

2004

# Review of: "Anatomy of a Conflict: Identity, Knowledge, and Emotion in Old Growth Forests"

Steven E. Daniels  
*Utah State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/sswa\\_facpubs](http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/sswa_facpubs)

 Part of the [Place and Environment Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Daniels, S. 2004. Review of "Anatomy of a Conflict: Identity, Knowledge, and Emotion in Old Growth Forests" by Terre Satterfield, *Rural Sociology*, 69 (1): 164-167.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in SSWA Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact [dylan.burns@usu.edu](mailto:dylan.burns@usu.edu).



and resource management have helped create. In turn, we challenge the authors to re-examine their implicit assumption of causality between healthy communities and healthy forests, and to explain how community forestry might gain the support of major social and political forces. We ask how community forestry can achieve the civic republicanism Baker and Kusel espouse without marginalizing the values of those, such as the national environmental lobby, who view interest group pluralism as a preferable or more viable venue for improving forest policymaking. By shifting power “to the people,” does community forestry risk creating Hamilton’s tyranny of the majority? Might the community forestry movement, and particularly the national networks that fight for policy reform, ironically become the paradox of inclusion the authors argue against?

Baker and Kusel are to be commended for moving the discussion of community-based conservation to a new, and necessary, level of debate. Their book constantly provokes the reader to argue for his or her own perspective, which, in the end, will serve to strengthen community forestry.

*Anatomy of a Conflict: Identity, Knowledge, and Emotion in Old-Growth Forests*, by Terre Satterfield, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2003, 198 pp. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 0-87013-655-0.

***Reviewed by Steven Daniels***

*Utah State University*

I am very glad this book was written, and equally pleased to have read it. But having done so, I am not sure I would buy it. I will use this review to explore the seeming contradiction between my enthusiasm and ambivalence.

The book focuses on the regional conflict over the management of federally-managed forests in the Pacific Northwest Region of the United States. The controversy played out predominantly from 1988–1996, and the book reports the results of research undertaken from 1992–1996. The research is ethnographic, with the major data drawn from participant observation of events and from a series of unstructured interviews of various players in what was locally referred to as the “spotted owl wars.”

For the people living in the Pacific Northwest during this period—myself included—the spotted owl controversy dominated civic life. The regional news outlets provided a constant barrage of news items about the latest court decisions, scientific findings, and public demonstrations

(tree sitting, log truck rally, etc.). As such, it seemed likely that a flood of scholarship would explore the social impacts of the controversy. There has not been a flood of scholarship. Carroll (1995) dealt with occupational communities in the logging industry, but largely predates the most acrimonious period; Yaffe (1994) offers a policy sciences perspective on the lessons learned, and Brown (1995) examined the human face of the spotted owl conflict among often marginalized groups in southwestern Oregon. Beyond these, the list gets quite thin. For that reason alone, Satterfield makes a contribution.

But this book has far more to commend it than merely adding to a sparse body of scholarship. The book applies the anthropological perspective to the *meaning* of the spotted owl controversy in people's lives, and there may be no better discipline for teasing out the construction of meaning at the cultural level than anthropology. Much of the spotted owl controversy was tactically played out as competing interest groups used competing experts to weigh in on claims ranging from conservation biology or timber industry economics. But as the judges, ecologists, and economists variously deliberated and pontificated, very real people's lives were affected in very real ways. No book does a better job than *Anatomy of a Conflict* at pointing out that typically urban environmentalists and typically rural woods- and mill-workers constitute distinctly different cultures. Both groups define themselves in terms of their relationship to the forests, and as such the spotted owl controversy was a competition between those chosen identities. This book articulates the depth of emotion inherently part of identity-based inter-group conflict.

Part of the value of this book flows from the research design that attempts to juxtapose the views of the competing groups. It is easy enough to tell the story of one group, particularly when that group is one to which you have affiliation. But it is an entirely different challenge to simultaneously develop a rapport with members of two groups in seemingly mortal combat (at least in political terms). Just as the researcher becomes comfortable with one point of view, the other comes crashing in with an equally consistent internal logic and equally articulate adherents overflowing with pathos: "The echo of the opposition's voice, no matter which group I happened to be with, seemed always to haunt me" (p. 52). The ethnographic research tradition is unrivaled in its ability to give voice to participants; it certainly captures the nuance better than surveys and statistics. In this regard, Satterfield has provided a real service.

So what are the problems with this book? First, two of the central chapters appeared earlier as journal articles. They are written in a notably different style and the contrast jarred me. They were just not

integrated as well into the whole. But more importantly, I would have really liked the book to attempt to inform theory more than it does. It links to theory throughout—it is by no means atheoretical. I am nevertheless left wishing for more in terms of theoretical insights—the proverbial “so what” message. So what do we do with the recognition that this was a cultural conflict? So what do we do with the knowledge that people in meetings were competing over identity claims? So what do we do with the understanding that groups were using and constructing concepts of credible science in very different ways? There are some very nice insights in this book: the stigmatization of loggers; the competing attempts to claim to be more “natural/primitive” (i.e., noble) than the other side; and the social construction, sanction, and manipulation of emotion all come to mind. But I nevertheless find myself wanting more focused or integrative conclusions.

My final critique is that Satterfield often concluded recollections of interactions with interview subjects by reporting how they made *her* feel, or what the impact was on *her* views or understanding:

At one point Doug announced that “this is as good as it gets.” I assumed he was reminiscing about his days as a cutter and logger. His meaning was clarified when he followed with, “You can’t get any closer to the universe, to nature, than this.” I was a bit taken aback, and could not help recalling the anti-military bumper sticker: “Go to exciting places, meet exciting people, and kill them.” Again, I kept my thoughts to myself. (p. 49)

I appreciate that anthropologists have dropped the façade of the impartial, objective researcher because it is an anachronistic anchor that impedes other sciences. But editorializing about the views of one’s research subjects may be going a bit far. Of the various things I would hope to learn from this book, Satterfield’s growth and self-discovery is the least among them. I am far more interested in accurately understanding the views of her interview participants or in Satterfield’s observations about cross cutting themes and theory. Her begrudging respect for woods-workers, “... I quite enjoyed Doug’s spirit and appreciated his knowledge of the world” (p.49) or her unease with a Druidic moment at an environmental outing, “I was uncomfortable with my participation in what struck me as an awkwardly manufactured New Age ritual. My discomfort was not over my hope for the tree’s survival, but rather, over engaging in an act that I would not have undertaken on my own” (p.52), are both interesting but not central to my motivations for engaging her scholarship.

All in all, this book was rich with insights and is an honest and thorough attempt to convey the perspectives of two different and competing cultures in the midst of a very rancorous public policy conflict. It adds meaningfully to the scholarship on the spotted owl era. It has also provided me with a richer vocabulary to explain the dynamics of inter-group conflict over natural resources. My criticisms may stem as much from a dilettante's knowledge of ethnography than from methodological weaknesses in the research. On final reflection, I probably would buy the paperback.

### References

- Brown, B. 1995. *In Timber Country*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Carroll, M.S. 1995. *Community and the Northwestern Logger: Continuities and Changes in the Era of the Spotted Owl*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Yaffe, S.L. 1994. *The Wisdom of the Spotted Owl: Policy Lessons for the New Century*. Washington D.C.: Island Press.