

'Balding Nevis': Place Imperatives of an Invisible Cohort within Tasmania's Forest Communities

PETE HAY

School of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, Private Bag 78, GPO Hobart 7001, Tasmania, Australia. Email: peter.hay@utas.edu.au

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Abstract

An under-recognised cohort within Tasmania's forest communities is identified, one that shares the social and cultural background of Timber Communities Australia's constituency, but holding deeply antipathetic views toward current forest regimes. Deploying ethnographic data gathered in the upper North Esk country in Tasmania's North-Eastern Tiers, where this cohort seems to predominate, the elements of a deep attachment to place are explicated: these include a desire to return to a past local economy based upon small but labour-intensive sawmills with viable satellite hamlets, and a concern for water quality, for the integrity of forest ecosystems, and for the wellbeing of individual plant and animal species therein. Overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, lacking political skills, and distressed by the dramatic economic and environmental changes within their community, this cohort is unlikely to organise politically, and is likely to remain relatively voiceless within the fraught dynamics of local politics within riven forest communities. Nevertheless, this 'third cohort' suggests wider issues for the politics of place. Its worldview constitutes a potent contemporary articulation of 'the moral economy', as described in the 1970s by E.P. Thompson, and extended to a conception of 'moral ecology' by Karl Jacoby. It also suggests, *contra* Doreen Massey, that the identity-based place theory of the phenomenological tradition is compatible with a conception of places as sites of conflicted meaning, and that it is wrong to assume the vector of change within place to be progressive; rather it is as likely to conduce to a loss of individual and collective agency.

KEY WORDS *Tasmania; forest practices; forest communities; place; moral economy; moral ecology*

Introduction

This paper reports ethnographic research that combines place studies with hermeneutic phenomenology to examine the core values and beliefs of a specific cohort of residents within Tasmania's forest communities. It employs the 'life story method' (Alasuutari, 1995) or 'tales from the field' (Van Maanen, 1988) gathered *via* multiple subject interviews, and privileging those on the ground as they unselfconsciously move from the

personal to the social (and back), such that the weave so obtained enables the researcher to tap relevant cultural understandings. I have sought, in short, to explain how the members of this forest community cohort 'are' in place – with what meanings they endow it; what they expect from it; why, indeed, they live where they live'. 'For different groups and communities', Edward Relph (1976, 58) writes, 'places have different identities'; furthermore, 'personal eccentricities

and attitudes are subsumed to the dominant image of the group'. The group whose world-views I report here is largely invisible, deeply alienated, and enmired in a sense of utter powerlessness. In the discussion that follows I refer to these people as the 'third cohort' within Tasmania's forest communities.

The paper begins by distinguishing the three cohorts within Tasmania's forest communities, and the political context for the sociological fault lines so established is described. These axes of conflict are, it is contended, intractable, socially debilitating, and of some import to wider issues of wellbeing and social cohesion². An account of the place-saturated norms of the 'third cohort' follows, with emphasis upon the disjunction between this group's place values and the current regimes of forest harvesting. The paper then examines some synergies between the values – and the circumstances – of the 'third cohort' and certain place-relevant theoretical constructions. The first of these is E.P. Thompson's (1971) concept of the 'moral economy', a state of being in time and place that Thompson thought to be specific to the 'English crowd' of the eighteenth century, but which several observers have observed to have wider cultural (and even contemporary) relevance. The second is Karl Jacoby's (2001) adaptation of Thompson's theory to a 'moral ecology' of forest communities, though the evidence here provides a variation upon the slant taken by Jacoby. Finally, the evidence of the 'third cohort' is used to evaluate certain key ideas within the place writings of Doreen Massey (1997, 2005), notably her contentions that phenomenologies of place are intrinsically essentialist and hence incompatible with the diversity of identities that constitute the actuality of most places; and that the progressive quality within vectors of change is submerged within the 'reactionary' tendency of place scholars to resist place dynamism.

