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**MESSY  
COLLABORATIONS:  
METHODOLOGICAL  
ISSUES IN SOCIAL  
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FOR FISHERIES  
COMMUNITY BASED  
MANAGEMENT**

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# Messy Collaborations: Methodological Issues in Social Science Research for Fisheries Community Based Management<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses a significant ellipsis in the theory of fieldwork methodology, specifically, the agency of actors collaborating to build an iterative fieldwork process. It argues that what is especially absent is the role that our informants play in attracting and holding our attention through an ethnographic encounter. Further, there is little explicit theory that deals with the context of this important iterative process, which involves both the researcher and the researched, and which creates a common space for cooperation. The paper first traces the rapprochement experienced during recent research among fisher's groups in Scotia-Fundy, Canada. It recounts conversations between the researchers and fishers that track this process, and then explores the broader processes of self-representation involved. The paper next explores how these processes of representation draw on polarized political meanings and how various actors strategically use these to construct images of themselves and of other relevant actors. Finally, the paper suggests ways in which these processes can be better theorized and researched through the notion of 'field' as elaborated by Bourdieu.

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## Introduction

*. . . the task of critical analysis is not, surely, to prove the impossibility of foundational beliefs (or truths), but to find a more plausible and adequate basis for the foundational beliefs that make interpretation and political action meaningful, creative, and possible (Harvey 1996: 2).*

*A scientific practice that fails to question itself does not, properly speaking, know what it does. . . it does not know itself (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 236).*

Imagine an anthropologist planning a multi-sited research project in the Scotia-Fundy fisheries of the Canadian Maritimes to examine how local fisher's organizations are resolving social management issues, including policy and rule generation, compliance issues, collective action, and distributive concerns. The underlying research values include environmental sustainability, equity, livelihood resilience and best resource management practice, although there are no clear guidelines for how such values can be promoted. Given an assumption that the project will learn from local practice, the design awards considerable power over the research process to fisher organizations. However, the fisheries environment is internally fragmented into several gear and boat sectors, each with differing perspectives on the germane problems of the industry. The inshore sector (boats under 45 feet taking shrimp, lobster, crab and some groundfish) is the most innovative in responding to management problems (see Wiber 2002). However, the mid-shore sector (boats between 45 and 65 feet, pursuing groundfish, swordfish, and tuna) is a powerful political player in the Scotia-Fundy region. And the largest offshore boats of the international commercial fleets are seen by both in- and mid-shore fleets as a significant threat to fishing sustainability. In addition, the fish aquaculture industry is pushing into the region. Finally, an influential Supreme Court decision has just required that the government create room for aboriginal fishers in the commercial industry, and without increasing overall fishing effort or threatening conservation priorities. Now imagine the process by which this social scientist and some fishers negotiate involvement in a common research project.

With an anthropological background, the reader will have little difficulty in imagining the complexity of this process.<sup>3</sup> In this article, however, I argue that there is a curious ellipsis in our theorizing and writing about it. This ellipsis relates in particular to the agency of the actors we are

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<sup>3</sup> The complexity is all the more marked in real ethnographic encounters which increasingly involve complex constellations of collaborators. In the Scotia-Fundy research described here, four social scientists of diverse backgrounds are involved. One individual is drawn from the natural sciences, marine biology and human ecology, while another works in management science and economics. The remaining two members are both anthropologists.

drawn to as ethnographers. Once you recognize the ellipsis, you can search in vain for any place in the discipline where it is filled in, with mere commentary, with methodological reflection, or with any discussion of its impact on the ethnographic outcome. Even among those interested in ‘total reflexivity’ (Davies 1999: 7), and who acknowledge that “two sides of an encounter arrive at a delicate workable definition of their meeting”, the primary interest has been on what the researcher brings to the encounter (ibid: 8). What is missing is the role that informants, or subjects of our investigation, play in attracting and holding our attention through an ethnographic encounter. Further, there is little theorizing on the context of this important iterative process, which involves both the researcher and the researched, and which creates a common space for cooperation. Tsing (1999: 18) investigates the ‘meeting of imaginations’ that allow NGO activists and tribal people to work together, but fails to extend the potential application of her analysis to the ethnographic encounter. Although she and Li (2000) propose some theoretical tools to better understand the conceptual baggage that each side may bring to the encounter, neither theorizes specifically on the limits of agency nor on how this is related to wider context.

One reason for their oversight may be the unhappy tendency to under-theorize methodology in general within the discipline. But I think a more specific reason relates to the fact that both Li and Tsing are examining how powerful representations of ‘the other’ influence decisions about the potential for *political* collaboration. This focus on what Tsing calls “the hopeful edge of a political project” to “remake the world of the collaborators” immediately sets their findings off from general methodological relevance because of the sharp distinction made between classical and applied anthropological work. In the classical fieldwork situation one curiosity-driven researcher is immersed in an alien place for some time, while in the applied situation they may be part of a larger team working with rapid methods for a practical action outcome. While Gardner and Lewis (1996: 132-133) note that this distinction is becoming increasingly arbitrary, with most research falling on the continuum somewhere between the two extremes, textbooks continue to treat the methods employed as largely distinct. The primary difference ideally lies in ethnographer objectives; in the former case, ethnographers ‘follow their nose’ in the pursuit of pure knowledge, seeking information from all sectors of society, and having no immediate instrumental objective in mind. In the latter case, political or instrumental objectives privilege some descriptions of the problem, some voices, and some outcomes over others. But in neither case has the discipline paid particular attention to the agency of the prospective subjects of analysis, plus there has been a rather narrow attention paid to researcher agency. Participatory action research is founded on significant involvement of the subject in the research process, for

example, but the actual process and patterns of participation are not well researched (Pottier 1997), and most of the methodological attention is focused on the challenges to researcher objectivity.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I argue that the difficult process of negotiating ‘a meeting of the imaginations’ is one that applies equally to classical and applied research. Further, it is one that involves a delicate and iterative process of rapprochement that involves both researcher and researched. And finally, I argue that it is a process that is under-theorized in anthropology, despite decades of reflexive and postmodern critique of the ethnographic method.<sup>5</sup>

I begin this paper by tracing the path of rapprochement experienced during recent research among fisher’s groups in Scotia-Fundy. I first examine the ways in which conversations between the researchers and fishers alerted us to the importance of language in tracking this process. Second, I explore the broader processes of self-representation, which influence how the ethnographer and those studied take the measure of each other. Third, I show how these processes of representation draw on polarized political meanings found in “historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning” (Li 2000: 156). Actors draw on these meanings to construct images of themselves and of other relevant actors in their particular context. Finally, I suggest ways in which these processes can be better theorized and researched through the notion of ‘field’ as elaborated by Bourdieu and others. I conclude that particularly where questions of power are involved (and where are they not?), failing to interrogate this iterative process leaves our resulting theoretical constructs much impoverished.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Reason (1988: 10), for example, writes little about building collaboration, saying only that the empathetic researcher must make “an almost complete identification with the subject of our attention”, and “we cannot truly participate in the whole unless we take responsibility for it”. Slocum et. al. (1995) provide more discussion on the question of who will be involved, but again privilege the role of the researcher and merely touch on questions of power and the likely exclusion of particular social groups.

