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University Of Cape Town



Taken along the shoreline of St Helena Bay, these images are included to evoke the Myth of the West Coast.

## Acknowledgements

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*This study was a not a solitary effort. First and foremost I would like to acknowledge my debt to the people in the St Helena Bay who welcomed into their lives, without their kindness this dissertation would not exist. This work is dedicated to them. I would also like to thank Barbara Paterson and Astrid Jarre for their openness to different ways of thinking about the world. Special mention must go to my supervisor Lesley Green for the uncompromising rigour of her guidance, as well as for teaching me the importance of being diplomatic in one's writing. To dearest Khuthala, thank you for bearing with me through this endeavour. And finally, to my family: thank you for making me believe that I could do this.*

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## Abstract

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This dissertation uses ethnography as a means to examine how multiple-scale patterns of interaction between social and ecological systems as they manifest locally in St Helena Bay. The growing integration of the West Coast has brought rapid change in the form of industrial production, urban development and in-migration. The pressure placed on local resources by these processes has been exacerbated by the rationalisation of the local fisheries - there are fewer jobs in the formal industry and small-scale fishing rights have become circumscribed. In the neighbourhood of Laingville, historically-contingent racial categories have become reinvigorated in a context resource scarcity. An autochthonous cultural heritage related to the West Coast has become transposed onto the category of 'real' or 'bona fide' fishers. For those who claim this identity, it serves as a means to legitimate claims to resources while simultaneously excluding the claims of others. A pattern of recurring dichotomies emerges as a defining motif capturing the sense among local people that threatening elements from 'outside' are imposing themselves on the local socio-ecology. For small-scale fishers, the lack of recognition by the state of what they believe is their autochthonous right to access to the marine commons feeds an intense sense of frustration. The act of breaking 'the rules' of the state is perceived by many as an assertion of their rights and thus, of their dignity. In the case of poaching, it is seen by fishers as a means to become an active agent in one's own life, while at the same time making more money than could be made if fishing rules were adhered to. Because of these powerful symbolic and material motivations for breaking the rules, it is something that many people take pride in doing. In contradistinction to this, following the rules of the state is seen as collaborating with the state in undermining one's own socio-economic conditions, and, significantly, in negating one's birthright. For many fishers in Laingville, adhering to the rules is infused stigma.

## List of Abbreviations

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- ANC – African National Congress  
BCLME – Benguela Large Marine Ecosystem  
COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions  
GEAR – Growth Employment and Redistribution policy  
ICDP – Integrated Coastal Development Plan  
IMF – International Monetary Fund  
IRP – Interim Relief Permit  
MCM – Marine and Coastal Management  
MPA – Marine Protected Areas  
RDP – Reconstruction and Development Plan  
SADC – South African Development Community  
SAPs- Structural Adjustment Programs  
SBM – Saldhana Bay Municipality  
SFTG – Subsistence Fishers Task Group  
WCDM – West Coast District Municipality  
WTO – World Trade Organisation

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# Introduction

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## *The West Coast in Context*

The West Coast of South Africa is undergoing rapid changes associated with its growing integration into the national and global political economy. There is a sense among local people that elements from outside St Helena Bay are imposing themselves upon the area, and that these elements present a threat to the wellbeing of the ecology and people there. In St Helena Bay, urban development and the political reform and economic restructuring of the local fishing industry are primary factors in the transformation of this once relatively isolated coastal town. While the nature of these processes as they manifest in St Helena Bay are specific to the area, they nevertheless represent patterns that are evident in other locations across the world where agrarian economies are becoming ever more deeply intertwined with the global economy. St Helena Bay can thus be understood as a nexus linking national and global social and ecological dynamics to those on the local level. In a context of rising living costs and a growing rate of unemployment, the decline of St Helena Bay's fisheries has significant implications locally, both for people and for the environment.

According to the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), a now defunct developmental vision put forward by the ANC in 1994: "The primary objective of fisheries policy is the upliftment of impoverished coastal communities through improved access to marine resources and the sustainable management of those resources through appropriate strategies" (African National Congress – RDP Manifesto, 1994: 104). Similarly, the Southern African Development Community's Protocol on fisheries, requires that "State parties" should "seek a rational and equitable balance between social and economic objectives in the exploitation of living aquatic resources accessible to artisanal and small-scale fisheries" (SADC Protocol on Fisheries, Article 12). Yet, in South Africa it has been conclusively demonstrated that economics objectives have tended to take precedence over social and ecological considerations.

The reform of South Africa's fisheries has reflected the government's adoption of a neoliberal macroeconomic policy framework, and is embodied in the Marine Living Resources Act (1998). This legal document signalled a turn towards market-based marine

and fisheries management objectives where the profitability of the industry became protected in law, opening the way for established fishing companies to lobby for the continuation of their privileged access to the marine resources. They successfully achieved this by lobbying on the basis of their contribution to national prosperity, with an emphasis on the thousands of jobs that the industry provides (Van Sittert, 2002; Issacs and Nielson, 2002). In concert with the consolidation of access rights in the hands of the large-scale industry, the continuing rationalisation of the fishing industry in response to growing global competition has made employment conditions precarious.

The political and economic power of the large-scale commercial industry has placed the sector in a favourable position with regard to securing a portion of the global Total Allowable Catch. In St Helena Bay this process is evident in the drastically circumscribed access of small-scale fishers to the marine commons. Thus working class people in St Helena Bay who worked for the large-scale commercial companies, *and* those who fished for themselves on a small-scale basis, have both been negatively affected by state policies that favour a market-based approach to marine and fisheries management.

These factors - perceived to be 'from outside' St Helena Bay - are catalysing a growing tension within poorer communities like Laingville. Insiders are hostile to outsiders, who they believe to be interlopers imposing themselves on St Helena Bay and competing for material resources. Meanwhile they - the insiders who believe that they have a moral claim to the resources of the area - are excluded from benefitting. The objective of this dissertation is to explore how these tensions are connected to St Helena Bay's growing integration into a broader political economy, and, in particular, the multiple-scale processes associated with capitalism. Through ethnography, it also intends to understand how small-scale fishers are responding to a situation that some of my research participants referred to as being worse than the days of apartheid.

### *Methods*

The multidimensional nature of this study of St Helena Bay required that I use a diverse host of data sources. The principal methods for this were library-based research and fieldwork, supplemented by informal discussions with various 'knowledgeable experts'. This dissertation emerged from conversations that I had in 2007 with my supervisor Lesley Green, as well as Astrid Jarre and Barbara Patterson from the Marine Research Institute.

Some preliminary scouting followed during a three day trip up the West Coast in December 2007 with Barbara, Astrid, Rosemary Ommer and Jackie Sunde. The blend of small-scale fishing and large-scale industry in St Helena Bay suggested this as a challenging but useful site for interrogating the interaction between these sectors. Racialised tension in the St Helena Bay neighbourhood of Laingville also came to my attention during this scouting mission, and suggested another avenue of research - as this dissertation hopes to demonstrate, the racial tensions in Laingville are not unconnected to shifts within the fisheries.

With a broad plan to study the political ecology of St Helena Bay, I began by carrying out library-based research on the marine ecology of the West Coast. My selection of literature was guided by the advice of Astrid Jarre and Barbara Patterson. Discussions with Jarre and Patterson, Jackie Sunde of Masifundise, and Gary Simpson (who ran the COSATU Fishing Desk at the time), were invaluable for developing an overall understanding of fisheries management in South Africa today.

The secondary data I collected based on the experience of these experts was combined with a review of the growing body of political ecological analysis of fisheries around the world which argues that conventional approaches to managing fisheries are deeply flawed. According to the perspective, top-down, market-based marine governance facilitates excessive exploitation of resources, while dramatically altering historical relationships between coastal communities and the marine commons. These studies of fisheries interrogate issues such as property rights (Copes, 1986; Berkes, 1989; Torres; Floysand & Linkvist, 2001; Pontecorvo, 2001; Mansfield, 2004); the global political and economic integration of local fisheries (Pena-Torres, 1996, 1997, 2002; Arbo & Hersoug, 1997; Cole, 2003; Dietz et al, 2003); and local level regulatory compliance (Gezelius, 2002; McMullan & Perrier, 2002; Raekjaer, 2003).

With regard to the political analysis fishing in South Africa, I am indebted to historian Lance Van Sittert's (1993, 1994) excellent political economic analysis of fishing on the West Coast. His PhD thesis was the only social research that I could find that dealt with St Helena Bay explicitly. Research done by Hara & Nielson (2002), Isaacs & Nielson (2002), Van Sittert Croeser & Ponte (2005) Crosoer et al (2005), Branch & Clark (2006), Hauk (2006), Sowman (2006), and Witbooi, (2006) has developed a valuable picture of South Africa's fisheries. A central issue of concern for these scholars has been the reform of the

access and regulatory regime associated with South Africa's democratic transition and reinvigorated integration into the global market, and the impacts this shift has had on both the macro and micro fishing sectors. The overall picture of South Africa's fisheries painted by this research is that despite the stated redistributive intentions of fisheries 'transformation', the ANC's pro-capital stance, (evident long before GEAR) subverted the realisation of its lofty political rhetoric<sup>1</sup>. These researchers have pointed out that, with few exceptions, South Africa's fisheries reform has taken place along *race* but not *class* lines.

The basic reality of a consolidated fishery in the hands of a few vertically integrated companies persists today after established companies lobbied strenuously against radical reform and redistribution (Nielson & Hara, 2006: 44). Yet experience has shown that a privileging of "economic efficiency" leading to the subordination of "the principles of social equity and environmental sustainability" (Hauck, 2008: 638).

While this body of research provides a valuable overview, the emphasis on governance issues tends to obscure the socio-cultural beliefs and values, and individual experiences, that inform the actions taken by people involved in South Africa's fisheries. The application of the ethnographic methodology in coastal fishing communities offers a way to understand how local social dynamics "mediate between the pressures emanating from the larger society and the exigencies of the local ecosystem" (Wolf 1972, p. 202).

Various government publications were necessary for building a picture of the regional and local economy, and for assessing the socio-economic context of St Helena Bay. However, their low resolution could not account for local specificity, and only served as general overview. The South African component of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Socio-Economic Overview (2005) and Socio-Economic Baseline Survey (2006), conducted by the Environmental Evaluation Unit, one of therefore of great value. A broad study of fishing communities along the West Coast, this report demonstrates the nature of socio-economic conditions that characterises many of those communities. The accuracy of this quantitative-based research was confirmed during my ethnographic fieldwork.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bezuidenhout (2000) 'Towards global social movement unionism? Trade union responses to globalization in South Africa'

The social overview needed to be complemented by a spatial one. To this end, the patterns of urbanisation were charted using Spatial Development Plans for the Saldhana Bay Municipality (1996 - 2012). These revealed a development vision predicated on industrial production, tourism and urban expansion. Planning documents relating to urban development in St Helena Bay offered a precise representation of how much land has been enclosed for property development, though the euphemistic abstraction of the local landscape onto a map

Once I had a broad overview of St Helena Bay's sense of place, its socio-economic conditions, and an understanding of the most important dynamics animating both small and large-scale fisheries on the West Coast, I embarked on three months of ethnographic fieldwork from January until March of 2009. Ethnography is essentially a mode of social research that involves spending a prolonged period of time immersing oneself in a field site, making an intimate and detailed study of people's everyday lives. Such a close study is not possible in the space of a few days because people are generally cautious and uncomfortable in the researcher's presence. But if sufficient time is taken to develop trust and rapport, then a space is opened for the researcher's status as outsider to fade into the background. This space allows people to relax in the researcher's presence, making it possible to gain an intimate and visceral sense of people's lives. Of course one can never hope to truly attain the *emic* (insider) perspective, but ethnography does make possible insights that would be unlikely with other methods.

The principal method of ethnography is participant-observation. Kluckhohn (1940: 331) describes participant-observation as a conscious and intentional sharing of the daily experiences of the research subject, at least, as much as is possible. As an outsider, I was lucky to have someone on the inside who could allow me to participate in, and observe, the lives of the small-scale fishing community in St Helena Bay. Tannie Sara, a coloured resident from Laingville, was active in the struggle for fisher's rights, and was well-known in the community<sup>2</sup>. As my principal guide and informant, she facilitated my entry into her broad social network, giving me access to situations and conversations that would otherwise

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of 'race' is a social construct which does not find itself reflected in biological reality. That this is so is beyond debate. Yet it continues to resonate in the 'New' South Africa. Though I am aware of the historical and theoretical controversy surrounding them, I will be using these categories because they reflect the discourse utilized by my people in St Helena Bay.

have been closed to an outsider. The trust and rapport that I developed with local people was due in large part to her.

Most days then, were spent accompanying Tannie Sara or her family members as they went about their daily activities, or in their leisure time. While participating in the daily activities of Tannie Sara or her extended family members, I would interact spontaneously with them, or the people that we had gone to visit. If appropriate, I would ask questions related to my research, and would take notes if given permission. If it seemed that taking out my notebook would clearly interrupt the flow of conversation or action, then I would listen and record the events when I got home. However, there were many times where people were not amenable to being interrogated by a nosy researcher. On these occasions I would allow my researcher persona to fade into the background and I would simply interact or observe, continuing to build rapport. While putting aside my research agenda could be seen in some social research circles as an inefficient use of my time in the field, it allowed me to develop relationships with people and to earn their trust and respect. Once people in Tannie Sara's social circle (her immediate and extended family and friends), got to know me, they began to open up to me as a person and not as a researcher. There were many times when people revealed themselves and their vulnerabilities in ways that disarmed me.

While Tannie Sara played a very important role during my fieldwork, I had to ensure that I kept a critical distance from her interpretation of life in St Helena Bay. At times it was difficult to engage with other individuals in the community because of the gate-keeping role that she had assumed. The trickiest issue to negotiate was speaking to black people in Laingville. This was particularly the case because of the highly-charged tensions that exist between the coloured and black communities here. My association with Tannie Sara made me reluctant to approach black fishers because I was worried that this could arouse suspicion and possibly inflame pre-existing tensions. Tannie Sara also had an interest in giving me a particular interpretation of the competing claims of black and coloured people for the same resources. She was reticent to arrange for me to meet the black residents that she knew. Thus the views of black people in St Helena Bay are absent – this is the main gap in this dissertation.

The fact that I had a car meant that I became a taxi-driver for Tannie Sara's social network. Using my discretion, I would also pick up people on the side of the road who were hitchhiking. My car thus proved to be an asset and I was able to learn much on the long drives

when there was nothing to do but talk. However, while people became 'captive' research participants who felt obliged to answer questions because I was helping them out, I would never force my agenda on them. While I gave people lifts without charge, they would sometimes offer to pay me for longer journeys. If it seemed appropriate, I would accept, though I usually tried to refuse payment. This was a tricky issue to negotiate for me: I wanted to help and felt uneasy about taking people's money, but I had to be careful not be taken advantage of because I would lose the respect of the people whom I was trying to build a relationship with. This dilemma points to the important fact that ethnographic fieldwork is a game of give and take. There were times when I really didn't feel like giving someone a lift, and I felt that I was being used, but then I had to empathise with my research participants, who were giving of themselves by opening their lives to me. The challenge is to navigate through this sensitive terrain in a way that builds rather than erodes trust and rapport.

In addition to participant-observation with Tannie Sara's social network in Laingville, I also spent time on my own in St Helena Bay and the surrounds, engaging spontaneously and informally with people who seemed amenable to conversation. This helped me to build a more comprehensive picture of life in St Helena Bay as seen by people who lived there. I also conducted eight semi-structured interviews with six residents of St Helena Bay, and one with an MCM director. During these interviews I would begin by explaining in broad terms what I was interested in, and would then allow the interviewee to lead me to what they thought I should know, all the while making notes. I would only intervene if they diverted significantly off the topic, though these diversions were often useful in and of themselves. This allowed the research process to be guided to some degree by the research participants. Though there is a place for formal and structured interviews, my approach was a highly qualitative one. During my fieldwork I wanted to grasp the feeling of life in St Helena Bay, as it was lived by people there. Asking directed questions about something as ineffable as this can 'lead' the respondent to answer in certain way - the picture they paint is often contrived for the benefit of the interviewer.

