

“Ma’iingan is our brother”: An Ojibwe way of speaking about wolves

Tovar Cerulli

Doctoral Candidate, University of Massachusetts Amherst

PO Box 82

Montpelier, VT 05601

tovar.cerulli@gmail.com

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Abstract

In the context of debates over the protection, management, and public hunting and trapping of wolves (*ma’iinganag*) in Minnesota and Wisconsin, this draft book chapter examines a prominent cultural discourse employed by representatives of Ojibwe communities and governments: that of the wolf as a relative whose fate the Ojibwe share. The chapter shows how contemporary communication practices—and concepts of relevant communication forms—are rooted in historically situated ways of conceiving relationships among humans, other persons, and the earth.

Introduction

If you sat down with a wildlife biologist and asked about wolves, you might expect to hear about ecology—population dynamics, predator-prey relationships, and the like—and perhaps about public attitudes and the Endangered Species Act. You probably would not expect to hear a creation story. For many people, the former are primary ways of speaking about contemporary wolf issues. For some, the latter is central.

In 2012, wolves in the western Great Lakes region were removed from the federal endangered species list. Minnesota and Wisconsin established public hunting and trapping seasons to begin that autumn. The day before Minnesota's hunt started, I sat down with White Earth Nation natural resources director Mike Swan. When I asked about wolves, he spoke of his people's decades-long quest for cultural renewal. He then told me how the first human was accompanied by Ma'iingan the Wolf. (For transcription details, see Hymes [2003] on ethno-poetics.)

212 MS: When the Creator
 213 we call him Gitchie Manitou
 214 he put man on this earth
 215 he walked
 216 and he was lonely
 217 and
 218 as he walked
 219 it was
 220 the Ma'iingan
 221 that walked with him
 222 kept him company
 223 kept him
 224 and they traveled together
 225 and what they did is they walked around
 226 and they
 227 started naming everything

228 the plants
229 the flowers
230 everything there

Soon, Swan spoke more about relationship between Ojibwe and Ma'iingan.

258 MS: Because of that legend
259 in our history
260 we consider
261 the wolf, the Ma'iingan, as our brother
262 and
263 we always believed
264 what happens to the Ma'iingan
265 is going to happen to us
266 the same way
267 what happens to us is going to happen to Ma'iingan
268 'cause we walked
269 that path together
270 and that's the reason why
271 when we look at history
272 that
273 for example
274 you know, one time, at one time, you know
275 well, ma'iingans were hunted and
276 so were we
277 you know, lost a lot of land and so did we

278 But, you know, those are just kind of parallels
279 to what
280 a person could generalize
281 of what
282 of what could happen between us
283 the Ojibwe, Anishinaabe people

284 and
 285 Ma'iingan the wolf

286 So we always believed
 287 that
 288 they are our brothers
 289 And that's part of our history
 290 that's part of our legends
 291 and that's what was told a long time ago to me

Note: The Anishinaabe include three cultural groups: Ojibwe/Chippewa, Odawa, and Potawatomi. Though "Ojibwe" and "Chippewa"—alternate anglicizations of the same word—and "Anishinaabe" are used somewhat interchangeably, the latter is most frequently employed by speakers referring to themselves and their own people.

Conceptual framework

Before turning to other tellings of this story and analyses thereof, a few words on theory and method are in order. Below, I employ cultural discourse analysis (CuDA), an approach rooted in the ethnography of communication as advanced by Dell Hymes (1972). CuDA devotes primary attention to culturally distinctive communication practices and the meaning-making active in them. CuDA assumes that people create and use localized communicative means and meanings, that these vary cross-culturally, and that these should be investigated and interpreted on and in their own terms. Two other key assumptions are that social life is formed and shaped by communicative practices, and that these practices draw on deeply historical resources.

CuDA further presumes that communication encompasses both explicit and implicit meanings. To interpret these, analysts employ a conceptual model of five discursive hubs and radiants: identity, relationship, action, feeling, and dwelling. In any communication practice, one or more of these may be verbally explicit. An explicit hub, however, is only part of a larger discursive web. To understand cultural discourses, we must also interpret implicit meanings activated. These can be conceptualized as radiants; thus, various implicit meanings (e.g., about how one acts, or should act,

as a certain kind of person) might radiate from an explicit discursive hub of identity (Carbaugh, 2007; Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013).

