

# *Massaging the Misery: Recent Approaches to Fisheries Governance and the Betrayal of Small-Scale Fisheries*

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Common assertions about the benefits for small-scale fisheries under co-management and human rights approaches become untenable in the context of neoliberalism, because they facilitate the penetration into communities of rationalities and operational methods that betray resource harvesters by undermining family life and cultural systems and destroying the local social organization of production. Based on neoclassical economics, neoliberalism does not recognize cultural, historical, and social characteristics and so cannot accommodate power relationships, social class inequalities and exclusion, social class-based exploitation, vested interests, and wealth appropriation that all must be overcome to deal effectively with inequity, poverty, and powerlessness. These weaknesses are ignored in the small-scale fisheries governance literature, which is characterized by a naïve faith in the magnanimity of the state to perform in a morally and socially positive manner. But the state is no benevolent patron of the public interest and democratic representation, although these are among the predominant underlying yet unstated assumptions in the recent approaches. Rather, based on property ownership and the “individualization” of rights and decision making, it facilitates empowered social classes to further increase wealth and capital accumulation. Although portrayed as benefits of the recent management approaches, democracy, popular participation, institution building, partnership, and local knowledge are sought by the state to legitimize the imposition of market discipline, not for their intrinsic value.

**Keywords:** co-management, governance, human rights, neoliberalism, small-scale fisheries

*The Overarching structure of the corporate state and the idea of the common good are irrelevant to [academic] specialists. They exist to make the system work, not to examine it.*

— Hedges 2009:98

## Introduction

The contributions of small-scale fisheries are increasingly recognized (FAO 2010), leading to the vigorous promotion of alternative approaches for their governance. Co-management is particularly promoted, its widely asserted benefits being a more inclusive and equitable form of

resource governance that directly engages and, thus, empowers “users” and “stakeholders.” In ways generally not clearly specified, it is implicitly assumed that this would enhance ecological and livelihood sustainability, while fostering “user/stakeholder” regulatory compliance.

A fundamental problem is that the term “co-management” is vague, partly because its usage covers too wide a variety of arrangements. That undermines understanding, meaning, and its usefulness to redesign management, such that “[t]he term ‘fisheries co-management’ has now become so broadly used in applied settings and in social science that it risks losing important aspects of its original thrust” (Pinkerton 2003:69). In contrast, Jentoft (2003:3) opines that “co-management can mean different things in different settings.... This is partly because the concept is broad.” He continues, “although principles such as democracy, transparency, accountability, and sustainability are key defining attributes of co-management, the way they are converted into concrete management institutions may vary from one country to another and from one fishery to another. The context into which co-management is introduced must always be taken into account. This means that co-management as a concept...has to be...sufficiently flexible to be generally useful...” (Jentoft 2003:3). He continues describing co-management as “a collaborative and

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participatory process of regulatory decision making between representatives of use groups, government agencies, research institutions, and other stakeholders. Power sharing in partnership is an essential part of this definition. Admittedly, this is a broad characterization, perhaps even too broad, since it frequently leads to questions of what co-management really is. *Therefore it seems easy to state what co-management is not than what it really is*" (Jentoft 2003:3, emphasis added). In a similar vein, we are advised that "[c]o-management should be viewed not as a single strategy...but rather a process of resource management.... Thus, the co-management process is inherently adaptive, relying on systematic learning and the progressive accumulation of knowledge" (Pomeroy, Cinner, and Nielsen 2011:115). In other words, despite the accumulation of a large and numbingly repetitious and descriptive wave of social science publications that too commonly lack a basis in evidence, there is nothing inherently different about co-management: it is precisely the same as any process of knowledge acquisition in being adaptive, systematic, and progressive (cf. "additive" and "sequential" learning in traditional education, as described by Ruddle and Chesterfield [1977, 1978]). Those authors quoted above nicely confirm that co-management of fisheries is basically an ill-defined philosophical and advocacy-academic approach that is actually a Godsend for neoliberally-inclined governments as a template for designing both domestic fisheries governance and foreign assistance for fisheries.

In this article, we examine the central topic of the relationship between neoliberalism and co-management using examples from Nova Scotia, Canada. In our view, this analysis can be extended to other nation-states where fisheries governance has become permeated by neoliberal ideas, including Denmark (Høst 2011), Norway (Hersoug 2005), and, if Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) are included, Iceland (Matthiasson and Agnarsson 2010) and New Zealand (Connor and Shallard 2010; Duncan 2011; Hersoug 2002). In addition, as illustrated by the approach of the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC), it can also be applied to small-scale fisheries management in the developing world, where it has been asserted that "managers need to exert more control over access" (i.e., property rights) (Davy 2002:viii), and whose "[r]ecommendations have included new governance regimes, such as community-based management or co-management, and increased use of local fishery knowledge" (Davy 2002:vii).

