

Predators and Capitalism: World-ecology of Historical Human-Wolf Relations in Finland

Pollen 2020: Convivial Conservation 1

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Introduction and Research Rationale

- The influence of expanding capitalism on predator policies and perceptions in Finland
- Current public discourse on wolves in Finland is highly polarised: support for wolf-conservation is widespread while hostility towards wolves lingers especially in rural areas (Lähdesmäki and Ratamäki 2015), a situation repeating around industrialised countries where wolves have been returning in the new millennium
- A *longue durée* perspective on human-wolf-relations: How did we get from pre-modern, ambivalent conviviality to extinction and subsequently the situation today?
- Exploring history can help imagine and (re)build post-capitalist, sustainable lived environments (Gibson-Graham 2006).
- Historical roots of the prominent discourse on linkages between capitalism and conservation (cf. Büscher and Fletcher 2015; 2019; 2020), while switching focus from protected areas to species conservation

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

- World-ecology as a post-Cartesian analysis of capitalism as a frontier, and a methodology (Moore 2015; 2017)
- Capitalism as understood in the world-system tradition (Arrighi 1994)
 - Seeking profit on profit without regard for externalities
 - Critical junctures creating seeming path-dependency
- Dominant structures and perceptions are the result of certain processes and power relations, not a 'natural progression' (Igoe et al. 2010, following Gramsci 2000)
- Synthesising literature review
 - Scientific research, popularised handbooks, and books and reports ordered by governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations from 1789 to today
- Ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2019-2020 in villages in the municipality of Lieksa, in North Karelia, Eastern Finland



Central Argument

- 1) Capitalism along with the power relations its consolidation produced were an integral part of the historical circumstances that led to the eradication of wolves
- 2) The process of wolf eradication in the 19th century was not only a result of animosity towards wolves, but forces that led to eradication also helped produce that animosity
- 3) Bounties, and later compensation, continued to compress the value of wolves to monetary measures, signalling a lack of inherent value
- 4) The resulting negative perceptions, coupled with practices formed during the subsequent wolfless era, are key components of current day contestations

From Nature Religions to Natural Resources

Argument 1: Capitalism along with the power relations its consolidation produced were an integral part of the historical circumstances that led to the eradication of wolves

- Prior to the incremental spread of permanent agriculture from 15th century onwards, and, *Isojako* (enclosures) during 1750-1870, people in Finland lived with wolves in ambivalent conviviality
- Nature/culture-divisions of the Enlightenment entwined with the production of private property -> from nature to natural resources
- New class of rural landowners were able to accumulate both capital and political power
- The enclosures thus created an imaginary that one could, and even should – for the sake of rational, civilised utilisation of natural resources – guard the forest lands denominated as one's own from the transgression of beings considered harmful, such as wolves

Wolf Eradication in the 19th Century

Argument 2: The process of wolf eradication in the 19th century was not only a result of animosity towards wolves, but forces that lead to eradication also helped produce that animosity

- Wolves were mostly extinct by the beginning of the 20th century
- Narratives of the eradication of predators commonly depict the process as a result of an enhanced ability to kill them, as an unavoidable outcome of pre-disposed hatred towards predators and especially wolves
- Wolves posed a threat to livestock agriculture and to a small extent to people, but within the precarious context of rural life in the 19th century, they were just one among many hardships
- Wolves threatened game hunting – a specific interest of new landowning elites advocating for gentlemanly sports hunting and rent-seeking on hunting lands
- Active lobbying for incentives that would encourage ‘common people’ to take part in the eradication efforts – helped by budding newspapers and magazines
 - bounties were increased and advertised vehemently
 - killing wolves became an act of accumulation financed by the State and counties

From Bounties to Compensation

Argument 3: Bounties, and later compensation, continued to compress the value of wolves to monetary measures, signalling a lack of inherent value

- Bounties ended in the 1970s, wolves gained current protection status in 1995 when Finland joined EU
- Compensations have been shown to be necessary, though not sufficient alone, for predator conservation in European countries with higher GDP (Kojola et al. 2018)
- Scientific understanding of the key role of predators in odds with capitalist logic of freedom to profit and do whatever one wants with privatised natures
- By giving a monetary value to beings, the mitigating force between conservation and accumulation is capitalistic logic itself
- Reducing beings to an object that can be counted, mapped, and given a set monetary value at the expense of plural and inherent values and meanings (cf. critique on Payments for Ecosystem Services)

Historical Legacy and the Situation Today

Argument 4: The resulting negative perceptions, coupled with practices formed during the subsequent wolfless era, are key components of current day contestations

- Wolf image is created by history and popular narratives of the history, while current habits and ways of life have been developed during the concrete wolflessness of the 20th century
- Previously existence of wolves has been efficiently controlled by killing, creating a perception of controllability of wolves – especially difficult to reconcile among hunters
- A myth of wolves as a timid creature was created in the 20th century, when all wolves that challenged this assumption were killed (Lähdesmäki 2020) – Persistent image of historical “real wolves of the wilderness” that are “domesticated” today (interview in Lieksa, July 2019.)
- The idea of what a wolf is has been so fundamentally shaped by Mastery over nature (cf. Val Plumwood 1993) and a monetised way of deciding what is allowed to exist, that after violent expulsions of wolves are no longer legal, the emerging wolf populations are not seen as natural

Conclusions

- Finnish history of the late 19th century, when enclosures were finished, private land properties created new rural elites, and the ideals of civilisation created nature/culture dichotomies, is a history of mastery over nature, of killing those parts of nature that hinder commodifying other parts of it – while making that process itself incentivised and entwined with capitalist logics through different forms of monetisation.
- By giving primacy to capitalist ways of understanding and ordering nature, and turning to capitalist mechanisms also to mitigate contradictions, the ways of understanding and imagining predators and human relations to them are severely curtailed
- Lopez (1978, quoted in Fritts et al. 2003: 295) writes that “man has externalized his bestial nature - - on the wolf”; we argue that this bestiality is expressed in the dispossession and violence of capital accumulation, and is made invisible by emphasising dispossession and violence by wolves.
- A mere sighting of wolves can still today draw media attention away from other issues, making explicit the disproportional interest different human-nonhuman nature relations invoke. Who has agency and how and what processes are hidden are thus key questions for future research to delve into in relation to convivial conservation, capitalism and world-ecology.

Thank you!

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- Pictures by Sanna Komi