With this model in mind, analysts examine communicative practices for *cultural terms* (symbolic key terms, especially appearing in clusters) and then formulate *cultural propositions* (arrangements of terms that express taken-for-granted views) and *cultural premises* (statements that capture the essence of participants' beliefs).

Applying this framework to the western Great Lakes wolf situation, we can ask: How do people create and use wolf-related discourses? What meanings, beliefs, and values are presumed by, and created in, wolf-related communication? In what renderings of history is such communication rooted?

A story for the board

Several months before I met Mike Swan, the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board held a public meeting concerning wolf "harvest quotas." During the meeting, Joe Rose, Sr.—representing the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and the Voigt Intertribal Task Force Committee of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission—told a version of the creation story Swan had volunteered.

Rose began by speaking in Ojibwe (*Anishinaabemowin*). He stated his name (*Mooka'am Giizis*, Rising Sun) and identified himself as a member of the Eagle Clan (*Migizi Indoodem*, indicating a Euro-American patriline) and the Grand Medicine Society (*Midewiwin*). He then translated most of his initial utterances into English, added that he is an associate professor of Native American Studies at Northland College, and proceeded.

This is a common form of introduction for Ojibwe speakers addressing non-Ojibwe audiences, one that can be heard as demonstrating the survival and vitality of language and culture, and as expressing communal pride in the continued ability to speak this way. Importantly, *Anishinaabemowin* is indigenous to the place where Rose stood speaking. There, its use enacted and expressed a local identity that English could not, establishing Rose as someone qualified to speak about indigenous cultural matters.

Rose's self-identification as a "member of the Midewiwin, or the Grand Medicine Society" tells listeners more particularly that he knows traditional Anishinaabe ways. Conventional English translations define Midewiwin as a "religion." Traditionally, however, Midewiwin encompassed what are commonly conceptualized as religion, psychology, higher education, and health and social services.

Rose's introduction can thus be heard both as saying certain things and as setting context for other things to be said. As we shall see, telling a creation story can be heard similarly.

Rose began by telling of the four orders of Creation—the physical world, plants, animals, and humans, created in that order—and of how the Great Spirit lowered Anishinaabe (Original Man) onto Mother Earth, asking him to "visit all places / and to name all things."

88 JRb: And so Anishinaabe began his walkabout
 89 and while he was traveling he met the one that we call Ma'iingan
 90 the wolf
 91 Now since the wolf was of the third order
 92 he'd been here much longer
 93 than Anishinaabe
 94 so he became the guide
 95 and in time
 96 in time
 97 blood brother
 98 to Anishinaabe
 99 They were inseparable companions

Rose then spoke of similarities between Ma'iingan and Anishinaabe, of how the Great Spirit later set them on different paths, and of the prophecy that "in this age of the Seventh Fire / You, Ma'iingan / you may no longer have a place to retreat" and may "pass out of existence" (JRb148-153).

154 JRb: And you, Anishinaabe
 155 if your brother Ma'iingan passes out of existence
 156 you will soon follow
 157 And so what Gitchie Manitou was referring to was not just the wolf
 158 but everything that the wolf represents
 159 And if Anishinaabe passes out of existence
 160 all other humans will soon follow
 161 And so our destiny
 162 is related to the destiny
 163 of Ma'iingan
 164 the wolf

Rose then spoke of how humans are "dependent / on the first three orders of the Creation," are here "to live in harmony and balance" (JRb168-181), and are approaching a "fork in the road" (JRb191), one path leading to pollution and destruction, the other to restoration and balance. He told how, in prophecies, even "in the eleventh hour," "there is hope / because the Anishinaabe people were given a gift / we call it mashkiki / loosely interpreted / it means medicine" (JRb205-212). With that gift, he said, comes "responsibility" "to share this knowledge and wisdom" (JRb215-216) with all other humans. So it is said

