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Theorizing Logger Religion within the Pacific Northwest Timber Conflict

Christopher Serenari

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Raleigh, NC, USA
cserenari@gmail.com

Nils Peterson

Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources,
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, USA
nils_peterson@ncsu.edu

Brett Clark

Department of Sociology, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA
brett.clark@soc.utah.edu

Abstract

This paper examines the links between the material and symbolic nature of timber extraction during the Pacific Northwest (PNW) timber wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Applying Durkheim's work on religion and social solidarity, the authors consider a form of logger religion that emerged through many years of PNW timber production, shaping the identities of loggers and timber community dynamics. This paper proposes that forests are spaces that bridge the sacred and profane. Our evaluation examines a totemic meaning assigned to loggers originating from forest-based labour and reinforced by timber communities through rituals. Throughout the timber wars, loggers also developed a conflicted consciousness, stemming from their connection to and the destruction of forests. Given the character of logger religion that existed, the deployment of forest management and community development policies may not adequately re-create tacit relationships between the sacred and profane, previously damaged as a result of the drastic decline in timber production in the PNW.

Keywords

Durkheim – totem – logger – religion – Pacific Northwest

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Actively imagined, religious practice is the process by which people “orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings and values,” which very often occurs through mundane rituals that are not directed or sanctioned by religious specialists (Albanese, 1990, p. 6). These everyday religious activities reflect history and re-create the cultural worlds we inhabit.

SHIBLEY, 2011, p. 168

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1 Introduction

The forest conflict in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) in the 1980s and 1990s is typically characterized as one of biological, political, and economic substance (Porter, 1999). The endangered northern spotted owl's (*Strix occidentalis*) habitat loss, legislation that reduced or halted old-growth timber extraction, and significant job losses due to mechanization and liquidation of capital garnered most of the headlines. The authors do not dispute that these are important elements within the forest conflicts. We do contend that there are other overlooked dimensions of this conflict that should be addressed. Eller (2006) suggests that differing, if not shifting, forest values have shaped today's conflicting forest management practices. She also argued that non-market value of old-growth forests caught up to and surpassed market value in the eyes of the public (Haynes, Szaro, & Dykstra, 2005). U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio, who represented Oregon's 4th district and was affected by the timber conflict, claimed the old-growth controversy had “begun to resemble a religious war: those who deviate from the true faith—whichever true faith—are condemned as sinners, heretics, or worse. There is no compromise for the true believer” (DeFazio, 1992, p. 11). The religious aspects of this conflict encompassed more than conflicting moral judgments about the appropriate use of PNW forests (Porter, 1999). Rather, these aspects dictate how people involved in the conflict made decisions in their daily lives, and how identities and communities were shaped.

Although institutionalized religion is weaker in the PNW than in other regions of the United States, this does not mean that religious questions are generally less important (Eller, 1996; Shibley, 2011). In employing a broader conception of religious issues, as suggested by Emile Durkheim, a segment of PNW residents seem to have expressed an unconventional form of religion that comprises regional identity, communities, and politics. This essay explores the so-called timber wars as an expression of this religion. The authors' evaluation describes how religious conceptions and relations, originating from the seemingly mundane ritual of logging, has a religious character and plays a role in the timber conflict.

Inquiry into the role of religion in the timber wars has been largely one-sided, as attention has predominantly focused on environmental activists. Environmentalists advocate a Leopold-like land ethic where biological integrity is sacred (DeWitt, 2010; Norton, 1994). Environmentalists regard redemption as equating to stewardship and sustainability, ritual as activism, and purpose as transformation of human-nature relations (Shibley, 2011). When analyzed within the context of the timber wars, the sacred is commonly linked to "eco-spiritualists" and other environmentalists (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997; Shibley, 2011; Taylor, 2001; Zimmerman, 2000). Led by deep ecologists, environmentalists fighting against clearcutting of PNW forests used religious arguments to establish that the timber industry is doing more than extracting the remaining old-growth timber (Taylor, 2001a, b). Creative environmental discourse sought to evoke emotional appeal while actions, such as protesting, are viewed internally as ritualistic. The goal is to transcend the utilitarian worldview about forests that has dominated the region for over a hundred years (Ruud & Sprague, 2000; Taylor, 2001b).