Though it was my original intention to do some fieldwork in the fishing factories, it was difficult to gain access. As soon as I mentioned that I was student from UCT, my requests to visit would be met with evasive tactics. I was either told that the relevant person was in a meeting and would call me back, or I was told that they did not take people on tours. When I followed up on people who had not returned my calls my persistence was rewarded with

further evasion. I understand that the fishing industry is placed under a great deal of scrutiny by researchers of various kinds, and that my presence as a social researcher from a university may be unwelcome, however, given more time I believe I could have been permitted to visit one of the factories. As it was, I did not want to force my way in or place the manager concerned in a difficult position. To gather information about the factories I had to rely on secondary documents published by the companies that owned them, and on the verbal data provided by research participants.

Another key method employed during my ethnographic fieldwork was observation. For the first month I stayed at a campsite situated right on the beach in a part of town that was generally only frequented by local people. This provided a good introduction to day-to-day life in St Helena Bay. My simple living quarters (consisting of a small tent, a fold up camping table and chair, and a gas cooker), also turned out to be useful for building rapport among Tannie Sara's social network. We had a braai for her fiftieth birthday at my campsite and people became much more at ease with me, Buks told me: "I like your style! You live just like us, not like the other white people ... I like it!"

I walked around on my own a lot. My walks would take me along the shoreline, and through the various neighbourhoods of St Helena Bay I would also ride my bicycle around the surrounding area. This allowed me a much closer study than would have been possible had I been in a car. During my excursions I would simply observe the place and the people, taking photos if appropriate. I followed back roads and side paths that took me into secret spaces not usually frequented by outsiders. This was an excellent way to get beyond the tourism-brochure version of St Helena Bay to get a more accurate picture of what the place was all about.

During these jaunts, I became acutely aware of the high rate of urban expansion in St Helena Bay. I wanted to explore this in my fieldwork but found local estate agents were unwilling to talk about the myriad housing developments that now span the entire 10km length of St Helena Bay. Again, my position as a social researcher from UCT made people uneasy. At the municipal offices in St Helena Bay (which smelt overwhelmingly of cigarette smoke), I was told in a hostile tone to "go to the library". My visit to the SBM planning manager in Vredenburg was met with slightly more sophisticated evasion, he deflected my inquiries by proffering a host of planning maps and documents. The overwhelming impression created by this evasion was of a veil of silence. As with fish factory managers,

their reticence, to speak with me was therefore understandable: they were reluctant to answer uncomfortable questions posed by an outsider.

## Chapter outline

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The first chapter begins by setting the scene. The social and ecological aspects of St Helena Bay are described, with a brief discussion of St Helena Bay's integration into broader political and economic processes. After this, the theoretical framework for analysing these changes in St Helena Bay is presented. The chapter concludes with a description of the fisheries in St Helena Bay. Chapter two will introduce the reader to daily life in St Helena through ethnography; the intention is convey the sense of socio-economic pressure that many people were experiencing. The third chapter explores how the place-identity of the West Coast is being harnessed to legitimise claims to resources. It traces how this process acts as a mechanism to include some while excluding others. In the case of St Helena Bay historically-contingent race categories are being revitalized in the competition for scarce resources. The fourth chapter examines how fishers who believe they a legitimate claim to the access of local marine resources respond to the explosion of regulations governing their fishing activities. It argues that breaking or following the rules of the state has become imbued with the powerful symbolic associations of pride and stigma.





Images on pages 12 were taken around St Helena Bay. The images on this page were taken of farms behind St Helena Bay during the summer.

# Chapter One

## Setting the Scene: The Myth of the West Coast

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The West Coast is a dry and desolate place. It's isolated coastal plains and sparse Sandveld fynbos vegetation provides an austere backdrop to life here. The Atlantic Ocean is a cool and constant presence. Compared to a desert by some early European explorers the blend of a hot, semi-arid landscape, and an isolated frigid ocean, gives the West Coast a singular atmosphere. This ecological atmosphere, coupled with thematic ideas of *Wes Kus* (West Coast) culture, constitutes what could be called 'the Myth of die Wes Kus': a particular flavour of socio-cultural life – 'a cultural landscape' – that has emerged from the historical interaction of people and the local environment.

The flat coastal plains of the West Coast used to be covered by the Atlantic Ocean, resulting in porous, sandy and nutrient-poor soil. In addition, the region experiences a low rainfall. Though the West Coast is not an area ideally suited to agriculture, much of the West Coast consists of huge open expanses of commercial farmland, dotted with maize, sheep, ostriches and cattle. These farms abut the coastline, and look so dry in summer that it is difficult to imagine that anything can be yielded from the barren-looking soil. It is only through complex irrigation schemes and large quantities of chemicals that commercial agriculture transpires on the West Coast.

Except for the winter months when the *NoordWes* (North-Wester) blows, the prevailing wind comes from the South-East. Brisk and cool, this wind is a central actor in the drama of life on the West Coast. Its near-constant presence is a part of everyday life here. In the summer, it can howl for weeks at a time, covering everything in dust, turning a simple chore like hanging up washing into an impossible endeavour. The South-Easter's effects can also be felt on a more subtle level of subjective experience. The effect of a howling gale for days on end creates an unsettling atmosphere - it is unrelenting and inescapable. A steely determination (*deursettingsvermoë*) is thus required to resist the effects of this wind on one's peace of mind.

Yet it is also true that the South-Easter is a central ecological dynamic responsible for the 'Benguela Upwelling' (O'Toole *et al* 2005). This oceanic phenomenon brings a concentrated flow of nutrients from Sub-Antarctic waters to the surface along Africa's south-western seaboard and is an important centre of plankton production that supports marine species biodiversity and biomass on a global level (Shannon & O'Toole, 1999). The bounty sustained by the Benguela Upwelling's confluence of marine and terrestrial dynamics is central to fisheries of the West Coast. This plentiful marine-life has historically been a vital source of the calories necessary for life, as well as offering a chance to earn money.

The Myth of the West Coast includes not only the place but also the people, and provides a poignant illustration of the resonance between culture and environment (see Sauer, 1925; Jordan-Bychkov *et al*, 1995; Schein, 1997). The biophysical reality of what Escobar (1999) describes as *prediscursive* and *presocial*, forms the 'raw material' upon which human symbolic processes are inscribed. Perceptions of the natural environment are filtered through the medium of language and material experience (Harvey, 1996: 49). Hence normative conceptions of the culture of the West Coast held by both *inkommers* (people coming from the outside) and *agterblywendes* (those left behind), tend to reflect the ecology of the place - these conceptions generally include ideas of rugged-toughness, determination, beauty, simplicity and a lack of pretension.

When I asked a life-long St Helena Bay fisherman about the reasons for the droves of people who now arrive there 'in search of leisure', he told me that "the West Coast is still untamed ... you can still be a human being here", meaning, in other words, that one is able to live an unhurried and easy-going life in close relation to the natural environment. Through a shared history of life on an isolated and barren stretch of coastline, people have adapted to their environment to make a life for themselves. Over time, social life developed into an identifiable constellation of cultural elements that I refer to as the Myth of the West Coast. Local fishing legend Johnny Eigelaar (1998: 1) gave a lyrical description of Myth of the West Coast when he describes the similarities between people on the West Coast, and the hardy *fyntbos*: "Not much to look at from the outside, but tough and determined to keep living in an inhospitable coastal environment".

Yet it appears that the Myth of the West Coast is being diluted. As a 'regional growth node' and the largest industrial centre along the West Coast", the Saldhana Bay Municipality (SBM) is becoming increasingly wedded to multiple-scale political and economic processes

associated with late capitalism in the 'New South Africa'<sup>3</sup>. These changes are bringing a newfound urgency to the discourse of the Myth of the West Coast. Normative conceptions of this culture now exist as a kind of heritage capital that is claimed by different actors in different contexts. Efforts to market the region to tourists and property investors are based on a 'brand identity' that co-opts the myth of the West Coast, while small-scale fishers emphasize their claims to this heritage in their attempts to secure fishing quotas. Industrial production and in-migration continue to add pressure to infrastructure and resources.



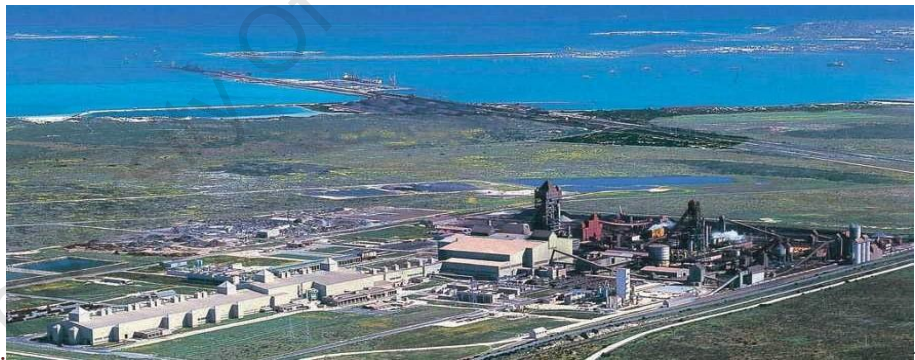
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<sup>3</sup> Socio-Economic Profile of the West Coast District Municipality - Chapter 5: Saldhana Bay Municipality (2006: 101)



Previous Images: *Change from outside.* 1 to 3 - Urban development in St Helena Bay; 4 - Saldhana iron ore terminal; 5 - Iron ore jetty; 6 - Loading steel coils for export; 7 - Aerial view of Saldhana Steel processing plant; 8 - Namakwa Sands Cement factory (images 4-8 courtesy of the West Coast District Municipality)

*St Helena Bay: an atypical West Coast town*

The name St Helena Bay can be misleading because it refers both to a town and to a coastal bay. The bay of St Helena has historically been known as *Die Agterbaai* (the bay at the back), denoting its position behind the more strategically valuable Saldhana Bay which is situated on the southern side of the Vredenburg Peninsula. *Die Agterbaai* itself begins in the West at Cape St Martin and flows east until the Berg River mouth at Veldrift. From here the coastline moves north for about 100 kilometres to Baboon Point at the edge of Elands Bay. Cartographically speaking, this is all part of St Helena Bay. However it is the *town* that I will be referring to when I use the name 'St Helena Bay'. According to municipal demarcations, the town itself begins at Laingville in the south-east, and continues through to Shelley Point and Britannia Bay in the West. A single main road runs parallel to the coast from east to west for 12 kilometres, on the right of the road lies the Atlantic Ocean, on the left the land rises up to form the St Helena Bay Hills.



A Bird's Eye View (from the top) - The town of St Helena Bay from the hills above Steenberg's Cove looking west; looking west into Sandy Bay Harbour; looking east down into the middle of St Helena Bay with the harbour in the background.

As with the SBM broadly, change is coming quickly to St Helena Bay. When once it was the gold rush-like lure of the fishing industry boom, now it is urban residential development and tourism that offer a new road to El Dorado for those with sufficient capital. Just like before, people from outside the area are being drawn to St Helena Bay for economic reasons. The rampant and unrestrained development of upmarket housing estates is overwhelming - in every direction, myriad billboards scar the landscape. The “spreading development of exclusive coastal holiday resorts and holiday homes” has “effectively limited access to the coast by locals”<sup>4</sup>. In 1980 there were 87 erven, in 2008 there were 6821 and in 2009 there were “just over 8000”<sup>5</sup>. Much of St Helena Bay has been carved up already. There are entire prospective neighbourhoods consisting only of roads and streetlights. Here weeds grow over the pavements and tumble weeds roll by while speculative developers wait for people to buy plots and build houses. This recent upsurge in urban development undermines - and at times destroys - the very character and atmosphere that is itself used as a selling point to entice stressed-out city-dwellers.

The mirage of greener pastures on the West Coast has also attracted large numbers of people to St Helena Bay in search of employment, particularly from the Eastern and Western Cape. Yet life for many inkommers *and* long-time residents of St Helena Bay is such that it subverts the image of the West Coast as a ‘land of opportunity’. The increasing presence of the state (in the form of Marine and Coastal Management), is another relatively recent ‘imposition from without’. Because of the regulatory explosion governing the actions of marine-resource users, fishers in St Helena Bay cite a growing awareness of the state’s ‘disciplinary presence’, even in the physical absence of officialdom.

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<sup>4</sup> Saldhana Bay Municipality Integrated Development Plan – 1998.

<sup>5</sup> The first two figures come from the 2008 SBM Spatial Planning Document: Erven Per Town. The final figure was sourced from a discussion with a planning official at the Vredenburg Municipal Office.

### *Conceptual and Theoretical Framework*

To explore these processes of change occurring in St Helena Bay, this dissertation employs the conceptual framework of political ecology; the fundamental premise of which is the existence of a co-evolutionary relationship between humans and the environment. Social anthropologist Arturo Escobar defines political ecology as “the study of the manifold articulations of history and biology and the cultural mediations through which such articulations are necessarily established” (1999: 1). It is thus a multidisciplinary endeavour that incorporates different analytical perspectives from across the natural and social sciences in order to understand the interaction between humans and the environment.

Patterns of interaction between human and ecological systems are so complex and intertwined, that the notion of a dichotomy between humans and nature becomes untenable, but at present there is still “no single universally accepted way of formulating the linkages between social systems and natural systems” (Berkes & Folke, 1998: 9). The challenge of conceptualising the interconnections between social and ecological phenomena implies a similar challenge for methodology. Difficulties arise when trying to incorporate and apply these different perspectives. This challenge is weighed down by history, and stems primarily from academia’s European intellectual heritage, where academic disciplines have developed as separate and distinct from one another, each with their own coherent logic (Hountondji, 2002; Wallerstein, 1975).

By drawing from across the natural and social sciences political ecology aims to develop a new way of conceptualising the culture/nature relationship. This has been the cause of some controversy between ecologists and humanists because of the way that it unsettles epistemological boundaries. Many ecologists ask: “where is the ecology in political ecology?” (Walker, 2005: 74). This is really a question about what the word ‘ecology’ means - should it include humans, or should they be excluded from ecological analysis? This depends on who’s asking the question. Bruno Latour (2004) has argued that we should go beyond the question of a single, universal notion of what ‘nature’ is, and rather to think of how our ideas of ‘nature’ are contingent upon specific historical and cultural processes. Perhaps we should heed the words of geographer David Harvey: “all ecological projects (and arguments) are simultaneously political-economic projects (and arguments) and vice versa. Ecological arguments are never socially neutral, any more than socio-political arguments are ecologically neutral” (Harvey, 1998: 182). This emerges most clearly when

considering how 'natural' phenomena are constitutive to the formation of identity as demonstrated in the Myth of the West, and the political and ecological implications that follow from this, such as inflamed racial tension and ecologically unsound fishing activities.

Thinking in terms of *systems* offers a way to analyse the rhizomatic pathways that connect social and biological phenomena across time and space, according to political ecologists Berkes & Folke (1998: 8): the "systems approach broadly refers to a holistic view of components and the interrelationships among the components of the system". It represents the paradigm shift among theorists from across the social and natural sciences: *from* the strictures of a Newtonian conception of the world constituted by isolated and separate parts interacting in a linear fashion according to fixed rules; to one that recognises the dynamic and non-linear interconnectivity of social and ecological phenomena (see Capra, 1983:52).

Of particular importance to this dissertation are world systems theory and ecosystem theory. World systems theory provides a hermeneutical toolkit consisting of '*systems*,' '*flows*' and '*linkages*'; dynamic patterns of interaction that integrate different geopolitical units into *a world system* that is defined in terms of unequal relations of power, within and between these units. Ecosystems theory understands an *ecosystem* to be: "any unit that includes all of the organisms (ie: the "community") in a given area interacting with the physical environment so that a flow of energy leads to clearly defined trophic structure, biotic diversity, and material cycles (ie: exchange of materials between living and nonliving parts) within the system" (Odum, 1971: 10). Key concepts harnessed from ecosystems theory are 'patterns of interaction'; 'feedback'; 'outcomes'; 'non-linearity' and 'unpredictability'.

It can be seen that biological ecology excludes humans from its conception of an ecosystem. However, political ecologists like Berkes & Folke (1999), in concert with practical and experiential forms of knowledge (including many indigenous or traditional cosmologies), recognise that social systems are a part of the ecosystem, rather than separate from it. In support of this view, Ommer et al (2005) focus on the *health of socio-ecological systems* to study coastal fishing communities in Canada. Their conceptual framework provides a useful guide for the analytical integration of humans and the natural environment in St Helena Bay. From this conceptual and theoretical framework it is possible to conceive of St Helena Bay as a socio-ecological nexus linking local ecological and social dynamics to those on a regional and global scale through dynamic and non-linear patterns of interaction.