More recently, a "human rights" perspective has been added by Allison et al. (2011) Allison (2011) and Charles (2011), in line with FAO (2005:3) observations such as "... fisheries ethics deals [sic] with the values, rules, duties, and virtues of relevance to both human and ecosystem well-being, providing a critical normative analysis of the moral issues at stake in that sector of human activities." Such human rights propositions appeal to sensibilities about morality and justice, especially in the liberal-democratic understanding and championship of these attributes. Implicitly, they assume that the neoliberal state is a promoter of social and economic justice.

Although superficially these initiatives appear broadly positive, an unintended side effect has been the acceptance of many assumptions that have neither been well researched nor proven. As a consequence, ill-considered approaches to governance have been promoted—particularly the assumption that governments must organize and mobilize communities—since the substantive sociological content of the implications of these new approaches for small-scale marine settings has been barely considered. This is evident in the worldview embodied in key assumptions of many leading researchers about governance, the state, and small-scale fisheries, such as the simple assumptions that it acts for the common good and best socioeconomic interests of its citizens, or that property rights are essential for rational and sustainable natural resources exploitation. Such assumptions, unexamined and perhaps not even perceived by those making them, have recently been exquisitely demolished by Bromley (2009).

Worse, apparently it is not understood that such proposals facilitate the penetration of neoliberal values and operational modes, thereby betraying the very people claimed as beneficiaries. Such key political-economic characteristics of small-scale fisheries as social class inequality, wealth appropriation, and class-based exploitation, which must be addressed to overcome poverty, inequity, and powerlessness, are ignored. This was demonstrated by our online searches (cf. Davis and Ruddle 2009). An August, 28 2011 Google search on "fisheries and management" and "fisheries governance" generated, respectively, 8.43 and 8.14 million results, while an identical search in Web of Knowledge produced 1,620 and 56,400 results, respectively. In addition, a Web of Knowledge search on August 15, 2011 using "fisheries research and management" yielded 1,600 journal articles published since 1987. By contrast, "neoliberalism and fisheries" yielded just two results, supporting Høst's (2011:4) observation that "[i]n disciplines concerned with the management and economics of fisheries, the neoliberal ideas and political project seem to live an inconspicuous but influential life...." The second result is troubling because over the last three decades "governance" and management have been emphasized in fisheries social research. How can such an omission be explained?

Focusing on co-management and treating briefly the "human rights" approach, we analyze the key concepts and presumptions from a selection of the recent governance literature identified through Internet searches, supplemented by several papers from a recent compilation (Chuenpagdee 2011) and illustrated by two vignettes from Nova Scotian small-scale fisheries. The central argument posed is that co-management, rather than being a benign, power-sharing concept, shifts the burdens and responsibilities to citizens—"stakeholders," in the neoliberal parlance—as a means of rationalizing fisheries. Our intent in this article is to provide a first step toward isolating and illustrating central ways that "recent approaches" in governance actually betray both small-scale fisheries and the promise of social research.

## On the Term “Neoliberalism”

Neoliberalism is closely linked with neoclassical economic ideas, in which individuals are related only by their simple and everywhere similar social relationships in a market. Further, behavior and institutions beyond the market are also assumed as uniform everywhere, with minimal impact on economic activities (Bruton 1985), and all change is the result of external influences (Feldman 1987). In neoclassical economics, the gap between theory and reality is enormous and is rooted in the specious universalistic concept of *Homo economicus*, conceived of as unfailingly operating as a “rational, self-interested, instrumental maximizer with fixed preferences” (Hirsch, Michaels, and Friedman 1987:322). Everyday economic life is reduced to the deterministic and presumed universal trait of “rational choice making,” which can be represented easily in formal models (Barnes 1988) as one of the fundamental goals of neoclassical economic study.

Such a teleological approach cannot accommodate power relationships, the strong influence on market behavior of vested interests, and the attendant qualities of social class and group structures and dynamics. The incorporation of non-economic factors is condemned as detracting from the scientific rigor of the neoclassical conceptual framework and its all-important, but overly simple, models (Brohman 1995). Thus, the assumptions of neoliberalism lack any semblance of appreciation for the cultural, historical, or social characteristics of the “real world.” As a consequence, approaches to resource management based on the assumptions of neoliberalism grounded in neoclassical economics stand little chance of success. Indeed, Amin (2004:11) discusses these ideas as “imaginary capitalism,” “closer...to sorcery than to the natural science which it pretends to imitate.”

