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GREEDY FOREST COMPANIES AND IDEALIST TREE HUGGERS? A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE RHETORIC OF CONTEMPORARY FOREST DEBATE

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Forest policy and natural resource management have been debated topics in Sweden for more than one hundred years. In the late 20th century, when the industrialization of the north of Sweden accelerated and forest companies began buying forestland in large quantities from the farmers, the so-called Norrlandsfrågan, the Norrland issue, was intensely debated in the press, in parliament and in literature. As a matter of fact, there are striking similarities between now and then.

In Spring 2012, the journalist Maciej Zaremba published five articles entitled 'Skogen vi ärvde', 'The Forest We Inherited', in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. He vehemently criticized the Swedish forest policy and described a deforested landscape where there is no place for either man or protected species. The articles were much discussed – both praised and criticized – and received replies from industry, the Swedish Forest Agency (Skogsstyrelsen), forestry contractors, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (Naturskyddsföreningen) and scientists.

In January 1894, a journalist, Jonas Stadling, started a documentary series called 'Vår irländska fråga', 'Our Irish Question', in the newspaper *Aftonbladet*, a series that would go on for eight months with more than twenty articles. Stadling had visited the northern regions of Sweden and described a poor and vulnerable population and reckless and greedy forest inspectors. In the articles he criticized the forest companies for deforestation and for cheating the farmers out of their forests and thereby ruining them and making them move to the cities. Responses and contra-arguments came

from scientists in cooperation with the head of one forest company (Frans Kempe, Mo och Domsjö) and from a representative in the parliament (Curry Treffenberg, county governor in Sundsvall during the strike in 1879 and Kempe's father-in-law). Both Zaremba's and Stadling's articles were later republished in book form.

Aim and Questions

Already in 1894, the debate was irreconcilable and polarized. What unites the two debates and what makes them different? What is there to learn by comparing the two? This is the point of departure for this article: its aim is to try to understand the deadlock and why the debaters always seem to be talking past each other.

Similarities in argument and style

First of all, there are striking similarities between Stadling and Zaremba in style and genre. They use a literary style, with fictive traits and passionate imagery, and they mix reports, arguments, narratives, interviews, and testimonies. Personal meetings and individual experiences are very important to both of them. The criticism toward the forest companies, and in Zaremba's case, towards the Swedish Forest Agency and the government, is emotional and has a post-colonial power perspective: the little man/the farmer is exploited and defenseless before the State and the big forest com-

panies. They both contrast the past and the future, where the past is portrayed as an idyll and the future as degeneration or devastation. Zaremba opened his first article with a description of the forest in Storfors, Värmland, before it was harvested by the Stora Enso company, saying that it was, in short, enchanting and captivating: tall pines and spruces, the ground covered with moss, small gullies on the slope toward Mögen Lake. He continued by contrasting the view seven months later -- the view was most similar to the battlefields of Verdun: meter-long stubs towering among the lumber where there used to be shady forest paths, here and there a solitary tree, otherwise desolation (Zaremba 2012: 11–12). Stadling's description of the situation in Härjedalen one hundred years earlier is similar: he says that when you have come down the slopes towards Ljungan River, where in times past majestic pine crowns rose in the air, now you see only withered branches. Wherever you turn your eyes, you encounter the same abominable devastation: stumps, tops, here and there, ruins of a log cabin (Stadling 1894: 63).

A major problem, seen both in Zaremba's and Stadling's argumentation, is the inability and the unwillingness to recognize what the question is *really* about. They refuse to admit that the forest policy is contradictory and that they themselves have no answer. This is seen, for example, in Zaremba's discussion of proprietorship *contra* the Right of Public Access (allemansrätten). The title of the article series, 'The Forest We Inherited', indicates that this is a key issue for him. His point is that we think of the forest as ours – and in some aspects it is ours – despite the fact that somebody else owns it. The forest is a part of our culture and it influences our way of thinking and living. In a certain sense, we all have a right to the forest, to walk in it or to pick berries and mushrooms. How come, then, we have no say when it comes to decision-making?