<sup>5</sup> The relevant names here are Talal Asad, James Clifford, Johannes Fabian, Michael Hertzfeld, Roger Keesing, George Marcus, Mary Louise Pratt, Paul Rabinow, Renato Rosaldo, and Paul Roth. This list is not exhaustive, but will do to begin with. See also Davies (1999: 1-25).

## **The Politics of Communication or the Communication of Politics**

Our conversations with fishers in the Scotia-Fundy region sometimes involved a blurring of linguistic boundaries very similar to those described by Cunningham (2000: 585), where “the lines between theoretical analysis and cultural production” become less distinct. Cunningham views this linguistic blurring as a result of the increasing sophistication of informants in an era of globalization (see also Brettell 1996). But I think this misses an important feature of when and why such blurring occurs. In our efforts to build collaborative projects with a number of different fisher groups, we attended many types of meetings in the initial months of the research. We began with small informal gatherings with officers of localized associations. From there, we organized a few larger meetings involving more fishers. Sometimes local NGOs or activists facilitated these. I also attended an annual general meeting of one association, and a number of us went to workshops hosted by other researchers or by fisher organizations. In all of these different venues, fishers expressed themselves in a variety of ways, using a variety of vocabularies. But at one meeting that we organized in April 2002, we noticed a considerable shift in language use. Several fishermen were comparing their association with another operating in the region under a different resource management strategy. To explain this difference, fishers spoke of their own “vision of equity within the community”, and contrasted it with another “vision of how to manage the environment, both physical and social”. They spoke critically of the “employment impact” of accepting the government “policy of privatization”, specifically in relation to “on the water jobs” and “on the wharf jobs”, as well as with respect to the “concentration of the right to fish in a few hands”. They used rights-based language to express frustration at their loss of access to the resource and linked this loss to the bureaucratic view of their sector as “outmoded” and “inefficient” in comparison with corporate enterprises. Why did fishers employ this specific type of language at this particular meeting?

By focusing on this conversation, I do not mean to erase other ways that fishers speak<sup>6</sup>, but to draw attention to the fact that these fishers, at this point in the research process, specifically used quite formal language with social science overtones to express their experiences. This was not accidental. Gudeman and Rivera (1990: 4) propose the model of conversation as “the practice of anthropology”, with a focus on both the temporal and scale dimensions of such conversations. If

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<sup>6</sup> Cruikshank (1998: 94) alerts us to the problems with assuming that oral data is uncritically “experience near”, reminding us that all sorts of social processes can “filter what is relevant, erase what is troublesome, silence or force to the edges what they do not want to hear” (citing A. J. Saris).

fieldwork is one piece of a larger conversation, involving many different kinds of voices at different points in time and in different places, then we must pay more attention to the specificities of those interactions. In our April 2002 meeting, the conversation was taking place at several levels. The fishermen were simultaneously representing another fishing group as less attractive given our stated research interests, and signaling their own, better understanding of those interests through their command of social science language. They were also reminding us that other fisher groups had long been contesting with them for a share of the resource, and would be aware of our research and assessing our potential impact on other on-going policy conversations with bureaucrats of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). In Tsing's (1999) terms, using social science language allowed the group we were speaking with to 'articulate a positioning' which would not only invite our interest in them as strategic actors, but also help us to position ourselves in response, in order to mold our own actions.

Is this strategic and opportunistic behavior? No more than that pertaining to any other conversation. As Li (2000: 150) notes, it would be unfortunate to construct a simplistic political or instrumental framing of behavior which is actually context-rich, responsive to signals, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement. In subsequent meetings with this same fisher group, this opening positioning was not maintained in a rigid way, but proved the springboard for other fluid positionings as our conversation proceeded. Fishers struggled to articulate an acceptable common identity among themselves, and to find ways of conjoining that position to our research interests.<sup>7</sup> None of the parties to this conversation were without agency, and many shifted their positions over time for reasons I discuss below.

Over many conversations we learned that inshore fishers share a common perception that federal policies of privatization are squeezing them out of the fishery in favor of the corporate sector. Further, they are divided as to how to respond. Consequently, several emotions were expressed in the context of our offer of research collaboration, including: frustration, powerlessness, despair, anger, and constructive and critical analysis of the situation. Further, it became obvious that our conversations were part of a larger discussion involving NGOs, activists, and academics, in a long-standing regional tradition of cooperative and community-based political activism. Fishers and activists in this region have collaborated for many decades in

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<sup>7</sup> Li (2000: 152) relies on the linked concepts of *articulation* and *positioning* to argue that a group's self-identification is neither fixed and organic, nor opportunistic and instrumental. Articulation is defined as "the process of rendering a collective identity, position or set of interests explicit" and of then "conjoining (articulating) that position to definite political subjects". Representations are contingent and contested, and can only be understood in a wider political context of positions taken *vis a vis* other actors.

creating self-help organizations and in scaling them up to deal with environmental, management and marketing issues. One component of this process has been the realization of a unity of interests, a creation of identity, and of identification with others in similar situations. But there is an equally-frequent countervailing tendency to fall out with each other, to enter into conflict within or between gear and regional settings and to lose interest in political projects all together. As Sally Falk Moore (1994: 362) notes:

To do fieldwork is to be witness to the active construction and challenging of relationships, meanings, categories, patterns, systems, orders, and, of course, their transformation and undoing as well.

Language use proves an important means to track not only these shifting patterns but also their response to the research process.

Another example will illustrate my point here. An important context of this research is the 1999 Marshall Decision of the Supreme Court of Canada<sup>8</sup>, which recognized an aboriginal right of commercial-level access to fish stocks for descendants of signatories to Peace and Friendship treaties signed in the eighteenth century. Bringing native fishers into the commercial fisheries is adding to the stress felt in Maritime communities (see Wiber and Kennedy 2001). Our project includes discussions with both native and non-native fishers, agents who have been represented as in deep conflict by Canadian bureaucrats and by the press. However, when we spoke to members of First Nation communities who were involved in commercial fishing, the conversational content alerted us first, to several possible alternatives in research collaboration (some less interesting to us than others), and second, to some positional stances shared by native and non-native fishers. For example, in an early meeting with one First Nation community, we heard one participant speak of the need to ensure “the commercial viability” of native fishing fleets, of the need to “generate revenue” to be “invested back into the enterprise”, and of the need to make hiring decisions based on “sound economic principles” rather than on native community unemployment patterns. This kind of language is also employed by many younger non-native fishers who emphasize that they are involved in a business and have to make sound business decisions despite a difficult regulatory environment. What it signaled to the academics, on the other hand, was a potential for collaboration based on very narrow grounds of measuring

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<sup>8</sup> The Marshall Decision has drawn a lot of press coverage to the region, very little of which takes a balanced look at the consequences of freeing space for native entrants in a severely regulated and delimited management regime. For many native and non-native fishermen in the Canadian Maritimes, the resulting intense scrutiny has more often distorted reality than accurately reflected it.

economic indicators, as well as a sharp sensitivity on the part of the speaker to the recent critical press on native boats manned by non-native skippers and crews. On the other hand, other natives in the meeting spoke using different language that used rights-based terminology to question the impact of commercial fishing on the longstanding aboriginal food fishery, and on the equity concerns within the community. This language has more in common with older non-native fishers who have also expressed concerns about long-term impacts of fishing policy on their communities. To the academics present, it also signaled willingness on the part of some natives for an expanded basis of collaboration.