The enormous interest in neoliberalism has generated a plethora of definitions and understandings (Hartman 2005; McCarthy and Prudham 2004). Those most widely shared are captured by Hartman (2005:58-59) describing neoliberalism as “an economic doctrine which gives supremacy to [self-regulating] free markets as a method of handling not only the economic affairs of nations, but also as a political ideology which can be applied to all manner of governance issues,” within which the state’s primary role is limited to championing and assuring the entitlements and rights of private property and contracts. This entails privileging an individual-centric notion of rights and freedoms over collectivist orientations and practices, including a concept of individual empowerment and action as contingent on “freeing” individuals to develop and employ their skills and abilities innovatively and entrepreneurially through the medium of secured private property (Hartman 2005). The state’s contribution is to assist the citizen-individuals “to practice their freedom” (Hartman 2005:60) through providing access to secured privatized property, combined with the responsibility to employ ownership in self-interested, competitive, and creative ways. This entails “the commodification of everything” (McCarthy and Prudham 2004:276). In the neoliberal ethos, anything

of value, including individual human labor and productive/creative capacities, must be marketable (i.e., a transactable commodity). For this to occur, everything must be transformed into alienable property (i.e., commodities) and made available for transactions through a process of state-secured private property ownership and entitlements. In this sense, the market is regarded as “a powerful instrument of civilization, inculcating such virtues as prudence, diligence, punctuality, self-control” (Hindess 2001:26). By extension, securing market and property rules while concomitantly reducing or eliminating non-market economic activities means that the rule of the market can be used as a powerful instrument of development policy and management of natural resource extraction.

The presumption of the existence of and necessity for private property as a tangible, alienable, and transactable good is the requisite organizing principle and central referent (e.g., Mansfield 2001; Pomeroy, Katon, and Harkes 2001). Further, as Mansfield (2004) argues, it is critical to understand that this neoliberal presumption is evident and advanced, irrespective of whether property ownership is individual or collective, when property ownership and rights are conceptualized as the key condition requisite for achieving economic rationality, to empowering self-interest and action and to securing livelihoods. Specific to fisheries, Mansfield (2004:314) observes that “the development of property rights in fisheries is tied into the neoliberal focus on markets as the central form of governance...through the presumption that private property rights are necessary for markets to work, and that markets are necessary for optimal economic and environmental behavior.”

Thus, the neoliberal state has the important yet limited role of advancing the application of private property-based market discipline in every meaningful area of life and social organization. In so doing, the state is purported to be advancing individual freedom, unlocking creative and innovative capacities, empowering citizens, and fostering “true” democracy. Key methods employed include the devolution of administrative functions to “the community” and “helping” “individuals to align their individual desires with government and to acquire the requisite virtues in order to become self-governing, enterprising individuals” (Hartman 2005:63). Citizenship becomes entwined with notions of obligation rather than rights, and “the language use revolves around the notion of contract and the ‘mutual obligation’ of both parties” (Hartman 2005:63).

There is an important associated vocabulary. “Good governance,” together with “empowerment,” “popular participation,” “responsibility,” and “democracy” related to it, are among the concepts most promoted by some Western governments both at home and overseas, via their international development agencies and dominance over United Nations agencies. As Hindess (2001:35) observes, “While modern democracy allows citizens only a limited role in the government of the state to which they belong, it is often sought to secure a degree of legitimacy for the activities of the state which other regimes are unable to match. It is this, rather

than the expansion of popular control itself, that particularly appeals to the development agencies and financial institutions which promote democracy as a fundamental component of good governance.”

Of course, in so doing, the state is facilitating and advancing conditions whereby the empowered dominant social class can increase wealth extraction and capital accumulation at ever-lower costs. In short, the neoliberal state and its cognate international bodies should not be confused with an image of benevolent and even-handed purveyor of the public interest, fairness, and democratic representation; yet, this perspective pervades the assumptions underlying the recent approaches to fisheries governance in social science research.

### **Co-management and its Shortcomings**

Co-management is the predominant recent approach to fisheries governance championed since the 1980s to promote resource sustainability and the participation of small-scale marine harvesters. Its basic attributes are described by proponents as administrative arrangements whereby user groups and government agencies participate and collaborate in resource management decision making (e.g., Jentoft 1989; Jentoft, McCay, and Wilson 1998; Pomeroy and Berkes 1997; Sen and Nielsen 1996). Key words like “collaborate,” “share,” and “cooperation” are sprinkled throughout discussions of the meaning of co-management, which, it is argued, decentralizes decision making through devolution and delegation of authority, thereby empowering resource users. Such qualities and outcomes are presented as desirable for the democratization of decision making, social justice, improved user compliance, and enhanced resource sustainability. Superficially, all seem eminently virtuous and progressive. Unfortunately, there are devils at play.