Conceptualising the interrelationship between people and nature requires a historical consideration of cultural, political and economic forms of social organisation through which that interrelationship is ordered. As the anthropologist Eric Wolf (1990: 587) reminds us: individuals do not inhabit “self-enclosed and self-sufficient universes”, rather they exist within webs of meaning, and within political and economic systems that constrain and enable thought and action in relation to nature. These symbolic and material systems are not apolitical.

Capitalism has been the primary mode of articulation between history and biology since the industrial revolution, and continues to facilitate a process of “freeing-up” nature from the multiple social ties that bind it to local social systems, making it available for ‘rational exploitation’ in the pursuit of economic growth (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004: 275). In this process, nature becomes a *fictitious commodity* that can be given a market value just like a hammer or a nail. Soil, water and air (not to mention people) are treated as unlimited and expendable, as though we could produce them ourselves (See Polanyi, 1944). Thus, the intellectual foundation of the industrial capitalist system of production is characterised by the “failure to distinguish between income and capital where this distinction matters most” (Schumacher, 1973: 11). Nature has been reduced to a *means* for capitalist production, when in fact it constitutes the very *conditions* upon which that production depends. This leads McCarthy (2004: 329) to argue that “capitalism tends to undermine the ecological condition of its own reproduction”<sup>6</sup>.

The present stage of capitalism (commonly referred to as neoliberal, or free-market capitalism), has brought a renewed vigour to the enclosure of nature for ‘rational exploitation’. The free-market economy administered by ‘multilateral’ institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation represents a movement towards a global system of governance. These institutions are tasked with ‘liberalising trade’ by overcoming ‘hindrances’ to the free flow of trade and finance. For example, the WTO institutional framework includes ‘investor protection’ provisions that allow foreign investors to lay a charge of ‘regulatory takings’ against a state, if that state enacted any regulations that they perceive to have undermined the value of their investment. According to legal scholar Richard Epstein, “virtually any reduction in the use or value of private property due to regulatory action”, can be defined as ‘indirect

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<sup>6</sup> See also Polanyi (1944) *The Great Transformation*.

expropriation' or 'measures tantamount to expropriation' (Epstein in McCarthy, 2001: 331). Signatory states to the WTO are liable for the loss of current or foreseeable investment value claimed by investors because of 'regulatory takings'. In other words, company shareholders can indirectly influence the way that a state formulates national policy. It appears that neoliberal trade mechanisms such as investor protection represent a "major redistribution of power between capital and states" ... "in the history of this policy, then, we see a concrete example of neoliberal rescaling of governance to escape national-scale environmental constraints" (McCarthy, 2003: 332).

### *South Africa in the era of neoliberalism*

Though most developing countries who have adopted had Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) have had them imposed by the World Bank and IMF, in South Africa, the process of economic globalisation through neoliberal restructuring has been "internally generated by the state and the major business groups that dominate the economy" (Carmody, 2002: 255). The work of economists like Patrick Bond (2001, 2004), Ashwin Desai (2002), Margaret Legum (2002) and Richard Peet (2002) demonstrate how neoliberal market imperatives have defined the country's overall development vision, encouraging the creation of policies that favour economic growth as the means to social and ecological well-being. The adherence to economic orthodoxy issued from WTO/IMF/World Bank complex constrains the ability of the ANC government to implement the progressive changes that characterises much of its rhetoric.

Yet these organisations and institutions are made of individuals acting in particular times and places. While structural analysis is valuable as a general guide to explore how geographically-specific social processes are influenced by those on a broader level, they tend to overemphasise broad generalities while obscuring the importance of "real people doing real things" (Ortner, 1984: 114). From an anthropological perspective, local specificities like individual agency and subjectivity is lost to an analytical orientation that understands local social phenomena only in terms of a preconceived model of 'the global system' (Agrawal, 2005: 210)<sup>7</sup>. In so doing the thoughts and actions of individuals become devalued - subjects become objects. Nevertheless, thinking in terms of the power of political and economic structures is necessary, therefore an analytical balance must be struck between "the

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<sup>7</sup> See also Van Sittert's (1993: 425) critique of structural analysis in 'Making Like America: the industrialization of the Helena Bay Fisheries 1936-1956'

meaningful and the material” (Paulson et al, 2005: 26). In his response to Sherry Ortner’s critique of structural analysis, Eric Wolf (1990: 587) writes that, indeed, these modes of inquiry do

touch on a lot of what goes on in the real world, that constrains and inhibits, or promotes what people do, or cannot do ... the notion of structural power is useful precisely because it allows us to delineate how the forces of the world impinge upon the people we study ... There is no gain in a false romanticism that pretends that ‘real people doing real things’ inhabit self-enclosed and self-sufficient universes.

One way to negotiate this tension between, local and global; structure and agency; and between the symbolic and the material, is the theoretical idea of place as it is used by cultural geographers (see Agnew, 1989). ‘Place’ here is not to be confused with ‘location’ or ‘community’, rather it is a “dynamic arena that is both socially constituted and constitutive of the social” (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000: 27). Oakes argues that it is “the geographical expression of the interactions between individual action and abstract historical processes ... such action is derived from linkages across time and space which makes ‘place’ more of a dynamic web than a specific site or location” (Oakes, 1997: 510).

With place as its focus, this study conceives of St Helena Bay as a socio-ecological nexus situated within a global web, connecting social and ecological processes across multiple scales in a locally-specific pattern of interaction. This specificity of this pattern is determined in large part, by social and ecological conditions in St Helena Bay. St Helena Bay as *place* links the immediate agency and meaningful identity of the local lived reality with the abstract reality of regional, national and global structures and processes (Oakes 1997). In the case of St Helena Bay, place becomes the source of the cultural identity associated with the Myth of the West Coast. This autochthonous myth and identity serves to legitimate the claims of local people to local resources. Among fishers in St Helena Bay, it is also the justification for breaking laws that they believe do not recognise this right.

### *The political ecology of the fishing industry*

The local fisheries provides the entry point for studying the place of St Helena Bay as a socio-ecological system, and is an important thread in the web linking local processes to those occurring on a wider dimension. Fishing in St Helena Bay is part of the global fishing industry rests upon unpredictable and non-linear marine ecosystems. The volatility of large-scale fisheries is also due to the scale of industrial fishing and its unsurpassed

'efficiency' in hunting fish. The stupendous amount of resources that have been channelled into developing the art of catching fish has culminated in a global industrial fishery capable of operating in the roughest and most remote seas for months on end (see Finlayson & McCay, 1998). In theory, this Promethean optimism leads to an increasingly 'rational' and 'efficient' exploitation of natural resources. However, a number of scholars demonstrate that the development of industrial-scale fishing has led to the overexploitation of numerous fish stocks (Schurman, 1996; Camhi, 1996; Myers, R.A, Hutchings, J. H. 1997; Pauly *et al.* et al, 1998; Finlayson & McCay, 1998; Taylor, 1999; Jackson *et al*, 2001; Lange, G.L. 2003; Myers & Worm, 2003; Neis & Kean, 2003; FAO, 2005; Branch and Clark, 2006; Pontecorvo, 2008).

Though national fishing industries have historically interrelated through various international trading networks<sup>8</sup>, several developments over the last 30 years have marked a new stage for commercial fishing. A pivotal moment in the development of an increasingly integrated global fishing industry was the establishment of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)<sup>9</sup> in the 1970s, whereby the disaggregation of the marine commons facilitated the progressive global integration of national fishing industries (Arbo & Hersoug, 1997: 122). The attendant deregulation of global trade administered by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is of paramount importance here because of the degree to which its 'free-market' principles and 'investor protection' mechanisms undermine policies aimed at socio-ecological protection<sup>10</sup>. With neoliberal deregulation, national fishing industries now have to compete with other national fisheries on a global market. The South African government's adoption of 'market-based' fisheries reform, which has disenfranchised many coastal fishing communities, cannot be understood without reference to the exigencies of neoliberalism, and bodies like the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation

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<sup>8</sup> See Lees (1968); and Van Sittert (Reform then and now)...

<sup>9</sup> See United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea - Part V ([http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part5.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part5.htm))

<sup>10</sup> See McCarthy (2004) 'Privatizing conditions of production: Trade agreements as neoliberal environmental governance' and John Jackson (1998) 'The World trade Organisation: Constitution and jurisprudence'.

### *Fishing in St Helena Bay*

It is fair to claim that, for many residents, their relationship with the sea has been ‘mediated’ through the fishing companies and their factories. Van Sittert observes that “on the West Coast ... the fishermen had long lost all access to the means of production and existed as a debt-bound proletariat (1994: 32). The presence of industrial fishing and processing has thus shaped the social character of *Die Agterbaai*, setting it apart from its smaller neighbours like Paternoster or Elands Bay. A Stompneusbaai factory manager observed that “those people” from Paternoster and Elands Bay were “real fishermen” who had “a direct connection with the sea”; while in St Helena Bay “people have always worked for the factories”. The story of Geraldine and Buks is described below. It is representative of the experiences that other people recounted to me about working in the factories.

Sitting in their one roomed ‘RDP’ house in Laingville, with a small dog sat on the couch and the TV playing to an empty ‘bedroom’ that was partitioned off by a large sheet, Geraldine and Buks told me about working in St Helena Bay’s factories. Geraldine (27) had worked in pilchard canning from 1998 until 2005, while Buks (28), a boiler-maker, had worked in various factories for the last twelve years.

#### *Conditions inside the factories*

Factory work can be tough. Geraldine told me how cold it can get in the canning factory where the women sort through the fish ensuring that only those of sufficient quality make it into the cans. “It’s very cold! Especially on the night shift. we worked with gloves but the cold comes right through. It’s actually exhausting because I worked for eleven hours. A Person gets tired because you stand upright for so long. Sometimes when we worked, the hands! Man the hands are cold, swollen thick with the cold!” In the boiler-section of the fishmeal plant, mostly worked by men, the temperatures are equally intense. A factory manager related that during production, temperatures often rise above 40 degrees Celsius. The noise of heavy machinery is also loud and relentless. Both mentioned that there were times that they enjoyed working in the factories: “it was nice to work in the factories, to experience what there is to experience there ...it’s good to see it man!” Despite these positive points, both Geraldine and Buks emphasized the monotony of factory work, as Buks pointed out: “But later, you get used to it, it’s the same thing again and again”.

The south-easterly shift in sardine - from the West Coast to the Agulhas Bank has had direct effect on the quantity of fish coming to St Helena Bay's factories. Buks claimed that: "the sardine is becoming scarce!" This has also impacted on the quality of fish landed. For women like Geraldine working in the heart of the factories, the result of this shift in the quality could be seen in the fish that ended up on their sorting tables:

"When the boat comes in with the fish, how does it look? The cats won't even eat it, because the stomach is broken up, that's not quality fish! And the fish are small man! The batches of fish that the factories bring in now, and those fish have unborn fish inside them ... we have to search hard, scratching around like you're going through garbage, you've got to really search to find the bigger fish".

### *Working each other away*

As mentioned, there is a perception among workers like Buks and Geraldine that the conditions of employment in the factories have deteriorated. Geraldine, cited a common refrain that I heard many times in various contexts:

"Now the workers have had to become strong, they have had to fight for their work ... and the factories are becoming strict, and the people are working each other away. It wasn't always like that ... but now ... I'm not actually sure what happened there ... now the people have begun to *work each other away* (*werk mekaar weg*), I didn't enjoy working anymore"

Geraldine recounted the example of the *pinkdoeks* (pink caps) who supervised the ladies working at the tables. The *pinkdoek's* job prospects depend upon being able to extract the highest level of production from the ladies at the table: "She's the lady ... she wears a pink cap ... who keeps an eye on your table, to make sure that production runs smoothly. They also work you away! Because they work with the men in the office, they work you away!"

The perception of a worsening in the relationship among workers and managers in St Helena Bay's factories has to be seen in historical context. In the past, it was common in the past for fish processing factories to be established along with "its own 'community'"<sup>11</sup>. Most of the work force lived together around the factory and there was thus a relative sense of solidarity and community in each factory. The pattern of labour relations was similar to that found on farms across the Western Cape, and could be described as one of paternalism.

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<sup>11</sup> As Oom Johannes, a lifelong resident of St Helena Bay told me.

Andries Du Toit (1992; 1993) has described paternalism on commercial farms in the Western Cape's as an implicit moral economy, where the community of workers on a particular farm (or in a particular factory) considered themselves as one big family, with the farmer (or boss) as the father figure.

Du Toit describes the phenomenon of the 'gaze', whereby the interests of each individual worker depend upon being in the farmer's favour (though in this case it is not the gaze of the farmer but the gaze of successive levels of management). Workers are placed into a situation of vulnerability as their conditions of employment are uncertain because they depend on the capriciousness of their superiors. Paternalism opens a space for unscrupulous individuals to further their own interests at the expense of their fellow workers by assuming "an undeserved position of trust with the master" (Du Toit, 1992: 17). On the farms, this phenomenon is expressed through the character of the *Piempër* - in the factories of SHB, it is encapsulated in the expression: to *werk mekaar weg* (to work each other away).

Today, this is becoming more prevalent. As the industry has restructured, jobs have become more precarious. Ommer *et al* (2007: 197) describe this process as "the movement towards more contingent, casual, flexible, and part-time labour". At the same time workers have also become more vulnerable because of the general lack of employment opportunities outside of the industry, as Buks put it: "you know you can't just leave your job because you haven't got other work ... work is scarce, really scarce ... Here along the West Coast, if you don't work in a fish factory, where are you going to work?". Caught between precarious work inside the factories, and a lack of work outside of them, the competition for jobs has become more intense and more people seem to be working each other away, dissolving the last vestiges of the moral economy of paternalism.

Yet in spite of the growing threat of unemployment, some people continue to assert their agency, reminding us that people will always find a way to express their agency in the face of overwhelming structural constraints. After almost two months without production, a manager in one of St Helena Bay's factories expressed exasperation at the reluctance of employees to come back to work one weekend when a boat full of sardines delivered its load to the factory jetty: "I just can't understand it!" The marine scientists whom I was accompanying on this occasion also expressed a desire to understand why people turned away work when their socio-economic situation seemed to dictate that they should seize the chance to earn some money.

It seems to me that the manager and scientists' struggle to comprehend the refusal to work was based in part, on a conception of people as rational individuals who always seek to maximise material gain. However, this economistic logic does not account for the complexity of human behaviour, nor for the importance beliefs and values that supersede economics. Something that Buks said hints at an explanation for the reluctance of employees to return to work. He described how communication from management to factory workers was often in the form of a demand and not a request. This inevitably led to dissatisfaction and frustration among both parties as many workers reacted 'antagonistically': "Come and *ask* us, don't *tell* us ... we will willingly oblige ... you come in screaming wildly, you are also human, you've also got a soul you see. If someone asks politely then you they will get a dignified answer". For lower level workers living in a context of precarious employment, one of the last means left for them to express political power and assert their own interests, is by saying "No". There is more at stake here than money: the reluctance of factory workers to go to work when they are suddenly beckoned is a symbolic and material assertion of agency, and thus, of human worth and dignity.

While it is the case that "fifty to one hundred years after European colonisation true subsistence utilisation of coastal resources declined to negligible levels and there is currently little subsistence utilisation", the presence of abandoned *bakkies* in the shadows of old fish factories along the bay's coastline is a poignant reminder that St Helena Bay has developed out of both industrial and small-scale fishing<sup>12</sup>. Contrary to the perception that 'people from St Helena Bay aren't 'real fishermen', I met many people who did indeed claim this identity, echoing the Subsistence Fishers Task Group's identification of a community of 'bona fide fishers' in St Helena Bay. These were full-time fishers who have never worked in a factory, and whose identity and material well-being was founded upon catching fish. Despite this, there were few local people in St Helena Bay with their own boats – the many skeletons of old *bakkies* were evidence of the slow suffocation of the small-scale fishing economy. Today, fishers generally have to find a site on someone else's boat, whether it is a skiboat of a wealthier resident from Hout Bay or Yzerfontein, or a trawler owned by one of the large companies, whilst a few fish on a handful of locally-owned *bakkies*.

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<sup>12</sup> Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Socio-Economic Overview (2005: 5).

Within the continuum that characterises different forms of fishing, there are people who rely on ‘informal’ fishing during times when employment is not available in the formal fishing sector. There are also many people in St Helena Bay who fish as one of an array of occupation. When I met Malcolm, a 40-year-old builder by trade, he was in St Helena Bay looking for whatever work he could find. He told me that he also caught snoek when he could get a site on a boat. Fishing, as part of the myth of the West Coast, constitutes a socio-ecological resource that is being harnessed by people in St Helena Bay to meet their material needs. This resonates with the findings of the socio-economic overview of the BCLME (2005: 7):

“Although there is limited genuine subsistence use of resources, there is a significant use and sale of marine resources by sectors of the south and west coast populations that have very low incomes, rely on marine resources as a nutritional supplement, have an *historical affiliation* to fishing practices, and have very limited opportunities for deriving an income other than from those relating to exploitation of marine resources” (emphasis added).

