

Power, politics and environmental change

MA Environmental Humanities 2016-17

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Class 5: The power of discourse, and incomplete dominations

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Intro

- **Purpose:** explain how post-structuralism studies
 - The operation of power through discourse
 - The limits of power and domination
- Reason **why** you should know this: because
 - The power of discourse: key approach for understanding how power operates (poststructuralism)
 - limits to power-domination are equally important as domination for understanding why and how environmental change happens

Class outline

- Assignment answers
 - To see operation of power through discourse
 - (but different to other classes: with reading)
- Exercise, questions and lecture
 - To discuss/ understand the limits of power

CLASS ASSIGNMENT

2

St. Martin (2006) explains that “As with past enclosures of common property, the discursive enclosure clears communities and their associated social/cultural relations from the domain of economy and produces a resource open to discursive and literal appropriation” (p. 173).

How does that happen?

- According to St. Martin, there is a dominant discourse:
 - What is a “discourse”?
 - What discourses do?

“There is a dominant discourse”

- What is a discourse?
 - A body of statements organised in a regular and systemic way (Kendall & Wickham, 1999)
 - Barry & Proops, 1999: a narrative, or a way of seeing and talking about something; a worldview
 - The language, ideas and values held by disciplines, institutions and society (Munns, 2010)
- What discourses do? Munns (2010):
 - They produce knowledge
 - Expressed through “statements accepted almost unquestionably”
 - Which is then used to justify the actions of social institutions
 - **Discourses produce reality**

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How does that happen?

- According to St. Martin, there is a dominant discourse:
 - What is a “discourse”?
 - What discourses do?
- **Back to St. Martin:**
 - What is the name of (does he call) the dominant discourse?
 - What does the discourse say?
 - What it does?
 - How it does it?

“There is a dominant discourse”

- What is **the name** he gives to that discourse?
 - The “bio-economics discourse”
- **What discourse says:**
 - The ‘bio-economics’ discourse holds that the economic dynamic of fisheries is the domain of fisheries bio-economics

The bio-economics discourse

What does the discourse say? The “ontological frame”

- Economic **subject**: “the fisherman” = utility-seeking economic man (individual)
- Economic **space**: fishing space = a container of resources available-for-appropriation
- **Subject + space**: individual, mobile, competitive utility-maximisers (fishermen) work in abstract space containing quantities of fish (the sea)
 - Where fishermen go, with whom, from where: irrelevant
 - Economic space: governed by single economic calculus

Importance of discourse: policy interventions

What it says?

- Loss of economic rent = because there is a deficiency in property relations
 - Absence of **private property**
- Common property fisheries (i.e. where community is the owner of the resource)
 - Pre-capitalist or not-yet-fully capitalist
 - Less efficient and productive
- Commons: can only aspire to become capitalist via
 - Private property
 - Management schemes to stimulate such relations

What does the discourse **do**?

- ***Displaces*** community from economic dynamic of fisheries
- ***Encloses*** fisheries in singular capitalist (private property) hegemonic dynamic

Importance of discourse! Its function

What it does?

- Academic, governmental, and international organisations have all adopted this vision of fisheries
- ...and based on it have:
 - designed data collection initiatives
 - performed scientific analyses
 - developed management strategies
- To justify and advance **privatisation** of natural resource (fisheries)

How does it do this?

- ‘Disciplining’ of community: geographic dimension
 - Fisheries: in sea vs. Community: inland (where fishers live)
 - Ports: place of community vs. Sea (resource): place essential economic dynamic unfolds
 - **“Community resides on land *while* processes of economy are at sea”** (p. 178)

Disciplining of community

- “This article is, therefore, an interrogation into the emergence and subsequent disciplining of community in fisheries resource management” (p.171)
- **QUESTION:** What does that mean?
 - Communities are made obedient (disciplined): not to even think that they may have property rights in the sea
 - Based on ideas of Foucault

Foucault: exercising power

- Power can be exercised in more **subtle** ways (than outright oppression)
- i.e. by establishing **normalised** and '**deviant**': behaviours (homosexuality), processes (democracy is inefficient), actions (stealing = crime), persons (lepers=unhealthy), places (Africa is dangerous, e.g. disease, crime), etc.