While the project began as an exploration into methodological innovation and local management of resources, it very quickly also became about communication and about political alliances and questions of representation – of knowledge, of agency, of actors and their impact on the environment, and of competing management paradigms. I next explore some of the meanings that feed into this particular messy ethnographic collaboration, and that shape the self-representations possible for social scientists, for fishers and for potential management regimes. I then turn to how these methodological findings can be theorized.

### **Methodological Challenges: polarized meanings**

Any ethnographer will be involved in decisions about who will have a part in the research conversation and why. Shanafelt (2002) and Metcalf (2002) explore the question of who we work with, but focus on “observer-independent truth” as a basis for the researcher’s choice. I argue that the absolute truth or falsehood of statements made by informants is often quite irrelevant and would furthermore be a rather difficult method for choosing ethnographic research collaborators. It is far more common that we are drawn by nuanced positionings which make selective use of ‘facts’. To one extent or another, *all* ethnographic field work involves making decisions based on these positionings. And here Tsing (1999) offers a way to focus instead on the agency of the research subject, by noting that given the potential set of self-representations available, they must strike a difficult balance between attracting desirable outside interest in and assistance for their political battles, and attracting attention that will subsequently limit their future options or demand too much loss of freedom. The problem is that most political positions currently have a significant number of quite contradictory images associated with them.

Take the example of rural producers in most nation states. Environmentalists view them as repositories of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Pharmaceutical companies see them as

holding potentially valuable biodiversity information. State bureaucrats represent them as requiring technological and economic upgrading. Each of these characterizations requires a different reaction from government and from NGOs. Tsing talks about how leaders emerge in such situations and walk a fine line between positive and negative images of their constituency, while simultaneously engaged in a struggle internally over whether or not they properly represent that constituency. While they must convincingly represent the kind of community that outsiders might want to work with, they must simultaneously convince their followers that such representations are properly inclusive. Both Tsing and Li optimistically explore the opportunities for agency on the part of such people, to resist or subvert the projects of others, through the “room to maneuver” offered by particular political self-representations.

And Li (2000: 156) also draws our attention to the polarized nature of the political meanings used in such self-representation, and on the wider links to modes of thinking stirred up by these polarizations. There are always both negative and positive sides to the “historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning” available as the building blocks of self-representation. On the positive side of the ledger for rural people, for example, they are “the salt of the earth”. On the negative side they are “country bumpkins”. There is always selective use made of such imagery. Representations then are contingent and contested, and can only be understood in a wider political context. In the research exercise, this stresses, as nothing else does, the need to pay more explicit attention to the process of representation - the representations we make as researchers to our potential subjects, and the representations that lead us to work with them. In the next section, I provide a brief reminder that social science is not free from this (polarized) pattern of meanings, before turning to the additional question of how polarized images of ‘the other’ affect the self-representation efforts of our potential research subjects.

### **Representing Social Science**

We are all well aware that the image of the social scientist is not an universally positive one, as another early conversation in our fisheries research reminded us. This is clearly related to the ‘objective positioning’ of scientist as observer.<sup>9</sup> The social scientist as one who stands back observing people’s lives, making conclusions based on models and modes of thinking alien to those people, was explicitly drawn on by some fishers who wanted to more deeply explore why

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<sup>9</sup> Later in the paper I mention a situation in which many fishers used this representation of the social scientist as the objective observer in a more positive way.

they were of interest to us. Our stated objectives and methods seemed deeply suspect to them, since our statements about our objectives failed to match what they expected. One fisher returned several times to a concern that the academic team would be observing him “like a rat in a maze”. To this man, it was neither immediately apparent nor at all obvious that our research effort was going to be beneficial or one based on full honesty. The academic team, meanwhile, tried to distance themselves from an image of the social scientists as one who never accurately portrays their true interests to the subjects of their study, nor communicates what it is that they discover in the process. While we had expected that our conversations within native communities would be plagued by such questions, this depth of suspicion in the non-native community was a surprise.

Perhaps it should not have been. As Calavita (2002:13) points out, popular suspicion of intellectuals as elitists with their own class agenda is not new, although it has been especially pronounced in recent years. Even accepting this generally well-accepted form of class antagonism, however, there may be more to it. Peggy M. Brizinski’s (1993) conclusions about negative perceptions of anthropological research among natives in northern Canada would make sense to the fishers we work with. She traces these negative images to a research boom in the 1950s and 1960s, where many social scientists flew into the north for a few weeks in the summer, largely working with government social programs. The result was first, to link social science with the unhappy outcome of many government initiatives. Second, summer visitors complicated the relationship between full-time residents in the north (both native and non-natives), especially if they interrogated entrenched patterns of political order. Third, few researchers stayed long enough to gain any true insight into the local culture and so resulting publications misrepresented the north, “failed intimacy” in Brizinski’s terms. Natives expressed a sense of betrayal as information offered “in trust” was taken out of context and used by outsiders for their own purposes.<sup>10</sup> Few researchers reported their findings back to the community, offered copies of their publications, or - more importantly in Brizinski’s view - explained how unlikely it was that anthropological research would influence government policy decisions. The objective stance was a particular problem. Northern natives saw true expertise as “a culled wisdom born of experience and learning and appropriately used” (ibid: 158). Betrayal in the native view then was also explicitly related to “the political factors of outside control”, especially of “control over cultural imaging and the political use of those images” (ibid: 159).

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<sup>10</sup> Harvey (1996: 38) sees the possibility of betrayal in any situation where one moves from place-based or lived experiences to the more regional concerns of national, international or global perspectives. Moving from one level of abstraction – one based on place – to another level which reaches across spaces, sets up the conditions of betrayal in thought or action. I return to this point later in the paper.

Our experience is that this negative view of social science is common in those communities that feel the heavy hand of bureaucratic control. Many fishers are alienated from efforts to rationally manage Canadian fish stocks. They are correspondingly suspicious of any attempt to measure, record, analyze, or make information widely available about fisher strategies on or off the fishing grounds. One example was a government dispute resolution exercise that relied on mapping areas in the Bay of Fundy where gear types and boat sizes came into conflict. From the perspective of some fishers, this simply put in one easily-accessible place information about where fishing activity was located, information that they viewed of interest primarily to other competing fishers: “Why should we give them information that will provide other fishermen with a competitive edge over us?” A related fear is that such information simply facilitates ever-expanding government control, based as it is on simplified views of the various fishing sectors, which then become the basis for government action (see Scott 1998). Finally, given the recent role of resource economics in the creation of management policy, the potential impact of social science on government policy cannot be conveniently distanced by claims of powerlessness, as Brizinski suggests.<sup>11</sup>

This relates to the question of what social scientists do with their findings, and how it ultimately reflects on the people we work with. One concern we heard from some fishers was that we would make professional gains from their experiences without paying much attention to how it affected them. We could not deny that social science research has often had unexpected consequences, even in cases where it was not designed to contribute to any policy or action. Canadian fishers may not be interested in anthropological globalization theory, for example, but organizations such as the World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fishworkers (WFF)<sup>12</sup>, they are often aware of how western social science theories are imposed on fisherfolk in far away places that are the targets of the latest development theory. Increasingly, many fishermen are involved with NGOs, seminars, clinics and policy forums. Given such sources of information, they can query social science, not only on the basis of whether or not it achieves their short term practical goals, but on the basis of a wider process of political positioning. The questions which we faced from fishers, questions which asked us to clarify the how and why of our interest in their lives, was an explicit demand to negotiate a social science practice that would prove attractive to them, a point I will return to later in the paper. How anthropologists respond to such challenges will

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<sup>11</sup> See Wiber 2000 for a critical analysis of the role of economics in developing fisheries management regimes.