225 JRb: that in this age of the Seventh Fire
 226 that a new people will arise
 227 They'll turn and look back
 228 begin to retrace their footsteps
 229 The Anishinaabe will pick up those medicine bundles
 230 that have fallen by the wayside
 231 and go to the elders
 232 for an interpretation of those teachings
 233 Those bundles, those teachings
 234 had to be taken underground for generations because of persecution
 235 but now they're beginning to see the light of day
 236 once more

Prophecies, he concluded, say that “a new paradigm / will come into being,” in which “true wealth / will be measured / in terms of clean water / and fresh air / and pristine wilderness / and all of those things that are represented / by Ma’iingan” (JRb237-250).

Rose’s creation-story telling was followed by remarks from Bad River Tribal Chairman Mike Wiggins, who said that Rose, as his elder, “set the context and foundation” for understanding “the Ojibwe worldview / as it pertains to the wolf bill and the hunting of wolves in general.” It was in this context that Wiggins then spoke of other matters, including tribal sovereignty, management authority, wildlife science, livestock depredation, and “the spirit of hunting.”

Speaking of creation and culture

In speaking about their people’s relationship with wolves, both Rose and Swan chose to tell a creation story. More generally, during public events such as natural resources board meetings, Ojibwe people often speak of wolves (and introduce themselves) with explicit reference to cultural and spiritual tradition; though biologists and other tribal representatives also speak in scientific terms, such talk is foregrounded less frequently. In contrast, Euro-Americans primarily speak of wolves in scientific terms and introduce themselves by emphasizing science-related credentials; they do not speak of culture or religion.

This contrast—between talk of creation and spirituality and talk of science—is frequently heard as indicative of a conflict between cultural-religious and scientific views. Media reports have depicted a faith-versus-science clash, emphasizing that the Ojibwe oppose wolf hunting “on the basis of religious principle and tradition,” have “a strong spiritual connection” to wolves, and “revere” them as “sacred” (Gorman, 2012; Smith, 2012).

In locally dominant (Euro-American) discourse, depictions of religion clashing with science are linked to a conception of tribal views as culturally biased and non-tribal views as culturally neutral. State wildlife agencies, for instance, often construct “issues of conservation” as separate from “cultural views” (Smith, 2012). Yet this proposition—that “conservation” is, and can be, separate from “cultural views”—is itself a culturally rooted claim. Following its logic, non-tribal listeners are apt to hear creation stories and other explicit talk of cultural and spiritual tradition as irrelevant or inadmissible in debates over wildlife management. (This echoes a broader societal insistence on

separation of church and state, a separation that would be incoherent in traditional Ojibwe and Midewiwin contexts.)

The crucial point here is that non-tribal ways of speaking about wildlife conservation and management are just as cultural—just as rooted in distinctive processes of meaning-making and distinctive expectations about what kinds of speech are relevant—as Ojibwe discourse is. Endres (2012) and others have argued that lack of viable means for publicly identifying and discussing competing cultural values is a flaw in common models for public participation: one that obstructs full participation by marginalized groups including American Indians. Though in-depth comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter, CuDA provides a valuable theoretical and methodological framework for understanding such variations in communicative means and meanings, as they are created and used cross-culturally.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted more particularly to interpretation of the creation story introduced above. As we shall see, highlighting its religious qualities obscures the story's vital historical contexts, including European colonization and Anishinaabe struggles for cultural survival.

Two other tellings

A previous telling by Joe Rose, audio-recorded and posted online by the Timber Wolf Alliance, is instructive.

1 JRa: Original Man
 2 and the wolf
 3 were brothers

4 And the Great Spirit
 5 told them
 6 He said, Original Man
 7 Anishinaabe
 8 the wolf
 9 Ma'iingan
 10 He said, In many ways

11 you are alike
12 He said, When you take a mate
13 you mate for life
14 He says, Your social structure
15 will be the clan system
16 He said, Both of you will be
17 good hunters

18 And he said, Later on
19 there will be others who will come
20 who will misunderstand
21 both of you

Rose then told how Original Man and Ma'iingan were instructed to walk separate paths, and how the Great Spirit predicted their shared fates.

