Young

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Reflexive tradition

Young working-class hunters between wolves and modernity

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Abstract

This article is based on a qualitative study of young working-class men who are dedicated hunters and hardcore wolf adversaries. Our aim is to make sense of their attitudes and practices regarding the re-appearance of wolves. They see the wolves as impeding their life projects: being hunters and outdoorsmen. Therefore, we discuss attitude formation in the light of theories of identity, paying special attention to the idea that identity formation is strongly affected by individualization in 'late modernity'. Norwegian media tend to depict rural ways of life as rooted in traditionalism, implying an antagonism between the modern and the traditional along an urban–rural axis. Yet, even if important choices made by the young men include distinct elements of local tradition, these choices are no less reflexive than those made by more mobile peers. The article argues that the young hunters are simultaneously traditional and modern and that they transgress such artificial antagonisms through their everyday practices.

Keywords

young hunters, individualization, identity, tradition, working-class culture, wolfs

H e wears tattered jeans and heavy boots, a dirty old baseball cap, a green hunting jacket, a fleece sweater and a checkered shirt. He has not shaved for a while. He is a local patriot with a working-class background and a strong interest in hunting, dogs and weapons. He has not got much education himself, although he may be a skilled worker, and he readily accepts temporary work if nothing else is available. And he hates wolves.

You probably recognize the stereotypical rural young man. This article is about him — or rather about a network of young men who through their style and life projects resemble this clichéd representation of masculinity in rural areas. 'Our' young man *Frank* is living in a forest community in south-eastern Norway. Now, in his late twenties, he is going through a transition from youth to adulthood and has recently established himself with a wife, a baby, a dog, a house and a car. All his life he has lived in the same small forest community. He has a working-class background and has never completed any education exceeding the compulsory nine years. Today he is employed as an assistant in the social sector.

Over the years Frank has seen many of his childhood peers leave the area for education or work, and he has observed that they do not return. Yet he has stayed behind. He is not alone in this, however, and he has daily contact with a fairly large network of like-minded 'stayers'. They, too, are young working-class men who share Frank's clothing style, his passion for hunting and his attitudes towards large carnivores. Some, like Frank, have just started families. Their greatest concern these days is the re-appearance of wolves in their forests.

In the last half of the 1990s, the number of wolves increased significantly in south-eastern Norway. During the winter of 1999–2000, two packs settled in Stor-Elvdal (Aronsen et al., 2000). These were part of a Swedish-Norwegian wolf population that had recovered from the brink of total extinction (Vila et al., 2003). In some segments of the community, the arrival of wolves was perceived as no less than a threat to the rural way of life. Sheep farmers claimed that their livelihood was in jeopardy. Potentially declining moose stocks were seen as a threat to the availability of good moose for hunting, and to the landowners' revenue from hunting leases. Shortly after the wolves appeared, there were several attacks on hunting dogs and some were killed. And, of course, there was the age-old fear of wolves. Consequently, conflicts soon flourished, and Frank and his friends saw this development as a threat to the totality of their lives.

THEORETICAL BACKDROP

Our aim is an improved understanding of the social mechanisms that underlie the hostile attitudes towards wolves displayed by Frank and his friends. Based on life history interviews and fieldwork, we will present the young men's own interpretation of their situations. By combining life history data and perspectives on general historical developments, we will suggest some theoretical approaches that can help us understand the challenges they face. To that end, we need to get a grip on the *socio-structural processes* that shape the context for these young men's everyday practices. Two issues have received considerable attention in recent research on young people in rural areas: the process of identity formation and the process of social exclusion

or marginalization have been seen as heavily influenced by large-scale processes of social change in contemporary modernity (cf. Helve, 2000, Heggen et al., 2003). We will comment on both issues and as they figure prominently in the literature that postulates the emergence of a new type of modernity, we will develop our perspective in a discussion with authors like Zygmunt Bauman (on marginalization) and Anthony Giddens (on identity).

As our hunters are going through the final phase of their transition into adulthood, they are in a position that is particularly sensitive to structural changes; living in a community that has wide-ranging change in its economic base, the young hunters cannot expect to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers as loggers or workers in the local sawmill. Hence, they are directly confronted with contemporary social change. They are forced to reflect upon their own desires for the future. We argue that the controversy over wolves is a case in point that can throw light upon processes of social change that greatly affect the lives of young people in rural areas. Taking this as our point of departure, we will explore the strengths and limitations of theories of late modernity through discussions of identity, self-identity, mobility, place attachment, reflexivity and the resilience of rural working-class culture.

Immobile working-class men

'You can call me a local patriot', Frank said at the beginning of the first interview, 'if you go 10 km north and 10 km south — that's about it — you've reached the limits of the area where I am willing to live my life'. Frank is not exactly mobile. He is strongly attached to the place where he was brought up and he has never had any plans to leave it. According to central conceptualizations of modernity in its present state, Frank and the others may seem outdated in their strong affection for the home village.