Lineaments of conflict in Tasmania's forests

On 6 October 2004, in the last week of campaigning for a federal election thought to be in the balance, Prime Minister Howard attended a Timber Communities Australia rally in Launceston. Having delivered his so-called 'rescue package' for Tasmania's disputed forests, an obviously delighted Prime Minister was enthusiastically acclaimed by brawny timber workers, thereby providing electorally-potent imagery for the television sets of a nation mere days away from voting. This was widely proclaimed to be

an election-defining event. Certainly the opposition Labor party lost two of its five Tasmanian House of Representatives seats, though opinion polls had already pointed to the strong probability of these seats falling to the Government. Given such a highly visible and – ostensibly – election-shaping event, it seems likely that most Australians now see the timber communities as politically undifferentiated, with Timber Communities Australia as their hegemonic champion. In such a view, conflict over the Tasmanian forests assumes a simple rural-urban configuration, with opposition to current forest practices confined, in the main, to the environmentally concerned 'doctors' wives' and their supporters in the large urban areas, and the productivist and status quo-defending position of Timber Communities Australia representing *the* voice of the bush.

The evidence supplied by the Launceston rally and the subsequent election outcome appears to render this a reasonable interpretation, but ultimately it cannot be sustained. Far from being politically monolithic, the forest communities are, in fact, sites of considerable community turbulence.

There is a tendency for local anti-forestry campaigns to be mounted by comparative newcomers to the communities in which they now live – in contrast to the pro-logging Timber Communities Australia personnel, who consistently pitch for legitimacy's high ground through a claimed generations-long involvement in the forest industries³. Many grassroots anti-logging activists came to the communities in which they now live 30 or more years ago, as 'alternative lifestylers'. Others, the 'sea (or tree) changers', have arrived more recently. They are often articulate, educated, and refugees from professional stress in the large cities of mainland Australia. They bring much-needed social capital and are frequently active in community re-vitalisation activities. In local politics they are savvy, confident, and strategic. 'The cultural revolution did come', writes Shayne Breen (2001, xiv) in his history of the 'Northern Districts' (to Launceston's southwest), 'albeit with less fanfare and welcome than in Australia's metropolitan centres. The new immigrants produced change', and now 'promoters of economic development are forced to compete with a resilient sub-culture of environmentalism'.

The prominence of these people within the forest communities *is* recognised; at least it is in Tasmania. But a third group can also be identified, one that shares the political aspirations of

the ‘sea-changers’ but having so little else in common with them that members of the two cohorts rarely make common cause. This group consists of people who, like the Timber Communities Australia constituency, have generations-long ties to the communities in which they live, including a continuous involvement in the forest industries, but who are staunchly critical of the harvesting regimes that currently pertain⁴. They tend to be older people but are not always so, and they are less visible because they keep their views largely to themselves. They do not join together in pursuit of common political goals, and they tend to avoid political structures set up by others, even when these are in sympathy with these others’ aspirations.

Dargavel *et al.* (2005, 25) have earlier observed that ‘modern forestry presents a misleading image of being a coherent, unified culture . . . a single culture defined by opposition from an environmental culture’. Though these authors use this observation to key a vertical or historical analysis of ideological diversity within forest industries, the present analysis identifies values schism on a horizontal or socio-cultural axis – nevertheless, it reinforces Dargavel *et al.*’s contention that the ‘traditional’ components of forest communities are *not* politically undifferentiated. It may be that in some timber communities this ‘third cohort’ is such a small presence as to be almost negligible, but I have identified one forest locality in which it seems to con-

stitute the majority cohort. This is the upland community of Burns Creek, Blessington and Ben Neevis (as the locals pronounce it) – the headwaters of the North Esk – and its place is the catchment for Launceston’s main domestic water supply.