37 JRa: He said
38 whatever happens to one of you
39 will also
40 happen to the other
41 And he told
42 Ma'iingan the wolf
43 If you ever
44 disappear
45 from the earth
46 that means an end
47 to the
48 to the wilderness and all the wild places
49 And he said, If this happens, he said, Anishinaabe
50 Original Man
51 he said
52 You'll soon
53 pass from existence also

54 you'll die from great
 55 loneliness
 56 of spirit
 57 And he said, If that happens
 58 he said, It won't be too long
 59 before all the other human beings
 60 will pass out of existence
 61 also

Also helpful is an excerpt from a written version of this story (Benton-Banai, 1979) in which Original Man expresses his loneliness.

He spoke to his Grandfather the Creator and asked, "Why am I alone? Why are there no other ones like me?"

Gitchie Manito answered, "I will send someone to walk, talk and play with you."

He sent Ma-en'-gun (the wolf).

With Ma-en'-gun by his side, Original Man again spoke to Gitchie Manito, "I have finished what you asked me to do. I have visited and named all the plants, animals, and places of this Earth. What would you now have me to do?"

Gitchie Manito answered Original Man and Ma-en'-gun, "Each of you are to be a brother to the other. Now, both of you are to walk the Earth and visit all its places."

So, Original Man and Ma-en'-gun walked the Earth and came to know all of her. In this journey they became very close to each other. They became like brothers. In their closeness they realized that they were brothers to all of the Creation.

When they completed the task that Gitchie Manito asked them to do, they talked with the Creator once again.

The Creator said, "From this day on, you are to separate your paths. You must go your different ways.

"What happens to one of you will also happen to the other. Each of you will be feared, respected and misunderstood by the people that will later join you on this Earth."

And so Ma-en'-gun and Original Man set off on their different journeys.

This last teaching about the wolf is important for us today. What the Grandfather said to them has come true. Both the Indian and the wolf have come to be alike and have experienced the same thing. Both of them mate for life. Both have a Clan System and a tribe. Both have had their land taken from them. Both have been hunted for their *wee-nes'-si-see'* (hair). And both have been pushed very close to destruction.

We can tell about our future as Indian people by looking at the wolf. It seems as though the wolf is beginning to come back to this land. Will this prove that Indian people will cease to be the "Vanishing Americans?" Will Indian people emerge to lead the way back to natural living and respect for our Earth Mother? (pp. 7-8)

Kinship and personhood

These creation stories speak of kinship, making relationship an explicit hub. Ma'iingan and Ojibwe/Anishinaabe are connected by terms and phrases including "(blood) brother," "inseparable companions," "company," and "close(ness)" (JRa3; JRb97-99; MS222, 261, 288; Benton-Banai, p. 8). This relationship is defined in terms of guidance and dependence—"the wolf...became the guide," "we...became dependent" (JRb91-94, 169-170)—resonating with the use, in Ojibwe and other Indian discourses, of "more-than-human" to describe what Euro-Americans call "nonhuman." Closely linked are terms concerning shared actions and interactions, through which kinship is said to have formed: "walk," "traveled," "naming," "talk," and "play" (MS221-227, 268; Benton-Banai, pp. 7-8).

Kinship between wolf and Ojibwe is also linked to senses of place in, and relationships with, the larger world: "on this earth," "land," "everything there," "wilderness and all the wild places," "all the plants, animals, and places of this Earth," "came to know all of her," and "brothers to all of the Creation" (JRa46-48; MS214, 230, 277; Benton-Banai, p. 8). These senses of place and world are tied to particular ways of dwelling: "respect for our Earth Mother," "natural living," "live in harmony and balance" (JRb181, 216; Benton-Banai, p. 8).

Integral to depictions of kinship, wolf and Ojibwe are said to be "alike" in various ways, including social structures ("mate for life," "clan system," "tribe") and means of subsistence ("good hunters") (JRa11-17; Benton-Banai, p. 8). Also integral are terms for emotion, describing how "lonely" and "alone" Anishinaabe felt before Ma'iingan joined him (MS216; Benton-Banai, p. 7) and how the

Anishinaabe will feel if wolves ever disappear: “you’ll die from great / loneliness / of spirit” (JRa54-56; cf. Kaiser, 1987).

