Fishy Comparisons or Valid Comparisons?
Reflections on a Comparative Approach to the Current Global Fisheries Malaise, With Reference to Indian and Canadian Cases

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Abstract The global crisis in fisheries is a powerful simplification necessary to stimulate resistance to the conditions that foster destructive fishing practices. It is imperative, however, that the crisis be represented in a way that allows for a diversity of experiences of crisis if it is to serve as an effective organizing force. In this paper I propose a comparative methodology drawn from anthropological and feminist sources that may provide the dynamism and flexibility necessary to underpin strategic simplifications such as the global crisis in fisheries. I illustrate that methodology in reference to the evolution of my own research and show how it can clarify the circumstances that led to the rupture in the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers at Loctudy in 2000.

Introduction

In November 1997, someway into my doctoral fieldwork[1] on the fishery of Gujarat, I took a break from my data collection to attend the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) in New Delhi. On an intellectual level, the trip was inspirational, as I soaked up speeches and participated in workshops with fishers, activists, and academics from maritime areas the globe over. I had a real sense that I was participating in history in the making; that the WFF meeting was a concrete step towards building a global movement for socially and ecologically sustainable fisheries. The meeting was equally exciting at a personal level. In attendance not only were internationally known fisheries activists but also representatives of the National Fishworkers Forum from Gujarat, the state where I was then doing my research, and the Canadian Maritimes,[2] where I had conducted research for my Master's degree in the early 1990s. Among the fisher-activists were Premjibhai Khokhari, who was later to become a key facilitator of my research in Gujarat, and Hérménégilde Robichaud, one of the key informants from my research on the fishing village of Val Comeau in Acadian New-Brunswick. One of my fondest memories of those few days in Delhi was skipping an afternoon session of the meetings so as to tear around the city in a rickshaw with Hérménégilde in search of gifts that he could take back to Val Comeau. I was put into the position of being the 'local' guide and interpreter to Hérménégilde, an abrupt and ironic reversal of roles given my more accustomed position as outsider and neophyte in both Acadie and India.

I begin this paper with the WFF Delhi meetings because they juxtapose so strikingly the central themes of this paper. My key theoretical-methodological concern here is to argue that effective representations rest on the dynamic interplay of simplification and comparison. I illustrate that approach through a reading of my

personal research trajectory. My substantive concern in the paper is to reflect on how the global crisis in fisheries itself might be best represented according to the criteria that I define. I trace the importance of the notion of a global crisis in fisheries in my research and then shift my focus to the WFF. I argue that one reason for the fracture of the WFF at the 2000 meetings in Loctudy, France was a representational failure, particularly around the idea of the global crisis in fisheries. Delhi is an appropriate summary device for this paper because it brings together these themes. At the 1997 meetings, I was connected to my present and past research through the vehicle of an organisation devoted explicitly to a similar purpose as mine: alleviating the global crisis in fisheries for peoples engaged in small scale fishing the world over.

Anthropology, Feminist Theory and Terms of Comparison

Simplification and comparison are basic attributes of human cognition because they allow us to navigate the enormous complexity by which we are surrounded. Simplifications reduce the sensory stimuli that constantly barrage us to manageable levels. One of the key insights of sociology and anthropology is that simplifications are not reformulated anew by each individual but, rather, individuals learn specific patterns of apprehension through enculturation and socialisation. The notion of collectively held simplifications has its popular label in the term stereotype and its more formal academic expression in reification. Reification refers to the process by which ideas acquire such collective weight as truths that they appear as immutable objects, not as negotiable, temporally specific social constructions. Stereotypes have a more pejorative connotation: they refer to the same objectification of ideas as reification but evoke the sense that stereotyping is a narrow and possibly dangerous process.

Comparison is fundamental to human perception in two ways. First, it is one technique by which reality is organised. Comparison allows us to categorise some things as like and others as unlike. In this sense it is a kind of simplification. Second, and most germane to the argument of this paper, comparison underpins the agency that limits the power of socially constituted simplifications and leads to their reconfiguration. Reference to alternatives is central to the ability of humans to re-complicate their realities and to reconstitute their modes of apperception.[3] The flux between simplification and challenges to simplification through comparison is at the heart of this paper.

An illustration of the tension between simplification and comparison relevant to this paper is the issue of representation in anthropology. In recent years there has been much debate within the discipline over the validity of ethnographic representation. The portrayal of other cultures had been resolved for a time in the middle decades of the 20th Century with the institutionalisation of the ethnographic narrative based on the personal and authoritative experience of the ethnographer (Clifford 1988:30-37). The simplified representation of a culture by a Mead or a Radcliffe-Brown was held as an accurate depiction of its reality. Interpretive and post-modern trends in anthropology from the 1970s challenged the representational claims of the mid-20th Century ethnographic form (Clifford 1988). Critics pointed to the ambiguities and contradictions in the ethnographic record that anthropolo-

gists sought to suppress in their unified constructions. The late 20th Century anthropological recomplication of itself has changed the terrain of simplification and comparison. Such supra-individual simplifications as society and culture have been redefined as fragmented, shifting, overlapping, and contested.[4] The comparison of discreet cultures has been complicated but new avenues for learning from multiple comparative perspectives have been opened. While the authority of the individual ethnographer has been undermined, new and more inclusive methods of representation have been defined.

Responses to the changed parameters of representation in anthropology have been creative and diverse (for example, Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988; Fischer 1999; Marcus 1999). It is not my intention here to synthesise the many reconsiderations of ethnography of the past 20 years that have tried to incorporate greater contingency and movement into representation. Rather, I have chosen to base my discussion of an alternative comparative method underlying representation on Marilyn Strathern's Partial Connections (1991), a work that draws from anthropology and feminist theory.

