over the years, we have been preoccupied with social groups that in many ways bear the brunt of economic and social change in rural Norway. In our study areas, people with a working-class background and deep cultural roots in resource extraction and harvesting are the dynamo of the resistance against wolf protection. For the most part, they do not own land or sheep, and their anti-wolf trajectory is not identical to that of landowners and sheep breeders. As we shall see in chapter 3, the latter groups do not enter the "alliance" by the same route either. In chapter 5 (on social representations of the wolf), it gets even more complicated, as we introduce the new and positive ways to conceive of the wolf that are also present in wolf areas—but predominantly with a basis in still other social groups.

The larger context of economic and cultural change is present in various ways throughout the book. In the concluding chapter 10, we aim to draw the strings together and elaborate on the relationship between rurality, social class, and power. But first we turn to a brief account of the status of the Norwegian wolf population, the Norwegian management system, and the historical background for Norwegian large carnivore policy.

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