Employing these terms and phrases, we can formulate cultural propositions that express taken-for-granted views, including these:

- “Anishinaabe” and “Ma’iingan” were “brothers” and “companions.”
- Anishinaabe and Ma’iingan became “brothers” and “companions” by “talking,” “walking,” and “traveling” together.
- In “walking,” “traveling,” and becoming “close,” Anishinaabe and Ma’iingan came to “know” “all the plants, animals, and places of this Earth” and realized they were “brothers to all of the Creation.”
- Being “brothers to all of the Creation” involves “respect for our Earth Mother,” “natural living,” and living “in harmony and balance.”
- “Ojibwe” and “Ma’iingan” are still “brothers.”
- Human beings are “dependent” on earth, plants, and animals, and rely on beings like Ma’iingan as “guides.”
- Without Ma’iingan, Anishinaabe felt (and the people would feel) deeply “lonely.”
- Anishinaabe people and wolves are “alike” in their “clan systems” and “hunting.”

These propositions offer insight into certain dimensions of a deeply felt relationship between Ojibwe and wolf: one that is said to go back to the beginning of human existence, to have developed through shared actions and experiences, and to be linked to relationships with—and valued ways of living in—the larger world.

In these tellings, humans are kin to wolves, are capable of cooperation and intimacy with wolves, are lonely without them, and are like them in various ways, including social structures and means of subsistence. All five hubs and radiants—identity (what kinds of beings humans and wolves are), relationship (how they are related), action (how they act and interact), emotion (how they feel about, and without, one another), and dwelling (how they live and should live in the world)—are interconnected here.

Peter David, a biologist who has long worked for the Ojibwe, contends that wolves have cultural and spiritual significance “so profound that many tribal members feel a certain degree of discomfort discussing it” (2009, p. 273). Lethal control of wolves, he writes, is particularly difficult for many Ojibwe to contemplate, as one does not “apply the death penalty to brother wolf” (p. 276). With some discomfort perhaps, Ojibwe governments have, over the years, generally agreed to support lethal control in cases where wolves have killed livestock and where non-lethal methods have been deemed unworkable.

At this point, we can propose several cultural premises that illuminate the foundations of propositions formulated above, making key beliefs and values more readily audible.

- Humans and other beings are kin.
- Humans depend on and learn from other beings.
- Humans and other beings interact, communicate, and experience intimacy.
- Relationships develop through interaction.
- Relationships among humans and animals are part of larger webs of relationship among all beings, places, and earth.
- Relationships with other beings, places, and earth are important and deeply felt.
- Human interactions and relationships with other beings and the earth should be characterized by respect, harmony, and balance.

As these premises suggest, cultural views of communication encompass distinctive conceptions of what kinds of beings communicate with one another, in what ways, in what relationships, as part of what kind of world. These views, in other words, are intimately linked with particular models of personhood, sociality, and dwelling.

In this discourse, wolves are spoken of as communicative persons. Hallowell (1960) argued that Ojibwe ontology involves an understanding of “persons” that includes not only humans but also other beings, including stones, thunder, the sun, birds, and mammals. Guided by values and obligations, humans live and act within webs of relationship among these persons: “The world of

personal relations in which the Ojibwa live is a world in which vital social relations transcend those which are maintained with human beings" (p. 43). Similar views of communication and personhood have been explored in literature on other American Indian discourses concerning more-than-human beings and places (e.g., Basso, 1996; Carbaugh, 1999; Deloria, 1991; Nadasdy, 2007; Nelson, 1983).

It can be challenging for some listeners to grasp systems of cultural meaning in which animals—wolves, in this case—are understood as social, spiritual, and communicative persons. It can be even more challenging when those systems of meaning also encompass the morally acceptable killing of these animals. When I asked Mike Swan if wolves had been traditionally hunted by his people, he said they never had "wolf hunts" specifically. He mentioned, though, that some wolves were caught in traplines. And he said that, traditionally, some people had wolf hides or heads which they used ceremonially to "show respect," often dancing to imitate the wolf.

