

Fish Weirs to Sonar Screens: the demise of the native fishery

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"The management of fisheries is intended for the benefit of man, not fish."
Canadian Economist H. Scott Gordon, 1950

Introduction

Amongst my earliest memories are the sights, sounds and smells of fishing activity on the docks of Prince Rupert and Nanaimo. My father was a commercial fisherman of French-Canadian descent. His first boat was a double-ended troller; one of the hundreds seized from Japanese fishers during the war. Salmon was the main fishery, but there were also halibut. In Prince Rupert I remember seeing a mature halibut filling the hold of my father's thirty-two foot boat. A fish of this size was rare as the once great north coast halibut fishing banks had been greatly depleted even by 1915. After my family moved to Nanaimo in 1958, my father fished salmon for some years in the Georgia Strait before the development of the purse-seine fleet depleted the gulf fishery. Commercial salmon fishers in the Gulf were then forced to travel to the west coast of Vancouver Island to earn a livelihood.

Herring came into Nanaimo harbour in great shoals in the 1950's. As a 10 year-old I recall the excitement going out to rake herring at night in a dugout canoe with my Indian neighbours, who lived in stilt houses in Newcastle Channel. This was before herring, a vital food for the marine ecosystem, itself became a major commercial fishery. Between 1960 and 1967 when sharply declining stocks forced the closure of the reduction herring fishery, hundreds of tons were taken for fertilizer and feed. Herring stocks are again in serious decline since a market has been developed in Japan for the female roe. Federal fishery biologists estimate that about 170 locations where herring used to spawn in the Johnson and Georgia Straits are barren or near barren. The Indians and their stilt houses disappeared from

Newcastle Channel along with the herring. They were removed to the reservation at the other end of town, near the mouth of Nanaimo River, whose marine life was destroyed when it became a booming ground for the logging industry.

Since the European West Coast fisheries began in the latter part of the 19th century, West Coast marine life has gone from awesome abundance to precipitous decline, to extirpation or near extirpation of many species that most British Columbians have never even heard of. Today we are concerned about species extinctions, but they have been going on for some time outside of our awareness. The Pacific sardine, the pilchard, once third in commercial value next to salmon and halibut, supported fisheries from B.C. to California and was second in volume only to North Atlantic cod. It was fished to virtual extinction by the 1950's. Surf smelts, a small fish that performs the phenomenal feat of laying its eggs by hopping out of the water and digging a hole with its tail in the intertidal zone, virtually disappeared from West Coast beaches by the mid 1970's. The ling cod fishery, a small boat, hand-line fishery was depleted in the early 1980's by high-tech trawl fishing. The once ubiquitous abalone, a delicacy unknown to most British Columbians today, was depleted by the late 1980's. The geoduck fishery off Tofino virtually extinguished the clam beds in the early 1990's. The geoduck, a giant clam, one of the earth's oldest living creatures, can live up to 100 years, so it is not likely they will recover soon. The halibut fishery came close to collapse in the 1970's as a consequence of bottom dragging by foreign trawlers. Now that the once mighty Fraser River salmon runs are barely commercially viable, the corporate commercial fishing industry has moved offshore to find other "under-utilized" species such as the hake trawl fishery or is investing in salmon farming. Unlike the North Atlantic cod fishery, where a single and dominant species collapse was dramatic and sudden, the West Coast fishery collapse has been gradual and piecemeal.

In a three-year joint study of 42 Canadian fisheries done by the University of Victoria, the University of British Columbia and Memorial University in Newfoundland, B.C.'s ground fish trawl fishery ranked the

worst, contravening U.N. codes for responsible fishing. By the mid-1990s the West Coast trawl fleet accounted for only 2 % of the boats in the commercial fleet but caught half of the fish. They are company boats, owned by conglomerates with large integrated networks from fishing through food processing and on up to the retail sales level. With the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 fish processing industries in Washington and Oregon became reliant on trawl caught B.C. fish. The Department of Fishers and Oceans in Ottawa does not require that the hake trawl fishery report on by-catch (species caught accidentally) which yearly includes thousands of tons of juvenile halibut, sturgeon, crab, oolichan and salmon, as well as dozens of species of cod. This by-catch is either sold illegally or more often, to avoid prosecution, simply dumped overboard. Recently the tracks of destruction on the ocean shore left by bottom-dragging trawls, which show as plumes of silt and debris, have been captured by satellite photography.