The first difficulty is the presumption that the liberal-democratic state is willing to share authority to empower marine harvesters and enhance social justice. For example, in their recent assessment of Chilean small-scale fisheries co-management, Marin and Berkes (2010) do not identify negative impacts on pre-existing governance practices, but find virtue in the “centrality of state institutions,” “the stability of the state,” and “the rule of law” while recognizing that “[t]he combination of bureaucracy and rigidity of the law define a state-driven system with little room for bottom-up learning and innovation” (Marin and Berkes 2010:856). This precisely exemplifies the confused and contradictory thinking arising from an absence of conceptual sophistication and analysis regarding the neoliberal state.

Rather, the neoliberal state devolves and delegates, as Hartman (2005:69) observes, for the purposes of “producing docile subjects who discipline themselves in the name of individual initiative and responsibility.” That is, the neoliberal state pursues regulatory policies and seeks opportunities that will download responsibility and costs onto citizens, whom it understands as “clients,” “users,” and “stakeholders.” In so doing, the state champions the imposition of market-based

logic and discipline to organize and express new management responsibilities. In turn, this fosters the interweaving of livelihood interests as self-interest with management responsibilities.

Once defined by and embedded in this form of participatory management, livelihoods are extracted from their customary social and cultural contexts and relations and recast as a narrowly conceived and necessary means for achieving economic goals. Meaning becomes referenced to the self and the advancement of self within administrative structures and processes. Self-interest is extracted and alienated from customary social relationships, dynamics, and constraints and then placed squarely in the arena of individual performance, as measured by market-derived “efficiencies” associated with such variables as supply, demand, costs, and income. Users have little choice but to adopt the behavioral and organizational discipline demanded by participatory management and its responsibilities, but in so doing, they fatally compromise their social capacity to oppose and resist the neoliberal definition of what matters and of how life should be oriented. Contrary to the apparent assumption of fisheries co-management proponents, the neoliberal state and its international cognates are anything but facilitators of social justice, rights, and empowerment through management collaboration with citizen-clients.

Co-management in the neoliberal vortex also requires that resource users adopt organizational and decision making methods alien to their customary practices. Co-management collaboration requires new organizational forms, formal leadership and administrative specialists, decision making processes, and the like. Collaboration, devolution, and delegation require shared organizational attributes and operational rationalities. That is, state authorities and managers can deal only with entities and their representatives that in fundamental ways embody a mutual understanding of what is important, employ a common worldview and language to express it, and make decisions in a manner consistent with neoliberal administrative practices and objectives (Ralston Saul 1992). These requirements characterize what is commonly referred to as local-level “institution-building,” a prior requisite for co-management. Indeed, such “institution-building” is usually presented as an additional benefit of co-management initiatives to build new local-level capacities. Such methods must either be placed above or be separated from the customary practices used by small-scale fishers (e.g., Gelcich et al. 2006). Co-management proponents, ostensibly champions for inclusion, empowerment, and “voice,” intended or otherwise, make the case for transforming small-scale fishing societies from that which is valued and desired into that which is abhorred. As part of the process, the essential rationalities framing and expressed through social relationships are levered out of a socially-embedded and referred way of living and replaced by a self-centered, institutionally mediated, professionalized occupation that internalizes and references the core principles of neoliberal valuations and market discipline.

Next, co-management proponents presume that “property” is central to organizing effective marine resource governance (e.g., Bromley 1991, 1992; Hanna, Folke, and Mäler 1996). Hanna (1998:3) typifies the neoliberal perspective, observing that assigned and clearly specified “[p]roperty rights in some form are necessary for co-management because without them there is no definition or assurance of legitimate participation or of the conditions that link user groups to each other and to the government.” Harvesters’ relations to and tacit possession of fishing grounds, resources, and livelihoods in themselves legitimate participation in marine harvesting and decisions concerning it. This is evident in the common usage of “stakeholder” to characterize those involved in local marine harvesting. For instance, Jentoft (2003:3) argues that co-management involves “a collaborative and participatory process of regulatory decision making between representatives of use groups, government agencies, research institutions, and other stakeholders.” Often employed interchangeably with the more descriptive term “user,” “stakeholder” conjures images of mineral prospectors registering claims, or, as in the corporate business world, persons or groups with a stake in an organization. Certainly the term “stakeholder,” used to denote marine harvester relationships, subsumes all the values of neoliberalism. In particular, for an individual to be cast as “holder” of a “stake” assumes that they are defined through their relationship to “property.”

