

Whale Conservation in Coastal Ecuador: Environmentalism of the Poor or Neoliberal Conservation?*

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Abstract In this paper, I examine the interaction between transnational activist networks, conservation scientists, government authorities, and artisanal fishing communities in coastal Ecuador. Focusing on the problem of cetacean bycatch, I employ the concept of the “discourse of nature” to identify contrasting languages of valuation used by the stakeholders for marine coastal environments. NGOs utilize a scientific evaluation to portray artisanal fishing as a hazard to the survival of humpback whales, but this coincides with the attempt by government and development agencies to portray artisanal fisheries as inefficient and ecologically harmful. In contrast, a survey I carried out in a coastal fishing community shows that local residents contest this portrayal of fishing as ecologically harmful, drawing upon their discourses of livelihood, indigenous identity, territorial claims, and social marginality. Focusing on the social conflict surrounding the marine protected area [MPA] of Machalilla National Park, I argue that additional restrictions on fishing to mitigate the incidence of cetacean bycatch will not have adequate social acceptance by local artisanal fishing communities. Hence, the language of whale conservation which appears to be a pro-poor environmentalism at the macro (international) level, appears to local actors as a threat to their livelihoods. To offset this micro/macro discrepancy, whale conservation NGOs should support local aspirations to continue fishing as a livelihood, thereby

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restoring whale conservation to the status of “environmentalism of the poor”.

Key words Environmentalism, conservation policy, ecotourism, Marine Protected Areas, fisheries, humpback whale

I. Introduction

Is there a conflict between the goals of international wildlife conservation and the economic needs of local communities? As the developing nations of the Global South increasingly follow the guidelines of the Convention on Biological Diversity [CBD], the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora [CITES] and other multinational treaties, international commitments must be translated into conservation policies at the local level. However, some conservation specialists in the developing world argue that programs of environmental conservation often operate as new forms of exploitation or colonialism (Guha 1989). In this vein, Ecuadorian biologist Elizabeth Bravo (2004; 2012) criticizes the “market-based” approach to conservation, while anthropologist Diego Quiroga (2009) critically reevaluates ecotourism in the Galapagos Islands. Conservation policies that cut off local communities from the habitats in which they have lived and earned their livelihoods can be viewed as the imposition by global forces of “neoliberal conservation” (Büscher et al. 2012).

However, some researchers are calling attention to indigenous forms of environmental activism originating in the Global South and oriented to the needs of local communities. The “environmentalism of the poor” [EOP] is a term applied by researchers to social struggles in which human rights and issues of environmental protection are inseparable (Martínez-Alier 2009). The term originates in the work of Joan Martínez-Alier, a pioneer in ecological economics who also serves in the scientific committee of the

European Environmental Agency. Since environmental problems pose a greater threat to poor people than to the wealthy, poor people are mobilizing all over the globe to defend the natural habitats on which their survival depends.

Conservation of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) in Ecuador is an environmental cause which upon first glance appears to simultaneously protect the environment while promoting the economic and social interests of Ecuador's coastal residents who depend on the ocean for their livelihoods. Policies to protect Ecuador's humpback whale population are advocated by local environmental non-governmental organizations [NGOs]. The NGOs are operated by Ecuadorian scientists who have long-standing relationships with the coastal communities. They argue that by protecting the whales, the Ecuadorian government is also protecting an asset, since the whales attract tourists from around the world. Hence, the NGOs argue that by nurturing the whale-watching industry, the Ecuadorian government is also creating employment opportunities for coastal residents. They claim that protecting whales is not only good for the environment but also good for Ecuador's coastal economy.

Within the structure of NGOs, Ecuadorian scientists have devoted effort and resources to research aimed at developing policies to protect whales and dolphins in the wild. Their research methods are adapted to the local conditions of Ecuador, where research funding is limited and equipment is not elaborate (C. Castro, personal communication 17 August 2012; F. Félix, personal communication 8 August 2012). While addressing the local economic, technological and social factors, Ecuadorian whale conservationists have also tried to influence international policy. Their work includes collaboration with international networks of scientists and environmental activists, which Wapner (1995) describes as transnational environmental activist groups [TEAGs].