Strathern's purpose, to reflect on how anthropologists might make representational claims about their subjects of study, relates closely to the general problem of simplification and comparison in the face of complexity. Strathern argues, in reference to anthropological representational practice, that complexity cannot be fixed but must rather be approximated by following a dynamic methodology based on scales and partial connections. She employs scales as a way of depicting positions; they stand for the innumerable places from which one can perceive an issue of concern. Scales are innumerable. They can consist of intellectual constructs such as theoretical or disciplinary stances, which she calls domains, or they can change through the magnification or telescoping of physical spaces, as in the focusing on particular elements of a case or through the expansion of the number of cases under consideration. These two broad categorisations of scales are themselves not distinct as one could imagine the magnification within a domain or telescoping out so as to include more domains (Strathern 1991:xiv-xv).

Close examination from each scale reveals huge complexity. Comparison involves juxtaposing different scales, which is problematic as each scale shift for comparison entails a multiplication of the already intense levels of complexity (Strathern 1991:xiv). Comparisons therefore necessitate a reduction of focus even as they bring to light aspects of issues of concern and of scales themselves that were previously obscured (Strathern 1991:xiv, 108). Strathern describes the methodological process of comparison as one of partial connections. We are only ever able to partially grasp the connections between things being compared and those connections themselves are only ever partial. We should, nonetheless, make claims even on the imperfect understanding of our partiality with the caveat that our claim is an imperfect simplification subject to revision through exposure to new scales. In this sense partial connections, as a basis for comparison, are dialectical as they demand an unending movement of approximate representations.

The constant adjustments evoked by partial connections as a comparative methodology is also reflected in Gayatri Spivak's notion of strategic essentialisations. Spivak argues that essentialisms are necessary simplifying mediators of the com-

plexities of life and that active political engagement demands choosing to be guided by particular simplifications.[5] Like Strathern, however, Spivak insists that we have to be vigilant in relation to such constructions even while using them as they have '…the unavoidable usefulness of something that is very dangerous' (Spivak 1989: 129). Thus, for her, a strategic essentialist position is one that engages with the concepts of the world, but recognizes their provisionality and their political and power potentialities. In her words:

> It seems to me that the awareness of strategy - the strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like woman or worker or the name of any nation that you would like - it seems to me that this critique has to be persistent all along the way, even when it seems that to remind oneself of it is counterproductive (Spivak 1989:125).

That counterproductivity might manifest itself as a sense of hindrance, an obstacle to getting things done or as an overly obsessive reflexivity. Nonetheless, the constant taking stock, which can seem an annoying kind of second-guessing, is the reaching out to other positions as a perennial adjustment and resistance to reification.The dynamism that is most strongly apparent in Spivak's strategic essentialism but which also underpins Strathern's partial connections contributes to a reconceptualisation of validity as a measure of methodological effectiveness. Standard sociological measurement validity is the degree to which imagined constructs are connected to concrete indicators of that construct (Neuman 1997:141). Such a definition depends on the assumption that unitary shared understandings of construct and external reality exist. The positionality underlying strategic essentialism and partial connections opposes the idea of such perfect congruence in understanding (cf. Strathern 1991:xiv, note 2). Validity from a positional perspective rejects the idea of a reality as a knowable object-like essence and when strategically employing constructs recognises how they are partially composed. Constructs are a negotiated field in which differences are recognised.

I am now able to answer the promise of my title and make a few claims about validity and comparison. Fishy comparisons, from a positional perspective, are those that base themselves on unreflexive essentialisations. That is, they assume a direct comparability of transparent cases without considering questions of scale, complexity, and incommensurability. Valid comparisons integrate the latter considerations, seeing alternatives as positions rather than essences. The movement between positions does not imply a perfect comprehension of either position, but the partial connection produced by the juxtaposition nonetheless shifts self-awareness and alters guiding strategic essentialisations.

Positioning the Global Crisis of Fisheries

As one of the most important connections between my research and the mandate of the WFF is the shared strategic simplification that the world is facing a fisheries crisis, it makes sense to begin my substantive discussion with a few words on how to

conceptualise that crisis. A first observation on the idea of a global crisis of fisheries is that it presents the scale problem of how to reconcile a putative global crisis with multiple different local experiences of that crisis. For example, if there is a diversity of experiences of fishing and overfishing just among the neighbouring fishing communities in Nova Scotia (for example Apostle and Barrett 1992), how can it make sense to bring the entire world of fishers and fishing communities under the same umbrella? One answer is that despite the vast differences that separate fishing communities world wide, there are certain global historical changes that have occurred that affect them all. These can be housed roughly under the rubric of globalisation and include such factors as the establishment of a market for fish that is truly global in reach, where certain major corporations dominate the fish trade, the spread of similar ideas, techniques, and technologies of production to most fisheries of the world, and the predominance of interventionist states following high modernist ideologies of development (Scott 1998:88-90).[6] Globalisation, though a concept much more fully explored and theorised than the notion of a global fisheries crisis, is open nonetheless to a similar critique: an unreflexively employed globalisation glosses over the vast diversity of different engagements with the forces of which it is composed. Seeing global fisheries unity through globalisation is thus only a partial answer.