Hanna (1998:4) states, “linking stakeholders into the management process is a critical element of co-management.... The organizational task is to maximize representation so that decisions reflect a full array of interests and so stakeholders are as vested as possible in the process.” The characterization “stakeholder” embodies liberal-democratic assumptions about the sorts of institutional and legal conditions requisite for achieving fairness, inclusivity, “voice,” empowerment, and justice. Much rests on situating freedom, liberty, and rights as inherently vested in the individual human being and the presumption that individuals in possession of themselves are free to use their self-possession however they choose. Thus, liberty and freedom first require establishing and institutionalizing property (i.e., ownership of self as a “right.”) Property and particularly relations of exchange between individual property owners characterize the assumed basis for liberal-democratic social organization, institutions, and relationships. Self-possession is the first condition, but it becomes meaningful only when mobilized in relation to material property used for productive and essentially self-interested purposes. That is, the individual’s relation to the ownership and use of property is the key condition in the liberal-democratic approach to achieving liberty and freedom, to defining rights (legal or human), and to enabling what it considers progress and development (cf. MacPherson 1962). Additionally, institutions have value only in so far as they tangibly advance the self-interests of those engaged and/or represented. Consequently, the co-management model, regardless of the specific details of its iteration, presumes that the neoliberal notion and essential principle of property are critical to organizing and advancing human interests.

It is important to note here that many proponents specifically argue that co-management arrangements address small-scale fisheries’ needs for social and distributive justice (e.g., Hauck 2011). Yet, rarely are any substantive empirical data and analyses provided on the political economic conditions underwriting such injustices. Concepts such as social class, wealth appropriation, power, and exploitation are notably absent throughout the new governance literature, with the defining economic, political, and social relational attributes and outcomes of marine resource commodity pricing and market structures and processes rarely mentioned as determinant of poverty and powerlessness (e.g., Jentoft and Eide 2011).

For example, in a well-intended but ultimately unsuccessful effort, one leading proponent of co-management recently noted the absence of and need for the analysis of power in fisheries management research (Jentoft 2007). Jentoft’s treatment is problematic largely because of an apparent inability to recognize that power is seated in and expressed through economic, political, and social structures dedicated to sustaining and advancing the material interests of dominant social classes, wherever they are situated within commodity production and exchange systems. That is, power is the consequence and instrument of hegemony (class dominance and relations), *not* the source of hegemony. Identifying and understanding power in such settings must begin by isolating and examining the structure and dynamics of the social class systems, particularly the social and economic relations of and basis for wealth appropriation and harvester exploitation (e.g., commodity price determination). This analysis is inconsistent with a position that argues that “...co-management is defined as power-sharing...by introducing a system that gives stakeholders an equal chance to apply or shield themselves from power” (Jentoft 2007:428). Explicitly valuing the potential of the liberal-democratic state to act in the interests of citizen welfare and situating property rights as the legitimate and requisite organizational reference simply adds to the fog enveloping conceptual and analytical clarity.

Finally, the concept of “community” is falsely idealized and defined in much of the literature (Li 1996). This is partly because so-called communities are characterized by multiple and overlapping boundaries (Ruddle 1996), most often have a shifting membership, are hugely varied in geographical scale, and are internally differentiated by qualities such as religion, social class, and ethnicity. Further, it is generally assumed and sometimes even stated that, in extreme contrast to the inefficient State, rural and particularly “traditional” communities had long lived sustainably in harmony with “nature” (e.g., McCay and Acheson 1987). Such inaccurate, reductionist, and essentializing images of an “idealized community” were used in an attempt to alter radically the stereotypical, conventional thinking that, for example, the “tragedy of the common was inevitable” (Acheson 1989) or that rural people were backward and ignorant whereas scientific knowledge and management systems were superior (Chambers 1983). Past with present and fiction with fact are conflated to produce an “ideal” type of community that

was likely considered more impactful than mundane reality for the task of advocacy in influencing policy (Li 1996). Of course, homogenizing notions of “community” also overlook the key issue of exactly who from within what communities will be engaged in capacity-building, decision making, organizational control, and resource management (cf. Béné and Neiland 2004). Often, these challenges are treated through vague reference to community “stakeholders” as the loci for participants and empowerment.

### **Neoliberal Co-management Illustrated: A Nova Scotian Interlude**

Over the last two decades, the Small Craft Harbors Unit (SCHU) of Fisheries and Oceans Canada has strived to divest itself of property developed and overseen on behalf of small-scale harvesters and recreational boaters. For instance, in 1995 Nova Scotia had 308 small craft harbors, of which now 47 percent either have been sold or transferred. The remaining 164 are “co-managed” through a so-called partnership between SCHU and local non-profit Harbor Authorities. SCHU created the Harbor Authority Program 20 years ago to facilitate divestiture. It assists users to assume management responsibilities (GoC 2008, 2011) for which they must organize themselves into a formal Harbor Authority that once “certified” by SCHU then must lease the facilities from it. Thereafter, local authorities are responsible for all routine administrative and maintenance matters. SCHU’s role in this “partnership” is to receive proposals for major upkeep or expansion of the facility and decide which harbor “partners” to support.

