

Hunting and the Politics of Identity in Ontario

By Thomas Dunk

1. Introduction

On March 4, 1999 the government of Ontario decreed Regulation 88/99 under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, thereby terminating the spring bear hunt. This action apparently was the result of lobbying by environmental groups, most notably the International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Schad Foundation, the latter organization headed by Robert Schad, a prominent business man. The government had announced its intention to cancel the spring bear hunt approximately six weeks earlier, on January 15th. This set off a storm of controversy among hunters and among the tourist outfitters who serviced the spring hunters. The reaction was particularly strong in northern Ontario where much of the bear hunt took place. The Minister for Natural Resources, the person responsible for the action, was inundated with some 35,000 faxes, approximately two-thirds of which were opposed to the cancellation of the spring bear hunt. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (hereafter OFAH) and the Northern Ontario Tourist Outfitters (hereafter NOTO) along with several individuals launched a legal and public relations campaign to bring back the hunt and to have the right to hunt recognized under the terms of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly under section 2(b) which declares that everyone has the right to “freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression...”¹ The protest against the cancellation of the hunt acquired international dimensions when heavy metal rocker, Ted Nugent, an avid hunter and hunting lodge owner, launched from his

¹Department of Justice Canada, *The Constitution Act, 1982*, Part I, Section 2, “Fundamental Freedoms.”

Michigan home a campaign to boycott hunting trips to Ontario because of the new hunting regulation and because of Canadian gun control laws.

There are relatively few large game animals that can be hunted in the spring. Traditionally the spring bear hunt involved the killing of about 4,000 bears. The environmentalist and animal-rightist opposition to the hunt revolved around the supposed orphaning of bear cubs.² Even though existing legislation restricted the killing of lactating sows, these individuals and organizations argued that it was impossible for hunters to always correctly identify the sex or condition of the bears and that as many as 274 cubs were orphaned every year. They also objected to practices such as the use of bait to lure bears into the range of hunters hidden in blinds. The OFAH suspected, however, that the objection to the spring bear hunt was just the “thin edge of the wedge” of an effort to abolish hunting altogether. The fact that the opponents of the hunt referred to hunting as “recreational killing” fuelled these fears. In his announcement, the Minister indicated that the spring bear hunt was cancelled on ethical grounds. The government also announced a compensation package of 20 million dollars for the tourist outfitters who would suffer economically because the hunt had been cancelled, and an extension of the fall bear-hunting season.

The attempt to placate hunters and tourist outfitters with an extended autumn bear-hunting season and financial compensation were for naught. On April 12, 1999 the OFAH and NOTO, along with a number of individuals initiated an application for a judicial review, a move which if successful would have suspended the regulation canceling the bear hunt until they could appear before a panel of three judges at the Ontario Divisional Court. The legal challenge was based on two arguments.³ One was procedural. The appellants alleged that the Minister had not followed a process that he is legally bound to respect. This would have involved, they claimed, an environmental assessment and the provision of incontrovertible proof that the action he took was necessary to achieve an end related to conservation. The OFAH and the NOTO lawyers asserted that the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* had conservation as its sole aim and purpose and, therefore, the Minister could not make changes to regulations covered by the Act that were not

²The accuracy of this claim is hotly disputed by the OFAH.

³This summary is based on my reading of the court transcript of the hearing. *Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) v. the Queen*, Ontario Court (General Division), Court File No. 99-097, April 22-23, 1999, Kenora, Ontario, Proceedings.

consistent with the principles of conservation. In particular, the OFAH and their allies charged that the Minister's decision was made for political purposes because, they alleged, Mr. Schad, in a meeting with the Premier of Ontario, had threatened to target certain vulnerable ridings in the next provincial election. The second set of arguments was based on constitutional grounds, that the cancellation of the spring bear hunt represented a restriction of the right to hunt, a right which is covered under the terms of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The appellants lost their challenge on the procedural grounds. The judge ruled that the Minister of Natural Resources had the legal authority to change regulations whether or not they could be justified in terms of conservation. Indeed, in his decision he disputed the argument that the Act only addressed issues of conservation, stating that it clearly was designed to also regulate the ethics of hunting practices. Hence the spring bear hunt has not taken place since 1998. However, the judge did agree that there may be a triable issue under the Charter arguments. In other words, he agreed that hunting may represent a form of expression that is protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. At this writing the OFAH is pursuing their Charter challenge and the campaign to have the spring bear hunt re-instituted carries on.⁴

The controversy surrounding the cancellation of the spring bear hunt in Ontario serves as an entry into a discussion of the way in which the identity politics of whiteness and masculinity influence debates about environmental controversies. The focus in this case is hunting, specifically the arguments put forward by the OFAH and NOTO regarding hunting as a meaningful activity in the culture of their members who are overwhelmingly white men. My interest pertains to the way in which concepts such as culture, tradition, and heritage are employed by groups that are composed largely of white men, a segment of the population in nation states such as Canada that have comprised the dominant norm against which subordinate and/or minority others have had to struggle.

⁴*OFAH v. the Queen*, Reasons. It should be noted that NOTO have now withdrawn from the legal challenge, a move that was very controversial within the organization. There is a widespread perception that the organization was either "bought off" with compensation payments, or, more generously to the NOTO membership, that the government threatened to hold up compensation payments to the effected tourist outfitters if the organization continued with the legal challenge.

The arguments employed by the OFAH and the NOTO exemplify a number of interesting developments in the ongoing struggles about identity, power, and relationships with nature. They indicate that culture is now recognized by these organizations as a form of political capital. The state, the legal profession and the lay public are picking up on the anthropological idea that everyone has culture — not only those odd, quaint immigrant groups, religious minorities, or remnant indigenous peoples. This may represent an interesting side effect of the intellectual critique of whiteness and masculinity as hegemonic cultural forces. Those who have been the principal object of this critique are now recasting their own place in the social hierarchy as a cultural rather than a purely economic-political phenomenon. This is not to prejudge the nature of the intention that lies behind the arguments of white men's organizations regarding their culture. The extent to which the arguments about the relationship between hunting and culture utilized by the OFAH and the NOTO are politically motivated as opposed to sincerely felt by white hunters is impossible to know. Rather than engage in a futile debate about the honesty of white hunters' claims about the place of hunting in their culture and identity, it is more fruitful to think through how this case reveals some of the limitations of identity politics as a means of achieving social, economic, and environmental justice. A discursive strategy and ethical position similar to that employed by subaltern groups to defend endangered minority cultures is here being used to support the status quo. Many who have operated from a more explicitly Marxist-oriented perspective have long been wary of the potential implications of arguing and acting on primarily cultural grounds as opposed to political and economic terrain. The debates about hunting, culture, and rights reveal that, in the absence of a deeper engagement with the entire system that simultaneously involves the destruction of nature and the creation of social dislocations, alienation, and inequality, we end up in an endless cycle of claims and counter-claims about the linkages between the uses of nature, cultural traditions, and rights.

2. White Hunters and the “Tribal Slot”

The claim that hunting is an integral part of a white, mostly male culture that is under threat and deserves to be recognized and protected in the same way as other minority cultures exemplifies a global phenomenon. Political capital can be gained by being recognized as having a distinctive “traditional” culture. White men do not generally fit into the “tribal slot” but it appears that they may now be trying to do

so in some of the white settler nations.⁵ They are defending lifestyles and economic activities that are perceived to be threatened by one or several of the so-called new social movements, in particular indigenous rights and environmentalism, although feminism is also a problem in so far as it is critical of the role of traditional white family structures and supportive of initiatives such as gun control.