‘Balding Nevis’

It may be that this community is unquestionably unique. A colleague who knows the southern timber town of Geeveston reports very little evidence of such a cohort there, with the locals being enthusiastically behind the current forestry regime. At nearby Franklin, on the other hand, such people do exist (a local activist has assured me), though, as I would expect, they keep their heads down. In the Meander Valley, which I know better, it is easy enough to find people who fit into my third cohort, but they are certainly not in the majority. This cohort obviously exists, though, and I suspect that, as I investigate other parts of the island, I will find it to be a not inconsiderable factor within the demography of the various timber communities of Tasmania.

In the North Esk uplands there are considerably fewer people than there are in the Meander, and the community infrastructure is restricted to one single community hall – there is no shop, school or church, not even a graveyard. Yet this was once core sawmilling country, with a network of self-contained villages attaching to each mill. Most mills were small, but a couple of them were among the largest on the island. Now there are only the diehards left, small sawmillers – not necessarily even old – retired millers, retired ‘fallers’ (as they call themselves), more men than women, and, as yet, no sea-changers.

The place of which I write is currently the epicentre of possibly the most rapid conversion of native forest to plantation on the island. It should be prime Timber Communities Australia country. It is not. ‘Everyone around here thinks like me’, said one outspoken sawmiller when I asked him how hazardous it was to excoriate current forest practices in the way that he customarily does. And, when I asked about Timber Communities Australia, he said: ‘there’s no Timber Communities Australia around here. They wouldn’t get anyone to join’. Most have only the rudiments of formal education – sometimes not even that – but they are impressively articulate. They speak in a strong, old-fashioned drawl, and they are brilliantly inventive in their deployment of language. The title of my paper

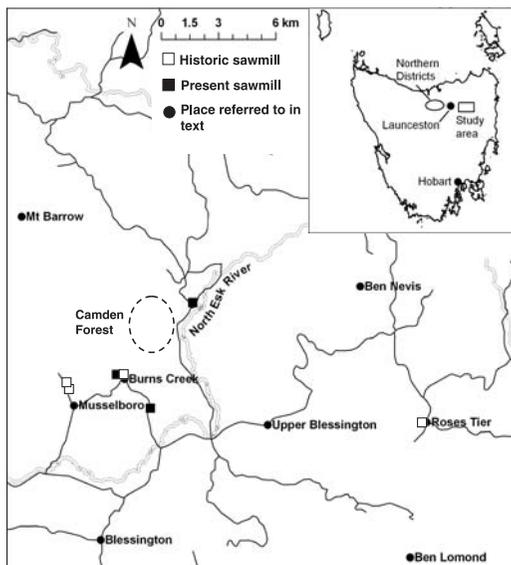


Figure 1 Regional map of the upper North Esk valley, showing sites referred to in the text.

is taken from a remark made by the same sawmiller quoted above. Gesturing to the mountain at his back he remarked: 'they're baldin' er up there today mate. They're completely baldin' er'.

The people of Burns Creek/Nevis harken back to an economy based around small sawlog production for local or regional need. They carry a very strong sense of local history, speaking reverentially of the legendary bush-workers and communities that were here before them. They insist, furthermore, that such an economy remains viable, that the resource to sustain it still exists (though it will not be there for much longer), and that it could provide sustenance for a sustainable network of small villages and towns in place of the asset-stripping and depopulation that presently characterises the smaller centres within timber country. One sawmiller commented:

Even if they just save this little bit, and people get sawmilling going again, and everyone helping everyone out. People would say: 'gee, I'd like to live in that little town. Get businesses working again and farms going'. People want to stay, but what can they do?

The same sawmiller sees considerable irony in the 'Timber Communities Australia' sobriquet. Like many others, he sees this organisation as a front for a monopolistic industry that actually wants people *gone* from the bush:

they want to close the farms and the little towns down – they want a clear run at it out there, so they don't want to have to worry about poisoning people's water supplies, or copping shit about the bloody arc lights that are on all night so they can just keep on working round the clock.

It was sometimes observed, too, that most of the men working in the clearfells are not locals; that many, indeed, are not even countrymen, but live in Launceston, Tasmania's second city, and a mere 40 minutes drive away.