Dominant 'bio-economics' discourse

How does discourse disciplines communities? *With what mechanisms of power?*

- Economic impact analysis
 - Assess Econ + Soc impact of FMPs
 - Impacts on fishing communities: look recent econ changes
 - Measure: gross revenue by region (i.e. in terms of \$\$) = community health
 - “Location of community groups” map: in land
 - But what relation with resource?
- Social impact analysis
 - No connection ports (community residence) – sea (resource site)
 - Community: site of impact of decisions taken re: sea (e.g. enclose or not?)
 - Community: studied by anthropologists (domain: culture) no implications for NR mngm
- Public participation meetings:
 - all community issues = struggle over allocation of catch
 - community = desires of individuals to increase harvest
 - The economic domain (i.e. resource in the sea) remains strongly bounded (enclosed)

Foucault: a geographical approach

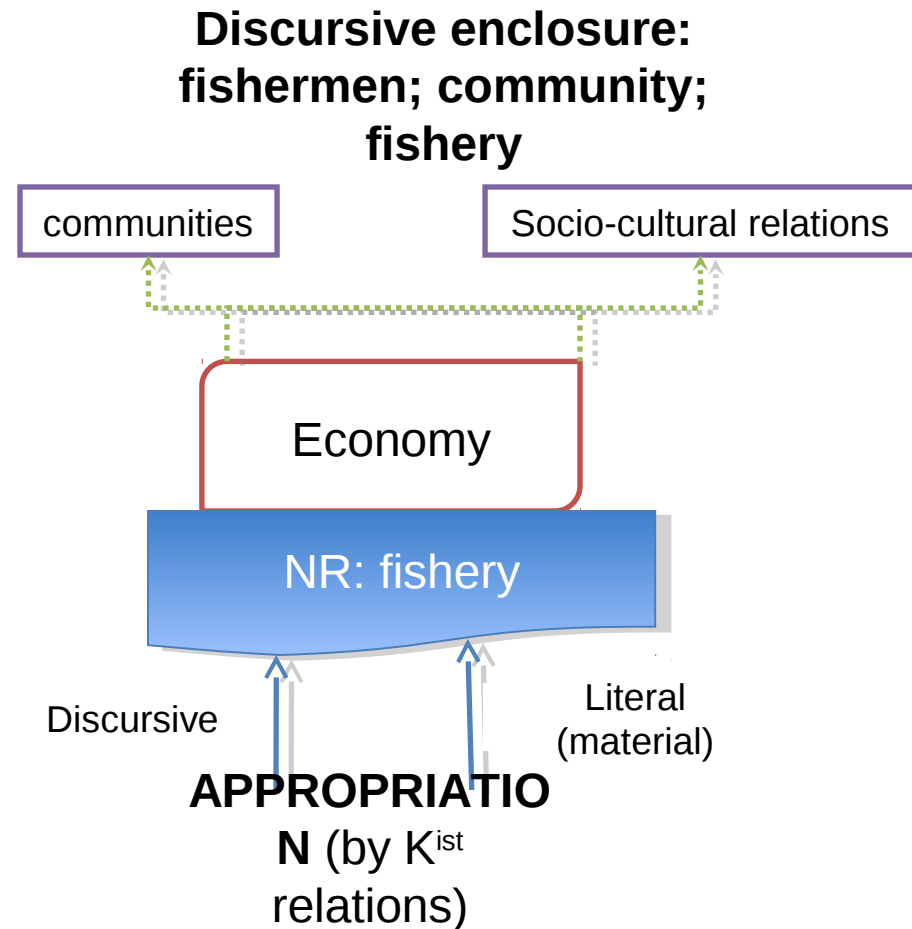
- Using EIA, SIA, and public participation meetings
 - To establish the bio-economics discourse in order to
- To shape the space of **fisheries** as
 - Container of resources available for appropriation
 - Space where utility-seeking economic men operate
- Disciplines communities
 - not to think of the sea/NR as anything else but above
 - No other policies, property rights regimes (private)

Post-structural view of power

- Power imposed through **discourse/ knowledge**
- Through the ‘construction’ of (what it means to be) a resource (e.g. the fisheries), a human group (e.g. fishermen), a space (periphery of New England), an identity (student)

The material result

- “As with past enclosures of common property, the discursive enclosure clears communities and their associated social/cultural relations from the domain of **economy** and produces a resource **open to discursive and literal appropriation**” (p. 170)



Block 2

THE LIMITS OF DOMINATION (POWER)

St. Martin, 2006

Challenging power

- “To accept communities everywhere, to see them as co-extensive with [= having the same scope as] the urban and mixed industrial environments of the Northeast (as opposed to only in isolated rural villages), threatens the dominant discourse” (p.177) [and the privatisation management regime]

Questions:

- Are there communities in New England?
- If yes/ no, what does that mean for fisheries management?
- *Exercise:*
 - Get into groups and answer question (can read text)
 - Begin: what dominant discourse says about New England communities?
 - Is there another way, i.e. apart from the dominant discourse, to find out if there are communities?