Yet, by the very nature of their work, loggers ("those involved in any part of the process of moving logs from the stump to the mill" [Reimer, 1995, p. 5]) also operate in close contact with so-called nature. It is important to consider, address, and evaluate the relationship between loggers, timber communities, and forests because literature suggests the "lure of the woods" for loggers, though "difficult to pin down," is critical to the cultivation of their worldviews and existence (Bonnell, Irving, & Lewis, 1997, p. 25), and is rooted in community relations. For instance, in *Deadfall* by James LeMondes (2001), a logger states, "When you lived around a logging town, that's all the young fellows seemed to think about was getting into the woods. I didn't want to go to school ..." (p. 250).

The reason why the woods are so captivating to loggers has not been explored fully. If a logger religion was a force compelling loggers to work in the forest, one can entertain novel insights into the conflicts that emerged, as well

as consider the origins of unwanted outcomes (e.g., unemployment, crime, loss of identity) that may manifest during periods of socio-ecological transformation (e.g., drastic decline in timber production and changes to forest policy in the PNW [Dumont Jr., 1996]) that may socially destabilize communities (Porter, 1999, p. 24). In this context, one can also evaluate prospects for new socio-economic policies that attempt to address social crisis and re-create broken relationships between people and nature.

1.1 *Purpose and Approach*

In this essay, the authors examine the existence of a logger religion during the timber wars of the 1980s and 1990s by applying Durkheim's theoretical insights on religion and social solidarity to describe conceivable ties between loggers' symbolic and material worlds. Durkheim's work allows readers to reflect on religious spaces outside of secular or deity-based religion to uncover links between loggers, nature, and the sacred, as suggested in claims that this conflict appeared to be a religious war. The descriptions of loggers and timber communities are rooted within specific accounts and analyses of the PNW. In reviewing research regarding the history of logging in the PNW, as well as the timber wars at the end of the 20th century, several issues were especially striking. First, historic research on logging situates loggers within the forests suggests that this distinctive setting and the type of work shaped their understanding of the world and the communities to which they belonged. Second, historical accounts of the timber wars often emphasize the spiritual moorings of environmentalists and suggest a unique connection to the forests. In both situations, questions regarding worldviews are evident, even if not fully explored and developed.

This paper contends that Durkheim's account of religion and community can serve as a useful means to reveal the religious character and relationships among loggers and timber communities, which is often missing in accounts of the timber wars. The literature on the history of logging in the PNW, in conjunction with Durkheim's account of religion, is engaged to generate a general account of a logger religion. We recognize that the general account is not absolute because logger experiences include circumstantial variations and shifts, also bounded by the time and place. Nevertheless, this account and framing provides useful insights, especially for considering the implications of sweeping change in forest management policy and societal values in contemporary society.

The first section of the paper presents the conditions that contribute to logger spirituality often overlooked by scholars, politicians, and others. It begins with a synopsis of the political economic context to ground the analysis and

illustrate the evolution of ideological and social tensions in the conflict. The second section discusses the religiosity of loggers through the construction of totemic meaning. The final section examines a dual consciousness that resides among loggers, providing an opportunity to reflect on the erosion of timber communities and implications for development policy.

2 The Masking of Logger Religion

This section summarizes the timber wars to draw attention to how historical development and the larger political economy of unbridled timber production influenced logger relations with nature during the conflict. This brief historical account presents the larger context in which PNW loggers worked and created their communities. It is part of the setting that shapes their lives, yet it also tends to eclipse any religious connections that emerged within the forests. This discussion calls into question the robustness of the stereotypes (e.g., He-Men, marauders, victims, and heroes) that masked logger religion (Moore, 1993; Quam-Wickham, 1999; Satterfield, 1996).