A more satisfying answer to the question of how to talk of the shared connections between fishers at a global scale is to address it from the perspective of a positional approach. First we have to acknowledge that the global fisheries crisis is a notion that is constructed for political purposes. My interests, and those of the WFF, are in mobilising fishers and their supporters in an alliance (World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers 1998). A central element of that position, as important and contentious for the practice of the WFF as it is for my research, is support for artisanal, small-scale but labour intensive fishing practice against industrial, capital-intensive corporate fishing (McGoodwin 1990; Kurien 1996). I recognize the gross simplification of that binary statement, but hold it up as a starting point for further specification. The global fisheries crisis is thus a strategic essentialism as is the alliance that mobilises to challenge its causes; it does not correspond to any external unitary reality, but is composed of multiple partially connecting experiences of resource degradation and social upheaval. It is fruitful to consider globalisation, with its interwoven global and local scales, from a similar analytical standpoint. Recognition of the constructed nature of the global fisheries crisis (or globalisation) and of the partial connections that make it possible does not weaken its political effectiveness as a mobilising concept. On the contrary, it gives the movement against global resource degradation, corporate overfishing, state simplifications of complex fishery systems, and the destruction of fisher livelihoods resilience, adaptability, and power.

Global Differences and Global Connections

I started this paper with an anecdotal account of my participation in the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers in New Delhi in 1997. That experience provides a convenient and meaningful frame for my examination of the utility of a positional methodology for practice in personal and institutional contexts. The

first part of my discussion re-interprets moments from my trajectory as a researcher through the lens of a positional approach, demonstrating the momentum given to my research trajectory by the encounter with new scales. The second part considers the institutional breakdown that occurred in the WFF at Loctudy. I conclude by arguing for the advantages of bringing together individual researchers and social movements and note that political commitment and methodological rigour must complement each other as a basis for the articulation of research and practice.

Fishing in Canada, Fishing in India

The most dramatic juxtaposition that I experienced at the 1997 WFF meetings was seeing Hérénégilde and Premjibhai in the same room. While they symbolised the main axis of comparison in my research history, other people representing less direct but still important and revealing comparisons were also present. On the Canadian side, Gastien Godin, who had previously been the director of the Association des pêcheurs professionnels Acadiens, and Parzival Copes, an important Canadian fisheries economist, were also in attendance. On the Indian side were well-known scholars and activists including John Kurien, Nalini Nayak, Sebastian Mathew, and the charismatic leader Thomas Kocherry. Together these participants offered a rich array of positions from which to re-examine my own research in Canada and India and to examine the connections between the two. Beyond that group was another ring of participants with whose work I was not familiar, but who presented yet further possibilities of contrasting experience. It would be beside the point here to try to chart the influence on me of each of the names I mention above. What I will do instead is to re-trace moments in my research trajectory from a positional perspective, focusing particularly on the tension between comparison and simplification. I have chosen to present those moments in broadly chronological sequence.

Val Comeau and Atlantic Canada

An arbitrary beginning would be going lobster fishing with Hérménégilde in August of 1993, towards the end of my first field work, and listening to him recount the tribulations of trying to convince the strong-willed fishers of Val Comeau that participation in their Maritime Fisherman's Union local was worth their while. I talked to many other residents of Val Comeau and neighbouring communities that summer about a whole range of issues. Being new to fieldwork and not being quite sure exactly what I was doing, I was willing to ask questions and listen to more or less anyone who had interesting things to say or to anyone who was recommended to me as someone who would have interesting things to say. Over the course of the summer, I found myself increasingly focusing on a few key informants from Val Comeau, including Hérménégilde, on the topic of the historical development of the material conditions of life in Val Comeau. Hérménégilde, for example, while piloting his boat, setting the scallop drag, or frying up scallop livers for lunch, warned me about the complexities of union mobilising in one's own very small community while teaching me a few of the basic principles of how to fish for lobster and scallops. He also made it clear that there was considerable difference between the inshore fish-

ers of Val Comeau and the mid-shore fishers of Shippagan and Caraquet. Inshore fishers harboured mixed feelings towards the larger scale fishers, resenting their perceived high impact on the fish and their greater wealth. Other inhabitants of Val Comeau, particularly the amateur historian and conteur Livain Sonier, filled out Hérménégilde's account by sharing with me their recollections of the changes that had occurred in Val Comeau since the 1920s.

I spent the fall and winter of 1993-94 trying to create a coherent narrative out of the complex mass of information that was my field notes and the secondary sources that I had picked up along the way. This was the first large simplification of my life as a researcher. There was nothing more than vaguely strategic about it. If I had any epistemological model at that point, it was simply one of synthesis. I was attracted to Marxist theory as a binding agent for its critical and progressive promise. In the end, I produced an expansive and improperly digested mix of modes of production and ethnographic historical reconstruction. Even if the overall form was not pretty, the effort gave me a several useful points of reference that positioned me for my later research in India. These consisted of a few guiding insights into various scales within the Atlantic Canadian fishery.

Four scales from my Acadian research linger particularly strongly in my mind as points of reference: history; the household; the state; and fishing. It is hard to grasp the idea of history as a scale or as a position, given that it is constant change. Given our only partial knowledge of the past, and the positionality of memory, moments from history can only be approximate simplifications. Despite the ambiguity that underlies historical interpretation, however, the positions that are created in historical reconstruction are critical counter-points to the present. While I tried to capture the shifting nature of historical change in my writing on Val Comeau, I still reduced the complexity of that change to a comparison of before and after, with an imagined point of transition occurring in the middle 1950s with the introduction of unemployment insurance for fishers. That particular state intervention was a critical moment in the transition of material life in Val Comeau and I return to it shortly.

The household has been a fundamental scale of analysis for my work in Canada and India. In Val Comeau, the household has been the site that has articulated gender, class and work in the provision of livelihood for the members of the community. I will not elaborate on the complex patterns of work that prevailed in the community in the pre and post 1950s periods other than to say that in the earlier period fishing, farming, and logging formed the economic base of the community. Men worked as fishers and loggers while sharing the farm work with women who also had primary responsibility for household productive and reproductive tasks. The predominant work in fishing was done for credit, primarily for the W.S. Loggie Company. Logging was wage work that involved lengthy winter migrations. Women also had access to some wage work in lobster canning, blueberry picking, and other poorly remunerated jobs important for household livelihood.