The question is legitimate, but has no easy answer. Individual owners and private companies own most of the forestland in Sweden (www.skogsstyrelsen.se). The forest is their source of income and in a certain sense it is logical that they get to decide what happens on their property. Nevertheless, there must be laws and regulations to follow. When a biotope is found, we must recognize that, there is a conflict between the values of nature and those of economic profit for the forest owner. The owner's decisions will vary depending on the various values and interests. But still, it is the owner's decision. The forest is not ours in this sense: it is on loan to us. However, Zaremba seems to ignore this, because when he addresses his opponents' arguments on ownership, he rallies and tells a fictional story of a future archaeologist who writes her dissertation on "an ethnic group called foresters" and their exclusion from the rest of society. He caricatures the polarized opinions and he speaks ironically of an

article in the professional journal *Skogen* (*The Forest*), where townspeople are described as ungrateful, spoiled and talking foolishly about the forest as "our forest": he says that it is only a matter of time before they try to take the right to farm their land from the forest owner (Zaremba 2012: 128). The implication is that the reader should renounce the views of *Skogen*, but the reason for doing so is missing. How far is Zaremba willing to push the argument of the general public's right to the forest? What is a valid argument if you want to argue against proprietorship?

The responses to Stadling and Zaremba are very different in character, but they also share important characteristics. They have a more traditional disposition, the argumentation is linear and straightforward, the tone is lower key and the style is literal and technical. But most important, many of them argue in a way that makes it look like they are discussing actual facts, not arguing for or against a controversial belief. Their arguments are hidden, not least because of the fact that many of them claim to speak for the sake of both industry and nature. This is especially noticeable in the response in our time from the head of the Swedish Forest Agency, Monika Stridsman, and from a group of professors at the SLU (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences). Stridsman argues that the Swedish Forest Agency first and foremost has to follow the law. She criticizes Zaremba's one-sidedness and objects to several of his arguments, but does so mostly by saying only, "This is not the case," and that they have a policy that states that clear cutting should be reduced (DN May 16, 2012).

The professors from the SLU are not as polemical: they acknowledge the importance in Zaremba's criticism but they object to his biased description. Their main argument is that there is a difficult conflict of interest between nature values and forest production and they describe some of the conflicting goals that have to be taken into consideration. Here, they are close to reaching the heart of the matter. They exemplify by using the conflicting Swedish environmental objectives Reduced Climate Impact and A Rich Diversity of Plant and Animal Life. Forest fertilization that absorbs carbon dioxide gives an increase in biomass fuel, but also has negative consequences for biological diversity. They are also aware of the ethic, social, cultural, economic and proprietary aspects that must be taken into consideration (DN May 16, 2012). But still, they seem to put too much faith into what they call "value-neutral knowledge" and scientific facts and that this – albeit together with ideological, economic, cultural and emotional arguments – will lead us to the "right" decision. I would like to ask right for whom? And what is value-neutral knowledge? When does a fact turn into an interpretation? From a rhetorical perspective, a factual description will never be completely value-neutral, and facts (not just values) are dependent on the acceptance from an audience in order to actually function as facts. Rather than

talking about value-neutral knowledge, the rhetorical concept of *doxa* can be used to describe what the scientists are aiming at. *Doxa* (from which 'orthodoxy') is the domain of opinion, belief or probable knowledge that cannot be questioned at a specific moment in time in a society, but that in the long run can change when and/or if new arguments arise for a new thesis (Rosengren 2011, passim).

Already the responses to Zaremba's article series show that scientific knowledge is not always value neutral. In a later article, climate scientists claim that clear cutting is not climate-smart; two days later, other scientists assert the opposite (clear felling is climate-smart) (DN May 30, and June 1, 2012). The different conclusions can be explained by the fact that the measurements of carbon dioxide emissions are made in different ways and related to distinct norms and values. In other words, scientific knowledge needs interpretation, and interpretation means relating to values in some ways. Despite this, these scientists talk about carbon dioxide emissions and their effects as if this were an undeniable fact. There is an unwillingness to recognize that science is also value laden and, further, that there is a tendency to believe that we can find the Right Answer simply by having faith in Science. However, in fact, these two articles clearly show that it is not as simple as that. Even if scientists were to agree on which kind of forestry technique is best for the environment, there would still be disagreements as to how to assess the importance of the forest industry (in terms of export value, jobs, etc.) compared to environmental objectives (diversity, biotopes, sustainability, etc.) As has been shown, there are scientists who are well aware of these conflicting goals, but they do not discuss how to solve them.

On the other hand, the argument from industry and the contractors is simple: we do take the environment and nature into account. We already have a good forest policy, says one (Lantbrukarnas riksförbund Skogsägarna in DN May 22, 2012). Another states that Swedish coniferous forests are robust ecosystems (Pelle Salin, contractor, in DN May 16, 2012). The defenders in 1894 used the same strategy: Carl Bovallius, professor in zoology and the most prominent spokesmen for the industrial agenda (though in close cooperation with Frans Kempe, the head of Mo och Domsjö) argues that a rational forest management (that is, an industrialized forest management) is the best solution for the farmers, the forests and the economy (Nya Dagligt Allehanda, NDA February 20, 1894). He wants changes in forest legislation, changes that enable the owner of the lumber mill to secure his need for timber and, at the same time, maintain a population of farmers. His main argument is that the forest industry in Norrland is beneficial – but also necessary – for Sweden's economic and technological development.

