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Hunting for (dis)connections in Northern Ontario: "nature," wild meat, and community in Hearst

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Abstract

This thesis follows a group of hunters in the town of Hearst in Northern Ontario, as they move through space—from the town, to the hunting ground, and back to the home. The analysis presented draws on research that took place over a six-month period during the summer and fall of 2016 and involved a combination of library research, participant observation, 28 interviews, and numerous informal conversations. The analysis presented explores how hunting in Hearst is linked to 1) a sense of place and community membership, 2) local knowledge of, and attachment to, the surrounding “natural” environment and the regional fauna, 3) feelings of connection to family, friends, and local food sources, 4) and a regional identity built on antagonistic relationships with “distant” others (the state and residents of Southern Ontario). Hunting and related practices in Hearst—from butchering to feasting on wild meat—constitute a good starting point to reflect on how people in communities of Northern Ontario like Hearst may relate to each other, their towns, their region, the forested environment and wildlife around them, and the food they consume.

Keywords

Northern Ontario, French Canadians, hunting, place, wild meat, identity, gender, self-provisioning, human-nonhuman animal relationships, citizen-state relations

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Introduction

A return to the landscape

Six years ago, I moved away from my hometown, and stopped eating meat, among other changes I made to my diet, as I became more aware of the problems that surround industrial agriculture and meat eating. As a graduate student, I wanted to look at alternative food movements in Northern Ontario and realized that wild meat acquired through hunting was the most prevalent food alternative in the region. My research on hunting in Hearst, Ontario, was a personal journey on many levels. It allowed me to explore what it meant for me to refuse to hunt and consume wild meat. Moreover, through it, I was able to reflect on my connection to Hearst, Ontario—my hometown—a place towards which I have ambivalent feelings: a place I gladly left for the first time six years ago, but a place I constantly daydream of and return to every time I have a chance. Beyond that, the research encouraged me to think about my relationship to food, my impact on human and nonhuman animals, and the earth as a whole, particularly since I decided to start eating wild meat again. Most importantly, this work allowed me to realize how hunting and wild meat are central to the relationship I have with my father, and how refusing to participate in those practices came with a disconnection to this place and my favourite man on earth.

Hearst is often referred to as the Moose Capital of Canada. This animal, one that is often perceived as an imposing and charismatic one, is, in a sense, the emblem of the town. This becomes clear when you are driving westward on the Trans-Canada Highway, as the first thing you might notice, as you drive into town, apart from a wood mill, is a roadside attraction—sculptures of moose and wolves (Figure 1). You would not need to stay in town too long to see that it is not only the moose itself that is the center of the town's identity, but so are the practices that surround hunting it down.



Figure 1: Moose and wolves sculptures—Hearst Tourism Centre (provided by the Town of Hearst, photo taken by Jamie Boilard).

I was excited to return to Hearst in the fall. It had been a while since I had seen the environment in which I grew up go through the transformations that come with this season. Some of my most vivid childhood memories are associated with hunting: specific smells, sounds, and sights. The sound of the rain hitting the prospector tent in which we slept during the multi-day outing (is the wooden frame still standing somewhere in the forest, I wondered?), the sound of the fire crackling in the small woodstove, the smell of smoke, the thrill of seeing a moose appear in the distance: I clearly remember my father's excitement, his disappointment, and the sick feeling in my stomach that time he injured a moose, and we could not find it.

In October, my father and I set out to find that tent frame, where we camped during our moose hunts about 15 years ago. We drove for hours on rough roads; my dad noticed that some roads were new and that old ones had been overgrown. After a long drive and a few encounters with grouse, we finally saw the old frame of our camp (Figure 2). When I saw it, those memories came back to me, and I realized that this was where I was initiated into hunting—it was there that it all began, and it was why I was here today. Like the wood of the frame that was covered in moss, rotting, and slowly returning to the landscape from

which it had been taken away, by returning to Hearst for this research, I felt like I was returning to my roots, I was where I belonged: “through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are part of it” (Ingold 1993: 154).



Figure 2: Old hunting camp close to Oba, Ontario—where I was initiated to hunting.

Yes, I am biased

It is sometimes argued that anthropologists “must stand apart from the Other,” and that they need to be distanced from the society they are studying to avoid sliding into subjectivity, “even when [they] seek explicitly to bridge the gap” (Abu-Lughold 1991: 468). As a member of the Hearst community who is personally entangled in residents’ perspectives and emotionally invested in the subject I chose to research, I do not meet anthropological expectations of a “distant” participant observer. I cannot deny that my subjectivity has influenced this research, but I would argue that being a member of the community means that I had years of observation and experience to draw upon when painting a picture of the town and analyzing the perspectives and experiences of those I worked with. Furthermore, although I left Hearst several years ago, most participants

knew me prior to taking part in this research, perhaps allowing them to feel more comfortable talking to me about this somewhat controversial activity and their frustrations and challenges. On the other hand, personally knowing the residents and being aware of multiple layers (negotiating between what I heard in interviews, what I observed, and what I knew) also made my analysis more nuanced than it would have been, had I spent some time in an unknown community.

Being a member of the community also allowed me to talk to residents in the language in which they are fluent. While I find it unfortunate to write a research on a francophone community (where all my research participants except two were francophone) in English,¹ I have attempted to write in a language accessible to the residents of Hearst—with an emphasis on residents' narratives rather than academic theory. My hope is that writing in plain English about the pleasures, tensions, and frustrations that Hearst residents experience with regards to hunting, will not only nurture feelings of pride and solidarity among hunters in Hearst, but will open a needed dialogue that will help break down stereotypes that interfere with a more informed and fair understanding of the way of life of Northern Ontarians.

Ultimately, my research has the potential to influence future decision-making at the provincial level by showing how government regulations should take the community's needs, traditions, and knowledge of the non-human environment into consideration. With this ambitious hope, my work perhaps comes closer to what Joanne Rappaport calls "public anthropology" which aims "... to effectively address problems beyond the discipline—illuminating the larger social issues of our times as well as encouraging broad, public conversations about them with the explicit goal of fostering social change."²

1 All interviews, except for Marc Johnson and David Barbour, were conducted in French and translated by me.

2 The definition continues: "Public anthropology demonstrates the ability of anthropology and anthropologists. It affirms our responsibility, as scholars and citizens, to meaningfully contribute to communities beyond the academy—both local and global—that make the study of anthropology possible" (Rappaport 2008: 25).

Why non-indigenous hunters of Hearst?

From the beginning, it was clear in my mind that this research would be situated in Northern Ontario, an area where few carry research and where people feel forgotten and misunderstood by outsiders, who usually look down on their occupation and lifestyle choices, including hunting their own food.

In communities of Northern Ontario, hunters may at times take part in actions, or express views, that reinforce the stereotypical image of them as “rednecks” who are politically conservative, and who get off on using powerful guns, killing wildlife, and riding around in big trucks. This one-sided portrayal of Northern Ontarians leaves out much of the positive sociality and life affirming aspects of hunting and hides the fact that, for many, hunting also comes with a concern for the environment and the fauna. If forests and animal populations are not sustained, the tradition cannot continue.

In addition, while for most hunters, taking part in hunting is not usually a way to consciously take part in global debates about factory farming, in medium and small-size towns of Northern Ontario, having access to fresh, cheap, and nutritious food can be a challenge. Due to cold winters, agriculture is not as well developed as it is in Southern Ontario, and relative spatial isolation means that grocery stores and supermarkets are not as well provisioned as they are in well-connected urban centers. Inasmuch as hunting, in a northern context, can constitute an important alternative to store-bought meat, research on it can contribute to nuancing our understanding of differently conceived, contemporary efforts to break away from the conventional food system.

Furthermore, whereas an extensive body of anthropological literature on hunting in traditional hunter-gatherers’ societies is available, including recent research on the importance of wild meat consumption in indigenous societies, studies on non-indigenous rural hunting communities in Canada, and their long-established traditions and connections remain virtually nonexistent. In this respect, I feel the research can begin to illuminate an understudied and much misunderstood population.³

³ Had I had more time than is afforded by the short M.A. fieldwork period, I would have liked to include the hunting practices of the indigenous populations of Constance Lake, Ontario, as part of my

Ethnographic research

I conducted ethnographic research for a period of approximately 7 months—extending from May 2016 to November 2016. My research started with looking into the archives of the local newspaper—*Le Journal Le Nord*—to understand the importance of hunting in the community, how the activity is portrayed in the media, and the changes that have taken place in the last 10 years or so. This, along with reading posts on local hunting Facebook groups, has allowed me to explore the opinions of community members concerning hunting and relevant regulations.

To recruit participants, I put up posters around town, posted on hunting-related groups on Facebook, sent out emails, made phone calls, and encouraged participants to share information about my research with their peers. Despite my efforts, fewer hunters than anticipated reached back to invite me to take part in the moose hunt. This was most likely due to a number of concerns. First, hunters can be wary of having strangers on their hunting territory, perhaps even more so when the stranger is a researcher who might share their best spots and hunting tricks with others. More importantly, hunters were probably also worried about inviting someone who could negatively impact the result of their hunt—they did not know how much I knew about hunting etiquette (especially as a female who had moved to the city five years earlier), and they were not going to risk their precious moose tag for someone who may make a faint noise that could scare the rare moose away.

Even though I was not as successful as I had expected in joining hunting parties, I still spent more than 100 hours observing hunting-related activities. Emphasizing that Hearst was my hometown, and mentioning my father's name probably opened more than a few hunters' doors, as did my keen interest and familiarity with the subject. Thankfully, following my father on hunting adventures starting at a young age has equipped me with some experiential knowledge of hunting, so that I could easily converse about the subject.

study. I feel it is a gap of my current study that I was unable to adequately explore the relationship between the hunters I studied and this nearby population.

My first site of observation was the classroom, where I took my hunting and firearm safety courses, from May 6th to May 8th, for a total of 25 hours. I had never killed an animal before, and I wanted to be able to better understand the embodied experience of the hunter, so taking the courses was a logical first step, as it is mandatory for all hunters. After spending approximately \$300 and obtaining my licenses, I was ready to go on my first hunting trip on May 11th, as the spring bear hunt pilot project was extended for five years, after being cancelled in 1999. In the fall, I took part in grouse, goose, and moose hunting during several outings (including one overnight outing with a moose hunting group). I also had the chance to take part in the field dressing and the butchering process on a few occasions. Throughout this period, I alternated between spending time in the bush—on a four-wheeler, on a boat, walking, or waiting in a tree stand, often standing still, and remaining in silence, sometimes with a gun on my shoulder; in garages—where the animal was transformed into pieces of meat; and interviewing participants—either in the comfort of my home or theirs, at their workplace, or in their vehicle, as we were driving to the hunting ground.

In November, I attended the Wild Meat Supper organized by the Hearst Anglers and Hunters Club. As opposed to my previous observation sessions (when I spent time with individuals, sometimes accompanied by their family members and friends), during this event, I was able to witness members of the community coming together around wild meat. This was just one of the several times I ate wild meat, while I was in Hearst, as I spent hours in the kitchen preparing meat, and eating it with family and friends, usually with fondue pots or raclette grills at the centre of the dinner table.

I conducted 28 semi-structured interviews with residents of Hearst with different roles in the hunting endeavour. This included a hunting storeowner, a taxidermist, a conservation officer, a biologist, owners of hunting outfitters (almost all of whom were also hunters), and several other hunters. The fourteen males and fourteen females who participated in my research were of all ages, with the youngest participant being 19 and the oldest being 85. This demographic diversity allowed me to explore gender and generational differences in the way hunting is practiced and perceived. I should note that the number of female hunters is not representative of the male-female ratio in Hearst but may be an indication that women were more open to talk to me, as a female researcher.

In general, all interviewees were enthusiastic to participate in this research, and all but one, who is not mentioned by name in this thesis, signed consent forms where they indicated they wished to be identified by their proper names, hence, the subsequent text contains no pseudonyms.

Archival research, observation, and interviews were combined with countless informal discussions that were triggered as a result of people asking me what I was doing in school, when I went around town for strolls or to run errands. I have yet to meet a member of the community that did not share passionate opinions, personal experiences, or the name of skilled hunters he or she knew at the mention of my research on hunting.

Thesis outline

This thesis shows that hunting is more than a sport or an activity for those who practice it, it defines who they are. It is part of their social and cultural life, it connects them to place, and to a large extent, defines their perception of and their relationship to local residents, the environment, “wild” animals, food, and outsiders like Southern Ontarians and the state.

In some ways, hunting is the perfect entry point into the social and cultural fabric of many a community in Northern Ontario. This thesis ultimately explores how the residents of a northern community, such as Hearst, define themselves and experience the world and their place within it through the connections and disconnections that are formed through hunting. These include the connections formed with 1) the town and their fellow community members, 2) the “natural” environment and its fauna, and 3) the family and friends via the preparing and eating of wild meat. The disconnections involve tensions with both external and local actors that arise from conflicting interests or perceptions over hunting.

To accomplish this goal, I follow hunters through space from the town to the hunting ground and back to the home. I then take a step back and consider the tensions and misconceptions that surround hunting and make for less than amicable relations with all sorts of Others.

In Chapter 1, I look at the significance of hunting in town, for both those who hunt or

take part in related activities, such as those who are involved in the tourism industry. I use the work of authors such as David Bell and Gill Valentine, Sidney Mintz, and Richard Wilk to explore how hunting and related culinary traditions inform place-based and collective identities, and help strengthen community ties.

In Chapter 2, I move to the hunting ground, where I explore how hunters connect to the nearby forested environment and to the wild species that inhabit it. I show how for hunters, the forest is acknowledged to have a human history, yet is also conceived as the epitome of that “nature” which is thought to exist outside of the human realm. Drawing on the work of American landscape historian William Cronon, and anthropologists Tim Ingold and Anna Tsing, I explore the contradictions of hunters’ perspectives on the environment and “nature.” I then move on to consider how hunters relate to the wild species they seek to kill, their reasoning about the advantages and disadvantages of various technologies, and the pleasures, challenges, and mixed emotions of the hunt. My reflections on multispecies interactions on the hunting ground are guided by the work of feminist scholar Donna Haraway, and anthropologists Eduardo Kohn and Paul Nadasdy.

In Chapter 3, I look at the home, because the household is where family traditions are formed, where one’s role in the hunt (and in the world) is first learned, and where individuals form a relationship to their food. The chapter explores the specifics of preparing the meat for consumption, and in doing so, considers how family ties are strengthened through the butchering, cooking, eating, and sharing of wild meat. Inspired by the work of Mary Zeiss Stange on women and hunting, this chapter ponders the gendered nature of hunting in Hearst, and contextualizes recent shifts in the protagonism given to (or taken by) women in the hunt. When discussing hunters’ relationship to wild meat, an attempt is made to place local perspectives in a broader context by comparing them to the perspectives known to dominate among urban-based populations, consciously engaged in the so-called alternative food movement (Weiss 2012; Heath and Eng 2011).

Finally, Chapter 4 includes the tensions that arise between the hunters I have worked with and a range of actors whose perceptions, decisions, or actions are thought to negatively affect the activity of hunters in Hearst. Throughout this chapter, I primarily reference the anthropologist Thomas Dunk’s article *Hunting and the Politics of Identity in Ontario*

(2002), which allows me to outline the perspective that several hunters I interviewed have on Southern Ontarians, logging companies, and hunters with constitutional rights. When discussing local residents' well-reasoned antipathy towards the state, I find inspiration in the work of James Scott's *Seeing Like the State* (1998), which is helpful in articulating the pitfalls of government plans that fail to take into account the specificities of place and culture. In an attempt to work against representing Hearst as a homogeneous, idyllic community, in this chapter I also address the tensions that exist within members of the community, and even within the same group of hunters.

Through these chapters, I hope to have succeeded in presenting the reader with a well-rounded picture of the community I studied. I hope to have highlighted the many facets that an activity like hunting has in a Northern Ontarian community like Hearst, and its importance for local residents.

Chapter 1

1 « The Town »

Hearst, located on one of the most northern points of the Trans-Canada Highway in Ontario, is a fairly isolated town with a population of approximately 5500. After driving an hour east, passing by a few villages and several abandoned houses along the way, you would arrive in Kapuskasing, a town that is not much bigger than Hearst. The town's geographical isolation from large urban centers and amenities associated with them would become even clearer, if you were to drive west, as Hearst is home to the last McDonald's in more than 500 kilometers, and the last gas station in more than 200 kilometers. The town is situated at almost 1000 kilometers from Toronto. From there, it would take you at least 10 hours to get to Hearst by bus or car, probably more in the winter, when the road conditions tend to be poor. Taking the plane would not be much quicker, because after landing at the Timmins airport, you would need to drive another 3 hours (you could also transfer to an old and noisy 19-passenger plane, land in Kapuskasing, and drive another hour). The train that ran from Toronto to Cochrane—more than 2 hours east of Hearst—stopped running in 2012.

Being isolated means that, in Hearst, the quality and affordability of the food at the only grocery store do not match that of cities or well-connected settlements. While the town has multiple artistic, cultural, and sportive events, such as plays, art exhibitions, hockey and softball tournaments, and the Taste of Hearst fair in the fall, entertainment options are not comparable to those of cities or well-connected centers. On the other hand, however, the town's proximity to the "natural" environment, and this relative scarcity of standard urban entertainment venues, signifies that outdoors activities like snowshoeing, skiing, camping, fishing, snowmobiling, and of course, hunting, are central to residents' leisure time and the town's tourism industry.

1.1 « Hunting and place-based identity »

The Hearst Tourism Information Guide states that Hearst, often referred to as “the village of the indomitable Gauls,” “[...] is 88% Francophone.⁴ Yet it is a community energized by a cultural richness meshed with French, Oji-Cree and Euro-Canadian heritage” (Tourism Information Guide 2015: 3). While Ojibwe and Cree have been living on the land for thousands of years, it is with the construction of railways at the beginning of the 20th century that families of European descent moved to the area. The provincial government’s advertising of agriculture and forestry allowed for the colonization of Northern Ontario. From the beginning, the economy of the town—incorporated in 1922—was driven by the forest industry. First came the small contractors who obtained cutting rights on crown land in the 1930s, then, the Francophone family-owned sawmills dominating the forestry sector in the 1960s and 1970s, as the French Canadian Catholic Church spread the language and the religion by encouraging adepts to move to Northern Ontario. Crown land was sold at a good price, and owning a lot made it possible for new settlers to work as lumberjacks in the winter and farmers in the summer—a seasonal work pattern that was not unfamiliar to French Canadians arriving from Québec (Hearst, 2015). Still today, the existence of Hearst and its communal life depend on the extraction of resources—the cutting of trees. Just as logging is central to the economy and the creation of jobs, hunting is a central leisure activity for many residents and a way of making a living for those involved in tourism-related hunting.

In the community, hunting—and the moose hunt in particular—was initially practiced more as a means of subsistence to feed the typically big families of the time, on top of the food that was produced on the family farm, but eventually became more recreational than essential to survival. Louise Miron—a 42-year-old huntress—told me that when her father was growing up, moose meat was a fundamental animal protein, and her grandfather tried to get one or two moose every fall to feed the family. Hunting practices and regulations have changed significantly since then, and today, it is not uncommon to

⁴ Community members are typically proud to say that Hearst is the community with the highest percentage of francophone residents in Northern Ontario.

hear older men reminisce about a time when laws were laxer and moose hunting was more accessible. An experienced hunter told me: “back in the days, we all had tags, we hunted on bush roads, driving while drinking beer, and the mill would almost shut down [because no one wanted to work].”

Inasmuch as hunting has historically been a popular activity in Hearst, it has shaped the local cuisine, which, as Mintz explains, “implies access to particular food resources” (2006: 6), tied to a specific environment. Thus, residents of Hearst adapt their French Canadian culinary practices to local food sources by preparing dishes like wild meat tourtière (meat pie), wild meat cipaille (pot pie), and grouse baked beans with maple syrup. In this manner, they both express their French Canadian and hunter identities through a “local cuisine” which is, in fact, also a hybrid of local and global cuisines and ingredients. As Richard Wilk observed in his study of Belizean cuisine, dichotomies such as local/global allow us to think with categories, but “all the real action takes place *in between*” (2006: 15). Thus, the hunters of Hearst also use wild meat (and the distinctive “local” taste associated with it) to prepare spaghetti sauce, shepherd’s pie, tacos, burgers, stir-fries, and stews.

A sense of pride in local identity is made clear when hunters share those wild meat recipes with people from outside of town. In fact, when I attended the Hearst Anglers and Hunters Club’s annual Wild Meat Supper, a participant noted that the dinner was proof that Hearst is different. As geographers Bell and Valentine have commented “every mouthful, every meal, can tell us something about ourselves, and about our place in the world” (1997: 3). At the dinner, with every mouthful, out of town visitors experienced how they may be different from town residents (and vice-versa), as they did, with every bite, they arguably experienced the distinctiveness of Hearst. According to the participant mentioned above, the visitors she brought were impressed, and she was reminded that a wild meat dinner is not possible everywhere.

Many others expressed pride in distinctive culinary traditions linked to hunting. For instance, at Christmas David Barbour—a 47-year-old biologist and hunter—takes out wild meat pepperettes, sausages, and hunters’ kielbasa for his guests, he says “it’s a

northern thing.” He tells me that those who are not from the region are always curious to know more about the various meats. Likewise, Daniel Fauchon—a 21-year-old hunter—told me that while he studied in Ottawa, he cooked different types of wild meat for his friends. Marie-Louis and Stéphanie Plamondon—a 20-year-old huntress—also commented on how they enjoy feeding wild meat to family members when they visit from Québec, and how they are always delighted. These stories, in one way or another, illustrate pride in place-based traditions.

In the fall, the significance of hunting traditions for town residents is reflected in myriad ways. If you were to drive around Hearst during the hunting season, perhaps while listening to a radio show on which special guests answer hunters’ questions, you would see hundreds of residents dressed in camouflage or orange clothes driving through town, preparing for a day, or a multi-day hunting trip. You would see pick up trucks hauling campers and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs)⁵ in the parking lot of the only grocery store, or in the parking lot of gas stations, as hunters grab food for their outing, and fuel up their machines and fill up red plastic gas canisters. Others might be at Typer’s Live Bait—the only local hunting and fishing store owned by Serge Dillon—buying the missing supplies. Danika Boisvert—a 21-year-old huntress—talked of hunting as a religion for residents of Hearst. As she described it to me, at 6 am on the first Saturday morning of the gun moose hunting season, the Tim Hortons’ parking lot would be so full that some hunters would need to park on each side of the highway, and on the other side, in the Canadian Tire parking lot, as people line up to get a warm coffee and breakfast before leaving for the bush. Finally, if you could get your hands on the weekly local newspaper—*Le Journal LeNord*—there would probably be a special edition containing all kinds of advertisements and articles that make reference to hunting, and on the front page, the journal might feature a picture of a proud hunter and his family around a dead moose hanging in a garage. In other words, it becomes very apparent around town when

⁵ Acquiring equipment is an important part of the hunt for most hunters. My 23-year-old female friend was proud to show me her brand new 17,000\$ ATV, when we went grouse hunting, on a windy afternoon of September. Material such as trucks, trailers, and ATVs, alongside stickers and other accessories of hunting brands such as “Browning,” allow hunters to distinguish themselves from non-hunters, and others to recognize them.

the hunting season opens; there is a sense that everyone puts his or her life on hold for that activity. Surely, many residents would echo Guy Rheault sentiment, when the 60-year-old tells me that you could never get him away from town in the fall.