Ojibwe wolf management plans, including one from Leech Lake, note that tribal members historically took wolves for "traditional and cultural purposes." Leech Lake's plan mentions that the band's Division of Resource Management has received occasional requests from tribal members for wolf hides, and has met those requests with wolves struck by vehicles or killed through federal livestock-depredation control. If the Tribal Council were to approve future trapping or hunting seasons, the plan states that wolves would be taken for "traditional use."

Underpinning such expressions about appropriate "purposes" and "uses" are cultural premises about taking life. Though exploration of these premises is beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be noted that some Euro-American hunters are opposed to wolf hunting for "sport" or "recreation" and—like many Ojibwe—speak in terms of an ethic of utilization and respect, stating that wolves (and other animals) should only be hunted when and if they will be appropriately used.

Some Ojibwe assert that anyone within their community who would kill wolves for anything less than "traditional and cultural purposes" is someone who has been assimilated, adopting different cultural views and values. As this suggests, and as tribal leaders acknowledge, there is diversity of perspective among the Ojibwe. Like many Euro-American hunters, some Ojibwe hunters believe that wolves are driving down deer populations. One tribal hunter I spoke with said he did not think wolves "need that much protection" and expressed interest in hunting them. In a survey conducted in Wisconsin when wolves were federally protected, 8 percent of Bad River tribal members agreed

with the statement, “if I were out hunting and saw a wolf I might shoot it”; twice as many non-tribal respondents agreed with the same statement (Shelley, Treves, & Naughton, 2011).

As such diversity reminds us, use of cultural discourses is not restricted to a single group. Rather, a distinctive, morally infused way of speaking may be employed by members of multiple groups.

“What happens to one of you will also happen to the other”

Let us return to the stories, where it is said that the fates of wolf and Ojibwe are bound together: “what(ever) happens to one of you will also happen to the other,” “what happens to the Ma’iingan / is going to happen to us...what happens to us is going to happen to Ma’iingan” (MS264-267; JRa38-40; Benton-Banai, p. 8). These shared fates have a dangerous aspect—“if your brother Ma’iingan passes out of existence / you will soon follow”—which extends to “all other humans” and to “everything that the wolf represents,” “wilderness and all the wild places” (JRa48; JRb155-160).

Note that Rose’s use of “wilderness” seems to invoke a kind of “wild place,” not a policy definition of land where humans may not dwell. Many people—Euro-American and Indian—simultaneously value wildness and resist wilderness policies (Freedman, 2002; Proescholdt, Rapson & Heinselman, 1995).

Here, three cultural propositions are expressed clearly, with relationship and dwelling as hubs:

- What “happens” to Ma’iingan “also happens” to the Anishinaabe, and vice versa.
- If Ma’iingan “disappears” or “passes out of existence,” the Anishinaabe will also.
- The danger may extend to “all other humans” and to “wilderness and all the wild places.”

From these, we can formulate a cultural premise:

- The fates of humans, other beings, and earth are linked.

This premise about linked fates, and these propositions about things “happening”—species and peoples “disappearing” and “passing out of existence”—take on greater gravity if we listen to particulars.

The parallel paths of Ma'iingan and Ojibwe are said to have been foretold in relation to other people. “Later on / there will be others who will come / who will misunderstand / both of you” (JRa18-21). “Each of you will be feared, respected and misunderstood by the people that will later join you on this Earth” (Benton-Banai, p. 8). Ma'iingan “lost a lot of land and so did we”; they “were hunted and so were we” (MS275-277). “Both have had their land taken from them. Both have been hunted for their wee-nes'-si-see' (hair). And both have been pushed very close to destruction” (Benton-Banai, p. 8).

Here—with dwelling and relationship still foregrounded—much is said, both explicitly and implicitly. Here, the story brings attentive listeners down to earth, out of the realm of ancient, spiritual connection to the harsh ground of recent historical specificity.