There is now a thick literature on the concept of the “invention” of tradition. The early historical and anthropological works showed that cultural practices which were widely thought to be survivals from earlier historical periods were often much more recent creations and thus lacked historical authenticity. As the debate has progressed, interpretations of the concept of tradition have become more nuanced. Scholars are now very conscious of the potential political and legal consequences, especially for subordinate populations, of labeling tradition, custom and heritage as mere inventions. They are also more sensitive to the theoretical complexity of the interactions between “real” cultural practices and the representation of this reality in the contemporary, highly mediatised and globalized world, a world in which separating “reality” from its representation is increasingly difficult. So far the result of these debates has been to undermine the utility of a strong opposition between categories such as authenticity and inauthenticity and to underline the ever-changing nature of culture.⁶ At another level, however, the debate has not, and probably cannot solve the thorny ethical and political issues involved when the “reality” of the customs and traditions of subaltern groups who are struggling for recognition and political, legal and economic rights is questioned or, alternatively, when groups who are descended from white colonists and settlers begin to employ the same discursive strategy to defend property or other rights or privileges which may be affected by the recognition of the legitimacy of the claims of colonized indigenous peoples.⁷

⁵For an example from New Zealand see Michèle D. Dominy, “White Settler Assertions of Native Status,” *American Ethnologist*, 22,2, 1995.

⁶These debates began with Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s edited volume, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The special issue on indigenous peoples of the journal *Identities*, 3,1-2, October 1996, provides a good example of the nature of the debates. Tania Murray Li, “Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resource Politics and the Tribal Slot,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42,1, January 2000, offers a very good review of the literature, especially as it relates to the linkage between “tribal identity” and environmentalist cultural politics.

⁷See, for example, the debate about Dominy’s work with white, high country ranchers in New Zealand in the pages of *Anthropology Today*:

The emergence of segments of the white population in white settler societies that are claiming a right to have their cultural traditions recognized and protected corresponds with the rise of a critical intellectual interest in whiteness as a form of identity. The upshot of this work is that whiteness is now recognized as one (or several) form(s) of identity as opposed to simply the “normal” or the “mainstream” against which all “others” are assessed. The static homogeneity of categories such as white male or female has been compromised. This offers the undoubted benefit of allowing for a far richer analysis of the class, gender, ethnic, and regional variations and conflicts within white populations and the complexities of the ways in which various segments of the white population interacted with indigenous cultures and societies and other subordinate ethnic and/or racialized groups. Of particular relevance to this discussion is the ways in which, for some elements of the white population, whiteness is constructed through the combined yet contradictory processes of distancing from, and appropriation, inversion, and mimicry of the cultural practices and representations of or about subaltern others. Whites also frequently speak to themselves about themselves — their anxieties, desires, frustrations — through representations of these various others — a form of ventriloquism at times, as so tellingly illustrated in Eric Lott’s work on blackface minstrelsy and the emergence of American “white” working-class culture.⁸ An example of this phenomenon that is more directly relevant to my argument might be Archie Delaney, an Englishman masquerading as Indian, who became famous in the guise of Grey Owl for alerting white colonial society to the dangers and alienation inherent in ways of life dependent upon industrialization and urbanization.⁹ In the legal arguments employed by

Michèle D. Dominy, “New Zealand’s Waitangi Tribunal,” *Anthropology Today*, 6, 2, April 1990; the responses by a number of people in “Cultural Politics in New Zealand,” *Anthropology Today*, 6, 3, June 1990, and her response to their comments in *Anthropology Today*, 6,4, August 1990, p. 23.

⁸Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁹The ironies of the interface of representation and reality at times are striking. Consider this: One of my graduate students, a very talented Ojibwa woman, served as an assistant director during the filming of the movie *Grey Owl*. One of her jobs was to help prepare and take care of Pierce Brosnan (otherwise known for playing the character of James Bond), who played the role of Archie Delaney pretending to be Grey Owl. Brosnan is known for his environmental activism and this apparently was one of the reasons for his interest in the role of Grey Owl. While they were in the eastern townships of

OFAH and NOTO, the attempt to mimic and appropriate a discursive strategy employed with some success by aboriginal people in Canada is explicit.

3. Hunting as Meaningful Expression

The OFAH and the NOTO assertion that the right to hunt is guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is based upon an argument about the role and meaning of hunting in the culture of their members. In his argument before Superior Court of Justice Judge J. Stach, Timothy S. B. Danson, the OFAH's lawyer, cited various affidavits that had been submitted to the court. The first of his examples came from an affidavit prepared by C. Davison Ankney, a professor in the Department of Zoology at the University of Western Ontario:¹⁰

Hunting represents a fundamental expression of a hunter's identity and self-worth and search for natural freedom and personal adventure. As such the act of hunting and the hunting experience occasion moments of profound self-fulfillment....hunting is their means of spiritual renewal and reconnection with the natural world....Hunting is self-fulfillment and as a fundamental expression of the hunter's sense of identity and self-worth creates for the hunter a comprehensive worldview and way of life which is intimately connected to wildlife, nature, the life cycle of both, survival, self-sufficiency, the wilderness experience, respect for nature and its power, and ensuring a sustainable annual harvest of wildlife. Its is [sic] a deeply profoundly spiritual experience for those of us who partake in it.... Simply put, hunting is a way of expression of life which cherishes the

Quebec (Delaney actually spent his time in Northern Ontario among the Ojibwa) filming a movie with an environmental theme using support actors chosen for their adherence to a conventional Hollywood image of what "Indians" look like, Brosnan's Malibu home was washed away by floods in California.

¹⁰Ankney is a specialist in waterfowl, although he has also participated in the debates about the biological bases of supposed differences in intelligence levels between men and women. He has defended the idea that there are biological differences in brain size and that these do correlate with differences in intelligence between men and women. See C. Davison Ankney, "Sex Differences in Relative Brain Size: The Mismeasure of Woman, Too?" *Intelligence*, 16, 1992.

notion of living with and obtaining food from nature, and being at one with nature and wildlife, and surviving in and through it. It represents a unique sphere of peace, freedom and challenge where the individual is a participant in, rather than just an observer of nature. As such it provides a haven for the spirit and a forum for the soul.

Erich Fromm, the Marxist social psychologist, is referred to, as is the Spanish philosopher and defender of hunting (although in his case only hunting by the European nobility — a point the OFAH submission fails to record), Ortega y Gasset — “one does not hunt to kill; on the contrary, one kills in order to have hunted.”¹¹ In summarizing this first part of his argument about how the cancellation of the spring bear hunt violated his clients’ right to freedom of expression, the lawyer argued that “...it is a strong, strong statement uncontradicted and unchallenged as to how these people feel and what this is for them. It is a profound, profound statement of expression, a way of life, how they identify themselves in the world with their family, with their friends, with their community. This is, in my submission, a core value expression.”¹²

One of the appellants in the case was Elsie Meshake of Aroland First Nation. Mr. Danson drew the judge’s attention to the written submission and then added: “I think this is interesting because what you have here is an aboriginal perspective which is the same as the perspective of the other affiants. And in this respect I would simply draw Your Honor’s attention to page 4 of that affidavit, paragraphs 13 through to 17 where she talks about the significance of hunting and what it means to First Nations. And I think it is fair to say on the basis of this evidence, as we go down the road, that for someone of the government to tell not only my clients but [the] aboriginal community that hunting is just about killing. It is an egregious misrepresentation of what is really happening.”¹³

In his submission, Mr. Danson also referred to the importance of tolerance: “the diversity in forms of individual self-fulfillment and human flourishing which ought to be cultivated in an essentially tolerant, indeed welcoming, environment not only for the sake of those

¹¹*OFAH v. the Queen*, Proceedings, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125. The quote from Jose Ortega y Gasset is from his *Meditations on Hunting* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), pp. 110-111.