When Marc Johnson moved to Hearst, he quickly became aware of the significance of hunting for residents, and participating in this activity allowed him to, in a sense, become part of the community. He was born in the outskirts of Ottawa, and although his father occasionally hunted when he was younger, he tells me that he was not brought up in a “culture of hunting.” However, guys from work got him into hunting a few years after he moved to Hearst in 1977 and started working for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR). He started hunting, because he enjoyed going out in the bush, and he felt peer-pressured, initially starting with fishing, then hunting, until he became passionate about it. Now at 61, Marc does not hunt anymore, but reflecting back, he told me: “I was a pretty hardcore hunter, like everybody around here.”

In fact, many residents are under the impression that everyone in Hearst hunts. According to Stéfanie Proulx and Angèle Fortin, two huntresses who both grew up in Hearst, hunting is part of the identity of the community, and they find it odd when people tell them they do not hunt or fish—men especially. You are like “Who are you? Where are you from? You don’t come from here, do you?” Angèle explained. Although it is safe to say that everyone knows a family member or a friend who hunts, and although Hearst is in close proximity to the natural environment and a prime hunting area, not everybody in the community hunts. Despite that, the activity has become iconic and has given residents a sense of pride and belonging. Hunting and related wild meat-cuisine are thus intricately connected to a sense of attachment to place which, in the words of geographers Bell and Valentine (1997: 150), can be likened to a kind of “local patriotism.”

1.2 « A sense of community »

More than offering a sense of connection through a shared tradition that cultivates attachment to place, hunting allows people to connect to each other literally through communal practices and rituals that surround the leisure activity. For instance, *Le Conseil des Arts de Hearst* organized two hunting-related festivals in the community over the

years. There were three editions of *Le Festival de l'original de Hearst* which started in 2003; it included several activities related to the themes of 'hunting' and 'moose' such as a moose call competition and an exhibition of moose antler sculptures (D.J. 2005: HA6). *Le Festival country de la perdrix*, on the other hand, initiated by a group of local residents and taken over by *Le Conseil des Arts* de Hearst in 2014, included country music concerts and a grouse hunting tournament. The last festival took part in September 2016. Organizers mention lack of funds and interested participants as the reasons for the termination of both festivals.

While these hunting-related festivals were abandoned, since 2008, the Hearst Anglers and Hunters Club has organized successful annual wild meat dinners, as a fundraising for the club (as will be discussed in Chapter 4, it was almost cancelled this year because it failed to adhere to provincial food safety regulations). This event allows for hunters and non-hunters of the community, along with the occasional visitor, to come together around food. Marie-Louis Pitre, the 61-year-old president of the club, told me that in the past, about 80% of the attendees were neither hunters nor anglers. Many attend because they are interested in tasting different wild meats. This year, one participant told Marie-Louis that the Wild Meat Supper was an opportunity for him to taste different meats, since he is too busy to go out hunting. It also allows hunters to taste game meats they cannot usually acquire, such as lynx and beaver that local trappers sometimes donate, and meat from animals they do not usually hunt, such as bear and goose. The meats are usually cooked by the same people every year. In the past, 200 people have attended the event, but the number of participants had to be reduced to half, because fewer wild meat donations were made.⁶

On Nov 19, 2016, I attended the Wild Meat Dinner along with family members and friends, and approximately 100 other participants—the event was sold out. I presented

⁶ One reason as to why fewer hunters may choose to donate wild meat is that the moose population is in decline, and the moose tags have become limited. Hunting is also expensive—especially for those who may drive an entire day to reach a deer hunting ground—an activity that has replaced or supplements moose hunting for some. In short, wild meat has perhaps become more difficult to obtain, pushing hunters to keep the meat they have for themselves and their loved ones.

my \$25 ticket and entered the spacious and bright fluorescent-lit room where the gathering was held; four long tables were covered with green plastic tablecloths. Some participants were dressed in camouflage-patterned clothes, while some women wore dresses. Groups included families, friends, elders, and young adults, many who seemed to know each other. About 15 cooks had been hard at work to prepare their wild meat recipes for the crowd. Participants stood in line with trays and plastic plates, which were filled with wild meat (dishes included smoked bear, deep-fried battered pike balls, moose and goose chili and more), accompanied with salad and a few vegetables. The club received positive feedback, as many agreed that the food was delicious. The event reminded dad of his days in the lumberjack camps, where informal dinners with plenty of food and loud conversations were had, and all the lumberjacks sat together at a long table. This gathering was more than about eating wild meat, but about the sense of connection that was formed by sharing this food with other community members (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Wild Meat Supper: participants eat a variety of homemade wild meat recipes, as they share stories.

The Wild Meat Supper was also an opportunity for the club to present different annual prizes to its members. Categories included the bull with the biggest antlers, the first cow and calf of the season, and the longest fish. However very few seemed captivated by this segment of the evening (perhaps because many participants were not serious hunters and anglers themselves and were more interested in eating the hunted meat and socializing)—most kept talking, making it almost impossible to hear the presenter.

Yet, during the event, I overheard a few groups talking about their hunting adventures. As I observed at the Wild Meat Supper and at various other dinners I attended, hunting stories and memories seem to emerge when people come together around wild meat. More specifically, storytelling and boasting about heroic hunting tales bring members of the community together, as they can converse about this shared interest. During the hunting season, hunting becomes the conversation topic of choice, and when a moose is brought back in town, news is fast to spread. Stories about the hunt play a role in community building and in reproducing a sense of regional identity that reinforces the town's connection to hunting, even for those who do not participate.

While the club may bring any member of the community together through some of its activities like the supper, it is a club that was more purposely created to bring hunters and anglers together. It was founded by a group of friends in 1982; today it has around 180 members—most of them joined to participate in fishing tournaments but remain inactive in the running of the club. Just as it was originally imagined, today the club continues to work on improving accessibility for hunters and anglers and on maintaining healthy fish and game populations. More specifically, volunteers have been involved in the stocking of lakes and the improvement of trails and roads—often logging roads that are no longer used by the companies.

However, while hunting remains very popular in Hearst, it recently became clear that very few seemed interested in volunteering for the club, apart from a small group of mostly older retired men. The future of the club became uncertain for a few weeks, when Marie-Louis Pitre stepped down from his president position in January 2017, and only a very small number of residents were interested in taking over the available positions, during the club's elections in the same month. Disheartened, Marie-Louis made the issue public by doing interviews with the local radio station and Radio-Canada (Projean, February 3, 2017). According to the local newspaper—*Le Journal LeNord*—the follow-up meeting that the club organized on February 8, 2017 was so successful that the location of the meeting had to be changed to accommodate the thirty attendants (Lavoie 2017: 2). Most of them were young passionate male and female hunters and anglers, several around 23 and 24 years old, who have returned to Hearst for work after leaving

for school and shared an interest in the continuity of the Club. They agreed to take over, and Marie-Louis agreed to remain the president for another year to facilitate the transition. Of those who became involved, three were grandsons of the club's founders (Projean, February 13, 2017).

Being more focused on fishing-related activities, the Hearst Anglers and Hunters Club has not been overly successful in bringing local hunters together in recent years—nor has *Le Conseil des Arts* with hunting-related festivals. Nevertheless, one can say that local hunters do not need these more formally organized venues to come together. Apart from exchanging stories at their workplace, they come in frequent contact with each other, in other places in town. In a small community like Hearst, locations like the Tim Hortons or the only supermarket have become key stops before or after the hunt. It is not only where hunters grab food (and coffee) before their outings, but it is where hunting stories and gossip are exchanged, particularly in the fall. After a morning in the woods, a quick stop at the grocery store dressed in hunter's orange⁷ led several people to ask my father and I about our experiences. For Gilles Desjardins, recognized by most residents as a local conservation officer, going grocery shopping, or taking part in other activities in the community for that matter, also means being bombarded with all kinds of hunting and fishing related questions.

Typer's Live Bait, the store most hunters and anglers visit before heading in the forest to buy equipment, ammunition⁸, or tags, has also become an important meeting point for

7 Hunters wear distinctive clothing: flashy orange clothing as prescribed by the law or camouflage clothing to blend in the landscape, becoming invisible to animals. Like ATVs and hunting gear, clothing allows residents to identify hunters. By wearing those clothes around town or in the forest, one instantly becomes identified as a hunter.

8 Although hunters usually acquire new ones long before the start of the hunting season, Serge Dillon told me that guns are the most popular item in his store, and since gun hunting is popular, hunters regularly visit the store to acquire ammunition. Some like to hunt grouse with shotguns such as the 12 or .410 gauge (shotgun shells contain several small pellets, called *shot*—making it more likely to hit the target). Others prefer using rifles—the .22 calibre being the most popular for grouse hunting—which use a cartridge containing one bullet, requiring more accuracy. While there are several bigger caliber rifles for big game hunting, Serge told me that the .30-06 is probably the most popular one for local moose hunters. Like the other equipment mentioned in an above footnote, hunters become very attached and proud of their guns.

hunters. The storeowner's name, Serge Dillon or "Typer" (Figure 4), often comes up in hunting-related discussions among community members. Being in contact with hunters daily at his store, the 51-year-old has, in a sense, taken on the role of the town's hunting-related news broadcaster; he knows about new trends and regulations and hunters' exploits, as well as who hunts with whom, and where. Over the years, he has no doubt heard countless hunting stories, and shared them with others, in turn.⁹



Figure 4: Serge Dillon in his store, showing me different rifles and shotguns

Julie Lecours, like Serge Dillon, is well known in the community for her hunting-related work. More particularly, her name is associated with the display of hunting trophies. Although her taxidermy job keeps her busy year-round, like owners of outfitters, fall is an even busier period for her. When she is not working at the hair salon, the 54-year-old woman is probably at home or the cottage—both filled with all kinds of stuffed animals—working on taxidermy projects. She first became curious about taxidermy as a young girl, when she cleaned her father's mounted and stuffed animals at the family

⁹ In some instances, places like Typer's Live Bait, the Tim Hortons, and the grocery store are not only places where informal networks are formed between residents, because it is where they discuss a passion for the activity, but because they share their frustrations with the Other who impedes the activities of hunters (explored in Chapter 4).

cottage, but it was not before her own children were older, and she was in her thirties, that she decided to learn the skill herself. The first animal she preserved was a pheasant that she completed while watching a VHS at 34; it took her 2 days. A few years later, she took an online course and obtained her license.

Today, you can see her driving around with her brown truck with a decal that reads “Julie’s Taxidermy” with deer tracks decals surrounding the words. Her taxidermy projects—small mammals, big game animals, fish, and birds—are found everywhere around town. Her work can be found at public venues, like the Tourism Centre, as well as in private basements and garages, where mounted trophy fish and deer heads are proudly displayed on walls. She is one of the only taxidermists in the region, so she also has clients from several neighbouring towns. Over the years, she has even had a few clients from Southern Ontario and even one from Africa—a tourist hunter who killed a bear through Payeur Outfitter and wanted to have a rug made with the fur.

1.3 « Hunting tourism »

While an informal network has formed between residents who participate in hunting-related activities, there are also hunting activities that involve outsiders who come to Hearst, often paying a fortune to take part in the activity. During the hunting season, a resident of Hearst would recognize new faces, as hunters from other towns and cities drive through town, on the Trans-Canada Highway, to hunt around Hearst and beyond, perhaps through an outfitter like Payeur Outfitter, run by Chantale Groleau-Payeur and her husband Rémi Payeur.

Payeur Outfitter was established about 25 years ago by Chantale’s parents-in-law. Her husband had always been involved, and it was his dream to take over the business one day. So, when his parents retired in 2011, they took over the business. One evening, I drove to the outfitter—located at approximately 20 kilometers south of Hearst—to spend time with Chantale. Her father is neither a hunter nor an angler, so she never participated in those activities when she was younger, but her husband introduced her to them when they started dating. Even though she has another job at *La Maison Verte*, an organization with a mandate to grow seedlings for reforestation (among other projects), the 44-year-

old is involved in the business in several ways. This includes participating in the tracking of dead animals (because not every animal drops dead when and where it is shot, hunters have to follow different cues to recover them). She particularly enjoys photographing the hunters with their kill (she posts the pictures to their Facebook page and adds them to an album she shares with hunters).

While I was there, Chantale showed me their different cabins, their walk-in freezer, the storage for bear bait, the area where bears are butchered and weighed, and the “Bear’s Den” they made in the garage—a cozy spot with couches, a big screen television, decorated with hunting pictures and different taxidermy animals. She tells me it is an area where hunters can socialize, drink beer and watch a football game (a sport which is probably more popular among their American clients), after a day in the bush. The link between hunting and alcohol consumption is undeniable, in fact, Chantale joked that she sometimes wonders why it is not called beer hunting rather than bear hunting.

Today, they offer different services from bear and wolf hunting, to guiding, fishing, and camping to tourists who are looking for, as their website states, a “unique getaway in [a] pristine wilderness area,” (if they have \$850 to spend for a six-day black bear hunt or \$1700 for a five-day wolf hunt package) (Payeur Outfitter n.d.). While they are starting to have more clients from Southern Ontario, bear hunting is most popular among Americans—from Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, Texas, and Ohio, in particular. Hunters—male hunters in large part—hunt bears for the trophy and the fur, but she tells me that most of them eat the meat too.

Marc Johnson reminded me that in the region, bear hunting has long been associated with tourism and Americans. Even though it is perhaps becoming more popular among local hunters, several of those with whom I spoke had never practiced bear hunting. As Haraway has shown in her book *Primate Visions*, Americans have a long history of trophy hunting (with the trophy-hunting safari-expeditions of President Theodore Roosevelt as an indication of this), which has been closely intertwined with dreams of domination (Haraway 1989), but even if hunters at Payeur Outfitter are not always lucky, many return year after year for the good times. At the same time, they visit Chantale’s

parents-in-law, with whom they have formed a friendship over the years, and several hunters have also become friends of Chantale and her husband.

The day after paying a visit to the Payeurs, I went to meet the owners of Hearst Air Services—another popular outfitter in the area. Some of their clients have also been returning for years; it is now some of their children who bring their friends. The base is located at more than 20 kilometers west of Hearst, on Carey Lake, from which planes take off to bring hunters and anglers to outpost cabins. The business is recognized for its fly-in adventures to secluded lakes, where trophy fish are caught and impressive pictures are taken, and for moose hunting, but they also take on charter contracts.

When I got there, staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry was loading a plane that would take them north, where they had to conduct surveys. George Veilleux bought the business about 40 years ago, because he enjoyed flying planes, hunting and fishing, and although he still pays them a daily visit, his children Mélanie and Michael are now in charge of operations. Mélanie became involved almost 20 years ago, when she moved back to Hearst; she missed “the northern lifestyle,” and seeing how passionate her father was about what he was doing, inspired her to take over the business.

They now have three planes, and most of their clients are American and Southern Ontarian males. Unlike the owners of Payeur Outfitter, however, the Veilleux have access to moose validation tags which means that non-residents of Ontario can hunt moose through them; for \$2495 a hunter can acquire a 10-day moose hunt package which includes the camp, a boat, the motor, the gas, the moose tag, and a flight to the cabin and back (Hearst Air Service n.d.). However, as Mélanie pointed out, younger people usually like to take pictures and instantly post them on social media, but flying-in to no service zones does not allow them to do so, so it is only the more “hardcore” ones who come to them.

Hunting has become a defining activity for the community, one that makes hundreds of tourists travel numerous hours every year. At Hearst Air Service, Mélanie Veilleux sees approximately 150 hunters from the U.S. and Ontario on an average year (a few of them are from Northern Ontario). At Payeur Outfitter, on the other hand, Chantale welcomes

approximately 30 tourists from outside Ontario and 100 from the province (including people from nearby areas) yearly. This is on top of all the tourists who come to the region to hunt independently. In an email, Melanie told me that during the hunting season, she probably sees more than five thousand hunters drive by on the Trans-Canada highway (like my father and I at the grocery store, the orange clothing and equipment makes those hunters recognizable). For many of them, no doubt, hunting is the only reason they can identify Hearst on a map.

As I have shown in this chapter, hunting is central to the lives of people living in Hearst. The hunt and related culinary traditions come with a sense of pride and local identity for residents. Hunting further provides those who practice it with a sense of belonging to a community that is united in its appreciation and love of all that comes with the activity. This community is not necessarily a formal grouping that comes together at set venues but a loosely defined network that converges towards hunting related events, specific town stores, or hunting experts, at specific seasons of the year. Over the years, some members of the community have become iconic characters in the hunting scene and may act as nodal points for hunting related news. Hearst is also a destination of choice for tourists passionate about hunting. While, given the town's proximity to the surrounding forests, some of the animals—hunted by locals or outsiders alike—may occasionally come into town, most Hearst residents feel that they do not belong there, but in the hunting ground. It is this space “away from town” that I turn to in the next chapter to explore hunters' connections to the land and the wildlife they aim to kill.

Chapter 2

2 « The Hunting Ground »

The Hearst Forest, which was delimited by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Hearst Forest Management Inc. in 1986 (for forest management purposes relating to the harvesting and replanting of forests), is more than 12,000 square kilometers. It is “twice the size of Prince Edward Island and currently [...] one of the largest forests in Ontario” (Hearst Forest Management Inc., 2016b), with Hearst located at its center (Hearst Forest Management Inc., 2016a). Since the town is relatively isolated, as described in Chapter 1, and is surrounded by one of the largest forests in Ontario, residents live in proximity to a vast landscape inhabited by “wild” animals and “uncultivated” plant species, which encourages contact with “nature.” This is especially the case with hunters who, as shall be seen, go into the hunting ground, in part, seeking this contact.

First, I will look at hunters’ relationship to the forest environment. I start by giving an overview of the landscape where hunting is carried out, and I explore how local hunters perceive the biophysical environment, talk about it, and connect to it, in ways that both validate and contradict the Western myth of wilderness described by William Cronon (1996). I then move to multispecies encounters to explore the relationship that hunters have with the animals they hunt. Through attempting to conquer them in different ways during the hunt, they come to know them, appreciate their beauty, and recognize their agency. Dividing the chapter up into two sections, one dealing with hunters’ relationship to the landscape and another focused on their relationship to animals, allows me to explore different aspects of hunters’ connections to the forest.

2.1 « The “natural” environment »

It would be very hard for outsiders to reach hunting grounds, as directions are not always evident, and points of reference, such as lakes, have not always been officially named. As Harrison points out in his study on the relationship of landscape and memory in Papua New Guinea, only people of the community who are familiar with the place and its

history can move in the landscape with ease using “signs discernable only to some privileged few” (2004: 148).

I find it helpful to think of the landscape using Tim Ingold’s dwelling perspective: “the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them,” (1993: 156) and in doing so, leave a record of their presence. According to Ingold “to perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance [...]” (1993: 152). For him, the landscape is not the product of the imagination nor “a totality that [we] can look *at*, it is rather the world *in* which we stand in taking up a point of view on our surroundings” (1993: 171).

In Hearst, the community’s history and memories are evoked in the way locals talk about their surrounding landscape. Locals sometimes use names that are only known to them, because they represent a specific history of the place. For instance, the road officially named Caithness Road is locally known by the name of a company (Levesque Lumber) that logged on it in the past. For instance, a waterfall on Levesque’s Road is sometimes referred to by the name an individual who drowned at the location; the landscape has a human history and hunters are particularly aware of this. This way of designating the landscape allows members of the community to orient themselves geographically while re-enacting their connection to the local landscape through shared stories that reference the history of Hearst.

Then, just as “the forest is a medium for telling stories of oneself and others” for the Meratus of Borneo described by Tsing (2005: 201), for the hunters I worked with, the forest is alive with community and personal stories shared with hunting companions. As Tsing tells us, people come to know “forests as social, historical, biographical spaces” (2005: 201). “Your grandfather used to log here,” dad always tells me, when we drive on a particular road, on our way to a hunting ground, “and this is where the camps were, when I worked in this area as a young lumberjack,” he tells me as he points to the landscape. Today, I remember exactly where those lumberjack camps were (the terrain is more elevated, and there is a turn in the road), I can also find a narrow trail that gets me to that secluded waterfall with a biographical name—a trail my dad often took as a young

man. His knowledge and stories have become mine. Learning the informal names of landmarks and the stories attached to them is part of getting to know the landscape—it is an inter-generational activity that is reproduced, as apprentice hunters like myself “through these markers, learn their way in the forest and, later, craft their tales of places and events” (Tsing 2005: 200). Although the bush road, situated in a young boreal forest of trembling aspen, spruce, birch, tamarack, and cedar, could seem uninteresting and unchanging to newcomers, for others it is most engaging and “full of markings of past communities” (Tsing 2005: 198). This is true in a literal sense, for instance, the red ribbons tied to branches found everywhere in the bush indicate that the site was or is currently a point of interest for someone.

Spending time in the forest and being familiar with the environment is a requirement for local hunters in Hearst. While most hunters are comfortable navigating portions of the surrounding forests and can orient themselves with the help of landmarks such as bush roads, lakes, and rivers, the immensity of the “natural” environment that surrounds the town makes it impossible for hunters to be familiar with the entirety of the territory.

Most of the Hearst Forest is crown land or public land—hunters are free to navigate and hunt almost anywhere on this landscape. The exceptions are provincial parks and some areas where outfitters and other businesses can limit access to the public. It is not uncommon to see Villeneuve Construction Co. Ltd. “no trespassing” signs or gates, for instance, when they have a quarry in an area. Likewise, some townships that were sold to American businesses and resold to other companies throughout the years have been officially closed off to the population. This is the case for land that was acquired by Newaygo Timber almost 100 years ago.¹⁰ Today, Domtar Forest Products and Wagner Ontario Forest Management own those townships, which are, for the most part, not accessible to the public (apart from those who hunt through Payeur Outfitters, which rent private land from Wagner for their hunters, for instance).

¹⁰ Newaygo Timber started harvesting pulpwood on its townships in the 1920s, first for its paper mill located in the United States, and later for a sawmill that the company built in the region (in the village of Mead) after its paper mill shut down. The sawmill was operational from 1973-1984 (A Short History of Hearst and Area Sawmills: 2006).

As opposed to other regions where hunting is carried out on private land or farm land, in Hearst, most hunting is carried out on crown land. For moose hunting, hunters are required to apply in a Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) of their choice. For management purposes, the province has been divided into such units using physical features such as rivers and roads as natural borders.¹¹ People tend to apply for the same WMUs every year, so that, despite the public nature of the space, over time, many hunters have developed a deep connection to a particular site, which they treat as private and personal. This is the case with Louise Miron who continues to hunt in the area where her parents initiated her into hunting, at the age of 4 or 5. This is not uncommon; Stéfanie Proulx—a 23-year-old huntress—still hunts in her great-grandparents’ cabin with her family—an area where her grandfather has also killed many moose—albeit not always legally. As a result, even though the land is usually public, hunters come to feel a sense of ownership over the spaces they hunt in, and others come to associate those areas with particular groups.



Figure 5: Tree stand—my 19-year-old cousin Samantha Fleury climbs the ladder of her tree stand. That day, we sat on the platform in the hope that a bear would come eat at the bait placed in line-of-sight, to allow for an easy shot.