Here, the hub of dwelling draws our attention not only to “living in harmony” and protecting “wild places” but also to the “taking” and “loss” of “a lot of land.” It also draws our attention to how such words are doubly placed (Carbaugh, 1996). These words not only create and express meanings about place and homeland but are also expressed in place—not just anywhere, but here, as when Rose stood speaking in “what’s called the state of Wisconsin” (as one tribal chairman put it), or as when Swan, sitting on a reservation in what is called Minnesota, said that Ma'iingan “lost a lot of land and so did we.”

Here, the discursive strand of relationship draws our attention not only to relations between Ojibwe and Ma'iingan but also, obliquely, to relations with “others” who came later. Note that Euro-Americans remain unnamed, their identity implicit. They are not directly linked to actions of taking or destroying. In most utterances, they are not even mentioned as participants. Actions “happen” without an actor.

Similarly, the radiant of emotion is left implicit. One does not lose most of one’s homeland without feeling some mix of grief, anger, and the like.

The “destruction” resulting from interactions between Ojibwe/Ma’iingan and these “others” invites us to reflect on endangerment, extinction, and genocide: on dangers posed to species and cultures alike, and on the sources of those dangers. When it is said that both wolves and Ojibwe were “hunted,” this can be heard as depicting attempted eradication of a species and a people or—from the perspective of this discourse—two peoples. “Destruction” and “hunting” powerfully evoke all five discursive radiants: identity and relationship shared with Ma’iingan, depth of feeling active there, deeply (and very differently) felt relationship between Ojibwe/Ma’iingan and Euro-Americans, and interactions that resulted in shared dwelling places being lost and taken. We are reminded of links between loss of homeland, loss of identity, and threats to multiple kinds of survival.

This comes into sharper focus if we attend to descriptions of wolf and Ojibwe both being “hunted for their wee-nes’-si-see’ (hair)” and reflect on historical bounty payments, for which Euro-Americans would supply “scalps” as evidence of having killed wolves or Indians.

During the 2013 White Earth Wolf Conference, a woman sitting beside me spoke. She equated state-sponsored science and violence aimed at controlling wolf populations and “wiping out our brothers” with state-sponsored science and violence aimed at controlling Ojibwe populations and wiping out her people: “What they’re really talking about is what they’ve actually done to not just animals but to us / There was bounty on our heads / You can go get a redskin / go get their scalps...That was a form of / ‘Here’s my bounty’ / You know / ‘Here’s the proof / I just killed an Indian / please give me my bounty.’” Her words, like Benton-Banai’s, refer to parallel, institutional efforts to kill—and control populations of—wolves and Indians. Population goals and caps, often central to state wolf management plans, are seen as inappropriate from this Ojibwe viewpoint; “there is probably no topic for which the language of discussion between the state and the tribes has less common ground” (David, 2009, p. 274).

Indian-wolf parallels have been constructed not only in Ojibwe and other Indian discourses but in dominant cultural discourses as well. Barry Lopez cites a 1638 Massachusetts law that imposed a five-shilling penalty for shooting within town limits “on any unnecessary occasion, or at any game except an Indian or a wolf” (1978, p. 170). An 1887 article lauded the Mexican state of Chihuahua’s policy toward Apache “fiends”: “It puts a price upon an Indian’s scalp the same as upon that of a wolf” (An Apache ambush). Today, the phrase “the only good wolf is a dead wolf” appears regularly in public discourse, as does its parallel “the only good Indian is a dead Indian,” which has

been in use since the 1860s (Mieder, 1993). As one historian put it, the “drama of hunter versus predator (or hunter versus American Indian) has always represented the righteousness of the American cause,” the triumph of good over evil and “civilization over savagery” (Herman, 2001, p. 28).

Recoveries

“We can tell about our future as Indian people by looking at the wolf,” wrote Benton-Banai in 1979. “The wolf is beginning to come back to this land” (p. 8).

Rose spoke of how it was foretold that the Anishinaabe would “arise,” returning to “medicine bundles” and “teachings” that had been “taken underground for generations because of persecution” (JRb226-234). Swan told me how the Ojibwe were “looking for their culture” and how “it was forbidden...to practice our own beliefs and religion openly until 1978,” referring to passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, four years after wolves received protection under the Endangered Species Act, and seven years after the American Indian Movement’s occupation of Alcatraz Island.