2.1 *Political Economy and the Masking of Logger Religion*

The roots of the PNW forest conflict reach back to the early and mid-19th century when settlers forcibly appropriated and occupied Native Americans' land. In the time that followed, private individuals came to own most of the PNW forests that became fiercely contested during the timber wars of the 1980s and 1990s. In the 19th century, these forests contained the highest quality timber and were the most prosperous timber-producing regions on the continent (Widick, 2009). Redwoods, for instance, provided some of the best quality lumber in the world (Haynes, Szaro, & Dykstra, 2005; Satterfield, 2002). During this time, public old-growth forests were routinely sold to corporations under the premise that public forests were "working forests" (Satterfield, 2002; Widick, 2009). In Humboldt County, California, a microcosm of the larger PNW forest conflict, timber extraction became the number one commodity for export in the 1860s (Widick, 2009). Between 1860 and 1880 the timber industry was the recipient of eight out of every ten dollars invested in manufacturing in the state of Washington (Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, 2012). Investors were drawn to the region by the allure of large profits, and labourers came to the PNW seeking employment in the forests.

The timber industry of the mid-19th century was geared to meet the needs of the regional market, but the arrival of the railroad in the 1870s expanded markets, increased demand, and contributed to a restructuring of the timber

industry. Board feet production in the PNW increased from 2.9 billion in 1899 to almost 10 billion by 1929, largely due to sales on the national timber market that were made possible by the completion of the Northern Pacific Railway in 1882 (Brandeberry, 1929). Private individuals held most forestland in the early 1900s and timber companies moved quickly to buy these forests and take advantage of increased timber demand. Financial restructuring was needed as debt became associated with resultant and widespread timber speculation and then sizeable purchases of capital by timber holding corporations, aided by lax forest protection laws (Satterfield, 2002). Timber holding companies dealt with debt by liquidating PNW forests and extensive cutting operations. These practices were beholden to timber markets making boom-and-bust economic cycles a staple of the timber industry and leading to regular wage reductions and layoffs (Satterfield, 2002).

In the 20th century, the timber industry also needed to refine timber extraction and processing through advances in operations, technology, and science to speed up production and reduce labour costs (Widick, 2009). After World War II, large-scale tractor logging facilitated further harvest increases, alongside an expansion in post-war lumber demand (Madej, 2010). The vast growth in the timber industry was also aided by technological innovation that simplified the arduous process of timber felling, extraction, and processing. Railroads, chainsaws, trucks, timber cruisers, high leads, and roads replaced the use of waterways and mules. These technological advances increased the efficiency of timber production. They also led to the slashing of approximately 22,000 timber jobs in the PNW between 1950 and 1998, despite a rise in timber demand and a population influx to the Pacific Northwest (Noss, 2000; Satterfield, 2002). As production costs and demand for timber increased, an already powerful timber industry desired even lower wages and weaker regulations (Satterfield, 2002). Timber operations were dubbed inhumane, as companies made strides to reduce their overhead and maximize profit at the expense of logger labour and the communities that labour built (Satterfield, 2002). Numerous divisions arose within timber communities in the PNW, especially in response to mergers and changes within the timber industry itself. Cumulatively, the restructuring of and reduced need for labour produced conflict that would later become a major issue during the so-called “timber wars.”

The timber wars came to a head in 1986 after Maxaam, an investment firm, took over California-based Pacific Lumber. This event resulted in a well-publicized civic movement against unsustainable clearcutting and free market valuation of PNW forests, old-growth forests in particular. The environmental movement presented a challenge to a century long business as usual approach within these forests, attempted to mobilize the public in opposi-

tion to unsustainable logging practices, and sought legislation to protect further degradation of old-growth forests and their ecosystems. Environmentalists employed demonstrations, property destruction, blockades, persuasive publicity (including the spotted owl making the cover of *Time Magazine* and using the term “ancient” instead of “old-growth”), and political lobbying to slow timber extraction and ecological degradation (Satterfield, 2002; Widick, 2009).

In the 1980s, “new forestry” research linking timber production and forest ecology was used to advocate for a holistic ecosystem management approach (Dietrich, 2010). This scholarship provided the ammunition environmentalists needed to fight governmentally sanctioned timber production policies. Dissent by personnel within the U.S. Forest Service and the timber industry, including loggers, posed new challenges to unsustainable logging practices. Meanwhile, The Roadless Area Review and Evaluations, National Environmental Policy Act, The Wilderness Act, and the Endangered Species Act provided the needed legal tools for the environmental movement to further contest unsustainable logging (Dietrich, 2010; Haynes, Szaro, & Dykstra, 2005; Satterfield, 2002).