11 This illustrates what Ingold says in relation to features of a landscape: “no feature of the landscape is, of itself, a boundary. It can only become a boundary, or the indicator of a boundary, in relation to the activities of the people (or animals) for whom it is recognized or experienced as such (1993: 156).”

The unwritten rule is that other hunters should not go on their hunting grounds. In order to avoid infringing on someone else's territory one has to know where some families or groups hunt—knowledge that is acquired by having lived in town for years and by talking to other hunters. Territories that have become “privatized” may also be identified through the presence of bear bait sites—where barrels are secured and filled with different foods to attract bears to the hunting ground, trails,¹² along with cabins, and tree stands—elevated platforms, usually secured to trees, but sometimes sitting on a wooden base, used for the advantageous vantage points they give hunters (Figure 5).

Hunting requires long periods of observation and repeated contact on the sites that hunters have made theirs. Hunters not only spend a lot of time on their hunting grounds, they gain knowledge and appreciation for the landscape and everything in it, while doing so; “this involvement draws people into the lives of the forest” (Kohn 2013: 5). Because they spent time on their hunting ground every year (during the hunt, beforehand for preparations or for other leisure activities), hunters, such as Louise and Stéfanie, know specific areas very well. Like most hunters, their parents probably taught them to notice different signs on the landscape, by pointing things out and sharing their knowledge to them, and over the years, they became even more knowledgeable of the place through their own embodied experience.

As explained by 48-year-old huntress Lina Comeau, once at their hunting ground, the majority of hunters' time is actually spent waiting to encounter an animal: “because you are there for such a long time—let's say you're posted two or three hours—you see different things, you hear things, [...]” While some may spend hours waiting suspended in the air, in their tree stands, others are on the ground, either standing still or walking around. For instance, on a gloomy day of September, I spent eight hours with Michelle Lamy, a patient and attentive huntress in her 60s, walking different trails looking for grouse. Likewise, it is not uncommon for hunters to leave for the woods with their GPS

12 Ingold holds that paths impose a pattern on people who take the same paths years after year, and that, simultaneously, paths are the product of that movement—they are a testimony of journeys on a landscape. Moreover, paths allow one to travel from one place to another and thus, “there can be no places without paths” (1993: 167).

or compass at dawn and return at dusk, walking several kilometers in a day, in the hope of encountering a moose.

Since most of the time spent on the hunting ground is spent trying to encounter an animal, all the hunter's senses become alive and in tune with her or his surroundings. In fact, to be successful, hunters must not only be familiar with the landscape, but with the features and signs in the landscape that hint at a potential animal encounter. Being more familiar with the flora and fauna found on the hunting ground, for instance, my father can detect subdued sounds—such as distant bull grunts—that I have not yet learned to discern. I would argue that hunting encourages acute awareness of the biophysical environment that would not be there otherwise. This is evident in the amount of details that hunters add when they tell hunting stories, even several years after the fact. For instance, telling me about his first successful moose hunt, which occurred almost 40 years ago, Guy Rheault not only recalled the features on the landscape, but even the smallest details about the weather: there was a frost, and it was a beautiful windless morning. Details about the weather and vegetation, particularly in the fall season, abound in the interviews I conducted about hunting trips.

In general, hunters enjoy the contact with "the outdoors," even if the hunt is unsuccessful. Speaking of hunting in the fall, David Barbour told me: "I just really enjoy it, that time of year, you can appreciate you know, taking a deep breath. I've told my kids, I've told friends: 'Take a deep breath.' 'Why'? 'Just do it.' 'Take another one, just do it.' So we'd do it, and I'd say: 'You can't do that in Toronto.'" Marc Johnson similarly explained how he loved to "[walk] down a nice trail in the fall, [on a] nice crispy morning." Likewise, my father likes grouse hunting, because it allows him to walk alone in the fall, breath fresh air and exercise. As George Veilleux and many others told me, it does not matter if they come back with grouse or not, for many, it is simply an opportunity to spend time outdoors and take in its healing powers.

Fall and hunting are not only intertwined in hunters' imagination because this is when the season opens for most types of hunt, but because it seems to be the time when they most enjoy being outdoors. Hunters appreciate the fall scenery because of the transformation in

the flora, the smells, and the sounds, which comes with it around that time. Every year, during the moose hunt, Guy Rheault spends countless hours in his tree stand observing those transformations:

The change of colours! I love fall and the smells that come with it. It's full of small trembling aspens around one of my tree stands: they start to become yellow, then, they become bright yellow. And tamaracks too, they are so beautiful! The beautiful golden colours of the tamarack last about a week, and I get to see this progression [...] I love it.

Hunters' focus on the quality of the air, seasonal change, and fall vegetation speak of an experience that is not replicable in the town, which does not offer the same kind of diversity and volume in plant species, nor the experience of an expanse "open" territory.¹³

In this respect, although the hunting ground can be close to the town in geographical location, it is both experienced and constructed as a separate place in a manner that reproduces the familiar nature-culture dichotomy. Appreciation for the "natural" environment re-occurs in hunters' narratives and seems to be an integral part of why they hunt.

According to American environmental historian William Cronon, dominant constructions of "nature" presume the existence of a landscape that is "... pristine—remote from humanity and untouched by our common past" (Cronon 1996: 19).¹⁴ In Canada, this

13 This time spent near the "natural" environment also allows hunters to become more knowledgeable of the environment and to make different observations. For instance, hunters are made aware of climate change through their activities, the weather is now warmer in the fall, making it trickier for the call, as it usually becomes more successful after a frost according to some. Hunters also have to be more careful when handling of meat. Once, Cathy Glazer's group had to get rid of a moose—the meat went bad because of the warm weather. In that sense, by spending time on the landscape, hunters can produce local expert knowledge, which can become important for registering the effects of climate change and noticing dynamics in plant and animal species; hunters know the forest "because of this kind of alertness, grown over time in familiar territories" (Tsing 2005: 186).

14 It should be noted that Cronon's interest in the social construction of "nature" contrasts radically with Ingold's concern with the lived dimension of the biophysical world. In Ingold's dwelling ontology, the mind is not detached from the world: "apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view of the world but of taking up a view *in it*" (Ingold 2000: 42).

notion of a vast wilderness has been intricately connected to the creation of a national identity—an identity promoted, among others, by the Group of Seven who, in their paintings, epitomized Canada as a wild and empty landscape—with humans and development left outside the frames of artists. Arguably, this romanticized connection made between the country, and “the wilderness” remains powerful in the popular imagination (White 2007: 11) and no doubt has influenced the experiences of the hunters I worked with.

At first glance, notions of a pristine nature appear to be reproduced among hunters, when they seem to speak of the hunting ground as a place where you are “in the presence of something irreducibly nonhuman, something profoundly Other than yourself” (Cronon 1996: 8). This was illustrated, for instance, as Guy recounted what he called “extraordinary spectacles,” including multiple encounters with animals and fascinating weather phenomenon. Once, the air became white before him, as if the humidity had crystalized; he also told me how at dawn, from his tree stand, he is often in awe as he observes some kind of fog rising by the beaver dam. In recognizing “the spectacular” Otherness and beauty encountered on the hunting ground, hunters like Guy often reproduce the idea that true beauty is found in the pristine and untouched “wilderness.”

In keeping with dominant constructs of the wilderness as pristine environments uninhabited by humans, many hunters resent the presence of too many other humans on the hunting ground, perhaps not only because this may decrease their chance of catching an animal, but because, among other things, it breaks the illusion of a “nature” devoid of humans. Most want to be alone or with their groups on the territories they perceive as theirs, during the “sacred” period of hunting. For David Barbour who chose to live in Northern Ontario, because he is far from the crowds, bear hunting was spoiled when the spring bear hunt was reinstated, and everyone started doing it, interfering with his experience of “...being out there making observations, seeing things as they are.” Cathy Glazer also expressed that she does not enjoy hunting in some WMUs, due to the presence of too many hunters, whose presence is sometimes made obvious with gunshots. Some areas are indeed becoming very busy during the hunting season. For instance, my friend told me that her father recently tried shooting one of two moose he had spotted but

missed. He then saw that another group was waiting on the other side of the forest stand and shot both moose, as they got closer to them.

Being alone or with a selected few companions allows hunters to reconnect with “wilderness” and their true “primal” and spiritual selves. To borrow Cronon’s words, the hunting ground becomes “a place where we can see the world as it really is, and so know ourselves as we really are—or ought to be” (1996: 16). In other words, hunting becomes an opportunity for introspection, a time for people to learn about themselves. For many, the contact with “nature” is particularly important as a healing act that can only happen by moving away from “civilization” and the busyness of everyday life. This is the case for 26-year-old Angèle Fortin, for whom spending time hunting is usually time spent alone—a time to reconnect with herself, a time of reflection, and problem solving. For Louise Miron, this is the principal motivation for hunting—obtaining meat is a bonus. “I grew up in nature,” she told me, “so for me, that’s where I regain my energy after a week at work. Whether I go fishing or hunting, it relaxes me. It’s about being in the forest and admiring what nature gives.”

Inasmuch as the hunters of Hearst thus reproduced the dichotomy between culture and nature, they may be different from those described in cited anthropological ethnographies that focused on more “traditional” hunter-gatherer groups that may not make the kinds of distinctions “we” make about culture and nature. For “them,” human animals are interdependent with flora and fauna rather than separate from them; they live a world encompassing both human and non-human components of their environment (Ingold 2000: 43-7). And yet, it would be wrong to assert that the hunters of Hearst are unaware of the nature-culture entanglement, in their everyday lives.

While the biophysical world around them may be a place of recreation, introspection, healing, beauty, and inspiration for some, many hunters, who make a living on the land as

did their ancestors,¹⁵ know that so-called nature is not always sublime (winters are harsh, and black flies are remorseless), nor is it separate from human activity, as romantic constructs of nature suggest (Cronon 1996). The forest, for locals, is a landscape for recreation and contemplation, but also as a land for the extraction of resources (from trees to “wild” game)—most hunters seem to be well aware that most forests are second-growth forests.¹⁶ The perception that Hearst residents have of the landscape comes closer to what Paxson calls the “working landscape”—a landscape on which people place both sentimental and material value (Paxson 2012: 17).

Interestingly, this understanding of the landscape may have long roots in the region. In her essay in the book *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art*, Esther Trépanier compares the English and French versions of the national anthem to demonstrate that there are linguistic and cultural distinctions in the way the landscape is constructed. Whereas the Anglophone version focuses on wilderness and Canada as a land yet to be conquered, the Francophone version focuses on the social and historical aspects of the landscape. More specifically, it was the norm for Québécois artists to depict rural life, that is, worked nature as opposed to pristine nature (Trépanier 2007: 303).

Hence, instead of escaping history in “wilderness” (Cronon 1996: 25), as seen earlier, the people of Hearst are acutely aware that “wilderness” has a human history and that history continues to be made in “wilderness.” It should be clear by now, that the image of a frontier of “virgin land, with no trails, no signs [...]” does not correspond to the reality on the ground (Cronon 1996: 20). Although some hunters may at times reproduce notions of the hunting ground as a “wilderness” site where “nature” (not humans) reigns supreme, they are also continually reminded of human presence by the markings left on the

15 Alluding to Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Paxson makes a distinction between the land and the landscape; the land is where resources are extracted, and the landscape is an object of contemplation (Paxson 2012: 16).

16 Second-growth forests exemplify what Tsing calls “gaps” (2005: 193), or what Haraway calls “border zones” or “borderlands”: areas located between the “potent mythic poles” of “nature” and “culture” (1989: 1)—where there is no clear boundary between human transformation and the “natural” environment.

landscape or the sounds of “civilization” nearby. While, as mentioned, many do not want the literal presence of too many humans on their hunting ground, some are indifferent about the fact that “civilization” is close by. When my father and I spent time in the tree stand, most of the time he was sitting in silence, sometimes with his eyes shut, almost in a meditative state. However, all this time we could hear traffic on the highway, and one night, three ATVs went by in the trail beside us,¹⁷ which he seemed to accept as a reality of spending time in the forest.

The activity of hunting itself is responsible for the physical transformation of the landscape. For example, tree stands are common, since it is too complicated to put them down at the end of the hunting season. If the tree stand is bigger than a certain dimension, the MNRF has the right to bring them down, but many survive from season to season (my father, for instance, has at least four tree stands standing around Hearst). Even if the majority of hunters do not litter, they modify the landscape with their tree stands and the ATVs they drive to study the landscape and find the best territory to hunt their desired prey. They further create trails and cut trees, to reach their site of choice. The disturbance continues during the hunting season, when hunters travel in the forest with their trucks, ATVs, and snowmobiles, killing plants and trees on the way, polluting waterways when they cross them with their vehicles, and polluting the environment with the lead contamination from the ammunition. While humans continue to constantly alter the Hearst forest through different activities, including hunting, they do not always recognize their own footprint.

Most, however, are aware and acknowledge that humans, through activities like logging, have in large part manufactured this landscape. For them, logging, hunting, trapping, and having an appreciation for “nature,” and even concerns for environmental sustainability,

17 This brings to mind American authors, such as Henry David Thoreau, encountered in Leo Marx’s work who wrote at the time of the industrialization of the United States and became fascinated by the “machine in the garden,” or the technology that interrupted their experience of being in a pristine landscape (a locomotive heard from Walden Pond in Thoreau’s case) (Marx 1964). However, being in proximity to other humans and hearing those sounds does not surprise my father; he is aware and familiar with the long-established nature-culture entanglements in the area.

do not have to be contradictory. Most hunters accept logging activities, or at least perceive them as a necessary part of their lifestyle. In fact, this activity has put many residents of Hearst in contact with the environment, for, while taking part in “destructive” (and sometimes reforestation-related) work activities, they developed a deeper understanding of the environment through observation and experience. As Richard White tells us: “work that has changed nature has simultaneously produced much of our knowledge of nature” (1995: 172).

When I ask them what they think about logging, most hunters tell me a version of what David Barbour said: “We live in Northern Ontario, in which if there weren’t forestry operations going on, these communities probably wouldn’t be here.” More than being central to the economy of Hearst, the activities of logging companies make hunting possible. In fact, hunting as it is practiced today in Northern Ontario, began after World War II—facilitated by bush roads created and maintained for modern forest and mining industries (Dunk 2002: 57-8). Many want more roads and more maintenance of those roads—once these roads become unused by companies, only the Hearst Anglers and Hunters Club works to maintain them, with the help of subsidies from the provincial government.

While bush roads allow humans to move on the landscape, logged areas also provide good feed for moose when the regrowth starts—disturbed forests are ideal moose habitat, as they promote the growth of shrubs, which provide nutritional food for moose (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Hunting on a logging road—Daniel walks on the road hoping to encounter a moose or see one in the distance.

Christiane Groleau told me that companies are currently logging on her hunting ground which is pushing moose away, but she knows it will not be long before they come back, as regeneration comes with the growth of moose feed such as red osier dogwood—what she and others call red branches. Logged areas also allow for good hunting spots, because cleared forests allow for a better chance of seeing and shooting an animal. In fact, throughout the years, many hunters have had to change hunting grounds because regrowth made it impossible to see in the distance. For instance, Marie-Louis Pitre and his brothers used to go hunting around a village named Beardmore, but when forest operations stopped, it became difficult to spot moose. On top of that, they never knew if they would be able to access their hunting ground because maintenance of bush roads stopped.

On top of accepting forest operations, and even being dependent on them, some hunters seem to develop an admiration for the areas that logging companies have altered. Indeed, for hunters, this flora and fauna “whose otherness compels our attention” (Cronon 1996: 23) does not need to be found in pristine landscapes. Residents of Hearst—hunters in particular—can appreciate the landscape and even the human alterations made to it in the process of making a living. In fact, hunters appreciate landscapes that might often be overlooked by others—swamps and logged areas are propitious environment for moose. This became clear to me the night Daniel Fauchon, who at 21, has already killed three moose, one bear, and two deer, picked me up for a night of moose hunting in an area Hearst residents called the Ritchie—an area where there has been a lot of logging activity over the years. When we got there, Daniel was surprised that so much had been cut down in the span of one winter. In an area he thought he was familiar with, the landscape had completely changed, there seemed to be endless new roads, and there were barely any trees left standing.

That night, we were not successful, but it did not matter. Between Daniel’s moose calls, we looked at the sun set through the few trees that were still standing, as we heard the ducks take off on the creek and the geese honk. Ironically, in an area where there had been so much human disturbance, that night I felt like we were the only humans in the world; we were both absorbed by the sounds and the sights. Even the slightest noise was

thrilling, everything was amplified, we had become very alert. At some point, Daniel turned around and whispered: “look at how beautiful this is”—this area had been altered to a point where a forest could barely be identified, yet, Daniel and I could still appreciate it.

Hunters do not seem to buy into the myth of wilderness, which holds that we can “leave nature untouched by our passage,” however; many seem to be aware that they can “decide what kinds of marks [they] wish to leave” (Cronon 1996: 23). Despite this not-so-benign tampering with “nature” at the hunting site, most hunters understand that the future of their livelihood and traditions depends on the forest; hence, the majority of them seek to preserve it. While most residents accept the activities of hunting and logging, most hunters agreed that they must be carried out with proper care. In fact, what frustrates some hunters even more than having other hunters on their hunting ground, is the fact that some of them leave litter behind. The refrigerator left at the entrance of Irish road and the countless beer cans and coffee cups that I have picked up on Levesque’s road are a good indicator that not everyone who spends time in the forest respects it, and several hunters can attest to that. Most hunters are very critical of unnecessary pollution, more specifically of the amount of trash scattered throughout the forest, and most tell me that they pick up litter whenever they can. On the other hand, Marc tells me there is less trash than when he first moved to Hearst, and some hunters, such as Danika, have noticed that it has improved in the areas they visit. Still, the amount of trash remains considerable in areas. Furthermore, while hunters appreciate logging for the ways it benefits the hunt, and many hunters are indifferent to the deforestation that is occurring, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, others also acknowledge that some practices accepted in the logging industry have detrimental effects on the environment and for hunters.

While looking at hunters’ perspectives of the environment at the hunting ground allows us to understand their relationship to one aspect of “nature,” a crucial dimension of the hunting experience remains to be discussed: hunters’ relationship to non-human animals. It is to this topic that I turn to in the following section.

2.2 « Multi-species encounters on the hunting ground »

It is on the hunting ground—whether a secluded forested area, a logging road, a river, or a trail—that hunters can come into direct contact with the animals they wish to kill (be they grouse, bears, deer, geese, or the more coveted moose). Hundreds of residents anxiously wait for the hunting season every year, variously motivated by the love of the outdoors, the thrill of the sport, the social aspects of it, and a desire for “wild” meat.

Dad wakes me up around 6 am, and by 7 we are both sitting in the boat, on the foggy Kabinakagami River (he has spent hours getting all the equipment ready the previous night). The river is calm, the trees have taken on their colourful fall appearance, and we can only hear the motor. It is only the second day of October, but I quickly realize that the several layers of clothing that I am wearing are not enough. Despite the seemingly mysterious and picture-perfect landscape that surrounds me, I can only think about how cold I am, and how I would much rather be in bed on this chilly Sunday morning. At this point, we have already spent a few cold mornings in the tree stand, and by the time the bow-hunting season comes to an end, we have spent several hours standing or sitting still, in silence, listening attentively, and looking in the distance. Yet, we still have no moose meat in the freezer. Based on hunters’ narratives and my own experiences, hunting is not always enjoyable—it can be cold, uncomfortable, and long—but the possibility of getting an animal is what makes it special. Hunting is a “sacred time” that is guarded by local hunters for all the pleasures and challenges it offers to those who participate. It is valued as a time when they not only come in contact with “nature” but also experience the thrill of encountering and killing animals.

Many will wake up before the sunrise on the weekend, take time off work, and take their children out of school for hunting. Daniel Séguin, Lina Comeau’s partner, is a trapper and a forest technician and supervisor for Lecours Lumber Co. Limited, a softwood lumber producer, and the only logging company that remains family-owned in the area. Growing up in Hearst, his father and his older brother also introduced him to hunting. Needless to say, Daniel has acquired extensive knowledge through his experience and close contact with the flora and fauna over the years. He works on logging sites all week, and on most weekends, he is trapping at the cabin, because he must adhere to annual

harvest quotas. For instance, not complying with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's quota of 130 beavers per year (a rule put in place by the Ministry to protect the land and keep the beaver population in balance) could mean that his license would be revoked. Despite the hard work and discipline entailed, Daniel and others would not give up the hunt. Even after taking part in hunting for decades and spending almost every day outdoors, now at 51, moose and deer hunting remain "sacred" to him. He takes a week off for each of those hunts: "it's sacred, if my boss doesn't give me my weeks off, I quit," he said half-jokingly. And indeed, his feelings seem to be shared by other hunters who have been anxiously waiting to get their hands on a tag for years or have been talking and preparing for the hunt for months.

The hunting ground, like the town, is full of complicated connections between humans and animals, animals they love and animals they also love to kill. Hunters and "wild" animals are entangled in complex ways.¹⁸ Ultimately, the relationship that hunters have with animals varies from individual to individual, depending on factors like past experiences, life stage, family traditions, values, and preferences. On the surface, most hunters seem unhesitant when it comes time to take the animal's life. They have usually taken part in hunts since a young age, and coming in close contact with a dead animal long before taking part in the hunt is not uncommon. Reminiscing during our interview, for example, Cathy Glazer told me "I have pictures of when I was young, [...] I think I was 3 years old, and I'm standing inside a moose." Therefore, it is rare to meet a hunter for whom seeing dead animals is shocking. Nonetheless, hunters usually experience panoply of emotions when they encounter, injure, or kill animals, and even if hunters enjoy the sport and seek to kill animals, they usually want to do it in a respectful way. When I ask them how killing an animal makes them feel, some hunters turn the question around and ask me if I have seen videos of animal predators taking their prey out. It is much crueller than hunting, they argue. In that sense, some see themselves as just another species in the food chain, only they do it more respectfully than others.

¹⁸ Like the dualism encountered when hunters talk of "nature" as a place outside of town, a humanity-animality dualism (Ingold 2000: 48), that is, by and large absent among traditional hunter-gatherer groups, is reproduced in this context.

The notion that killing is part of life (as Haraway tell us, human lives depend on it) is a fact that many hunters have accepted. Christiane Groleau who has been in contact with dead animals from a young age particularly illustrated this for me. Animal organs have always fascinated her, and the sight and smell of blood never turned her off (as a child, she would carry blood pails around the family farm for the making of blood pudding). She talks about shooting down animals with sparkles in her eyes; the 49-year-old likes guns, knives, and touching blood and flesh with her hands. This is, in part, because she understands herself and her prey to be part of a life cycle—to eat meat, we have to kill animals.

Not everyone is equally nonchalant about the act of killing a “wild” animal. I met with David Barbour—originally from Kapuskasing, Ontario—in the hope of understanding the perspective of a local biologist, but Dave was more than a knowledgeable biologist. When we moved from the meeting table of the MNRF’s offices to his personal office (filled with hunting pictures—pictures of living and dead animals), he switched to his perspective as a local hunter. We ended up spending more than two hours together, during which he told me several hunting stories. At some point during our interview, he told me:

[...] the moose I first shot with archery, like I thought I was dreaming, you know? You'd thought it was a dream. I was like: 'wow.' You know those dreams where you win the lottery, and all of a sudden you wake up? It was like that, and it was sort of surreal, and all of sudden, you're like: 'wow,' 'I just killed that big animal,' and you're sort of feeling bad and sad, but happy and elated, all at the same time, right? It's a weird feeling, but at the end of the day, I think everything's related, I feel that it's a great sense of pride, a sense of relief, a sense of appreciation.