Many individuals with a historical relation to the area spoke longingly of a time when people could go down to the sea and fish for their own needs, supplementing the low wages they received from working in the fishing industry, or on the surrounding grain farms. A descendent of the town’s first butcher explained that “in those days you could catch what you wanted, people wouldn’t go hungry because the sea is right here”.

While some people are still fishing to live, and others are gainfully employed in the factories or on the trawlers, it appears that, as an overall contributor to incomes in St Helena Bay, and in keeping with the regional trend on the WK, there has been a “decline in the fishing industry in the last few years”<sup>13</sup>. According to the BCLME Socio-Economic Overview of fishing communities on the West Coast: “opportunities for employment have decreased in the formal sectors of the local economy in small coastal towns”, there are “very few new jobs being created” and “most of the jobs in the formal employment sectors in these settlements are also associated with low skills and low pay”<sup>14</sup>.

The present situation described by Geraldine and Buks thus points to a shift with regards to the place of the fish factories within the social life of SHB. As the local population has

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<sup>13</sup> West Coast District Spatial Plan, Vol. 1. Consultative Draft, November 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Socio-Economic Overview (2005: 73).

increased, so the number of these jobs in the fish factories has fallen. The experiences of people working in St Helena Bay's (historically) paternal fishing industry resonate strongly with Du Toit's (2005: 12) observations in relation to agriculture in the Western Cape: "many workers" who were "previously given some protection by the implicit moral economy of racialised farm paternalism" have been negatively affected by the "integration of the agrarian economy into global markets".

The following chapter uses ethnographic description to convey the textures of daily life of St Helena Bay's majority. This will be supported by analysis that highlights how political and economic dynamics inform the interrelationship between people and ecology in St Helena Bay.





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The Industrial Fishing Sector in St Helena Bay: 1 - Factories in Stompneusbaai; 2 – Discolouration of seawater around factory in Sandy Bay Harbour; 3- Pelagic trawlers in Sand Bay Harbour; 4 – Sorting sardine for canning; 5 - Sardine (4 & 5 courtesy of the West Coast District Municipality).





4.



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7.

In-shore sector: 1 and 2 - Loading snoek at Sandy Point Harbour; 3 - Loading the boat at Stompneusbaai after catching crayfish; 4 - A snoek handler at the harbour; 5 - A woman *flekking* (cleaning) a snoek. If you look closely at her hands you can see the speed and lightness of touch in her movements; 6 - A *langaana* (fish buyer) inspects the snoek while it is being flekked; 7 - Scene from loading bay.

## Chapter 2

# An Ethnography of Life in St Helena Bay

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Life stirs early; the abundant local population of birds can be heard as the sunrises over the Cedarberg Mountains to the east. On some mornings, Southern Right and Humpback whales can be heard exhaling. These sounds, travelling through the half-light of dawn, create the impression that St Helena Bay is a space of natural wilderness. Soon the sun lights up the scene, revealing the industrial and urbanised character of the town.

As the sun rises, in the background can be heard the intermittent sound of enormous flatbed trucks servicing the factories and harbour, as well as providing supplies to the many ongoing construction sites, buses can also be heard ferrying factory workers to and from their shifts. The sound of pelagic trawlers entering and leaving the harbour is also part of the aural texture of everyday life in St Helena Bay. The sights, sounds and smells of these trucks and trawlers provide gruff reminders that this is no 'untouched wilderness'. Smoke from factories drifts into the clear blue sky, bearing with it the intense and disagreeable smell of fishmeal; imposing warehouses filled with industrial supplies jostle for position near the entrance to the harbour; while the shells of abandoned factories and industrial equipment tell the observer of the unpredictable history of industrial production in St Helena Bay. It soon becomes clear how deceptive the billboards inciting people to "Come back to nature!" are.

When the wind isn't too severe, between two and five bakkies can be seen fishing just beyond the granite boulders that congregate along *die wal* (the shoreline). The most popular areas being in front of Mid West in Stompneusbaai, and between Hannasbaai and Steenberg's Cove to the east. Crayfish, hottentot, harders and maasbankers are the main target species for these local fishers. On most mornings a few local people (between three and seven people on most days) forage for shellfish along the rocky shore of Hannasbaai and Steenberg's Cove. I observed that it is primarily women and young girls who do this - though during my fieldwork I did occasionally see a man busy harvesting amongst the rocks. The practice of foraging for shellfish along the rocky shore in St Helena Bay is a

form of subsistence fishing in the seemingly incongruous context of ‘industrial’ St Helena Bay. From observing and talking to people engaged in this foraging behaviour, I learned that many of the limpets, alikreukal and mussels that fill their plastic packets go directly to their pots, feeding their families and social network.

However, it is also the case that sometimes a portion of their ‘harvest’ will be sold to their neighbours or local middle-men for cash to buy necessities (though the market for shellfish doesn’t pay very well, for example: white mussels fetch about 20c each). This practice illustrates the hazy boundaries between definitions of ‘subsistence’ and ‘small-scale commercial fishing’<sup>15</sup>. This stems from the penetration of the market economy into all corners of the West Coast. As stated in the South African component of the BCLME Socio-Economic Overview (2005: 69), people cannot be expected to subsist on marine species alone because they cannot provide all the necessary nutrients, other foods are also needed, but “the acquisition of these food resources requires purchasing power, especially in areas where people have no access to agricultural land”.

In keeping with trends in other fishing communities on the West Coast where “few employment options meant an increased reliance on fishing” (Cardosa, 2004: 8), there are people engaged in these practices who have not harvested marine resources personally before but are now turning to the sea because it presents itself as one of the only available means to get food and money. In St Helena Bay, Michael’s step-son Alistair, had recently joined his crew. After three years of searching for work in the fish factories and at the municipal council, and without any other options, Alistair decided to start fishing with his step-father. Similarly, Carel, a middle-aged coloured man who was *jiving* for white mussels on the beach near Groot Paternoster Reserve, told me that he had only been harvesting mussels for two years, and that his decision was motivated by economic necessity<sup>16</sup>. Carel told me that he normally worked from between two and four hours, filling two hessian sacks – each one containing 500 mussels, though the legal limit per day was 50. Having been a farm labourer for his working life, and now without a job, Carel was harvesting marine

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<sup>15</sup> See Subsistence Fishers Task Group Report (2000); Sowman, (2006) ‘Subsistence and small-scale fisheries in South Africa: A ten year review’ in Marine Policy 30; Hauck (2008) “Rethinking small-scale fisheries compliance’ in Marine Policy 322.

<sup>16</sup> Jiving is a local term for the practice of harvesting white mussels in the intertidal zone by twisting one’s body in a kind of dance, so that one’s heels sink into the sand until they come into contact with a mussel.

species to survive. Without a permit, he either sold his harvest to someone who did, or he took it home to eat. For him the sea was a life-line to food and money.

Along the main road between Laingville and Sandy Point harbour are dozens of people looking for a chance to earn a day's wages. The majority are migrants from the Eastern Cape. They start walking into town from around 6 am, by 10 am you can see them walking back to Laingville. The main group of job seekers follows this temporal pattern, but for the duration of the day, latecomers can still be seen walking along the main road to and from the harbour and various factories, as well as the wealthier neighbourhoods, looking for work against all the odds. I met a young Xhosa woman who had moved to Laingville from the Eastern Cape in 1996 - her tenuous grasp of English and Afrikaans indicating her socio-cultural isolation on the West Coast. As we stood on the black and sooty dirt in front of her shack-dwelling, she gave me her impression of life in St Helena Bay for the marginalised majority: "Ooh ... eish, it's hard! All the people, no job!"

The presence of these hopeful and desperate jobseekers may provide outsiders looking to buy into 'the good life' with the realization that, perhaps, all is not as the billboards promise. Nevertheless, for some wealthier residents, St Helena Bay appears relatively isolated from the socio-economic problems that are so obviously present in other parts of South Africa. The perception among middle and upper-class *inkommers* that the WK (and hence St Helena Bay) is relatively crime free, is exploited in the marketing of urban development and tourism. While crime levels are low in relation to the other parts of the country, the lack of crime in St Helena Bay (and the Wes Kus) is more a perception than a fact. Crime levels in St Helena Bay and the West Coast in general, are rising sharply, in concert with the rising levels of unemployment and social disaffection<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, while many people - like the residents of 'the Golden Mile' - are financially secure, a large proportion of the population in St Helena Bay are not. The socio-economic circumstances of many residents could be described in terms of high levels of asset poverty, cash dependency and food deprivation<sup>18</sup>. In St Helena Bay the percentage of economically active people who have either no income, or earn less than R1601 per month, stood at 54% in 2001. Laingville, experiences the highest levels of material deprivation in St

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<sup>17</sup> Socio-Economic Profile of West Coast District Municipality - chapter 5 Saldhana Bay Municipality (2006: 123).

<sup>18</sup> See Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Socio-Economic Overview (2005).

Helena Bay. A report in the local community paper 'Die Weslander', told of the suicide of a young Laingville resident (one of five during one month in the SBM area)<sup>19</sup>. It quotes a financial 'expert' who says that: "the maintenance of average living standards for many people, especially those from lower-income groups, has become increasingly difficult ... Some people have a strange relationship with money. They see money as a measure of their humanity" (Weslander 29/01/09 - page 1). Trying to come to terms with this event, a local pastor said that: "Children are becoming tired of life. We sit with matriculants who can't get work and there is also a lack of meaningful guidance, it is very tragic" (Weslander 29/01/09 - page 3).

### *Laingville*

The majority of St Helena Bay's population lives in Laingville. Established in 1972 to accommodate the need for housing in Steenberg's Cove, this township lies tucked away below the entrance to St Helena Bay, out of sight of the glossy urban development billboards<sup>20</sup>. As with many of the townships established during apartheid, Laingville has a single entrance. In the mornings, there are dozens of people standing along the pavement trying to wave down passing cars. Some are on their way to work, or to look for work, in Vredenburg (a regional service-town), others are headed into St Helena Bay for the same reasons. During my fieldwork, travelling the 13 kilometres to Vredenburg by taxi cost around R12 one-way (a large sum relative to average income levels). Buses are unavailable except for employees of the factories in St Helena Bay.

In keeping with the socio-economic findings of the BCLME research program, many of the Laingville residents I encountered described the experience of being 'trapped' in an isolated and semi-rural township without options and opportunities<sup>21</sup>. The word *transport* (used mostly when referring to a private motor car) was imbued with potent meaning: it symbolized economic as well as practical mobility. Hopeful for the future, one resident explained that: "One day if I get enough money ... the first thing that I will buy, I will go and buy a Corolla ... because here there are no busses".

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<sup>19</sup> Weslander 29/01/09.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 3 for census statistics.

<sup>21</sup> Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Socio-Economic Overview (2005: 60)

On weekdays, Laingville is busy with people meandering along the roadsides - some merrily, some listlessly. People buy goods from the main 'shopping centre' (a superette, bottle store and post office), though most are just hanging around, talking while children play in the streets. Many conversations deal with ordinary topics like gossip about a neighbour's weight, or the status of a friend's romantic life. However, these conversations also include serious subjects such as money and jobs; conflicts and negotiations over material resources; who is suspected of having HIV/AIDS; or whose child has become addicted to *tik* (crystal methamphetamine). Because I did much of my fieldwork with fishers, talk also included the presence or absence of fish, working conditions on particular boats, laws regulating fishing, or who was *gevang* (caught) while poaching. Meanwhile skinny, scraggly dogs and cats skulk in corners, harassed by boots and hunger. Large dogs lie chained in the gravel of front yards, protecting their owner's homes from *skelms* (unsavoury characters). Inside, television sets beam constantly - palliative distractions that provide some succour for the boredom and frustration of everyday life. Television also provides a kind of 'link with the outside world' in the context of isolation and immobility.

The average day in Laingville sees some people congregate around entrances to houses and in front yards, pouring a beer or smoking cannabis. Levels of substance abuse (including alcohol) are high in Laingville. While this contributes to social problems, it should not be seen as the root cause of peoples' ills, but rather as a symptom of socio-economic and political marginalisation (Gerstein and Green, 1993). While alcohol has a very long history among the coloured population of the West Coast, methamphetamine use is a recent development that continues to increase dramatically<sup>22</sup>. The spread of this destructive stimulant presents a disturbing prospect for the residents of Laingville.

An insight from two local children poignantly summed up the darker side of everyday life in Laingville. While walking through a (predominantly white) cemetery in Veldrift with the 8 year old granddaughter of a Laingville fisher and her little cousin, both children commented on how few children's graves they saw - Jainie told me that: "There we where live there are many children's graves, they are tiny little ones".

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<sup>22</sup> See Report of the South Africa Cape Coloured Liquor Commission of Inquiry (1945); Du Toit (1992) 'The Farm as Family: Paternalism, management and modernisation on Western Cape Wine and Fruit Farms'; (1993) 'The Micro-Politics of Paternalism: the Discourses of Management and Resistance on South African Fruit and Wine Farms'

For many Laingville residents, the most significant day of the month is known as “*All Pay Day*”. On the first day of every month, *All Pay* (one of the companies contracted by the South African government to dispense welfare grants), comes to Laingville. In the days that precede and follow it, ‘All Pay Day’ constantly pops up in conversation. There is a palpable change in the general mood as excitement, expectation and a tentative relief fills the air. For the first day or two after ‘All Pay Day’ the Shoprite Supermarket in Vredenburg is inundated with people buying everything from five kilogram bags of frozen chicken pieces, to bathroom tiles and plastic chairs – these are the spoils of state largesse. In the immediate surroundings of the supermarket, a ritualistic monthly get-together takes place as people socialize with an ice-cream or a soft-drink in hand - the atmosphere is that of a public holiday.

### *Dignity and Conviviality*

In Laingville, the mornings are time for chores: many residents are cleaning their yards and doing their laundry. People are sitting in front of their homes, chatting to family and neighbours. There is much neighbourly social interaction and it was never difficult to find a particular individual: sometimes I would arrange to meet someone and they would tell me to find them “at home”, only to find that they were actually at a neighbour’s house several doors down. For many people in Laingville, ‘home’ extended out beyond the immediate boundaries of their actual abode.

Without idealising the situation, for it is a fact that Laingville experiences the same disputes, tensions and uneven power relations that prevail in all social contexts, a kind of ‘conviviality’ exists in the township, enabling people to ‘get along’ with each other in day-to-day life<sup>23</sup>. Despite underlying racialised political and economic tensions between and among the township’s residents, people generally go about their business without interfering with each other. An example of this ‘live and let live’ approach transpired at the funeral of a local teacher:

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<sup>23</sup> See Du Toit (2005) ‘Chronic and Structural Poverty in South Africa: Challenges for Action Research’ for a discussion of how the concept of ‘social capital’ is used in a vague and uncritical manner by social researchers. He argues that this obscures the unevenness of intra and inter-communal power relations that determine not only who has access to resources, but also the nature of that access, and the nature of those resources.

a young group of church members took to the stage to play some songs in honour of the deceased. They had turned the volume of their instruments and microphones too high and the result was an excruciatingly loud, literally painful 'wall of sound'. The people who were gathered in the hall found the 'music' much too loud, yet the young musicians were enjoying themselves immensely. No-one went up to the stage to request that they turn the volume down, instead everyone simply picked up their white plastic chairs and moved out of the hall to the reception area where they continued their conversations as if nothing had happened. Meanwhile the band continued to play as loud as before, aware but unconcerned that the entire funeral had left the hall. Nobody was offended by this incident.

In the midst of intra-communal conflict, where the social fabric is strained to breaking point by various structural political and economic factors, people have ways and means of getting along with each other - of being civil. In addition, networks among family, neighbours and friends provide support that often means the difference between hunger and a warm dinner. On three occasions, I observed how quickly the word spread when Mark came home with a few snoek. Soon a neighbour's daughter would poke her head in at the door to ask for a snoek, to be followed shortly afterwards by a family member, and then another, sometimes leaving Michael's family with just one fish for their own dinner, and nothing for the following day. This kind of behaviour was quite common: for example people would turn up at someone's house unannounced to borrow some water when the taps in their part of the neighbourhood were dry (a regular occurrence), or if they needed some fishmeal for supper.