Bauman (1992: 695) suggests that 'The urge for mobility, built into the structure of contemporary life, prevents the arousal of strong affections for any [place]; places we occupy are no more than temporary stations'. An undermining of strong commitment to any locality seems to be a direct consequence of the general modernization process described by Bauman. In the post-modern epoch, culture is understood to be a celebration of a consumption that has individualized lifestyle choices and mobility as core elements. Furthermore, globalization is a dividing process as much as a unifying one. It creates new forms of social division. According to Bauman (1998:2), the ability to move is becoming 'the main stratifying factor in our late-modern or post-modern times', making mobility one of the most desirable assets. As capitalism moves towards weaker bonds between corporations and local communities, people who for some reason stay behind become vulnerable. 'The company is free to move; but the consequences of the move are bound to stay. Whoever is free to run away from the locality, is free to run away from the consequences' (Bauman, 1998: 8–9). Therefore, to be bound to any locality, to be a 'stayer', may be seen as a sign of marginalization. The risk of facing such marginalization would seem to be greater in rural districts, where the labour market is more limited than in urban areas.

Norwegian public debate has indeed demonstrated concern for rural 'stayers'. As the rural labour market is becoming more difficult, it has been argued, young men without academic training will lose in the competition for jobs (Magnussen, 1995). The media tend to create an image of a countryside filled with young, poorly educated

working-class men, who — while driving aimlessly around in cars — are parasites on their parents and the social security system. There is an obvious gender dimension to these concerns. The number of jobs in agriculture, forestry and manufacturing is decreasing, while the number of jobs in the private and public service sectors has, at least to this point, been increasing (Statistics Norway, 2002a). Typical jobs for men are disappearing, but within the modern welfare state the number of service jobs is still high, so there is an ample supply of jobs that have typically been occupied by women.

On identity: The individualization hypothesis

Identity is a concept with two quite distinct dimensions. At one level it refers to identification with something collective, cultural or social. At another level it denotes a sense of something individual, a *self*, and a sense of *continuity* within that self. According to Georg Herbert Mead (1962), *the self* is a product of a socialization process that takes place in a local context — situated in time and space — where children grow into society by gradually learning to take the perspective of the other. The constantly ongoing interaction with *the significant other* creates a child that in a strong sense comes to resemble the socialization agents.

The 'high priests' of the so-called post-, high-, or late-modern epoch have all been preoccupied with individualization, and identity seems to be a core concept. In the later work of Giddens, for example, contrary to Mead's conceptualization of a socially determined self, identity formation is no longer situated in a local context. Heavy structural changes labelled *separation of time and space* and *disembedding mechanisms* 'propel social life away from the hold of pre-established precepts or practices' (Giddens, 1991: 20) and remove the objects of identification from local society. This situation poses a great challenge for modern youth. The ongoing individualization process is leaving social background factors and the traditionally important social agents as less influential on young people's choice of life track than they used to be. The late-modern individual is condemned to autonomy. People are not determined by structure in their struggle to achieve a sense of self. They must choose from a large range of possible identities or they can create altogether new identities. Identity formation becomes a reflexive process, identity becomes *self-identity*.

On habitus: Reproduction of localized class culture

The concept of late modernity is, of course, subject to discussion. Empirical research has demonstrated that fundamental social categories are forces of continuity. Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel concluded a review that 'old' background factors such as class and gender are still structuring the lives of young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Indeed, sociology offers a range of concepts aimed at understanding social and cultural reproduction. One of the most elaborate theoretical approaches is to be found in the works of Pierre Bourdieu. The concept of *habitus* is a theoretical antagonism to the idea of self-identity, such as it appears in the writings of Anthony Giddens and other authors in the 'reflexive modernity' tradition (cf. Giddens, 1991; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994). Habitus consists of previously established categories of

perception, which create an inner felt understanding of what is valuable and what is not, and which guide or even determine people's everyday preferences and practices (Bourdieu, 1984). The term also underpins, in contrast to self-identity, an interpretation of the social world in which practices are heavily ingrained in time and space — far from 'disembedded' — and where everyday choices are seen as expressions of power rela-tions. Desires and tastes vary throughout the social stratification system. The highly socialized *habitus* drives people to act in accordance with values and tastes that are valid according to their social position. The term refers to a collective level: habitus is the property of classes and class fractions. Therefore, the practices that constitute the concrete expressions of habitus are elements of *class cultures*. Hypothetically, anti-carnivore attitudes can be interpreted, at least partly, as an end-product of a socialization process and thus woven into more general and often class-specific value sets.

Rural 'stayers': Marginalized and traditional or well adapted and modern?

Bauman and others have claimed that mobility, in the context of 'the new modernity', is increasingly valued as an asset in itself (Bauman, 1992; Friedman, 1997; Olwig, 1997). Youth researchers have identified significant variation in rural young people's mode of attachment to their home place, and claim that 'social and spatial mobility have challenged the traditional links between identity and place' (Wiborg, 2004: 429). Home place may still be important to young people in their identity formation, notably in conjunction with gender and class, but presently more as a social construction than as a concrete locality experienced in a physical sense. Agnete Wiborg (2004) studied students who had moved from rural areas to a city, but 'the rural' may predominantly be a cultural construction for rural dwellers as well. Gry Paulgaard (2002) found that myths about rural life in Northern Norway are frequently rejected due to young people's desire to be modern. In another study, Paulgaard (2006) described how the same myths were components in new and ironic constructions of local rurality.

Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed (1997) argue that authors writing about rural identities frequently reinforce a notion of the urban/rural axis as corresponding to a traditional/modern opposition. This not only contributes to the perpetuation of a stereotypical understanding of the rural as rustic, it also contributes to preserving a cultural hierarchy where the rural is positioned below the urban. However, such con-structions do not only appear in scholarly writing. They may also be used as weapons of resistance, for example, in an effort to radically alter such cultural hierarchies.

It may be that a strong local attachment and a firmly rooted rural identity are as flexible as any manifestation of dedication to urbanity. Processes that motivate people to strive for 'a good life' in the rural community where they grew up may possibly stimu-late life course choices that are adequate responses to the challenges of contem-porary society. Interviewing and spending time with Frank and his friends reinforced our doubts about 'stayers' as being necessarily non-modern. Perhaps 'staying' could equally well be interpreted as a strategy to realize a modern life project and to avoid marginalization.

RESEARCH ISSUES, DATA AND LOCALITY

Our ambition is two-fold. First, we want to understand the current life situation of these rural young men. Their interpretation and handling of the wolf situation is a lynchpin in this analysis. Second, we want to use this insight to comment upon some central contributions to the interpretation of modernity in its present state. In this discussion, we will attempt to put to productive use the tension between the two theoretical perspectives outlined earlier.

Sample and methodological approach

The primary data source for this article is a network of young hunters in Stor-Elvdal, Norway. Data were collected by way of life history interviews and participatory field observation. The network members were mostly recruited as a sub-sample from a larger research project called *Land Use Conflicts in Rural Areas* (see Skogen, 2001; Skogen and Krange, 2003). Seven of the network members participated in full, taped interviews, but in the course of the fieldwork we observed and talked to many others. By combining interviews and fieldwork observation we got detailed information about the young men's life histories as well as their everyday practices.

The larger *Land Use Conflicts* project also included several other informant categories and Stor-Elvdal was only one of three study localities. The other two were Trysil and Elverum; municipalities located in the same part of south-eastern Norway.

The methodological design for the research was guided by proposals given by French sociologist Daniel Bertaux. He suggests that qualitative *life history interviews* constitute an appropriate methodological approach to uncover social structures (Bertaux, 1982; Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). Daniel Bertaux (Bertaux, 1982; Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiam, 1981) argues that if informants are recruited from a well-defined field of practice, life history interviews can provide data that facilitate analyses dealing with social problems on a higher level than mere individual experiences. The key concept is *saturation*. When the researcher reaches the point where new informants add nothing to the variation of life patterns, it is probable that the informants can be taken to represent others that belong in the same situational category (Bertaux, 1982; Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). However, Bertaux recommends that this research strategy should be limited to the study of social milieus that are constituted around a common activity, for instance, a profession or significant leisure activity.

While the combination of fieldwork and life history interviews provides rich data and is well suited to the analysis of meaning, our network of hunters in Stor-Elvdal was not big enough to meet Bertaux's saturation criteria. To solve this problem, we included interviews with young male hunters from similar milieus from two other study localities. While these interviews were generally not supplemented by systematic observation, they increased the number of informants significantly and enabled us to validate the data collected in Stor-Elvdal. This strategy provided further 33 interviews from Elverum and eight from Trysil. Some of the informants from Elverum and most of the informants from Trysil were younger than those from Stor-Elvdal, but they were all in different stages of what we may term a transitional phase stretching from late teens into young adulthood. Our interpretations of the Stor-Elvdal material are

substantiated by the additional interviews, to an extent where we can be confident that further data collection would provide limited new insight.

Regarding the two additional study localities, it is sufficient to say that they are more economically and demographically complex than Stor-Elvdal, with larger and more urban centres and a modern service-sector economy. However, they also comprise many small rural communities, and the presence of cultural configurations among younger people similar to those found in Stor-Elvdal was evident (Skogen, 2001).

The carnivore issue has been a source of fervent debate in the region and one might think that most people have taken a clear stance in the matter. But in the interview sessions we soon observed that many people presented themselves as holding relatively complex and 'politically correct' views. While this obviously reflects the considerable diversity of opinion that exists in communities affected by carnivore problems (contrary to simplified media images) (Skogen and Haaland, 2001; Skogen and Krange, 2003; Skogen et al., 2003), we also got the impression that some informants dissembled their true feelings about wolves in the context of taped interviews. In an effort to penetrate such reticence, we decided to approach the life-world of a selected category of informants through fieldwork. With Frank as our guide and door opener, we took part in a series of different hunting and outdoor activities. Frank's house is a place where the men in his network regularly drop by. Spending evenings with him, we met his friends and participated in their conversations at his kitchen table. Between visits, we stayed in touch by phone and Frank reported on the general state of things at his end.