I argue in my work on Val Comeau that there was a dramatic historical shift over the period of my study in the household organisation of work, a transition in which the Canadian federal government played a central role (Johnson 1999). Farming and forestry have all but disappeared as part of the livelihood of Val Comeau's inhabitants, their contribution to household income replaced largely by unemploy-

ment insurance benefits (UI). Large-scale subsistence farming was abandoned in the 1950s and 1960s with the introduction of UI, which made farming redundant when UI payments allowed for the purchase of foodstuffs throughout the winter months. An important consequence of the provision of cash to the villagers of Val Comeau on a regular basis was to give them greater access to the commodity economy. Seen from another perspective, this was an important step in the globalisation of the community. Initially work in forestry remained a vibrant sector in which the men of Val Comeau could earn their UI credits. By the 1980s, however, mechanisation in the industry had eliminated logging as a possibility for all but a couple of men from Val Comeau.

State intervention was also critical in changing the nature of fishing, the fourth major scale of my research in Val Comeau. The intent of the Canadian government from the 1950s was to modernise and professionalise Canada's fisheries. The fishers of Val Comeau had already indicated their eagerness to increase their productivity in the 1930s and 1940s by beginning to purchase larger boats and by beginning the mechanisation process. They also took advantage of financial weaknesses of WS Loggie to escape from the debt relations that the company had held them in. This led to the departure of WS Loggie in 1958. In 1961, the first federal loans were made available for the purchase of equipment for fishing. In 1967, lobster was the first species for which fishing licenses were introduced. By 1976 all species caught by the fishers of Val Comeau had become subject to licensing restrictions. Accompanying the expansion of government regulation was the increasing sophistication and cost of fishing technology, with depth sounders, CB radios, mechanical winching systems, high-powered diesel engines, and now cell phones becoming the norm. Government restrictions on who could fish and the dramatic cost increases of fishing combined to professionalise the fishery of Val Comeau. Where up to the 1950s, fishing was just one component of the livelihood strategies of all households in Val Comeau by the 1980s it had become a valued and exclusive profession controlled by some of the households in the village.

For the purposes of narrative clarity, I have drawn together the four scales that I have considered in a superficially balanced sketch of Val Comeau. Onto a historical backbone, I have noted key social, political, and economic factors. I could conceive of multiple substantial rewritings of this little sketch by plunging into details on each scale or on sub-scales such as gender relations, technology, or political patronage. Val Comeau the small village of 550 residents could unfold sufficient stories and partial connections to keep a scholar occupied for many careers. I could also draw out the conflicts in interpretation and shortcomings in data that considering Val Comeau from a multi-scale perspective brings. For the moment I wish to conclude the simplification of Val Comeau that I have presented here by elaborating how elements of it can contribute to a broader political project, a scale of strategic simplification that can serve as one way of organising my understanding of Val Comeau's many scales.

The dominant, media enhanced image that Canadians hold of the Atlantic fishery is one of tragic ecological collapse. This is an essentialism that accurately captures the intensity and severity of the crisis that much of Atlantic Canada has experienced. Nonetheless, looking at this image from Val Comeau introduces an element of discordance. The fishery of Val Comeau came through the 1980s and 1990s

rather well; if its fishers did not become rich and if there was not as much flexibility and openness in the fishery as there once was, at least they still had the basis for their livelihoods. A cornerstone of the success of fishing in Val Comeau has been lobster, the relatively stationary nature of which makes it much easier to manage than species like the northern cod. Lobster provides the most important economic return for the fishers of the village. As important as this biological advantage, however, and more important in strategic import, is the relatively small-scale nature of the Val Comeau fishery. The combination of timely state restriction on lobster fishing, the avoidance of its pillage by more 'efficient' harvesting techniques like trawling, the continuance of small scale techniques with associated indigenous regulations on fishing areas, and the diversity of fish targeted by passive catch technology that the fishers of Val Comeau pursued represent a relatively successful model for comparison elsewhere.

Gujarat

I met Premjibhai Khokhari for the first time at the WFF meetings in Delhi, although his reputation as one of Gujarat's foremost fisher organisers preceded him. I knew already that he was the lead player in helping establish a branch of the Indian National Fishworkers Forum in Porbanda (NFF). After the November 1997 meetings, it was to be almost a year until I met Premjibhai again because, as with my research in Atlantic Canada, I chose to focus most of my effort on a single village, Dhamlej, that was several hours by bus away from Premjibhai's office in Porbandar.

I chose Dhamlej for several reasons. In scale terms, it had parallels with my research in Val Comeau. Both Val Comeau and Dhamlej are villages, although that term is a relative one. In the Canadian context, Val Comeau's 550 residents make it a not unusual village. In India it would be a hamlet at best. The 7,600 residents of Dhamlej would make it the size of a small town in Canada. More importantly, however, Dhamlej was similar to Val Comeau in that its fishers used fishing technology that was small scale in Gujarat terms. Outboard motorboats of 26 to 36 feet in length and nylon gillnets were standard equipment in Dhamlej, small scale in comparison to the larger wooden gillnet boats and trawlers with which they share the coastal waters. The research problem that I posed myself for Gujarat built on the formulations of my earlier research in Atlantic Canada. I envisaged an historical ethnographic approach that would deal with the interlinked topics of state intervention, transition to a commodity fish economy, and resource depletion. The latter scale of research was a new addition, reflecting changes in my interests and the greater amount of time that I would have at my disposal for this doctoral research. I chose Dhamlej for another reason that differentiated the research in Gujarat: it was within easy reach of Veraval, the largest trawler fishing port in Gujarat. My ambition for the Gujarat project was to introduce the perspective of trawler fishers as a new scale of comparison.

