The "Modern Fisherman"

Masculinity in Crisis or Resilient Masculinity?

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Cet article examine l'impact sur les hommes des récents changements dans les lois sur la gestion des pêcheries et ce que veut dire être pêcheur à Terre-Neuve. Je critique la réaction et les réponses aux changements des critères concernant l'accès aux ressources poissonnières.

A major shift is occurring in Canadian fisheries management. The state is in the process of dismantling its extensive fisheries regulatory regime including its scientific infrastructure and transferring the responsibilities for management onto participants in the industry. This shift is premised on two key assumptions. First, there are too many fishers chasing too few fish; and second, economic restructuring, informed by a neoliberal agenda, is the solution to such overcapacity and associated problems, including stock collapses and dependency on social programs. These assumptions underlie adjustment initiatives that accompanied state-imposed moratoria on groundfish in Atlantic Canada starting in the early 1990s and subsequent fisheries-related policy, the objectives of which are to reduce capacity, rationalize access, and ultimately create self-reliant and self-managing individual entrepreneurs (DFO 1996, 2001). These assumptions and initiatives reflect and enable what Barbara Neis and Susan Williams call a "global ecological revolution" which is "based on the transformation of nature, our productive relations to nature, the reproduction of fisheries households and communities and the dominant legal, political and ideological frameworks that govern fisheries" (56).

The effects on the lives of fisheries-dependent peoples of this "global ecological revolution" are mediated by gendered and hierarchical divisions of labour in local fishery economies, in communities, and within households, and by gendered ideologies that provide spaces in which to create meaning and that guide national and local policy- and decision-making about access to fisheries-related wealth, resources, and jobs. In her case study of a Newfoundland fishing village, Dona Lee Davis argued that one effect has been a feminization of local men. To put it another way, there has been a "crisis of masculinity." This conclusion seems logical given the well-documented historical importance of the fishery as a site in which Newfoundland men earn a living, live a distinctly masculine way of life, and create meaning. In this paper I offer a different response to the question, "Has this global ecological revolution triggered a crisis of masculinity in the Newfoundland fishery?" I do so by critically examining the impacts of and responses to the changing criteria concerning access to fisheries resources—as part of an overall development process—on men's work, practices, identities and ways of making meaning and on the implications for women's dependency and visibility in the fishery. I draw on interviews conducted between 1995 and 1998 with 97 women and men from the Bonavista-Trinity Bay region of the island portion of Newfoundland and Labrador.[1]

Men are Gendered Too!

Claims of a masculinity crisis require evidence and rigorous analysis. According to the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, development processes—or a "global ecological revolution" for that matter—impact women and men in different ways because they are differently and unequally located in local and global cultures and economies (Kimmel 21). Patriarchal ideologies and structures reflect and reinforce women's and men's respective material conditions and positions in the local, national, and global economies and the meanings, norms, and values available to them (Connell 1998; Connelly, Li, MacDonald, and Parpart). GAD's inclusion of men exposes the mainstream "invisible male" and recognizes that more equitable social relations depend on changes in the structural position and identities of men,

as well as women (White). Gender, after all, is "a way in which social practice is ordered ... in relation to a reproductive arena" (Connell 1995: 71). And masculinity, like femininity, is "a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (Connell 1995: 71). This relational construction means that any claim of a "masculinity crisis" would require evidence of a breakdown of patriarchy (Brittan 184).

There are also differences *among* men (and among women), reflecting cultural variation and the multiplicity of other positions that mediate masculinity. This means we can consider the possibility of a local masculinity crisis even if a more widespread or global crisis does not exist. Local economic crises, for example, may undermine what Robert W. Connell calls the "patriarchal dividend"—"the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (1995: 79). Furthermore, there may be local-global tensions. Connell has argued that the current world gender order increasingly reflects a dominant neo-liberal agenda that privileges the male entrepreneur, transnational capital, and global markets. The result, he contends, is a hegemonic "transnational business masculinity" (1998: 15-16) marked by a commitment to rationality, capitalist accumulation, and a lack of social responsibility, which may or may not conform to local gender orders.