The Pacific salmon, iconic symbol of wildness and freedom, precise navigational skills and fidelity to place, is now at the crossroads of its very survival. This sobering reality is a critique of the two legged predators from far off lands and their treatment of one of the most plentiful fish populations ever to inhabit the planet. The abundance of the west coast salmon migratory runs was the aquatic parallel of the great herds of buffalo that once roamed the prairies. The voracious technology of the powerful newcomers and their canning factories has resulted in bringing a millennia-old fishery to its knees in less than 150 years. In Environmental Culture: The Ecology of Reason, Australian eco-feminist Val Plumwood describes the ethic that precipitated this crisis: "The sado-dispassionate is the dominant mode of the Heroes in science and capitalism...[t]he market is portrayed as a detached, disengaged, supremely rational mechanism, free from the 'irrational', as the supreme social end and the measure of the worth of other social ends." (1)

Historical Background

When the first explorers, Simon Fraser and Alexander Mackenzie, reached what became known as the Fraser River, they were greeted by one of the world's oldest fishing cultures. Archeological evidence suggests that eight to ten thousand years ago B.C.'s aboriginal cultures were amongst the first peoples on the planet to adopt maritime and semi-sedentary ways of life. This was a sophisticated fishery, involving tens of thousands of people. Native fisheries were governed by a system of customary law and locally based rights-access to individual streams. On major rivers there were complex arrangements between tribes to allow passage of salmon to tribes living far upstream into the interior. In a yearly ritual, entire villages moved to the mouth of the spawning grounds to partake in the annual harvest. Women and children working in groups filleted the salmon, smoked and dried it. Salmon oil and fish eggs went into stews or dried cakes. Salmon was the main staple during the uncertain long cold winters in the interior of the province.

The native fish husbandry was run-specific, took place at the end of migration, and was selective. In order to strengthen stocks larger fish were released for spawning. Fishing technologies varied according to the depth and swiftness of waterways. The most common method was the use of weirs constructed across the mouth of rivers and streams. These fence-like structures corralled salmon then caught selectively by spears, traps and dip nets. Sections of the weirs were opened at the end of the fishing day to release spawners upstream. Closer to the spawning beds streams were cleared of logjams. Native fishers also practiced restocking of streams by taking eggs and milt from productive spawning beds. The traditional native selective fishery and management of stocks is similar to what many salmon biologists are calling for today. Some ethnographers believe that the aboriginal fishers not only amassed a considerable knowledge of fish husbandry and resource management but engaged in purposeful genetic selection of stocks.

On the Skeena another major salmon river, harpoons, fish wheels and conical traps were in common use. Because salmon runs are usually mixed-

stock of several species of salmon at the mouth of the river, harvesting was relatively light in relation to the abundance to allow the maximum number of spawners to pass and to keep agreements with upriver users. As the migratory path of individual salmon populations arrived closer to their natal streams harvesting intensified - the opposite of the European industrial, ocean-based fisheries which take the highest rates of harvest in the salt water before the fish even begin their upstream journey.

The first explorers, Mackenzie and Fraser, were dependent upon the native fishery for subsistence. "we could never have crossed [the mountains] if the natives, who received us well, had not helped us." wrote Jules Quesnel, a trader who was traveling with Fraser, in 1808.(2) "Despite their hospitality many native peoples had misgivings about the white strangers, believing them to be a foreboding of some great change or events of prime importance...but in what they did not know," (3) recorded James Tiet, who also accompanied Fraser. The changes were not long in coming.