This example illustrates how the state employs co-management to download operational responsibilities and costs onto citizen-users, while divesting government of providing infrastructure critical for sustaining livelihoods. This has been a key component of the Canadian government’s policy to rationalize small-scale fisheries by concentrating capacity on “core” harbors, while essentially abandoning others. Gradually, marine harvesters unable to bear the additional costs of using non-core harbors are leveraged out, thereby serving the government’s goal of reducing capacity and maintenance costs. As one harvester is reported to have observed in response to a recent SCHU divestiture, “It’s not impossible to fish out of [the local core harbor], but when you consider that it is an extra one and a half to two hours on each day, along with fuel costs, labor costs, and wear and tear on equipment, it’s not a good alternative.” (Beswick 2011:A7). Further, the terms of Harbor Authority organization and operation prioritize neoliberal sensibilities and “market discipline,” so local Harbor Authorities must rely on users to cover the costs, thereby increasing harvester vulnerability to rising costs and fluctuations of resource prices.

Meanwhile, the SCHU lauds Harbor Authorities as “essential to the social and economic life of many communities... that depend on local harbors. [They] link people to nearby waters by keeping vital harbor facilities in good repair [and]

are also key in representing the needs of its users at the community level and to various interested parties” (GoC 2011). What was once understood as a liberal-democratic government’s duty and responsibility to support livelihoods through the provision and maintenance of essential infrastructure now largely depends on “volunteer participation [where] an estimated 5,000 people generously give their time through more than 550 Harbor Authorities across Canada. The volunteer effort approximates 135,000 hours per year, which equate to nearly 70 full-time people” (GoC 2011). While imposing neoliberal methods and market discipline and downloading responsibilities, costs, and risks, the state celebrates the new volunteerism and co-management arrangement. Warm and fuzzy language masks the essential rationality and intent of “co-management” and “partnership,” i.e., to shift the burdens and responsibilities to citizen users as a means of rationalizing fisheries.

### **The “Human Rights” Approach**

It has recently been proposed that a “human rights-based” approach would advance the interests of small-scale fisheries more than current governance schemes (e.g., Allison et al. 2011; Charles 2011), since framing fisheries governance in terms of existing international conventions on human rights would compel governments to address *inter alia* income and asset poverty, food insecurity, marginalization, risk, poor education, and inadequate access to health care. Further, Allison et al. (2011) note that a “human rights” approach would better enable fisheries-dependent peoples to employ devolved governance opportunities more fully than earlier. For these and other advocates, a human rights approach would focus on transforming the political circumstances, issues, and decision making processes at the heart of injustice, inequality, and poverty. Although such terms as “empowerment,” “poverty,” and “injustice” again accompany this proposition, there is, apart from a notable corpus of literature by Béné and associated authors, mostly on African and inland small-scale fisheries (e.g., Béné, Hersoug, and Allison 2010; Béné and Neiland 2004, 2006), little unambiguous analysis of underlying economic, political, and social conditions.

Since fisheries alone cannot satisfy their nutritional requirements, as Raymond Firth (1946) observed long ago, marine harvesters must engage in exchange relationships. This means full-time fishing demands the production of commodities for exchange or sale, and it follows that the material quality of harvesters’ lives depends on the terms of economic exchange (cf. Béné, Hersoug and Allison 2010; Béné and Neiland 2004, 2006). Remarkably, such an essential condition has been generally overlooked by the human rights advocates, although in many cases, poverty in fisheries resource harvesting stems directly from the processes and relationships that determine catch values. That is, harvesters are impoverished by political and economic circumstances they generally cannot control. Thus, the local, regional, national, and international political economy of commodity values,

wealth distribution and accumulation, power, and class are more germane to understanding material poverty than is an absence of human rights.

Without considering the underlying characteristics of advantage and exploitation, it makes little sense to argue that a human rights approach will somehow benefit the poor majority in a political economy where commodity systems assure the wealth accumulation of a small minority. Equally troubling is the presumption that the nation-state is something other than an instrument organized to benefit the dominant wealth-accumulating class. For example, neither Allison et al. (2011) nor Charles (2011) acknowledge the existence of class systems that subordinate and exploit small-scale fishers. This is a serious omission because the appropriation from small-scale harvesters of the real economic value of what they produce is the foundation for entire systems of wealth generation, economic organization, and political action. This is where poverty begins; this is how poverty is sustained. The nation-state, in its relations with the dominant classes advances and protects their specific interests, including the conditions whereby wealth is appropriated and accumulated, requiring the impoverishment of marine harvesters' families and communities.