During the formulation of my research focus for Gujarat and during most of my research, I saw Gujarat through a prism that in at least one major way was deeply etched by my preceding and much shorter research in New Brunswick. Despite evidence that mounted over the course of my fieldwork in Gujarat, I failed to make sufficient distinction between the roles of the state in the fisheries of Val Comeau and Gujarat. I continued to adhere to a picture of the state as a powerful external

regulating force, an institution that exercised a great degree of influence on the direction of change in the fishery. It was not until a meeting with John Kurien at the Centre for Development Studies in Trivandrum in December 1998 that my deeply held assumption was abruptly challenged. I asserted to Dr. Kurien my impression of the Gujarat Department of Fisheries as an interventionist force and he challenged me by stating that the success of the Gujarat Department of fisheries was precisely in the way that it had left much control of fisheries management to the fishers themselves. His statement left me rather tongue tied for the rest of our meeting as I was trying to sort through the wreckage of the simplification that had so far guided my interpretation of the role of the state in the Gujarat fishery. It took me two more years to reassemble the pieces and to reformulate my understanding of the role of the Gujarat government in the development of the State's fishery. I now view the Gujarat government as having played a critical role in fisheries development, but have realised that it has done so almost exclusively in the capacity of introducing and subsidising new technologies of production and processing. Unlike the Canadian state, it has been completely absent from the sphere of regulation. Both states have shared production focused, high modernist approaches to development but their different capacities for action have given different degrees of space for agency to different interests in their fisheries. There is a partial connection between the models of state intervention in Atlantic Canada and Gujarat, but one that is quite different from my initial conception. I speculate further on that difference shortly when I introduce a comparison with fisheries development in Kerala.

The greater length of time I had for my Gujarat research allowed me to spend considerably more time contextualising Dhamlej as my ethnographic research site. As part of that contextualisation, I was concerned particularly to examine the role of the state in fisheries development. I have touched on that effort above. I was also concerned to introduce other scales of comparison into my work. I had hoped initially to make research forays into the regions of Kachchh and South Gujarat, the fishing areas furthest from my research site, in order to get comparative data from all major coastal regions of the state comparisons. Time did not permit their inclusion, so I had to content myself with comparative data gleaned from secondary sources and from migrant fishers from those regions. I did, however, conduct several comparative research trips along the coast of the Saurashtra region in which Dhamlej was located. Those trips augmented in particular my knowledge of trawler fishing. Whereas, in my New Brunswick research, I had to depend on other academic work to establish intra-regional comparisons with other modes of fishing, in Gujarat I have been able to make comparisons based on my own data.

The end result of my research in Gujarat was a plethora of scales of analysis. Within Dhamlej itself, gender, class, caste, kinship, religion, and faction combined in numerous partially connected ways to shape identity and social relations. From the position of the village, relations with the exterior moved along caste links, kinship ties and economic connection mediated by the wealthy merchants of the village. A Muslim fisher from Dhamlej village, for example, might have crewed his boats with Hindu labouring caste workers from the neighbouring agricultural village. His wife might have taken part of the low value catch for sale in the local market town, another part of that catch might have gone to a dry fish merchant from Kerala,

while he might have sold the best fish in his catch to a Muslim fish merchant from a neighbouring village who then might have sold the catch in Veraval. Each of those relationships and each of those aspects of life in Dhamlej would unfold further levels of complex detail. Yet, from the perspective of Veraval, Dhamlej would seem just one of a dozen neighbouring fishing villages all using similar gillnet techniques. From Veraval, suddenly Bombay, Europe and China acquire much greater immediacy as the fish packed in Veraval's many fish processing plants is stamped with those markets as their destination.

I have just given a glimpse of the complex linkages running through the Gujarat fishery and connecting it to places elsewhere. In order to make sense of that complexity one has to turn to simplifications. One of the positional simplifications that I have been fleshing out, with help from John Kurien's well-placed comments, is the historical view of the state as a development agent. Another is the changes in social relations that have occurred in the specific space of Dhamlej. A third is the historical bifurcation between trawler fishers and gillnet fishers that has occurred in Gujarat and the relevance of that split for class relations at a regional level. All of these entry points into the complexity of the Gujarat fishery are partially connected to each other and together[7] provide partial substantiation for the strategic simplification that there is a global fisheries crisis. That crisis contains within it hundreds of distinct routes to resource degradation, all of which nonetheless share sufficient connections to make them comparable. I can be more specific in this regard by bringing the experience of Gujarat together with that of Kerala.

Kerala

My task is made somewhat easier by the fact that Kerala is already present in Gujarat. Keralites have been an important presence in the Gujarat fishery at least as far back as the 1950s. Since the early days of the Gujarat fishing industry, the processing sector has boasted numerous Keralite owners. Educated men from Kerala were an important contingent in the Gujarat Department of Fisheries. The entire skilled labour force in the processing industry is composed of temporary migrant women from Kerala. Even the traditional pilani gillnet boats of Gujarat were made of logs from the forests of Malabar. There has been an important Keralite contribution to the development of the Gujarat fishing industry.