Much of the antagonism expressed towards current forest practices is directed towards its effect upon water quality, particularly high up in the headwaters, where permanent hydrological changes are seen to be taking place. Some are scornful of industry and government scientists, who are thought to turn up to do their studies and take their measurements at precisely the times when they can be sure of *not* finding anything in breach of the Forest Practices Code. 'There are people up here can't read and write',

said one local, 'and none of us are scientists, but we're here all the time, and we see things – dead wombats in the creeks and that, the creeks foaming like y'wouldn't believe, algae up here where none's ever been known before – we see stuff that the bloody scientists never see because they aren't here when it's right there in front of you'. Such an observation raises questions about the comparative status of grounded place knowledge versus the authority of science. Who merits greater credibility: scientists who turn up three or four times a year, stay for an hour, gather samples and take them away, or local people of little or no formal education who have developed a keen eye for the most subtle of changes; and who understand the land in its minutiae and the nuances of its biophysical processes? The 'third cohort' people of the Burns Creek/Nevis country know animals and animal behaviour, weather, trees – and they can also speak idiomatically about soil types and properties, and about hydrological matters. Not surprisingly, many are openly contemptuous of forest science as they have experience of it.

On current 'falling' regimes there is similar scorn. 'We used to spend hours working out how to fall a tree so as to do the least damage to the forest', said one retired 'busher' – another local colloquialism – and then, with bitterness: 'I don't know why we bothered'. The second of the sawmillers quoted above has a one-person mill that lies idle for most of the year. He insists that most of what goes to the chipper is 'millable', and that it is only greed, laziness and incompetence that condemns it to the chipper:

I could make a year's living out of just one truck load going down the road there to St. Leonards – where they'll just say, 'no good, off to the chipper with it'. That's because they don't know how to mill. I do. I can get timber from logs that no-one else can. I could make a fortune out of the blackwood that's going to the chip. If they'd drop one log off here on the way I'd make more from that one log than they'd make from the rest of the load.

There is also much sadness for the animals and birds destroyed in clearfell operations and the subsequent laying of 1080 poison⁵. One of the study's informants, a sawmiller who walks through the bush in all weathers in bare feet, who lives in a humpy at the centre of which is an old caravan, and whose home within fire-adapted bush is surrounded by old car bodies,

spoke of the wild things of the bush in a way, and entirely unselfconsciously, that was almost primal. A recurring observation is that animals cannot live in the plantations, and that, along with the much publicised decline in the Tasmanian devil population – and the disease that is ravaging devil numbers was universally attributed to the chemical regimes deployed in forestry operations – the quoll and tiger cat are also in significant decline, as are many species of birds. ‘And there’s a lot more roadkill now’, one man observed to me. ‘The animals are so docile with all that poison in them. Even the fish just lie there in the creek, with no energy’.

A tangible sadness hovers around the lives of these people. They are not optimists, and a sense of utter powerlessness overwhelms most of them. Stories are told of marriage and health breakdown – even suicides – as social consequences of life within the devastation of the clearfells. I struggled to comprehend the stress that these people are under⁶. Remember that they are not politically confident or savvy people, and low or non-existent literacy levels prevail. Most are poor. Many simply cannot conceive of ever living anywhere else – or of doing anything else. Then I heard a story that broke through that comprehension barrier. A sawmiller waved to the mountain at his back, and he said:

That bush up there is all I know. I can take you up there and show you how the wind shifts when you go a yard or so that way, and how the temperature pools differently over there. And this summer they’re going to flatten that bush. They’ll plant it out in *nitens*, but it wouldn’t matter if they let it grow back – it still wouldn’t be the bush I know. And that’s *all* I know. They might as well cut my brain out.

I have no idea how prominent this cohort is within the wider mesh of forest communities in Tasmania – let alone the rest of Australia. It is an invisible community, its members lacking the political skills and confidence to organise, and for the most part they keep their views to themselves. It is not likely that they will be as prominent in most timber communities as they are in the one in which I have spent time, but neither are they often likely to be negligible. Their existence greatly complicates present assumptions about the political complexion of the timber communities.