Again, one should be cautious about conceptualising this kind of 'social capital' as wholly egalitarian in nature, yet neighbourhood and kin networks often provide a safety net that mitigates conditions of material deprivation. Many people in Laingville depend upon extended social networks because the regional economy has been "restructuring by shifting away from the unskilled and labour intensive sectors towards capital-intensive and high skills sectors ... low levels of education prevent participation in the job market and exacerbate the unemployment situation"<sup>24</sup>. Even for people with jobs, daily life can be a constant struggle without any guarantees or security. Many people in Laingville fall within the category of the so-called 'working poor' - their income barely covers basic living expenses, and sometimes not even those expenses can be met.

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<sup>24</sup> Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Socio-Economic Overview (2005: 12)

Lack of money in a money economy can lead to profound frustration. This was explained to me by Tannie Sara's self-confident and intelligent son David. Twenty-nine years old and unemployed for more than three years, his last job was in a fish-processing factory at Sandy Point harbour. This job had resembled a growing pattern in the contemporary working world: it was a short-term contract with low pay and no benefits or opportunities for advancement. A boiler-maker with 7 years experience, he has been turned away from several interviews because he "didn't have papers" (formal qualifications). While sharing some Black Label quarts, David spoke passionately about how money "gives you choices in life". He had applied for a job as a sweeper at the municipal council several months prior, but was told to wait until a job was available for him. He is still waiting.

But David didn't appear particularly disappointed. It seemed to me that he believed this type of work did not allow him to utilise and develop his potential as a human being. He described the monotony of working in a factory, without any outlet for personal creativity, where "the bosses only care about production" and a lifetime of service is paid off with an incommensurably small amount of money<sup>25</sup>. For David, the knowledge that structural inequality constrained him from achieving his potential was profoundly disheartening: "I don't want to be ordinary, I want to be *extraordinary!*" This frustration encapsulates the stories of so many individuals in Laingville. In their search to make sense of these conditions, historically-contingent racial categories have become reinvigorated.

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<sup>25</sup> See Cardosa 'Doringbaai Socio-Economic Study' (2004: 6)

## Chapter 3

# Agterblywendes and Inkommers: Dichotomies of turmoil

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Chapter one described a Myth of the West Coast composed of the West Coast's desolate and isolated ecological and social-scapes that combine to create a place-specific identity recognized by both insiders and outsiders. In their own way, people I spoke with pointed to this myth as the defining characterisation of the area's sense of place (see Sauer, 1925; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). The Myth of the West Coast encompasses an identity that is being claimed by various actors in various contexts. This is directly related to the economic and political rationalisation and reform of fisheries, tourism, and urban development that have turned this cultural matrix into a kind of heritage capital. Framed within a newly democratic neoliberal South African state, the stakes of claiming this myth and identity have increased accordingly.

Geschiere's ideas on *autochthony* - which he describes as an "idea of local belonging" that "strikes a deep emotional chord" - are salient here as the identity accompanying the Wes Kus myth is indeed a form of autochthony (Geschiere, 2009: 7). Autochthony - from the Latin root meaning 'from the soil' - signifies an identification with a place which is so powerful that it has "a naturalizing capacity which makes it the most 'authentic, the most essential of all modes of connection" (Comoroffs, 2001: 658). Yet as Geschiere (2009: 9) points out, it has a "difficult relationship with history". The rigidity posited by autochthony is contradicted by the dynamism of history - claims to autochthonous 'belonging' are ambiguous, relative, and always in flux. Nevertheless "nothing is impossible in autochthony" (Detienne, in Geschiere, 2009: 5): different people are able to tap into the same autochthonous cultural heritage and identity of the Wes Kus Myth for different reasons.

### *Fluid boundaries*

Just who can 'legitimately' lay claim to being one of *die Wes Kus se mense* ('the People of the West Coast') is relative and depends on who one talks to. In some cases, the criteria for

claiming *this* identity can be highly restrictive<sup>26</sup>. Sitting in the kitchen of her farm house, a white Afrikaans grandmother told me of how she was considered by “real West Coast people” as an *inkommer*. Acting on her own initiative, Tannie Marie had spent years compiling a history of St Helena Bay from the oral testimonies of people with historical connections to the area, as well as from original texts and photos dating from the late 1800s until the present. Tannie Elizabeth (see below) described Tannie Marie as “someone who knows the history of St Helena Bay”. Though she had lived in St Helena Bay for 35 years and was married to a member of an eminent Wes Kus fishing family, Tannie Marie told me of the discomfort she felt regarding her status as ‘the local historian’. She felt people like her in-laws - who were born in the area – would resent her presuming to pronounce on the history of St Helena Bay because of her *inkommer* status, fearing that it would not be seen as authentic: “that is what I’m most afraid of”. Echoing Geschiere’s (2009: 8) statement that the language of autochthony is a “nervous one”, Tannie Marie was reluctant to publish her work.

Tannie Elizabeth, a middle-aged white woman, had lived in St Helena Bay for seventeen years, having been born in Cape Town. She had married into a family who were part of St Helena Bay’s fishing history, her father’s side of the family also had a multi-generational connection to the West Coast. She expressed a deep love for the area, saying that “my Dad was right when he said that the West Coast grows on you like a barnacle”. Tannie Elizabeth made the same observation as Tannie Marie, explaining that when she was in the company of her husband’s family, she was considered to be an outsider for two reasons: the first is that she wasn’t born in St Helena Bay; and the second was that Afrikaans was her second language, though she spoke it fluently. I argue that the first reason is flexible, while second is considerably more fixed.

There were some people that I encountered who weren’t born on the West Coast, but who claimed this identity with solemn sincerity. Describing one of his ‘impossible dreams’ to me while cooking a ‘potjie’<sup>27</sup> full of seafood, David told me of a dream he had to establish a

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<sup>26</sup> Van Zyl (2008) argued the same point in relation to Kassiesbaai in Arniston. (Masters dissertation, UCT).

<sup>27</sup> A small three-legged cast iron cooking pot.

restaurant: “It will be a proper Wes Kus restaurant. I want to show the people how the genuine style is, and we will serve ‘perdevoet pie’, and things like that”<sup>28</sup>. He spoke with authority about, and identified with, the ‘Myth of the ‘Wes Kus’, positioning himself as a rightful heir to this autochthonous heritage, as opposed to the many establishments owned by ‘inkommers’ whose fare was not authentic. Hence I was surprised to discover from him that he had lived for the first half of his life in Paarl. David’s grandmother was born in St Helena Bay, as was his mother, who had moved around the Province during her life. His mother identified both herself and her son as a being ‘of the Wes Kus’, and, thus, by implication, ‘autochthonous’. As Coloured people, an important factor informing this family’s association with the West Coast is their claim to Khoisan heritage as constituting a historical bond with the Cape West Coast that superseded the exact location of one’s birth: “we come from the Bushmen”.

Tannie Elizabeth, Tannie Marie, Tannie Sara and David, would be identified as insiders by tourists and others from the ‘outside’ because of the relationship they had developed with St Helena Bay over time. These individuals also identified themselves (implicitly or explicitly) as insiders, and positioned themselves as such in relation to other individuals with a less developed relationship with St Helena Bay. As Geschiere notes (2009: 10) the “naturalizing capacity” of autochthony makes the boundaries between ‘insider’ and ‘outsiders’ clear, but “any attempt to define the autochthonous community in more concrete terms will give rise to fierce disagreements and nagging suspicions of faking. The preoccupation with purifying the community from strange elements makes people tend to define autochthony at ever closer range”.

Ideas about who can legitimately claim to be ‘of the Wes Kus’ are therefore open to contestation. The conflicting claims of people like Tannie Marie, Tannie Elizabeth and David’s on the one hand, and the claims of people born in St Helena Bay like Oom Vaughn (see below) or Tanie Sara, illustrate that the criteria for qualifying as a legitimate ‘person of the West Coast’ are not fixed. While being born in St Helena Bay affords a special right to claim ‘autochthony’ in the area, the cultivation of a relationship with a place also allows a person to claim a kind of ‘autochthony’. In St Helena Bay, the claim to being a ‘real local’ could perhaps be conceived of as a constantly shifting array of possibilities that relate to an

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<sup>28</sup>‘Perdevoet’ is a kind of limpet.

individual's place of birth, their first language, who their family is, the length and depth of historical relationship with the area, as well as who is doing the identifying, and context in which this takes place.

*Die Verstand (The Understanding)*

Some interpretations of who can legitimately lay claim to the West Coast's autochthonous cultural heritage and identity garner a degree of consensus among residents in St Helena Bay. When I asked people who had lived in the area for 30 years or more how they perceived life in St Helena Bay to have changed, one particular theme kept recurring. Many of the coloured and white people I spoke to told me of the "*die verstand*" ("the understanding") that existed historically between white and coloured people of all classes. This nostalgic narrative describes a 'mutual understanding' between coloured and white people who considered themselves autochthones, sharing a unified culture and identity as *Wes Kus Mense*. This goes back to the historical development of the Myth of the West Coast, where many white and coloured people experienced similar living conditions and shared the same cultural milieu. The conditions of socio-economic deprivation that characterised life in St Helena Bay up until the Second World War were experienced by both white and coloured people<sup>29</sup>. A common language and history of hardship within a rugged ecological context, forged a sense of common identity among coloured and white people living in St Helena Bay and the West Coast broadly.

This shared identity based on a mutual understanding was especially strong among fishers who did the same difficult work together. The author Lawrence Green - renowned for conjuring up the Myth of the Wes Kus - wrote that both coloured and white fishers on the West Coast constituted a unitary group: "the stormy coast breeds a *tough race* of fishermen" (1973: 176) (emphasis added). Robin Lees, writes that: "living and working conditions were uniformly bad and there was almost no distinction drawn between coloured and white labour" (1968: 95).

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<sup>29</sup> See Van Sittert (2001) 'Velddrift: the making of a South African company town'.

Tannie Elizabeth described the stories she had been told by elderly fishers in St Helena Bay, about how the coloured and white fishers of *Die Agterbaai* “forged a bond by living the same life”. According to her, it was this bond that made West Coast fishing villages unique. Johnny Eigelaar explains that in the 1940s he always employed a mixed race crew: “I always had a mixed crew, and we never had any problems in terms of colour” (Eigelaar, 1998: 29). Oom Bernaldus, the son of St Helena Bay’s first butcher and grocer described what he perceived to be the “goeie verstand” (“good understanding”) between coloured and white people: “we respected their being on earth”. During this time his father would often give fishermen goods on “tick” (on account) - “there was trust”. He told me that when he was a young boy in the 1940s: “we played with all the coloured guys, everybody knew each other”.

It was not only white people who made this claim, many of the older coloured people that I spoke to made the same observation about *die verstand* between white and coloured people. Oom Danie from Laingville spoke longingly about the days when white and coloured people shared a sense of identification with each other: “Here along the West Coast ... the coloured and white people understood each other”. Great Grandmother Cara, a lifelong St Helena Bay resident, affirmed this belief when she told me that throughout her life coloured and white people used to work well together on the boats and in the factories. Even today, this perception persists: a young Rastafarian I met who had lived in Laingville his whole life claimed that “here, there is no racism between the boere and kleurlinge (white and coloured people)”.

Mohamed Adhikari’s (2005) writing on coloured identity illuminates *die verstand* between coloured and white people on the West Coast. He argues that an “assimilationist tendency” exists among coloured people, where they have historically identified more with white people (and the associated dominant societal order), than with black people. This tendency, he argues, emerged from a kind of ‘Coloured myth of origin’ based on notions of biological ‘hybridity’, which informed their intermediary status in South Africa’s three-tiered racial hierarchy. While the idea of an ‘assimilationist tendency’ would probably be contested by most so-called ‘coloured’ people, this idea does seem to provide a partial explanation for the recurring references to *die verstand*.

It is generally understood (among those who spoke about it), that this understanding between white and coloured people developed out of a shared historical experience. This has translated into a common belief that white and coloured people ‘made’ the history of

the West Coast and the myth that emerged from this history. Though this belief was spoken of in serious tones that implied a sincere faith in its truth-value, it is wise to emphasize the capacity of memory to change the past in relation to the present<sup>30</sup>. While the belief in *die verstand* has some basis in historical fact, it is not immune from the distortions of nostalgia. Van Sittert (2001: 213) notes that in Veldrift during the 1950s boom for example, “prosperity ‘trickled across the racial divide”, yet he also observes that ... “when opportunities for economic and social advancement arose, racial segregation (and later apartheid policies) favoured poor whites at all levels”. The degree to which people were ever really ‘equal’ is questionable. *Die verstand* could be better described in relation to paternalism, and the idea of *mekaar verstaan* – ‘to understand each other’ – that has historically prevailed on farms in the Western Cape. Du Toit (1992) explains that *mekaar verstaan* described ideal subordinate/superior relations, where “both farmer and worker knows what to expect from each other” (1992: 5). Defined by a context of racialised socio-economic and political inequality, *mekaar verstaan* and *die verstand* are euphemistic expressions used to affirm a less salubrious reality: namely that subordinates must *know their place*.

Nevertheless, as Geschiere (2009: 11) rightly observes, historicizing a strongly-held belief doesn’t necessarily “relativize its mobilizing force, and the hold it has over people’s minds”. The narrative of a historically-contingent mutual understanding between coloured and white people on the West Coast is important because it asserts that it was these groups who made the West Coast’s history, and thus that Afrikaans-speaking coloured and white people are the rightful claimants to the Wes Kus myth and identity. Further, by including some people, this belief excludes others.

#### *Inkommers: Black people on the Wes Kus*

Oom Vaughn - who still remembers when his grandfather used to transport snoek along dirt roads with a donkey-cart - was born and raised on the Wes Kus and has been part of the local fishing community his whole life. His mother (born in 1920), told him that she was in Grade 8 when she saw a black person for the first time. Up until that point she had only

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<sup>30</sup> See Bissell (2005) ‘Engaging Colonial Nostalgia’.

seen white and coloured people, so she described her reaction as one of shock. This story captures the common perception among both coloured and white people who assume insider status, that black people are alien to the West Coast.

Seen in historical context, the reasons for this become clearer: pre-colonial demographic patterns on the West Coast, coupled with racialised settlement policies of apartheid such as the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Coloured Labour Preference Act (1954), meant that very few black people lived in the region<sup>31</sup>. During apartheid, the bizarre three-tiered racial hierarchy ranked the racial categories of 'White/European' and 'Coloured' above that of 'Black'. This served to crystallise a shared racism among coloured and white people towards black people. Standing on a beach while loading a bakkie onto a trailer, a coloured fisher told a white estate agent about his problems with the 'New South Africa' and "*die tyres*" ("the tyres" - black people), to which the estate agent replied: "be careful man, you'll bring out the AWB in me<sup>32</sup>".

Many coloured and white people do not believe that black people played a part in the history of the West Coast, rather they position them as outsiders who do not belong. Here we see the 'difficult relationship' of autochthony with history because black people have indeed been part of the historical development of the West Coast. While their presence on the West Coast was marginal before the 1950s, the Post War modernization of St Helena Bay's fishing industry signalled a shift in the demographic pattern as black people were drawn to the area in search of work in the industry - as factory workers *and* as crew on the trawlers.

According to histories favourable to the industry such as Robin Lees' *Fishing for Fortunes* (1969), the existing coloured labour force on the West Coast had proven less than satisfactory to the needs of capitalist industry. Echoing the racial prejudice of the time, Lees claimed that: "most of them [coloured people] were inherently indolent" (1969: 188), and coloured fishermen in particular were "hidebound by apathy and conservatism" (1969: 47). In 1943 the Coloured Advisory Council found that coloured fishing villages "presented a picture of illiteracy, poverty, drunkenness, malnutrition and disease ... when there was no fishing, the fishermen had nothing else to do but drink" (Coloured Advisory Council in Lees,

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<sup>31</sup> See Evans (1985) *The Coloured Labour Preference; a government labour policy in action*. South African Institute of Race Relations.

<sup>32</sup> The *Afrikaaner Weerstandsbeweging* (the Afrikaner Resistance Movement) was a radical white supremacist group dedicated to pursuing the interests of white Afrikaans people.