And this, I think, beautifully encapsulates how many hunters may feel when they kill an animal—all the emotions that they experience simultaneously—and the sense of excitement and appreciation they feel when they master part of “wild nature.”

In order to master their prey, hunters all over the world not only become more aware of the “natural” environment, but more attentive to and knowledgeable of the fauna and surrounding environment. Johnny is now 85, and as a hunter, trapper, and hunting guide, he has encountered and killed a lot of animals as the different antlers hanging on the wall

of his house—one that he has built himself cutting trees one by one—bear witness to. Some years he caught more than 500 beavers, and he has killed hundreds of moose. It is fair to say that a strict observance of hunting regulations, guilt, or concern for animal populations do not feature predominantly in his hunting narratives. Despite that, it became obvious that Johnny had a sense of admiration for the animals and a desire to learn about them. In fact, his success as a hunter can be attributed to his extensive knowledge, acquired through years of observation and transmitted to him by his father. His dad taught him that to hunt an animal down, one must learn about it. Today, he can tell you all about changes in marten and fisher populations in the area, caribou behaviours and parasites that affect them, and trends he observed during the mating season. Such knowledge, as Tsing argues, “. . . is a form of attention to biological diversity, not only as a list of species, but also as growth habits, populations dynamics, species associations, and ecological histories” (2005: 186). The desire to get in proximity to “wild” animals encourages hunters to develop local expert knowledge and appreciation for the hunted animals.

Hearst hunters, for whom the hunt is primarily a recreational activity these days, experience the hunt differently depending on the size and perceived threat of the animal killed. Many, like David Barbour, expressed pleasure and pride in overpowering particularly large non-domesticated animals. The pleasure of conquering “wild” animals seemed especially pronounced when the animals involved were perceived as nuisances to humans, be they as potential predators of humans (e.g. bears) or of their preys (e.g. wolves that kill moose). Christiane Groleau, the huntress who generally loves everything about the hunt, tells me she is planning to start wolf hunting soon and that wolves are one animal she does not mind killing for fun, because she believes we need to get rid of them.¹⁹ In addition, like Cloé Morin explained to me, some may hunt bears to get rid of

19 While most people seem to share Christiane’s perception of wolves, there are exceptions. Louise Miron told me that she would often argue with her father on the subject. He wanted to get rid of wolves, because they eat moose. “But we eat moose too,” she would reply. Louise believes that wolves are in the ecosystem for a reason—they probably eat moose that are sick, for instance.

them, not necessarily because they enjoy the meat, although she hears that more and more people her age chose to take on bear hunting for the meat. Stéfanie Proulx and Christiane told me that the only reason they kill bears is if they feel threatened by them or if they are on their property. I have also heard cruel stories in my interviews: one about a person who apparently killed 18 bears in a year, shooting them in the guts, so they would suffer and die further in the bush, and another about a person who took 10 shots of .22 rifle on a bear and then left it in the bush (instead of opting for a quick kill). Although these are stories of exceptions, which I cannot confirm, they emphasize the fact that some hunters find pleasure in bringing down large and “dangerous” animals.

The emphasis on human dominance and human antagonism with the wild expressed in these stories contrasts sharply with the perspective of many northern Indigenous groups such as the Crees of northeastern Canada that Ingold looks at, and the Kluane people of Southwest Yukon with whom Nadasdy did fieldwork, who conceive of the hunt not so much as an act where humans overpower “nature” in the shape of animals, but as an act where animals, considered “persons” by some of these groups, offer themselves as gifts to humans (Ingold 2000: 48; Nadasdy 2007: 25).

Technology plays an important role in permitting hunters to overcome the “wild” animals they seek to kill. Despite the deep desire that most hunters express about preserving the landscape and “wild” animals, the technologies they use sometimes negatively impact both the environment and animal populations—most hunters acknowledge that the moose population is in decline, and although there are several possible factors, such as highway collisions, wolf and bear predation and tick infestation, according to David Barbour, a significant part of it is:

all the technology, all the awareness and accessibility. Everybody's got a four-wheeler now, everybody's got a GPS, now you got drones, now you got high-powered rifles that can shoot at ridiculous distances. You've got Wild TV that's promoting every product out there that will enhance your chance to shoot a big buck. You put all that together, what do you have? You have a massive amount of attention and focus on a species and everybody's blaming everybody.

Most hunters are aware of these changes, but some argue that technology also brings some benefits for the animal populations. As Marie-Louis pointed out to me, more

accurate and powerful technology means that the success rate is higher for hunter, but it also cuts down on unnecessary pain since fewer animals are wounded without being killed. Hunters told me that equipment has changed the way hunting is practiced. They tell me that crossbows, which hunters can use during the rut season when animals are very vulnerable, are almost as powerful as guns. They also talked about trail cameras which allow hunters to be aware of the animal activity on their hunting ground, and ATVs that are more powerful than ever and allow hunters to access more secluded areas, even if the terrain is very rough. These are acknowledged to be new and powerful ways to more easily conquer the “natural” environment and its fauna.

Rifles and shotguns are the most common technologies used to kill animals.²⁰ Hunters use various techniques to encounter moose during the gun-hunting season, usually involving wandering in the woods—either on foot, with an ATV, or simply driving on bush roads—until one spots a moose or fresh moose tracks. Once tracks are found, some groups use the “drive hunting” method, which requires some group members to be *drivers* and others to be *standers*. *Drivers* walk around in a delimited forested area, attempting to make the animal come out to the *standers*, who are standing still at a designated spot, circling the area. Despite the use of powerful guns, this technique requires a good knowledge of the landscape and a great deal of effort. In contrast, hunting with a gun can involve little effort, as hunters can choose to drive around until they encounter an animal, so they can shoot it.

David killed a moose this way before: drove around, got out of the vehicle and shot it, but he has since switched to bow hunting and he has been hooked:

If they could bottle *that* feeling, when you get this animal coming in and the trees are shaking, you got a piece of string and a stick with a little razor blade on the end, and you're going: 'wow this thing is coming for me,' well I think that would be considered a narcotic, because the adrenaline rush that you get off of that is... crazy.

²⁰ Hunters are usually proud of their hunting equipment and how skillful they are at using it—this seems especially true for those who hunt with guns. For instance, Stéfanie Proulx proudly told me that she already has three guns in her name; my dad proudly told me that he has one of the most powerful guns in Hearst—and that one has to be a good shooter to withstand the recoil.

For many bow and crossbow hunters, their method is superior to gun hunting due to a number of reasons. First, David and others tell me that using the bow and arrow brings them closer to their prey and comes with a bigger thrill. Daniel Fauchon finds that crossbow hunting is more challenging, because of how close you have to get to the moose; he likes the feeling he gets when he gets close to those big creatures. The thrill of encountering the animal, for those hunters, seems equivalent, if not superior, to the thrill of killing it. In fact, Dave told me that even though it is better if he can bring a moose back home, hearing and seeing a moose is what satisfies him during an outing. Bow hunting makes the hunt more challenging, because on top of requiring more practice and adjustment of the tool prior to the hunt, hunters need the elements on their sides to get closer to the animal (e.g. a minimum of wind that blows in a favourable direction such that the smell of the hunter is not carried to the animal which have a finely tuned sense of smell).

Others also mentioned that the thrill of using a bow and arrow or crossbow to capture one's prey is partly found in the many ways in which hunters outsmart animals by imitating their language and behaviour. The earlier bow season coincides with the rut season or the mating period—a time when animals are very active. The action—the sights and the sounds—that comes with hunting during the rut is what Lina Comeau likes about bow hunting, although it is arguably much harder to succeed at capturing the prey. As opposed to gun hunting, when the hunter usually tries to encounter moose by going to them or finding them, during bow hunting, the goal of hunters is often to make moose come to them. For instance, some hunters may use human made antlers to reproduce the sound of bull antlers hitting trees, and urine of a mare in heat to attract bulls. These aids help hunters lure bulls to them by tricking the animal into thinking that another moose is close, either a cow in heat, or another bull—a competitor that might win the cow's affection before him. Others, like Daniel Fauchon, might use additional techniques to avoid being recognized as humans on the landscape; he uses an Odor Eliminator spray, which he sprayed on my clothes when we went hunting together.

Most commonly, however, during the bow-hunting season, hunters communicate with animals using different calls: the call of a cow in heat or different bull calls. Bow and

crossbow hunters have evolved their calling techniques over the years. Some seem to have adopted rituals that they maintain year after year—hunters choose to do different types of calls, call at various frequencies, do shorter or longer bawls, and choose specific locations from which to call. Some may also use a cone, either homemade or store bought, for a better projection of the sound. Christiane enjoys the rush that crossbow hunting and communicating with moose brings her. The first time she heard the grunting sound of a bull she was in awe: “The shiver it gives you just to hear them answer and then [...] it cracks, and you see the firs shake because of its antlers,” she told me. “It was like: ‘wow!’ ‘That’s what the call is?!’” David calls that noise “addictive and blood-rushing.” The excitement described seemed to be about more than the chance of shooting an animal; it is also about the excitement at being able to imitate the animal. In that sense, in contrast to hunting with a gun, bow and arrow and crossbow hunting require the hunter to literally get closer to the “wild” by relying not just on technology, but on more human ingenuity.

Another reason that hunters such as Guy Rheault and Marie-Ève Côté—a 28-year old huntress—state for switching from gun to bow and arrow or crossbow is that they feel that it is more “fair game” for moose.²¹ The notion of a more honorable way to hunt that gives a fair chance to the predator, connects with long-established notions of sportsmanship in hunting which takes us to the words of Carl Akeley—the father of taxidermy—who believed that: “ideally the killing itself had to be accomplished as a sportsmanlike act. Perfection was heightened if the hunt were a meeting of equals” (Haraway 1989: 41). Hunting with a crossbow is described by those who do it as allowing for greater proximity with the non-human animal—something which brings a more intense adrenaline rush and enjoyment at having acquired the skills to engage the animal in a more challenging, sports-like manner.

21 Authors such as Dahles (1993), have explored this desire to kill as a sport, noting that the reason why hunters are proudest when they encounter and kill male “game” animals is that those animals are seen as stronger animals that are ready to fight back. Hence, human characteristics are given to the animal, justifying hunting as a sport among equals.

The hunter's desire to get closer to the "wild" is also reflected in the use of the camera and the act of photographing. Marc Johnson remembers the last time he went grouse hunting and aimed his shotgun at a bird and thought: "I just don't want to do this anymore, it's not fun." That was his final realization that he had lost the thrill to kill. For Marc it was something he had been thinking about for a few years, until he had to stop completely. He never really liked taking an animal's life, but he justified it by eating the good meat and never wasting it. The older he got, however, the more he came to terms with his own mortality and realized that life was too short—for other species too. "I just lost the enjoyment of pulling the trigger on something and killing it, because you're kind of relating it to your own sort of mortality," he told me. Today, he hunts with his camera, which has entirely replaced his hunting rifle.

Even though Marc's developed dislike for hunting is exceptional, several hunters enjoy living animal photography. Michelle Lamy told me that, every year, the day before they leave for deer hunting, her hunting partners head to Mission Island in Thunder Bay, where the deer population is abundant, and deer have become accustomed to humans. There, they spend their time photographing and observing the living deer. The next day, they all meet at a cottage they rent on Lake of the Woods, where they have a meal together, and they get ready to start the week long hunt the following day. This demonstrates how hunters have varied relationships with the animals they hunt. On the one hand, they may admire and love them in living form and even attempt to immortalize them in photography. On the other hand, they may not blink at killing them with their guns. While this may seem contradictory to some of us, it is not necessarily so for some of hunters I worked with.

For some hunters, such as Lina and a member of Stéphanie Plamondon's family, encountering the animal and shooting a picture leaves them feeling satisfied, even if they do not take any meat back home. Stéphanie Plamondon's family member is passionate about taking moose pictures and videos and sharing them with his family and friends; even if he does not have a tag, he can spend days on end observing moose and capturing them with his camera—he once saw 18 moose in one weekend. He also has a video of moose mating, something that apparently very few hunters have witnessed. When he goes

hunting, if he cannot shoot the moose with his gun, he will shoot it with his camera—the photo perhaps becomes a reminder of the prize he could capture with a gun in a near future. Likewise, Lina Comeau always carries her camera alongside her hunting rifle. She often encounters different animals, such as wolves, when she is out hunting: “when I snap a nice picture, even if I don’t kill a moose, I’m satisfied with my hunt,” she tells me. In other words, it is evident that shooting with a gun or with a camera are almost equivalent for some hunters: a photograph of a living animal from a short distance acts as proof of their close encounters with the wild.

Taking a picture with the dead animal is also an important tradition for hunters. This may be especially true for new hunters for whom the first kill marks their changed status into hunters—it is a souvenir that is deeply cherished. In the cases I studied, the tradition continues throughout the hunter’s life. I observed a seven-hunter group track a young bull. Thirty minutes earlier, we had gotten a call on the walkie-talkie—one of the other group members had shot a moose.²² Now all the hunters were walking very slowly, as they looked for drops of blood. There were very little, and some pointed out it was most likely because the hunter had shot the moose in the lungs. A few hunters started to be worried, as some of them had been unable to track their prize in the past, something hunters want to avoid at all cost. A hunter then decided to go look further and found the bull: “Got it! The beer’s going to be good tonight!” he yelled. It was not very far from where the hunter had shot his arrow, but sometimes, when the flora is dense, and the blood is scant, it can become tricky to spot the fallen animal. We all joined him around the dead animal; a sight that seemed normal for all of us. The hunters seemed proud and commented on the size of the animal—it was a small bull with antlers that were still covered with velvet, meaning that they were still growing; for hunters this meant that the meat would be tender and delicious.

²² When hunters are certain that the shot is fatal, they usually wait a while before tracking the animal to ensure it dies—going after an animal before it drops dead could scare it away, pushing it deeper in the forest.

They then asked me to take pictures of the group with the moose. Some pictures were of the successful hunter alone with the animal, some were of him and his wife kissing in front of it, and others included the full group—they all smiled with pride. A picture of hunters crouching with a smile beside a dead animal may be disturbing to non-hunters who might perceive these emotions as pleasure emerging from the taking of a life. However, as I understood from talking to hunters, the smile represents pride of having succeeded after years of persistence and hours of practice, gratitude for the “wild” meat that has always been part of their diets, and happiness of sharing that moment (and subsequent meals) with friends and family. Some may use those pictures to boast about their catch and post them on Facebook, others to show a few friends, but most hunters like keeping pictures as souvenirs of the events experienced with loved ones, and a souvenir of their successful achievement and mastery over “the wild.”

As mentioned earlier, as opposed to many northern Indigenous groups for whom hunting is perceived as a “long-term relationship of reciprocal exchange between animals and the humans who hunt them” (Nadasdy 2007: 25), hunters see game animals not so much as subjects with whom they are in a mutual relationship, but as powerless objects of human actions and desires. Objects they kill with guns, bows and arrows, or crossbows; photograph alive or dead; or preserve with taxidermy.

Taxidermy is another way in which the conquering of a “wild” animal is eternalized. Killing a large bull—a trophy—comes with the greatest amount of pride. Trophy hunting is not a motivation for the hunters I have interviewed, however, but if they happen to shoot a trophy bull, it is celebrated. Like Marie-Ève told me, she would never hunt for the trophy only, but she likes taxidermy because it eternalizes the animal. As mentioned earlier, many hunters have taxidermy work done by Julie Lecours. Many have proudly showed me mounted deer, bear or moose heads, and antlers in their garage or on their basement walls. As you go down the stairs leading to Marie-Louis Pitre’s basement, the first thing you see is the mounted deer head; the buck’s gaze is fixed on you, perhaps reminding the hunter of his adrenaline rush, when the animal became aware of his presence, seconds before he shot it. Having never killed a big game animal before, for me, the dead animal looking in my eyes seemed more like a reminder that we are

responsible for its death, a conquest the hunter must accept every time he or she looks into his or her trophy's eyes, although I doubt many hunters see it that way.

Even if Christiane enjoys killing animals, it does not contradict the admiration she has for them. Hunting not only requires attentiveness and knowledge of the “natural” environment, but also engages hunters emotionally with the animals they hunt. One time Christiane and her husband were camping on the riverbank, when he woke her up in the wee hours of the morning: “Christiane, Christiane, I think there's a bear.” She listened for a while: “Oh! It must be a fish jumping,” she said before falling back asleep. Not much seems to scare Christiane, for whom it is not uncommon to spend time in the forest alone. One hour later, he woke her up again, and just there, at about 100 meters in front of them, on the other side of the river, was a big bull eating and playing in the water. Moments like this are special to her, because she says she can examine how animals react and act in the woods, when they do not feel threatened by humans: “he would put his head underwater, so you could only see the antlers, then he would bring his head out, and he had weeds everywhere, and he was eating, water splashing from its dewlap. It was like: WOW!” They watched the moose for a while and decided not to take any pictures—which is never representative of what the eyes can see, according to Christiane—they simply enjoyed the moment. He eventually jumped in the water and left swimming, leaving both in awe: “Hunting is fun, because well it's the hunting season, and we are allowed to kill meat, but apart from that, I really like observing them,” she told me. Listening to her talk about the thrill that shooting a deer with a pump action gun gives her, you might not guess that she would look at moose with this much amazement, but this sense of admiration for the animal they seek to kill reoccurs in multiple interviews.

More than seeing beauty in the other, hunters might develop empathy through personification—by projecting human characteristics on the Other. Even some of the most experienced hunters feel guilt or feel conflicted about certain practices, and while a hunter can feel comfortable killing certain animals, she or he can perceive other types of hunts as cruel depending on the animal—the type of species, its sex, and age. Since they became mothers, Cathy Glazer and Marie-Ève Côté told me they would not be able to separate the cow and the calf; they both find bulls easier to kill. Although perhaps not

under the best circumstances, two huntresses have witnessed the strong connection between a cow and a calf first-hand—experiences they call bad memories. In Cathy’s case, the calf had just been shot, and it was injured, and the cow would not leave. The hunters tried to scare her with a chainsaw and by throwing rocks at her, but it did not work. It did not leave before Cathy had made sure the calf was dead, but not before charging her (Cathy’s dog had provoked her), steam coming out of her nose and scratching the ground. Louise had a similar experience; she told me it was heart wrenching for her to hear the mother and see her become aggressive, after her baby had been shot. They tried firing shots in the air, but to no avail; she would not leave. As much as she likes hunting, seeing a young creature die and witnessing this strong connection between a mother and her calf—seeing the effort she made to protect her offspring—made it hard for Louise. Human females—often mothers—more than other hunters, felt that separating the mother and the offspring was a cruel act. They were perhaps able to feel more compassion by being able to put themselves in the position of the other-than-human females. Likewise, Marc Johnson stopped hunting when he saw himself in the other, as he became more aware of his mortality through the death of animals.

The perception that hunters have of “nature” and nonhuman animals goes beyond recognition of their beauty and mere personification, however, hunters contemplate the “wild” and come to see that it embodies a certain power, that it has its own agency. Even though some hunters see themselves as necessary to the balance of “nature,” most of them see the “natural” environment and its fauna as balancing itself, independently from human beings. One experienced hunting guide told me that animal populations thrive when hunters and trappers harvest animals, comparing forests to gardens, he told me that humans have to remove weeds for the seedlings to flourish. On the other hand, while acknowledging that human actions can have real consequences on animal populations, there is also a recognition that the “natural” environment has the power to balance itself: “she always finds a way to make things work without our help,” Louise told me.

Similarly, hunters recognize the power that animals have as individual beings. Cloé Morin, the passionate 20-year-old huntress, came to my house for an interview during which she talked about her many frustrations, how she sees hunting as a lifestyle (she

takes part in most types of hunts, and she eats wild meat almost every day), how she practices shooting with her bow daily, and she showed me the words “country girl” and the deer tattooed on her chest. The first time she went deer hunting, however, she experienced what is known as “buck fever,” which refers to a hunter’s inability to shoot at the sight of an animal. Cloé did not believe her father and her partner, when they warned her about buck fever, but then this happened:

I saw the buck—a 10-pointer—he was going down the hill, everything was picture perfect: the sunset, you could see the antlers and everything. He was probably 10 feet from me, I’m not kidding, with your bow that’s perfect, maybe too close even. But I was never able to shoot, I completely missed it, it really was buck fever [...] it’s crazy how nature can be powerful towards you. I cried a lot, he went right past me, I saw the antlers going down, and even if I would’ve wanted to kill him, I wouldn’t have been able to. I had time to look at him go down and make his way past me [...]. I don’t know, I guess I just wasn’t ready.

Cloé not only blamed her inability to shoot on her seemingly lack of preparedness but attributed it to the power of “nature” and the power of the deer itself, as if it had mesmerized her.

Daniel Fauchon’s encounter with bears is another example that illustrates how hunters recognize “wildlife’s” power and agency. Daniel really enjoys bear meat, but he does not want to kill young bears, because he thinks they look like dogs—which makes it hard for him. On the other hand, however, he is also somewhat scared of them because the human-bear intimacy “involves eating but also the real risk of being eaten” (Kohn 2013: 3). One time, he was bear hunting with his friend—an inexperienced hunter. They got out of the truck when they saw a bear in the distance, Daniel let his friend shoot, but he missed. Before going back in the woods, the bear looked at them, which left Daniel feeling uneasy. Two days later, Daniel swore they encountered the same bear; this time Daniel knew the bear had recognized them.

Similar to what the philosopher Jacques Derrida (2008) tells us about his cat who looked at him while he was coming out of the shower one morning, the bear looked right at them and sat down. Unlike Derrida who chose to look away from his cat and failed to “become curious about what the cat might be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available

to him in looking back at him that morning” (Haraway 2008: 20), Daniel recognized a sentient being, not a passive object, but a subject that was interpellating him. The bear had the power to look back, to respond, and react; “We’re not going any closer, he has control, we don’t,” he told his friend. “He wasn’t scared of us, he had seen us two days earlier and we had missed,” he told me. When his friend missed a second time, Daniel told him: “let’s get away from here and quick.” They were close to the truck when Daniel saw a black spot in a trail in front of them, they looked in the scope and saw that the same bear was running towards them, they ran into the truck. More than simply being dangerous experiences for Daniel, it showed him that bears are powerful animals—in fact way cleverer than he thought. Just as Daniel had the power to look at the bear and follow him, the bear, he realized, also had the power to recognize him and lead the encounter. As Kohn mentions when discussing the Runa of Ecuador’s Upper Amazon and their relationship to nonhuman Others, “encounters with other kinds of beings”—and the possibility of being attacked—“force us to recognize the fact that seeing, representing, and perhaps knowing, and even thinking, are not exclusively human affairs” (Kohn 2013: 1).