As currently structured, the nation-state and its political economy are improbable vehicles for addressing fisheries' poverty, injustice, and inequality. Under such conditions, imagining that a human rights agenda will somehow transform state "governance" and action from the interests of the dominant and advantaged class to those of the exploited, marginalized, and impoverished demands a denial of historical evidence. Although most nations have signed the various international human rights conventions, small-scale fisheries, as with other livelihoods, remain defined by the social, political, and economic relations of economic value appropriation, wealth accumulation, and class advantage, intimately interlocked with their continuing exploitation and impoverishment.

### **Social Relationships and What Matters to Small-Scale Fishers: Lessons from a Nova Scotian Vignette**

Much about the organization of life, values, and meaning among small boat marine harvesters contradicts the assumptions of the recent governance literature. Extensive and time-honored social research evidence demonstrates that small boat fishing is best understood as a way of life rather than an occupation (e.g., Davis 1985; Davis and MacInnes 1998; Davis and Wagner 2004; Matthews 1976; Thiessen and Davis 1988). "Work" and "social" relationships are indivisible in any locality because day-to-day experiences and life histories are similar for everybody. They share common fundamentals across generations. At the core of their social relationships lies economic/livelihood production controlled entirely by crews composed of immediate family and social familiars, all of whom learned their roles from either kin or family

friends. Small-scale fishing has always been an intimate and socially tight world, with most people nurtured in fishing as a way of life and sharing the values, attitudes, behaviors, and understandings of the local fishing culture (Apostle, Kasdan, and Hansen 1985; Davis and Wagner 2004; SRSF 2001a, 2001b; Thiessen, Davis, and Jentoft 1992).

When on the water, boats often have a formal social hierarchy, with captains occupying authoritative positions based on years of experience and knowledge accumulated, which earn them respect and influence, although usually routine matters are decided by mutual agreement between captain and crew. Captains are usually the legal owners of their vessels and equipment, although this is arguably not all that meaningful because the attributes and dynamics of social relationships when fishing matter much more to harvester satisfaction with their livelihood and all that is related within family and community life. But the ownership of boats, in particular, is also the medium through which captains attain reputation and express status among their peers. Success is captured in newness and such attributes as where boats were built, their equipment, and design. A captain's status among peers depends largely on success and its associated reputation. Status and reputation among family, familiars, and within a livelihood and social community matter, and these are born and grown within an intimate social matrix where what really matters is what is done with ownership and not ownership itself. Certainly, ownership is not understood as the basis of social and economic differentiation within communities and between families. Crew (i.e., non-owners) could aspire to captaincy and ownership following their apprenticeship "in the stern of the boat."

However, once off the water, everything changes abruptly. With their catches on the wharf, Nova Scotian small-scale harvesters immediately become enmeshed in an exploitative "port market" process. Little negotiation takes place with fish buyers and processors about purchase prices for catches, such that harvesters become price takers to the buyers and processors as price givers. If not, they would be left with a quickly degrading and unmarketable catch. Further, most harvesters are locked into a patron-client system that obligates captains to "sell" their catches to specific buyers/processors, since indebtedness and obligation are managed by buyers to assure regular resource supplies. This reduces marine harvesters to a subordinate position within the local class structure. Through control of commodity values and exchange relations, resource buyers exercise their power to expropriate the lion's share of commodity value. An array of neoliberal state policies, ranging from resource management and income insurance, through environmental regulation and industrial development, to finance and export regulation, assure the hegemony of the dominant class and its material interest in wealth appropriation and accumulation.

The new governance proponents embrace a neoliberal rationality that distinguishes captain-owners ("stakeholders") from others and attaches vested interest in resource management and access to captaincy-ownership. This heightens

local-level socioeconomic differentiations, creating the basis for social class divisions within small-scale fisheries communities. Whereas those participating as crew were once an integral component of livelihood social relations and dynamics, within neoliberal governance they become something akin to hired labor. As such, crew are effectively excluded from direct membership in local management organizations and decisions. The economic interests of captain-owners and their families are resituated in opposition to those of crew and their families, as factors like return on investment and enterprise efficiency supersede the obligations, decisions, and comportment that flow from livelihoods framed by the social relationships.

## Conclusions

The “new” resource governance alternatives are anything but what they claim to be, because they simply advance neoliberal presumptions about the necessity for and priority of proprietorship as a basic requirement for local empowerment. Most new governance proposals envision marine harvesters, at the very least for boat owners and captains, as having a role in decision making, possibly as partners with existing authorities. Clearly, such proposals do not expect the underlying neoliberal system to be transformed to respect and engage with local social and economic priorities or practices. Nor do they challenge proprietorship and associated exclusion as the central requirement for effective governance.