Despite the strength of Keralite numbers in the Gujarat fishery, the histories of fisheries development in Gujarat and Kerala are quite different. Neither state has matched the comprehensiveness of intervention of the Canadian state in the management of fishing and fishing communities but the government of Kerala has been more deeply involved in its fishery than that of Gujarat. A plausible explanation for this difference lies in the different mores regarding fish in Kerala and Gujarat. Fish has historically formed a central part of the diet of the inhabitants of Kerala, whether Hindu, Muslim, or Christian. Gujaratis, in contrast are much more loathe to consume fish. Part of this may have been due to the difficulty of transporting fish from the coast to Gujarat's main population centres in the past. A more important reason, however, is the staunch Hindu vegetarianism of Gujarat. Despite having the highest fish catches of all Indian states, the residents of Gujarat consume the least fish per capita (Somavanshi 1998). The marginality of fish to the diet of Gujarat and the stigma attached

to fishing as a profession may explain why the prosecution of the Gujarat fishery has been left almost entirely to coastal communities and particularly coastal fishing castes. Keeping fishing the preserve of fishers has allowed Gujarat to avoid the serious tensions that have plagued Kerala since the 1970s. Rather than providing the means for its fishing communities to develop the fishery themselves, the Kerala government facilitated the entry of non-fisher private businesses into fishing. These entrepreneurs invested in large-scale trawling and ring seine equipment, which constituted a major threat to the livelihoods of Kerala's artisanal fishers. Small-scale fishers reacted to the incursions of the newcomers with protests and violence, but were to some degree pacified when the government of Kerala offered them concessions on mechanisation. The wholesale mechanisation of the Kerala fleet over the 1970s and 1980s has led to serious concerns about resource degradation (Kurien 1978; Kurien 1991).

Throughout the entire period of upheaval over the fisheries resources of Kerala, the fishers of Gujarat enjoyed a steady boom, which raised their standard of living across the board. It was not until the early 1990s that the first signs of trouble in the Gujarat fishery appeared in the form of widespread declining catches per unit of effort (Johnson 2000; Johnson 2001). It was not until the price declines associated with the East Asian economic downturn of the late 1990s, however, that the fishers of Gujarat acknowledged that they faced a serious problem. Unlike Canada, blame for the overfishing was not directed at the government, but rather at different players within and outside of the industry. Trawler owners pinned the blame for overfishing on the joint-venture factory trawlers that had been plying Gujarat's waters and on fishing during the monsoon by smaller gillnet boats. Gillnet fishers directed their criticisms at trawling in general, including the trawlers of their fellow fishers in Gujarat, towards whom they feel a considerable amount of resentment.

While there are clear differences in opinion on the causes of overfishing in Gujarat, there has been none of the open conflict over resources that has plagued Kerala. An important part of the explanation for the peace that reigns in the Gujarat fishery can be found in the different approach to fisheries development followed in the state. The willingness of the Gujarat government facilitate the modernisation of the fishery but to leave management of the fishery to its fisher communities has meant that bonds of caste and locality have so far prevented outbursts of violence between trawler fishers and gill net fishers. The rapid development of the fishery has led to growing class divisions, but these also have yet to act as mobilising positions for the fishers of Gujarat. Despite the relative calm that prevails in the Gujarat fishery, Premjibhai Khokhari and the National Fish Workers Forum in Gujarat will have to bear the underlying gear based tensions in mind. At the time of my research, the Gujarat branch of the NFF only represented trawler fishers. This is somewhat puzzling as the trawler sector is precisely the sector against which the Kerala branch of the NFF was formed. If the NFF desires the negotiation of broad-based solutions to the resource difficulties that the Gujarat fishery faces, it will need to reach out to the members of other gear groups.

Through the foregoing discussion, I have tried to give a sense of the multiple positions that are possible in looking at Val Comeau and at the fisheries of Gujarat and Kerala. There are numerous productive points of comparison between and among the three cases. I tried to adopt a deliberately fluid writing style in order to

capture the flow of ideas that juxtapositions between different places and positions create. The result is somewhat disappointing for its failure to pursue in detail all of the different directions in which I could have gone. At the same time the result is slightly disorienting for its failure to stick closely to any one analytical position. This tension between the energy of partial connections and the desire for establishing guiding positions gives a sense of the methodology that this paper seeks to describe. Left there, however, it is inadequate because it misses the political element of strategic simplifications. Effective strategic simplification means that certain guiding assumptions have to remain at the centre of the process of making partial connections. In the case of my work in India and Canada, therefore, this means looking for continued refreshment in comparison but also trying to keep returning to the position that there is a global crisis in fishing that has been caused in great part by production processes influenced by high modernist ideas. That crisis and the political claims pinpointing its causes have direct potential to mobilise fishers, fishworkers, and their supporters as the WFF demonstrates. At the same time, however, tensions within the WFF arise from an attempt, similar to that in my work, to balance guiding strategic simplifications against the partial connections between the groups that compose the organisation.

The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers

Reflection on the importance and perils of bringing together fishers from geographically distant places is exemplified by the meeting of the WFF in Loctudy in 2000 where it became clear that an initial consensus between the different parties involved inadequately accounted for their differences. Conflicting claims of legitimacy fed into struggles for power and position, obscuring the linkages of solidarity that brought representatives from all regions of the globe together in the first place. My personal research history just happens to be an unintended parallel of a central rift within the WFF. When the Loctudy meetings in 2000 broke apart into two separate factions, Hérménégilde and the fishers of Northern Europe and Canada were on one side and Premjibhai and the fishers of India and the South were on the other. One purpose of writing this paper, therefore, is as a way for me to reflect on a division that directly challenges my own experience with small-scale fishers and my hopes that their international solidarity can challenge the global predominance of destructive fishing practice.