In short, hunting does not only influence hunters’ relationship to their community and its residents, as described in Chapter 1, but puts hunters relationships with the environment and the nonhuman animals that inhabit it. The landscape around Hearst is filled with human history. Among the thousands of square kilometers of forest, hunters become attached to certain spaces, for which they develop a sense of ownership. Through “their” hunting territories, hunters develop awareness and knowledge of their environment. At first glance, many hunters seem to reproduce a view of the hunting ground as a place where hunters expect to get away from humans and closer to “nature.” In fact, many—often neglecting their own impact on forests surrounding the town—become frustrated when strangers are encountered on “their” territory. On the other hand, the landscape is far from always being romanticized, as it is often viewed as a place where resources are extracted. While many agree that there are marks of unwanted human activity on the landscape, hunters acknowledge that humans are needed to make the activity of contemporary hunting possible through logging, and they still come to appreciate those disturbed areas.

It is in these forested areas, both vastly altered and not, that hunters seek to conquer the “wild” in different ways, whether with a gun, with a bow and arrow, a camera, or taxidermy. Through establishing dominance, however, hunters learn about animals and come to see not only their beauty, but in some cases, attempt to understand their points of view. They come to respect their agency and their ability to react to humans’ actions, even to lead them. As Haraway tells us, hunters and “wild” game are companion species entangled in a messy relationship that constitutes them; we become worldly and shape the world by meeting with other species and becoming entangled with them, whether this relationship is harmonious or not (2008: 296). In other words, regardless of the nature of the relationship, animals—“wild” ones in this case—influence the lives of humans in several ways. Looking at human-nonhuman animal relationships on the hunting ground help us understand how hunters define themselves and the act of hunting through their relationship with their prey.

These relationships affect the way hunters deal with the meat that results from the hunt. To explore dimensions of the hunting experience having to do with butchering and cooking “wild” meat, I now follow hunters back to the town and into their homes, where a number of family traditions are enacted, and where hunters’ passion for hunting is first established

Chapter 3

3 « The Home »

The home is the site where we are socialized, where we first acquire knowledge of the social world and our role in it. In this case, the home is where traditions²³ that surround hunting, butchering, and the gifting, cooking, and consumption of wild meat are initiated and maintained. Through these traditions, as shall be seen, gender roles are both reproduced and contested, and ties are formed and strengthened among household members and among relatives outside the home.²⁴ The home is also where individuals establish a positive or negative relationship to their food—once the animal they have killed is turned into meat. Hence, moving to this geographical scale allows me to shed light on the distinctive way in which the people of Hearst connect to food through wild meat.

3.1 « Family hunting traditions »

The home is usually the first place where we derive our sense of family and identity, including our gendered identity. For most residents of Hearst, the home is where the knowledge and passion for hunting begin and where memories and souvenirs of the hunt

23 Throughout this thesis, I use the word tradition in the same way hunters use it: as a custom that is repeated from year to year, from generation to generation. While hunters' ancestors might have taken part in the activity in Québec and in Europe in the past, no one I spoke to traced their hunting "tradition" to a distant past. In fact, the stories I collected on the subject never went back more than two generations. Notwithstanding this fact, hunting in Hearst can be likened to what Hobsbawm and Ranger would call an "invented tradition"—a tradition that "appear[s] or claim[s] to be old" but may be "recent in origin and sometimes invented" (1983: 1). Importantly, this tradition, much like the ones described by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), seems to play a central role in the expression of group rivalries and power struggles which, as I will explain in Chapter 4, are here mapped along the regional lines that distinguish between Northern and Southern Ontario.

24 While hunting allows for the strengthening of intrafamilial ties, it also allows some local families to difference themselves from other families, as hunting seems more central to the identity of certain families. For instance, if someone has Séguin, Payeur, or Dillon as a family name, people in the community tend to assume she or he is a skillful hunter, even though not every member of the family hunts. In other words, taking part in hunting is part of the familial identity, this is how some families are labeled and want to be recognized. When I first asked Serge Dillon, if he still took part in hunting, he did not take my question seriously and responded laughing: "of course, I'm a Dillon."

are kept and shared. It is also the place where people learn and contest established gender roles regarding hunting.

The family traditions and memories embodied in hunting materialize in the Boisverts' garage, where Danika and I are looking at a frame with several hunting pictures, hanging on the back wall. In some pictures, three generations are posing together at the camp, in others, they are standing beside a dead moose. She is still a child in those pictures and talking about them seems to bring up happy memories of this time spent with her family, at a time when her grandparents were still alive. Today, in this same garage, the tradition continues.

Two weeks after talking with Danika, her father, Roger, invites me to observe the butchering of a moose a family member has just killed. When I get there, the first thing I see is a skinned moose; but now that the moose is skinned and the head is removed, there is little evidence that the large carcass hanging at the center of the garage, or the meter-long pieces of meat on the plastic-covered table, come from a cow that was roaming in the forest a few days earlier. It is not the first time that I see a dead animal like this in a garage, and the sight feels normal for me. Roger Boisvert laughs at my attire and tells me I am not properly dressed for the job—the garage is cold, and he wants me to help with the butchering—so he runs in the house to get Danika's camouflage fleece jacket. As we butcher the animal, he explains the different cuts he makes and their different uses, for instance he will use the filet mignons for steaks, and the less tender parts for ground meat and pepperettes. We are removing the thin transparent layer of connective tissue and nerves from the muscles, and I cannot even finish working on my cut before I leave an hour and a half later.

As with hunting, the knowledge of butchering in Hearst is primarily acquired through observation, imitation, and first-hand experience. Roger's parents initiated him to hunting, butchering, and cooking wild meat, and he has transmitted these traditions to his daughters. Danika told me she must have been about nine months the first time she went in the forest, as it is an activity that is central to her family traditions—one that they observe diligently year after year. As the pictures hanging on the wall show, in this

family, three generations have established stronger bonds through their shared knowledge, experiences, and passion for hunting. This story is shared by many others I interviewed.

My dad took me shooting in sand quarries in the area long before I obtained my firearm licence,²⁵ and every time I went hunting with him as a child, I was unknowingly learning a multitude of hunting techniques, by observing him and asking questions. Virtually all the hunters I interviewed had the same experience: they knew how to hunt before they sat down in a hunting class, because they had spent time hunting with family members.

As seen with Danika, who started taking part in the hunt as a baby, for many hunters, it is important to pass down those practices and traditions to young children. Cathy Glazer, who is now 34 years old, grew up in the area and started hunting at the age of five with her father, who used to hunt as a means of subsistence. She remembers waking up before sunrise, eating a can of baked beans and toast and walking in logged strips all day with him. She introduced her own son to hunting at around the same age; he is no stranger to four-wheelers and guns. Samantha Fleury's parents brought her hunting when she was still in a car seat. This story is repeated from hunter to hunter—most took part in this familial activity, before they knew what hunting meant. For Johnny, Marie-Louis, and Julie, hunting is an activity that also brings them closer to their grandchildren, as they take them out in the forest to share their knowledge of hunting. Interestingly, Guy Rheault never really had the chance to take his three daughters moose hunting, but today, one of them is a skilled huntress, which Guy attributes to the fact that growing up she saw how passionate he was about hunting—an activity his own father transmitted to him.²⁶

25 "I was raised around guns; I raised my kids around guns," an experienced hunter told me. In a sense, in Hearst, children not only grow up in culture of hunting, but a culture of guns—where gun ownership is normal and widespread. While I am against conservative gun rights advocates that focus on self-defense, for instance, when I'm in town, I feel comfortable handling rifles and shotguns, seeing them on backseats, and meeting hunters who are carrying them in the forest.

26 Not only knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, so are hunting aids. When Louise Miron's father passed away about five years ago, she inherited his guns, and despite the fact that several people tell her that they are too powerful for her, those are the guns she learned to hunt with, and it is important for her to continue hunting with her father's guns.

Not only is hunting (and butchering skills) generally introduced at home, it strengthens family ties, as the hunting experiences are often shared among close relatives.²⁷ When you send an email to Mélanie Veilleux, one of the owners of Hearst Air Service, under her signature, it reads: “let us help you make great memories with family and friends,” and for many, this is good part of what hunting is all about. Sharing the experience with loved ones and keeping family traditions alive is a significant part of hunting—it is often what makes the outing unforgettable. Around Christmas time, Dave usually heads out with a bunch of relatives and friends that are visiting for the holidays to go grouse hunting, they spend time together and come back home with a few birds. Others camp in the bush together for the weekend, cooking food on campfires and drinking alcohol as they narrate memorable hunting events.²⁸ So whereas hunters’ best memories are usually tied to successful hunts, and the size of the animal harvested, a significant part of those memorable experiences is the family members and the friends with whom they are shared. For Dave, moose hunting is about the funny or stupid stories that emerge when hunters spend time together. These stories are part of why he likes to go out every year—they “define the year [...] they become entrenched stories that last forever.”

Like Danika who seemed to feel nostalgic looking at the pictures of the hunt, at a time when her grandparents were still alive, for some hunters, the best hunting memories are those shared with loved ones who have passed away. For instance, Louise Miron had a tag for a bull, she was not able to shoot so her dad did, and without knowing it, it was her dad’s last hunt, before he passed away. Hence, she cherishes that hunting trip and the butchering activities they shared. Through hunting and the memories that emerge, then, dear ones who have passed away are also remembered.

27 Although a few hunters enjoy walking alone in the bush from time to time, most hunters hunt in pairs or groups, with relatives and friends. Hunting has traditionally been practiced in groups “for social, cultural and practical reasons,” and the Ontarian government holds that the reason why the moose tag allocation system is more advantageous to those who apply in groups, is so this tradition can be maintained (Government of Ontario 2016: 37).

28 Alcohol consumption seems to be an integral part of the hunting in Hearst, with each group having their own alcohol-centered “ritual.” Just to give a few examples, Louise’s group always have a beer at the spot where a moose has been found whereas Michelle’s, Danika’s and Stephanie’s groups, share tequila, fireball, and wine, respectively. In all cases, the celebration involves alcohol.

In addition to being a place of knowledge transmission and socialization, where a connection to kin is formed and maintained, the home is the place where gender roles are first learned and reproduced. As explained in the introduction, the equal ratio of male to female hunters interviewed for my research is not representative of the hunter population in the community. There is no doubt that the majority of hunters in Hearst are men. In fact, in many families, hunting is considered more appropriate for males who are believed to have a “natural” aptitude and more likely to succeed. As mentioned earlier, knowledge of hunting techniques was traditionally passed down from father to son, and it remains a gendered activity that fosters strong father-son relationships. Daniel Fauchon told me that his best hunting memories usually involve hunting with his father: “A good memory is usually with my father, [like] when we shot our moose together,” he told me. “We are happy—[it’s] an experience between father and son.”

As is evident from some of the stories I already told, some women actively chose to get involved in or continue hunting to maintain a strong relationship with their fathers. Cathy, Angèle, and Stéfanie Proulx told me that they aspire to kill a moose, for the thrill it would give them, but to make their fathers proud. In a way, they seem to feel pressured to fulfill their father’s expectations; they see themselves as lesser hunters, if they do not. Danika, Cathy, Angèle, and Stéfanie, for instance, are bothered by the fact that they have not been able to kill a moose yet and look forward to being able to talk about their own moose hunt success stories, instead of constantly retelling their fathers’ exploits.²⁹

Even though women obviously participate in the hunt, many still seem primarily relegated to the role of supportive actors to men (the real hunters): they are simply there to follow them around, or because they have a tag in their name. When I asked hunters why they think hunting has become more popular among women, many told me it is probably because it has become harder to acquire tags. It is true that husbands and fathers

²⁹ I suspect that these women’s lack of success in getting a moose may be partly due to male group members’ lack of faith in their skills—the males, for instance, may take the shot for them, fearing they might miss—resulting in less practice and even less chance in being given an opportunity and succeeding.

may pressure women who are uninterested in hunting to take their hunting and firearm courses, to have an additional applicant for the moose-hunting draw.³⁰

While some women may be content with a secondary role in the hunt or may primarily get involved seeking their father's approval, in Hearst and similar Northern Ontario communities, some women may consciously embrace the activity to assert their independence and contest established gender stereotypes. For instance, Danika Boisvert seems to get a great sense of fulfillment from driving the truck, and hauling the trailer and ATVs, during the hunting season, especially when she gets surprised stares from men. Likewise, Samantha Fleury told me that she is looking forward to killing a bear “to prove that it is not only guys who can.” This motive is, in part, fuelled by different sexist remarks she has heard over time. For example, the time when, upon hearing she was going hunting with her female friend, her middle-aged female neighbour exclaimed: “why don't you just bring a man with you, if you really want to kill something?”

According to anecdotal accounts, the number of females involved in hunting in the Hearst area has increased over the last few years—a trend also noted for the province as a whole (a 2014 *Globe and Mail* article states that it has increased by 70% from 2000 to 2014) (Mitchell: 2014). I myself encountered several women, including Samantha and her friend, who hunt on their own. This is also the case for Julie Lecours, whose best hunting memory involves deer hunting alone with her daughter. Women like Julie not only break gender roles by hunting, but by becoming hunting mentors to their own children.

As Mary Zeiss Stange has argued (2005: 15), throughout Euroamerican history, hunting has been considered “eccentric conduct” for women.³¹ Despite the recent changes, this is

30 If they acquire a tag, women are obligated by law to go on the hunting ground for the hunt (although the tag can also be transferred to another member, if the hunters applied as a group).

31 “[...] in the wilderness, a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity”—the imagined frontier was always masculine (Cronon 1996: 14). Not only is the activity of hunting associated with males—an expression of their true masculinity—but contemporary feminist theory has shown that the discourse that surrounds hunting is often one of “white male dominance and power,” (Kalof et al. 2004: 239) where hunting becomes closely linked to sex, and women to animals. There is an evident “sexualization of animals, women, and weapons” in the hunting discourse (Kalof et al. 2004: 245). Although there were no blatant misogynistic comments made during my interviews, the examples

evidently still the case in Hearst. “You’d think that, in Hearst, everyone [men and women] hunts and fishes, but it’s still like that,” Samantha Fleury told me, talking about the fact that people are often surprised, when they find out that she is a hunter.³² The exceptionality of female hunters is also reflected in the “name tag” often given to Stéfanie Proulx who is described by others as “a girl who hunts” (an unlikely descriptor for a male) or in the above cited sexist comments of Samantha’s neighbour.

While most of the huntresses I have interviewed do not set out to consciously disrupt gender roles, they deliberately chose to take part in the activity, and by the very act of hunting continue to break down stereotypes, just like outdoorswomen in the second-half of the nineteenth century who helped expand “the boundaries of what was socially and culturally possible for women” (Stange 2005: 16).

3.2 « Butchering practices »

As it was repeated in the interviews I conducted, when a hunter is successful, and a moose is killed, it is then that the real work starts. Bringing a moose out of the forest can be a strenuous task, depending on how far away the animal was shot and where it fell; sometimes the forest is dense, and creeks have to be crossed. As I have witnessed when I went hunting with Daniel Fauchon and his group, the animal may be tied to an ATV to be pulled out to a trail or a road (a deer is much lighter, and hunters usually pull them out of the woods using physical force). It is then field dressed, meaning that the internal organs are removed: an incision is made from the throat to the anus and extra care is taken to avoid busting the bladder, which could spoil some of the meat; it is a very messy task (Figure 7). The animal is lifted on a trailer; organs are usually left behind for scavengers. Hunters are then ready to drive back in town, where the work will continue.

(based on their reading of several hunting magazine issues) that the authors give of this patriarchal discourse characterized by a sexualization of the activity are, without doubt, not unfamiliar to those (including myself) who have grown up around this male-dominated culture of hunting, in Hearst.

³² I myself became aware that I held the same prejudices, as I tended to ask only women whether they had killed a moose and was always surprised when they replied that they had.



Figure 7: A hunter and his moose after field dressing

Based on my observations, there is little to no group sociality involved in butchering of small game. This is not the case with large animals that require a group effort. Since moose is the most challenging to harvest and the most time consuming to butcher, it is customary for a group to come together to celebrate the successful hunt and help each other turn the moose into pieces of meat—it is on this practice that I focus next.

It is common among some hunters to let the moose hang a few days (two to four for most, as long as a week for others), in a garage or a barn, before starting the butchering process. According to those who swear by this practice, letting the animal hang allows for the meat to stretch, which makes it more tender; letting it drip also means that the meat becomes less bloody.

The butchering of a big game animal typically goes as follows: first, the skin, the head and the legs are removed—the antlers may be put aside for the trophy; second, the muscles are separated and detached from the bones; third, the connective tissue and nerves are removed from the muscles; fourth, pieces are wrapped as they are, cut into steaks, cut into cubes, or processed into ground meat, pepperettes, jerky, or preserved in

some other way; finally the meat is split (equally) among hunters who usually preserve it in a freezer (those who only help with the butchering are usually rewarded too).

Apart from a few groups, the majority of hunters I spoke with butcher the moose themselves. Those who choose to pay someone else do it say it is because it is hard work; it is too time consuming, and it sometime leads to disagreements among group members. Hence, they would rather chip in to pay someone who can do a better job. I understood what they meant when I helped Roger and my father with the butchering: one needs a certain level of experience to make good cuts, and being an inexperienced butcher with no knife skills like me meant wasting time and meat.

Butchering is not a job that is romanticized by Hearst hunters, as with the case of those seeking involvement in alternative movements, like aspiring butchers participating in do-it-yourself craft butchery in Portland, Oregon (Heath and Eng 2011) and North Carolina (Weiss 2012). Hearst hunters are often familiar with the butchering process from an early age and acquire required skills inter-generationally in their home. Aspiring craft butchers, on the other hand, lack previous experience in butchering (Heath and Eng 2011; Weiss 2012) and are willing to cross the line of legality (Weiss 2012: 620-1), and pay a high cost to learn necessary skills from an expert (Heath and Eng 2011: 47 & 50).

Although most hunters agree butchering is hard work, many seem to enjoy the process, especially because it allows family and friends to come together and celebrate: “it’s part of the hunt, [...] we have as much fun on the day of the butchering,” Daniel Séguin told me. Unlike the “ethical butchers” in Oregon, who get involved in butchering as a way to transform the industrial food system by reconnecting to their food (Heath and Eng 2011: 48), for Hearst hunters what matters most is the sociality involved.

If the group is big enough, the job can be done in one night, but it can extend over a few days. While it is a tradition for some groups to order food, it is a tradition for many to bring out the propane stove and to cook pieces of moose, usually the filet mignon, as they are butchering. This is the case for Julie Lecours, Christiane Groleau, Angèle Fortin, my

dad, and their groups for instance. It is common for the case of beer to come out on these occasions, as hunters boast about their accomplishment and retell old hunting stories.³³

Although everyone usually partakes in the celebration, in general, a gender division of labour applies to the butchering. For Cloé Morin's group, the men butcher the moose in the garage, and they bring steaks in the house for the women to cook as they go (Cloé disapproves of this and insists on taking part in the butchering, even though she may not feel welcomed). Similarly, my cousin Samantha never butchered an animal herself, but she remembers that when the event took place in her garage, it was only males who participated—drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. In the groups of Angèle Fortin, Stéphanie Plamondon, and Daniel Fauchon, men remove meat from the carcass and separate the muscles, removing some of the fat, while women usually take care of the more meticulous jobs such as removing the nerves and any hair that might be left. Sometimes they make different cuts, wrap the meat and identify the different parts by writing on the package: “we use cute writing: ‘butt steak 2016’; we really have our typical women job,” Angèle told me.

While it is true that some groups may adopt distinct gender roles, in the end, like the hunt, the butchering of a moose is an activity that allows for family members and friends, regardless of gender and age, to come together. As Guy Rheault told me: “When we butcher the moose, the family usually comes. I’m all organized in the garage: I put up tables and good lighting. We drink beer; it’s fun [...], ultimately, it’s a family reunion.” In that sense, it also allows those who could not take part in the hunt to feel like they are part of the tradition. For instance, Stéfanie Proulx’s grandmother always takes part in the butchering even though she does not hunt; she is always proud to contribute by bringing her meat grinder. In short, the laborious task of butchering allows hunters to connect with their friends and family members, making the task enjoyable.

33 Hunters often use the Québécois idiom: “pèter de la broue” to describe this.

3.3 « Sharing of wild meat »

Once they are done butchering the animal, it is customary for hunters to share their portion of wild meat. Roger acknowledges that obtaining meat is time consuming and hard work; one has to be patient. Therefore, he is reluctant to give a lot of meat away, yet, like all the hunters I have interviewed, he still does—meat sharing remains central to hunters' traditions.³⁴ Human relationships are created through such generous gifts. As Tsing explains, with “gift economies,” rather than being alienated from one another as is the case in commodity economies, “things are extensions of persons and persons are extensions of things” (2015: 121-2). As in Tsing's case, involving Japanese Matsuke mushrooms, wild meat in Hearst has “the ability [...] to build personal ties” (2015: 125). Sharing wild meat with someone “is like a sign of respect, a sign of love,” Stéfanie told me. Her friend Angèle agreed, she says that if she gives you a moose steak, it is because, “you mean something to [her].”

While hunters may be more reluctant to gift wild meat to strangers (recall the decline in the Wild Meat Supper donations, for instance), it is customary for hunters to share with people that hold a significant place in their lives, usually friends or family members—siblings, children, and parents—especially if they do not hunt. When Louise has enough meat, she tries to give some to her brother who lives in Sault Sainte Marie, “for him, it is the best gift I could give him,” she tells me. It is customary for Stephanie's family to bring a moose steak instead of a wine bottle, when someone who appreciates wild meat invites them over for dinner. For many residents of Hearst, although they may not hunt, wild meat seems to be a food source that is special to them, and receiving a piece of game meat usually comes with a lot of gratitude, especially for those who cannot acquire that meat otherwise.

³⁴ Hunters repeatedly told me that obtaining meat was hard work and more and more expensive and complicated. Hence, it may be that hunters in Hearst are not as much into sharing meat as their own emphasis on sharing suggests, and at times may feel pressured to gift it to family members or friends and those who help at some point in the process.

Sharing meat with elders or those who cannot hunt is a recurring theme among hunters. It makes them proud to share with those who could not otherwise consume it, especially when they know the recipients really enjoy the taste of it and appreciate the gesture. When her great-grandmother was still alive, Stéphanie Plamondon's family made a point to send her moose meat, which she enjoyed, since she used to hunt herself, allowing her to reconnect with food that had once been central to her diet. One of Angèle's friends loves wild meat, as she always ate it growing up, but since her mother's relationship with a hunter ended, she has not been able to obtain it. Therefore, she is ecstatic when Angèle gifts her meat or fish; on top of being food that always held a significant place in her life, it helps her financially.

Wild meat can also help students financially. Samantha Fleury's father gives her wild meat, when she leaves for university, but on top of helping her save money, in a sense, it makes her feel at home, as food also plays a role in "people's memories of 'home'" (Bell and Valentine 1997: 65). More specifically, it is familiar food that allows her to reconnect with the landscape and her father through memories of their past hunting experiences and shared meals, as wild meat is food that she associates with hunting and family dinners in Hearst.

Hunters are usually generous, and in a sense proud to share good meats they have harvested themselves and recipes they have perfected—"as gifts, they make relations and reputations" (Tsing 2015: 122). A couple of days after I went to observe the butchering process at the Boisverts', they gifted me a piece of moose and moose sausage meat, to thank me for helping (although I had barely done any work). Likewise, Patrice Beauparlant—a 23-year-old hunter—kept insisting that I keep some of the grouse, when we went hunting together. In this case, gifting wild meat may not only be about generosity, establishing or maintaining good personal relationships, but establishing one's reputation as a skilled and generous hunter.