<sup>12</sup> The WFF was formed at an organizational meeting held in Ottawa in 1995. Following the establishment of the global organization in November 1997 in New Delhi, India, the WFF's Coordinating Committee has organized meetings in several countries. This committee includes representatives from the commercial fisheries in Iceland, Mexico, Senegal, the Philippines, Chile, India, Canada and the U.S. In all, some 23 nations are currently represented on the WFF.

increasingly affect their ability to do field research. On the other hand, informants must also consider how to represent themselves when confronted with an interest from the social scientist. As I have argued that this is the most under-theorized area in anthropological methodology, I now turn in some considerable detail to the complexities of alternative representations of fishers.

### **Agency and Self-Representation**

As Tsing and Li remind us, rural producers occupy a precarious position in the wider public imagination. Fishermen are often viewed in positive ways. They are sometimes the “salt of the earth”, “rugged individualists”, “canny businessmen”, and “confronting raw nature in their everyday life”, images that have attracted anthropological interest and that ethnographies have often promoted. Anthropologists have a keen interest in alternative livelihoods and the necessary practice-based skills that go with them, such as marine navigation, weather savvy, boat maintenance, and marine ecological knowledge. Nevertheless, there are other countervailing representations of such rural producers which are equally powerful, and that other social scientists are more likely to call on, particularly in the small boat sector, which has also been called “backward”, “traditional”, “inefficient”, and “outmoded”. In economically-depressed coastal areas, the inshore fishing sector has been viewed by economists and government bureaucrats as the employment sector “of last resort”, as if only those without more valuable skills put out to sea in small boats to fish. In the Canadian Maritimes, the diversified livelihood strategies of rural producers, which anthropologists often glorified, are alternatively characterized as dabbling in a little fishing, farming and forestry: “Jack of all trades, master of none”. In this view, lack of specialization is seen as a reason for rural poverty. It is this less positive reading of rural lifestyles that has fed the bureaucratic imagination for over half a century now, and that have been a key feature of the expansion of bureaucratic powers.

But these images have not just been imposed from outside. Fishers have had reason to draw on selected aspects of these broader representations depending on who they are presenting themselves to and with what objectives in mind. If we forget this simple fact, we negate agency and misunderstand what we observe. In a recent article on participatory research into food security, for example, Pottier (1997: 212-218) recounts a case from Tanzania where farmer input into a workshop merely confirmed bureaucratic views of locals as ignorant and stubborn, insisting on growing maize when their land was more suited to sorghum. Pottier himself blames the nation’s “politico-intellectual climate”, which thwarted critical questioning by workshop

participants. He never discusses the possibility that the local participants were actively steering the kind of bureaucratic intervention they might attract, even though he recounts their interventions in favor of fire control, reforestation, regulations for charcoal burners, and health education.

Perhaps like some fishers we spoke with, the Tanzanian farmers were trying to build an image of themselves that attracted interventions they prioritized, rather than worrying about the goals of the workshop organizers. That they did so at the expense of how they were viewed by outsiders was likely irrelevant to them, especially if they were successful (see F. von Benda-Beckmann 1989). At another point in time, they may reassess their success in the light of later developments and work towards a different self-representation. For example, in that April 2002 conversation recounted at the outset of this paper, fishers discussed the accommodations they had made with the national government, looking back with a critical eye on their own participation in a “professionalization” of the industry which ultimately reduced livelihood flexibility. One fisher expressed it in the following way: “Core status was a limited-entry solution and fishermen wanted limited entry in the 1970s.” They had opted to push many part-time fishers out to improve the livelihood of those remaining behind, adopting a modernization stance to do so. The resulting trend for economists and bureaucrats to continue to use modernization theory against their sector was unexpected. Now, with ecological sustainability and livelihood resilience entering the policy vocabulary, some fishers know very well that alternative self-representations may be useful. In order to better understand this iterative process of self-representation, and the potential impact on ethnographic research, deeper levels of analysis are required, with a particular focus on the historically constituted repertoires of meaning which provide much of the raw material for self-representation.

### **Historically Sedimented Repertoires of Meaning**

Consider the images of fishers generated by the current contests for control of the seas. Within the Exclusive Economic Zones (or EEZs) of many nation states, competing claimants for the ocean’s resources are continually emerging, and selective use of terminology is deployed by all sides in the contest, either to represent themselves favorably or the other side less so. In the past, these struggles between agents primarily involved different sectors of the traditional fisheries, those who pursue wild stocks of fish with various sizes of boats, levels of sophisticated technology, and gear. In the Scotia-Fundy region, however, many in the so-called “capture” or

“traditional” fishery are now confronting additional demands from the rapidly growing aquaculture or “fish farming” sector.<sup>13</sup> This sector presses for sites on the water exclusively licensed for fish cages, and for the noisy pumps and bright lights that are part of the aquaculture presence on the water. But the convenient and profitable near-shore sites are heavily utilized by inshore and herring weir fishers, both of whom protest the impact of aquaculture on their operations. Some of these contested sites are characterized as fish “nursery” areas, with fears that fish farming will harm “natural” fish stocks. Other sites are located along prime coastal real estate, bringing aquaculture into conflict with property values affected by its industrial character.

These conflicts present proponents of aquaculture with a problem. Since they are attempting to make claims on resources that already have well-established interests, they must represent themselves as more deserving. To do so, they are able to rely on deep historical precedents, reflected in British common law and relying what Laura Nader (2002) has called ‘the politics of lack’. Any ‘lack’ on the part of one claimant, of settled agriculture, of technological sophistication, of political organization, of capital investment, justifies allocation of a resource to a ‘superior’ claimant who lacks none of these. Patricia Seed (2001: 4-7) traces this logic back to the “distillations of everyday practice” and notions of “the obvious and proper” that have long historical roots in British society. They were given eloquent voice by Locke in his “labor theory of ownership”, which also prioritized capital investment as a superior type of labor input creating a superior claim to property rights (ibid: 14-16). These ideas in turn were linked, during the long and contested period of the enclosures in England, to arguments about resources “going to waste” in the hands of improvident holders who were not making them properly “fruitful” (ibid: 31-33). “Improvement”, in the later context of a rapidly expanding mercantile society, was then linked not only to profit-making, but to the wider public benefit that supposedly accrued from entrepreneurial endeavors.<sup>14</sup> Although these notions were contested, both in Britain and in her colonies, Seed and Nader argue that particularly in the colonial context, the politics of lack became set in stone, as the primary justification for claims to resources in a setting where

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<sup>13</sup> In the following section of the paper, I want to particularly alert the reader to the conflicting terminology deployed by fishers and those in aquaculture.