Their mode of being within place also suggests some issues to do with the politics of place

that are of wider general import. Some of these are considered in the remainder of this article.

The moral economy of the Bush

The apparent anti-modernist romanticism of the timber folk of Burns Creek/Ben Nevis is wrongly depicted as such. It is, rather, a claim to the reciprocal relations of a moral economy that flourishes within a community in which economic and social activities are closely integrated – in this case the processes, social and economic, associated with falling, snigging, transporting and milling sawlogs. It is constituent of beliefs concerning right and wrong ways of interacting with the natural world, with extracting human sustenance from those interactions, and with structuring relations between individuals, and between individuals and an ambient community.

The concept of ‘moral economy’ was formulated by the historian, E.P. Thompson, in the context of a now-classic study of the English crowd in the eighteenth century food riots. ‘The men and women in the crowd’, wrote Thompson (1971, 78), ‘were defending traditional rights and customs; and, in general, they were supported by the wider consensus of the community’. Their actions ‘operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, banking etc’, and this was ‘grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor’ (Thompson, 1971, 79; see also Thompson, 1991, 260–262). But Thompson believed that this moral economy had not survived the coming of advanced capitalism; that the reduction of human intercourse to relations of monetary exchange value inevitably extinguished the moral economy:

the breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old moral economy ... one symptom of its final demise is that we have been able to accept for so long an abbreviated and ‘economistic’ picture of the food riot ... a picture which is itself a product of a political economy which diminished human reciprocities to the wages-nexus (Thompson, 1971, 136).

In fact, most contemporary commentators on ‘the moral economy’ proceed from an assumption that it is *not* historically bounded – and

certainly not insofar as its normative relevance is concerned – even though the concept connotes a socio-economic condition that most characterises pre-modern economic relationships (see Booth, 1994; M'Gonigle, 2000; Sayer, 2000). A still wider circle of 'post-development' political economists produce prescriptive accounts that resemble Thompson's in their key particulars (see, for example, Gibson-Graham, 2003; 2004; Gibson-Graham and Ruccio, 2001). Thompson's insistence that vernacular constructions of the moral economy cannot survive the integrated rationality of advanced industrial capitalism also seems confounded by the evidence. The 'third cohort' of Tasmania's forest community adheres to a home-grown system of belief in mutual socio-economic obligation and responsibility that accords, in all major respects, with Thompson's formulation and, though it is now under considerable stress, it is of no small significance that it has survived into the twenty-first century.

This is not an observation of any great novelty. Similar regional or local value systems of socio-economic mutuality should be discernible within many defence-of-place political struggles. If this is indeed the case, it can be concluded that vernacular and organic formulations of the moral economy have survived to become, now, a discourse of resistance to the amoral and place-obliterating interactions of the global market; indeed, though market transactions were not then global in scope, this was even so at the time of the English food riots at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The place discourse not only accords with the moral economy tradition – it may be that the former has become the latter's contemporary standard-bearer, for much of the literature of place contains observations that correspond with the idea of the moral economy. Beatley and Manning, for example (1997, 137; see also Theobald, 1997), write of the need for communities to 'assum[e] control over their own development patterns'. The first lesson I take from the sawmillers and retired bushers of Burns Creek/Ben Nevis, then, is that E.P. Thompson's concept of the moral economy merits resurrection and prominent lodgement within an emergent body of policy-relevant place theory.

The moral ecology of the Bush

Furthermore, Thompson's formulation can be broadened out. The 'third cohort' of Tasmania's forest communities articulates a clear moral sense of what constitutes socially appropriate economic activity, but to this is added a profound sense of

the extent to which this nexus nests within a third relationship, that between the community, its socio-economic norms and practices, and the natural world upon which they draw – and this, too, is an ethically constructed relationship.