In reflecting on the divisions in the WFF that blew up in Loctudy, I don't claim to have more than a fragmentary knowledge of the historical process of negotiations that underwrote the entire organisation or of the different parties involved in the Forum. Nor would I be so bold to suggest a solution to heal those rifts. I propose simply to reflect on a terminological flashpoint that goes to the heart of the dispute at the WFF and offer some reflections on the lessons it offers from the point of view of simplification and comparison.

The idea of a global organisation of fish harvesters and fish workers goes at least as far back to discussions among fisheries activists in India and elsewhere in the early 1980s.[8] The WFF was officially proposed in a meeting of fishers' organisations in Québec in November 1995. The purpose of the Québec meeting was to pressure

for the inclusion of fish harvesters and fishworkers in global fora such as the FAO Symposium of World Food Security that was occurring in Quebec City at the same time. At the fishers' meeting it was decided that the only way to gain enough clout to bring about such changes was to form a global forum of fishers. The forum's mandate in particular would be to oppose industrial forms of fishing that its members deemed to be the principal cause of overfishing and the principal threat to fisher livelihoods globally (Kurien 1997).

The WFF meeting in New Delhi in 1997 was held to define the goals and strategies of the organisation. The culmination of the 1997 meetings was the acceptance of a provisional charter for the organisation. One of the overall objectives of the WFF, as expressed in its Charter for the Interim Arrangement for the Operation of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers, was to '…secure preferential access for small- and medium-scale, artisanal, and traditional fishers, and indigenous peoples to coastal resources on which they have historically depended.' Later in the document, the Charter further labelled the groups that fell within its purview as including: fish harvesters and crew members directly engaged in fishing harvesting in small and medium boats; crew members of other fishing units; mass based organisations of women in fishing; and, fishworkers engaged in processing who are not merchants (World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers 1998:52). There is a clear attempt in the document to be as explicit as possible about the large constituency on behalf of which the WFF sought to speak but that was a difficult task as the WFF had to be sufficiently exclusive so as to not dilute its core membership while still allowing for the participation of groups from the North and South.

The rift that sundered the WFF at Loctudy was a sharp indication of its failure to meet the daunting institutional challenge of how to integrate multiple organisations that are significantly different in composition, purpose, and operation and which represent extremely diverse regions. In the analytical terms of this paper, the WFF had to reconcile a variety of positions around two key mobilising simplifications. The first was the need to address the global crisis in fisheries. The second was that the fishers' organisations gathered under the auspices of the WFF were sufficiently similar in terms of their relationship to that crisis that they could work together to address it. The consensus at Loctudy came apart around the second simplification, but also reflected on the construction of the first.

I am not aware of the precise series of events at Loctudy that led to the split of the WFF. Post-Loctudy analyses point to the flaring of differences due to bruised egos and struggles for control of the organisation, particularly between the Canadians and the Indians (O'Riordan 2000:7-8; Santiago 2001). It is unclear given the overall common purpose of the WFF what specifically provoked the power struggle that developed. O'Riordan ascribes it to different organisational bases and modes of action while Santiago states that it developed as the Indians tried to defend themselves against Canadian attempts to assert their 'supremacy' (O'Riordan 2000:7; Santiago 2001:31).

I am most interested in reflecting on the general context of the split that relates to difficulties with the two simplifications underlying the WFF that I introduce above. The WFF failed to build a convincing argument for its constituents that fishers of the North and South shared a similar identity and relationship to fishing.

One major difference between the fishers of North and South that contributed to shattering the construction of unity within the WFF was the distinction between professional fishers and artisanal fishers. Organisations from the North America and Europe, and in particular the Canadians, asserted an identity as professionals while Asian and African delegations to the WFF defined themselves as representing artisanal fishers. This distinction is important in livelihood, organisational, and technological terms. The label of professional implies a small-scale entrepreneurial ethos where fishing has shifted from a community orientation to a business orientation. Professional organisations in North America and Europe tend to be aggregations of individuals who negotiate with the government for special considerations. The artisanal fisher label, in contrast, emphasises collective community identities and traditional connection to the fishery while the organisational style is of mass mobilisation and protest as a means of negotiation with the state. A further difference between the two groups is that professional fishers of the northern countries tend to pursue a more capital-intensive mode of fishing than those of the South (cf. O'Riordan 2000). Voices from the South advocating an artisanal model of fishing largely prevailed in drafting the 1997 Charter of the WFF: in the long list of types of acceptable fishers in that document, professional is not an adjective that appears. There was sufficient ambiguity in that list, however, to allow for the inclusion of fishers from the North and South with the allowance that small and medium fishers could become members of the Forum. As the document did not define the precise size parameters for determination of small and medium, fishers representing considerably different scales of fishing could join the Forum.

The tension between fishers from the North and South over collective identification was already present at the 1997 World Forum. A major point of debate at the meetings was whether the trawler fishing practiced by fisher representatives from some Northern countries put them in contravention of the basic criteria for membership of the WFF. Fishers from the South argued that such techniques were industrial in nature and therefore represented a direct threat to artisanal fishing. Northern members of the Forum practicing trawling argued that their position in relative terms in their home countries made them equivalent to artisanal fishers in the South even if they employed much more intensive fishing craft and gear types.

The assertive use of terms like professional and the participation in the WFF by fishers who in Indian terms would be large scale was bound to provoke tension between members of the WFF. The concerns held by members of southern countries would have been reinforced by the knowledge that their northern counterparts were from the same countries that were the source of the bigger trawler vessels that had been stripping southern waters. If northern delegations did not tread lightly and self-consciously in their dealings with the south, it would not be at all surprising that relations between the two groups deteriorated into power struggles.