Environmentalists also attempted to articulate a different relationship between humans and the land, one rooted in spiritual and ethical prudence. During this process, loggers were often vilified, typecast as ignorant, in denial (Satterfield, 1996), or appendages of the big timber machine (Bari, 1994). It was common to present loggers as inherently alienated from so-called nature. Rather than engage in a war of ethics, the timber industry fashioned an owls versus jobs discourse in an effort to reframe the conflict and encourage workers to side with timber companies (Moore, 1993). This framing is an important part of the timber wars, but it also helped obfuscate the role of logger religion in the conflict.

3 Uncovering a Logger Religion

A foundation for a logger religion is not grounded in a belief in the deific, but beliefs, ideas, and sentiments of a collective body that are fixed upon a material object. Durkheim’s (1954) definition is well suited to the PNW, a region perhaps less known for secularized religion than deity-less nature religion. He argued, “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things ... set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim, 1954, p. 47).

Durkheim divided the world into two cognitive domains imagined by humans, real (*profane*) and ideal (*sacred*), to frame the organization of human societies in relation to religious beliefs. Durkheim's depiction of the sacred also fits well in this context because it emphasizes an association between the individual and collective that may have existed in the PNW before and during the conflict, as the following analysis suggests. The sacred is comprised of "simply collective ideals that have fixed themselves on material objects ... they are moral forces ... made up of the ideas and sentiments awakened in us by the spectacle of society ..." (Lukes, 1985, p. 25).

3.1 *Forests as Bridges between the Sacred and the Profane*

Absent from our depiction of a Durkheim-inspired logger religion is a material object that links the sacred and profane. Earthly spaces and features of the landscape can become objects of societal sacralization and the link between the sacred and the profane (Eliade, 1959). We propose PNW forests united the sacred and the profane for loggers. Viewing PNW forests in this way allows one to consider the underexplored and important religious character of working in the forest.

Natural landmarks such as waterways, forests, and mountains can serve as places where synergistic relationships between ideology and transcendent relations emerge and lead to individual ablution, group sanctification, and provides access to ultimate reality (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997).

On the one hand, [sacred landmarks] represent the cosmogony or world-view of the group which uses them, and on the other hand, such spaces define the relationship of the community to the larger universe. As such, these spaces exhibit both identity-building and identity-distinguishing aspects.

BARTKOWSKI & SWEARINGEN, 1997, p. 310

Forests served in this role because as loggers worked within the woods they found a sense of being and belonging. The next section develops support for this idea, reflecting on how working in the forest produces a distinct religious character that bridges the sacred and profane. Applying Durkheim's theory, we first outline the totemic meaning associated with logger identity in which forests serve as spaces where transcendent relations occur. This relationship also serves as the foundation for a sacred imagined world or timber community cosmogony. Second, Durkheim's perspectives on religion and its integral ties are employed to the collective to render visible connections between loggers, timber communities, nature, the sacred, and the profane.

3.2 *Logger Totemic Meaning*

Totems, symbolic representations of societal groups, can bridge the sacred and the profane. A totem, in theory, is usually a deified entity and symbol of a material expression of an “object of venerable respect” (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997, p. 123). In the presence of the totem, a person will experience a feeling of dependence and communion upon the object; the totem is also one’s equal rather than one’s superior (Kalland, 1993). The object’s “nature” is different than that of humans and requires the aid and sacrifice of humans so that the ends associated with the object can be achieved. For this reason, as well as out of respect and communion, devoted people may act in a manner they believe is desired by the object. People find strength, identity, solidarity, and a degree of meaning in devotion to the object. The powers of the object may manifest themselves as commands to violence or productivity. Totems have also been abstracted to include respect for or dominance over the customs, values, and institutions. Rituals (discussed later) are used to express devotion to the totem; they “affirm [the group’s] collective existence” and are a “means by which the social group reaffirms itself periodically” (Kalland, 1993, p. 287).