¹²*OFAH v. the Queen*, Proceedings, p. 126.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 127.

who convey meaning, but also for the sake of those to whom it is conveyed.”¹⁴

The judge suggested that aboriginal people’s hunting rights were covered by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* rather than section 2(b), and that it did not help the OFAH and the NOTO argument to invoke an analogy with the aboriginal experience.¹⁵ Again, my concern is not with the effectiveness of the arguments from a legal point of view. My interest is in the insistence that the aboriginal and the white experience is the same.

In the words of Mr. Danson:

No but I think it is helpful because they are still — because when you look at the — what I would say the white man is saying about hunting and what the aboriginal community says about hunting in terms of [how] spiritually important it is, the meaning, being at one with nature, identifying yourself, your personal self-worth and identification, expressing that into the community that you’re in with your friends, it’s a way of life, it’s a heritage, it’s a custom. What’s remarkable is that the perspective of my clients and the aboriginal perspective are the same. So that — I mean whether we have a s. 35 of *The Constitution Act* for Aboriginal People, in terms of the expression and the meaning that is being conveyed, it’s the same.¹⁶

In his reply to the lawyers representing the Ontario government and the Schad Foundation, Gordon Acton, counsel for the NOTO, argued that in addition to the fact that his clients suffered irreparable economic harm because of the cancellation of the spring bear hunt, they also suffered another kind of injury: “Our harm of the joint applicants is not just the commercial harm. There’s a lack of participation in this function of hunting, of this existence of hunting. There is a lack of ability to prove ourselves that we don’t have to go to the local grocery store to survive. That we can sustain ourselves. It’s a statement. It’s a

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁵Section 35 of *The Constitution Act, 1982* spells out the rights of the aboriginal people of Canada. Subsection (1) of section 35 states “The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.” These aboriginal and treaty rights include the right to hunt and fish.

¹⁶*OFAH v. the Queen*, Proceedings, pp. 154-55.

statement about who we are. That we are individually sustainable without resorting to the modern world by reaching back into a traditional activity and putting food on the table for our families. It certainly conveys a meaning and an important lesson to our children. That is both the meaning and the expressing irreparable harm. We can't participate in that function.”¹⁷

Thus, far from hunting being about the domination of nature and the taking of life, hunting is said to be about relating to and being one with nature, with one's self and with one's human community. Indeed, the lawyers for the Ontario government and the Schad Foundation referred to hunting as recreational killing. This description was criticized by the lawyers for the OFAH and the NOTO. In his decision, the judge supported these arguments, referring to the characterization of hunting as recreational killing as having a “particularly pejorative connotation” that “does not lend itself to reasoned debate” and “is based, moreover, upon logically weak syllogistic reasoning.”¹⁸ Thus, even the judge seems to agree that to understand hunting requires that we adopt an anthropological mode and see it as a ritual activity which includes killing but is not necessarily primarily about killing.

These arguments represent an explicit attempt to claim a legal and moral position equivalent to that of aboriginal people in terms of the relationship to nature and in terms of cultural traditions and the legal and political rights that flow from them. Of particular significance is the emphasis on the spiritual nature of the hunting experience and the importance of hunting to white hunters' identity. This is a form of argumentation that has been used with some success by aboriginal people in Canada, although in legal terms their right to hunt and fish is dependent upon earlier treaties and the British North America Act of 1763. Nonetheless, in an officially multicultural state such as Canada, there is a both a legal and politico-discursive space for arguments about the rights of groups to maintain their culture. The importance of tolerance for minority groups and unpopular activities is a well-established element of Canadian political discourse. Thus when the OFAH and the NOTO argue that their members and clients who are overwhelmingly white and male also have a culture that involves deep spirituality, close relationships to the land, and deserves to be treated with tolerance (even if it is a minority culture that is perceived by others to involve distasteful forms of behavior), they are consciously trying to locate themselves within an established discursive field.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁸*OFAH v. the Queen*, Reasons, p.24.

4. Hunters, Hunting, and Power

One of the discursive strategies employed by the OFAH and the NOTO is to characterize the struggle over the spring bear hunt as a struggle between wealthy, urban-based environmentalists and their young and naive supporters — Robert Schad plays this role in the spring bear hunt drama — and rural, local, small-business people and workers whose livelihoods and cultures will be ruined by further restrictions on hunting. Given what we know about the social bases of environmental concern and the environmental movement, this strategy builds on the already-existing antagonism to environmentalists and animal rights activists in rural areas.¹⁹ It is well-known that Marx and Engels saw the conflict of interest between town and country as one of the key issues in the evolution of societies. In their opinion this division reached its most developed form under capitalism.²⁰ The dispute over the spring bear hunt and hunting more generally certainly reflects the economic and cultural divisions between densely populated metropolitan areas and hinterlands comprised of small cities, towns, villages and hamlets which are much more directly located in nature and involved in the direct appropriation of nature. However, interpreting the bear hunting controversy primarily as a spatial and class conflict masks some of the more complex features of the social bases of the actors involved.

In many parts of Europe, for centuries hunting was a privilege reserved for the king. In other areas, the right to grant hunting privileges was not unique to the king but was restricted to an elite aristocratic group.²¹ Hunting regulations and restrictions could be

¹⁹On local working-class ideas about and images of environmentalists and nature see Thomas Dunk, “Talking About Trees: Environment and Society in Forest Workers’ Culture,” *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 31,1, February 1994; and Thomas Dunk, “Is It Only Forest Fires That Are Natural? Boundaries of Nature and Culture in White Working Class Culture,” in L. Anders Sandberg and Sverker Sörlin, eds., *Sustainability the Challenge: People, Power, and the Environment* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998).

²⁰John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), p. 117.

²¹I am using the term hunting in a broad sense here. In the European context, the distinctions between hunting, shooting, and coursing were important. My generic use of the word hunting to cover all of these field sports is following my understanding of normal North American English. Moreover, in the context of my argument these distinctions are not relevant to the point I wish to make about hunting rights and class struggle. My understanding of the European (in which I include the United Kingdom)

interpreted both as expressions of the class and status inequalities of medieval society and, as the transition to capitalism began, part of the process of alienating peasants from the land which the political economists dubbed primitive accumulation.²² It is no wonder that one of the first actions of the revolutionary government in France in 1789 was to abolish the restrictions on hunting.

The tradition of hunting regulations linked to the conservation of game can be traced back to this aristocratic heritage. As I discuss below, however, the conservationist discourse currently used by hunter's organizations in Canada must also be understood as the product of much more recent resource management practices. The ideas are similar to the concept of sustainable yield employed by foresters to try to maximize production of timber for industry over a relatively longtime span. Regardless of the historical origins of the regulations, these rules have undoubted consequences for lower-class rural folks whatever their cultural origins.

In the US, for example, the “Bambi” wars — that is the conflicts between residents of small communities who hunt and newcomers who are often opposed to hunting — are perceived to be one element in a struggle between “Tocquevillian” or “Jeffersonian” rural petty commodity producers/workers and “Keynesian” public-sector workers and members of the professional middle and upper class who increasingly inhabit rural communities and commute to their jobs and careers in cities. The locals — apparently known as “woodchucks” in some areas — perceive the local woods, whether or not they are owned in a *de jure* sense, as *de facto* property and the wildlife within them as important subsistence resources. The ethical and property concerns of their urban-dependent but rural-dwelling neighbors find little support in this cultural milieu. Game animals are likely to be perceived as food sources rather than cute or cuddly animal friends and regulations which involve adherence to seasons and licenses are likely to be seen as an

situation is based upon P.B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: the English Game Laws 1671-1831* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975); and Bertrand Hell, *Entre chien et loup: Faits et dits de chasse dans la France de l'Est* (Paris: Maison de la Sciences de l'homme, 1985).

