Marine Policy 80 (2017) 1–9

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Marine Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/marpol

Hegemony and resistance: Disturbing patterns and hopeful signs in the impact of neoliberal policies on small-scale fisheries around the world

Evelyn Pinkerton

School of Resource and Environmental Management, 8888 University Drive, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada, V5A 1S6

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Neoliberalism
Fisheries policy
Livelihoods
ITQs
Financialization
Loss of sovereignty
Local conservation rights
Social movements to protect habitat
Alternative marketing

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the major themes and contributions of this Special Issue in light of a broader social science literature on how to conceptualize small-scale fisheries, the role of the state in facilitating or limiting neoliberalism, and the failure of neoliberal policies to improve conservation. It concludes with a look at ways in which neoliberalism is being undermined by emerging alternatives.

1. Introduction

This Special Issue, global in scope, builds on a Special Section/Issue in the November 2015 issue of Marine Policy, which addressed the effect of neoliberalism on North American small-scale fisheries (SSFs) [1]. Briefly, neoliberalism was defined in that issue as emphasizing private property rights, economic efficiency, deregulation, economic growth, government cutbacks, and devolution of responsibilities and risks to the private sector.

A question to be addressed in this Special Issue is whether anything has changed notably since then. Is neoliberalism even more ascendant or is it encountering more resistance? And is this fully reflected in the experience of SSFs?

If the 18 papers in this Special Issue are any indication, there have indeed been important changes. New issues covered for the first time or in more depth in this issue include: (1) the role of national and international speculative finance as the focal point for profit in fisheries and aquaculture, overshadowing concerns about production, sustainable management, and communities; (2) "green" neoliberalism and the rhetoric of Corporate Social Responsibility in which governments prioritize their roles as development advocates and investors over their responsibilities to protect the environment and sustainably manage wild fisheries; (3) the growth of social movements led by indigenous SSFs to protect fish habitat; (4) the successful resistance by artisanal fisheries to invasion and overfishing by larger gear and development projects; (5) government regulation or re-regulation which dampens neoliberal control mechanisms; and (6) the growth of alternative marketing and licensing strategies by SSFs which bypass the corporate fish processors.

These differing illustrations of the dominance of or challenges to neoliberalism are reflected in opposing declarations of neoliberal analysts. For example, economist Joseph Stiglitz pronounced in August 2016 that "neoliberalism is dead". His assertion was based on neoliberal thinkers' growing disenchantment with their own doctrine since the 2008–2010 recession, which required massive state bail-outs and Keynesian-style stimulus measures. Stiglitz's claim was also inspired by growing inequality and critiques of the negative economic impacts of inequality from economists at the International Monetary Fund [2]. On the other hand, geographer/anthropologist David Harvey analyzed how the neoliberal "hegemonic mode of discourse" had made seemingly permanent inroads into the Swedish welfare state, in which the goals of full employment and equitable income distribution were overridden when Sweden entered the European Union in 1993 and by Sweden's own neoliberal program of deficit reduction, inflation control, and balanced budgets, a program which survived the return to power of Social Democrats in 1994 [3].

This introduction to the Special Issue on Neoliberalism and Global Small-Scale Fisheries uses these divergent viewpoints as an opportunity to consider the different ways that both neoliberal forces and challenges to them are operating at greater velocity. In this situation, papers in this Special Issue contribute to our understanding of the conditions which tip outcomes one way or another. Fully half the papers focus mainly on alternatives to, or even direct challenges to, neoliberal impacts on SSFs, while a majority include some discussion

E-mail address: epinkert@sfu.ca.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2016.11.012
Received 11 November 2016; Accepted 11 November 2016
Available online 23 November 2016
0308-597X/

of alternatives. The other half illustrate the enduring and even expanding dominance of neoliberal processes in SSFs globally.

This introduction also provides an overview of conditions which produce one condition or the other for SSFs in Canada, the US, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia, Iceland, the Netherlands, France, and Malawi. It does this through a broader focus on three "burning issues" which crosscut almost all the papers: (1) wellbeing vs wealth as reflected in "the logic of sufficiency", (2) the role of the state in facilitating or limiting neoliberalism, and (3) discrepancies in claims that neoliberal policies create incentives to conserve. It concludes with a look at ways in which neoliberalism is being undermined by emerging alternatives.

2. Wellbeing vs. wealth or sufficiency vs. "efficiency"

Researchers of SSFs, including those in Ratana Chuenpagdee's "Too Big to Ignore – Global Partnerships for Small-Scale Fisheries Research",[1] often struggle with how to define "small-scale". Paul Durrenberger's insight that shrimpers in Mississippi are not "firms" – at least as economists use the term – is useful here [4]. His point was that the purpose of these shrimpers was not to accumulate individual wealth, but to provide a livelihood for the community and its households.