I am not the first person to draw the parallels between Thompson's work and vernacular constructions of ecological ethics. In his study of local conservation regimes in and around the Adirondacks, Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, Karl Jacoby makes the following observation (2001, 3):

I seek to recreate the moral universe that shaped local transgressions of conservation laws, enabling us to glimpse the pattern of beliefs, practices, and traditions that governed how ordinary rural folk interacted with the environment – a pattern that, paraphrasing E.P. Thompson, I have come to term the participants' *moral ecology*. This moral ecology evolved in counterpart to the elite discourse about conservation, a folk tradition that often critiqued official conservation policies, occasionally borrowed from them, and at other times even influenced them. Most of all, though, this moral ecology offers a vision of nature 'from the bottom up' ...⁷

Jacoby's study leads to the conclusion that (2001, 193) 'country people fashioned a variety of arrangements designed to safeguard the ecological base of their way of life', and that, therefore, 'the belief that prior to the advent of conservation, rural folk, in keeping with the supposed rugged individualism of the American frontier did as they pleased with the natural world', is quite erroneous. As we have seen, the 'third cohort' of Tasmania's timber communities also carries with it a generations-forged sensibility of what is and what is not appropriate interaction with the 'ecological basis of their way of life', a sensibility that is profoundly affronted by the practices and processes of present-day industrial logging. Such a 'moral ecology' constitutes a vernacular emergence from place-specific entanglements of ecology, economy and society – it is, then, an under-utilised conceptual tool with the potential to greatly enrich studies of place, and it is a tool that fits readily within extant conceptions of an ecologically-based sense of place. For example, Beatley and Manning (1997, 32) write that:

A sustainable community . . . nurtures a sense of place by understanding and respecting its

bioregional context – its topography and natural setting, its rivers, hill-tops, open lands, native flora and fauna, and the many other unique elements of its natural context. A sustainable community respects the history and character of those existing features that nurture a sense of attachment to, and familiarity with, place.

Identity and difference: thoughts on the political location of ‘place’

The most significant fault line that has emerged within place theory over the last two decades pits those who argue for phenomenologically-based place identity against those who stress intra-place diversity, even conflict, arguing that social difference – on class, ethnic or gender lines, for example – renders a uniform place identity illusory, and that, where a single identity is proclaimed, it can only be the ideological ploy of a powerful elite.

Doreen Massey can stand for this latter position. She argues (1997, 323) that ‘places do not have single, unique “identities”; they are full of internal conflicts’. Moreover, most writing in the ‘place identity’ tradition is, in its resistance to change, reactionary; ‘a retreat from the ... dynamic and change of “real life”, which is what we must seize if we are to change things for the better’, and, thus, it is ‘a form of romanticised escapism from the real business of the world’ (1997, 319); Massey’s notion of place as characterised by ‘a constellation of processes’ that make for a phenomenon-characterising fluidity, a ‘throwntogetherness’, is succinctly explained in her book, *For Space* (2005, 138–142). Discussing this bifurcation, Tim Cresswell (2004, 23) is adamant that phenomenologies of place identity are essentialist, and that there is no space within which this might be qualified. I do not think that he gets this right. The phenomenologist’s stress on experiential understanding is inimical to such a reading, because experience is an internalised activity, and one person’s experience in place can never be duplicated, though, where sufficient commonality exists, individual experiences can be mediated into a never-static suite of group norms. In small, cohesive communities, these socially-mediated norms can be less fluid, more sedimented. The normatively-rich sense of place of the ‘third cohort’ of the Tasmanian timber towns was established under such conditions. Under circumstances of greater social dynamism it may be that place identities will only be coherent at the level of the group –

at the level, say, of the three cohorts that I have identified as characteristic of Tasmania’s timber towns. At this point Massey’s stress on intra-place difference is well made. Cheng *et al.* observe (2003, 87) that ‘natural resource politics is as much a contest over place meanings as it is a competition among interest groups over scarce resources’. The first half of this sentence is in line with Massey’s position – the second suggests how identity-based place theory can still accord with a view of places as sites of conflicted meaning.