The case of wild meat sharing in Hearst also brings to mind Marcel Mauss' work (1990) on reciprocity, as oftentimes, when meat is given to another hunter, it seems to be expected that she or he will reciprocate the favour. As in Mauss' examples from

Polynesia, gift giving is never fully altruistic. For example, Guy Rheault gives meat to friends who have not obtained meat in a while; they do the same for him. Not every year is successful for hunters, but through the gifting tradition, friends and families can help each other obtain meat. Through gifting, hunters may also receive different types of meat (it is not possible for them to take part in every hunt, but exchanging, for example, a piece of moose for a piece of goose, can allow hunters to taste meat they would not otherwise be able to sample). For instance, Cathy was not able to go hunting this year, but when I talked to her, she was hoping either her dad or her brother could ensure she had some wild meat for the winter. In other words, family members and friends might expect hunters to share with them, even if they do not hunt themselves.

3.4 « Cooking and consumption traditions »

Meals—preparing and consuming food together—can produce “home,” “family,” and inform individual identities (Bell and Valentine 1997: 60). In the past, hunting was somewhat of a necessity to feed big families, but today wild meat is often thought of as a nice reward that comes with the sport. The hunters I interviewed eat wild meat more regularly in the fall—during the hunting season—and in the winter, but it is common for them to eat wild meat year-round. Wild meat is a significant part of their diets; most hunters started eating it at a young age and continue to consume it often, almost every day for some, and once every week or every second week for many (especially when the big game hunts have been successful). Since, as mentioned in Chapter 1, hunters use wild ground meat to make day-to-day meals like spaghetti sauce and burgers, they end up eating wild meat frequently. What is considered a proper and more special wild meat meal to most, however, is when the meat is the centerpiece of the plate, when they cook steaks, roasts, and make fondues, for instance. When I ask hunters about their favourite way of eating wild meat, several tell me it is simply to cook it in a pan, sometimes with spices and gravy. Even if the meal only includes the immediate family, most hunters tell me that eating wild meat is a special meal.

Cooking is also a significant part of more elaborate family traditions.³⁵ Cathy Glazer enjoys cooking wild meat; her grandfather worked as a cook, and her mother is a talented cook. Every Christmas, her uncle cooks his special moose steak recipe and “cipaille,” which contains different kinds of wild meats. Knowledge of recipes and different tricks have been passed down from generation to generation, and it is one way in which household ‘identities’ are reproduced (Bell and Valentine 1997: 66). Cathy was taught that she should only cook a moose steak in a cast iron pan, for instance, and she continues the tradition. Similarly, Danika Boisvert’s father continues to make recipes that her grandmother used to make. Whereas Bell and Valentine, citing a number of studies from Europe argue that although gender roles are changing, women remain, in large part, responsible for cooking (1997: 70-2); recipes and related knowledge are usually passed down from mother to daughter (1997: 66). This is not necessarily so with the cooking of wild meat in Hearst, however; Roger has taught Danika how to make his mother’s recipes, my father has taught me how to prepare wild meat—gender roles are not distinct when it comes to cooking wild meat.³⁶

Every year, Danika Boisvert’s family members keep the hearts of deer to cook them at their annual “heart party.” Her grandmother started this tradition, and today, they continue the tradition without her. Likewise, in the past, one woman had offered Marie-Louis Pitre to make a recipe with moose tongues for the Wild Meat Dinner, since it was a recipe that her husband enjoyed when he was still alive. Maintaining this tradition and

35 When I talked to Angèle and Stéfanie, the two women reminisced about their college days, when they lived together in Sudbury. Like Samantha, they brought wild meat with them and cooked meals that reminded them of home. For instance, Angèle would cook moose and deer with caramelized onions in black pepper gravy for Stéfanie, after a night at the bar. While talking to them, it became clear that hunting not only brings Stéfanie and Angèle closer to their families, but their shared love of the activity and wild meat strengthens their friendship.

36 As seen with Cloé’s group during the butchering of a moose, some division of labour is established in some families, where women cook the meat, but I know of several male hunters who cook it. As Adler (1981) has argued, however, this does not necessarily mean that the burden of daily food preparation is not unequally placed on women, but it may simply be that men take part in the preparation of food that is associated with masculinity, in Hearst it would be wild meat, in other context it may be meat and potato or the extraordinary meal as the weekend barbecue (Adler 1981: 47-8).

sharing this recipe with others was thus important for her. Another tradition Danika's family has is to come together with their hunting group—family and friends—for New Year's to eat the filet mignon; they wrap it with bacon and barbecue sauce, and they usually cook it on the barbecue even though it is winter.

An important tradition that surrounds eating wild meat is coming together for a fondue; it is a custom in many families, and for some hunters, the most delicious way of cooking wild meat. A fondue is a special meal in the sense that it extends over a long period—perhaps an hour or two. Some even wait to make them on special occasions, such as during the Christmas holidays. At these occasions, each person has a few sticks around which thin slices of meats are rolled, and then dipped in the pot of boiling broth (usually beef and/or onion broth) that is placed at the center of the table.³⁷ The people sitting around the table have a lot of time to talk and exchange stories, while they wait for the meat to cook. One evening, I was invited to a fondue dinner at my friend's house and was able to witness their family traditions, such as having to kiss the person beside them, if their fondue fork became submerged in the pot. Making a fondue also allows hunters to invite friends over and socialize around wild meat; each guest may bring some type of wild meat they have in their freezer, which allows people to share and try different types of meat.

These cooking and consuming (along with preserving practices for families who can wild meat, for instance) strengthen ties between family members and their friends—wild meat gives them a reason to come together.

3.5 « Relationship to wild meat »

While hunters may start thinking of the animal as food when they first encounter it (as mentioned in the previous chapter, Daniel's group members observed that the meat would be tender when they first saw the dead moose), it is when the butchering starts that

³⁷ A similar practice is a raclette grill dinner. The grill is placed at the center of the table and each person puts meats and vegetables of their choice on it, talking to each other, as they wait for the food to cook.

hunters come into contact with the animal's flesh (Figure 8). Hunters usually put in a lot of hard work to skin and butcher the animal themselves, and they are forced to look at death in the eyes before eating. While many enjoy the activity of butchering, they also become aware of different issues with the meat, such as parasites. Hunters may develop feelings of aversion, in a manner that changes their relationship to their food. However, being in touch with the animals, the meat, and its different characteristics, also means that hunters can trust the meat they eat and know that it is healthy.

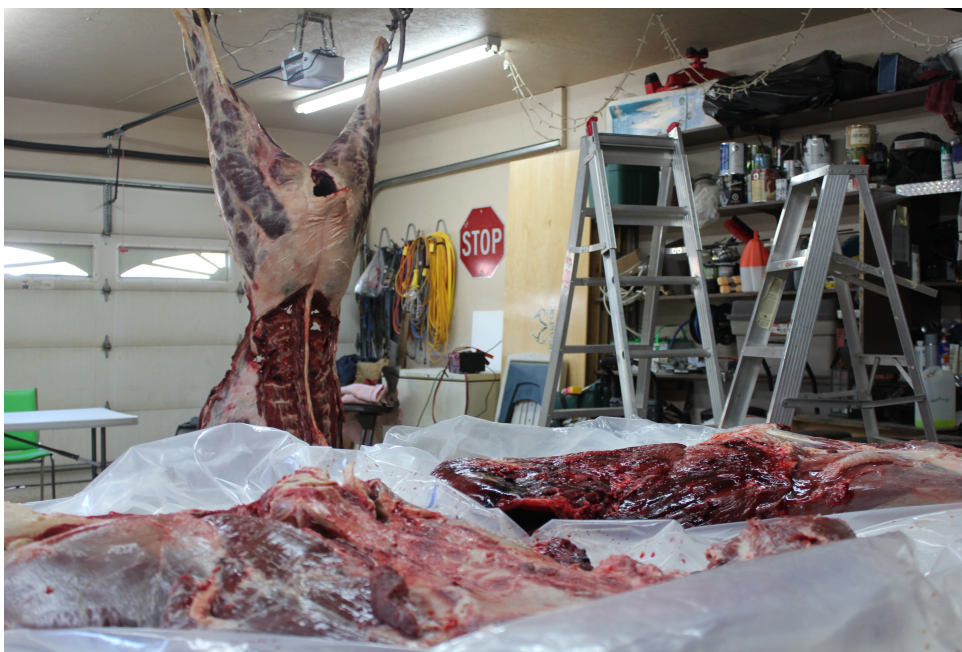


Figure 8: The butchering of a cow in Roger's garage—from animal to meat.

A few months before butchering with Roger, I had my first experience with skinning an animal myself. Although the sight was not new, it was the first time in close to a decade that I had seen a big game animal getting killed, and touching the flesh and getting my hands full of blood was a new experience for me, strangely, one that I ended up enjoying. In the moment, I forgot it was the same bear cub that was eating on the side of the road a few hours earlier—I focused on the task. It is only later, when I looked at the pictures that dad took of my sister and I, while we were skinning the bear, that I got the full picture, and mixed emotions.

A few weeks later, I got a phone call from a hunter who was inviting me to his garage to observe the butchering of bear he had just killed. When I got there, the dead bear was on a table, and the hunter, his father, and his young son were standing beside it; they were all together, when he shot the bear. Although he is passionate about hunting and told me that his room is decorated in a hunting theme, it was the son's first time witnessing the butchering of a bear; and like me, he seemed unfazed, rather he was fascinated and intrigued, asking several questions to the two adults. Like the both of us, most hunters seem indifferent to the handling of dead animals and bloody meat.

The two participants that seemed to enjoy butchering the most here were women. As mentioned earlier, it is common for groups to establish distinct roles for males and females—with females typically having roles that require less “dirty” jobs, but Lina Comeau and Christiane Groleau have both butchered whole deer alone in the past. Oftentimes, when Lina and Daniel Séguin come back from deer hunting, Daniel, who is also a trapper, has to go check on his traps, so Lina is left alone with the butchering; she enjoys it. In fact, she is a bit of an exception, as she prefers to butcher alone than with a group—she tells me she has become picky—she likes to make the cuts and organize everything her way. Likewise, Christiane tells me that when an animal is killed, it is when the fun starts for her. It is one of her motivations for hunting: “I like to butcher [...], I always hope to kill, so I will at least be able to play with my knives.” Last time her friend Serge Dillon went deer hunting, she offered to butcher his deer, because he was busy, and she had time off. “Two days, it was all skinned, butchered, wrapped up, [...] I did the deer on my own, I don't mind it, I have fun with my knife.” For these women, it is not necessarily about the social aspect of the butchering, they truly enjoy the task. In addition, these women and other hunters, have developed an extensive knowledge of the animals they eat, and through the butchering process, they connect to their food.

As seen above, coming in contact with the dead animal, handling the carcass and bloody flesh has become a normalized activity for several hunters. In fact, they are so comfortable with it that, as discussed earlier, several hunters eat meat as they are butchering. However, for some, certain sights or smells come with an element of disgust, which changes the hunter's relationship to certain meats.

The day I went to help him butcher, Roger found parasites in the piece of meat he was working on, he only found a few, so he was not bothered by it, but he told me that he once had to throw a moose away because of the high number of parasites in the meat. Many hunters have had the same experience with the tapeworm, which develops as white muscle cysts in moose. Most hunters know that the meat is still safe when it is well cooked, but many choose to get rid of the meat, or if they keep it, a feeling of aversion remains, when they take a piece out of the freezer later.³⁸

Individual hunters have had experiences that have transformed their relationship not only to meat, but also to some living animals. Guy Rheault does not think he would be able to kill or eat bear because of a memory he has of something he saw when he was younger. He walked in a garage where a skinless bear was hanging, and for a moment, he saw the body of a human being. He is not the only hunter who has made this observation. The first time I skinned a bear, it was the first thing I noticed—the similarities between the anatomy of the hands and feet of bears and humans is striking. Although I found this sight somewhat disconcerting, this sight left Guy traumatized, and he promised himself he would never go bear hunting. Coming in contact with the dead animal not only affected the relationship that Guy has with bear meat, but it has made him perceive the animal as human-like, making it impossible for him to kill it.

When my sister and I skinned the bear, what perturbed me most was the wound we found on the animal's back. The infection around the wound and the liquid it left between the skin and the muscles left us with a feeling of disgust, to say the least. Although we took care to discard the meat that surrounded the wound, the thought of it remained clear in

38 Being in contact with tapeworm has more than changed the relationship hunters have with meat; it has allowed some hunters to understand the interconnection between wolves, moose, parasites, and humans. The tapeworm grows and reproduces in the intestines of the wolf, the moose then eats plants that have been contaminated by the carnivore's excrements and becomes infected in turn. The parasite is inactive in the moose (only forming cysts), but the cycle starts over when a carnivore eats infected meat. Again, the activity of hunting allows people to acquire knowledge of the biophysical environment, knowledge that would not be there otherwise.

my mind and left me feeling somewhat uneasy about the state of the meat. This lasted while I was butchering the animal, handling the meat, and eating it.

Just as those sights encountered during the skinning and butchering of the animals have changed hunters' relationship to wild meat, some smells also trigger bad memories in hunters. A dead animal's carcass has a particular smell, and that is even truer for meat that has gone bad. If the animal is not cooled quickly enough after the kill, or if the animal is shot in the guts or the bladder is perforated, some or all the meat can go bad or take on a distinctive smell, making it hard for some hunters to consume it even though the bad parts have been discarded. One time, the moose that Daniel Fauchon's groups harvested heated, "sometimes we would take out two steaks, we had to throw one away, the other was good—it depended from which side it was coming from—it smelled like the devil."

Since most hunters butcher the animals themselves, they are forced to come in contact with dead animals. While it is an enjoyable part of the hunt for many, because it is gathering of family and friends, or simply because they enjoy the task, hunters also become aware of the subtlest abnormalities, which may change the relationship they have with living animals and the meat, when they consume it later. Hunters deal with those real concerns that consumers have become far-removed from when meat is bought. There is an ellipsis between the animal and the meat made possible by "the creation of abattoirs as places set apart, where the inevitable occurs" (Vialles 1994: 5 and 31). Even though they try to fill this gap, craft butchers can acquire local meat cuts that have already been selected, but hunters never know what they will get.

Adverse feelings aside, the taste of wild meat is a significant motivation for taking part in hunting traditions. Many hunters wish they could have more wild meat available in their home; some even wish they could eat certain types of meat every day. Like I mentioned earlier, I felt guilty about the bear we had killed, and unsure I could eat the meat. I recalled Pollan's thoughts, looking at his hunting pictures, wondering if he could eat the animal he had killed: "I realized that the drama of the hunt doesn't end until the animal arrives at the table," he writes (Pollan 2006: 360). However, every time I took a bite, I

wanted to go buy another tag and have more of this delicious meat for the winter. This is why I had just decided to start eating meat again after not eating it for years.

Likes and dislikes vary from one hunter to the next, and family traditions seem to influence hunters' preferences, and whereas the taste of wild meat is probably the main reason why I, along with other hunters, want to take part in hunting, not every resident likes the taste of it. For instance, at the fondue dinner I attended, my friend's mother did not eat any wild meat, although she ate the grocery store beef that was complementing the other meats on the table. When I asked why, she explained to me that when she was younger her father was constantly poaching, so they ate substantial amounts of wild meat at home—she cannot stand the taste anymore.

Even though all the hunters I have interviewed like wild meat, the “gamey” taste³⁹ that comes with it is not always appreciated, and sauces, spices, onions and techniques like smoking are often used to conceal this taste. For example, one of Cloé Morin's recipe is to take a piece of bear meat and cook it for 6 to 7 hours in the oven with a Ketchup sauce; it “takes away the little taste of hunted meat that you don't want to taste,”⁴⁰ she told me. As my father explained, wild meat must be prepared in specific ways, because meat tends to be tough if it does not come from a young animal; cooks have to find ways to make the meat more tender. Goose is not popular, because it is said to be both gamey and tough, Cathy Glazer joked that when you cook a goose, “you cook a rock with it, you throw away the goose and you keep the rock,” (because the rock would probably be more tender). However, there are ways to make it better, similarly to what Cloé does with her bear meat, my father and his brothers cook the meat on low heat in the oven with a sauce. In other words, even though most participants agreed that wild meat was better tasting than grocery store meat, most want to avoid gamey and tough meat (a few hunters such as Michelle Lamy, Daniel Séguin, and Lina Comeau told me, that they prefer the more gamey spruce grouse to the ruffed grouse). Some say they prefer moose, because deer

39 Some say: “ça goute le bois” (literally: “it tastes like the bush”) to describe this “gamey” taste.

40 Translation of “le petit goût de chasse.”

tastes stronger, some say the deer is stronger, but overall, ruffed grouse, a young moose, and bear (among the few that eat it) tend to be favourites because they are less gamey.

While hunters have different preferences, virtually all of them enjoy the taste of ruffed grouse—which has a taste that is somewhat similar to poultry. The meat of a young moose is another favourite, and even more special, because it is less commonly obtained. In fact, many tell me that they would rather harvest a younger moose than a big bull with a trophy rack, because the quality of the meat is significantly better. “My father once gave me meat from an old buck,” Cathy told me, “it wasn’t edible, it’s really not good—it’s strong.” Angèle told me that even the filet mignon of their 36-inch rack buck (apparently that is not even that big for a bull) was “hard like a rock,” so they decided that they were going to let the big bucks live and reproduce in the future. On the other hand, Serge Dillon told me that when calves are too young, they are very tender but have no taste.

In addition, based on their hunting and consuming experiences, hunters know the factors that change the taste of meat. Along with age, animals’ behaviours will influence the quality of the meat. Spruce grouse taste stronger than ruffed grouse, for instance, they do because they eat coniferous trees. Geese taste “gamey,” because they eat wild rice, among other food. Animals, such as ruffed grouse and bear that eat leaves, buds, and fruits, on the other hand, have a milder or more familiar taste—a taste that is more like typical grocery store meats such as beef and chicken. Another behaviour that affects the meat is the activity of the animal—meat is said to become tougher when a moose runs a lot. For example, during the rut, bulls run around to find females, while females move slowly and wait for the bulls to come to them; usually making the meat of a cow more tender than that of a bull. Even chasing the animal for a long time before shooting it down is said to make the meat tougher, according to some.

Those who butcher and eat bear also know that there is a difference between a spring bear and a fall bear, the former being leaner, because it just got out of hibernation, the latter being very greasy. Furthermore, many are wary of bear meat, because they know bears are scavenger; they have seen them walking around destroying garbage cans in town, and

they associate bears with dumps—they are greasy and disgusting. This is not the case for the majority of bears, however, especially when food is plentiful in the forest.

While many hunters find bear meat disgusting, several hunters admit that they do not hunt or eat bear, simply because it is not part of their family traditions: “we have never been accustomed to eating bear,” Julie Lecours told me. As Daniel Fauchon and Marie-Louis Pitre have observed, however, when people do not know what they are eating, they find it delicious. As mentioned earlier, in the past, Daniel has invited his friends over to eat wild meat; he served moose, deer, and bear but did not tell his guests which one was which. Both times (one time in Ottawa, one in Hearst), his friends agreed that bear meat was the best among the three, probably because it is more fat, more tender, with a less gamey taste, he told me. Marie-Louis once had friends over for dinner and served them bear. His friends’ daughter went for a second serving of meat, but when she asked her father what she had just ate, she felt sick, ran to the washroom and vomited everything.

Just as bear meat can be a trigger for disgust, so are different animal parts, hence, not the entire animal is used. In fact, most hunters seem disinterested in eating parts other than the typical cuts. In this way, the dietary practices of Hearst hunters differ from those of the urban “locavores,” described by Weiss, who have an interest for “snout-to-tail cookery,” or “learning to eat the whole animal,” striving to understand the edible qualities of each body part (2012: 620). Generally, Hearst hunters are also different from the nearby indigenous population, as some members of the latter community are willing to take ribs, briskets, and bones that their non-indigenous friends tend to discard when they butcher a moose.

A few hunters, such as Christiane Groleau, enjoy various non-typical parts. She has a reputation for eating moose and deer testicles; she says it is a delicacy—the most tender meat on the animal. In addition, Lina and Daniel try to waste as little as possible, they usually eat the tongue and organs like the heart and the liver, if the animal is not too old. The older hunters in Cloé Morin’s hunting group sometimes eat some parts like the tongue, the liver, the heart, but she thinks this is disgusting. Stéphanie Plamondon’s great

grandfather ate those parts too, but her hunting group has stopped keeping them since he passed away.

Although, as mentioned before, some hunters can eat the animal right away, at the hunting ground or as they are butchering it, I have spoken with hunters who prefer waiting a while before eating the resulting meat. Some say the smell stays with them. As Cloé Morin told me: “since I hunt, I’m going to be honest with you, I’ve had a hard time eating wild meat because I butcher [the animal], I kill it, I see everything.” Daniel Fauchon tells me that hunters say it is better to let the meat “rest” or “die” in the freezer for a few weeks before they eat it, although he does not see a difference in taste or quality. He thinks it is a myth, perhaps a way for hunters to forget about the kill and the butchering, before they start eating meat again.

While eating wild meat, hunters seem to focus less on the butchering or the image of the dead animal than they do on the living animal and the experience of hunt, including the experience of the environment or the thrill of overpowering the animal, however. Talking about how much he enjoys grouse meat, Marc Johnson told me: “it was always my favourite way to hunt—walking down a trail on a nice crispy fall morning, so I almost relate the taste of the meat to that experience.” During the several wild meat fondues I have attended, I have noticed that people are usually interested in knowing where the meat came from, and who killed the animal. They may also ask about the sex and size of the living animal, and what part of the animal is being served. More than a concern for the quality of the meat or the welfare of the animal, they seem interested in the hunting experience and comparing hunting exploits. Marie-Ève Côté’s young children are thrilled when there is wild meat for dinner, and like the adults present at fondue dinners, they often ask what meat they are eating and request to hear the story of the hunt that produced the meat on their plate. Contrary to children in other communities used to eating meat that comes from a supermarket shelf, children in Hearst have an awareness that the meat they eat often comes from a once living animal which they, their parents, or friends have a personal connection with through the hunt.

Hearst hunters are “close” to the wild meat they consume, yet, contrasting to those involved in the alternative food movement, they do not engage in hunting as part of a

conscious search to connect to their food. Hunters, like many other people these days, have concerns about meat safety and animal welfare within the industrial food system. While many buy meats at the grocery store and appreciate the fact that it is a simpler, often cheaper option than wild meat, they believe wild meat is better on many levels.

Nearly everyone I interviewed told me that they have no concerns whatsoever about the safety of wild meat, since they come in direct contact with the dead animal and the meat. If the animal is not sick, if the meat smells good, and the meat and the liver look good, it is safe meat. The first few times Guy Rheault brought wild meat to his sister-in-law in Ottawa, he thought it was weird that she was questioning the safety of the meat; it never even occurred to him that it could be an issue: “We grew up in this [hunting and eating wild meat], we never asked ourselves that question.” Guy trusts that nature will balance itself, he believes that if an animal is sick, it will be the first one that wolves will eat.