²²Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 38-58.

annoyance to be ignored rather than a justified attempt to manage game animals.²³

In contemporary Ontario, however, neither the spring bear hunt nor the right to hunt as a constitutional and heritage issue can be understood primarily in terms of class struggle, at least not as an expression of a struggle between rural small producers and workers and the urbanized professional classes. This is not to say that class and region are irrelevant. Indeed, I will discuss some of the ways they are important to our understanding of disputes about hunting later, but an adequate analysis of the bear hunt dispute and the right-to-hunt movement must go beyond these two variables.

The OFAH has 83,000 members. Since 1993, its offices have been located on an eight-acre site near Peterborough, Ontario that was donated by a local philanthropist. It has 35 full-time, professional staff, as well as part-time and contract employees. It claims that its demographics “pretty much run like a cross section of Ontario,” ranging from the “Chinese anglers...association to the francophone hunt camps of the north east. Italian and aboriginal peoples are among other ethnic groups” that form its membership. The largest percentage of their membership is composed of males between the ages of 35 and 55, “although efforts to reach youth and women are increasing numbers in these areas.” With regard to the issues of class and region, the OFAH claims that education levels and household incomes of members are above average and the occupations of members “run the gamut as well. Lawyers, doctors, and other professionals are a significant component of our membership as are blue collar workers. The majority of our membership is in the heavily populated urban south.”²⁴ In the historical account of the organization which is available from its website, the OFAH traces its origins to the Toronto Angler’s Association, an obviously urban-based group.²⁵ From this brief sketch it is clear that even if many rural small farmers and rural workers are members of OFAH, the organization cannot be characterized as having that specific a class or regional basis, although it is clear that it sees many of its opponents as urban-based. Furthermore, poaching is one of

²³For an example of this kind of analysis see Edward C. Hansen, “The Great Bambi War: Tocquevillians versus Keynesians in an Upstate New York County,” in Jane Schneider and Rayna Rapp, eds., *Articulating Hidden Histories: Exploring the Influence of Eric R. Wolf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

²⁴Personal communication with Mark Holmes, Communications Officer for the OFAH.

²⁵At www.ofah.org/AboutUs/index.cfm (as of March 29, 2001).

the OFAH's principal concerns. It promotes a "report-a-poacher" program and in some rural areas billboards advertising Crime Watchers programs also carry anti-poaching statements supported by the OFAH.²⁶ In the historical literature on hunting and class struggle, battles over poaching are largely interpreted as part of the conflict over access to resources that pitted landless farm laborers and small farmers against the gentry and large capitalist farmers. For some segments of the rural population, the OFAH may also be perceived as an external power, one with local allies and closely linked to conservation officers and the police, but an external power nonetheless that is regulating the actions of the rural poor for whom hunting regulations are an encumbrance on their subsistence activities. The OFAH is concerned to conserve game stocks for the hunting pleasure of its membership. If this aim is consistent with the subsistence needs of local populations that is good, but the organization's opposition to the extension of aboriginal hunting and fishing rights suggests that where these two goals conflict local subsistence needs will be sacrificed to the larger goal of maintaining game animals for sport hunters, who may or may not be locals. In some local contexts the situation is highly racialized in that what the OFAH interprets as poaching is perceived by many Metis and First Nations individuals as an exercise of their treaty and/or constitutional rights.

The upshot of this brief discussion of the OFAH is that it cannot be understood as merely a rural organization defending the rights of small producers and workers. The kind of spatial and class analysis that has proven very useful for understanding hunting disputes elsewhere is not as useful in this case. Again, this is not, however, to argue that class has no relevance to issues such as the defense of the right to hunt.

The NOTO can, perhaps, be thought of in more straightforwardly class terms. Tourist outfitters are in essence private entrepreneurs, part of the petty bourgeoisie or middle class. Their defense of the bear hunt is at one level a defense of a class position. This is true in terms of the economic interests they have in the spring bear hunt and hunting more generally and, if the presentation by their lawyer cited above is an accurate indication, in terms of a culture in which values of independence which are expressed through hunting are highly important features. This does not mean, however, that there are not some wide variations in the actual economic circumstances faced by tourist outfitters as a group. Moreover, not all tourist outfitters are locals. Some are actually based in southern Ontario or in the US and come to

²⁶Along the north shore of Lake Superior on Highway 17 for example.

northern Ontario only for the season. NOTO claims to have 650 members who operate lodges, resorts, camps, camping and trailer parks, canoe outfitting and fly-in services. “Accommodations range from luxurious resorts to little log cabins.”²⁷ The clientele the outfitters cater to is undoubtedly as varied as the level of accommodation offered. Local petty commodity producers and workers may avail themselves of outfitters’ services. The industry works hard, however, to attract wealthy hunters from both Canadian and US urban centers.

One of the issues that complicates class analysis of disputes over resources in northern Ontario is that 90 percent of the land is crown land. Thus, unlike in much of the US, or in southern Ontario and parts of eastern Canada, where the rural population is composed of small landholders whose land may have been in the family for centuries — in other words, they may be the descendants of “Jeffersonian” hardy, independent, landowners — in northern Ontario, the history of landownership and petty commodity production is rather short and its extent limited. White settlement, beyond the few whites involved in the fur trade who lived and worked at the posts, only goes back to the latter part of the 19th-century, and the development of the current industrial base of pulp and paper, logging, mining, and transportation is mostly a product of the 20th century. Indeed, state intervention and state control of public lands was consciously employed to prevent the development of a large population of landowning farmers so that the region’s mineral, forest, and hydro-electric resources would be available to business interests, generally located outside the region. As Nelles argues in what is still the seminal work on the “development” of northern Ontario, the active state did not pursue socialist goals but was used by the southern-based business community to achieve its ends.²⁸ The anti-statist culture of frontier individualism that has been and continues to be important in many hinterland regions in the US where homesteading has been encouraged and much more of the land is held privately is not as strong in areas such as northern Ontario where the class of small landholders has always been rather restricted. Local, small-scale entrepreneurs sometimes align themselves with external corporate and state forces that control the region’s resources and economy, and sometimes they find their own interests juxtaposed to these powers.

²⁷The quote is from the NOTO web page (<http://www.noto.net>).

²⁸H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974).

The local working-class is in a somewhat similar situation. In small and medium-sized communities which are heavily dependent on a few large employers involved in resource extraction industries workers often line up with their employers in the face of perceived external threats to the viability of local mills or mines. But these communities are hardly free from internal tensions. Hunting is a popular male working-class activity. Local working-class hunters often find themselves in conflict with tourist outfitters — some of whom are not locals — over access to land, rivers, and lakes. Outfitters would like to preserve as much territory and as many licenses as possible for their paying customers, while local hunters brace at the idea of having access to crown land restricted. Local ideas about *de facto* property rights, especially with regard to crown land, do not necessarily mesh with the economic interests of tourist outfitters.²⁹

At another level it is clear that hunters and the organizations that represent them, despite their attempts to claim a subject position as a misunderstood minority, have some very powerful allies. The OFAH is, despite its dispute with the provincial government over the spring bear hunt, very close to the Ontario Conservative Party and the current Ontario government. In their quest to have hunting recognized as part of Canadian heritage, hunters groups such as the OFAH are not alone. In the fall of 2000, the province of Ontario sponsored a “Premier’s Symposium on North America’s Hunting Heritage.” The press release dated January 17, 2000 pointed out that the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources was working closely with volunteers from the Hunting Heritage/Hunting Futures initiative and the OFAH. The press release framed the symposium in the following manner:

The symposium comes at an exciting time for Ontario’s hunting community as the Ontario government completes a number of major initiatives that recognize the province’s hunting traditions and the position of hunters as pioneers of the conservation movement. In the works are a hunting strategy for the province and legislation that recognizes hunting and fishing as heritage resource-use activities that should be safeguarded.³⁰

²⁹It is also important to remember that tourist outfitters also cater to many non-hunters.