But Massey (in the passage cited above) makes the profoundly ideological assumption that ‘we’ have the vector of change within our keeping; even that its essential quality is progressive, constituting a movement from a given state to one likely (certain?) to be better. The place constructions of the ‘third cohort’ within the timber communities conduce to emphatic rejection of such an equation (and such optimism). Can the values of these people really be categorised as reactionary romanticism? For them, change has brought with it a *loss* of individual and collective agency; a *diminution* of human potential. The members of the ‘third cohort’ are politically disarmed – but this only serves all the more dramatically to point up the fact of disempowerment in the face of centrally-imposed economic structures, as well as the anti-progressive nature of technologically-rationalised change in forest practices and its incumbent socio-economic consequences. The conclusion must be that a politics of place identity is not inevitably exclusionary or reactionary – because change within place is itself as likely to be regressive in character as progressive⁸, and ‘sense of place’ (or place identity) politics can provide a mobilising frame for resistance to the agency-stripping, homogenising, place-oblitative tendencies within economic and cultural globalisation⁹. Harvey acknowledges this (1996, 306) in his deployment of the notion of ‘militant particularism’, wherein is posited a revitalisation of ‘the bond between the environmental and the social’ in order to ‘bend the social processes constructing space-time to a radically different purpose’.

Conclusion

The ‘third cohort’ within Tasmania’s timber communities falls below the radar. It is of unknown numerical strength, not politically organised (and probably not amenable to organisation), and its likely survival into the future is tenuous at best. Nevertheless, that it presently exists

challenges the predominant view that the bush is politically undifferentiated, a view that received considerable affirmation through highly visible events during the 2004 federal election. The existence of this 'third cohort' also raises interesting, more generally relevant, issues to do with the politics of place. Those considered in this paper have a certain random eclecticism to them – in that they are theory-practice synergies that have occurred to the author entirely unsystematically. Nevertheless, the congruence between E.P. Thompson's concept of the moral economy, and Karl Jacoby's extension of Thompson's insight to a vernacular construction of 'moral ecology', would seem to hold considerable promise for theory and application in place studies. Similarly, the character of the 'third cohort' suggests ways in which the needless opposition between those who point to the intractable, conflictual nature of intra-place difference and those who proceed phenomenologically to notions of collectively constructed place identities might be resolved.