The young men did not form a social group in any strong sense. There were no distinct boundaries between them and the rest of the community. However, using snowballing as our sampling method, we always asked informants to supply us with new contacts, which usually resulted in the repetition of a limited number of names. In a sense, this is also a form of saturation and it confirmed our impression of a tightly knit network which was nevertheless fully integrated in the larger community.

Big river valley

In line with Bertaux's methodological approach, it is necessary to highlight some of the structure and historical development within the informants' local context. The principal part of this study was conducted in Stor-Elvdal (the name means Big River Valley), a municipality located in south-eastern Norway. Its 3,000 inhabitants share an area of no less than 2,167 sq km. About two-thirds of the population lives in the municipal centre, Koppang. Forestry and forest-related industry have always been the pillars of the local economy.

There are huge differences between the land-owning class and 'ordinary people' in Stor-Elvdal. The 12 largest properties cover about 56 per cent of the productive forest acreage. This not only renders the small class of large landowners economically powerful, it also means that they control a large part of the most important leisure resource within the municipality — the land itself.

Public services provide about one-third of the employment. The private sector is dominated by small businesses. The largest industrial enterprise, a wood-processing plant, employs about 60 people. The agricultural sector provides about 14 per cent of the employment. Only 13 per cent of the population aged 16 and above has completed

post-secondary-level education, compared to the national average of 21.5 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2002b).

Since 1950 the population has decreased from 4,570 to less than 3,000. Young people have been moving away and the population is both shrinking and ageing (Statistics Norway, 2002b). Modern agricultural and forestry methods have led to declining employment in those sectors, a loss that has not been fully compensated for by the increase in public and private service jobs. Furthermore, in contrast to some of its neighbouring municipalities, Stor-Elvdal has only a small tourist industry.

During the last decades, the economic importance of resource extraction has declined. However, the forests and mountains provide excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation. 'If you can't enjoy nature you have no reason to live here', one informant told us, expressing a common view. Hunting is an important form of outdoor recreation, and there is a large variety of game.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A network of young working-class men who are simultaneously traditional and modern

The men in the network were all young adults in the process of choosing their life track. They all knew each other and appreciated each other's friendship. In addition, they were all dedicated hunters, and none of them owned enough land to have private hunting grounds. They all had to buy local hunting permits or rely on the good will of landowners. Most had fathers who were formerly employed in the local timber industry or as craftsmen. One informant came from a small farm. Manual jobs are now far less available, yet the men had jobs that did not require education above the man-datory nine years. Most of them were employed in the public or private service sector, where women form the majority of the work force. Several, including Frank, had found work in social services or health care. However, some held traditional men's jobs, for instance, as taxi drivers or truck drivers.

The network members had learned their hunting skills from fathers and grandfathers, and they saw their outdoor practices as a continuation of culture inherited from earlier generations. The visible expression of their identities can easily be portrayed as stereotypical male rural working class, and indeed this picture is not completely misleading. In many ways they shared the ways and values of their fathers, but unlike the older men, most of them maintained traditional male working-class identities without traditional male working-class jobs to support them. Many worked in places where they were outnumbered by women, many of whom were better educated professionals in such occupations as nursing and teaching.

One of the core qualities of the young men in Frank's network is to be a traditional rural man and a modern man simultaneously. Lars, who works as a truck driver for a timber mill, served us cookies, and proudly announced that he had baked them himself, using a local recipe. Baking, of course, is a traditionally female activity, and Lars' cookie baking suggests that he was not afraid to disregard the expectations that young men of his type have traditionally met.

Other activities were ingrained in local tradition as well. Some made knives, one made traditional wooden furniture, and one was a competent folk-musician. They met to hunt and sometimes to spend the night in hunting cabins. On such trips, we have been served beer, homemade spirits, half-fermented trout (typical of the Norwegian inland), salted pork belly and fatty sausage. They often met in the woods or in some-body's home or they talked on their mobile phones about hunting, weapons, dogs and (at the time of the study) wolves. The friendship and sense of community that hunting provided seemed to be important to every member of the network. They lived this significant part of their lives in accordance with what they perceived to be the trad-itional ways in the area.

Nevertheless, those who had started families were modern fathers who assumed considerable domestic responsibility. Frank seemed to be aware of the potential con-trast between his life as a rough outdoorsman and his life as a family man. He often made jokes about gender differences in domestic labour, saying things like, 'Well women, you wash the dishes' or 'We are going to watch some TV; serve us coffee', but they were always followed by laughter. In fact, his family life was conducted in accordance with modern standards: he changed diapers, fed the baby, washed dishes and scrubbed floors. There were definitely limits to his traditionalism. In his home we were never served the fatty food we ate on the hunting trips. Instead, Frank and his wife served Italian-, Indian- and Chinese-inspired dishes and 'Cajun-crossover-fusion' courses, with chilli sauces and garlic. The young outdoorsmen filled their time with work, outdoor recreation and caring for their families: a set of activities that enabled them to prolong the traditional ways of their working-class fathers, while at the same time incorporating elements of what we might term a modern male lifestyle.