<sup>14</sup> Carrier and Miller (1999: 30-31) note that it was Bernard Mandeville, in *The Fable of the Bees*, published in 1714, who first explored the fundamental paradox between private vice and public virtue. Mandeville argued that the private virtues of modesty and restraint were inimical to the economy, and that it was the pursuit of luxury and excess (private vices) that circulated wealth and general prosperity (public good), an argument that Adam Smith ultimately carried forward with great success. Carrier and Miller (ibid: 31-32) argue that this paradox was foundational for the emerging discipline of economics, and served to consolidate the position that: “ethical judgments must be concerned with consequences: if private vice can lead to public benefit, then even actions that induce present misery can be good if they lead to future happiness.”

aboriginals have continually protested expropriation. It is deeply ingrained in modern American property law, and as Nader has shown, through the Americanization of international law, it has become dominant there as well. A relevant example here is the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention governing the EEZs within the 200 mile territorial limits of coastal nations. If a nation lacks the technological or scientific resources to exploit these zones at the level of the “maximum sustainable yield”, then they are obliged to allow other nations to fish within their territorial waters (see Tsamenyi and Blay 1989).

The politics of lack have come into play in the ideological battle over “secure tenure in the sea”, where proponents explicitly correlate aquaculture with land-based farming and to long-standing arguments of the superiority of private property rights and the supposed tight link between these and economic growth. Aquaculture in the Canadian Maritimes grew very rapidly, seemingly ensuring unlimited economic growth for a region dominated by resource extraction and experiencing long-term economic stagnation. Aquaculture proponents, including the influential Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, have argued that continued recognition of and respect for any claim by the “traditional” fisheries, especially given their record of “reckless squandering” of the ocean’s resources, is tantamount to turning the region’s back on economic growth and prosperity.<sup>15</sup> Conflict with the developing energy sector creates similar kinds of polarized positioning. For some of the fisher groups involved in our research project then, the Bay of Fundy has been a contested site (aquaculture), while for others the Scotian Shelf area of Nova Scotia has been the scene of similar struggles between fishermen and oil exploration.

The resulting rhetoric is reminiscent of Seed’s discussion of the colonial appropriation of native rights in lands. For example, aquaculture representatives have argued that “traditional” fishers represent a form of “hunting and gathering” livelihood. Seed (2001: 45-56) explores the rhetoric of British settlers with respect to native hunting practices, one that linked complex historical social and legal patterns. First, it drew on the distinct separation between the elite right to hunt on land and rights of the subordinate class which made the land productive. Second, it drew on the distain generated among those subordinate classes as a result of clashes between the leisured pursuit of entertainment and commoner agricultural production. Male hunting thus came to play

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<sup>15</sup> These proponents find no shortage of support in economic and legal models which endorse securing the rights of some by denying the rights of others. Heller (2000: 202-202), for example, has proposed the “anticommons” as a significant threat “whenever governments define new property rights and fail to terminate old ones.” The anticommons, according to Heller and others, is a situation where multiple parties with rights in a single resource are able to exclude each other and “no one has an *effective* right to use” (ibid: 190 my italics). Heller’s analysis of the anticommons in post-Soviet states is as oversimplified as was the Hardin analysis of the commons, and so I predict it will have as significant a policy impact.

several roles in settler characterizations of the North American natives. It first and foremost implied that no superior ownership right existed in the land on which native males hunted. At the same time, it fixed native males as a kind of low class poacher since hunting was class stratified in England and North American natives were clearly not elite members of society. Finally, it allowed for a characterization of the hunting lifestyle as somehow parasitic and proof of a moral and economic “laziness”, particularly when viewed from the standpoint of Quaker values (ibid: 55).

It is these complex historical images that come to life when proponents of the aquaculture industry press for “secure tenure” in the sea<sup>16</sup> and disregard pre-existing “capture” fishers as “hunters and gatherers”. The fishing industry is thereby characterized as somehow lacking labor inputs, particularly those all important capital inputs, which so clearly adhere to large aquaculture installations (and to deep-sea oil drilling). That nothing could be further from the truth in the modern industrialized fishing enterprise is hardly germane to the political representation. In recent years, however, the fishers have been fighting back in a way that draws on more positive images of hunting and gathering. New kinds of canned fish products are appearing on Canadian supermarket shelves. Salmon that is explicitly labeled “wild”, for example, allows fishers to benefit from a positive perspective of hunting and gathering as more “natural”, and the resulting food products as less tainted by “industrial foods” contamination.

In assessing the impact of these political struggles on our research efforts, however, we are constantly reminded that the combatants are of unequal size and political clout.<sup>17</sup> Although the inshore (and midshore) sectors of the Canadian fishing industry are increasingly organized into lobby groups, they have neither the financial resources nor the political presence that characterize the competing international offshore fishing sector. They are even more handicapped when it comes to the multinational oil and aquaculture sectors. Nevertheless, the situation is not hopeless.

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<sup>16</sup> The Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS), in partnership with the Canadian Aquaculture Institute (CAI), recently released its latest report on Canada’s aquaculture industry. The press release for *Canadian Aquaculture: Drowning in Regulation* (at <http://www.aims.ca/Publications/Aquaculture/aquaculture.pdf>) argues that “the current federal-provincial regulatory environment for aquaculture is dysfunctional and that fundamental institutional change is therefore required if this potentially vibrant and growing industry is to achieve its full potential in Canada”. The institutional change they promote is “secure tenure in the sea”.

<sup>17</sup> Aquaculture in Scotia-Fundy began as small family-based enterprises but was soon concentrated into the hands of a few international firms. Many of these are vertically integrated, with fish feed processing operations in Chile and sea cage construction in Norway. Their well-funded lobbyists speak at policy conferences, unfavorably comparing the business climate in Canada with that in Chile, and in Norway, where they find “a more supportive bureaucratic environment”. But a glut in the farmed salmon market, taken together with numerous scandals over chemical contamination has set the industry back sharply. Other concerns include escapements of genetically-altered salmon into wild salmon habitat and disease transfer from cage salmon to wild fish stocks. Environmentalists have been sharp critics, including the influential David Suzuki Foundation in Canada.

As Li (2000: 154) reminds us, many factors go into the success or failure of particular positioning efforts. One force at work involves bureaucratic jockeying in the national political arena of budget allocations and project justification, jockeying which has played an important role in the debate over aquaculture in Canada. In the peculiar division of power in Canadian confederation, both the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the respective provincial departments can claim administrative jurisdiction over coastal sites where aquaculture operations are located. Federal powers explicitly extend over marine environments, but provincial powers extend over “submerged lands”. The provinces are often supportive of aquaculture, seeing economic growth and prosperity springing from secure tenure in such submerged lands. The federal government, on the other hand, can be quite protective of those industries over which it has bureaucratic control, including the fisheries and ocean-going transport. It is perhaps not surprising then that federal representatives have not always been particularly convinced by the kinds of arguments described above, and have argued, for example, that marine protected areas must be given a higher priority than aquaculture sites. As I will discuss in more detail below with respect to community-based management, there is currently a highly politicized debate about appropriate management regimes for the marine environment, including ‘integrated coastal management’ whereby federal and provincial bureaucrats are trying to negotiate shared powers. Fishers are affected by these debates as I will discuss below.

But before turning to the specific case of community based management, I would first like to point out that our meetings with the partners involved in this project have sometimes drawn on a more positive fisher perception of social science, which is directly related to the political jockeying described in the preceding paragraph. Fishers have sometimes requested our political collaboration as university academics to throw the weight of ‘scientific objectivity’ behind the inshore fishers in the rights allocation debate. They particularly want our support when they push the federal government to further protect their sector. In this hoped-for collaboration, academics are characterized as valuable particularly because of the ‘objective observer stance’ which was so problematic in other contexts. After all, objectivity is something that government bureaucrats have also accused fishermen of lacking. Against this version of ‘the politics of lack’, social science objectivity is seen as providing outsider, scientific evidence for inshore fisher arguments, not only against the more powerful competing claimants from outside the fishing industry, but also within the fishing industry itself.