The Direction of Fisheries Policy and Management

Informed by a neo-liberal and social investment framework (Giddens), the state has been implementing strategies through re-regulation that enable a downloading of the responsibility for fisheries management onto an exclusive group of self-reliant individual entrepreneurs (DFO 2001). One such strategy is the introduction of Enterprise Allocations, Individual Quotas (IQ) and Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQ) that allocate quotas to individual enterprises or harvesters, replacing annual renewal arrangements with longer terms (DFO 2001: 13, 31, 34). Another strategy is a targeted reclassification scheme that divides inshore fishers into core and non-core categories. To limit capacity, there is exclusive membership in the core group, entry into which is through replacement and conditional on meeting prerequisites including heading an enterprise, holding key licenses, and demonstrating attachment to and dependency on the fishery (DFO 1996; DFO 2001: 24). These categories are used to determine who gets what fisheries resources, with core fishers having privileged access to replacement and new licenses and vessels. The implementation of the core classification scheme has occurred alongside provincial and industry initiatives to professionalize fishers. Together the Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board and the *Professional Fish Harvesters Act* entrench a set of criteria—apprenticeship programs, formal training and experience requirements—designed to keep out "moonlighters," improve the status of the occupation, and increase a sense of pride, security, and opportunity among the remaining participants (DFO 2001: 98). After meeting the requirements, fishers advance along the Board's gradient designations—Apprentice Fish Harvester, Level I, and Level II. In 1997 DFO incorporated and applied these designations into its registration system, with existing fishers grandparented to the appropriate levels based on fishing years and fishing income.

Measures that support privatization and off-loading of responsibility of allocation and conservation on the industry as the solution to stock declines and overcapacity have been criticized for weakening owner-operator and fleet separation policies that limit the abilities of companies and non-harvesters to buy up licenses and quotas (CCPFH 2001). Equally, "ownership" of resources does not necessarily mean conservation. As Neis and Williams have pointed out, IQs may limit competition temporarily; however, declining stocks and incomes and rising costs will push fishers to increase harvesting effort in the long term. Further, once quotas are transferable, individuals and corporations buy them up, leading to concentrated ownership outside local communities (McCay; Neis and Williams). Also, the assumption that there are too many fishers and not enough fish driving state and industry efforts to reduce capacity ignores the differential impact of the various technological and harvesting capacities between the inshore and offshore sectors, and it ignores the fact that the most serious stock collapses have occurred where access to the commons has been heavily regulated (Alcock).

Nor are privatization, professionalization, and the allocation of quotas gender-neutral. As documented in other North Atlantic fishing economies (Munk-Madsen), when fishing rights are attached to ownership of fishing "property," the patriarchal dividend is upheld or created since men tend to be the ones who formally have ownership. In Newfoundland and Labrador, access

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to fishing licenses is limited through professionalization and membership in the core fishery. Yet, few women are eligible because they do not own any or at least key licenses, or they have shorter or interrupted fishing careers and thus less total and annual fisheries income. If advancement in the industry requires formal training and a household cannot afford to train more than one member, it is likely that *he* will train. Of course, women's domestic and childcare responsibilities also constrain access to training. The criteria developed for professionalization assume a male fisher embedded in a fishing enterprise unencumbered by family responsibilities, which further strengthens male control of the fishery. Thus, we must exercise caution when interpreting the increase in participation rates for female fishers—from eight per cent in 1981 to 20 per cent by 2000 (Grzetic 17). This increase reflects decreased work opportunities for women and household economic strategies. Women's status as fishers remains subordinate to men's. They are underrepresented as license holders (2.2 per cent) and are overrepresented at the Apprentice Level (Grzetic 19-21).

Despite the low wages experienced by many inshore fishers, their peculiar semi-proletarianized position offered men the opportunity to be their own boss, to work outdoors, and exercise a certain amount of autonomy.

Responses that "Look to the Past"

Fishers responded to and made sense of this shift in regulation using varying and often contradictory fishing practices and meanings. Those who have been edged out of the fishery through retirement schemes and re-training initiatives tended to do so slowly. Stock declines, moratoria, and policy directives have necessitated that fishers wishing to remain in the fishery adopt or adapt fishing strategies. Strategies reported by fishers demonstrate variation based on household and crew needs and available resources. Some have been able to resist abandoning investments by purchasing crab quotas. Some fishers moved into smaller boats requiring fewer crew and less gear or began to fish with their wives, often depending on the age of children and the availability of childcare. Less investment and husband-wife crews allow more potential income to remain in the household. This strategy also reflects material losses for women and their increased dependency on men. Women are disproportionately concentrated in the processing sector, which has been arguably hardest hit (Neis, Grzetic and Pidgeon). Others decided to fish on their own or entered into cooperative work relationships with other fishers. Some reported supporting the household economy by manipulating the welfare system, participating in the underground economy, and fishing illegally for the purpose of selling or personal consumption—although the extent to which is difficult to gage. Fishers defended illegal actions and manipulation of state rules in terms of economic need. Such activities are, however, also symbolic displays of resistance to authority. Although it would be a stretch to argue that such activities might effect any real change. Nevertheless, poaching is meaningful insofar as it reflects adherence to a particular framework shaping one's position on access to fisheries resources—I call this the "looking to the past" framework. According to this perspective, all Newfoundlanders—which really means all Newfoundland men, not just fishers—have the right to fish for food. As such, restrictions on both commercial fishing and fishing for food were interpreted by some locals as an attack on their "way of life." The fact that poaching is practiced not only by fishers but other local men and the wave of protest fishing by non-fishers in the summer of 2005 aimed at opening a food fishery support this idea.