Childhood

No matter where you live in Stor-Elvdal, the forest is your nearest neighbour. The young hunters emphasized the significant part that the forest had played in what they all considered to be a genuinely good childhood. The woods were their most important playground. Later, experimenting with alcohol and cigarettes on hiking and hunting trips, the forest formed an arena for practices that are important in the teenager's struggle to break loose from parental control. As they learned hunting skills from their fathers and other grown men, the forest also formed a background for warm relationships with adults — experiences they also wanted for their own children. But now the woods did not seem safe anymore.

'I don't trust those bastards', Frank kept saying, with reference to the wolves. He was not convinced that his ten-month-old daughter was safe playing alone outside the house. In his mind, one of the reasons for living in the countryside — to provide a safe and happy childhood for his children — was threatened.

The conceptualization of local nature

From building tree houses as children to hunting as adults, the woods constituted the most central arena for recreation for the young men. But it was always on people's own terms. Nature was never really wild, although it contained wild animals. As it

only included elements that local people accepted, it was always a safe playground, a place to roam freely, providing pleasant surroundings for the local community. There is hardly any room for large carnivores in such park-like surroundings.

When asked if they meant that usefulness to humans is the only valid reason for a species to exist, all the young men stated that every species has a right to live in its natural habitat. Wolves were not an exception, but the hunters did not believe that wolves belonged in Stor-Elvdal. Besides, they pointed out, wolves are not an endangered species globally. Wolves simply did not fit their image of nature in their own immediate surroundings. It threatened to break down the whole concept of what nature in Stor-Elvdal was meant to be: a safe playground for people and dogs, and a place where wild game has nothing to fear from species other than humans.

Dogs

Wolves do kill dogs, and Frank and his friends blamed wolves for every dog that was lost. Their dogs were extremely important to them. Within the network there were dogs for almost any hunting occasion: Norwegian grey elkhounds for hunting moose, dachshunds for roe deer, hare hounds for hare, and even a Karelian bear dog. The young men cared deeply for these animals and committed a great deal of time and effort to their training. As award-winning Norwegian and even Nordic sporting champions, they were well-controlled dogs that functioned as excellent hunting companions. And their owners spoke of them in terms normally reserved for people. By attributing skills that they hold in high regard to the dogs, they expressed a strong identification with them. 'He's a real hunter', Frank often said about his award-winning hare hound. 'He is almost like a member of the family', was a common saying and the dog rhetoric used to underline the important role of these animals. The cooperation between a well-trained dog and its owner seemed to be the most important element. Frank, who appreciated hare hunting more than any other form of sport, always spoke of success in terms of the baying of the hound and never the killing of a hare. In fact, he rarely fired his shotgun.

As companionship with the dogs was woven into the local hunting practices, it was also a significant part of the hunters' lifestyle and one of the reasons for living in Stor-Elvdal. Their dogs helped them to be good at what they really wanted to be good at, and this added to their importance. In addition, some of the dogs were valuable as stud, potentially providing the young hunters with extra income to supplement their relatively meager incomes. Their anxiety may have been exaggerated, but they really worried about their dogs, and they were seriously provoked by not being able to take their four-legged companions hunting in the forests they considered to be their own. The wolves were the dogs' enemies, and to the hunters, their dogs provided a very good reason for taking an aggressive stance towards them.

The city and the enemies: Two sides of the same coin

In the introduction to a textbook used in the mandatory hunting course, the historical relationship between the hunter and nature is explained to the novice. 'Through hunting, modern man forms an alliance with nature and his past'; and further, 'The ancient

Nordic hunting and trapping culture is still alive in our country' (Gjems and Reimers, 1999: 14). Several members of the network kept their course diplomas framed on their living room walls. Because hare hunters would no longer risk releasing their dogs in the forest, they spoke of hare hunting as an old culture that they feared would disappear. Although relatively new as a mass phenomenon, hunting is culturally constructed as a very old tradition, and it is seen as a way to withdraw from the stress of modern city life (Brotveit and Aagedal, 1999). Thus, to choose hunting as a lifestyle may also signify withdrawal from modern life in a broader sense.

The young men justified their choice of place to live, not only by praising the good life in the small forest community, but also by denigrating the city. When asked to describe the city, they all came up with horror stories about crime, drugs and traffic. Large cities are unsafe, chaotic, noisy and packed with social misery. They also emphasized the negative aspects of the city as a physical structure — big ugly houses, crowded streets and, most importantly, the absence of nature.

Frank and the others used the word 'control' to highlight a key dimension of rural life. Rural life offered control of the environment — a positive feature in the context of raising a child. Another, less positive aspect is that 'everybody knows everything about everyone else'. They believed that they could appreciate some of the anonymity offered by the city, but that the cost would be too high. All in all, they saw cities as hostile places where people can never really thrive.