Through involvement with the TEAGs, the Ecuadorian NGOs have helped guide Ecuador toward an outspoken position against Japan's policy of scientific whaling and in favor of whale sanctuaries (MAE 2010). Ecuador is a member of the Group of Buenos Aires [GBA], a voting bloc of member countries in the International Whaling Commission which champions the strictest measures for protecting whales (AFP 2010). According to Bailey (2012), the GBA member countries see whales as a crucial biological resource to be preserved by developing nations of the global South against the consumptive exploitation of northern nations like Japan and Norway (which consume whale meat). According to Martínez-Alier, et al. (2010, 2), the actions of third world environmental movements demonstrate that "resources can be defended without an exclusive appeal to economic valuation", instead bringing to the fore "languages of indigenous territorial rights, human rights... livelihood, sacredness, environmental values, aesthetic values, and cultural values." The Ecuadorian scientists' defense of humpback whales against human exploitation appears to be precisely this type of pro-poor environmental policy framed by multiple criteria.

However, one critical problem of whale conservation has emerged. This is the problem of cetacean bycatch, which occurs when a whale or dolphin is accidentally entangled in a net used for catching fish. Worldwide, bycatch is a major threat to the survival of some whale species, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, which estimates that 650,000 marine mammals are killed annually in fishing nets (NRDC 2014). In the U.S.A. and Canada alone, at least 1,762 confirmed mortalities of large whales occurred in the period from 1970 and 2009 (Van der Hoop et al. 2013). Scientists also have evidence that such entanglements do not always produce the immediate death of the animal, but can cripple the animal and result in eventual death long after the initial injury (Félix et al. 2011). Hence, the Ecuadorian whale experts advocate that the Ecuadorian government should prohibit fishing during the

humpback whale breeding season, or else in certain areas where the whales are known to congregate (Alava et al. 2005; 2012). The question that must be raised is, what would be the economic impact of such a policy on coastal fishing communities, and how will the local fishers respond to the measures?

If artisanal fishers see conservation policies as a threat to their livelihoods, they may be reluctant to cooperate. Policies for whale protection should be evaluated from the perspective of Ecuador's artisanal fishing communities, since the members of these communities can contribute most to the success of the policies if they understand and support them. Environmental policies should support the preservation of livelihoods based on communal resources, instead of attempting to protect nature by separating humans from nature. I recommend that by realigning the goals of whale conservation with the needs of coastal communities, it will be possible to generate greater social support for measures to protect whales from harmful impacts.

If NGOs in Ecuador are arguing that whale bycatch can be mitigated by excluding fishing boats from certain zones, the possible impact of whale conservation measures should be evaluated in advance. The protection of natural habitats with the creation of parks and protected areas in the Global South has often resulted in the abolition of the local peoples' traditional rights of common access (Adams and Hutton 2007; Igoe 2004). In practice, the initiatives which are discursively aimed at protecting the environment may in fact lead to the "capture of common resources" by development initiatives seeking to sell products and services in world markets (Coffey and Marston 2013). It is precisely the exclusion of indigenous people and local communities by coalitions of states, corporations and nonprofit conservation agencies which has been referred to as "neoliberal conservation" by critics (Büscher et al. 2012; Wilshusen et al. 2001; World Rainforest Movement 2004).

Is whale conservation in Ecuador an example of "environmentalism of the poor", or is it an example of "neoliberal conservation?" Whale conservation

in Ecuador illustrates how a single discourse of nature can have contrastive meanings in struggles carried out at the macro (international) level and at the micro (local) level. At the international level, the prioritization of whale conservation is a defense of local habitats against outside exploitation. However, at the local level, the ideals of whale conservation can serve to marginalize artisanal fishers and saddle them with blame for ecological management problems. In this article, I argue that the conservation strategies proposed by Ecuadorian NGOs must be evaluated in terms of an “ongoing process of neoliberalization” which is not uniform and produces differing effects at micro and macro scales of social organization (Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2009, 51).