## **Unequal Power in Representation: community based management**

Another difficult process of rapprochement that marked our early fieldwork was finding some common ground in discussing alternatives to a state fisheries policy that is increasingly based on privatizing the right to fish. All fishers that we spoke with were aware of competing management paradigms that demanded greater input for fishing communities into policy development. But many of them were also aware that in this context, the notion of community has a similar polarized structure. Communities can be romanticized as the locus for strong symbolic markers of collective identity that allow for and promote collective interests, especially against rampant individualism. Or communities can be denigrated as hotbeds of internal strife or as overly organic and repressive to individual rights.<sup>18</sup> For many fishers, the more accurate picture of communities includes both common interests and real differences among the members. The question is, how to balance these in any management regime.

In the first paragraph of this paper, I pointed out the internal divisions within the fishing industry. Larger boats have a wider fishing range and generally use a different kind of gear than do smaller boats. Their operation can create anger in the small boat sector when they are seen to “infringe” on the more limited territories that small boats utilize. The boats in the mid-range and off-shore sector also have a larger proportion of the available fish quota, which again drives a wedge between them and the small boat sector. Fishers know that creating a unified image of their communities despite these frictions would be extremely difficult, although some coastal communities and fisher associations seem better able to find a balance than others. The manager of one fisher organization, for example, reminded us that his group incorporates a number of different boat sizes, which in their context is working well. Meanwhile another organization with a similar mix of boat size and gear types seems perpetually on the verge of splitting into two conflicting in- and midshore organizations. Fishers in yet another organization specifically referred to the way that kinship cut across these boundaries, (“my brothers-in-law needs to make a living too”) without fully resolving them. In fact, in most cases, dividing into smaller “communities of interest” has proved a political solution, allowing the various boat and gear sectors to promote their respective management preferences and to organize their own responses to perceived threats. Fishing “communities” in Scotia-Fundy, then are more often a community of interest than they are place-based communities.

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<sup>18</sup> See the debate between Amit and Rapport (2002) in *The Trouble with Community*.

However, communities of interest prove a difficult foundation for a community role in fisheries management. This is in part because place-based communities do remain significant referents. Fishing grounds, catch history, and the connection between catch history and port, as well as kinship, language and ethnicity play an important role in self-representation within coastal towns and villages. As Deborah Elliston has argued, building a collective image that is persuasive must “draw into itself and articulate the practices of everyday life that lend these symbolics whatever persuasiveness they come to hold” (2000: 197). But drawing on shared sentiments of attachment is difficult when the places that attract such sentiments are part of a “powerful discourse of place difference” (ibid.). For many involved in the fishing industry of Scotia-Fundy, attachments are to specific ports, specific fishing grounds, and to the history of fishing endeavor characterizing those ports/grounds. This can make it difficult to connect to a pan-fisher movement, even one that is restricted to one gear or sector. Many of the twisted strands of potential self-representation then seem to work against each other (the importance of place, the importance of gear or boat size, the importance of traditional fishing grounds) and this is best captured in the discourse of “history” that is prevalent in any conversation with Scotia-Fundy fishers.

The term “history” has a very specific meaning in the context of Canadian management regimes, but it also links into more emotional and general meanings which locate people to places. “History” is a term by which fishers refer to the catch history that establishes them as *bona fide*, that justifies continued access to fish resources, and that determines their share in the total allowable catch proportionate to their historic levels of involvement. Since the federal government began the process of “rational adjustments” on the Canadian fishing grounds by reducing the “too many fishermen chasing too few fish”, catch level records have become crucial. Catch records demonstrated when a fishing enterprise was full-time – a designation that offered some protection from unilateral loss of fishing privilege. Catch levels over a qualifying period could be and often were used in the initial allocation of individual transferable quota (ITQ), the individualized property rights in fish stocks that economic models pushed as a management option.<sup>19</sup> But transferable quota rights are mobile in a way that history was not. Many of the fishers spoke bitterly of “losing their history” when quota from their community was bought and transferred to another location, or to another sector. There is a rhetoric of invasion that fishers use

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<sup>19</sup> This method of qualifying for quota was adopted in most cases where quota management regimes were introduced, including the Canadian and European Community dairy industries, the world’s fisheries, and in manure quota in the Netherlands. This was usually followed by a period of rapid adjustment of holdings while quotas and their attendant rights in fish, milk, manure or other “goods” were traded between quota-holders. This almost always resulted in rapidly escalating prices for quota (see Wiber 1995, Wiber and Kearney 1996), and in the consolidation of access rights in fewer hands.

when skippers and boats from far-flung places establish rights to fish on local grounds. Claims based on geographic adjacency to fishing grounds remain an influential place-based aspect of fisher self-representation.

But another feature of history is the way that it is contested and contingent.<sup>20</sup> In this discussion of contested history, I rely on the definition provided by Silverman and Gulliver (1996: 150) for the ‘anthropology of history’ such that the focus is deliberately on the “ways and cultural rationales by which a particular people envision, create and recreate their own past and relate it to their perceived present”. As Silverman and Gulliver note, this approach often discerns several different histories in a specific locale, based on gender, age, class or other categories. The different sectors of the fishing industry in each coastal communities definitely envisage their mingled past in different ways, and these different interpretations can take on singular importance in policy decisions. Catch records, for example, were kept for some species but not for others, and can be incomplete in other regards. As a result, they can be and often are disputed by the parties who are affected by them. Disputes particularly arise on the topic of which years to select as the qualifying period – since different years could favor the inshore, the midshore or the offshore sectors given the impact of weather, prices, gear differences and fishing patterns. The inshore sector in particular feels that the manipulation of history has reduced their access to the groundfish resource (cod, halibut, haddock, and pollock) to a fraction of former levels, and it is true that the other sectors currently hold the majority of the groundfish quota, a result of a combination of initial government allocations and subsequent concentration of fishing rights. However, it is also true that the same fishing sector across different communities may find themselves in disagreement, particularly over boundaries of traditional fishing grounds.

Privileging local values, then, can be difficult, and any one fisher group has to be very careful how they promote interests. Here again, fishers may want to represent themselves as having old fashioned community characteristics that make them valuable as managers of a resource, but without (mis)representing themselves as ignoring the commercial demands and opportunities of their industry. This difficulty was reflected in fisher conversations with us. They know that for some social scientists, recognizing local values can be seen as making room for fisher practice-based resource management, while for others it can be seen as asking the state to subsidize one inefficient sector at the cost of real economic viability. Fishers challenged us to identify how

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<sup>20</sup> The renewed interest in ‘the growing nexus between history and anthropology’ has been addressed in a number of recent publications, including several contributors to Borofsky’s 1994 *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*, Silverman and Gulliver (1996), Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) and Donham (2001).

fragmented coastal communities could have an adaptive edge in resource management. Many asked who in the community was willing or able to devote the time to resource management. What kind of community leadership style could allow them to avoid internal conflicts that made consensus almost impossible? Some fishers characterized social scientists as naive if they expected these real problems to be easily resolved. On the other hand, other fishers continually revisited the argument that fisher communities shared a common understanding of the marine environment and of fishing as a business that the policy bureaucrats were simply missing. As I mentioned above, past representations of fishers are being actively recast (old meanings into new constellations) fed by the sustainability debate and by pressures for political decentralization, and cost cutting in the age of state debt reduction.