Assumptions and starting points

- St. Martin: fisheries are privatised, i.e. their ownership is being given to individuals
 - This is what he calls a “capitalist dynamic”, “capitalist relations”, etc.
 - Because ‘capitalism’ is an economic system at whose basis is the idea and practice of private ownership of the means of production (e.g. land, and NR more generally – such as fisheries)
- **QUESTION:** St. Martin thinks this is problematic: why?
 - because an alternative ownership regime, common property (different from private and state property) can be at least equally good ecologically-speaking
 - Evidence of this around world where common property regimes have sustained both human and ecological populations in very fragile and ecologically important environments (e.g. peri-desert areas in Western Africa)
- So, he tries to find out how common property is being made to look irrelevant for NR management

Back to fisheries in New England

- Dominant discourse: where can you find “fishing communities”?
 - ‘Fishing communities’ exist only in developing, pre-capitalist places
 - In a developed country such as the USA, they may only exist in peripheral places such as rural Alaska



Fishing community at Kazinga, Uganda
James Brown (Source: <http://www.new-ag.info>)



Akutan in the Aleutian islands (source: <http://jacobimages.photoshelter.com>)

Back to fisheries in New England

- Fishing communities don't exist in **mixed industrial environments** of New England
 - These are not “traditional”, pre-capitalist environments
 - To be heavily dependent upon fisheries
- There:
 - More (and industrial) economic activities take place: mixed industrial & fisheries
 - You only have some individuals fishing
 - Communities are in land
 - Commons rights to sea: unthinkable of



Source: photographersdirect.com



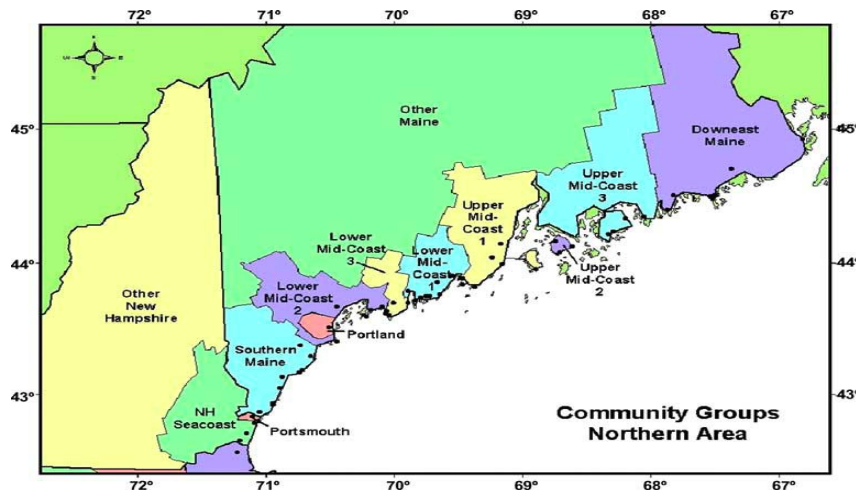
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But,

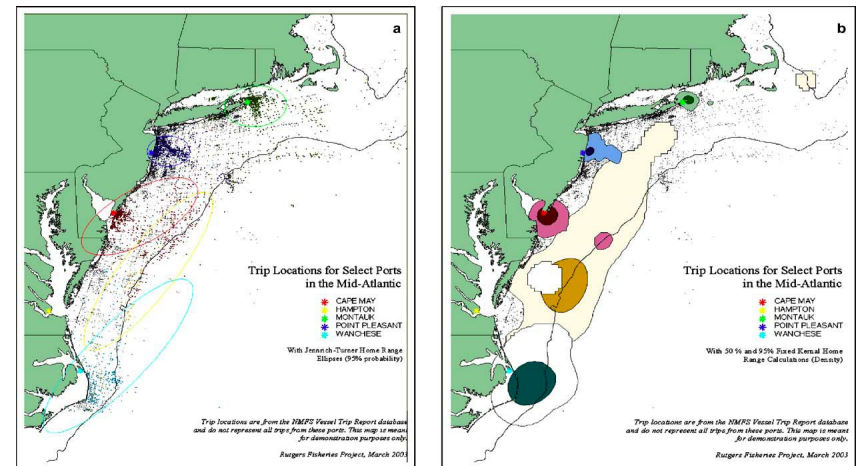
- St. Martin tells us:
 - Wait a minute
 - If you look closely, you will realise that fishing communities **also exist** in mixed, industrialised spaces such as New England!
- **QUESTION:** How does he find out this?
 - Mapping of communities in the sea

Shaping of community space: where is community constituted (St. Martin, 2006)?