1969: 116). Among white employers, people classified as ‘coloured’ had what might be called a ‘reputation for dissent’, and were believed to be predisposed to behave ‘insubordinately’ towards their superiors. Both white and coloured people have cited this stereotype in relation to coloured people on the Wes Kus – one coloured woman told me that “coloured people are lazy”, while a white St Helena Bay resident who has employed coloured people for decades told me that “they only do just enough work to buy their alcohol”. That this belief is in tension with the discourse of *die verstand* demonstrates how nostalgia reconciles contradiction within its warm embrace.

It was against the background of an industry trying to modernize itself - but hamstrung by what it perceived to be an ‘unfavourable’ coloured labour force - that moves were made to tap an alternative labour source. In Lees’ unfortunate words, the solution was found in “a cheap sturdy Bantu labour-source” (Lees, 1969: 188). In the early 1950s black people from other provinces (particularly the Eastern Cape) began to work in St Helena Bay’s factories. Housed in separate compounds and hostels, the majority of black Xhosa-speaking migrants were prevented from being part of the understanding that characterised coloured and white social relations on the West Coast.

The end of apartheid brought an end to the legislated racism that prevented black people from having freedom of movement and access to opportunities<sup>33</sup>. As noted by Tannie Elizabeth (and in keeping with a common belief among coloured and white residents of St Helena Bay), this development is popularly perceived to have “opened the floodgates” that had prevented black migration to the area. Tannie Sara told me that, that there “were never many black people in St Helena Bay”, and that “they always lived in their own compounds”, separated from the coloured and white workers. Similarly, Tannie Elizabeth claimed that, before 1994, there were “about 100 black people in St Helena Bay, all living in a compound in Stompneusbaai”; it was “only around 1994” that black people began to move into Laingville.

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<sup>33</sup> See Simon Eppel’s (2007) unpublished masters dissertation “They Come Here And Take Our Houses!” Community conflicts in Langa in the context of the housing crisis in Cape Town: ‘Borners’ against ‘Migrants’ for a cogent exploration of migration amongst black people in the Western Cape.

However, the 2001 census documented that 66 % of migrants in St Helena Bay were coloured people from other parts of the Western Cape, compared to 23% of black people from both the Eastern and Western Cape<sup>34</sup>. The perception among some residents in St Helena Bay that most migrants are black cannot be sustained in view of these statistics. However, when it comes to informing action, perceptions often count for more than statistics do.

### *An Eruption of Violence in 2005*

Sitting on plastic crates and paint drums in Laingville, two grandmothers - both lifelong St Helena Bay residents - described the violent clashes between black and coloured people in Laingville in 2005. At the end of a weekend of mayhem, three houses had been burnt down, 2 people were dead, and several others seriously injured. Ouma Geraldine, one of the grandmothers I was sitting with, had her house burnt down. She said that black and coloured people were fighting in the streets and that “there was only chaos”.

The dominant interpretation of these events focused on racial tension: according to this perspective, it was black frustration at being verbally and physically harassed by certain coloured individuals in Laingville that led to the outbreak of violence<sup>35</sup>. Though this may offer a partial explanation, race is not the primary issue here. Something Oom Vaughn said points to a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of these events. He said that it was that the cause of tensions between black and coloured people in Laingville was ultimately the competition for jobs. Indeed, I believe that it was the competition for scarce resources in the context of socio-economic marginalisation which found its expression in the violence of May 2005.

### *Rights to Resources*

The competition for material resources in a context where they are scarce, encourages people to blame ‘the Other’, believing them to be responsible for, or at least exacerbating, their socio-economic deprivation. For coloured people living in the conditions described in

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<sup>34</sup> Census 2001

<sup>35</sup> See IOL News 15/09/2005

[http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set\\_id=1&click\\_id=13&art\\_id=qw1126776780682B265](http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=qw1126776780682B265)

chapter 2, the increasing presence of black people in Laingville serves as a partial explanation for the perceived worsening of these conditions subsequent to 1994. In addition, by putting a face to the problem, this sense-making process allows anger and frustration to be directed *at someone*.

This brings the discussion back to ideas of autochthony and the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Socio-economic and political marginalisation increases the intensity of the competition for material resources. The emergence of a discourse of autochthony amongst poorer residents of St Helena Bay should be understood as part of the struggle for material resources among coloured and black people in Laingville. According to Geschiere, (2009: 6): “the reference to the soil ... expresses a right to possess”, so that “what is often at stake is less a defence of the local than efforts to exclude others from access”. In South Africa, state policy and rhetoric has pronounced a new dawn of participatory democracy whereby historical ties with a particular place have been tied to the access of resources<sup>36</sup>. For small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay, this development has impacted them most directly with regard to the various policies and laws in which the state has committed ‘itself’ to consult coastal communities as ‘it’ attempts to manage the marine environment and resources<sup>37</sup>. State initiatives like the Subsistence Fishers Task Group (2000) identified individuals and communities as “bona fide” small-scale fishers, thus ‘marking’ them out for special attention from the state. Occasionally, MCM sends representatives to some of these communities (including Laingville) to discuss pertinent issues, calling for the participation of local people in the development of marine-related policies that benefit all South Africans. There have also been efforts on the part of MCM to establish ‘co-management’ arrangements where ‘local communities’ are given particular powers to ‘manage their own resources’. An example of this in St Helena Bay is the Catch Data Monitors who are tasked with policing IRP holders in their own communities.

As Geschiere (2009: 10) puts it, democratization has politicised “issues of belonging” by foregrounding the question of “who is to profit from the new-style development projects ... and who can be excluded from them ... decentralization thus encourage[s] the re-affirmation of quite fuzzy identities and a constant search for the exclusion of ‘strangers’

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<sup>36</sup> See Sowman (1993) ‘The Status of Coastal Management in South Africa’

<sup>37</sup> See Integrated Coastal Development Act (2010); Marine Living Resources Act (1998).

(often citizens of the same state)". Adhikari (2005: 6) affirms this trend in relation to coloured identity in South Africa, arguing that there has been a resurgence of "ethnic mobilization to take advantage of the newly democratic environment", and that these assertions of identity are partly motivated by the perception that, as in the old order, coloureds were once again being marginalised". This process of 'ethnic mobilisation' can be seen playing itself out in St Helena Bay around the question of access to the marine commons. Central to the 'discourse of belonging' among coloured fishers in Laingville is the idea of 'real fishermen'.

*"We are real fishing people, with real rights to the sea"*<sup>38</sup>

After popular resistance to the current policy and legislative frameworks governing the interaction of 'coastal communities' like Laingville and Steenberg's Cove with the marine commons, MCM embarked on a process of consultation with fishers to formulate a new policy that more accurately reflected their needs. As part of this process, on January 22, a representative from MCM held a meeting in Laingville to discuss resident's views regarding the Interim Relief Permit (IRP) and the drafting of a small-scale fishing policy. It was attended by two local ward councillors, an NGO representative, as well as black and coloured residents from Laingville. The meeting ended after thirty minutes when heated argument turned to physical violence. An individual from Laingville representing several black residents had presented a list of individuals who wanted to apply – after the fact - for small-scale fishing rights through the IRP arrangement. The group of about 50 coloured fishers became angry - I was told by one fisher that "they're trying to sit at the table but it's already set!"

Officially the process of identifying 'bona fide' small-scale fishers had ended with the Subsistence Fishers Task Group's research process. Those who were identified as such expected to be preferentially positioned within the new rights dispensation, thus many of the coloured fishers present perceived this attempt to bypass 'the rules' as an act of bad faith. But, for the coloured fishers that I spoke to, this 'administrative issue' was secondary to a more fundamental objection they had to the efforts of black Laingville residents' efforts to access small-scale fishing rights, I was told that: "they are not real fishermen!". Yet, as

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<sup>38</sup> Laingville fishers comments on small-scale fishing draft policy

with the autochthonous identity of 'Die Wes Kus', the question of who is or isn't a 'real fisherman' depends upon who one asks.

As mentioned above, coloured people have a longer history of fishing on the West Coast than black people do. Describing the migration of black people to the West Coast fishing industry in the 1950s, Robin Lees (1969: 188) sums up a common belief on the West Coast that black people were alien to 'the fishing life': "many were recruited from the Transkei and had never seen the sea before ... many still believed that fish were connected with snakes and regarded rock lobster as some frightening kind of spider". While Lees' version is not innocent of racial prejudice and stereotyping, the notion that the coloured fishing population had "an inborn skill" while the black fishers had to "adapt" to a "strange milieu" is still common (Lees, 1969: 188). The coloured fishers I interacted with believed this version of history sincerely; for them, black people were "not real fishermen".

As Cardoso (2004: 13) observes in relation to predominantly coloured West Coast fishing communities along the West Coast: "fishing is more than simply harvesting marine resources ... although fishing is a source of income, it also an activity that is part of their cultural identity", social and ecological dynamics are "deeply-embedded". Oom Vaughn said that he has always "lived the fishing life", and that he constantly has to "have a net or a fish in my hand". Both he and his son said that being a 'real fisherman' is about "investing your life in it". Phillip, a fisher with 32 years experience, told me solemnly that "I am a fisherman. I love the sea, it is my life ... I get my food from the sea, not from the land". In a letter to MCM protesting against the manner in which small-scale rights have been allocated, Oom Theron explained that "I am a historical fisherman with forty years experience. I have lived from the sea for all these years". According to individuals I encountered who would claim the Wes Kus autochthonous identity, being a 'real fisherman' means that fishing has to be central to one's life, economically and subjectively. The phrases, "he has seawater in his veins", or "he is born with the fishes" were used by coloured and white fishers to describe real fishermen.

### *Concluding remarks*

The presence of a discourse of dichotomies ('real fishermen' and 'plastic fishermen'; 'insiders' and 'outsiders'; 'then and now'), expresses the perception among St Helena Bay residents that elements from 'outside' are imposing themselves on the local socio-ecological system. The decline of fishing as a cohering social force in St Helena Bay has occurred in concert with the influx of these new presences – in the minds of insiders, these *inkommers* cannot be real fishermen.

In the competition for scarce material resources, the discourse of real fishermen acts to exclude the claims of some while legitimating the claims of others. The ideas of 'then' and 'now', 'insiders' and 'outsiders', 'real' fishermen and those who are not; expresses among St Helena Bay's coloured fishers a sense of 'autochthonous' right to access the marine commons. This sense was summed up in the term used by an exasperated 'autochthonous' St Helena Bay fisher: "*ons as agterblywendes*" – literally: "we, as those left behind". The word *agterblywendes* captures the common belief among many people in St Helena Bay that *inkommers* drawn to St Helena Bay by economic opportunity are moving forward economically, while local people are being left behind.

Yet, this process of exclusion conceals the common experience of structural inequality among all residents in Laingville, whether coloured or black. By naturalising identities which are fluid, the shared social, economic and political marginalisation of both groups is obscured in the drive to place blame on the Other. Both coloured and black people in St Helena Bay are subject to the same broad political and economic constraints. Though the word *agterblywendes* was used to identify autochthonous St Helena Bay insiders, and to exclude certain groupings, including black people; it is ultimately the case that both coloured and black people in St Helena Bay could be described as *agterblywendes* if the expression is interpreted metaphorically. Both are working-class groups who are 'left behind', not necessarily in a physical place but in a kind of socio-economic and political limbo where 'mobility' and the opportunity to 'move forward' (to take steps towards a better life) are beyond reach.

In his thesis on housing in the Cape Town township of Langa, Simon Eppel also noted that the process of inclusion and exclusion between 'borners' and 'migrants' took place within a political and economic context of marginalisation that encompassed both categories of people:

“the use of the categories 'borners' and 'migrants' as a means to articulate entitlement to housing, makes claims based on hypostatised identities. What is important in the representation of the categories therefore is not that they necessarily embody an incontestable reality, but rather that *they highlight the circumstances in which such categories are used*” (Eppel, 2007: 82) (emphasis added)

In the same way that coloured fishers in St Helena Bay feel that black people are a threat because they are competing for the same resources, Eppel (2007: 86) argues that: “by identifying one of the main reasons for their suffering as lying with 'migrants', and by looking within the working class for the 'other', 'borners' have only found people who, like themselves, are suffering”. The discourse of dichotomies among agterblywendes on the West Coast is being fuelled by the West Coast region's growing integration into the broader political and economic processes. In relation to fishing, MCM has exacerbated tensions between black and coloured residents in St Helena Bay by identifying 'bona fide' fishers and fishing communities, and creating expectations that those identified as such would be privileged with regard to the distribution of access rights. Yet ultimately the exclusionary nature of these dichotomous categories obscures the common experience of suffering shared by both black *and* coloured people in Laingville and St Helena Bay more broadly.

## Chapter 4

# Rule-breaking and Rule-following

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“Remember, ‘we’ talk of *rights* not quotas”. These were the words spoken by an NGO representative to two coloured fishers from Laingville during a meeting about the draft policy for small-scale fishing. Small-scale fishing ‘communities’ frame their struggle for access to the marine commons as one of ‘rights’ rather than ‘quotas’ both as a conscious strategy for political engagement, *and*, in the case of many St Helena Bay small-scale fishers, as an expression of a legitimate ‘right’ to the marine commons based on a sincere belief in an autochthonous cultural heritage and identity.

### *Fishing ‘then’ and ‘now’: ‘free’ and ‘constrained’*

Many of the small-scale fishers I spoke to described fishing in terms of ‘then’ and ‘now’. Like the ambiguity of the boundaries that delineate autochthonous notions of belonging on the West Coast, ideas of ‘then’ and ‘now’ can be hazy. Pieter told me that in the 1970s through to the 1980s “there wasn’t permits but no-one went overboard” ... you didn’t have to ask anybody if you were allowed to catch fish”. Describing fishing in the forties and fifties, Oom Bernaldus said that: “back then, you could catch what you want”. Oom Theron affirmed this view, saying “We were never required to have permits”.

It appears however, that the transition to democracy in 1994 - embodied by the Marine Living Resources Act - is a commonly accepted boundary separating then and now among the fishers I encountered. They described this distinction as one between being ‘more’ and ‘less free’ from state regulation of their relationship with the sea; and that the bureaucracy relating to these regulations had changed from being uncomplicated to being complicated. Oom Theron observed a change in this relationship with the sea on people’s doorstep post-1994: “When the new permit system was instituted, the administrative work increased dramatically”. Oom Vaughn explained “the sad fact” that increasing regulation prevented

people from “really living the fishing life”, with children growing up in a socio-cultural milieu where fishing infused every aspect of life.

Indeed, Maria Hauck observes that “South Africa has experienced a plethora of new laws over the past decade” in relation to governance of the marine environment (Hauck, 2008: 636) much like the “regulatory explosion” that McMullan and Perrier (2006: 680) describe in reference to the Nova Scotian lobster fisheries from the 1960s to the 1980s. Prior to 1998, individuals had to either fish with a commercial or a recreational permit: “subsistence fishing activities were either ignored (in the areas where law enforcement capacity was low) or addressed by law enforcement efforts that resulted in fines or imprisonment” (Hauck, 2008: 638). In St Helena Bay, small-scale fishers were effectively ignored because of low levels of enforcement.

Nevertheless, there was common perception that the state’s presence had increased along the shores of St Helena Bay. This has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension among local small-scale fishers because many people who did not receive access rights have not stopped fishing. Just like the Nova Scotian lobster fishery, the regulatory explosion in South African marine management has made fishing “a privilege”, this has “conveyed inclusion and exclusion and constituted categories of violators that were previously non-existent but that were increasingly subject to sanctions” (McMullan and Perrier, 2006: 687).

#### *Big Brother is Watching: Panoptic vision on the West Coast*

During the time I spent walking along the coastline of St Helena Bay, I began to observe a recurring phenomenon among people who were busy foraging along the tidal zone or fishing in small bakkies amongst the near-shore rocks. On several occasions I noticed that people became nervous upon realisation of my presence in the vicinity. It seems that my attire was an important dynamic influencing this phenomenon: I was typically dressed in earth-toned greens and browns, sometimes with military-patterned shorts on; I would always have my camera contained in a high-tech case and slung over my back, looking very much like some sort of communication device. My sunglasses and army-style cap must have rounded off my impersonation of some sort of ‘Parks Board’ official. It appeared that people who were busy harvesting resources made an association between me and a state marine compliance officer. On another occasion:

walking down the beach one misty morning, I saw a middle-aged coloured man who was 'jiving' for mussels on the beach. We were about one hundred metres apart; I could see he was watching me with what appeared to be nervousness. He greeted me with a wave, I reciprocated and started to approach him. He continued to wave with a big smile, signalling that it was appropriate to continue approaching. As I began to talk to him I realised the wave and smile were because he suspected that I was possibly a compliance officer. The purpose of his 'friendly charade' was to mitigate the situation because he had been 'seen in the act' as it were. It took me several minutes to gently convince him that I was not a state official, but was merely a student interested in fishing. We talked for some time but he only appeared to genuinely relax after we shared a cigarette while his mussels were loaded onto the back of a four-wheel-drive by some locals.