Scholarship on timber workers suggests loggers’ “nature” was different than that of other humans. We suggest here that loggers can be viewed as hybrids between the deified object and symbol of a material expression. Therefore, assigning totemic meaning to loggers seems appropriate in this context rather than declaring them totems. Peterson, Peterson, and Peterson (2010) explained “totemic meaning often generates intense social cohesion at the same time it builds a sense of connectedness between the social group and those objects that have become totemic” (p. 129). Totemic meaning in this context is contingent upon working in the forest. To further investigate the links between totemic meaning and loggers, we now discuss logger identity, the catalyst for social cohesion among loggers and timber communities. The latter then celebrated loggers and their labour through various rituals.

4 **Logger Identity**

Our evaluation suggests that loggers in the PNW embodied extraordinary characteristics that intensified their totemic meaning. First, Dumont Jr. (1996) found loggers perceived themselves as positioned at the “foundation of American society” (p. 286). This is a weighty claim, but not implausible. Their labour yields products that make life possible not just for their communities, but for an entire nation. Moreover, these timber products are a result of extremely dangerous labour under inhospitable conditions “that no being of sound mind

and body would rationally endure" (Satterfield, 1996, p. 74; see also Patterson, [2008]; Walls, [2006]; Quam-Wickham, [1999]). Loggers proved capable of not only enduring, but thriving in extreme conditions that most human beings would avoid (Rader, 1967).

Second, loggers and their supporters during the examined time period in the 1980s believed that loggers possess unique environmental empathy. They alone are best qualified to propagate forest wellbeing from mountaintop to creek bed. They were alleged to be the "real" and "practical" environmentalists (Carroll, 1989). In an exchange regarding logger abilities to protect forests from wildfire, former Montana Governor Judy Martz emphatically indicated,

It's about cleaning up the forests. And who's going to do it if loggers don't? Who else? ... You are the physicians of the forest ... The goal is healthy forests ... So you tell me who are the real environmentalists. Who are the people taking care of the wildlife habitat and the watersheds?

DEVLIN, 2002, p. A1

Loggers and their supporters believed "cleaning up" and protecting the sizeable, extraordinary, and rugged lands of the PNW, which in turn sustain the existence of entire watersheds and ecosystems, is the logger's task.

The systematic ideology of the timber industry greatly influenced how loggers internalized working in the forests by romanticizing manual labor, which gave rise to an occupational identity among loggers (Walls, 2006; Quam-Wickham, 1999). The origins of this identity can be traced back to those loggers who had gone west riding the coattails of Manifest Destiny and protected the land and their communities from Indians, bears, and other perceived threats (Bari, 1994, p. 69). This identity embraced 19th century timber production philosophy asserting that clearing old growth forests was to improve the land (Earth Vision Institute, 1996). In his 1834 book, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the West*, James Wall illustrated pioneer sentiment when he described "wild" forests as gloomy and timber in Illinois as obscuring the true nature of river bluffs (pp. 45–46). Prior to the advent of 20th century forestry, which framed trees in terms of their monetary value, the Christian church was engaged in the clearing of forests to expel "the 'heathen' practices they symbolized" (Konijnendijk, 2008, p. 21). When placed in a North American context, "savages" and "beasts" occupied forests. Hall (1834) described the heathen nature of North America's "wild" forests and the mentality of timber worker ancestors who settled the West writing: "The savage was to be expelled; the panther, the wolf, and the bear to be exterminated; the forest razed, houses to be built" (p. 13). The identity and ideals about human-nature relations of these

European pioneers were internalized within successive generations of settlers to the American West (Konijnendijk, 2008).