³⁰The press release was posted on the symposium’s website <http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/ps2000/media.html>.

The Ontario symposium was modeled on five previous Governor's symposia that had been held in Montana, South Dakota, Arkansas, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. At this point the legislation promised in the press release has not been presented but the model in mind is hunting heritage legislation that either already exists or is planned in several US states.³¹

Although in the arguments he presented before Justice Stach the OFAH's lawyer claimed that the role of hunting in his client's culture was the same as it was in First Nations culture, it is quite clear that when hunter's organizations talk about hunting as heritage, aboriginal culture is not one of their reference points. The symposium press release emphasizes the role of hunters in the conservation movement.

This is an opportunity to build on our traditions and to help shape hunting for the future. Nowhere in the world does the word "conservation" have more meaning than in North America. That is, in large part, because of our history of democratic access to the fish and wildlife resources of the continent. The continent's wildlife continues to flourish, largely because of the leadership and contributions of hunters and their angling counterparts.³²

The democratic access to fish and wildlife celebrated by the press release is, of course, predicated on the alienation of First Nations from the land and its wildlife resources, a process which severely undermined indigenous cultures. Groups such as the OFAH continue to closely monitor and resist the extension of hunting and fishing rights of aboriginal people.³³ In this context, the term "democratic" carries a significant connotative load. It alludes implicitly to the northern European tradition in which hunting and shooting were privileges reserved for the aristocracy. It also undoubtedly alludes as well, in the Canadian context, to the deeply critical stance white hunter's groups have taken towards aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, which they see as granting special rights on the basis of race.

³¹Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Idaho, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Wyoming, and Alabama.

³²*OFAH v. the Queen*, Proceedings, *op. cit.*

³³The OFAH was an intervenor in *R. v. Howard*, for example, a case which revolved around the aboriginal right to fish out of season. Conversations with lawyers involved with Anishinabe-Aski, an organization representing a number of First Nations in northern Ontario, reveal that the OFAH is viewed as being strongly opposed to aboriginal rights.

The Canadian Outdoor Heritage Alliance is “a national hunting, fishing, trapping advocacy organization” that is “dedicated to preserving the right to hunt, fish, and trap in Canada while promoting the responsible use of fish, game, and rights of Canadians to hunt, fish, and trap while promoting the responsible use of fish, game and fur bearer resources.” Its belief statement reads:

Hunting, fishing and trapping are woven into the very fabric of how Canada became a nation. From the early days of the coureur du bois charting the waterways of this great nation in a quest for fur and adventure to today’s reality of license fees and contributions, which form the financial backbone of most fish, game and fur bearer conservation initiatives in this country, hunting, fishing, and trapping have a place in the minds and hearts of Canadians.³⁴

There is no reference here to the thousands of years of occupation of North America by First Nations, many of which were solely or primarily dependent upon hunting and fishing for survival. This apparently is not part of the heritage or tradition that these groups wish to “preserve.”

The campaign to have the right to hunt entrenched in legislation has to be understood in the context of the real or imagined successes of environmentalists and animal rights activists in raising a critical consciousness about hunting in the broader population and the limited success aboriginal peoples have had in getting their constitutional right to hunt and fish recognized by the courts. The OFAH has a Heritage Fund, its “conservation war-chest.” The point of the fund is to help reinstate the spring bear hunt and “to protect hunting and fishing from well funded misinformation campaigns from groups like the International Fund for Animal Welfare.”³⁵ The OFAH is also opposed to Canada’s gun registration law. Apparently in some regions of Canada, there is also concern about the fact that the numbers of hunters and fishers is declining. In Quebec the government is officially worried about the potential loss of this part of its culture due to a decline in the number of hunters and fishers. It, along with the Federal Government, is examining ways to encourage young people to take up hunting and

³⁴Canadian Outdoor Heritage Alliance, “Mission Statement,” <http://www/coha.net/mission.html> (as of 20 April 2001).

³⁵OFAH opens a conservation war chest at <http://www.ofah.org/HeritageFund.htm>, (as of 10/05/99).

fishing.³⁶ The Ontario government for its part amended its *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* to include penalties for interfering with anglers and hunters and created a Hunter Apprenticeship Safety Program so that children as young as 12 may hunt, albeit with a mentor who must be at least 18 years old.³⁷

Outside of Canada there is also evidence that hunters groups are now using the discourse of culture, heritage, rights, and the need for tolerance as a defense of their activities. In some regions white hunters' culture is still hegemonic. In addition to hunting heritage legislation in various US states, there is the tragic example of the Maine housewife who in 1988 was killed by a hunter while she was standing in her backyard. The hunter, despite years of experience, had apparently mistaken her for a white-tailed deer. A grand jury failed to indict the hunter. He was a local person, while the victim was a relatively recent migrant to the region. She was the wife of a professional and they had apparently moved to Maine for several reasons including the natural beauty and simpler life they expected to find. The defendant's lawyers were able to convince the jury that even though the victim was on her own property, her behavior in essence violated the local cultural norms that prevailed during hunting season. These included the fact that although she was on her own property and only a few hundred feet from her house she was not dressed in hunters' orange. Apparently in the local culture of this region of Maine, there is a sense that during hunting season the behavior of the entire population must change to conform to the fact that hunters are about. This case condenses a number of conflicts: male hunter versus female victim, a local against an outsider, and the mobile well-educated middle-class against the less mobile locals. The struggle over the ownership and meaning of terms such as victim illustrates how white hunters and their "culture" can become symbols of local concern because of the effects of large-scale

³⁶Martin Jolicoeur, "La chasse aux chasseurs," *L'Actualité*, 25, 20, December 15, 2000, pp. 54-58.

³⁷See *Hunting Regulations 2001/2002* (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources), p. 11 for details on the program. On June 4, 2001 CBC radio in Thunder Bay announced that the Ontario government is thinking of copying a Minnesota strategy of selling lifetime hunting licences. Apparently, the Minnesota program, which has been more popular than expected, was intended to encourage more people to take up hunting. It is an age-based system. The younger the individual is when their lifetime hunting licence is purchased, the cheaper it is. According to the radio report, adults can buy hunting licences for very young children. For more information on the close relationship between the OFAH and the government of Ontario visit the following web site: <http://www.bmts.com>.

processes that appear to undermine local residents' influence and control over their "own" space.³⁸ Thus, although in Canada and the US the hunting lobby might now adopt the language of a "minority" that needs the state to protect it in the name of human rights and tolerance, it has friends in powerful places and in some local contexts remains a hegemonic force.