Perhaps it is not surprising that my lone presence often aroused interest: I was an outsider in these situations, walking in places usually only walked by insiders. From people's body language it was apparent that they were uneasy about my presence, and that this was in some way related to concerns about the state and its regulatory regime. This phenomenon indicates the experience of an unseen disciplinary presence among small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay. While there is a general awareness that the aforementioned 'regulatory explosion' has crystallised categories of deviance which were formerly 'overlooked' by fishing laws, even for those who do have permits, there is often a high level of uncertainty regarding their precise parameters, and therefore, the legality of their fishing activities.

The lack of clarity regarding regulations is deepened by the contradiction between policy and law on paper, and the manners in which they are - or are not - implemented. The virtual absence of compliance officers in St Helena Bay means that the state itself is absent while its intangible legislated presence has increased with the regulatory explosion<sup>39</sup>. The result is the experience of *governmentality* among fishers - a subjectification of the state's power to govern people's interactions. In a situation not unlike that described in George Orwell's novel *1984*, people feel they are being watched even when they are not - they 'experience' the state's presence even in its absence. But because St Helena Bay's small-scale fishers continue to harvest marine species in the face of an 'unseen' disciplinary presence, a subtle underlying atmosphere of tension pervades their activities.

Nevertheless, the experience of *governmentality* does not preclude individual agency. When local fishers do encounter compliance officers, they witness how the implementation of supposedly fixed laws is often characterised by pragmatic flexibility and inconsistent

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<sup>39</sup> I only saw inspectors patrolling the shoreline twice in almost three months, while I witnessed poaching on numerous occasions.

implementation<sup>40</sup>. Compliance officers and fishers - as individual actors - operate within fixed legislative structures, yet by exercising their agency they shape the manifestation of these laws in lived reality. Because MCM officials represent the state to local people (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 17); their interactions with the state's officials and bureaucratic apparatus establish the state as a physical presence in the isolated coastal town of St Helena Bay. When people experience in everyday life the fact of the state bending 'its' own rules, the perception is created that these supposedly rigid and non-negotiable rules are actually flexible and negotiable for those who would use their agency to manipulate them.

### *The Spectacle of Participation*

For fishers in St Helena Bay wishing to exercise agency and assert their interests on the political landscape through lawful means, one course of action available to them is through formal structures and processes allotted to the participation of 'civil society'. As Rowe and Frewer (2004: 513) rightly state: "among the key questions that need to be answered regarding public participation are why it has caught the attention of policy institutions at the present time". Contrary to the ideals of equality among citizens that are associated with the discourse of 'participatory governance', its emergence among governments around the world was largely a pragmatic strategy to maintain "established regimes of privilege" in response to the increasing demands by 'ordinary' people around the world to be heard by the state (Comoroffs, 1999: 28). I learnt something of how small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay 'experience' participatory citizenship while standing at Sylvia's front-gate in the Cove. Sylvia conceded that, while MCM does give fishers a chance to speak, "the people on their high chairs" do not act on their suggestions: "every week there is another workshop, but they don't listen ... and then you start to ask yourself, what is the point, they don't listen ... you just get so frustrated!"

Small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay *do* have agency and *can* indeed exert power on the political landscape - the very existence of the IRP is itself evidence of this: public participation, both formal and 'informal', by fishers (and the organisations representing them), pressured the state into creating the IRP. It is a fact that engaging with the state through 'spaces of participation' *does* sometimes yield results.

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 1 for examples.

The granting of the IRP is significant. However, in St Helena Bay, it has been unable to provide fishers with a viable livelihood, even in the interim while a new policy is drafted. The permit's restrictions regulating species to be caught, permissible fishing areas, catch effort and quantity, are such that they relegate fishing to a supplementary economic activity. This suggests that the IRP has played the role of an 'instrumental concession' on the part of the state.

### *The MCM meeting in Laingville*

During the early months of 2009, MCM representatives embarked on a series of meetings where they visited coastal fishing communities on the West Coast. When Tanie Sara mentioned this process of 'participation' to her cousin Andre from Lamberts Bay, he replied sternly: "But that's a load of shit!" While "democratic participation is not a pre-existing text of social harmony" (Williams, 2007: 36), Andre's statement succinctly describes the fact that many fishers in St Helena Bay have experienced the state's creation of 'invited spaces of participation' as a 'hollow fetish'<sup>41</sup>.

A meeting to discuss Laingville residents' comments on the draft policy for small-scale fishing was scheduled for Thursday at 1pm on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2009<sup>42</sup>. While waiting for the meeting to start (it ended up taking place an hour late), I sat with Oom Michael outside the town hall as fishers slowly started to arrive:

People congregated informally at the entrance - the administrative course taking place inside had not been informed that a meeting was to take place and the MCM representative was still to arrive. During this time there was an atmosphere of scepticism among the fishers waiting outside. I listened to several conversations where people shared their views on fishing regulations, the state (as represented by MCM), and on processes of 'public participation'. I did not hear anyone express hope that the meeting that this would yield any positive results. Instead people described their frustration and exasperation as their 'voices were not heard' during MCM's previous participatory efforts. They felt that formal channels of 'participation' did not deliver what policy-makers and politicians had promised it would.

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<sup>41</sup> See Comaroffs (1999: 33) 'Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical perspective'.

<sup>42</sup> There was a very strong south-easter on this day so no-one was fishing. If conditions had been favourable then they would have opted to fish rather than attend the meeting, prompting Zandile to comment that: "you mustn't go to sea when there's a meeting because otherwise you will lose out".

When the meeting eventually started with MCM's representative sitting on one side of a large table surrounded by four black fishers and about 45 coloured fishers.<sup>43</sup> Zandile - who didn't speak Afrikaans - made a valiant attempt to communicate with a large group of angry fishers but the quality of this 'invited space of participation' was not conducive to meaningful communication. Held in an empty town hall with terrible acoustics and maintenance workers traipsing in and out and banging their equipment, it was difficult to hear what was being said. In addition, the meeting was not facilitated effectively: people often interrupted Zandile (and each other), making it difficult to follow the main discussion. It was also clear that most of the fishers had not read the draft policy that the meeting was intended to discuss. This was despite the fact stated by Zandile, Tannie Sara, and several of the fishers present, that copies had been made available during the previous meeting, where it was communicated that this would be the focus of the following engagement with MCM.

In such a setting, Zandile's ability to communicate MCM's position was impeded, as was the attempt by fishers to get Zandile to understand their perspectives. Further, as a lone state official with little power to make decisions regarding the issues under discussion, his position was fundamentally undermined<sup>44</sup>. In the eyes of small-scale fishers, MCM's commitment to genuine participation is placed in doubt by sending a single low-level official to consult with them. As the fishers left the meeting, many made weary jokes about how their perceptions of 'participatory governance' had been affirmed, others simply appeared exasperated.

Yet, regardless of the way this meeting was organised and facilitated, it was unlikely to yield positive outcomes for those involved. Though the state asserts (rhetorically and in practice), a conception of civil society that is the sum of different non-state interests (whether those of a fish-processing factory or a small-scale fisher), and is supposedly "inclusive and all-embracing"; civil society is in fact "founded on exclusion and divisiveness" where some people are 'more equal' than others (Comaroffs, 1999: 23). The "presence of invisible modalities of power renders untenable the liberal fiction ... of participatory politics"; this open secret ... points obliquely ... to forces that work beyond the arc lights of formal democracy, forces that empower or exclude without being seen to do anything at all"

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<sup>43</sup> While the political dynamics between and among Laingville residents are a very important element determining the outcome of participatory processes, the focus of this particular discussion is a participatory interaction between the state and 'ordinary people'.

<sup>44</sup> As Williams (2007: 35) notes "the amount of power to influence wielded by state officials ... determines the success of the resultant public participation process".

(Comaroffs, 1999: 30)<sup>45</sup>. The effective participation of local people in issues of governance faces a powerful tide of political economic constraints in the form of a neoliberal state which is bound to the class-based interests of established industry, conservation science, and ultimately, global economic institutions like the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO<sup>46</sup>.

While the question of organisational unity and power relations within Laingville and St Helena Bay is of significant importance, it is ultimately the state that bears the burden of making the final decision regarding the outcome of public participation processes. Indeed “a commitment to change, and to ensuring genuine community empowerment among marginalised groups on the part of government institutions and officials” is “critical to ensuring that any dialogue between government and citizens is meaningful” (Thompson, 2007: 8). The exigencies of *real politik* undermine the degree to which the state is able to accommodate the ideas of poorer coastal communities on the West Coast.

Considering the discordance between the ideals of genuine participation and the reality evidenced in this meeting, why did it take place at all? Achille Mbembe (1992), reveals one possibility in his discussion of political public ceremony as spectacle in Cameroon. He describes how ordinary citizens attend these events en masse, giving the illusion that the politician in question has their support. Yet by, for example, subtly altering the words of the slogans they chant, they are able to express their feelings of disapproval in a visceral and uninhibited manner. Meanwhile the politician in question is able to sustain the mirage of public support by virtue of their presence at the ceremony.

It appears to me that the MCM meeting was an example of participation as spectacle<sup>47</sup>. The state creates an ‘invited participatory space’ as a dramatic demonstration of its goodwill – this meeting ostensibly represents MCM as reaching out a hand to ordinary people in St Helena Bay. By attending the meeting, people are seen to participate in the development of a particular policy. This creates the impression that the state has allowed its decisions to be meaningfully informed by people’s views, even though their participation has been reduced to “a mere ceremonial presence” (Williams, 2007: 31). Like Ferguson’s (1990) ‘anti-politics

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<sup>45</sup> See also Von Lieres (2007: 88) ‘Widening spaces for citizen participation’

<sup>46</sup> Tannie Sara had participated in more than seven years of intense and sustained struggle before the state began devising a specific policy for small-scale fishers

<sup>47</sup> See Mbembe (1992:4) ‘Provisional Notes on the Postcolony’.

machine', it is not necessarily the explicit intention of MCM that 'participation' becomes a 'hollow fetish', yet an important instrumental effect of this meeting is that it adds formal legitimacy to its small-scale fishing policies.

And what of the fishers, a marginalised group of people attempting to influence the decisions of a state institution that have profound implications for their lives, why did they 'participate' in this 'spectacle' if it represented a process which to them, affirmed the symbolic power of an illegitimate regulatory regime? Their attendance at this meeting was more an act of subversion than one of acquiescence. For the majority of coloured Laingville fishers, this meeting was an opportunity to confront a representative of the state's authority on their own turf - to assert their physical presence and power, as well as their moral authority in relation the issues being discussed.

These brief moments are temporary though, and do not necessarily translate into concrete improvements in people's lives. Efforts to engage the state through formal processes of participation have been experienced as futile by many small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay. They have been unable to find relief by participating through formal 'democratic' structures and process because broader capitalist political and economic pressures have resulted in marine policies that sideline "issues of poverty and food security in pursuit of economic growth, efficiency and stability" (Van Sittert et al, 2006). In such a context, the decision to utilize 'informal means of political participation' becomes increasingly attractive.

#### *Poaching: rule-breaking and rule-following*

As agterblywendes' and real fishermen, small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay believe they have a pre-legislative right to access the marine commons that echoes the "subculture" of game poachers in Victorian England, where Jones (1979: 826) describes the popular belief among peasants that the "birds, fish, game and even perhaps land was recognized as the people's property". The failure to secure legal and lived recognition of this right through 'participatory' engagement with the state has added to the perception that fishing regulations are illegitimate:

Of course, we have to poach. We have to steal crayfish to stay alive. What else are we supposed to do? We've got no rights. They've been taken away from us but we still have to put bread on the table, and we take part in

crime to put food on our table for our families. We are, actually, forced to do that here on the West Coast. In some communities, the poachers use children as runners and lookouts. Sunde (2004: pg?)

It is a fact that poaching is a normative practice in St Helena Bay, and along the WK broadly. It exists as a continuum and occurs in different forms, from young teenagers swimming amongst the inshore rocks to dive for a few kreef to eat or sell for basic necessities; to sophisticated criminal syndicates connected to a globalised black market for seafood, who poach rare marine species by the ton. The most common form of poaching in St Helena Bay, known in the literature as '*communal poaching*', namely "a steady, routine activity perceived as a 'natural' event in many communities" - this form of poaching is usually for "subsistence, or to supplement a low income or wage". There are also individuals in St Helena Bay who engage in what is known as *outlaw poaching*, *profit it's the primary explicit motive*, this is carried out on the periphery of fishing communities by individuals who are part of criminal syndicates (McMullan & Perrier, 2002: 687). In St Helena Bay, there are many fishers who poach not just for a basic income, but for profit, these fishers interact with organised criminal distribution networks, and harvest more marine species than their basic nutritional and economic needs require.

Nevertheless, the present discussion of poaching focuses on 'autochthonous' small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay who personally engage in 'illegal fishing' and who fit somewhere along the continuum from communal to outlaw poaching. Their decision to poach is informed by the same cultural, political and economic reality - for these individuals, the sea presents an opportunity for *material* gain in a general context of socio-political and economic marginalisation where chances to earn a dignified living are extremely scarce. The sea thus also presents an opportunity for *symbolic* protest against the illegitimacy of a regulatory regime that fails to recognise what they believe is their 'autochthonous right' to the marine commons.

### *The pride of rule-breaking and the stigma of rule-following*

It was on my very first day in St Helena Bay that I became aware of poaching in the area:

I watched a group of 5 young boys (aged between about 12 and 17) as they swam out among the constellation of granite boulders that formed a 200m dotted arc from the shore out to sea. I marvelled at their bravery as they swam to the end of the arc of rocks, the water was freezing and none of them had wetsuits on. I noticed that there were two younger boys who sat on the beach watching them. Their intermittent and casual glances

to and fro alerted me to the fact that they were on watch-duty, and that their companions were actually doing more than just swimming amongst the rocks - they were diving for kreef (without any diving gear!) in an MPA. This was confirmed when I saw the 'divers' return with the kreef.

The reality of poaching as a normative practice in St Helena Bay was evidenced time and again during my fieldwork. Indeed, the claim could be made that the vast majority of real fishers had, at some point, engaged in some form of illegal fishing activities. As mentioned before, the belief in an autochthonous right to a marine commons that is governed by an illegitimate regulatory regime, provides a moral justification for 'breaking the rules'.

In addition, the economics of fishing outside of 'the rules' creates a powerful momentum inducing people to poach: for small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay, following the rules does not pay. This tension is embodied by the Interim Relief Permit (IRP). Literally an interim measure for small-scale fishers who have been denied fishing rights, it was supposed to provide a legal source of livelihood for people while a new policy for this 'sector' is being drafted. Yet the parameters of the IRP do not translate into a viable economic prospect for fishers in St Helena Bay, according to Sylvia, "the Interim Permit is a joke around here!"

During my fieldwork, IRP permit holders were mainly targeting kreef because it is the species with the highest economic value allocated to the IRP. Yet St Helena Bay is mostly covered by a kreef MPA. The only place to legally catch kreef is 5 kilometres out at a spot called *Die Blinde* and even then, there was no guarantee that one's quota will be filled. Even if one does fill the quota, the maximum of 4 kreef per fisher barely covers the cost of petrol. According to Gideon the Rasta, Sylvia, Sara, Michael and Paul, there were only 75mm kreef in St Helena Bay outside of the MPA, but the IRP only allows fishers to catch 80mm kreef. Sara told me that "here there are only 75s". While there was an abundance of 80mm crayfish in the MPA, fishers claim that this was not the case outside of it - as Gideon explained: "here you work yourself to death to fill your quota". One journey out to *Die Blinde* indicated the reality upon which this view is based:

After 2 tanks of petrol ran out 5 kms from shore, Michael's bakkie was towed back by his brother-in-law Tino, who was luckily in the vicinity at the time. Strong currents had necessitated the intensive use of the engine as Michael and his two crew members struggled for five hours to catch six kreef, losing two nets in the process. In line with the rules of IRP, Without a formal contract with a buyer, Michael was forced to sell his kreef for R15 each. The petrol alone had cost over R350!

