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One more Elephant?

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Some months ago (31st December 2011), the French newspaper “Le Monde” called attention to the massacre of elephants in Africa. Verifiable statistics show that, in the last year of 2011, 23 tonnes of ivory has been gathered and sold, which, according to the organisation Traffic, is the equivalent to 2,500 elephants. Reaffirming that the situation for the African elephant is getting worse is nothing more than a reiteration.

Those who have carried out these killings, which steadily continue this year, are in many cases mercenaries contracted to get hold of the tusks, the demand of which has dramatically increased in Asia and, more specifically, in Malaysia. As a result, from the middle of January to the middle of February this year, 200 elephants have been killed in the north of Cameroon, with total impunity and absolute indifference from the country’s authorities. On other occasions, the deaths of elephants, buffalo, rhinoceros, and other equally valuable species are carried out in safaris organised in Africa, or of bears in hunting parties that are still consented to by European countries like Hungary, Romania and Poland, overlooking the rigorous legislation of the EU on hunting and its restrictions. This all seems to be justified as an elitist pastime.

Certainly, there are countries in the southern cone of Africa – as is the case with Botswana – that permit the hunting of elephants and other wild species in paradisiacal enclosures, under the justification that such activity is a fundamental source of income for the country, and generates a lot of job positions (and to this, I would add illegal trade, making the CITES convention a mere metaphor).

“It’s not a crime to kill an elephant... It’s a sin to kill an elephant... It’s the only sin that you can buy a licence and go out and commit”; to many cinephiles who have followed Clint Eastwood’s career as a director won’t have forgotten the words with which the hunter refused to shoot down an elephant that came into his line of sight. It is the finale of a film (White Hunter, Black Heart), which is an overall homage to the filmography of John Huston and homage also to the elephant; a noble, intelligent and sensitive creature. A true miracle of nature. A splendour of a free life. I don’t know how it could be justified, or how to explain that killing such a creature, or any specimen of wild fauna, could constitute an amusement, or a legitimate recreation activity and supposed contribution towards conserving the balance of nature.

There is something obscene in hunting as a pastime. There is something ridiculous and cruel in photographing oneself with the body of a victim. Extending to animals the respect they deserve, expanding the so-called “circle of compassion” does nothing but ennoble human beings. We are not far way from a time when hunting elephants or any wild animal will be increasingly rejected by more layers of society. Fox hunting became prohibited in Great Britain, and it was not simple, as it meant dealing with a pastime tied with rural life and practiced by the rural nobility. The ecological balance was not destroyed, the British economy did not collapse, and traditions do not seem to have

broken, nor has the English identity shattered. Queen Elizabeth II, who celebrates 60 years on the throne, frequently appears with her dogs, with her horses, reflecting an image that, in the Anglo-Saxon countries, is considered an admirable personal characteristic; to love animals and show compassion for them, even publicly. It is also common to see American presidents with their companion animals (we are even told their names...). Perhaps it cannot be denied that it is an image shared for propaganda purposes, but it is propaganda that reflects the values of society as a whole.

I, along with many others, would not like (X) to go back to seeing any political representatives from Spain posing with a corpse and a hunting rifle. I would prefer that no more elephants would be shown, dead without pity, next to someone who, supposedly, represents us as civilised citizens. I would prefer them to appear walking their dog (as, indeed, we saw the Justice Minister doing last year), or that, on the Moncloa or Zarzuela websites, photos of companion animals that live there would start to appear, if they do indeed live there! Something would start to change.

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