Since the 1970s, wolf populations in the western Great Lakes region have grown significantly, despite persistent illegal killing. During the same decades, the Ojibwe have experienced cultural and political resurgence; this has encompassed reaffirmation of treaty rights related to hunting, fishing, and natural resources, despite occasionally violent responses from Euro-Americans (David, 2009; Hall, 1994; Nesper, 2002). Though there is not a universal American Indian view of wolves, members of other tribes—including the Nez Perce, who managed wolf reintroduction in Idaho (Salvador & Clarke, 2011)—similarly perceive wolves and their people as mirrors of one another in their historical displacement from, and recoveries toward, their rightful places: ecological, political, and spiritual.

Rose spoke, too, of a “responsibility” coming with the gift of medicine, “to share this knowledge and wisdom / of how to live in harmony and balance” (JRb215-216), echoing Benton-Banai’s question about whether Indian people would “emerge to lead the way back to natural living and respect for our Earth Mother” (p. 8).

Explicitly stated above are several cultural propositions:

- Ojibwe “teachings,” “beliefs,” and “religion” were “taken underground” for generations because of “persecution.”
- When the wolf “comes back,” the Anishinaabe will “arise,” “look for their culture,” and “pick up those medicine bundles.”
- The Anishinaabe may “emerge” to “lead” others back to “natural living,” sharing “knowledge and wisdom” concerning how to “live in harmony and balance.”

From these, we can propose cultural premises:

- Teachings and practices can be recovered (and shared).
- Recovering as a people involves recovering key teachings and practices.
- Teachings and practices are connected to more-than-human persons and guides including Ma’iingan.

Here, we can see a more hopeful aspect of the fate shared by Ojibwe and Ma’iingan: they have recovered together. As wolf populations rebounded, Ojibwe cultural practices also rebounded. Here, the material reality of the wolf is employed as a powerful cultural symbol, and dormant cultural symbols (e.g., “medicine”) are depicted as being restored to their proper public, material, ceremonial forms. Hubs of identity (Anishinaabe), relationship (between wolf and Anishinaabe), and dwelling (reinhabiting, and ceremonially reconnecting to, a shared landscape) are foregrounded, reinforcing a sense of the wolf-Ojibwe bond.

Implicitly, a complex relationship with Euro-Americans is also suggested, for they are persecutors and also potential recipients of teachings about “natural living.” Wolf recovery is thus linked not only to cultural recovery among the Ojibwe but also to the redemptive potential of “the Eighth and Final Fire—an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood” (Benton-Banai, 1979, p. 93).

Webs of meaning

Perhaps we have begun to develop some sense of what it might mean for Ojibwe speakers to say that the wolf is a “brother” and that the fate of wolf and Ojibwe are “closely tied.” What webs of meaning must be activated for such speakers when the federal government delists wolves, state governments legalize public wolf “harvests,” and (mainly Euro-American) hunters and trappers start pursuing them?

If, in the 1970s, Benton-Banai and others felt hopeful about wolves “beginning to come back to this land,” what must they feel four decades later, when there are many more wolves but states begin to “manage” their populations? What actions might federal and state governments, or Euro-American citizens, take toward the Ojibwe?

The historical hunting of, and land loss by, wolf and Indian are, Swan told me, “just kind of parallels to what a person could generalize...what could happen between us / the Ojibwe, Anishinaabe people / and / Ma’iingan the wolf.” As one tribal chairman summarized, “The wolf population / when we were depressed / was way down / on the verge of extinction / endangered species / Wolf population’s coming back / tribes are doing better / For us, that’s what it’s about.”

Regarding wolves and other wild species, many of us are accustomed to dominant discourses rooted in culturally specific views of communication, models of personhood, and renderings of history. With the aid of interpretive approaches such as CuDA, however, we can listen closely and think imaginatively. When we do, other ways of speaking—including creation-story tellings—serve as a kind of cultural hearing aid. They tell us that there are other roots from which concepts of animals can grow. There are other ways to speak of, and in, relationship with them.

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