The "looking to the past" perspective also provided men with criteria with which to identify "real fishers." The personal work histories of "real fishers" include long careers on the water, accumulated experience and skill, and possession of inter-generational ecological knowledge. This construction uses the discourse of tradition, and deliberately so, as the state has crafted its own notion of "traditional rights" which it has used to determine access to fisheries resources and adjustment programs. Originally, the state defined tradition in terms of adjacency and historical dependency but more recent documents demonstrate its reformulation to fit a male business model. Nevertheless, when fishers used the language of tradition, it was grounded in their version of "the past" and the intent was clearly to develop an argument to support their involvement in the future fishery. Interviews suggest that the "looking to the past" perspective is not confined to the level of ideas, but has a practical purpose. Local people have been dealing with the impacts of the local version of ecological revolution by returning to or relying more heavily on subsistence practices and other flexible and highly valued survival strategies, performed along gender lines, including relying on family and personal ties for support, services, and paid and unpaid work (Sinclair, Squires and Downton). Such subsistence work did not detract from being a "real fisher;" rather, it supported the local value of self-sufficiency and the egalitar-

ian ethic of "being satisfied as long as you are getting by."

The "traditional fisher" model also entails a bodily dimension described by fishers as being "in the blood." Indeed, the acquisition of practical knowledge and fishing skills is a "bodily exercise" (Palsson 37). Such acquisition involves an integration of the generational transfer of knowledge, the immediate task, the natural world, and social relations. This means that fishing knowledge is difficult to quantify or not easily understood without being experienced. According to this "traditional model," formal education and training are not able to capture these elements. Fishers, adopting this model, laid claim to "common sense" based on what they learned from their day-to-day work experience, which had correctly discredited formal versions of the health of fish stocks before the moratorium. Of course, this model must also be understood in terms of the intersection of local cultural meanings and structures of work along the lines of class and gender. Fishers were well aware that besides fishing there is little meaningful and culturally significant work available for men in their communities. Despite the low wages experienced by many inshore fishers, their peculiar semi-proletarianized position offered men the opportunity to be their own boss, to work outdoors, and exercise a certain amount of autonomy. While women are entering harvesting in increasing numbers, the "traditional fisher" model is largely unavailable to them both at the levels of ideas and practice. Gender-segregated work histories, patrilineal transfer of know-how and property and women's subordinate position as new entrants mean that women, for example, do not have access to boats to engage in resistance practices like poaching and that women cannot claim those experiences and ideas that make a "real fisher" or make fishing "in the blood" as constructed by the local culture.

Responses that "Look Forward"

"Looking to the past" and valuing the "traditional fisher"—however partial and simplified—are deeply embedded in the cultural psyche of fishers. Indeed, these have framed a history of resistance to the state's assumption that the inshore fishery is irrational and backwards and in need of modernizing. In the most recent round of restructuring and adjustment, fishers once again used this framework to decide that DFO policies, including the core classification schemes, arbitrarily and unpredictably excluded "traditional fishers" from qualifying for access to the resource and its wealth. Yet, this well-developed framework has not produced much organized resistance. Most of the coping strategies have been individual- and household-based. When fishers organized collectively, the protests tended to be issue- or sector-oriented. Furthermore, there is a competing framework—one that supports professionalization and exclusivity and is fueled by scarcity of fish, cuts to adjustment benefits and incomes and general uncertainty about their future positions in the fishery. The tension between the competing frameworks—one that uses the past as its referent and one that uses the future—becomes clear in fishers' discussions of quotas. While IQs are part of the state's overall plan towards privatization, fishers tended to accept and interpret them in terms of a cultural egalitarian ethic. Most fishers agreed that boat quotas are a fairer management strategy than the allocation of overall competitive quotas by ensuring each fisher a piece of the pie. As noted in other Newfoundland communities (McCay), there was more widespread resistance towards ITQs and the neo-liberal "profit ethic." Neis and Williams warn, however, that if incomes and resource continue to decline, fishers may increase support for ITQs in order to leave the industry.

