

**Arno Gruen**

## **Hunting People and Animals**

Hunting is connected to food. Meat provides people and animals with proteins that ensure that physiological living processes and their structures are maintained. The origin of hunting thus lies in a cycle necessary for life: the process of nourishment. Obtaining nourishment is, however, only ten percent of the actual goal of hunting. The other ninety percent is “sporting ambition.” That should give us pause.

Already in the early history of humanity, before the development of agriculture, hunting provided less than fifty percent of nourishment. By collecting roots, fruit, and other edible parts of plants, women made the main contribution to survival. It is an important question why the labor of hunting and collecting should have been divided between the sexes. It is very significant that this division led to a development among us over the course of which greater value was attributed to hunting than to collecting. Hunting became a matter for the “strong” and collecting a concern of the “weak.” Nota bene: I am speaking here of the perspective of our civilization. Primitive peoples did not distinguish between hunting and gathering as “strong” and “weak.” Neither “women’s” nor “men’s” work had a disparaging or laudatory significance for these people.

In our civilization, however, “women’s work” is associated with the “weaker sex.” In our history, hunting has become the symbol of strength, courage, and heroism and was reserved primarily for men. This development must be seen in the context of what became the core of our “great” civilizations based on power and possessions: the masculinity delusion. By this I mean the need for greatness, supremacy, control, invincible strength, and heroism. It is delusion because it reveals a fear that has become the essential driving force of existence in our culture.

We should be clear here that the origin of these needs does not lie in a genetic structure or natural constraint but rather in emotions of inferiority, lack of personal value, and the inability to endure uncertainty. Consequently, the effort to achieve absolute certainty and invulnerability by dominating human beings, peoples, animals, and nature has become a fiction, and indeed an extremely dangerous one. In the name of security, “strength” has to be demonstrated constantly. That also means that there always has to be an enemy vis-à-vis whom this “strength” can be exhibited. That leads to a hallucinatory behavior pattern, for in order to be secure, according to this absurd way of thinking, you must always be on your guard, particularly concerning who might become an enemy. You must always be mistrustful and harbor suspicion of others. That means that a state of paranoia accompanies any behavior motivated by security.

So it should not surprise us that hunting, which was once associated with food, came, over the course of millennia, to be proof of male strength and superiority. Hunting itself became the epitome of masculinity. And the larger and more dangerous the animal a man killed was, the more its murder reflected his courage and strength. The people we call “primitive” believed animals have souls. They asked an animal for forgiveness before killing it to preserve their own lives. Now its soul and its being no longer have meaning. This step of robbing other creatures of their right to psychological autonomy, to life and existence, simplified the transition to hunting people, since it requires denying the dignity of another person. That person becomes a life unworthy of life, a subhuman, in order to justify murdering him. Hitler was, as Carl Amery said, a precursor of all those who made a habit of calling their fellow human beings unworthy. By doing so, he—like others, for example, in Congo a century earlier—offered a rationale, marked by cowardice and hatred, for murder under cover of an ideology of purity.

The film *Hasenjagd: Vor lauter Feigheit gibt es kein Erbarmen* (distributed in English as *The Quality of Mercy*) by Andreas Gruber details the events that have become infamous as the “Mühlenviertel Hasenjagd” (Mühlenviertel rabbit hunt), in which five hundred Soviet officers were murdered in the vicinity of the Mauthausen concentration camp in February 1945. It reveals what hunting expressions in our culture: hatred. Hatred of life and liveliness. For wherever people are shaped by obedience, they begin to hate the life they were not allowed to live. This hatred finds expression in the need to humiliate and kill other living creatures.

At the same time, however, it denies this intention, since the act itself is stylized as something heroic. So soldiers fight wars in the hunt for peace. The true intention of the act is by no means epitomized by the act. But when the intention of an action is denied—that is to say, when the deed is separated from the intention—it becomes impossible for such people to have a direct relationship with themselves. That is what it is about in the end: We are dealing with people who are separated from themselves and their real motifs and are therefore driven by hate and destructiveness.

In *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, the Nobel Prize-winning author Wole Soyinka writes about people who want to be their own masters but are unable to do so because they are shaped by obedience, who can never become masters their own destinies because they were never to determine them for themselves. Such people believe, however, that they can get a grip on their own lives by controlling the lives of others, by humiliating and killing other living creatures. This is what hunting animals and hunting people have in common. The latter is called “ethnic cleansing,” and during our lifetimes we have seen it in Bosnia, in Rwanda, and in February 2000 in El Ejido, Andalusia, where locals hunted African refugees and migrant

In all our “great” civilizations, women have been demeaned and degraded as “prey for men.” This fact makes it clear that hunting essentially conceals a fear of the living. For women symbolize life and give life, and men who could never be their own masters have learned to hate this. If we understand hunting as a necessary measure or even as a harmless sporting pleasure, we conceal the murderous aspect of our culture. We hamper a process in which human beings could learn to recognize themselves in their totality. Sinje Dillenkofer’s work of art, a sixteen-part installation about hunting, may offer an opportunity to recognize our double standard. The exhibition is titled *Das Duell* (The duel), and it points in a metaphorical sense to its arena inside us.

In the process, Sinje Dillenkofer raises questions about the relationship of human beings to one another and to nature and about how they deal with life and death. Because her work is aimed at our totality, it offers hope that the humane will prevail.

*Prof. Dr. Arno Gruen is a psychoanalyst and author: [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arno\\_Gruen](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arno_Gruen)*

*Translation Steven Lindberg*