White hunters do not represent a repressed minority, although it is true that hunting is a minority activity. Nor can the dispute over hunting be reduced to an expression of a class struggle between rural small producers and workers and an urban-based professional middle class charmed by an image of forests full of "Bambis." There is undoubtedly some regional conflict involved. According to a Canadian national survey conducted in 1996, 37.3 percent of those who participated in hunting lived in rural areas while 62.7 percent lived in urban areas. By comparison only 17.9 of those who participated in wildlife viewing were rural residents, as opposed to 82.1 percent who were urban dwellers.³⁹ Clearly, in percentage terms, hunting is far more popular in rural areas than it is among the urban population. The percentage of hunters in Ontario is far higher in the north than in the south. One third of those who hold hunting cards in the province live in northern Ontario, even though the region contains only about one-tenth of the population of the province.⁴⁰ On the other hand, there are many hunters from the urbanized southern part of the province and the OFAH

³⁸Mari Boor Tonn, Valerie A. Endress, and John N. Diamond, "Hunting and Heritage on Trial: A Dramatistic Debate Over Tragedy, Tradition, and Territory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 79, 1993. In this struggle over space, even terms like "backyard" became highly charged symbols. At least one newspaper editor, sympathetic to the hunter, would not allow the term "backyard" to be used to describe where the victim was standing when she was shot, even though she was on her own property behind her house. The sense of hunter's control over space during the hunting season is apparently quite deep: "To many, Wood's [the victim] mere presence outside during hunting season was sufficient indication that she was *not* innocent of the danger surrounding her" (p. 172).

³⁹Environment Canada, *The Importance of Nature to Canadians: Survey Highlights* (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1999), p. 9, Table 1.

⁴⁰The information upon which this statement is based was provided by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. In the fall of 2000, 141,372 of the 422,963 hunting cards held in the province belonged to people with household postal codes that began with the letter P. This corresponds closely to the part of Ontario that is considered by the provincial government to be the north.

draws members from all over. There are rural-versus-urban and north-versus-south dimensions to the bear hunting controversy but the issue involves far more than these variables.

5. White Hunters and Tradition

By now there has been enough work done on the question of invented traditions to recognize that the reality of claims about cultural legitimacy and the meaning they have in terms of cultural politics rarely can be settled simply by reference to the “true facts.” This does not mean, however, that we should not at least consider the extent to which current hunting practices are a survival or reflection of some deep historical practice and the extent to which they are a recent cultural artifact and reflection of contemporary culture. There is not space here to provide a detailed history. Nonetheless, there are some observations that can be made that at least throw doubt on the claim that current sport hunting is the continuation of a long tradition among white males in contemporary Canada.

We should begin by distinguishing different kinds of hunting. Firstly, there is the tradition of elite hunting, the historic roots of which lie in the restrictive hunting legislation and game preserves created by the European aristocracy. This mostly northern European tradition is not particularly relevant to the hunting practices in contemporary Canada, although the tradition of “crown lands” can be said in a sense to have its origins in the medieval system of royal control of forests and other resources. However, the notions of conservation and environment that current hunters invoke have as much to do with rather recent developments in sciences such as ecology and forest management as they do with longstanding traditions of aristocratic hunting. There is nonetheless still a tradition of wealthy hunters who keep cottages or lodges in hunting territories throughout the US and Canada. Hunting is both a form of personal pleasure and of entertaining family, friends, and business associates.⁴¹

Secondly, there is tourist industry hunting. This overlaps with elite hunting in that to some extent the international class of wealthy outdoorsmen is one of its key markets. But we need to distinguish between an industry that is devoted to the provision of hunting and fishing expeditions, often in search of “trophy” animals, to paying tourists, and both the wealthy and non-wealthy hunters whose

⁴¹Clothing and equipment retailers such as L.L.Bean and Abercrombie and Fitch have traded in this image of the wealthy pursuing outdoor leisure pursuits.

livelihoods are not dependent on hunting. There is, of course, a range of touristic hunting — from relatively low-brow fly-in camps that appeal to a working-class market, to those that offer remote and exotic settings and are aimed at a very wealthy elite. The latter may involve as one of its attractions an experience of an indigenous culture, through interactions with native guides and perhaps “traditional” cultural performances. Hunting in this case is a commodity, a niche in the global entertainment market. For the owners and operators of these commercialized hunting camps and lodges hunting is business.

Thirdly, there is the local middle-and working-class hunting. This consists mostly of day or weekend trips out to local bush roads and clearings that have been produced by the forest, mining, and transportation industries. To some extent, this kind of hunting can be traced to local rural “traditions” but in another sense neither this nor the second kind of hunting I have described can really be said to be very old, at least not among the white population in northern Ontario.

Ethnologists such as Bertrand Hell have insisted that contemporary hunting practices in Europe be understood as meaningful cultural systems in the present world rather than historical survivals of an earlier time.⁴² The same is true of contemporary white hunting in Canada. Hunting by white men in areas such as northern Ontario is a product of industrialization and the postwar Fordist compromise that brought relative affluence to unionized, male workers, in the transportation, mining and forest industries. At an individual level, it requires a significant investment in licenses, equipment, vehicles, campers, and supplies.⁴³ It is also dependent upon the industrial resource extraction industry that has created the network of bush roads, pipelines, and rail beds that hunters cruise in their vehicles or walk in their search for game. What Fine says about hunting among Michigan autoworkers, can be applied to areas such as northern Ontario: “Even though workers hunted both before and after World War II, the war represented a watershed for the popularity and extent of this outdoor activity for auto men.”⁴⁴ Given the relatively recent development of the industrial working-class in northern Ontario, especially in the transportation,

⁴²Hell, *op. cit.*

⁴³In my experience, the high cost of wild game and fish is the subject of many jokes. In most of the larger communities, it is cheaper to buy beef, pork, chicken, and fish at a grocery store than it is to replace this meat with hunted or fished produce.

⁴⁴Lisa M. Fine, “Rights of Men, Rites of Passage: Hunting and Masculinity and REO Motors of Lansing, Michigan, 1945-1975,” *Journal of Social History*, 33, 4, Summer 2000, p. 805.

mining and forestry industries, the hunting “tradition” among many working-class individuals cannot go back very far before World War II, and in its current form is highly dependent on the high incomes that characterized some kinds of working-class employment beginning in the 1950s. Moreover, the white population in the region is descended from a mix of European immigrants but with very large Italian, Eastern European, and Finnish elements. Many of the white communities were strongly divided along ethnic lines until the years after World War II when declining immigration from Europe, assimilation, and postwar consumer society eroded the social, economic, and cultural significance of European ethnicity. It was only in the postwar era that local populations began to identify themselves more clearly as white in opposition to the First Nations and other aboriginal populations.⁴⁵ Whatever the hunting traditions of these immigrants and their offspring were would presumably have to be located in the European countries of origin if they are to legitimately be said to go back more than three generations.

One also should not discount the influence of the marketing strategies of equipment manufacturers. Hunters represent an important market for arms manufacturers and the producers of four-wheel and two-wheel drive light trucks, campers, tents, outboard motors, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, camping equipment and clothing. In the 1950s and 60s, advertisers explicitly drew connections between fatherhood, masculinity, and the technologically proficient outdoorsman who knew how to use the latest gadgetry.⁴⁶

The point is not that hunting was only recently invented as an activity of white men. However, contemporary white male hunting culture must be understood within a broader range of social and economic changes that have allowed the sport to have its current form and social base. An analogous cultural example from the US may be the “gun culture” that is vigorously defended by groups such as the National Rifle Association as a longstanding cultural tradition and political right. Arguably, it is better understood as a more recent

⁴⁵See Thomas Dunk, *It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-Class Culture in Northwestern Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991) and David Stymeist, *Ethnics and Indians: Social Relations in a Northwestern Ontario Town* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1975). In northeastern Ontario the white population remains divided along linguistic lines — French versus English.

⁴⁶Robert Rutherford, “Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the Good Life During Canada's Baby Boom, 1945-1965,” *Journal of Family History*, 24,3, July 1999.

creation of the industrialized arms business. The use of mass production techniques in weapons manufacturing, beginning with the Civil War, generated the need for a mass market. Advertisers used the “myth” of American traditions of gun ownership and political rights to help sell weapons.⁴⁷ Similarly, today a range of capitalist businesses — from tourist outfitters through to arms manufacturers — have an interest in promoting hunting as a means to enhance their market and reference to “tradition” and “heritage” is one way of doing so.