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) was established at Fort Langley in 1827. The potential for the fur trade in B.C. was limited and the HBC was looking for new ventures. Trade in salt salmon with the Indians soon outstripped the fur trade with the salmon shipped mainly to Hawaii. Then gold was discovered in 1852. Though the presence of gold had long been known by native peoples there was no market for it till the whites arrived. Tens of thousands of American gold seekers rushed into the interior. In August of 1858 alone 30,000 miners arrived in Victoria on the way to the Fraser River. In a matter of months the lives of the region's inland fishing peoples was radically altered. While natives living near Yale made money trafficking miners across impassible rivers, selling salmon and some becoming gold miners themselves, conflicts began to emerge. Sluicing and hydraulic operations on spawning grounds were devastating fisheries that were key to native survival.

Hereditary chiefs tried to expel the miners without success. Native women were being mistreated and raped by miners. In one instance, after miners killed a man and his wife who were selling salmon, natives retaliated;

two whites and ten natives were killed. In August of 1858, three native fishing camps were destroyed by vigilantes and 31 native people killed, including five chiefs. An uncannily prescient belief held by the Indians seemed to prophesy the danger encroaching on their way of life. Charles Wilson, a surveyor for the British Boundary Commission, wrote in his journal on August 8, 1858. "They often bring me salmon; about the salmon they have a curious superstition, always cutting off the head and taking out the backbone before they bring it to the Europeans, as they consider it would destroy the fishery if a European was to get a hold of these parts." (4) The 1858 B.C. gold rush that white society often celebrates with nostalgia was for the native inhabitants an outright theft and destruction of their traditional way of life. The seizure of the lands and despoiling of the Upper Fraser native fishery during the process of the gold rush is aptly described by Plumwood, "[I]t is not only the deep erasure of indigenous people that is expressed and sanctioned in the Lockean concept of private property, but also in a similar way the deep erasure of nature."(5)

Governor Douglas in Victoria did nothing to protect natives from the attacks on native villages and stream habitat destruction of the miners. A debate in the Victoria newspapers ensued, weighing the ethics of interring the Indians in concentration camps or outright exterminating them. In order to escape vigilante violence and outright starvation, in the first of a long train of forced migrations, interior tribes fled to the coast. In the 1870's their labour became a vital part of the burgeoning cannery business opening up at the mouth of the Fraser. Whole families worked from dawn till dusk for meagre wages as skiff fishers and cannery workers, ironically becoming a crucial part of the industrial process that was destroying their fishery. This was a fishery that for millennia played a crucial role in tribal folklore, custom and concepts of relations between human and the salmon. The enduring and close relationship of the aboriginal and the salmon was poignantly noted in a 1893 entry into the journal of one the cannery owner's sons. "Two sounds I have never forgotten...the seal's cry at night and the song of the Indian inducing fish to swim into his net...a composition of his own---a tune of a few

bars, sometimes with improvised words...on a quiet moonlit night...both were weird and startling." (6)

In 1871 the first cannery opened near the mouth of the Fraser. Returning salmon runs were now being intercepted by native manned gillnetter skiffs owned by a score of cannery owners who recognized that the real gold of the region lay in the export of canned salmon. British salmon streams were dying. The export business flourished as British factory workers ate salmon imported from British Columbia. Cannery crews were unable to handle the skiff loads of salmon at the height of the runs. Entire boatloads of rotting salmon were dumped as offal. On the cannery floor only the largest center-cuts of the salmon were canned and the rest discarded into the river. The river became a breeding ground for disease. In 1875 there was a typhus outbreak blamed on putrid fish carcasses in the river. Plumwood describes this kind of cavalier waste and plunder. "In the new Cartesian fantasy of mastery...nature is passive, replaceable and has only instrumental value...it can be reduced and regimented...if you wipe out one species of fish, it can be replaced with another, in theory without limit." (7)

A key symbol of Canadian unity is the construction of the railways across the continent. But for the aboriginal fishing peoples of the Fraser River, railway construction would have tragic consequences. Careless tunnel blasting by the Canadian National Railway, building a second track, caused the Hell's Gate Slide of 1913, considered by many to be the worst environmental disaster in B.C. history. Irresponsible blasting sent virtually the side of a mountain into the gorge, blocking the passage completely to fish passage. It was a peak year for sockeye runs. According to Geoff Megs in Salmon: The Decline of the B.C. Fishery, the disaster resulted from "deliberate and illegal construction techniques of the railway and should really be called a blockade." (8) To make matters worse, the disaster was covered up and compounded by officials who that same year allowed overfishing at the mouth of the river. The same officials attempted to eliminate the aboriginal fishing above the slide rather than ameliorate the

slide's effects or crimp the profits of the canners by reducing the fishery to compensate for the effects of the blockage.