In land: New England Fishery Management Council, 2001



In the sea: GIS map of community presence in sea by port of origin

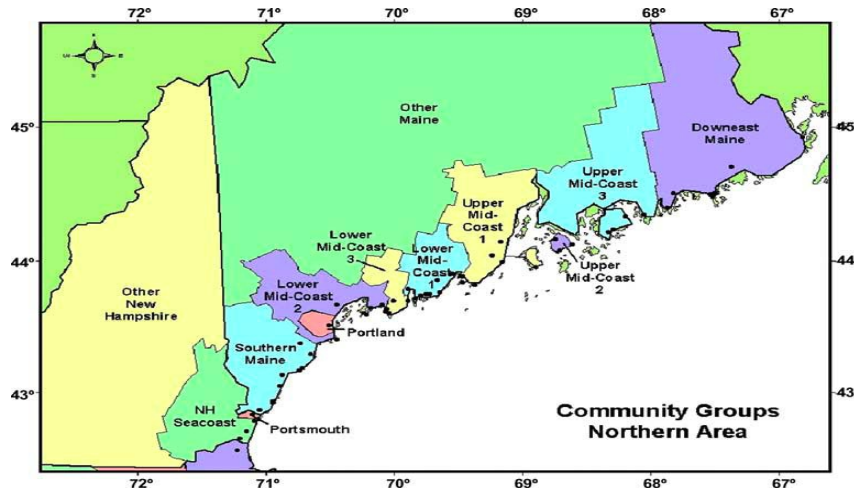


- Map 1: community in land (only individuals fishing in the sea)
- Map 2: community in the sea (fishing trips by port of origin)

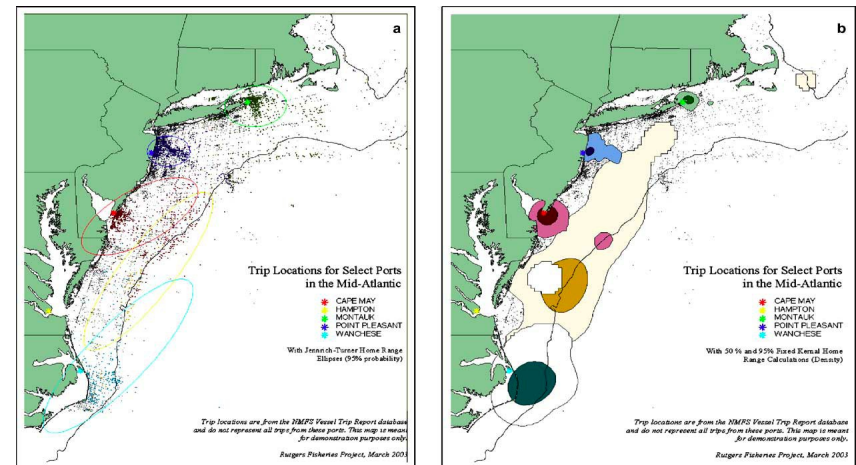
Shaping of community space: where is community constituted (St. Martin, 2006)?

Q: What does his mapping exercise achieve?

In land: New England Fishery Management Council, 2001



In the sea: GIS map of community presence in sea by port of origin



- Mapping exercise: places communities “back in the map” as potential NR owners: it maps community back in the sea resource
- Fisheries: *de facto* commons, because people of same community reproduce community via space they use + practices of reciprocity in sea
- Maps: technologies of **imposing** and **negotiating** power

Spaces of opportunity

- Mixed industrialised environment of New England
 - Not worthless, spaces where tradition has been dominated by modernity
 - Neither modern nor traditional
- Mix/ hybridity = evidence that capitalism/ modern state domination project = incomplete!
 - Space where pre-modern, alternative NR management regimes (commons) are still possible
 - State attempts to establish modern (bio-econs) regimes based upon presenting fisheries as spaces of private econ activity, community as sites of management impact, etc. through policies, events (e.g. participation) and documents are still unfinished/ unsuccessful



Copyright: Matt Wickenheiser | BDN (source: <http://bangordailynews.com>)

Studying power: the post-structuralist way

- Study ways in which social groups, resources, and spaces are **constituted/ shaped** (Paulson et al., 2005)
- How does power **operate**?
 - *Where* is power ‘located’/ operates: inside ‘the subject’
 - Power forms ‘the subject’ from inside, through rules (s)he voluntarily follows, even whose application by others (s)he monitors
 - Robbins (2007): US suburbs ‘lawn people’ voluntarily contaminating environment and themselves while complying to rule/ image of “good citizen”
- How can power be **challenged** (a main way)?
 - Study places, resources, spaces, communities
 - not for domination, but for **diversity** and as **spaces of opportunity**
 - E.g. where pre-capitalist/ modern elements (e.g. community) still exist!