In general, many hunters are suspicious of store bought meat and believe that to get good quality meat one has to either raise animals at home or go hunting. Stéfanie, who eats either wild meat or meat from the ducks and rabbits she raises at home, tells me she rarely buys meat from the grocery store. When she does, she recounts, “I cook it, and it is not the same thing. I don’t know where it comes from, and it’s not fun.” I was surprised to learn that five of the hunters I interviewed have raised farm animals at home and avoid industrial meat as much as possible. On top of hunting every year, Marie-Ève told me:

We raise chickens for meat and eggs, we sow a garden, we are really, like, I don’t know if it’s “hillbilly” or what, but it’s because we like to know what’s in our food. When you have your own garden, you know what’s in it. And our chickens, we know the eggs are good, the poultry is good because they are fed and walk everywhere in the yard, they are not confined to a small cage and extra fed, so they’ll become huge.

Animal welfare in factory farms is another concern for hunters, because unlike wild animals that roam free in forests, factory animals are raised in confined and crowded areas and are not always killed the quickest way.

Cloé Morin says that: “it’s always a bit special, because we kill [the animal] ourselves; the grocery store cow wasn’t killed like I killed mine. There’s always a bit of respect in

each bite.” Like growing and harvesting vegetables in your garden, eating wild meat is more dignifying than store-bought meat, because you go out and put a lot of effort, and you harvest the animal yourself, Cathy Glazer told me.

The distrust of store bought meat is linked not just to questionable raising and killing methods but to “unhealthy” diets and supplements given to industrial farm animals.

Angèle tells me that she does not like killing animals but does it anyways because, as she puts it, “I’d much prefer eating a moose steak for my health than eating a steak of a cow that has been fed with I don’t even know what, something I would not eat myself.”

Describing wild meat along the same lines, Marie-Ève Côté told me, “I think it’s more organic, there’s no hormones, no preservatives [...], less fat, I think it’s better for your health...” As Marc Johnson puts it, wild meat “[is] the best meat we can put in our body.” Indeed, some hunters claim that they feel better when they eat wild meat. Louise, for instance, told me that one year, she had enough wild meat for the winter, and when she had to start buying store meat again, she noticed a big difference in the way she felt. I have even heard stories of doctors prescribing wild meat, underscoring the belief that it is more healthful than store meat.⁴¹

In short, while hunters do not consciously aim to challenge the industrial food system through their hunting, it is clear that through their knowledge and experience, they have formed their own critique of the industrial food system—a critique that no doubt shapes the way they chose to eat at home.

As shown throughout this chapter, hunters strengthen their ties to family members and loved ones through the acts of hunting, butchering, meat sharing, cooking, and consumption. The home is where many of these activities originate, or take place, and where individuals derive their sense of identity as hunters, members of a family, and

41 Wild meat is much leaner, and hunters know this, because they have been butchering and cooking the meat themselves for years. When they use wild meat as a substitute in recipes, they know they sometimes have to mix it with other types of meats or add fat, because it can be very dry.

gendered selves. The home is also usually the place where people form their relationship to food. In a community like Hearst, where hunting occupies such a central place in the life of so many families, considering the way wild meat is produced and consumed, as I have done in this chapter, can tell us a great deal about how hunting shapes people's sense of self, their relationship to each other and to food.

While this chapter has primarily focused on the connections enabled through hunting, in the next one I turn to the subject of disconnections that are either exacerbated or brought to the surface via the act of hunting.

Chapter 4

4 « Disconnections »

In previous chapters, I have focused on how hunting brought people in the community closer together, this chapter, on the other hand, looks at the tensions I noted between hunters and actors at different geographical scales. Some of these tensions have to do with long-standing enmities, which extend beyond the act of hunting, while others arise from specific conflicts over the activity. I will first consider the disconnection between the hunters I worked with, Southern Ontarians, and distant government officials—the latter two being examples of “outsiders” whose ideas or decisions impact Hearst residents and often reflect their ignorance of the community. I will then consider hunters’ perspectives on local government officials, logging companies, and hunting competitors who are seen to interfere directly with hunting activities on the ground. More specifically, when it comes to moose hunting, some hunters feel a sense of rivalry with outfitters (and tourists who hunt through them), individuals who have Indian Status, and other local hunters—both within and outside one’s group. As will become clear, these tensions and enmities reveal much about how Hearst hunters and Hearst residents define themselves vis-à-vis other groups.

4.1 « Southern Ontarians and distant state officials »

In general, hunters expressed a regional antagonism towards the more urbanized Southern Ontarians whom they believe to be misinformed about life in Hearst, including residents’ activities related to logging, fishing, and hunting. While hunters know that some Southern Ontarians hunt,⁴² they are probably not wrong to think that urban residents often have a very biased understanding of hunting. The ratio of hunters to non-hunters is much higher in communities of Northern Ontario than those of Southern Ontario. In

42 In fact, as Dunk explains in his article, the majority of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters’ (OFAH) members are in urban Southern Ontario (2002: 48). This may simply show that Northern Ontarians are not interested in joining this Peterborough-based organization, but it is also important to note that in 1996, the results of a national survey showed that 37,4% of hunters lived in rural areas and 62,7% lived in urban areas (2002: 55).

2000, one third of hunting cardholders lived in Northern Ontario where approximately one tenth of the province's population lives (Dunk 2002: 55).

Although the reality is known to be more complex, for Hearst residents, the stereotypical Southern Ontarian is a city-dweller who is an environmentalist and hates hunting, that is, they are, by definition, opposed to the dominant lifestyle of most residents of Northern Ontario. As Dunk explains, it is not uncommon for Northern Ontarians to see themselves as a hard-working rural population, whose way of life is ruined by those urban middle-class environmentalists and gun control activists inhabiting the southern part of the province (2002: 46). For hunters, “the word ‘environmentalist’ itself suggests a self-righteous tree-hugger, an enemy of freedom who hates guns, has no respect for hunting, and imagines nature as a Disney-like fantasyland where humans should not tread” (Cerulli, 2014). Those stereotypes can even be reinforced in hunting courses. In the one I took, for instance, the instructor advised us to abstain from wearing hunting clothes when outside of town and to hide dead animals when driving through cities like Thunder Bay, when we go deer hunting. The idea conveyed is that because “they” are ignorant of, and opposed to this lifestyle, “they” could have hunters’ rights revoked, if “they” were to be offended at the sight of a dead animal.

While most hunters tell me that residents of Hearst have never criticized them for hunting and eating meat,⁴³ a few hunters tell me they have been in disagreements with city-dwellers over this subject. Marie-Ève Côté becomes somewhat frustrated when her family gets criticized for hunting, as it is an activity that is part of her traditions. This is especially true when those who criticize her are meat-eaters, because as she explains: “it’s no worse to kill a moose than buying beef that have been bred by the thousands, boosted, fed, at the grocery store; I don’t think we are cruel for doing this,” she tells me.

43 There are a few exceptions, for example, Marie-Ève Côté once had a disagreement with a vegan co-worker, and Guy Rheault has a family member who is against hunting (yet she still hopes that he will gift her wild meat every year).

It is hard for hunters to understand why people who eat meat every day are against hunting: “it is like they think meat comes from a package,” some tell me.

Hunters are aware of the deep-seated dislike non-hunters in other places may have regarding the sight of dead animals, and often feel they have to edit their Facebook profiles to cater to others’ sensibilities. During the hunting season, I have seen hunters proudly posing with dead animals on Facebook almost every day. While the comments all seemed positive and encouraging, hunters with friends outside of town know to refrain from posting those pictures—Angèle quickly learned this when she posted a picture with dead grouse and some friends from university reacted negatively.

Residents are often under the impression that Southern Ontarians want to save the northern “natural” environment from the residents’ “destruction,” which seems hypocritical from hunters’ point of view. As owners of an outfitter, Mélanie Veilleux and her father George sometimes interact with environmentalists, when they have to fly them up north. They try to make them understand that residents of Northern Ontario care about the environment, exactly because they do not want to be somewhere like Toronto, where “they” have already destroyed the “natural” environment. Mélanie is under the impression that “[‘they’] are sitting in [‘their’] office in Toronto and want to feel better about [‘themselves’] by conserving things.”

It is evident from the perception just described that the residents of Hearst, as Northern Ontarians, see themselves as starkly distinct from Southern Ontarians, particularly as pertains to their relationship to wild animals, food, and the environment. While residents’ characterization of Southern Ontarians may not be wholly accurate, there is no denying that the two regions have distinctive characteristics that set them apart. The author of the April 2016 report from the Northern Policy Institute: *Revolution or Devolution?: How Northern Ontario Should be Governed* shows that there are economical, linguistic, and cultural differences between the two regions. Northern Ontario contains 90% of the province’s land, where resources are extracted—it is a land-based economy. Southern Ontario, on the other hand, has a “modern industrial economy” based on human capital (Robinson 2016: 8). Furthermore, as opposed to the rest of the province, the family

income and the employment rate of Northern Ontarians have been declining in the last decades, and almost half of the province's francophone population and 33% of the Indigenous population live in Northern Ontario (Robinson 2016: 9).

Northerners seem to feel that despite significant differences between Northern and Southern Ontario, those at "Queen's Park" reflect the state's abstract, universalizing vision (Scott 1998: 15) as they manage the whole province in the same way, without paying due attention to local differences. Hearst residents often express anti-state feelings, as they feel that the state does not pay attention to the community's needs—the electricity and the gas are costly, the roads are in bad shape, and the list goes on. The report of Northern Ontario's independent think-tank mentioned above concludes that Northern Ontarians often feel like a colony of the South which lacks the autonomy to influence their own future, Northern Ontario is "governed from the outside and the benefits of its resources' wealth have been applied to benefit the governing region" (Robinson 2016: 12). According to a 2014 survey including more than 500 Northern Ontarians, most respondents believed that the issues of the two regions were significantly different, (Robinson 2016: 9) and they were dissatisfied with the way the province has managed the affairs of Northern Ontario (Robinson 2016: 5). In other words, there seems to be a general dissatisfaction with the way higher levels of government manage the region.

Hunters tend to be frustrated, not just with the government but with the power of Southern Ontarians in general (or "the people of the South," or "the people in Toronto," as it was frequently repeated in interviews), who, since they have most votes, are perceived to have more say over decisions. "Why do we have to be controlled by others? Oversee your part of Ontario, there's no more forests over there; I guess you can manage your cows and other things, I don't know, but mind your own business," Daniel Séguin told me. Several hunters, such as Guy Rheault shared similar feelings of antagonism, adding that "[they] have no idea what it is, what it represents for us—the people of the region who hunt." "So why let people who do not know what goes on here make the laws?" hunters ask.

The provincial government makes itself felt through a number of policies, which, according to hunters, make no sense on the ground. In addition, some hunters are overwhelmed by the amount of regulations which are constantly revised; some feel that the *Hunting Regulations Summary* booklet thickens every year. Although hunters usually agree that regulations are needed for sustainability, many hunters tell me that confusing and constant revisions and the plethora of regulations have caused some to abandon certain hunts.⁴⁴

More specifically, there have been frustrations in the way the populations of bear, caribou, and moose have been managed. The cancellation of the bear spring hunt in 1999 is one of those controversial decisions: “they closed bear hunting for no reason, no reason that makes sense, it’s just for votes, anti- [anti-hunting people] who wanted the ministry to close it,” Daniel Séguin told me. Residents felt that the decision did not reflect the reality on the ground—the bear population was high, hunters tell me. Furthermore, as years went by, many hunters argued that the population of bear became out of control because of the cancellation, that there were more nuisance bears around town because of it (I have personally witnessed bears getting shot on my street). They also argued that a higher number of moose calf got eaten in the spring due to that decision. Some local officials, such as Marc Johnson—who was only able to tell me this because he is now retired—agreed with hunters that it was a political decision and not science-based; the local biologists did not agree with the decision, and they had no say in it. From the point of view of a resident of Northern Ontario, it appears, then, that some decisions are taken only to satisfy the majority of voters in Southern Ontario, ignoring local particularities and desires.

Although not directly related to hunting, the Caribou Conservation Plan, put together to provide direction for the management of the woodland caribou, is another controversial change underway. Moose and caribous have different habitat requirements, and caribous

44 They have also angered outfitter owners, for instance, George Veilleux will not be able to bring tourists to his camp for moose hunting, since the date was pushed back, because the lake will freeze.

are smaller and less adapted to wolf predation than moose, so this plan would put aside forest stands to meet caribou conservation requirements, in the Hearst forest.⁴⁵ Hunters feel that it is another political decision that will be made in Toronto by people who will not consider northern residents. The caribou plan would limit access to certain areas by closing roads, trails, bridges to logging sites (which, some point out, companies have spent thousands of dollars to build),⁴⁶ and hence to hunters who use the logging roads.

As a past employee of the MNR who took part in aerial moose surveys, Marc knows that there is not a lot of caribou in the area: “I flew a million miles on moose surveys, and we had money just to look for caribous [...] yes, there are a few there [southwest of Hearst], there’s small pockets of the old population,” but none of the other hunters I have interviewed have seen caribous in the area. Daniel Séguin tells me he has been in the woods every day since he was 12 years old and never saw a sign of caribou; this is also the case for Guy Rheault. While there is no doubt that the caribou is a threatened species provincially, Marc wonders “why draw a line on a map just to take an area and say that it's for the caribou when they're not even there?”

Some hunters such as Cloé Morin, are concerned about the economic consequences that limited access may have: “there’s caribou so we [the government] will close the road,’ ‘Ok but what about us? Who are we?’” As she explained, everyone is directly or indirectly tied to the logging industry in Hearst, and she is concerned about what this could mean for the livelihood of some of her family members and for the several hunting groups that acquire wild meat by hunting in that area. Daniel Séguin has attended local meetings in regard to different issues such as the controversial Caribou Conservation

45 The goal would be to limit wolf predation, as this animal tends to primarily rely on line of sight for predation, and hence, on linear features like trails. Eliminating those features and limiting wood harvest would mean less predation on caribous, which depend on vast tracks of land to survive.

46 While David Barbour seems to be confident that a compromise can be reached where both caribous are protected, and the local economy is only disrupted to a minimum, Marc Johnson and others told me that the initial plan meant that one of the three mills around Hearst could have to be shut down, as a result.

Plan, but he feels like the residents' voices are not heard: "even if they consult with us, they already have a decision in mind, and it's already approved before they consult with us." Once again, residents feel like they do not have control over their future and that the Southern Ontario-based government continually dismiss their concerns and knowledge of the area and its fauna.

Hunters also wonder why there is so much attention put on the "inexistent" caribous, instead of the decreasing moose population. In fact, there are several recurring frustrations about moose hunting: the way the moose draw system works, the shortened calf season, and the high number of cow tags handed out.

First, hunters are critical of the moose draw system and how tags are handed out every year. Moose hunters must purchase a \$55,70 moose licence and apply for the draw. Hunters apply either as a group or individually,⁴⁷ for a specific season (gun or bow), a specific Wildlife Management Unit, and type of moose (bull or cow). Since the number of hunters is higher than the number of moose that can be harvested sustainably, a computerized draw is used to determine which hunter will obtain a validation tag—which validates the licence for which they have applied.

However, even though it should be advantageous for them, hunters feel like whether they apply in a group, or whether they have not been successful in previous years does not really matter. Many hunters repeated what Serge Dillon told me: some hunters seem to obtain a tag every two or three years, while others wait 20 years. Guy Rheault has an uncle who applies individually in WMU 24 for the gun season—a very popular demand—and obtains a tag every two years, while groups of six or seven do not always obtain one. At the other extreme, some groups obtain nonsensical amounts of tags—one year, Cloé Morin's group obtained 11 tags for their 12-member group. While some of

47 As mentioned before, the draw is more advantageous to groups; in 2015, 57% of groups obtained tags, while 13% of individuals did (Government of Ontario 2016: 47). As Marc Johnson explained to me, the group system works when everyone applies in groups, if everybody applies individually and obtains tags by the luck of the draw, it defeats the purpose of the system.

these stories may be exaggerated, I have yet to meet a hunter who is satisfied with the draw system,⁴⁸ and I know of people who have stopped moose hunting feeling discouraged after years of waiting.⁴⁹

The frustration with the tag system, as with all other state regulatory decisions that limit the hunt, feed into residents' antagonism against the big government they associate with Southern Ontario. It does not help that Southern Ontarians seem to obtain tags more easily than northern residents. One hunter told me that he stopped moose hunting a few years ago when he met a group of four Southern Ontarians with four tags; his 12-member group had one.

The exception for the moose draw is the open season calf hunt in WMUs around Hearst, which allows any hunter with a moose hunting licence to harvest a calf in any of those WMUs. Due to increased pressures and a recent decline in the number of moose, the calf moose season was shortened to two weeks starting in the fall of 2015 (there is now pressure to close the calf hunt entirely) (Rushowy, 2017), and in 2016, the moose hunting season was delayed by one week in most units. This angered several hunters who usually try killing both the cow (when they had a tag) and the calf at the same time. As seen before, some hunters feel uneasy about separating a cow and its offspring, and the new season dates meant that the successful harvesting of a cow would leave a calf to fend for itself. Danika Boisvert, Daniel Fauchon, Christiane Groleau, Julie Lecours and Marie-Louis Pitre all agreed that a calf without a cow becomes a prey for wolves or bears,

48 Hunters have given different suggestions concerning the distribution of tags and the moose draw during interviews. First, many agree that the draw should be more structured rather than simply based the luck of the draw: those who obtain a tag should go at the bottom of the list to let opportunities for others. Other hunters suggest that two tags should be put on one moose. "There are so many possibilities, but I think that a system like this is not ok," Guy told me. The point is that there are endless possibilities for the moose draw system, and the current one is not working, neither for the moose population nor the human population of Hearst.

49 Instead of completely abandoning, several hunters have opted to switch to bow or crossbow hunting. As mentioned earlier, some love the additional challenge it gives them when they conquer an animal, but many do so to have more chance to obtain a validation tag due to the lower number of hunters that apply in the draw for this season. Pushed by their frustrations, others have started to take part in deer hunting—that is what Guy Rheault's neighbour will start doing, after not getting a validation tag for years and not encountering any moose, when he finally acquired one last year.

which cannot ensure the continuation of the species—so why not be allowed to kill them, if they are going to struggle and die anyways, they wondered?

As Marie-Louis suggested during the interview, cows protect calves, so if you want to increase the population, the cow season should be shortened. David Barbour, the local biologist, concurred: “the reality is, I would like to see cows protected a little bit more, because they are the ones that are providing the calves, and they support the calves, nurture the calves, as they come up into the herd.” But right now, cow tags are the easiest to obtain for bow hunting.⁵⁰ This also frustrates hunters who wonder how the government determines the buck to cow ratio of tags that are handed out.⁵¹

On top of controlling how individuals and groups practice hunting through various regulations, the state is seen to interfere in other ways. For instance, the state tries to get involved when meat is being distributed in the community. As mentioned earlier, this year, the dinner was almost cancelled, because it did not conform to food safety regulations. After some negotiations with the regional Porcupine Health Unit, however, the Club got away with a few basic requirements such as the inclusion of a statement on the event’s tickets that indicated that “The Wild Game served at the event has not been

50 In 2015, the number of bull to cow tags available for bow hunting provincially were 756:1503, 673:1577 in 2016 (note the decrease in bull tags and an increase in cow tags) (Government of Ontario 2016: 47 and 50). However, it should be noted that the pressures on the moose population are not the same throughout the province. Furthermore, during the bow season, cows are much harder to kill. Whereas bulls may come out when you call them, the same cannot be done for cows—hunters can only hope that they will encounter them or that the cow will follow a bull out of the bush. For the gun season, in 2016, there were 4180 bull tags available in the province, as opposed to 4062 cow tags. However, in some WMUs, the ratio of bull to cow tags available is inversed. (Hunting regulations, 47 and 50). Nonetheless, some hunters feel that the number of cow tags, for both the gun and the bow season, is too high.

51 The best way for the MNRF to estimate the moose population is to fly around in a helicopter, and although not perfect, it is a more specialized undertaking than hunters tend to assume. Surveys are flown in specific conditions, for example, at a certain time of year, at a certain time of day, after a snowfall, at a certain temperature, and at a certain speed. Biologists have extensive knowledge of moose habitat and behaviour. They predict the density of each WMU’s plots. Several 10km by 2.5km low and high density plots are then randomly selected and guesstimates are validated, moose age class, antler class, sex, and the number of calves with cows are documented. They take those numbers, and taking into considerations factors such as climate, infestation, and predation, they offer a reasonable harvest percentage, which is evaluated and adjusted at a higher level of decision-making.

inspected under the Meat Inspection Act RSO 1990.” Not unlike the post-Pasteurians we meet in Heather Paxson’s study of artisanal cheese making in the United States, who believe that raw-milk artisan cheese is safer and healthier than industrial pasteurized cheese (2008: 31-32), for most locals attending the dinner, this bureaucratic requirement seemed unnecessary.

The state’s “unreasonable” requirements were also noted when it came to the subject of overseeing grants, such as those received by the Hearst Anglers and Hunters Club to improve access via bush roads and boat launchings on different lakes. Until recently, the club would get about \$50,000 every year to do this; the club was trusted with the money. Volunteers—retired men in particular—would drive around in the bush and look at the access points that needed repair. Based on their experience, they would estimate how much money and material was needed for a specific project. The club would consequently contact contractors who were doing similar work in the area to ensure money was used efficiently. According to Marie-Louis, lately, however, there has been changes in the structure of the MNRF and a decision was made that spending should be more transparent: “now they come from Toronto, they don’t trust Hearst, they don’t know what it’s like,” Marie-Louis told me. Now there is a lack of trust in the club’s members: “The Hearst Anglers and Hunters Club, who are they? Who are they to be able to manage roads and manage money like that, why would we give them \$50,000?”

Orders now come from Toronto, the contractors that will work on projects of \$5,000 or more have to be determined with bids, and there needs to be bids from at least three contractors (also meaning that the club might need to look outside of town, if not enough local contractors want to apply). However, the company with the highest bid will not necessarily be the most suited and most efficient for the job. Perhaps costing more and taking more time before it gets done, for instance if they have to bring all the necessary equipment deep in the bush, even if another contractor is already in the area. The new contract also stipulates that someone from the ministry has to go in the forest with the volunteers to make more precise quotes of the job that needs to be done. For locals, this and similar situations prove that the government does not trust the decisions of people that have acquired years of experience by being in the forest almost every day and who

have knowledge of local resources and connections with other locals (such as contractors) who can work more efficiently.

This case and others, pertaining to the management of local natural resources, show the disadvantages of the state operating on a one size fits all model. As Scott argues:

A mechanical application of generic rules that ignores these particularities is an invitation to practical failure, social disillusionment, or most likely both. The generic formula does not and cannot supply the local knowledge that will allow a successful translation of the necessarily crude general understandings to successful, nuanced, local applications (1998: 318).

Even though these policies can make sense for particular groups, spaces, or settings, they appear irrelevant, even burdensome for residents of Hearst, who feel like the little power they have left is thus taken away.