Helpless to continue their upriver journey, sockeye massed below the canyon blockage. Provincial and federal engineers tried to blast tunnels through the rock. Aboriginal people desperately dip netted salmon and transported them past the slide. The tragedy compounded as runs of Pinks tried to get past the blockage. Sockeye, Chinook and Pink populations were critically damaged and would take decades to regain a fraction of their former abundance. The building of the railway destroyed the biggest sockeye runs the world had ever known.

Banning the native fishery

Native labour was crucial to the commercial success of the early canneries. Though natives had worked in the canneries since 1876 many still stubbornly maintained their own fishery and trade in dried salmon far into the interior and felt strong ownership rights over streams and waterways. The native fishery and sale of salmon was intolerable competition for cannery owners. They also wanted the fishery banned to create a willing native labour force for the canneries. In collusion with fisheries officers in Ottawa, the cannery czars enlisted friends in the B.C. media and legislature in an orchestrated public campaign against the native fishery. The campaign focused on the Babine native fishery. The cannery operators claimed the Babine Barricades (native weirs) on the Babine, a tributary of the Skeena River, were destroying the entire Skeena fishery. A headline from the Province dated November 19, 1904 read. "*Indians wiping out Sockeyes.*" (9) Native fishers claimed, with reason, that the decrease in fish was not due to their system of barricades, but to the excessive ocean fishing supplying the canneries.

The canneries got their way. On March 3, 1894 the federal government dealt a major blow to the Babine and all aboriginal fisheries with Dominion Order in Council No. 590. Fish weirs, traps, dip nets and other aboriginal fishing technologies were outlawed in all rivers and streams in the province.

A food fishery by limited permit would be allowed, but only using nets issued by the Department of Fisheries. The sale of fish, a major livelihood of aboriginals, was prohibited. Native fisheries, even for food, were arbitrarily closed when it was deemed there would be "insufficient fish" for commercial purposes. Natives were prosecuted and jailed for "illegal" fishing while white commercial and sports fishermen had continued access to the salmon runs. For three generations famine stalked the Indian villages of the Fraser and Thompson rivers. Disease and dislocation had by the early 1900's reduced the aboriginal population in the Upper and Lower Fraser from a pre-contact population of 60,000 to only 10,000.

As fisheries officers dismantled traditional fishing technologies on the Fraser, the Nass, the Cowichan, the Skeena and the Babine rivers, thousands of native people traveled to the canneries on the coast to find work. Federal Fisheries inspector John William said of the Babine Lake Chiefs who traveled to Ottawa to plead the case of their fishery: "The trouble is the Indians are so lazy and idle they will not do anything at all. The reason they want the barricades is so that the women will go and shovel the fish out. Let them come down to the cannery and work as other Indians do, they cannot be spared." (10) Part of the 'rational' ordering process of the Fisheries Department in Ottawa was the transformation of the aboriginal into a wage worker.

Simultaneously with the campaign against the native commercial fishery, the native food-fishery came under attack. In 1895-99, sports fishers led a drive to have the native food harvest prohibited on the Coquitlam, Cowichan and Fraser rivers. Unlike natives, who required a permit to food fish, non-natives required no permit for recreational or food fishing. Depletion of the native food fishery was further accelerated by the licensing in 1907 of the purse seine fleet. Hundreds of large seine boats, which could scoop up a whole school of fish in one setting, were allowed free access to runs on hitherto native streams. Repeated pleas from hereditary Chiefs to Ottawa to curtail this fishery were ignored.