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NOTES

1. The interviews on which this paper is based were conducted between 2006 and the present (and are, indeed, ongoing). Interviews were semi-structured and taped – often on sawmill sites – though some 'interviews' were rather more informal than others, as I spent a considerable amount of time in the company of my subjects (if they must be so called), and much information and insight was gathered in this way. At such times notes, sometimes including a verbatim record of what had just been said, were made on the spot, a procedure which the study participants quickly learned to ignore.
2. There is, of course, a substantial and rapidly growing literature on forest conflict in Australia, a literature that traces back to the pioneering contribution of Routley and Routley's monumental 1975 work, *The Fight for the Forests*. Tasmania features prominently in much of this literary corpus which, in both its wider applications and that to do with Tasmania, focuses upon conflict dynamics as they manifest in political action (often dramatic in terms of both mode and selected physical terrain) designed to effect specific policy and management outcomes. Examples (and it must be stressed that this list is very far from exhaustive) include Dargavel, 1995; 2004; 2005; Dargavel *et al.*, 2005; Doyle, 2000; Gee, 2001; Hillier, 2002; 2003; Lane, 2003; Lane and McDonald, 2002; Mercer, 1991; Plumwood, 2003; Scarff and Duus, 2005; Schirmer *et al.*, 2003 – and
3. Timber Communities Australia is said, by the National Association of Forest Industries' Tasmanian director, Terry Edwards, to have 30 000 members (Michelle Paine, 'At Loggerheads over Tax', *Mercury* [The], 3 April 2006). In the same newspaper report Greens Senator Bob Brown describes Timber Communities Australia as a 'shadowy' organisation funded by the National Association of Forest Industries. The organisation's reputation in Tasmania took quite a hit in May 2006 when it conspicuously failed to defend harvesting contractors against a decision by Gunns Ltd. to cut long-term supply contracts in response to a sudden drop in woodchip demand, thereby fuelling a widely-held public perception that, far from being a grass-roots organisation created by and for the timber folk, Timber Communities Australia is merely a front for large industry interests (Sue Neales, 'Let the Record Reflect', *Mercury* [The], 20 May 2006). I have myself interviewed an ex-staff member of Forestry Tasmania who claims that the creation, in 1999, of Timber Communities Australia from the ashes of the old Forest Protection Society was masterminded within Forestry Tasmania management, even though the historical record identifies the Forest Industries Campaign Association as the organisation's midwife (and its financial underwriter). I have been unable to verify my informant's claim.
4. One important exception to the near complete invisibility of this cohort should be acknowledged. In his invaluable compendium of stories and essays, *The People's Forest*, Gregg Borschmann includes, from the collection of 88 oral histories that constitute the larger project, brief accounts from two Tasmanians who fit firmly within this cohort, Huon Valley sawmiller Darrell Brown (Brown, 1999) and northern Tasmanian bushman-bullocky Henry Steers (Steers, 1999). In his essay in the same volume, poet Mark O'Connor writes of celebrated fellow-poet, Les Murray: 'his heart, he said, was still with the small timber getters. Yet he could see that their day had gone. He wrote to Gregg Borschmann, saying that the story of Tasmanian sawmiller Darrell Brown nearly reduced him to tears' (O'Connor, 1999, 10). Murray's persistent and spirited support for the 'endangered' bush battler, in large part 'under the pressure of industrial timber harvesting' (quoted in O'Connor, 1999, 10), constitutes one of the rare consistent acknowledgements of the cohort identified in the present paper within a Tasmanian context.
5. David Warth's documentary film, *Two Visions* (n.p.: David Warth Productions, 2005) contains footage of dead animals in upland watercourses on cleared Ben Nevis slopes.

6. Of course, distress at clearfell forestry is much more widely felt, with an unknowable but sizable proportion of all Tasmanians suffering deep and ongoing grief for the loss of the forests. Tasmania's acclaimed novelist, Richard Flanagan, has written (2005, 5): '... not only the forest has been destroyed by this industry. Its poison has seeped into every aspect of Tasmanian life: jobs are threatened, careers destroyed, people driven to leave'. Observing that, 'after firebombing', a clearfell calls to mind images 'of the battlefields of great wars', Flanagan (2005, 6) gives potent voice to that sadness and despair: 'the great forests are gone, and they will not return, and nor will the intense human response we had to such places. Everything hereafter will be ordered and imaginable, paintable and representable in a way that those wild places never were, and we will be less'. If it is so for those who live many ridgelines distant, it can be imagined how heightened must be the impact upon the sensibilities of those who live, sleep and move about in its very midst.
7. As with the notion of 'the moral economy', so, too, the idea of 'moral ecology' abuts a discourse, philosophical in this case, that resembles it in many ways, and to which in some respects it may be considered close kin. Instances abound of attempts to conjoin ecological insights to systems of moral attribution. The burgeoning field of environmental ethics, indeed, coalesces around this central project, and I have myself attempted to summarise the manifold complexities that come together under this rubric (Hay, 2002, 26–71). But 'moral ecology', as it is deployed here, identifies the terms of a quite specific relationship – as described in the text of this paper – between 'ordinary' people and terrain that is notable for its valued but contested ecological qualities, in or adjacent to which these people live.
8. Wanted urgently: an index of criteria against which capital- and government-induced changes to place can be assessed as progressive or regressive!
9. As long as pre-conditions for mobilisation are present. These go beyond communal value frameworks to engage skills and structures of activism – and as we have seen, in the case of the 'third cohort' in Tasmania's timber communities, these mobilising structures are not in place.

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