

An eloquent statement of the natural harmony thesis has been published recently by the anthropologist and activist Hugh Brody (2001), but he has chosen to focus

on Canada's far north, where the way of life has been shaped for centuries by the international fur trade. Inuit commercial hunters flourished here, in time embracing the new technologies of hunting rifles, motorized sleighs, and radio communications, but this trade has been in decline for decades, and the consumer boycott of furs has made further inroads in the rump of the industry. Since the 1950s the Canadian government has implemented a policy of sedentarization. Today there are still a few part-time commercial hunters and, as elsewhere in North America, some men still hunt for recreation, but hunting is a marginal activity. Ethnographers have emphasized the continuing importance of what Stewart calls "the imagery rather than the subsistence aspects of hunting" (Stewart 2002:93; cf. Omura 2002). However, few could quarrel with Dorais's (1997: 3) conclusion that "Inuit society, in many respects, is as modern as its Euro-American counterpart."

Some activists wish that the Inuit would take up hunting again and restore an ancient environmental balance, but such hopes are not justified by experience. The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act created 12 Native-controlled profit-making corporations, which now export resources to Japan and Korea. Recently the Inupiat of Alaska's North Slope have supported oil drilling on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (although they are opposed by the Gwich'in Indians). In Greenland, the Inuit-led Home Rule government regards hunting as anachronistic and objectionable and favours the exploitation of non-renewable resources (see Nuttall 1998).

Leaving aside the question of how the land might be used, land claims on behalf of former "nomads" typically raise very tricky issues.<sup>7</sup> Canadian courts have found that it is difficult to establish the boundaries of lands hunted by former generations or to grasp how ancestral populations understood rights to resources and rights in land. They must also consider whether rights exercised by hunters are in some way equivalent to rights that arise from clearing virgin lands for agriculture or to other common-law entitlements. Finally, they must decide whether native chiefs legally entered into treaties that alienated some or all of their lands.

Some activists argue that too much emphasis is placed on treaties which may have been poorly understood by the natives and that courts should recognize that there are different cultural modes of encoding historical settlements. Hugh Brody, a leading theorist of the Canadian

First Nations movement,<sup>8</sup> favours recourse to unwritten historical resources, and in line with other Canadian activists he suggests that if there are no appropriate oral traditions the court should take evidence from shamans, who are able to see in dreams the arrangements that their ancestors made with the first European settlers (Brody 2001:134-36).

Brody concedes that questions may be asked about the factual status of oral traditions, let alone the dreams of shamans, but he insists that there is a reliable test of the historical value of these accounts. It all depends on who tells them. "For the peoples of the Northwest Coast," he writes, "as to any hunter-gatherer society or, indeed, any oral culture, words spoken by chiefs are a natural and inevitable basis for truth" (Brody 2001:207). Now, where chiefs exist, the word of one may carry weight, but it will not necessarily be accepted as "a natural and inevitable basis for truth" by anyone other than, perhaps, the chief's most loyal and trusting subjects. It is surely unfortunate if advocates of native rights grant powers to chiefs that they would be reluctant to allow to mere kings or emperors or even to elected presidents. Anyway, while some of the native peoples of Canada did have hereditary chiefs, in other cases it is far from certain that chiefs were recognized before the office was established by colonial authorities. There are also frequent disputes about who should be chief, and land claims regularly pit native against native, chief against chief (and anthropologist against anthropologist). Precisely because myths function as charters, there are inevitably competing stories, and disputes often rage over who owns a particular story and who has the right to use it to back up claims to resources.

Other problems arise when myths are compared with historical or archaeological evidence. As a consultant to Canada's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the 1990s, Brody organized a historical workshop in which archaeologists explained that the Arctic was colonized across the Bering Straits by way of a land bridge that connected Siberia and Alaska (2001:113-14):

One of the workshop participants was a woman from a Cree community who was enrolled in a Ph.D. programme at a prestigious American university. She was not happy about the Bering Strait theory. She pointed out that her people, and most "Indian" people, do not believe that archaeologists know anything about the origins of human life in

7. There is now a substantial literature on this issue; see, for example, Wilmsen (1989b). For an excellent account of the Australian situation see Hiatt (1996:chap. 2).