From the point of view of officials in Ottawa, the appropriation of the native fishery was not theft because aboriginal fisheries were not individually owned nor marketed and transformed in a way that was recognizable by European standards. Negotiating terms of access to the salmon fishery with the ninety-plus bands who controlled the Fraser fishery was never seriously entertained by the colonial governments in Ottawa and Victoria. As the fishery was forced from native hands, and salmon were increasingly intercepted in the open ocean, excessive over fishing and waste proliferated. Val Plumwood claims incorporation and assimilation of aboriginal peoples and their livelihood was deemed a necessary step in establishing mastery over nature. "The colonized and their 'disorderly' space is available for use, without limit, and the assimilating project of the colonizer is to remake the colonized and their space in the image of the colonizer's own self-space, own culture or land, which is represented as the paradigm of reason, beauty and order." (11) Wallerstein, as quoted by Eleanor Leacock in Limited Wants, Unlimited Means, put it another way. " Such mini-systems no longer exist in the world...the only kind of social system is a world-system...a unit with a single division of labour and multiple cultural systems. This world-system is the capitalist world economy."(12)

Barred from their traditional fisheries and fishing technology, Indians adapted the fishing methods of the white man. Native fishers performed the back breaking work of gillnetting from dawn to dusk in cannery owned boats. Native women and children were the main source of labour as cannery line workers and packers. In 1892 when independent fishing licenses (apart from cannery licenses) were issued by Ottawa, native fishers, who lacked the vote and could not own property, were not allowed licenses. On the other hand, independent licenses were extended, without limit, to settlers and British subjects. Cannery workers were enthusiastic about this policy as it allowed them to maintain the dependency of native fishers and cannery workers. Ironically, during WWII racism towards the Japanese resulted in some long denied equity towards the native fisher in the commercial fishery. When the Canadian government seized the Japanese fishing fleet much of it was

acquired by the canner operators. The cannery then leased out these vessels mostly to native fishermen, inadvertently helping consolidate the formation of the first coast-wide native organization headed by hereditary Chiefs, the Native Brotherhood of B.C. But it wasn't until 1942 that the first native fisherman, a Kwakiutl chief named James Sewid, was able to buy his own boat.

Global high-tech fisheries

From the time of the first great strike on the Fraser in 1900 when native, Japanese and white fishermen banded together to force the canneries to raise the price of a fish to 19 cents, the battle between the fisheries as a peoples commons and the fisheries as a private resource has been ongoing. The United Fishery and Allied Workers Union formed in 1945. Together with The Native Brotherhood, unions began to challenge the corporate fishery at a time when the industry was in the process of transition from pioneer capitalism to a more global, integrated industry backed by financial capital from as far away as Toronto, London and New York. The commercial fishery as a commons has always been in conflict with the capitalist tendency towards concentrated ownership by a few large corporations with increasingly mechanized fleets and expanding export networks and vertical economic integration. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) in Ottawa has consistently steered the fishery away from the ethic of a public resource, and through a series of narrow economically driven studies and commissions, has encouraged the concentration of licenses and fish processing. Not since the beginning of the European fishery in the late 19th century has the West Coast fishery been owned by fewer players. For the most part, this model has been encouraged by fisheries technology and the selective, politicized application of fisheries science with a poor knowledge base.

In the late 1940's fisheries technology advanced from the simple compass and AM radio to a sophisticated array of fish-seeking devices that today make fishing more akin to full time surveillance than the chance driven fishing of old. Radar, along with GPS navigation, allows boats to fish in the

fog and exactly pinpoint where they were at all times. Echo sounders detect the ocean bottom profile and schools of fish below the boat. Sonar, developed during WWII for hunting down submarines, can both sound the bottom and side scan allowing detection of schools of fish at distance. Every large boat now has a computer system called Noble Tech which makes detailed charts of all coastal waters available along with maps of the ocean floor in 3-D. This system is used by salmon fishers and offshore trawl fleets alike. Advanced radio scrambling allows big boats to fish as part of select groups, zoning in on schools from several directions. The switch from cable to drum seines means the turn-around time from one set to the next reduced from one hour to two minutes. Special winches and the newly developed 'drop stern' mean more fish can be caught and retrieved in a setting. Large seine vessels routinely take 5 to 8 tons of fish in one setting. One currently active seine fisherman described the modern high tech fishing fleets to the author as "highly efficient fish-killing machines – the fish haven't got a chance."