Third, and perhaps most importantly, loggers engaged in labour they perceived as virtuous (Rader, 1967; Steadman, Palmer, & Tilly, 1996). Pursuance of a path to virtuousness is principally an individual and spiritual endeavor. Engagement in virtuous labour creates a space to look past the archetypical achievement of “manliness” by loggers who were bleeding, sweating, and dying on the “He-Man” lands (Quam-Wickham, 1999). Stripping away this façade, one can observe a spiritual side of loggers who perceive themselves not solely as dominators of the forest, but also children “of the forest” (Rader, 1967, p. 192). This ideal originated from an imagined sacred world to which each logger was connected intergenerationally through thought, experiences, folklore, and tradition that highlighted a spiritual communion with nature. Rader (1967), for instance, wrote the lumberjack was viewed as both “fiercely independent, unconsciously intrepid, gigantic in physique,” and noted “in the woods and close to nature, he enjoyed an ideal way of life that nurtured superior men and superior virtues” (p. 192). It is this nurturing and perpetuating of a precise and extraordinary human in which a totemic meaning may have originated.

Finally, loggers were legatees that upheld and passed on the rules of social behavior set forth by their ancestors for over a century and a half (Steadman, Palmer & Tilley, 1996). Logging was “clearly more than simply a means of earning wages; it represents a way of life complete with a set of highly developed traditions and shared values” passed down between generations (Carroll & Lee, 1990, p. 145). Scholars asserted that loggers perceived work in the forest as a calling rather than a profession (Reimer 1995). Loggers were “born to be loggers” (McDermott & Nogaki, 1990, p. A1).

A totemic meaning given to loggers suggests an elevated logger status within timber communities. It also suggests forests were not just material objects to loggers, but sacred places: “the woods [became] more than just a place for doing business” (Reimer, 1995, p. 6). As one logger professed about the areas forests encompass, “They’re part of us” (Burke, 1970, p. 16). The totemic meaning of loggers and the symbolic and sacred nature of the forests starkly contrast the established narrative among environmentalists where forests serve as temples and people went to renew their spirit and their minds, or to seek refuge; nor were forests something only to be defended. The ability to work in the forest is the core of the logger religion described here. Felling a tree was perceived as an artisanal act and the value of that tree is gauged, not just in economic value, but for what it provides the greater good (Ruud & Sprague, 2000).

The forest was a sacred studio or workshop where only the most highly skilled and hardest individuals have gone for centuries to engage in forest-

based labour that results in the manufacture of noble beliefs, values, and commodities that define life-worlds for generations. To disengage from this sacred space is to not merely undermine community, culture, and psychological well-being, but also to forsake ties with the sacred and the reason for human existence. We now apply Durkheim's work on the connections between religion and the collective to reinforce our claim of a totemic meaning attributed to loggers and to outline the role of the timber community in the creation this meaning.

4.1 *The Role of Timber Communities in Constructing and Reinforcing Totemic Meaning*

Like the individual, the totemic logger is produced from collective life. For Durkheim, "a society is not made up merely of the mass of individuals who compose it, the ground which they occupy, the things which they use and the movements which they perform, but above all is the idea which it forms of itself" (Durkheim, 1954, p. 470). The resultant "collective ideal" is expressed by a religion borne of physical and emotional experiences and a product of a "school of collective life" (Durkheim, 1954). We first consider how the social environment of timber community residents can serve to explain how this collective life gave rise to a totemic meaning of the logger. Following Durkheim's logic, timber community residents developed intense shared beliefs about loggers as well as the physical and emotional experiences both groups had as a result of association with a dynamic timber industry. These beliefs were reified generationally as societal morals, habits, norms, and institutions. Because beliefs alone are not enough to keep the religious collective united, a social marking process is needed to mark membership in the collective, shape the collective constitution, and allow the collective to strengthen and reproduce itself (Schilling & Mellor, 2011).

Ritual assemblies are social marking opportunities where individuals can reaffirm their participation in the collective religion. A timber community would have reified these links through worship that served as means by which a community celebrates its own identity and reinforces its social cohesion (Durkheim, 1954). In the context of the timber wars, this occurred through the construction of timber museums, the creation of logger lore, and parades and festivals that celebrate timber culture. All of these events created opportunities to achieve a degree of "effervescent intoxication" (Schilling & Mellor, 2011), or excitement and enthusiasm, needed to connect individuals to the larger timber community. These activities also established external linkages with the "sacred, totemic priorities of the collectivity" (Schilling & Mellor, 2011, p. 24). Rituals also included protests and confrontations between timber com-