In response, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans has made some policy statements that apparently signal a willingness to devolve some responsibilities. Fisher responses to these overtures are somewhat segregated by age. Younger fishermen tend to be more skeptical of their ability to take on additional management responsibilities in a cut-throat commercial environment, arguing that community based management would be too time consuming and that they should ‘just be left alone to get on with their business’. Older fishermen, on the other hand, are skeptical that the government will devolve sufficient power to fisher’s organizations to make local management truly viable. Their view is that community based management will ultimately mean increased local responsibility to make policy work, with no real local power to make policy. As the manager of one fisher’s association expressed it: “We are here doing a lot of management for them already. Community-based management makes life easier for the DFO. [They should] use our organizations to be multi-species friendly.”

The DFO, meanwhile, is ambiguous on the question of what type of local empowerment they are willing to support. In a recent policy discussion document<sup>21</sup>, for example, the department proposes to develop policy in four interrelated areas, including: conservation, economic and social viability, access and allocations, and governance. The discussion document proposes a fundamental change for the DFO, “from one of micro-manager, heavily involved in day-to-day operations, to one of policy maker and strategic direction setter”. In this context, shared stewardship is defined as participatory decision-making processes and structures, particularly relying on license holders and other resource users through their professional organizations (thus

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<sup>21</sup> This document (Atlantic Fisheries Policy Review) was distributed throughout Atlantic Canada before regional consultations on policy reform were held with fisher’s groups. The text of the document was accessed at [http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/afpr-rppa/linksto\\_discodoc\\_e.htm](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/afpr-rppa/linksto_discodoc_e.htm) in November 2002.

relying on an interest-based definition of community). It also notes that any new legislative and regulatory framework could expand the management responsibilities of resource users with responsibilities such as making and enforcing rules to achieve conservation, an objective dispute-resolution mechanism, and orderly management objectives at the fleet or local level. However, this is spoken of as expanded co-management system rather than as community based management, probably because making policy, especially the crucial allocation and access remains the prerogative of the department.<sup>22</sup>

Tsing argues that in the normal course of events, those involved in positioning themselves within a single field of interaction have plenty of room to misunderstand what others in the field mean by the same term. In her view, this is not a problem so long as some room for useful political maneuvering is created by all sides. However, different points of view on the definition of community based management, or of co-management for that matter, can limited the creative potential of local fisher groups to solve the problems they experience in their industry on a daily basis, particularly given the power differentials between them and federal bureaucrats. The government bureaucrats, having such a fractured and argumentative constituency, often point to fisher disagreement as the reason for government intervention and for the lack of fisher input into policy development. Which fisher group should they pay attention to, when diverse groups want diametrically opposed outcomes?

But as F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann (1998) have pointed out in a different context, the state is in the local in that local bureaucrats are often part of the communities to which they administer. Rather than see the state and the local as polarized opposites, and studying “the processes in which these spheres come together as encounters between representatives of these disparate entities”, they encourage an approach which looks to connectivity. Bureaucrats also form attachments, opinions, and connections, positions on issues which are independent of state or bureaucratic dictates. Regional DFO officers may be more or less willing to collaborate in creating room for some changes in the political and economic future of the fisheries, and since there is significant regional autonomy within the structure of the DFO, local level bureaucrats can be quite helpful or obstructive in their interventions. Here again, a polarized positioning on

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<sup>22</sup> The same document defines these two terms in the following way: *access* is the opportunity to harvest or use the fisheries resource, generally permitted by licenses or leases issued by DFO; *allocation* is the amount or share of the fisheries resource or allowable catch that is distributed or assigned by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to those permitted to harvest the resource. Access is increasingly being controlled by the individual transferable quota, an administrative instrument which controls a set volume of fish and is bought and sold on the open market. Allocation has been a complex process of negotiation and some administrative fiat, including selected consideration of the historical reliance of a fishing sector on a particular stock as determined through landings records from a qualifying period. It is allocation and access policies that have generated the most fisheries conflict in recent years.

bureaucratic behavior is possible. Some fishers we talked with protested that the bureaucrats needed to take regional differences into account. On the other hand, and sometimes at the same meeting, they also argue that it is not fair when one fisher group is “allowed to get away with something” that another group is not.

Thus community based management takes on different meanings within fisher groups, within coastal communities, and in relationship to bureaucratic power. It is not perhaps surprising then that the academic debate over community has been polarized in recent years, as well. On the positive side, focusing on community is said to be a means of better understanding the policy implications of the “different folk geographies” by which local people correlate man and society with the physical environment<sup>23</sup>. For others, if properly identified, community can be the locus for generating more just laws (see Kagan, Krygier and Winston 2002), or for strengthening civil society (Randeria 2002). On the negative side are various arguments about community as an overly-romanticized notion finding fertile ground in development theory and policy (see Agrawal and Gibson 1999) which uncritically rely on the role of community in “mediating between the individual and the larger political and economic systems” (Amit and Rapport 2002: 3). Finding common ground for our discussions of ‘community’, as with ‘social science’, and with ‘fishers’, is affected by such meanings as well as by the political maneuvering going on between bureaucrats and different fishing sectors. And these contested meanings influence how all sides view the potential for community based management, or for collaboration in a social science project interested in it. But how can we uncover the methodological importance of these processes for ethnography? How can we usefully theorize the ethnographic impact of the iterative process I have recounted here, and of the agency of actors involved within it?

### **Methodological Implications: Bourdieu’s field of struggle**

The messy collaborations discussed above bring to mind Bourdieu’s model of the logic of fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 94-115). Various actors in the fishing industry of Scotia-Fundy exist in a common field, that is, they are: “linked by objective relations” and the structure of these material and symbolic relations affect each of them. For Bourdieu (1987: 816), such a field has a specific logic determined by two factors. The first factor is the specific power relations that give the field structure and that order the competitive struggles that it contains. The second factor is

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of space and place in both folk and state legal constructions see F. von Benda-Beckmann (1999).

the internal logic of functioning which constrains the range of possible actions and outcomes. The agents I have discussed in this paper are engaged in a “field of struggles”, in a configuration of objective relations between positions defined by their present and potential position in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital), the possession of which commands access to the benefits that are at stake in the field (paraphrasing from Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97). To understand the field, we must flesh out the ways in which agency is affected by differing degrees of power or species of capital, and by how: “players can play to increase or conserve their capital” or can “transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game” by working to change the relative value of species of capital. This can be done either through strategies aimed at discrediting the capital of others or through valorizing the species they possess (ibid.: 99).

Capital, then, as Bourdieu (1992: 101) has argued:

confers power over the field, over the materialized or embodied instruments of production or reproduction whose distribution constitutes the very structure of the field, and over the regularities and the rules which define the ordinary functioning of the field, and thereby over the profits engendered by it.