Canadian fisheries have, according to Plumwood, adopted a model where science became subservient to a maximum yield mode of fisheries. "Modern scientific knowledge prepares itself to be shaped as a servant of the corporation and the rationalist economy through endorsing sado-dispassionate rationalist models of personal objectivity as emotional neutrality and ethico-political responsibility." (13) An early example of this approach was the DFO sanctioned machine gun kill in the 1930's of some 7,000 seal lions by the Canadian gunship Givenchy. A more recent example of techno-barbaric fish stock management occurred when the salmon commission set up an electric fence on mouth of the Adams River in 1958 and electrocuted a million spawning sockeye deemed as "undesirable" fish. (14) In Dead Reckoning: Confronting the Crisis in Pacific Fisheries, author Terry Glavin, "A defining historical feature of the public regulation of the West Coast fisheries has been the elimination of the coastal canning monopoly's real and perceived competition for small-scale fisheries and small-boat fleets to aboriginal fisheries, seals and sea lions." (15)

In addition to the depletion of salmon runs by mismanagement and over-fishing, other activities significantly affect the integrity of the salmon stocks. Many activities of the dominant white society, with its mechanistic, industrial approach to nature and resource extraction, damage the ability of the salmon to reach its natal stream and successfully spawn. Among many examples are forestry road building and clear-cut logging with attendant siltation and direct heavy equipment despoliation of streambeds, toxic run-off into streams from mining, smelting and agricultural operations, suburban sprawl which has wiped out and polluted dozens of streambeds, hydro-electric power generation and control of entire river systems being given to corporations, like Alcan, who are more interested in maximizing electricity production rather than releasing water into the river to ensure viability of salmon runs. The most recent serious threat to the survival of wild salmon is fish farms. Waterborne disease, sea lice, and escapements of Atlantic salmon which compete with native species for food and spawning grounds, have already done considerable damage to wild salmon populations. Cheap farmed salmon has also forced down the price of wild salmon, pushing more small commercial fishers, many of them native, out of business.

Fishing with Joe

It was in this latter-day scenario of the West Coast fishery that I started fishing with Joe, an older Native man from the Shell Beach reservation near Ladysmith, where I lived in the 1990's. The story of Joe illustrates in a small and personal way the dilemma and situation of the present day native fisher.

Joe, like most native people in B.C., still looks to the ocean and its resources as a defining core of his identity. The Shell Beach reservation where Joe lives is located on a small peninsula jutting out into Georgia Strait opposite the town of Ladysmith on Vancouver Island. Ladysmith is built on what used to be the traditional hunting grounds of the Shell Beach tribe. Several tribes from Galiano, Saltspring and the surrounding islands were forced to move onto the Shell Beach reserve when the Crown seized their lands for settlement around 1900. As pressure from settlers for more land

grew, this small parcel of reserve land was further reduced in size (without native consent) by the 1920 federal McKenna McBride Commission's seizure of "cut off" lands that were ostensibly being "underutilized" by Shell Beach natives. Local streams and shellfish gathering activities were later destroyed by sawmill and logging activities emanating from Ladysmith.

Joe is a hybrid of aboriginal sensibilities with a European overlay. He speaks English with a Halkomelem accent and is a skilled fisher, hunter and carver. I learned many things from Joe but three things in particular stand out; to pay attention to the unique lives of fish, a slower and more textured sense of time and forgiveness for the sins of the dominant European society. His life as a fisher reflects what remains of the traditional salmon fishery as opposed to the commercial culture of salmon as an export commodity. When Joe was nine years old he was "snatched from his parents," to use his words, by the local Catholic priest and put into a Catholic residential school on Kuper Island. Four years later he was committed to the Chemanius hospital with a broken leg and a serious skin infection. His father refused to take him back to the school on Kuper Island and he was able to learn many of the bush and fishing skills that he still practices today.