munities and workers, politicians, and environmentalists. Chidester reminds us: "Religion is not simply a concern with the meaning of human life, but it is also an engagement with the transcendent powers, forces, and processes that human beings have perceived to impinge on their lives" (Chidester, 1987, p. 4).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The PNW timber conflict involves a long and complex history filled with various economic, political, and social nuances. Missing from the story is an understanding of logger religiosity. Loggers have been cast as just about everything but religious. Our discussion provides an alternative perspective to the dominant view portraying working in the forest as simply the basis for the systematic alienation of loggers from nature. Applying Durkheim's ideas, we tried to illustrate that the industrious pursuit of logger ancestors coupled with a Weberian calling to produce timber contributed to the creation of a logger religion. The religious character of logging in the PNW arose from working in forests, which were hubs of physical and emotional toil, camaraderie, and a sense of being. Communities were built that reaffirmed this collective activity.

Exploring logger ties between the sacred and the profane provides an approach for examining ideological divisions in the timber conflict. When compared with a cursory understanding of environmentalist spirituality in the timber wars (e.g., deep ecology), we posit that the construction of a totemic meaning gave rise to a logger religion that resulted in a battle of symbolic abstractions. These abstractions manifested themselves as subcultural values, norms, and institutions that provided structure to ideological worlds created out of logger labour, worshipped and defended by timber communities, and attacked by environmentalists during the timber conflict.

A totemic meaning assigned to loggers revealed potential hidden repercussions of forest policy changes and shifting national values. Though loggers are a relatively small labouring faction in society, they made a significant mark on the landscape and societal culture. To the extent that working in the forest created ties with the sacred for loggers, those ties were severed with the reduction in timber production and the closing of mills. This rather abrupt disengagement may have contributed to the downturn in forest-dependent community wellbeing (Kusel, 2001). Though government development policies targeted loggers and dying timber communities, many of these individuals and communities may continue to struggle to regain the culture, heritage, and religion lost as a result of sea change in the PNW.

Our analysis suggests that a logger religion could shape culture and politics in the PNW prior to and during the timber wars. Totemic meaning was created, reified, and deployed as a symbolic weapon to psychologically and physically organize, unify, and empower timber communities to battle environmentalists and politicians (Ingalsbee, 1996). However, when loggers began to leave the center of their universe, the forests, and side with environmentalists or join the unemployment line, they ceased to engage in the daily timber production necessary to sustain their sacred worlds (Gregory & Satterfield, 2008; Satterfield, 1996; Widick, 2009).

As the political economic conditions continued to change, the sacred imagined world of the logger depicted in this essay also appears to have been transformed. Loggers developed a type of double consciousness. As the timber industry intensified its “cut and run” practices, loggers experienced job loss and witnessed new extremes of unsustainable practices. Loggers questioned the industry and some forged connections with environmentalists. Nevertheless, the larger transformations within this sector resulted in displacing loggers from their sacred forests. Changes in the timber industry and forest management contributed to the degeneration of timber communities and the distinct type of social solidarity that existed when loggers were effectively working in the forests. Loggers were caught in the middle and appeared to have two states of consciousness during the timber conflict. They spoke out against clearcutting and other unsustainable timber practices, embracing aspects of the environmental discourse. At the same time, loggers embodied a consciousness whereby the timber worker physically, cognitively, and spiritually is affirmed with each tree that is felled. The forest steward consciousness represents the logger compelled to admit their engagement in “bad logging practices” (Widick, 2009, p. 58) that made “a terrible mess” (Gregory & Satterfield, 2008, p. 355) of and destroyed entire ecosystems and watersheds (Burke, 1970). The product of two states of consciousness was an imagined world that seems to have simultaneously fostered unsustainable timber production and forest stewardship.

Our analysis of the religious side of loggers discusses an overlooked domain within many analyses offered on the timber wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Logger religion decreed for generations that it was moral and just to engage in intense timber production so as to “take everything in range” because “there is plenty more over the next hill” (Widick, 2009, p. xxi). Exploring how the sacred and the profane are linked in this context also demonstrates that though economics is central to the plight of loggers, new jobs in tourism, technology, and other outlets will most likely never replace the social solidarity, religion, and sense of life purpose derived from timber production.

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