Neoliberalization is a social process involving discourses and practices of governance, whereas neoliberalism is the political philosophy which claims that the liberties and freedoms of individual persons are sacrosanct and must be protected against the intervention by governments. However, in spite of neoliberalism’s injunctions against state intervention, the policies often require governments to carry out intensified forms of coercive and disciplinary action (Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2009, 51). This is especially evident in policies designed to manage nature and the “sustainable use” of habitats while maintaining economic growth (Castree 2010).

The outlook of Ecuador’s marine conservation scientists is clearly not neoliberal; however, their proposals to protect the whales enter the policy arena and undergo a process of neoliberalization, which I describe here by identifying the distribution of competing discourses at different scales and in use by different actors. Martínez-Alier, et al. (2010) point out that any effort to preserve the environment creates distributional conflicts, in which the benefits of natural habitats are unevenly distributed to different stakeholders and interest groups. Members of each stakeholder group can be expected to utilize a distinct language of valuation to evaluate the conflict. Similarly, Noel

Castree (2010) argues that each “discourse of nature” expresses power relations, as well as impacting human communities with material effects. Inspired by these insights, I identify the discourses of nature employed by NGO scientists and government officials and compare them with the languages utilized by artisanal fishers of the Ecuadorian coastline.

Hence, the focus on policy discourses and policy practices serves to organize the paper. Subsequent to this introduction, the second section of this paper provides an overview of the bycatch problem in Ecuador and the efforts of NGOs to frame the problem for the Ecuadorian government. The third section provides a description of the research methods used in this study and the principal theoretical concepts which inform the research procedures. The fourth section describes the policy discourse of scientists affiliated with NGOs, and explains how they frame the problem as a need for transition from a fishing economy to ecotourism based on whale watching. The fifth section describes the policy practices of the Ecuadorian government in creating protected areas for natural habitats, and the sixth section explains how artisanal fishers react to government policies and discourses which place the blame for ecological problems upon the fishing communities. Furthermore, the fishers’ negative perceptions of the national park’s restrictions on fishing draws attention to the gap between local forms of environmental knowledge and the discourses of nature which are positively regarded in the international arena. Finally, the seventh section makes some recommendations for bridging this gap, and enlisting local communities as allies of whale conservation.

II. The Bycatch Problem in Ecuador

On the west coast of South America, yearly migrations bring the humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) to Ecuador in the months of June, July and

August to mate and to give birth to calves. The majestic and playful humpbacks have become a tourist attraction, and in the last 10 years whale watching tour businesses have proliferated in the coastal communities. The new whale watching industry is viewed as a generator of local employment and income, and it also exposes the public to information about the need for protecting whales and their habitat (MAE 2007). On the mainland coast of Ecuador, the largest number of whale watch tours is found in Parque Nacional Machalilla [PNM, or Machalilla National Park], which is estimated to receive 10,000 visitors annually (Hoyt and Iñíguez 2008, 38).

Whales and dolphins are not targets of fishing in coastal Ecuador. However, there is an alarming trend for entanglements in fishing gear which poses a threat to conservation. Ecuadorian fishing fleets use a passive fishing gear called a *gillnet*, which remains in an anchored position in the ocean until retrieval. Ecuadorian scientists affiliated with NGOs have shown evidence that gillnets cause mortal injuries to humpback whales as well as to dolphins and porpoises (Alava et al. 2005; 2012; Castro and Rosero 2010; Félix et al. 2011; Félix, Samaniego and Haase 2006). Some estimates place the number of humpback deaths annually in Ecuadorian waters due to entanglement as high as 33 whales annually (Alava et al. 2012).