The qualities of the rural community and its natural surroundings were seen as being diametrically opposed to the chaotic and unpleasant nature of the city; and their life as outdoorsmen as a negation of city life. They were hardly revolutionaries, but it seems appropriate to understand their love of the countryside and their scepticism toward urbanity not as mere preferences, but as a critical attitude towards the general development of modern society. It is not that their love of rural life expressed a longing for a better past. They saw their life as outdoorsmen as being a present possibility. In this sense, they could be seen as opposing urbanity and even modernity itself.

'They don't understand how it is', the hunters said, when asked to talk about the pro-carnivore lobby. 'You should have brought them here, and then I would show them what it's all about', was a common saying. The young hunters felt that they were up against a powerful enemy that did not understand the consequences of current policies. Describing the enemy, they referred to what they considered to be an alliance of politicians, resource managers, scientists and environmentalists. They used the terms 'city people' and 'extremists'. Consequently, the appearance of wolves was associated with urban life and an urban concept of nature. In the hunters' minds, that is a romantic view, based on a dream-like glorification of untouched nature, which does not account for actual consequences for real people. Through this construction, the wolf becomes an urban implant, indeed an icon of urbanity. In the young hunters' world, this is the ultimate antagonism to the nature they love. This conception of the wolf as 'unnatural' helped them to overcome the apparent contradiction between their love of nature and their scepticism towards the large carnivores.

The young hunters saw themselves as living in a world in which extreme attitudes are dominant within the circles of power. To them, power is used to achieve an end that is basically absurd, and large carnivore protection therefore becomes a token of

the chaos of our times. In particular, the large carnivore management regime resembles the chaos of *the city*. With the re-appearance of wolves, modern urban life suddenly caught up with the hunters. And this is exactly what they had sought to dissociate themselves from by living in Stor-Elvdal.

Fascination and latent ambivalence

The men regarded the presence of wolves as a threat to their life projects. At another level, they seemed to be fascinated by the animal itself. When they talked about wolves, they revealed an interest and a level of knowledge that went far beyond simple hate. Frank had often borrowed videos about wolves, and, as we have heard, he put considerable effort into imitating their howls. The wolf has skills that the hunters value and admire; skills they themselves would like to possess and to observe in their dogs. They acknowledged that wolves are great hunters. No animal, or human being for that matter, could receive a better testimony. Their rage was not directed at the wolf itself, which they saw as an animal that merely follows its instincts, but at the human agents of wolf protection.

IMMOBILE MEN — OUTDATED IDENTITIES?

A sense of crisis

The presence of wolves touched all the reasons the young hunters had for living in Stor-Elvdal. Consequently, they had multiple reasons for fighting them. These reasons added up to one unifying motive: they interpreted the re-appearance of wolves as a threat to their life projects, and extremist city people were to blame for it. In their view, the presence of wolves had already led to deterioration in the quality of their lives, and they feared that their chosen lifestyles would eventually become untenable. Thus, their resistance to carnivore protection involved a sense of crisis on an individual — even on a deeply personal — level. What they had chosen to *be* — their identities —was under attack. Furthermore, their sense of crisis entailed a deep scepticism towards the city and the modernization processes that threatened to marginalize their way of life. Needless to say, the wolf was hardly the main cause of trouble for their life projects, but in their view it was certainly the most prominent symbol of everything that was going wrong in rural Norway.

The rural hunter identity: Reflection of local culture or expression of individualized choice?

It is easy to recognize the stereotypic image of a rural woodsman in the young hunters. They refer to their fathers, uncles, and grandfathers as the men who taught them these practices. It is no wonder that they are often construed as having taken over the life projects of their fathers in a generally non-reflexive manner.

From time to time the carnivore conflicts receive massive attention in Norwegian public debate. In the media and apparently also among the general public, they are

predominantly pictured as a clash between urban modernity and backward rural traditionalism. Our young men follow suit: they are indeed among those who construct the conflict as an antagonism between urban and rural values and ways of life. By taking a clear anti-wolf stance, they actively contribute to reinforcing other people's impression of them as representatives of an outdated rural culture. Throughout the last decades, attitudes towards large carnivores have changed dramatically in the Western world. For example, the dominant image of the wolf is transformed from foe to friend. In most countries, the state no longer encourages the shooting of wolves; on the contrary, those who try to do so are heavily prosecuted. In the context of these changes, resistance to carnivore protection appears to be anti-modern, anti-progress and irrational.

Indeed, the hunters were, in a sense, realizing life projects that resembled those of earlier generations. But we must ask whether the traditions they perpetuated through their life projects and identities were inherited patterns, or whether the way they lived their lives was a product of 'disembedded' choice. In general, if we observe that a young man chooses to become very much like his father, we cannot say whether his choice is more restricted than the choice made by a child who takes a different path in life. Even if a young man's lifestyle is based completely on independent choices, one option is to choose a lifestyle that resembles his father's. We do find traditional patterns in the orientations and actions of the young hunters, but we cannot decide if these patterns are determined by cultural reproduction in a strong sense, or whether they are the products of a self-reflexive mind. We do not know whether we are observing change or continuity with respect to individualization. Freedom and power are exercised and negotiated in social relations. So in order to draw any conclusions, we must decide what kind of social relations lie behind a set of practices.