One species of capital is how various agents in the field are represented, by themselves and by others, in ways which legitimate or delegitimate actions they may want to take. Other species of capital include catch history and its relation to quota. Outside the field of fishing, quota has “no existence and function” (ibid: 101). Through quota, however, various agents in the Scotia-Fundy fishing industry gain access to fish stock, and given the volume of quota they control, they may also gain power within the fishing industry. Together with boats and gear, licenses and crew, and on-land marketing relations, quota now constitutes the “very structure” of the fishing field, controlling as it does distribution of benefits as well as input into issues of access and allocation. Through their dominant position as major quota holders, some sectors are better able to influence the rules of the game that constitute the fishing industry. Through political representation and articulation, meanwhile, various actors struggle to affect the shifting justification for quota allocation. Self-representations become important tokens by which different agents influence both the power structure and the internal logic of functioning within the fisheries field.

Perhaps this sounds like a “recital of what everyone already knows”, (Terdiman 1987: 810): people work in social contexts; they position themselves *vis a vis* others as best they can to protect their own interest; people will therefore tell ethnographers what they want them to believe. But as Terdiman (ibid.) points out, the social scientist should focus especially on common

assumptions and understandings, which Bourdieu labels *doxa*, for this common sense rhetoric masks “misperceptions and inadequacies any in-depth researcher seeks to uncover”.

What methodological advantage do we gain from thinking of our informants as embedded in such a field? First, in the process of doing anthropological fieldwork, we can begin to theorize about the importance of agency, of the methodological impact of both informant agency in shaping an image that we can relate to, and of our own agency in the iterative relationship we build over time with informants. Further, we can begin to uncover the meanings and contexts that informants draw on to shape their response to us, in casual conversations, in interviews, meetings and focus groups, as well as how they read our attempts to find common ground. And we can see how these meanings have relevance to a context-rich position within the field of struggle in which they are engaged. The way that we jointly build a meeting of the imaginations will have a significant impact on the fieldwork as it will shape the way that we as ethnographers pose our questions and the sources that we tap for our answers.

Second, thinking about articulation and positioning allows us to explore the polarized meanings that are available in structuring the interaction between agents, and to also reemphasize the conditional nature of any particular self-representation. The field is relational and it has its own logic. Further, there are asymmetries between the various specific agents who confront one another within the field and these can also shift in unexpected ways. From this perspective, the Bourdieu concept of field also encourages us to focus on *our* impact on the struggles going on within the field. We too are inside, however tangentially, through the act of researching other people who are more embedded in it. If we fail to appreciate this fact, it is all the more likely that we will misrepresent social actors as some kind of ‘static cultural representations’ rather than as creative political actors, or even worse, misrepresent our selective findings as “scientific fact”. It is also more likely that we will either over- or under-estimate our power to influence their position within the field. Finally, we will likely not pay sufficient attention to the transformations which take place when we describe one field of struggle within another field. Harvey (1996: 39) has identified this as an issue of scale, of moving from one level of abstraction to another level of abstraction. But it could be thought of as crossing the boundaries of social fields. The particularistic experiences that are place-based or field specific are not easily transferable to larger and broader geographical or political scales. Some have argued that when ethnographers describe the struggles going on within such a field, lifting them out of their sociological context and presenting them in other fields, the main risk is an easy appropriation of ethnography as mere

‘case studies’ or ‘slices of the human experience’ that can be presented abstractly through other discourses (Marcus 2002: 194).

Let me return to an example used earlier in the paper. Many anthropological studies of Canadian fishing communities have been used by economists and bureaucrats in their rhetorical construction of the ‘culture of poverty’. The argument runs as follows: over several centuries of poverty, coastal communities have generated a culture which has allowed them to survive at a minimal level through social mechanisms of redistribution. But these mechanisms also repress entrepreneurial endeavors and replicate the very poverty from which they suffer. Government policy needs to help them break out of this cycle, by encouraging capital investment and by refusing to reproduce this poverty anew every generation using public funds (unemployment insurance and the dole). Thus, as Marcus (*ibid.*) argues, “the ethnographic paradigm in its classic formulation engages only weakly and on the terms of other more powerful theoretical and formal genres of discourse”. In this case, economics and politics use ethnographic descriptions of coastal communities to build a genre of discourse which has had a significant impact on those same communities.

The process of doing ethnography then, needs reflexivity as to the levels and kinds of abstraction we will and can use as practical tools in our trade, in conveying the relations within one field of struggle. It also needs reflexivity with respect to our engagement in a sociological field, through the *act* of our professional participation. As Bourdieu has suggested, this ‘second level of reflexivity’ is related in turn to the struggles to influence our own field of action, the field of professional anthropology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 235-236).

Everything becomes different, and much more difficult if, instead of taking the notion of “profession” at face value, I take seriously the work of *aggregation* and symbolic imposition that was necessary to produce it, and if I treat it as a field, that is, as a structured space of social forces and struggles (*ibid.*: 243).

One struggle that has been going on within anthropology for many years is the symbolic value of advocacy, of applied work, of what Marcus (2002: 196) has called “circumstantial activism” versus what Roth (1989: 555) has called “the conventional pose of detached observer” (see also Hastrup and Elsass 1990). But this debate masks, I think, the fact that we all, whether detached observer or circumstantial activist, must make decisions to engage in a field of action: why else have we always called it “fieldwork”?

We have never simply been involved in a process of “translation”, nor are the disciplinary problems of methodology merely that translated meanings take on a life not recognizable to those

who are purported to have given rise to them. The basic problem is that anthropologists enter into the field of struggles of other actors, and then proceed to ignore much of what goes on there. In many cases they have been able to do so only because their informants were less powerful and/or unaware of the potential of harm to their own self-representation efforts. Bourdieu argues that every field has something like an admission fee, or perhaps gatekeepers, that define eligibility for participation (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 107). How do ethnographers satisfy such gatekeepers that their interventions will be useful, or at least benign? How do anthropologists decide to enter a field and how to proceed once within? Because once they do enter, I would argue, “the perception that they have of the field depend[s] on the point of view they take *on* the field as a view taken from a point *in* the field” (ibid: 101, italics in the original). ‘Studying up’ – the plea made by Laura Nader many years ago, was always difficult because actors in the relevant field refused us entry, therefore our perspective was always from afar, from outside the field, the root cause of the “fantasy” of a conspiracy that “haunts critical social thought” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 102). Only through the most delicate of negotiations could we access the fields of these more powerful actors, and as more and more of the human social fields we are interested in contain actors with the power or sophistication to refuse us, our messy process of building collaborations must demand more attention at the methodological level. But this is not because those messy processes have been absent in the profession until now. They have always occurred and we have simply, as a profession, chosen to pay very little attention to them, *because we could*.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper I have examined how the agency of both social scientist and of informant directs a process of positioning and articulation that affects choices about field work collaborations. Using an example from the Canadian Maritimes fisheries field, I have shown some of the pitfalls and processes that make such collaboration efforts “messy”, both within the field of sociological action in the Bourdieu sense, and in the fieldwork situation itself. I agree with Tsing that concepts of representation and articulation are important to consider in understanding messy collaborations, but I add to that consideration the argument that the field as an object of anthropological investigation does not offer much support for the objective observer status, at least as regards how choices are made in the field and in building the collaborations made within fieldwork. If we ignore these processes, we ignore much that impact on our data collection, analysis and ultimately theoretical results. We need to pay more explicit attention to this basic process in our

methodological approach, especially in times of growing interaction between the spheres of our interest, whether we call this globalism, and consider it new, or whether we call it politicization, and consider it a well-known problem. At the very least, it might allow us to better contribute to what Calavita (2002: 16) has called: “advancing a renewed appreciation for reasoned argument and facilitating the ability to make distinctions” in the public service.

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