In spite of the success of the local scientists in documenting and publishing scientific papers on cetacean bycatch, some researchers feel that government agencies in Ecuador do not give enough priority to the problem. The government agencies tend to disregard the estimates of the harmful impact because officials believe that NGO reports exaggerate the problem, according to Fernando Félix of FEMM (F. Félix interview 8/1/12). Hence, the actions of the NGOs in Ecuador can be understood in relation to the need to make a convincing portrayal that the harmful impact merits a coherent government policy response.

In the discussion of cetacean bycatch in Ecuador, researchers point to the

rapid expansion of fishing capacity, especially the rapid growth of artisanal (small-scale) fishing fleets (Alava et al. 2005; 2012; Castro and Rosero 2010; Félix et al. 2011). The Ecuadorian researchers recommend “changes to fishing gear and operational procedures”, (Alava et al. 2005, 167). The changes which can be made to prevent bycatch generally involve some combination of the following:

- Technical modifications to fishing gear to prevent entanglements
- Restrictions on the use of some types of fishing gear
- Restrictions on the locations where fishing operations can be carried out
- Closed seasons to restrict the time when fishing operations can occur

The difficulty is that implementation of any of these bycatch mitigation measures is likely to cause economic losses for communities that depend on fishing for their livelihoods. For example, the bycatch problem could be solved by a closed season on fishing during the three months when humpback whales remain on the coast of Ecuador (Alava et al. 2005; 2012); however, it would leave the coastal fishing communities without basic income. How can the local fisher communities become convinced to cooperate with measures to reduce cetacean bycatch?

III. Research Methods

The methodology of this study is to track the efforts of NGOs to shape the Ecuadorian government’s response to cetacean bycatch, distinguishing between two forms of political practice: policy discourse and policy practice. According to Castree (2010, 8), policy discourse refers to efforts to generate policy which reflect the “values, norms [and] ambitions” of those who try to direct government programs, while policy practice refers to the measures which are actually implemented to bring about changes. I assume that

discourses as well as practices are “contextually embedded and politically mediated” (Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2009, 52).

This approach justifies a focus on scientists who are affiliated with NGOs, as key policy actors who mediate between the global policy context and the local political structures. Ecuadorian NGOs such as PWF and Instituto Nazca depend on funding from abroad, but also work closely with the Ecuadorian government to provide scientific assessments; nevertheless, many of them also work directly with the public and key stakeholder groups to promote public awareness of the benefits of ecological conservation.

Three modes of data collection were used for this study. First, I collected a database of publications, including a database of news articles from Ecuador on reports of cetacean bycatch, as well as relevant scientific publications. Second, I interviewed the scientist members of the NGOs directly, to gain insider perspectives on their positions. Third, I interviewed stakeholders and other members of the public to determine the extent to which the NGOs scientific investigations and disseminations thereof have influenced widespread attitudes and practices.

The research was carried out in a period of 20 days in 2012, with visits to Guayas, Santa Elena and Manabí provinces. I carried out interviews with scientists from Fundación Ecuatoriana para el Estudio de Mamíferos Marinos [FEMM], Pacific Whale Foundation [PWF], and Museo de Ballenas. Other NGOs that could not be contacted are nevertheless referred to in this study on the basis of their published reports and activities documented in the news media. An interview was also carried out with scientists from the Ecuadorian government’s research entity, Instituto Nacional de Pesca [National Fisheries Institute], and with a public official from the Ministerio del Ambiente [Ministry of the Environment]. In August 2012, a survey was carried out with members of a village located in the Machalilla National Park, in Manabí province. The persons surveyed were those who have some income derived

from fishing activities.

The survey was used primarily as a device to initiate interviews, in order to discover the social and cultural criteria likely to determine if policies for prevention of cetacean bycatch will be socially acceptable in fishing communities. Currently there are no regulations or measures in place in Ecuador to prevent cetacean bycatch, so the target population was artisanal fishers who have experienced some encounter with conservation regulations similar to those recommended for whale bycatch mitigation. For this purpose, we selected a village located in the vicinity of Machalilla National Park [PNM], a coastal protected area which includes a known breeding zone for humpback whales (Scheidat et al. 2000).