Joe still manages to keep as much a hunting and fishing existence as he can even though his family's former hunting grounds are covered with highways and suburbs and what were their traditional fishing camps on the islands are now dotted with summer cabins owned by people from the city. He has never owned a commercial license but has worked as a deckhand on seine boats, gillnet boats and trollers. When he is on reserve, he fishes from one or another of several small open boats owned by him and his three sons. He sets his crab traps in the bay. In his spare time Joe carves totem poles, eagles, salmon, earrings and letter-openers for the tourist trade. In the spring he sometimes travels to Alaska to work at a native owned cannery. In winter he shucks oysters in Fanny Bay on the oyster farm leases and digs clams with Indian crews for fancy restaurants in Vancouver and the Granville Island Market. He has never traveled farther than the cannery in Alaska and has no desire to.

Joe is deeply related to place. He knows every bay and inlet and weather pattern for kilometers in every direction from Shell Beach. He knows when the fish feed and when they rest, where they are going and how far they have come on their journey. When Joe nostalgically points out the places where his family used to camp and hunt and fish it is without a visible trace of bitterness or accusation. In his non-aggressive way he seems to be striving for harmony and balance with things that he can't change. When we were fishing off the coast of Thetis Island one day, I once asked him if he wasn't angry with white settlers for taking the land of his family. His answer was typically indirect " We're still here." he said "Us Indians are still here."

The fishing experience with Joe is qualitatively and quantitatively different from the high-rolling, high stakes, technically advanced fishing I've done as a deckhand with various European descent fishers. Joe's 16 foot wooden boat has no high-powered engine, no computers or sonar screens. Nothing is rushed or hurried. We start early and get to the fishing grounds at dawn, put down our gear with a device made out of wooden spools and bicycle parts. We wait, sometimes not speaking for an hour or more, checking the lines for seaweed and putting them back down again. For cod we often use lures that Joe has carved himself. Sometimes there are fish and sometimes there are no fish. The equanimity of the day is uninterrupted by a sense of success or failure. Conversation is infrequent and related to something at hand. Usually by noon we have some fish and go to one of many small deserted island beaches to cook one up and maybe dig some clams.

For the past few years there have been very few salmon runs coming through the parts of the Gulf Islands where Joe normally fishes. The coho that he used to depend on catching have migrated to the west coast of the Island for reasons even fisheries biologists don't understand. Joe thinks it might be because the water is too warm and "some years the fish don't come through," he says, "something happens to them." The truth is that Joe and the other native subsistence fishers from the Shell Beach reserve have to go farther and farther from home in their small boats every year to catch any salmon at all. In the past few years the band has been hiring a commercial

seine boat to go to the west coast and bring back food fish for canning and freezing. But it does not offer the same rich experience as catching your own fish in your own boat and teaching your kids how to fish. Joe has always given away and sold a few fish outside of what he and his extended family need. Now he can do so legally since the 1992 landmark Sparrow decision of the Supreme Court of Canada acknowledging that aboriginal fishing rights are at the core of native rights in B.C. But now there aren't very many fish left.

Repercussions of the Sparrow decision

The Sparrow decision sent shock waves through the commercial fishing industry. Additional legislation also conceded economic rights to natives to barter and sell fish. No longer can DFO arbitrarily shut down native fisheries in deference to commercial and recreational fisheries. These decisions sparked a strong reaction from the commercial, corporate and sports fishing resulting in the "fish wars" on the coastal rivers in 1992-1995. Hysteria about "native poaching" reached levels not seen since the attack that closed down the native fishery in the 19th century.