In the current political and cultural context, the idea of hunting as a longstanding tradition and heritage elides with a longing for an imagined previous world where things were easier for white men. The frequent references to the linkages between hunting and family and community values in hunters’ discourse connote a time before there were environmentalists and gun control activists out to place limitations on the activities of white men. It is also explicitly an effort to conjure back the times when men supposedly were independent and self-sufficient, a time when “we” could feed ourselves. These are themes common to current neo-conservative rhetoric, especially that which links perceived current social and economic problems to the 1960s when the so-called new social movements began. This discourse resonates in hinterland regions where economic and social dislocation is common (the new social movements have, to a large extent, ignored many of the problems in these areas). It misidentifies, however, the larger economic and political forces that underlie the difficulties hinterland regions have experienced in the last twenty years. The fundamental causes of hardship are not new hunting regulations or aboriginal rights. They are, rather, the erosion of the social programs and the industries that were once the foundation of places such as northern Ontario in the face of the attack on the welfare state, and of economic globalization. In addition, technological developments and past poor resource management strategies have undermined the economic advantages that the natural environment once provided for industries in these regions.⁴⁸

6. New Age Hunters?

Lisa Fine begins her fascinating article on hunting and masculinity among the autoworkers of Lansing, Michigan with a scene from Ben

⁴⁷Michael A. Bellesîles, “The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760-1865,” *The Journal of American History*, 83, September 1996.

⁴⁸For a discussion of what was happening to the Canadian and international forest industry in the 1990s see M. Patricia Marchak, *Logging the Globe* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

Hamper's book, *Rivthead*, a biographical account of growing up in an autoworker's household and work and life in and around an auto plant. Hamper's description of the culture of autoworkers is revealing, amusing at points, but also highly critical. The passage Fine uses is one in which Hamper is confronted by a co-worker who is an avid hunter about a piece Hamper published in a local magazine. The article depicted hunting and hunters in a less than flattering manner. The co-worker is described by Hamper as six feet two, 245 pounds, a former Marine and member of the NRA. He confronts Hamper, refers to him as a "dumb cunt," and informs him that "faggots" are at the top of the list of things he enjoys killing. As Fine points out, the episode illustrates how deeply the worker is invested in his identity as a hunter, and given the sexist and homophobic language he uses, how important hunting is to his masculine identity.⁴⁹

This startling portrayal of the working-class redneck hunter fits well with a stereotypical image that is common in Canadian and US culture. As with many stereotypes, this one contains a grain of truth, or at least one can find individual examples that would seem to confirm it. As I have been arguing, though, "reality" is far more complicated than such commonplace images suggest. Hunters' organizations are now very conscious of the importance of projecting an image that is palatable to the wider public. The redneck working-class hunter has little place in the imagery that organizations such the OFAH are promoting.

Of course, the ideals regarding masculinity in the larger culture are not static. In the current conjuncture, an older, hegemonic masculinity is increasingly under question and, in turn, is being transformed even as it is defended and reasserted. The new-age Men's movement has been particularly active in trying to present an image of men as victims of an oppressive culture, a culture that demands of them forms of behavior which involve alienation from their essential selves. This discourse involves a double movement. On the one hand, it celebrates the "softer" side of men — their spirituality, their need for emotional expression, and their "wounds." On the other hand, it defends the male "need" to express a "hard" edge by getting in touch with the "darkness" inside themselves, and rediscovering the "warrior within." The claim that men are victims too and that they have a need and a right to express their essential nature is part of a strategy that allows white men to reclaim

⁴⁹Fine, *op. cit.*, p. 805. The scene she discusses is to be found in Ben Hamper, *Rivthead: Tales from the Assembly Line* (New York: Warner Books, 1991), pp. 135-139.

some of their lost prestige, status and power in a world where the interests, rights, and cultural values of formerly subordinate segments of the population have much more influence than they once did.⁵⁰

The arguments about the right to hunt that are being employed by organizations such as the OFAH and the NOTO must be seen within the context of this highly volatile discursive, political, and economic struggle over the meaning of masculinity. They are working to transform an image of the white male hunter: rather than the redneck worker encountered by Ben Hamper, he is a spiritual, family man, trying to express his essential being and his connectedness to nature.

The OFAH is very concerned about negative stereotypes of hunters. It is working hard to sell an image of a hunter as a conservationist and family man who, in and through hunting, is expressing an innate, masculine characteristic. The elements of the discourse about hunting, conservation, and spirituality can be traced to the beginnings of the conservation movement in North America. However, in its current form it, consciously or not, parallels themes found in the ideology of the men's movement. These, in turn, echo discredited ideas from 1960s debates between anthropologists about "man the hunter."

Timothy Luke has recently discussed the importance of hunting to such well-known conservationists as Aldo Leopold.⁵¹ The desire to preserve game for hunting, to manage it much in the manner foresters were learning to manage forests so as to measure and produce sustained annual yields, lay behind Leopold's interest and concern with conservation. According to Luke, the National Wildlife Federation in the US was dominated in its early years by what he calls the "outdoorsmanish" interests of hunters and anglers. The goal was to control "slob hunting" that was premised on the combined notions of limitless natural bounty and the use of the most efficient or easiest killing techniques so as to produce meat, hides, and fur for the market or to

⁵⁰The most widely known of the new-age Men's movement books is probably Robert Bly's *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990). For an insightful and critical analysis of the men's movement see Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (New York: Verso, 1995), and Andrew Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society* (New York: Verso, 1994).

⁵¹Timothy W. Luke, "The Pleasures of Use: Federalizing Wilds, Nationalizing Life at the National Wildlife Federation," *CNS*, 12, 1, March, 2001, especially pp. 18-28.

eliminate wild pests or resource competitors. Conservation of game stocks for future generations of hunters was not a concern.

Apparently, hunting was experienced as something akin to a religious phenomenon by people like Leopold and hunters were thus presumed to have a unique relationship with and a concern for nature that non-hunters did not have. This is the tradition that groups such as the OFAH are operating within. It is not particularly old, and in fact represents a rather marked break with that older tradition of “slob hunting.” In this sense, the conservationist/hunter might be better thought of as a critic of rather than the descendant of the “true” white man’s hunting heritage. This conservationist/hunter perspective is clearly based upon ideas and practices of government which, while they may have their origins with various features of the Enlightenment, came to have a reality only with the developments of Fordism or “organized capitalism” which begin in the 1920s. These developments were stimulated by the Great Depression of the 1930s, the national-level planning that developed to meet the economic and social demands of the military in World War II, and the rise of the welfare state. They are consistent with the Fordist-era ideals of rational consumerism, in the sense both of generating markets for mass produced goods (guns, vehicles, hunting equipment), producing “wildlife” as a consumable commodity for hunters, and producing rational, dependable workers.

In the present cultural climate, the discourse about the spirituality of hunting must be understood in relationship to the men’s movement which, like the pro-hunting movement, also tends to see men as victims of the era of so-called political correctness. Bly, for example, in his best selling book, *Iron John*, presents contemporary men as essentially alienated from themselves, and needing to rediscover their true inner self, their essence through a process that involves coming to recognize their wound and the “warrior within,” a move similar to the idea that there is a “hunter within.”