The hunter identity and structural change

The local anti-carnivore 'movement' seemed to form a kind of social alliance in which divergent opinions were not accepted. There seemed to be certain authorized interpretations of the wolf situation that were developed by influential actors within this alliance. When asked if he held scientific knowledge to be more valid than the local lay knowledge about nature, Frank replied: 'Not at all; researchers have a lot to learn from experienced outdoorsmen'. Typical authorities within this knowledge system are older hunters. Although their interpretations are often at odds with scientific knowledge, they appear to be taken at face value by Frank and his friends (see Skogen, 2001; Skogen and Haaland, 2001). These dominant interpretations are supported by sanctions. It is simply not possible to be part of Frank's network and to welcome the wolves. Even if no sanctions existed, however, Frank and the other young hunters would be unlikely to change the attitudes they express, which in every sense are their own. The power that is exercised within a socialization process works in much more subtle ways. The young hunters live in a context where significant local agents actively conceptualize their situation in terms of a political rhetoric aimed at politicians, managers, biologists and other urban enemies. They therefore exert power over the way the hunters think. Accordingly, it is possible to some extent to

interpret their life projects and identities as expressions of local culture and habitus, heavily structured by forces other than individual reflexive thought.

On the other hand, although they resemble their fathers in many ways, they cannot expect to relive their fathers' lives. The older men do not serve as role models in their work and family lives. Traditional male working-class jobs are few. Their women demand extensive participation on the domestic front. The social basis for the identity they express in style and interests seems to be disintegrating, and the realization of the traditional rural male project is confined to their leisure activities. A modern, gentle, family man and social worker is hardly the typical image of a rural hunter. Of course they sense this gap. Therefore, even if some fundamentally important choices include distinct elements of local tradition, it is far from obvious that their choices are less reflexive than those made by their socially and spatially mobile peers. On the contrary, structural change has made it increasingly difficult for young people in rural areas to pursue traditional lifestyles. The easier option would actually be to obtain more education and head for an urban area. Our men have chosen a path in life that they are forced to submit to reflexive thought. Tradition is transformed into choice.

General crises of modernity: Traditional identities incorporate conflicts with 'outsiders'

The carnivore conflicts probably enhance the significance of identity in the young hunters' lives. Resistance to an outside enemy, perceived as the 'pro-carnivore alliance', is firmly entrenched within the network. In the eyes of the young hunters, the members of the 'alliance' are deliberately causing rural communities to suffer. They are city people; they have power; and they do not understand life in rural areas. By protecting the wolf, they are making it difficult for Frank and his friends to uphold the identities as skilled hunters and outdoorsmen that are so vital to them.

Of course, the social basis for their lifestyle is disintegrating as a result of much broader processes. But now the sense of crisis that structural change may have evoked is de-emphasized, and within the network the focus is entirely on the wolves. It is usually in times of severe structural change that crises of collective identity occur. In such situations basic interpretations of *self* and *other* are revitalized in an attempt to solve these crises. This strategy generates an understanding of the others as the fundamental cause of the problem. Thus, we may understand the hostility toward large carnivores as a strategy to overcome a crisis of identity. In an attempt to make sense of the world, they identify an enemy to be blamed. When identities are threatened, the identification of an enemy could be a way to reassure the self and its boundaries (Giddens, 1991; Wimmer, 1997; Douglas, 1992; Cohen, 1985). Thus, hostility towards large carnivores may also be seen as a symbolic struggle against more general social developments. In their effort to resolve such identity crises, the young hunters tend to develop a strong sense of local identity that also generates hostility towards 'others' (see Skogen and Krange, 2003). The 'others' are people who(m) they see as part of the pro-carnivore alliance. Indeed, they have chosen a lifestyle that is culturally constructed as the sharpest possible antagonism to the urban culture that they feel the pro-carnivore alliance represents. Thus, tradition is not only transformed into choice, but also into resistance.

Immobile and marginalized?

As we have seen, commentators like Bauman (1996) and Giddens (1991) claim that mobility has become a central value, even an ideology, in contemporary society. According to Bauman, to be a life-long resident of any one place may in itself lead to marginalization. So where do we find the hunters in relation to the Baumanesque connection between immobility and marginalization?