Once on dry land, it was apparent that Michael and his crew were ashamed (*skaam*) in front of Tino's crew. I believe the reason for this was not only because they had just been 'rescued' by Tino and his crew, it was because Michael's crew were fishing on the IRP, while Tino's crew were fishing on Tino's netfish permit (a "proper permit"), allowing them a sufficient catch to make the trip financially worthwhile. The difference was stark: Michael's crew were fishing with a discredited permit and this undermined their legitimacy as real fishermen, while Tino's crew were fishing with a 'proper permit' and so, in this instance, they were the real fishermen.

As Gideon remarked, "the guys don't feel like working in this way ... they don't think it's worth the effort". It is a fact that small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay can make more money by breaking the rules and poaching, than by following the rules and struggling within legal limits. For three days I accompanied Michael as he struggled to get a crew of IRP fishers together to catch kreef within the rules<sup>48</sup>. It was clear that the fishers Michael attempted to conscript were reluctant because they didn't believe this would yield satisfactory economic results. Their reluctance was compounded by the aversion to being seen fishing with the IRP, interpreting Michael's decision as one to scavenge along St Helena Bay's margins for a paltry few scraps thrown down by the state.

In his attempt to conscript a crew, Michael visited Steenberg's Cove. These fishers, told us that people are now regularly catching kreef in the MPA, for food *and* to sell. They spoke about how Cove residents engaged in poaching, not only in St Helena Bay but also along other parts of the West Coast like Elands Bay. They explained that it was a logical choice to make under the circumstances: monetary rewards from poaching far exceeded anything attainable through legal means. In a context of increasing socio-economic pressure, local people who have the capacity to fish for themselves are thus faced with two choices: to follow the rules or to break the rules. These fishers politely intimated that one would be foolish not to poach. For them, following the rules meant struggling to catch an insignificant quantity of marine species; and thus, to collaborate with the state in undermining one's own socio-economic interests.

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<sup>48</sup> I have since been informed that Michael had been caught with 40 crayfish by MCM officers.

This perception is affirmed when fishers from St Helena Bay look to places like Paternoster where fishers catch and sell kreef with a near total disregard for authority<sup>49</sup>. Many of Paternoster's fishers drive expensive new cars, in stark contrast to fishers in Laingville. Despite other important factors, many small-scale fishers in Laingville and Steenberg's Cove believe that the difference in material circumstances between Paternoster and St Helena Bay is because Paternoster's fishers are known to break the rules. By contrast, the organisationally-fractured and less hostile small-scale fishers of St Helena Bay do not drive new cars, and are subject to relatively higher levels of state surveillance, preventing them from realising the same material rule-breaking benefits as Paternoster.

Gezelius (2002) rightly argues that an understanding of poaching requires an analysis which includes *both* rationalist *and* normative considerations. The salience of this claim is evidenced in St Helena Bay, where the stigma of rule-following has a symbolic basis as well as a material one. Indeed, the symbolic element underpinning the decision to poach sometimes supersedes the motivation of material gain, as the Victorian poacher and folk hero James Hawkins wrote in his autobiography: "I have poached more for revenge than for gain" (Hawkins in Jones, 1979: 830). Not everyone that poaches is consciously defining their actions in terms of political protest, but one cannot make the decision to poach unless one has a degree of disregard for marine regulations and the authority they represent.

The rules of the state are seen to alienate coastal fishing communities from what they believe is their autochthonous right to the marine commons - to follow these rules is to submit to an illegitimate power. This belief was articulated with the discourse of 'real fishermen'. My fieldwork pointed to a common perception among many small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay: if you collaborated in the denial of these rights, then you renounced your identity as a real fisherman - hence, real fishermen don't follow the rules. As Gideon (a known rule-breaker), eloquently put it: "We're fishermen, and if the sea is in your blood then you can't stop them, no matter how many monitors there are". Following the rules means battling to fish with unviable quotas, or abandoning fishing to pursue scarce and degrading work for very low pay on the farms or in the towns - for small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay, the choice to follow the rules translates into a form of subjective and material self-denial that is experienced as a loss of human dignity.

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<sup>49</sup> See Appendix 2.

The alternative choice – to break the rules – involves not obeying the agents of the political economic status quo. This choice allows people to take their lives into their *own* hands, and make their *own* decisions about their *own* lives. This choice translates into an affirmation of subjective and material self-worth, and is experienced as the assertion of human dignity. For some of these fishers, poaching presents the only chance to earn a decent income *and* to maintain their dignity. There is thus a pride in asserting one's 'birthright' as an agterblywende and real fisherman by breaking the rules and protesting against the injustice and illegitimacy of formal regimes of governance.

The explicit parallels between contemporary St Helena Bay and Victorian England are intriguing. Jones (1979: 828) explains that “the poacher who chose to break the rules of the game faced the whole panoply of physical and judicial protection that had grown up in the eighteenth century. This gave the crime a special excitement and *satisfaction*” (emphasis added). Indeed

“It was a matter of congratulations among the men as they talked at work if they had succeeded in ‘doing’ a person in a better position or even if they had ‘sloped summat’ from the well-to-do ... It is the idea of the legitimate prey, the right to make some folk disgorge, the suggestion of a just reprisal ... It is often the same spirit, too, which initiates poaching rather than for material gain. There is a satisfaction in carrying the war right into the enemy’s territory” (Holdenby in Jones, 1979: 835)

This phenomenon draws some of its force from the historical development of a subculture of resistance. A harbour master in Nova Scotia described how local fishers there had little “tolerance for the law ...they think they have a right to fish even if they do not hold a license ...I think it has a lot to do with the grandfather, and the son who always fished as they please” (McMullan and Perrier, 2002: 694). This subculture of resistance is well-developed among small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay and stems from the long history of antagonism towards the state under colonialism and apartheid. It constitutes an ideological basis that informs the choices people make in relation to state governance, while simultaneously providing a *strategic repertoire* to act on those choices.

### *Concluding remarks*

The culture and discourse of resistance is vital today in a way that suggests more than just the echo of history. Contemporary circumstances are breathing new life into the historically-contingent subculture of resistance - this is not just a historical pattern being repeated like an involuntary reflex. The reform of South Africa's marine regulatory regime has been experienced and perceived by small-scale fishers in St Helena Bay to be unjust: not only does it fail to recognise their rights but it has also exacerbated the context of structural inequality that already defines their lives. Thus rule-breaking becomes imbued with pride, while stigma is attached to rule-following. The former is an assertion of human dignity, while the other is seen as its negation. Nevertheless, it is probably the case that people would rather work within the law, if only this brought adequate material benefits in a way that recognised their humanity.

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# Conclusion

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As a place that is becoming increasingly integrated into the global market economy, St Helena Bay can be conceptualised as a nexus linking multifarious political, economic and ecological processes: a study of St Helena Bay offers a site for interrogating the interactions between these multiple-scale dynamics. Because of its historical centrality as a mode of production and livelihood in St Helena Bay, fish harvesting and production constitutes a primary medium through which patterns of interaction between social and ecological phenomena are expressed. What becomes clear is that, as David Harvey (1998: 332) puts it: “the circulation of money is a prime ecological variable”.

In the first chapter, I argued that St Helena Bay is undergoing dramatic changes as a result of its growing integration into the broader regional and global political economy. Tourism, urban development and industrial production continue to transform the socio-ecology of this once isolated area. Though these developments bring benefits for some, most local people have been unable to tap into the attendant economic opportunities. Meanwhile the increasing numbers of migrants drawn to the area by the lure of employment have exacerbated the general conditions of socio-economic deprivation that characterises life for the majority in St Helena Bay.

The reform of fisheries governance and rationalisation/restructuring of the local fishing industry have also placed strain on those individuals who have historically depended on marine species for their livelihood. There are fewer jobs within the large-scale commercial fishing companies, and direct access to the marine commons for small-scale fishers has been circumscribed by an explosion of regulations. Fishing is no longer as central to St Helena Bay's economy as it once was, further reducing the options available to local people as they seek to sustain themselves in a context of cash-dependence, where employment is scarce and few own enough land to grow their own food.

The scarcity of resources underpins a growing tension between different racial groups in St Helena Bay. Claims to an autochthonous cultural heritage and identity associated with the Myth of the West Coast, are understood by many local people to be a justification for privileged access to local resources. The in-migration of thousands of black job seekers to

Laingville has invested historically contingent racial categories with explanatory power: black workers are seen by many coloured people as being in some way responsible for the high unemployment rates in communities like Laingville. The competition for access rights to the marine commons via the Interim Rights arrangement and the drafting of a small-scale fishing policy, has brought together notions of 'real fisherman' with the autochthonous identity of the Wes Kus: oppositional concepts such as 'inside' and 'outside'; 'then' and 'now'; *agterblywendes* and *inkommer*; have become racialised and transposed onto ideas of 'egte vissermanne', or 'real fishermen'. These dichotomies provide a moral justification for inclusion and exclusion: the perceived legitimacy of one's claims to this place-identity determine the nature of one's right to local resources.

The problem with this interpretation is that it simplifies a complex reality, obscuring patterns of political and economic structural inequality that characterises the lives of working class people in St Helena Bay, regardless of their racial classification. The violence that erupted in Laingville in 2005 demonstrates that the stakes relating to these hypostasised dichotomies are increasing in relation to rising living costs and unemployment levels, as well as the expanding regulatory regime governing small-scale access to the marine commons.

The glaring gap between what small-scale fishers imagine to be their pre-legislative right to the sea, and their limited legal access in actuality, is something that they view as unjust. In response to this regulatory reality – fishers in St Helena Bay can choose to engage with governmental regulation, and thus recognise the state's authority; or they can choose to subvert these rules and the authority they represent. To assert their rights to the marine commons, some fishers in Laingville have gone to meetings with MCM and marched to parliament, abiding by the rules of democratic participation, and fished within the parameters of the law. Many others have demonstrated their views by poaching, a symbolic act of protest that breaks the rules of the game. In St Helena Bay, important developments like the establishment of the Interim Relief Permit were largely the result of participation within formally-recognised structures and processes. This has, however, failed to convince the majority of fishers that following the rules is better than breaking them. In St Helena Bay, to 'follow the rules' of the state's regulatory regime means one either has no rights to fish, or that one has to struggle to survive within the limited parameters of the Interim Relief Permit.

This makes the alternative option of acting in ways that break the rules - such as poaching - particularly attractive, particularly because of the strong historical sub-culture of resistance against state authority which provides an established repertoire of thought and action. Not only does poaching provide a direct opportunity for economic gain that usually exceeds anything that which could be earned legally, it also serves as a mechanism for protest that asserts the actor's right to access the marine commons. Among fishers in Laingville St Helena Bay, those who 'follow the rules' are seen to struggle financially at the very same time as they are submitting to the authority of the state, while those who break the rules by poaching are seen to benefit financially without submitting to state authority. According to this interpretation, following the rules equates to relinquishing agency, while 'breaking the rules' is seen rather as an affirmation of agency. Coupled with the hard reality of economics; this formulation imbues the former choice with stigma, and the latter with pride.

What does this mean for the ecological systems of St Helena Bay? The lived experience of the majority of people in St Helena Bay is such that I often heard older coloured Laingville residents speak wistfully about the days of apartheid, as one old coloured fisher put it to me: "In the apartheid years things were bad, but at least a person could get work". For people from poorer parts of St Helena Bay such as the fishers of Laingville, the challenges associated with a history of racialised capitalism are currently being exacerbated by the restructuring of the local fishing industry and the reform of the marine regulatory regime. In such a context, characterised by socio-economic and political marginalisation, many people are struggling to meet their immediate material needs: long-term ecological considerations are a luxury.

Contrary to environmentalist discourse that posits a need to 'educate' poorer/disadvantaged communities about the importance of conserving the ecosystem; people in Laingville are fully capable of comprehending the logic of conservation. Ignorance is not the key issue here, as Middleton (2003: 23) notes, "economic power is a vital determinant": while the impact of wealthy people is "driven by their intense resource use ... the poor may degrade the environment because they have no other option ... they cannot afford to do anything other than overuse and misuse the resources that are immediately available to them"

Educational 'empowerment initiatives' that aim to instil a 'conservation consciousnesses' in places like Laingville or Steenberg's Cove play an indirect role in governance by attempting

to reshape people's relationship with the environment. But such initiatives to 'manage' natural resource users by 'changing their behaviour' are critically flawed. They pay insufficient attention to the fact that people's perception of, and relationship with, the natural environment is absolutely tied up with their specific social, political and economic conditions (see Berkes & Folke, 1998: 415).

According to Hartwick & Peet (2003: 189), political and economic policy makers have had to find "some ideological means of reconciliation ... between two contradictory political imperatives: economic growth and environmental protection". Through the adoption of paradoxical orientations such as 'sustainable development' and 'maximum sustainable yield', "environmental concern has been ideologically and institutionally incorporated into the global neoliberal hegemony of the late twentieth century". Sustainable development does not preclude the 'enclosure' (privatisation) and commodification of nature, and has articulated with the enclosure of nature for conservation and tourism purposes, further marginalising local people<sup>50</sup>. Because of this, conservation discourse tends to be interpreted by this community as an attack on their right as human beings to a dignified life. Indeed, Cosgrove (1995: 8) argues that dominant approaches to conservation often resemble "imperialist interventions", excluding local people from access to, and ownership of, natural resources in their area. The "connections between neoliberalism, environmental change and environmental politics are all deeply interwoven" – the multiple dynamics that are affecting the socio-ecological health of St Helena Bay cannot be fully understood without reference to their articulation with capitalism (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004: 376).

Ultimately, the degree to which people in Laingville (and other poorer neighbourhoods of St Helena Bay) impact the natural environment when compared to large-scale industries – such as the pelagic fisheries of St Helena Bay, the mineral and energy sector in Saldhana Bay, urban development, or commercial agriculture - needs to be considered objectively. Even when operating within the rules set by multiple-level regimes of governance, industrial production (in all its forms) tends to harm the environment on a much larger scale and in more profound ways. Our profit-driven industrial system of production is a castle made of sand. Genuine sustainability can only emerge when we recognise that our absolute interdependence with the non-human world.

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<sup>50</sup> See Dryzek, J. (1997) 'The politics of the earth: Environmental discourses'.



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## Appendix 1

In her role as Catch Data Monitor, once I observed Tannie Sara ask a low-level compliance officer if her husband could land at Stompneusbaai rather than Sandy Point Harbour. The regulations regarding her husband's Interim Relief Permit (IRP) stipulated that they were to land at the harbour because it is "an approved landing site" (IRP conditions, Section B – 7.1) ostensibly to allow for easier regulation of catches - but this often means additional petrol costs, something that the state didn't take into account. Though the permit conditions stipulated that "written permission must be obtained from the Chief Director of Marine Resource Management to deviate from this condition" (IRP, section B – 6.9), the officer obliged her request.

Oom Andries, told me how he observed two local "Parks Board" (MCM) officials handing over 16 kreef nets to another resident from the 'Cove'. Andries and his wife Sylvia claimed that this individual was not a 'real fisherman' because "hy't altyd in die fabriek gewerk" ("he always worked in the factories"). As they described it, this person was a local 'power-broker' who was "boetie-boetie" (in a position of 'underserved trust') with local MCM officials.

The Interim Relief Permit allocation process was another example of the 'uneven' implementation of 'the rules'. Oom Theron has lived in Steenberg's Cove for his entire life and been a fisher for forty years. Though he was denied an IRP for small-scale fishing because he also fished on pelagic trawlers, he stated that: "Die meederhied van Veldrift se vissers wat op die pelagiese bote werk het wel gekry. Ek weet nie wat is die problem nie, want ons bly in die selfde land ... daar is 'n fout gemaak ... ons gemeenskap ly nou daaronder en Veldrift se vissers ... trek vaat uit die situasie" ("The majority of Veldrift's fishers who work on the pelagic boats did indeed receive permits. I don't know what the problem is because we all live in the same land ... a mistake has been made ... our community is suffering and Veldrift's fishers are benefitting from the situation.

## Appendix 2

Many fishers here were earning a relatively good income from illegally catching and selling kreef, while MCM was seen to turn a blind eye. Discussing this with Tannie Sara, she asked me what differences I noticed between Laingville and Paternoster. When I, as a clever university student, began to overanalyse this question, she simply asked: "did you see their cars?" Aside from the many luxury vehicles owned by tourists and other wealthy inkommers, it is indeed the case that many of Paternoster's Agterblywendes owned new and relatively expensive vehicles, something virtually unheard of in Laingville and the other poorer neighbourhoods in SHB.

**Appendix 3** (from 1996 and 2001 National Census undertaken by Statistics South Africa)