8. The blurb of his book presents Brody's credentials: Oxford-educated, he has taught social anthropology at Queen's University, Belfast, and in the 1970s "he worked with the Canadian Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and then with Inuit and Indian organisations, mapping hunter-gatherer territories and researching Land Claims and indigenous rights in many parts of Canada. He was an adviser to the Mackenzie Pipeline Inquiry, a member of the World Bank's famous Morse Commission and chairman of the Snake River Independent Review, all of which took him to the encounter between large-scale development and indigenous communities. Since 1997 he has worked with the South African San Institute on Bushman history and land rights in the Southern Kalahari."

the Americas. The idea that people first came as immigrants from Asia was, she said, absurd. It went against all that her people knew. . . . There had been no immigration, but an emergence. . . . She would have nothing to do with so-called scholarship that discredited these central tenets of aboriginal oral culture.

This objection broke up the workshop. Brody recalls feeling confused. Could something be true at the University of Toronto but false in Kispixox?

Yet the Cree student had good reason to be troubled. If their ancestors were themselves immigrants, then perhaps the Cree might not after all be so very different from the *Mayflower's* passengers or even the huddled masses that streamed across the Atlantic in the 1890s. To be sure, the great population movements from Siberia across the Bering Straits began a very long time ago, but it was still relatively late in the history of the colonization of the world by fully modern humans. According to a recent authoritative review, "nothing found thus far challenges the view that significant human population movements through the area occurred only after the peak of the last glaciation, 16,000 years B.C." (Snow 1996:131; see also Dillehay 2000: esp. chap. 2). These migrations then continued for many millennia. The first wave passed quickly to the south, and the Arctic and Sub-Arctic were settled at a later stage. The ancestral Aleut-Inuit may have begun to colonize the far north only in the past 4,000 years. The ancestors of the Cree are dated from 3,000 years ago (Mason 2000), while the proto-Athapascans are dated from 2,000 years ago (Clark 2000).

Precisely whose ancestors came and when may also be problematic, and, of course, over the centuries communities migrated, merged, died out, or changed their languages and altered their allegiances. "Archaeologically well-known populations that predate the last 4,000 years may never be assigned clear linguistic identities," a modern authority concludes (Snow 1996:128). Consequently, it is difficult to sort out the various strains that intermingled to produce the native populations with whom the first Europeans made contact in Alaska and in the far north of Canada. However, it cannot be doubted that some of the First Nations were not merely immigrants but actually colonizers. Innu, for instance, entered the Quebec-Labrador peninsula only 1,800 years ago, displacing and assimilating earlier populations (Mailhot 1999:51).

Ever-changing colonial and national contexts have, of course, added layers of complexity to the histories of populations that derived from the precolonial communities, and with the best will in the world it may not be possible to return to a pre-Columbian state of nature. In Labrador (to continue with a Canadian example), an organization called the Innu Nation demands the restoration of ancestral lands. One difficulty it faces is that

the northern portion of its claim overlaps land claimed by another ethnic movement, the Labrador Inuit Association. A further complication is that this area is also home to another category of people, originally of European stock, known locally as the Settlers. Their presence raises another sort of problem, one of principle. There have been several generations of intermarriage between Settlers and Inuit; both Inuit and Settlers are often bilingual, and their ways of life are similar (see Plaice 1990, Samson 2001). If the phrase has any meaning, one might surely say that they have a common culture, though apparently not a common identity. Under certain conditions, Settlers are accepted as members by the Labrador Inuit Association, but the Innu Nation regards them as its main adversaries, and the government excludes Settlers from collective land claims and treats them as squatters because they cannot prove aboriginal bloodlines. At the same time, a person who has lived his or her whole life in, say, St John's in Newfoundland and does not speak a word of a native language may be granted aboriginal status in Labrador having demonstrated a sufficient proportion of aboriginal ancestry.

In short, for the Canadian government native claims to land are based not only on descent but on a calibrated measure of descent. One has rights only if one has a certain number of appropriate grandparents. This might fairly be called the Nuremberg principle. A drift to racism may be inevitable where so-called cultural identity becomes the basis for rights, since any cultural test (knowledge of a language, for example) will exclude some who might lay claim to an identity on grounds of descent. In the indigenous-peoples movement, descent is tacitly assumed to represent the bedrock of collective identity.