In the end, the government sometimes changes its plans based on input from locals, but for hunters the problem is that adjustments are made after the community has felt the negative consequences and local knowledge has been dismissed. For most of Hearst residents, more local control from those who are in direct contact with the “natural” environment and its fauna, through hunting and related activities, would result in better decisions about conservation and other important issues.⁵²

4.2 « Local government officials »

While virtually all hunters disagree with many of the decisions made at higher levels of government, hunters such as Daniel Séguin, acknowledge that there are knowledgeable

⁵² During my fieldwork, I had ample opportunity to ascertain the accuracy of local hunters’ knowledge vis-à-vis that of experts like the local biologist. On the same day that Dave, a local biologist, told me that the number of calves in WMU 24 was at an all time low, an 80-year-old hunter told me that it was now rare to see cows with calves. He learned from word-of-mouth that most cows that had been shot in the last few years did not have calves with them. He also told me that there were a lot of wolves now, a statement that was also confirmed by Dave and Gilles Desjardins, a local conservation officer. Furthermore, based on their observation of a specific landscape over several years, many hunters tell me that there is less moose than there used to be. For instance, Guy Rheault told me that the moose population was so dense around Nassau lake when he was a kid, that they used to call it the “barn yard,” today hunters struggle to obtain a validation tag. In other words, the local and scientific knowledge of the fauna is often in line, it is the policies and the decision making that those hunters often disagree with.

biologists and conservation officers who work for the local government. It seems that they would be better suited to make decisions, yet they do not seem to be consulted. As seen with the cancellation of the spring bear hunt, even local officials can disagree with higher levels of government, so in a way, hunters tend to be much less critical of them. As Marc Johnson observed, officers at higher levels of government, such as the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, have more power than others and the district level has little decision making power now.

Even though local officials, as residents of Hearst and as individuals knowledgeable of the surrounding environment, have much in common with hunters, in their capacity as representatives of the state who have the power to fine or discipline hunters, they are not always a welcomed sight. Encountering conservation officers on bush roads can be an anxiety provoking experience. Hunters are often unsure whether they are adhering to all the regulations, and there is always the chance that they might be breaking a minor rule. Although most hunters deny committing severe infractions like poaching,⁵³ many admit to committing minor ones such as not wearing (or not wearing enough) orange clothing, having loaded firearms inside a vehicle, and leaving trees stands and cabins in the forest. Several hunters also seem to keep more than the accepted limit of grouse meat (15 grouse per person) in their freezer to ensure provisions over winter.

While most hunters generally respect conservation officers, tensions arise when hunters get caught doing illegal acts, have to pay fines, lose meat or equipment, and their trees stands get destroyed, for instance. In these cases, hunters can hold grudges against particular conservation officers, which extend beyond their general dislike of distant government officials and decision makers.

53 When they do, it is usually unintentional. In some instances, hunters did not identify the moose correctly, in others, they have shot deer on private property that was not well identified. In some cases, this means the loss of hunting equipment and hefty fines.

4.3 « The logging industry »

As explained previously, the town's economy is based on forestry, and most residents approve of companies' activities. As Dunk argues "in small and medium-sized communities which are heavily dependent on a few large employers involved in resource extraction, industry workers often line up with their employers in the face of perceived external threats to the viability of local mills or mines" (2002: 51). This applies to Hearst where livelihoods are dependent on employment in the sector. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, hunters appreciate logging activities as roads make hunting possible, clear cuts are beneficial to big game hunting, and new growths attract moose.

Since hunting is carried out on crown land, where businesses' interests are usually prioritized,⁵⁴ there are occasional disagreements between residents and companies. Dunk is not wrong to add that although most residents align with the companies in their day to day life, "these communities are hardly free from internal tensions" (2002: 51). Although hunters become frustrated with Southern Ontarians' criticisms of the forest industry, hunters are also aware that logging companies⁵⁵ may have negative consequences on the environment, and hunting in particular.

Although there are perhaps stricter environmental laws⁵⁶ imposed on logging companies than in the past, companies now have more efficient technology and more trees are felled

54 While in rural Southern Ontario small landowners have land that has been in the family for centuries, in Northern Ontario "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" (Dunk 2002:50).

55 Three companies are responsible for most of the logging in the area, Tembec Industries Inc., based in Montréal (may be sold to an American company soon), Columbia Forest Products, an American company, and Lecours Lumber Co. Ltd., a family-owned company based in Calstock, Ontario. My impression is that most residents are indifferent of the fact that two of these companies are not locally-owned, they are most likely to see them as local businesses that employ local residents.

56 As Gilles Desjardins explained to me, companies are required to follow different regulations (leaving trees around bodies of water, for instance), and there are different regulatory bodies put in place to ensure that. First, companies ensure that they adhere to these regulations through self-compliance—by hiring their own technicians. Second, Hearst Forest Management has technicians for

in less time. The rate at which trees are cut down is perhaps the biggest change that hunters have noticed throughout the years they have been in contact with the “natural” environment. This was made obvious to me the day my dad and I went to look for our hunting cabin, or the night I went hunting with Daniel Fauchon, and the two hunters could barely recognize the landscape. Guy Rheault has personally witnessed areas go from what seemed to be pristine forests to clear cuts, as far as the eye can see. Last year, he went on Pitopiko road, and all he could see was a field and all that was left were a few birch trees without leaves; “birch cadavers [...]; it was an awful sight [...]; it was a macabre environment,” he told me. Even though Daniel Séguin works for a logging company, and although he acknowledges that companies generally follow good practice, he believes that the industry does not leave enough trees standing. He told me that he often voices his concerns about the volume of trees that is being cut down when he attends meetings, but he gets shut down.

Apart from a general concern for the environment that arises when hunters see entire forests being completely transformed, clear cuts are often to blame for pushing the animals out (although most hunters, as explained in Chapter 2, are indifferent because animals usually come back when regrowth starts). As a part-time trapper, Daniel is aware that animals are being pushed away; but when he mentions this, employers reply that animals have four legs and can find forested areas elsewhere. In Guy’s opinions, companies should practice selective cutting—only older trees should be cut down which would not affect the fauna and flora—but selective cutting is not interesting for companies, as it would be less profitable, and forests would be more challenging to manage.

The impact that companies have on forests does not stop after the trees have been cut down. Trees are replanted, and herbicides are used to kill anything that competes with the coniferous seedlings. Guy is not only frustrated as a hunter; he is sceptical of herbicides use: “Their argument is that the government allows it. It doesn’t mean anything, the

external inspection. Finally, the MNRF also has technicians who conduct audits and keep an eye on companies.

government had allowed DDT, and it took years before they realized that there was bioaccumulation and that birds were dying.” They tell him the chemical is not harmful; “so why do they put up signs to prevent people from going in areas where they spray, and why can’t they spray in proximity of lakes?” he wonders.⁵⁷

Guy had a disagreement with a logging company on the matter. He bought four properties with family members to have private ground to practice moose hunting. There is one kilometre between their property and the lake, and despite their opposition, this area was logged, and then got reforested. Now, Guy’s concern is that the area will be sprayed with herbicides, which means that moose will leave for an extended period of time, as the chemical kills the moose feed—leaves and twigs. Guy told the company that if they wanted to go on his property to reach the area to be logged, they had to give him a written guarantee that they would not use chemical spray; they refused and had to build a road beside his property to get there. Guy is frustrated because, as a retired biology teacher, he knows that trees will grow without the use of herbicides, but companies want quicker results to make more profit. The quicker trees grow, the quicker they can cut them down again. More importantly, some of Guy’s family members are barely able to go out and hunt anymore, and he is worried that they will never be able to go hunting on their property if they decide to spray. “I’ve had enough,”⁵⁸ Guy told me; he plans on approaching our Member of Provincial Parliament, Gilles Bisson to get political support and try to get an injunction concerning logging around private properties.

Forest access, made possible by the creation of logging roads, while usually listed as a positive side of logging activities, is also blamed for a decline in the moose population. This is not only a concern for hunters but owner of outfitters for whom healthy animal populations are crucial to the success of their businesses. Hence outfitter owners and

57 It should not come as a surprise that some residents are skeptical of herbicides use; a report released in 2013 admitted that between 1940s and 1970s (Agent Orange report released: 2013), Agent Orange was used for bush control in Northern Ontario. Some forestry workers of the time have now developed several health issues including different types of cancers—the effects on the wider population have not been studied (Zlomislic: 2011).

58 Translation of idiom: “J’ai mon voyage.”

logging companies are sometimes in disagreement. Mélanie and her father George argue that logging creates more access and more traffic in the forest: “as soon as there’s a road, [people] want to hunt it,” which results in more kills and a decline in the moose population. As a pilot, George is even more aware of the transformation: “When you fly, it’s destroyed, you don’t see that from the highway,” he tells me.

On the other hand, their sites are fly-ins (as opposed to road accessed), so only a very limited group of people hunt them once every year or couple of years. New logging roads close to their sites could have detrimental consequences on the moose population and their business. While outfitters do not have exclusive rights to lakes, they have permits to set up camps on them, and the government needs to ensure that those lakes’ resources are protected. Hence, before logging is initiated in the area, logging companies have to negotiate with owners of the outfitter to determine at what time of year and how close to the lake they will log; there is an attempt to strike a balance between protecting the resources and allowing the cuts. The negotiations are usually conducted in a respectful manner, and whereas there are now more standards and audits in place than there used to be, in Mélanie and George’s opinions, logging companies still have too much pull.

Trying to maintain a thriving resource-based economy while maintaining a healthy environment is a tricky task, but there have also been some positive changes, according to Marc Johnson. The Hearst Forest Management, a private company with the timber license (with Tembec Industries Inc., Lecours Lumber Co. Ltd. and Columbia Forest Products as shareholders), attempts to strike a balance through its long-term forest plan. (Hearst Forest Management Inc., 2016b). There have been mistakes made, but it is part of learning process “an evolution of trying to do things right,” he told me. Some people have been involved in the planning process for decades “you’ve got that continuum of knowledge of working on the same land base,” and throughout the years, old wrongs have been redressed. For example, some fish habitats have been destroyed, but since then, culverts or bridges have been put in, which according to Marc, is a “good example of how we’ve learned to do things right and we’re not afraid to go back and correct it.” Nonetheless, several hunters insist that logging companies could do much better.

4.4 « Moose competitors »

Hunting communities are not free of internal tensions—different groups are in direct competition for land and moose tags in the community. Just as owners of outfitters have frustrations with logging companies, in Northern Ontario some hunters are frustrated by outfitters' presence in the area, which, as seen in Chapter 2, imposes limits on the crown land that hunters can access. Although this was not a topic underscored during interviews, it was often mentioned during informal conversations I had with people around town, and it has been the subject of opinion pieces in the local newspaper throughout the years. Tensions among outfitters and local hunters are not uncommon and have been noted in other nearby communities (for instance, in Hornepayne, Ontario).

The owners of the two outfitters I visited told me that there are often misconceptions in the community about their special rights. Outfitters have exclusive rights to certain lakes, have access to some roads that are closed to the public, and as in the case of Payeur Outfitter discussed in Chapter 2, they may have exclusive rights on private territories. Some hunters are frustrated when their access to certain areas is restricted, yet outfitters are allowed. It may seem that hunters' frustrations have no basis, when we take into consideration the immensity of the landscape, but sometimes, areas that are suddenly closed off have been the hunting grounds of some for generations. In addition to being frustrated about restricted access to some land, some hunters seem to be bothered by the fact that some tags are being put aside for tourists who hunt through those outfitters, which means less tags are available for them, their group, or family members.

Hunters are also critical of the “special” rights that hunters of indigenous descent have, because they compete for “their” moose—“they” are often blamed for the decline in the moose population.⁵⁹ More specifically, they are frustrated about the fact that individuals

59 Dunk argues that hunters seem to simultaneously appropriate indigenous discourses on hunting to form their own identity. More specifically, hunters may present themselves as spiritual family men who are trying to reconnect with nature: “thus hunting is far from being about domination of nature and the taking of life” it is about “being one with nature, with one’s self and with one’s human community” (2002: 45). This is, in part, an attempt to construct an identity that is presentable to the public—one that goes against the stereotypical “redneck” image of hunters (Dunk 2002: 45 & 60).

with the Indian Status can hunt at any time of the year without limits. In that sense, many “white” hunters, even the OFAH, may interpret treaty or constitutional rights as poaching (Dunk 2002: 49). As seen in Chapter 2, there are several factors responsible for the decline of moose: ticks, collisions, wolf predation, more accurate and powerful technology, and as mentioned above, increased access—what David Barbour calls the perfect storm: “the more we put these little pieces of the puzzle together, you can realize that it's not just an individual or a group, it's the perfect storm”—but hunters continue to blame others.

More commonly, however, hunters tell me they have nothing against these “special” rights, when individuals hunt to feed members of their families or residents of the reserve. However, they are more critical of individuals they sometimes call “white Indians,” individuals who supposedly go back several generations to claim indigenous ancestry and acquire the Indian Status to take advantage of hunting rights, even though they do not seem to identify with that ancestry in any other way.

Some hunters tell me that some individuals with Indian Status cards have taken advantage of their rights to kill animals in large quantities to sell the wild meat although it is illegal (they usually know about this because meat was offered to acquaintances or coworkers before). Selling meat is deeply frowned upon; for some, such as Louise, it is because it takes away from the inherent value that hunting and the resulting meat have for community members.

Finally, hunters or different groups of hunters in the community are sometimes in conflict with one another. Tensions are often the result of people infringing on each other's

This is not necessarily the case for the hunters I have interviewed, however. While it is true that many appreciate spending time in “nature,” the stories of human dominance mentioned in Chapter 2 show that hunters do not usually deny the thrill they get when they kill an animal (things might be different when they talk to non-hunters or Southern Ontarians). Hunters continuously narrated their heroic hunting stories which often included putting down large bulls—which goes counter to the traditional indigenous perspective. The only instances of appropriation in my interviews (and I am in no position to judge the genuineness of their claims) were when a couple of hunters told me they thank the animals they kill. Whether they do so to justify their actions, feel less guilt, or because they are genuinely thankful for the meat they acquire is unclear to me.

territories, as seen in Chapter 2. Not only outfitters are perceived as competitors for land, so are other hunting groups. As explained before, hunters are usually careful not to infringe on other hunters' territory, however, every year, there are some clashes over territory, as the story of my friend's father having "his" moose taken by another group shows.

Tensions not only arise between groups but within them. It is not uncommon to hear of hunters having arguments with their own hunting group members concerning the division of meat or how they should proceed to carry the animals out of the forest. There are also instances of jealousy that arise when another group member kills a moose. In some cases, the rifts have become so deep that some group members split to start their own new groups. Some hunters have told me that they would hunt alone, if it were not for tags being so difficult to get. In other words, even though ties between family and community members may be strengthened through hunting (Chapters 1 and 3), hunting together may also lead to tensions and severed bonds.

Through hunting, people express, or become aware of, what makes them different from other groups. As shown here, hunting brings up the differences between Northern and Southern Ontarians in a manner that illuminates pre-existing tensions and antipathy between both. Just like hunting allows some Hearst residents to define themselves vis-à-vis Southern Ontarians, it also allows them to define themselves against the state that, in their view, dismisses their knowledge and their needs, failing to adequately manage the natural resources. In these cases, disconnections with outsiders allow for a strengthening of ties between residents and hunters who share similar frustrations. However, in other cases, hunting becomes the source of divisions and tensions that surface between Hearst residents. This is the case for local officers, logging companies, outfitters owners, individuals with the Indian Status card, and other hunters.

Conclusion & continuation: looking back, moving forward

In towns of Northern Ontario that are isolated from well-connected centers, dependent on resource-based industries, and in relative proximity to the “natural” environment, outdoor activities such as hunting have a central place in the life of residents. Although neither the region of Northern Ontario nor the town of Hearst represent homogenous populations, in important ways, Hearst can be considered representative of typical towns in the region, in particular those with a French-Canadian heritage.

Outdoor activities like hunting are central to the social fabric of small communities in Northern Ontario, bringing residents, friends, and families together through shared interests and traditions. From special events, like the Wild Meat Supper, to the daily bustle of the hunting season, hunting fosters feelings of community membership, bringing residents together at local clubs, sports specialty stores, and quintessential small-town social hubs like Tim Hortons. For those towns with a dominant francophone population, pride in hunting and in one’s ethnic heritage (as well as feelings of attachment to the locality) is reflected in the wild meat recipes that combine local resources with French Canadian culinary traditions. Ethnic heritage aside, it seems evident that in Northern Ontario towns where hunting is important, this activity structures family life and is deeply implicated in the reproduction of intergenerational bonds and gender specific roles. Even though everyone in the family is usually involved in some way, dominant gender roles tend to be reproduced through involvement in such outdoor activities. This is generally true with hunting in Hearst, as women tend to take a secondary role in the hunt. As seen with this research, however, these activities may also allow women in towns of Northern Ontario to contest those roles, for example, when they take a primary role in the hunt or hunt by themselves. Overall, however, hunting or similar activities like fishing, which presume proximity to “the wilderness,” are still predominantly conceived as masculine activities.

In northern communities that exist in close proximity to a forested area, the “natural” environment is not only a source of jobs, leisure and wild meat for locals, it is also a tourist attraction that is marketed for consumption to outsiders who are seeking to

experience the “wild north” and its pristine “nature.” In such communities where many residents work in resource extraction industries, some residents (and hunters) may, at times, romanticize the environment as pristine “nature” but, in general, are acutely aware of the landscape’s human history and know that human livelihoods often depend on its destruction. They hold a similar sober view towards the killing of wildlife, even though, as described in this thesis, they express contradictory emotions on the subject (from the pleasure and pride experienced at overcoming a “wild” animal, to the sadness, empathy, and guilt felt when the hunter recognizes the sentience, personhood, or agency of the animal).

Regardless of the emotions that accompany the hunt, to be successful, the activity requires attentiveness to the environment and animals. Through participation in outdoor activities such as hunting, people gain an awareness of continuities and changes in forested environment and local fauna that would not be there otherwise. This awareness, in turn, often means that residents have informed opinions and critiques on, as well as a vested interest in, conservation efforts currently carried out by companies and the government.

Beyond influencing their view of the surrounding environment, its flora, and fauna, in towns like Hearst, hunting traditions are also connected to a well-developed taste for wild meat in a context where, as mentioned, supermarkets are not always well provisioned. In general, residents prefer to get meat from hunting and are proud to be involved at every step of the process (killing, field dressing, butchering, and cooking). This relationship stands in stark contrast from the relationship that an average supermarket consumer may have with meat bought in a plastic wrapped package with “no face,” no parasites, and often no distinctive taste or smell. Most hunters also seem to accept, in a matter of fact fashion, in ways that may make non-hunters frown, that eating meat involves killing.

Finally, intra-community tensions are present in Hearst and similar towns of Northern Ontario. Here, these were illustrated in the animosity the hunters I worked with expressed towards local government officials, logging companies, Indian Status card holders and other hunters who, in one way or another, are thought to adversely affect their hunting

experience. This intra-community animosity, however, is nothing compared to that expressed towards the more powerful government representatives and residents located in Southern Ontario. As explained, Northern Ontarians feel a strong sense of rivalry with distant high state representatives, who, in their view, dismiss local knowledge, restrict local livelihood and outdoor activities, and do little to benefit Northern communities. They also feel disconnected from Southern Ontarians who are thought to see the resource-based traditions of Northern Ontarians in a negative light, despite enjoying the economic contributions brought by logging to the provincial economy. They similarly resent Southern Ontarians hypocritical concern with the killing of animals for food when many of them eat meat from animals that had to be killed by others. Like in other communities, where dissatisfaction concerning political representation is felt, those frustrations reflect deeply felt fears over the potential loss of regional character, identity, and traditions (Balthazar 2017).



Figure 9: Enduring traditions: grouse hunting, almost a decade ago, on the left, as a graduate student on the right, after my recent reintroduction to the activity.

For me, as for most interviewees, taking part in hunting or related activities is, in one way or another, central to what it means to be a Northern Ontarian. As my cherished childhood memories of hunting trips with my father inspired me to do research on the subject as a graduate student (Figure 9), it was important for me to shed light on the central role that hunting has in the construction of identity at the individual, family, and community level in the region

Moreover, through this work, I have tried to reveal the full significance of hunting in the region, in a manner that moves beyond reductive “redneck” stereotypes. It is inaccurate to describe hunting as an activity that involves people going into the bush with all the advantage of technology with their sole intention being to pillage “nature” and kill wildlife. Rather, I hope to have shown that hunting often comes with appreciation for “nature,” a concern for conservationism, and an attention to the lives of Others. This ethnography of hunting hopefully questions unfair one-sided stereotypes about non-indigenous hunting communities in Northern Ontario, and shows the positive dimension of hunting as an activity that builds not only a love of place and the environment but also positive community and family bonds. My hope, then, is that I was able to give a voice to residents of Hearst whose perspective is often misunderstood. Consequently, non-hunters can begin to understand the complex relationships that are found beyond the stereotypes.

Ignoring hunters’ local knowledge about the “natural” environment and its fauna can result in important consequences for both human and animal populations in the region. Hence, it is also my hope that this thesis illuminates the importance of decision-makers considering local perspectives and cultural particularities when revising relevant legislation.

Hunters, of course, are only one group of participants on the landscape, and they should ensure that their interests also allow space for the “natural” environment and animal populations to thrive. As humans, we have to recognize our limited capacity to grasp the complex “webs of interspecies dependence” on the landscape (Tsing 2012: 144). While both entangled, “nature” also operates independently of humans, in ways we have yet to understand. As Dave Barbour puts it: “we make a poor god, in the sense that we can't

control things like what we think we can;” Tsing would add that “we can’t fix anything, even what we have broken, by ourselves” (Tsing 2015: 257).

I hope this thesis contributes—albeit modestly—to ongoing reflections on our relationship to the food we eat. Hunting represents a distinctive relationship to food—a relationship many city-dwellers have lost and are trying to regain. I still do not feel comfortable killing or seeing an animal get killed, and I feel uneasy eating moose meat knowing the population is unstable, but I feel fulfilled looking in the pantry and seeing the bear and goose canning, along with beet and zucchini preserves I made with my garden harvest. I feel satisfied to see this food, because my father and I have worked hard to acquire it, prepare it, and preserve it, and because it is rewarding to know that, if only once in a while, we can feed ourselves without relying on corporations that mistreat workers, animals, and the planet (especially in Northern Ontario where, on top of that, food is not so fresh and expensive). When I invite family and friends for wild meat fondues (Figure 10), and every time I open a mason jar, I am happy, because I am surrounded by people I love, the meat is delicious, and I feel good eating it, and because I remember the many hunting experiences I had a chance to share with the people I care so much about, as a child, and again more recently, in the community that is so dear to me.



Figure 10: Wild meat fondue with friends: something we try to do when we are all reunited in Hearst, taking the time to share food we all have grown up eating, while sharing a bit about our lives with one another.

It may have been the last time I went hunting or the last wild meat meal I shared with friends for a while, and although I have to conclude the story I have told in the last hundred pages or so, the real story does not end here. It is true that the northern resource-based economy is precarious, and that the moose population is in decline—the future is always uncertain, and this seems particularly true for Northern Ontarians. Yet, hundreds of residents are already getting ready for the next hunting season. This year, some will go hunting or eat wild meat for the first time, young hunters will kill their first grouse or their first moose, new pictures and new hunting trophies will be put up on garage walls, and old and new stories will continue to be passed on. My hope is that this project, even if it offers just a glimpse into those lives, will be a step towards a fuller understanding of the meanings, practices, relationships, and attachments formed around hunting in Northern Ontario, shedding light on what may make communities like Hearst unique.

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