There are now two options for the global movement of fishworkers: maintaining the separation of Northern and Southern fisher's groups or trying to re-coalesce the WFF as a global organisation. There is some logic to maintaining two distinct international fishers' organisations as real occupational differences do separate them. In terms of attaining both the short and long-term goals of the WFF, however, an organisation with global reach would be preferable. Not only would the larger

group have greater clout in contributing to meetings on global fisheries governance and in resisting large-scale industrial overfishing but it would be forced to confront terminological, technological, and social divisions that threaten not only North-South solidarity but are increasingly surfacing in southern fisheries.

If indeed there were a successful attempt to bring the WFF back together as an international coalition, it would seem fundamental that it internalise a heightened capacity for self-reflection. Participants in the WFF would have to strive to constantly bear in mind the partiality of their connections to one another in the context of strategic simplifications that will face constant and necessary challenges to their legitimacy. They are coming together for shared ambitions, but those ambitions themselves require different optics depending on the position of each of the participants in the overall project. It is imperative that all parties engage constantly in the attempt to re-situate themselves as others in a process that tries to accommodate difference as part of its strategy. A first step in that direction for the WFF might be to re-consider the apparent binary opposition that has developed between artisanal and professional. Neither Hérménégilde nor Premjibhai's constituents, on close inspection, would appear to fit either category very well.[9]

Conclusion

An important part of overcoming the differences between groups that formerly constituted the WFF may come from the acknowledgement that their interaction can actually strengthen the organisation by forcing the recognition that similar divisions as occur between the North and South also occur within each region. This would be an important step in moving towards recognising the strategic value of partial connections as an idea. Similarly, in my research increasing effort to be conscious of shifts in scale and of the altered vision such shifts bring should allow me to strengthen the validity of my arguments. In both the cases of collective activist struggle and individual research, however, at some point judgements have be made on the degree to which interactions or findings conform to core interests. The strength of those judgements rests on how convincingly they have articulated perspectives from multiple scales around the central interests. For a time the successful strategic simplifications that result hold until the next round of challenge from an altered set of scales. The accommodation of researchers and institutions to the dynamic though unsettling methodology of partial connections enables fluid responses that match shifting conditions of the global crisis in fisheries.

At several points above I have hinted at the connection between individual researchers such as myself and activist organisations like the WFF. In my case the ideal of global fisheries solidarity and activism around the issue of industrial overfishing has been a key point of connection to the WFF. Reinforcing such ideological affinity is a further compatibility between activist organisations and researchers. The process of institutional self-reflection is enhanced by the presence of individuals associated with different scales. An individual researcher faces fewer institutional constraints than his or her counterparts who represent different organisations while those representing institutions can remind individual researchers of the necessity of

institutional constraints for effective co-ordination of action. Further, researchers often have experience working at different scales, including different places, which makes them useful in facilitating partial connections for international activist organisations, because they literally embody them. My experience with Hérménégilde in New Delhi demonstrates that interpreter's role quite well. The sensitivity of researchers to partial connections can also give them the important function of maintaining institutional auto-critique, even if they sometimes earn ill will for doing so. None of these abilities, of course, are the sole domain of researchers.

From a personal and professional point of view, the split that occurred at Loctudy was a disaster. Confronting those in control of the destructive forms of industrial fishing underlying the current global fisheries crisis demands firm solidarity between fish harvesters and fish workers of the north and the south. We can only hope and work towards an eventual re-unification of the parties who met at Delhi in 1997. When that time comes, it behoves us to construct a more durable basis for collaboration. Perhaps the ideas of strategic simplifications and partial connections might furnish some of the inspiration for that effort.

Notes

[1] I am grateful to the International Development Research Centre for funding my doctoral research. I would also like to acknowledge the influence of Dr. Marta Rohatynskyj in helping me conceptualise the framework for this paper. Dr. John Kurien and Dr. Jojada Verrips also provided constructive feedback. Responsibility for the arguments made in this paper rests solely with me.

[2] The Canadian Maritimes comprises the three Atlantic Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

[3] The ongoing adaptation of human action to changing circumstance is captured well by James Scott in his discussion of his concept of metis (Scott 1998:ch.9).

[4] The danger of giving in fully to a post-modern epistemology when considering social life is the loss of the ability to make simplifying claims. I do not go so far but rather join those (e.g. Sarkar 1997; Marcus 1999) who recognize the critical potential of a self-reflexive post-modernism while still believing in the necessity of taking positions. One reason for doing so is that humans clearly have the capacity to act and survive even if according to understandings that are patently socially constructed (Taussig 1993:xv).

[5] For the purposes of this paper, I employ the terms essentialisation and simplification as synonyms.

[6] There are also certain material ecosystemic changes that have occurred in many parts of the world such as the trend to fishing down food webs, which are associated with increased fishing capacity (Pauly, Christensen *et al.* 1998).

[7] There is not space here to elaborate on the argument that I have developed to justify the inter-connection of these key aspects of social and ecological change in the Gujarat fishery. The fullest expression of my constructed history of the Gujarat fishery is in Johnson (Johnson 2002) but is also introduced in a preliminary way in Johnson (Johnson 2000) and (Johnson 2001).

[8] John Kurien, personal communication, September 2001.

[9] Each category, on close inspection, contains elements that challenge the image of the whole and link them to the contrasting category. The definition of professional that the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters puts forward is one of fishers who are 'given control over the setting of standards for training in the areas of conservation and responsible fishing practices' (Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters 1997). By this definition, the CCPFH is equating professional with increased management responsibility, a contention equally acceptable to artisanal fishers. By the same token, should we consider the small Kattumaram fishers of Kerala artisanal when they employ ring seine nets that are highly destructive?

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