Federal Minister of Fisheries, John Crosby, launched an investigation into the "missing fish," which revealed that indeed some native tribes did fish outside of DFO regulations, but from their point of view they were taking fish that was rightfully theirs. Ironically, in 1992 more sockeye reached their spawning grounds than in any other cycle year for about half a century. The commercial fishery, which is allocated 90% of the annual sockeye run, was the most lucrative since 1940. The Sparrow decision allocates only 5% of the salmon runs to the aboriginal fishery. In contrast the seine boats owned by B.C. Packers Ltd., a Jimmy Pattison company, caught an estimated 1.2 million sockeye in 1993, more than the total sockeye allocation for all the Fraser River tribes combined.

The Sparrow decision and other latter-day rulings recognizing aboriginal fishing rights have arrived in the context of sadly diminished stocks and a greatly depleted Fraser river fishery. In 1995 the total Canada-U.S.

commercial sockeye catch collapsed to fewer than 1.5 million fish. The economic consequences were felt far and wide by native and non-native fishers alike. In a little more than a hundred years since the aboriginal fisheries was banished and replaced with of a techno-industrial model of fish management, a unique genus of fish, the abundant Pacific salmon, has been reduced to a dwindling, relict population that must run the gauntlet of deep sea trawlers, purse net seiners, trollers, gillnetters, sports fishers and fish farms before even entering their home waters.

Conclusion

The time for new approaches to the West Coast fisheries has come. Studies advocating the dismantling of the large-scale industrial fisheries in favour of smaller and more sustainable models are coming from the within the DFOs own Program, Planning and Economics Branch. Skeena River tribes are experimenting, with modern materials, the selective fisheries techniques used by their ancestors. Tribal fisheries planners have also turned to live capture experiments with fish wheels, which worked so well in the past. Such cooperative community driven initiatives within native communities and between native and non-natives are occurring all over the province.

Commercial trollers and native bands in the Kennedy Lake area near Tofino are working to restore Kennedy Lake sockeye runs to their previous levels. In Sooke, the DFO and the provincial government are working with the Sooke Tribal Council to establish an evolved form of the ancient live-capture reefnets that people had used there until the canneries came and forced them off their fishing grounds. And in the interior of the province, the Shuswap National Fisheries Commission is working jointly with ranchers, logger and others in their territories. In the 1990's they began rebuilding some of their ancient fish weirs in the small tributaries of the Thompson River watershed. Some, like author Terry Glavin believe that "[i]ndustrial and technological approaches to fisheries management are giving way to ideas about changing and managing human activities...instead of managing the

behaviours of fish populations, the focus is shifting towards restoring to human communities the tools to manage themselves." (16)

Modern fisheries science in Canada has been designed to maximize fish yields in the short term, for export markets. Very little is known about the migration patterns of salmon, why they spawn in one place and not another, and how resilient they are to the challenges presented by fish farms and the importing of Atlantic salmon into our waters. We need more science designed to meet the needs of the salmon and a more ethical and value-oriented approach to all marine species akin to that of the indigenous peoples who sustainably managed the fishery for thousands of years. Plumwood advocates a "recognition stance" towards nature as opposed to a "reductive stance" as a way of regaining ethical ground. "The rich intentionality the reductive stance would deny to the world is the ground of the enchantment it retains in many indigenous cultures and in some of the past of our own...extending intentionality to the non-human is crucial for extending to them a narrative conception of ethics." (17)

Our Cartesian nature has allowed us to create institutions that have blinded us to the folly of our subservience to a crude, short term rationalism and the harms it has created. With our ideas of dominance and entitlement, Europeans took the position of God and discounted the fishing methods of the Indians as primitive and backward. In reality it was us Europeans who were the backward ones. The aboriginal approach was wise enough to intimately observe what worked in nature and to enhance natural systems for human benefit in a way that had been truly sustainable for centuries. We need to learn to do this.

There is still time to create a viable fishery, begin to repair the marine ecosystem and make restitution for the destruction of the native fishery. B.C. natives remain a fish centered people. Fishers like Joe still have an intimate knowledge of their marine environment, a deep concern about the fishery and a drive to keep the fishery alive for future generations. Justice demands a return of a substantial part of the commercial fishery to native tribes; a direction that may also be a way towards an enduring fishery for us all.

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