At the time of the interviews, few accepted the idea that total privatization is the best way to ensure conservation. Nevertheless, using a competing framework—that I call "forward-looking," which supported the state's position on the future direction of the fishery—fishers developed a number of arguments supporting a more limited fishery and drawing the line of exclusion at their feet. These fishers tended to be younger and demonstrated commitment to the fishery by emphasizing their willingness to change with the times—measured in terms of accumulation of fishing gear and communication and labour-saving technologies, movement into larger boats, and overall increased financial investment. A common interpretation of state fisheries policy among locals was that larger boats (measuring over 35 feet) would be favoured in terms of the future allocation of quotas and licenses. Thus, many felt tremendous pressure to choose between "going bigger" or getting out, even if ideologically they were committed to a "traditional" fishery. At the same time, it takes time and money to procure technology and some fishers, especially newer entrants and those lacking capital, are being left behind.

While we can read the accumulation of new technologies (or at least a

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willingness to adopt new fishing technologies) as a strategy to deal with stock declines, which necessitated increased harvesting effort, such willingness may also symbolize conformity to dominant notions of what it means to be a "modern fisher." The concern with appearing compliant and compatible with the dominant versions of who and what should and will be included in the future fishery, of course, reflects a recognition that the state has the power to exclude and include. Those fishers adopting the "modern" approach tended to view professionalization and exclusivity as progressive and favourable. This approach, however, does not easily coexist with the idea that all Newfoundlanders are entitled to fish for personal consumption—an idea I have associated with the "looking to the past" perspective. Like the "traditional fisher" model, however, women are largely excluded from the meanings and practices associated with the "modern fisher." Women's concentration in processing, which is not part of the professionalization movement, their positions in harvesting as crew, their lack of direct fishing capital, and their culturally-assigned responsibilities for childcare and domestic work perpetuate their dependency, vulnerability and invisibility in the industry.

Policy changes in the form of IQs, professionalization and core status, and fishers' responses to them are reshaping how people think about and the rules distributing access to fisheries resources—from favoring familial links to capital investment. According to DFO's reform strategy, new core members must replace exiting core members and licenses in turn are distributed via the state as "replacement licenses." These criteria appear to disrupt patrilineal inheritance patterns. However, the apprenticeship prerequisite and the ability of core fishers to name fishers for replacement licenses appear to advantage those with links to the fishery. Indeed, there was a tendency for fishers with sons interested in pursuing the fishery, to take efforts to stay in the industry. That said, the rising costs of licenses and the reluctance of banks to accept licenses as collateral are forcing many to seek financing through processing companies—which opens up other spaces for company control (CCPFH). The decisions fishers make will no doubt affect family members' involvement in the fishery, the makeup of the next generation of fishers, and the conditions under which they work. One thing seems certain, however; the fishery will remain predominantly male.

Crisis of Masculinity?

There is no disputing the ongoing crisis in the Newfoundland fishery. However, this crisis has not produced a "crisis of masculinity" or a "feminization" of men—either in terms of identity or social position. There has been no breakdown of patriarchal privilege at the policy or local levels. There is evidence of feminization in parts of the industry where employment increasingly takes on the traditional characteristics of women's work—insecurity, low earnings, and deskilling. However, men have remained relatively privileged in the overall gender order through policies that distribute access and wealth via their relation to licenses and fishing property, and to women's reproductive labour. Not all men benefit in the same ways or to the same extent, and those best able to adhere to the state-sanctioned version of masculinity—a modified version of Connell's "transnational business masculinity"—benefit most. In other words, the current policy regime that offers restricted access and privatization has solidified corporate interests *and* reinforced a history of male privilege. While local resistance to the corporate model has been strong with the discourse of "tradition," there has been little, if any, challenge from men or women made to the patriarchal dividend men gain. In fact, privatization and professionalization have encouraged women's complicit identification with conservative gender relations by limiting their other options. Local configurations of masculinity seem to be changing form and adapting. Davis's argument that male fishers have become "feminized" is grounded in men's assessment that they can no longer "be men" in culturally prescribed ways. However, this does not necessarily mean that they have become "women." In fact, Davis provides evidence to the contrary. Men adapted masculinity—through confrontation and alcohol abuse—rather than abandoning it as a way to cope with their changed economic and cultural circumstances.

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KY Hanewich, "Tomatoes/Bread," oil on canvas, 16" x 24", 1999. Photo: Mikhail Hanewich-Hollatz