In fact, most new governance proposals would deepen the penetration of neoliberal values and, by so doing, further define and advance social class formation and differentiation in families and local societies. In essence, new governance is just another way of transforming small-scale marine harvesters into the self-interested maximizers presumed in neoclassical economics. Failure to locate power relationships, particularly those associated with economic exploitation and appropriation, at the very center of the context in which the production, sale, processing, and distribution of resources as commodities constitutes the basis of livelihoods means that recent governance approaches are not empowering for small-scale fisheries. Since neither co-management nor human rights proposals emerge from the practices and priorities of small-scale fishing cultures, families, and societies, the very specification of governance as designated function and priority reveals values, organizational necessities, and specified priorities that presume requisite neoliberal modernity and governance practice as imperative. Little if any value or substance is associated with engaging and advancing small-scale harvester social relations of production and way of living as the key reference in any form of harvester-referenced and driven governance.

Participation in small-scale fisheries creates and sustains a way of living and a local culture and buffers families and communities from powerful external forces that would dehumanize and disrupt local social relations of economic production and social life. In Nova Scotia, as across the globe, an array of

external forces strives diligently to force neoliberal production and market “efficiencies” on small-scale marine harvesters. These forces range from government marine resource allocation and management policies, through exploitative market processes, to the so-called “alternative” and “empowering” approaches of “new governance.” Above all, these attributes are revealed by exposing the logic and assumptions that promote and legitimate, either intentionally or otherwise, the imposition of “enterprise efficiency” and “market discipline” as desirable outcomes for small-scale harvesters.

Further, the motives for adopting new governance approaches can muddle implementation, particularly since a common aim is replacing failed previous attempts to manage a fishery, as in Canada, where much of the fisheries management focus struggled with its failure to reconcile and treat critical conditions. Although a period of resource collapses seems hardly an appropriate time to champion devolution of resource governance responsibilities to marine harvesters and their communities, it is certainly ideal from the perspective of wily bureaucrats seeking to shift the blame and duck responsibility for the consequences of their actions. The exercise of effective and empowered “voice” in governance requires the economic resources to develop and to support a wide array of necessary and foundational capacities ranging from an independent ability to design, conduct, and assess research concerning resources, through development of locally determined organizational, management, administrative, and decision making abilities to the wherewithal to design, implement, and enforce local management policies and practices. Certainly, marine harvesters striving to cope with resource collapses and fishing moratoria are unlikely to generate and dedicate the economic and organizational resources required to create and sustain co-management.

Defining the generic and universally applicable cause of governance failure in the now generally accepted terms of property rights is less than sophisticated. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, there is a fundamental need to examine each fishery in terms of its local attributes and social, economic, and historical contexts. Further, the character and prospects of locally prevailing social relations and social structures are more likely the locus of insight respecting poverty, inequity, and injustice than are organizational capacities to advance property rights claims. It is imperative when thinking of introducing new governance arrangements to acknowledge that the diversity, complexity, and dynamics of small-scale fisheries eschew simple panaceae. Introduced governance will succeed only where complexity, diversity, and the changing contextual factors that impinge on small-scale fisheries are taken into account and where the locally distinct range of “actors” involved are all included. Rigorously designed and implemented social science research can play a crucial role in documenting conditions and change in small-scale fisheries, especially since cultural characteristics, social relationships, labor supply, and marginalization are of critical, if largely still unappreciated, importance to designing and implementing fisheries policy.



Co-management and “human rights” options rarely examine conditions “on the ground,” preferring to employ a generic or ideological approach. Largely ignored are the need for, the requirements of, and the methods by which to empower “voice” so as to achieve real and substantial powers enabling key aspects of the “fit” between local priorities and the attributes of resource governance. Particularly serious is that most champions of “new” approaches to governance ignore entirely the local exercise of economic power and the vested interests it represents. That is, there is little analysis of the determinant structure and dynamics of the local market respecting the definition, allocation, and distribution of resource values. In a commodity-producing, corporate-capital, profit-taking/capital accumulation economic context, the power and capacity to manage resources cannot be decoupled from engagement with the distribution and dynamics of power regarding the buying, selling, processing, and marketing of resources. Analyzing and understanding the linkages among and potentials of local practices and relations with initiatives focused on such harvester-centered and determined alternatives as marketing control, cooperatives, resource price negotiation/determination, and the like would do much more to advance harvesters’ economic and social interests than would championship of governance approaches that are likely to assure nothing more than deeper disempowerment of pre-existing social and cultural strengths.

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