The young hunters have several reasons to feel attached to the area in which they live. First, it is plausible to interpret the young men's attachment to place partly as a product of heavy socialization into a local culture, a process that has been going on since early childhood, and that has forged their strong bonds to the community. Their longing to become great hunters and outdoorsmen is in complete accordance with the values handed down to them from earlier generations. To achieve this goal they are more or less *bound* to stay behind. A hunter can only be renowned and celebrated by proving his skills. To be a good shot and to have an outstanding dog is important, but not enough. One must demonstrate detailed knowledge of the game and the forest, which takes time and requires sustained effort several days a week. The young hunters believe that all the hours they have spent in the Stor-Elvdal forests have made them splendidly competent to hunt there. Frank, for one, would probably feel like a traitor if he chose to move. But as we have argued, in the light of the many difficulties rural communities face, these cultural elements and identity projects are transformed into practices that contain reflection and even resistance.

Second, the young men have seen many of their peers leave to get an education or to work. But from their point of view, these projects may seem downright irrational. Because most of them have limited formal education, as well as a strained relationship with the educational system, the more obvious of the two alternatives would be to try to find work in an urban area. This would mean working in the unskilled segment of the labour market, but that is exactly where they already are. Even though salaries are usually higher in urban areas, there would be no economic gain in moving. In 2000, the price of small houses was twice as high in urban as in rural regions of Norway, and housing costs, on average, were about 25 per cent of the Norwegian households' total consumption expenses (NOU, 2002). Obviously, apartment buildings would be the most likely urban housing alternative for our men — definitely not an attractive option. Being 'stayers', the young hunters manage to acquire a private house and a more robust standard of living than they could ever hope to enjoy in an urban area.

The other alternative, to leave for education, may also seem irrational to the young hunters. Higher education could actually diminish their chances of finding relevant work in Stor-Elvdal. There are relatively few jobs that require academic training, and it is difficult to time graduation with a vacancy for a relevant job. Therefore, if one's main goal is to live and work locally, higher education serves no purpose. It could, in fact, be argued that one is in a better position to accept the jobs that are likely to be available without such education, and is thus more flexible in the context of the Stor-Elvdal labour market.

In addition, the young hunters feel culturally comfortable in Stor-Elvdal. Living where they were raised, they know the local ways, the dos and don'ts of local culture.

This is the only type of community in which they can use the woods on a daily basis, and that possibility is of utmost importance to their identity projects.

In sum, these factors render them virtually immobile. So are these young men facing marginalization? Because there are fewer and fewer traditional male working-class jobs in the area, they have reasons to fear unemployment. However, as industrial companies have moved out, public services have moved in. Thus, the consequences of the ongoing structural modernization process are not entirely negative for people who wish to spend their lives in Stor-Elvdal. Until now, all that has been needed is a willingness to accept jobs in the public service sector, which is exactly what several of the network members have done. Together with women of all ages, they fill the need for unskilled labour in a sector that has been expanding for several decades. Thus, the popular notion that rural working-class men are facing marginalization due to collapse of the material foundation for their masculine identities, that is, the demise of manual working-class jobs, seems questionable. Younger men, at least, seem capable of upholding masculine identities with distinct traditional elements without such a basis. This, however, is not to say that the young men's identities as rural hunters rely only on leisure activities. Typical elements of the workplace culture of the industrial working class, as described by, for example, Paul Willis (1977, 1979), Brian Jackson (1968) and Sverre Lysgaard ([1961] 1976), live on among unskilled workers in the private and public service sectors — and not least in segments of the unskilled workforce that are dominated by women (cf. Skilbrei, 2003). Working-class jobs in the service sector may well play a role as a social basis for the production of cultural meaning in line with what we have observed among young rural hunters.

CONCLUSIONS

The theoretically interesting point is of course the mechanism behind this story. These men are traditional and immobile, yet their lives are marked by change. They are working-class men (at least in terms of background, education and culture), and they are hunters like their fathers, yet their lives depart from the ways of earlier generations in several respects. With their woodsman identities they would face a great risk of marginalization in an urban area. They would experience a lower standard of living, and access to their treasured leisure activity would be dramatically restricted. So they stay where they are, well established with jobs, houses and families. Thus, 'marginalized' is hardly an appropriate term. They resolve their potential crises by managing flexible identities. Because their traditionalism and immobility are not simply inherited, even though they replicate stereotypical rural styles, the identities they have established do not fit Bourdieu's concept of habitus. But neither are their flexible identities adequately described by the concept of self-identity. They are, in a sense, *forced* to be reflexive, but this is not reflexivity of the autonomous variety emphasized by Giddens. What we observe is more probably a conscious identity management that is heavily constrained by social structures. Because they are forced to develop flexible identities, they manage to become relatively successful within the Stor-Elvdal context. Their lives are in a sense an antagonism to Bauman's notion of immobility. Put simply, it is through immobility that the young hunters avoid marginalization. The young hunters

have gone far to meet the standards that seem to be required of modern men. Their outdoor practice is vitally important to the construction of continuity in their lives. By being part of what they see as an old hunting culture, they manage to construct a link between modern ways of living, their local place, and its history. Summarized in terms of identity, hunting is both identification with the collective level and an important base for the sense of self. It was into this fragile situation that the wolves entered, and their re-appearance was experienced as a personal attack. No wonder Frank and his modern traditional friends reacted the way they did.

Acknowledgement

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