The philosophical defense of hunting is premised on an essentialist anthropological understanding of male human nature. In brief, the argument goes something as follows: Given that for most of the history of our species hunting was an important male activity, men have evolved to be hunters. Civilization has tended to reduce the economic role of and the cultural esteem attached to hunting. This cultural development has led to male alienation from their species being. Hunting is also said to involve intimate interactions with nature. Indeed, non-hunters are by definition alienated from nature since the acts of hunting and killing, which at one time involved the danger of being hunted and killed oneself, had to instill respect for nature. Hunting is,

thus, said to be one of the primordial ways of relating to the natural world and to one's basic nature. To not hunt is to be disconnected from the natural world and from one's true essence.⁵²

In the 1960s anthropologists debated the importance and role of hunting in human evolution. "Man the hunter" was the subject of a famous conference and the publication that emerged from this conference generated much heated discussion. Feminist anthropologists vigorously critiqued this one-sided view of the evolution of the human species and pointed out that even in hunting and gathering societies, gathering, the majority of which was done by women and children, was far more important in terms of its contribution to subsistence than was hunting. In any event, even those anthropologists who emphasized the role of hunting in human evolution discussed its importance in the development of behavioral patterns such as cooperation and sharing. They did not present hunting as a genetic imperative.⁵³ Even if one accepts that natural selection would have favored males who were good hunters, it is a blatant example of mechanistic and essentialist thinking to suggest that behavioral traits that were selected for by past forms of social organization and subsistence patterns have now become fixed characteristics that societies need to arrange themselves around. The point of the concept of natural selection understood as a dialectical relationship between organisms and their environment — which for humans includes culture, society, and nature — is that neither the organism nor the environment is fixed.⁵⁴ Their mutual interactions over time lead to continuous, albeit uneven, change. Given that human culture and social organization are relatively flexible, compared to the much slower process of biological evolution, humans have the capacity to change behavioral patterns relatively quickly. This has been demonstrated historically many times. Thus, the notion that buried deep inside every man is a hunter waiting to emerge and rediscover his place

⁵²For a review and critique of the "primitivist" defence of hunting see Roger J.H. King, "Environmental Ethics and the Case for Hunting," *Environmental Ethics*, 13, 1, 1991, especially pp. 70-84.

⁵³Sherwood L. Washburn and C.S. Lancaster, "The Evolution of Hunting," and William S. Laughlin, "Hunting: an Integrating Biobehavior System and Its Evolutionary Importance." Both essays are in Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore, eds., *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968). A classic critique of the man-the-hunter hypothesis is Sally Slocum, "Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology," in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

⁵⁴See Foster *op.cit.* pp.190ff. for a clear discussion of how Darwinian ideas about natural selection undermined essentialist and teleological arguments.

in the natural world is weak thinking even if for a long period of human evolution societies required males who could hunt.⁵⁵

Of course, modern men's groups which are trying to deal with male alienation from their supposed true inner selves search about for representative cultures where, they imagine, men are still "real" men because they have remained in touch with their essential masculinity -- hence, the popularity in the Canadian and US men's movement of the signs and symbols of more "primitive" cultures. An emphasis on drumming and on rituals of self-discovery that are based, however loosely and inaccurately, on the cultural practices of indigenous tribal societies is common. They are yet other versions of mimicry and ventriloquism employed by white men to try and locate themselves and provide meaning for their own lives in postmodern society.⁵⁶

Hunting enthusiasts do not shy away from making some huge claims regarding the socially redeeming value of hunting. A bumper sticker I recently observed stated, "Kids who hunt, fish, and trap don't kill old ladies."⁵⁷ The opening speaker at the OFAH's 2001 annual

⁵⁵It is worth noting that in his article on sex differences in brain size, C. Davison Ankney offers the following explanation for why male brains are larger than female brains: "...women (at least in Western cultures) excel in verbal ability, perceptual speed, and motor coordination within personal space; men do better on various spatial tests and on tests of mathematical reasoning. Perhaps these sex differences in mental abilities are related to proportional differences in brain mass. Two conditions are required for this to be true: (a) natural selection over the course of human evolution produced a dichotomy in abilities between the sexes, and (b) the abilities at which men excel, for example, spatial ability require more brain tissue to accomplish. There is evidence to suggest the first condition is true. The differing roles of men and women during human evolution, for example, men, but not women, hunting far from home, should have selected for greater navigational (spatial) ability in men..." (Ankney, *op. cit.*, p. 335).

⁵⁶See Pfeil, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷The corporate sponsor listed on this particular bumper sticker was Fur Harvesters Auction, Inc., North Bay, Ontario. Immediately below this sticker was another: "Go Bankless, Go Credit Union." The latter hints at a rural populist political consciousness, one which has undoubted progressive possibilities, but also sees government regulations as forms of oppression — presumably this would extend to state hunting regulations as well. My neighbour's pick-up truck sports his OFAH membership stickers and along with others that read "Remember Bill C-68 [Canada's most recent gun control legislation] when you vote." So again, one cannot dismiss the class element, although the issue cannot be sufficiently understood through a class analysis.

conference was Randall Eaton, a resident of Oregon. His talk was entitled “Is Hunting Good Medicine for Bad Kids?” His answer, not surprisingly, was yes. Drawing on essentialist ideas about masculinity and human nature, he claims that “inner hunters exist in all males and that civilization hasn’t eliminated the need to kill animals.” In a rather extreme version of the idea that a hard wilderness experience is good for people, especially problem youth, Mr. Eaton’s suggested program involves a two-week survival camp in the bush where the participants must kill their own food.⁵⁸ Such programs have clear affinities with both the contemporary Men’s Movement’s fascination with wilderness retreats in which men are to find and celebrate the darkness inside themselves and that older tradition of celebrating and appropriating the Noble Savage so as to better live peacefully and productively in the contemporary world.

My point is not to imply that in reality hunters actually are “rednecks.” Rather I wish to draw attention to the way in which the discourse promoting the right to hunt elides with the arguments defending ideas about the essential characteristics of manliness. In my experience relatively few hunters, at least in northern Ontario, see themselves as “new age” men. Yet, ironically, they are drawing upon ideas about what it means to be a man that are very similar to those employed by the late 20th century mytho-poetic men’s movement.

7. Conclusions

It would be wrong to argue that the idea that hunting is part of a white male cultural tradition is a mere fabrication. Hunting has been a part of European cultures for thousands of years, although in most regions it has been a very minor activity, and it certainly has not been central to either physical or cultural survival since the agricultural revolution came to Europe. The current claims being made in Ontario about the nature of hunting, hunters’ relationship to wildlife, their role in conservation, and hunting’s importance to a whole way of life must be seen as the product of a set of practices, ideas and discursive strategies that are very much a creation of the 20th century. In this sense hunting today is hardly a traditional activity.

Of course, the larger issue is that debates about what a “real” as opposed to a “false” customary practice may foreground the fact that this kind of identity politics is a quagmire which ultimately cannot generate social or environmental justice. The dispute about the spring

⁵⁸Colin Freeze, “Hunting can tame wild boys, speaker says,” *Globe and Mail*, Saturday, February 24, 2001, p. A19.

bear hunt and hunting as heritage in Ontario provides another example of the limitations of identity politics when applied to environmental issues. Some subordinate groups have gained moral and political mileage through emphasizing their unique relationship to the natural world. The example discussed here illustrates that this strategy can be adopted by dominant as well as subordinate groups. While the court is still literally out regarding the success of white hunters' legal arguments about their right to hunt, it is clear that they can muster powerful allies to support their claims to historical and cultural legitimacy. Meanwhile the larger economic and ecological issues that impinge upon the entire society, especially on regions that historically have had close involvement in the direct appropriation of the natural world, go largely unexamined. The need for a political and ecological discourse that transcends divisive identity issues and creates a space for an inclusive discussion of meaningful social, economic and ecological sustainability and equality remains. Killing more bears will not solve the problems that beset the rural and northern regions of Ontario.