Differences in place and position

As we have seen, the rhetoric of 2012 has several similarities with the rhetoric of 1894, both in terms of arguments and style. But of course, there are also differences. The most crucial change is the place and position of the farmer. Those who criticized "*baggböleri*" in the 1890's took a stand for the farmer and the peasantry. The farmer was deprived of his forest, deceived and impoverished. Stadling wanted to empower him. Today, the farmers have their own voice, but what is more interesting, it is a voice in harmony with the forest companies. They share the same views, as for example when representatives for Lantbrukarnas riksförbund, Federation of Swedish Farmers, state that Sweden already has a good forest policy (DN May 22, 2012). A forest contractor from Jämtland in the north of Sweden goes even further and argues that if the forest is going to contribute to prosperity and development, extreme nature conservation cannot be tolerated (DN May 16, 2012). The state, the forest companies and the farmers argue for the proprietor's right to decide over his own property, for "individual responsibility" and "voluntary actions".

Of course, not all farmers have changed sides. Zaremba speaks of farmers who fight vigorously for *not* having to cut their forests and others who lament their lost childhood dreams. But this actually distinguishes Zaremba's articles from many other critical attitudes towards the forest industry nowadays. Nature conservation has been the dominating argument for the past 50 years, but it is not a prominent theme in Stadling's articles as knowledge about nature conservation then was scarce. There is a link between Zaremba's cause and the case in 1894, however. They both reflect on man's place in the forest and the forest's place in man. What does the forest mean to man, and what are man's responsibilities toward the forest? Zaremba brings back the existential dimension in the forest debate – although this time it does not concern only the farmers, but all of us, mankind in general. Stadling's articles make us see the forest as an integral and important part in the modernization and industrialization processes. In retrospect, the optimistic hopes and the absolute confidence seem naïve and simplistic. But that should make us humble and prevent us from saying things like, sure, the forest has been misused now and then (mining, "*baggböleri*", pasturage, pesticides), but not anymore because now we have learnt from these mistakes and nowadays nature conservation is adequate (DN May16, 2012).

Conclusion

So what can we learn from this short examination of some of the arguments in the two forest debates initiated by Stadling and Zaremba? First of all, a historical perspective reminds us that we should always be prepared to reconsider and re-examine our positions and opinions, but it also shows us the strong continuity in the debate. If the goal is to create a more constructive debate, this is the first step. But even more important, we must understand the deadlock today -- that is, the conflict between conservation and industry, environment and economical interests -- as a consequence of the debaters' different perspectives: a humanistic perspective collides with scientific and industrial ones. The sides are biased and one-sided: Zaremba because of his refusal to see the complexity and for using only sources that support his agenda, the antagonists because of their overconfidence in science or dependence on economical factors. Most important, though, is the inability on all fronts to see that the question is about conflicting values. If the parties could recognize this, and speak openly about the different values at stake, the discussion could achieve more.

In Marie Appelstrand's article "From Confrontation to Dialogue. Developments in Swedish Forest Policy and Administration" in this volume, we meet a successful example of this strategy. She discusses an application of new modes of governance in environmental management in the project called the Östra Vätterbranterna Partnership. The project group focused on finding and defining social norms and bonds within the community and between different stakeholders and organizations. She concludes:

> Through these activities even the land owners became interested in conservation, and a dialogue was initiated with authorities and other actors about the best forms for protecting the natural value areas. With a common understanding and agreement of problems and goals, the foundation for solving problems and finding solutions was laid and cooperation within the project developed (Jonsson 2004).

Another central, conflicting value discussed above is man's place in the forest and his rights and responsibilities. While Zaremba emphasizes the existential dimension, the industry underlines the forest's potential to create wealth and the nature conservationists focus on the protection of the plant and animal life. The parties have different agendas, and they relate to different norms, traditions and habits of thought: that is why they have so much trouble reaching an agreement. In one way they should not reach an agreement, because these central but conflicting values cannot and should not be erased or totally resolved. All perspectives bring important values to the question. The point is the importance of trying to recognize, un-

derstand and accept other perspectives and other approaches regarding a question. There is no single truth and our knowledge is always anchored in a society. What is a fact is dependent upon time, place and context (Rosengren 2011). The challenge for the parties in this debate is to recognize the conflicting agendas and at the same time acknowledge the legitimacy of the opponents' standpoints. Only then can a constructive and productive dialogue develop.

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