Of relevance to this question is the introduction to the first Special Issue which considered how neoliberalism had been applied in fisheries through Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) [1]. The purpose of ITQs, expressed most benevolently, is to avoid expenses that arise when individual boats have to race to catch the fish first. This avoidance of extra racing expenses (by having a share of the catch virtually guaranteed) theoretically leads to efficiency, which then theoretically leads to more efficient boats being able to buy out less efficient boats, leaving more wealth to be divided among fewer boats. Less often mentioned as part of this logic is that allowing free transferability of ITQs via the market leads to wealth accumulation by ITQ owners, and eventually investors, at the expense of deckhands and skippers. In an unrestricted ITQ regime, skippers end up leasing quotas from owners, and can never progress to ownership [5,6]. The regime also disadvantages smaller vessels, which are initially allocated very small catches and often proportionately greater monitoring costs [7]. Both the wealth accumulation purpose and the efficiency purpose of ITQs run counter to the ethic and lifeways of many SSFs.

In his book *The Logic of Sufficiency*, Tom Princen [8] calls for a new focus on human wellbeing and a rejection of "efficiency" as the supreme economic value. He wants us to "put ecological and social constraint with a long-term view at the center of economic and political life" because "sufficiency is the cornerstone of a growth-free society.".

Several papers in this issue speak to this perspective. The most aligned with Princen's views is Lalancette's account of the Torres Strait Islanders' horror at the immorality of individuals benefitting at the expense of the community and their adamant rejection of the proposed ITQ system for managing their small-scale rock lobster fishery. She also asserts that the Islanders are not likely to enter into a race for fish because they have resisted strong pressures to move into more "business-like" fishing operations, despite intense competition from the rival ITQed fishery; they continue to state their preference for small-scale, low-overhead operations, resisting the "specialization trap", maintaining their flexibility and resilience to changing resource abundance, markets, and climate. The McCormack paper likewise notes that the race for fish is not a natural attribute of SSFs, demonstrating that they do not need ITQs to be "efficient".

Chambers and Carothers found that in Iceland, SSFs strongly resisted fisheries privatization on ethical grounds, calling it evil or immoral because a fisherman's labor was devalued with the increasing focus on capital accumulation through private ownership; the individual in a position to benefit was accorded more importance than collective wellbeing. They remind us that ITQs are based on an asocial view of how fisheries are organized, ignoring how SSFs are constrained by culture and local rules, or are not centered on maximum financial gain. Indeed, McCormack's paper shows how ITQ management in New Zealand leads to Maori SSFs having difficulty fishing for traditional ceremonial feasts – something which they theoretically have the right to do. The permitting system is too daunting for some traditional Maori and the government appears to have more interest in prosecuting a Maori ceremonial fisherman than being concerned about unrecorded bycatch and dumping in large-scale fisheries, whose behavior is an order of magnitude more harmful to fish stocks. Similarly, Donda's paper shows that government's conception of the "latent effort" they would like to "professionalize" in rural Malawi would disrupt the low-tech flexible adaptations which SSFs have perfected in a lake ecologically unsuited for large-scale fishing gear. And Brewer and co-authors note that SSFs in the state of Maine, USA, value natural resource-dependent small businesses, and fisheries in particular, for reasons that have more to do with cultural history and support for local economies than actual monetary value.

Most of the papers mentioned above also emphasize that SSFs are important for creating and maintaining community sustainability through flexible arrangements that respond to local social and environmental conditions. Not having heavily capitalized and specialized fleets, they can easily switch species, thereby adapting to market and climate change. According to an English small-scale fisherman interviewed by a journalist, in the UK, SSFs—which constitute nearly 80% of the fleet – "…are tailored to have a minuscule bycatch because you have to physically untangle it out of the net…. Fishing is seasonal. When they [the fish] move out of our area, we don't chase them. We're using big mesh sizes, being selective." Greenpeace believes that according to the updated EU's Common Fisheries Policy, local, low-impact fishermen should receive more fishing quota because they fish more sustainably, have lower CO2 emissions, and provide greater employment opportunities than the industrial-scale fleet [9]. It should not be surprising that environmental NGOs would ally themselves with SSFs, given the centuries-long history Alegret documented of the *cofradias* in Spain—the regional organizations which managed SSFs in their region. *Cofradias* lobbied against destructive trawling because of its damage to immature fish, using "language that differed little from that used by environmental organization today arguing against the use of trawls in shallow water" [10]. Nor should it be surprising, as discussed in the Frangoudes and Bellanger paper, that Greenpeace is currently allied with SSFs in France and Europe to gain a sufficient share of the catch, for similar reasons.

Finally, to round out the picture of SSFs as being about sufficiency rather than wealth, the paper by Allen and co-authors illustrates the key role of indigenous SSFs in fish habitat protection. The Lummi tribe in Washington State, USA, has treaty-protected fish habitat protection rights and fisheries which would be seriously polluted by a proposed coal port terminal. In fighting successfully for the rejection of the coal port proposal, they worked with a coalition of local groups, all of whom clearly prioritized welfare over wealth, including the supposed wealth of all the local jobs promised. This parallels an indigenous-led movement against proposed oil and gas pipelines across British Columbia which are considered a grave threat to fish habitat, as discussed below. In all the cases mentioned in this section, concern for welfare considered as "sufficiency" trumped wealth accumulation interests and could be considered an important way of defining SSFs, as well as providing grounds for their resistance to neoliberal fisheries policies.

[1] TBTI (http://toobigtoignore.net/), which inspired both of these Special Issues, is supported by a Partnership Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.