The village I selected is Salango, which is located adjacent to the PNM (01°35'S, 80°52'W). The town is one of four beachfronts used as a base for fishing operations in the waters under the jurisdiction of the park. However, Salango is also the smallest of the four, registering only 216 fishermen in a recent census of Manabí Province (Bazurto 2008). Salango may not be adequate as a site for evaluating the impact of artisanal fishing on whales and dolphins, since most bycatch incidence is connected to the larger artisanal fleets based in Anconcito, Ayangue, Esmeraldas and Puerto López (F. Félix, personal communication, 4 August 2012). However, there are two good reasons for choosing Salango for our survey.

First, a small community like Salango may not represent the biggest impact of fishing on cetaceans, but it can provide some information about the impact of conservation measures on artisanal fishing. Hence, without claiming that Salango is “typical” of Ecuador’s artisanal fishing outposts, it may offer a balanced mix of different types of artisanal fishing (such as inshore versus offshore). Even more importantly, Salango is a place where the goals of artisanal fishing, wildlife conservation and ecotourism have come into conflict. A report issued by the Ministry of the Environment (MAE 2007, 34-5)

indicates that local fishers resent the impact of the park on fishing activities; residents claim that ecotourism centered in the park does not benefit their communities. Nevertheless, the PNM is also where two NGOs (Pacific Whale Foundation and Yaqu Pacha) have carried out successful public awareness programs to inform local citizens about the importance of whale conservation and ecology (Barragán 2002; Castro and Rosero 2010). Hence, Salango is in some aspects a test case for whale conservation because of the town's continued dependence on artisanal fishing in spite of the fact that it is adjacent to the national park where ecotourism based upon whale watching has been most vigorously developed.

The survey was devised and administered in collaboration with Mr. Cirilo Macías, a university student who resides in Salango. After the goals of the investigation were explained to Mr. Macías, he composed the questions in language understandable to the local fishers. The author and Mr. Macías together administered the survey randomly to persons we encountered on the beachfront, from August 14 until August 17, 2012. Many respondents were visibly engaged in work, such as net repair or boat maintenance. Out of our sample of 20 respondents, 15 are primarily employed in fishing; among the remaining five, one fishes part-time, one is a small-scale fish merchant, another unloads fishing boats (*gavetero*) and two worked for tourism related businesses. While carrying out the survey, we also witnessed boats landing and fish changing hands. Hence, our analysis focuses on ideas gained from conversation and face-to-face interaction, instead of focusing on the measurement of attitudes with survey questions.

Nevertheless, the survey did attempt to measure the respondents' attitudes about whale or dolphin entanglement in the present time, in the absence of any policy specific to cetacean bycatch. Hence, the survey elicited the respondents' experiences or perceptions of conservation policies in general which impact the conduct of fishing. The wording was left open, with fishers

being asked simply if “there are any problems with the laws” that regulate fishing. We also asked about the craft used, the number of crew members, fishing gear, target species and the distance from shore habitually fished. Some respondents declined to provide details about their fishing activities.

Another set of questions measured attitudes about whale and dolphin entanglements. We asked, “If a dolphin was entangled in a net, would you be willing to cut the net to release the dolphin?” and “If you encountered an entangled whale, would you be willing to assist in efforts to free the whale?” Most responded that dolphin entanglements are not frequent in Salango where fishers do not use the type of fishing gear which entangles dolphins. Nevertheless, these questions can be taken as a measurement of potential willingness to change fishing practices for cetacean conservation.

A survey carried out for three days in the village of Salango cannot represent the entire population of the Ecuadorian coastline, but it does provide examples of how local people interpret policy actions taken by government and policy actors. In this sense, it serves to illustrate the contrast between the discourses of actors at different scales, using contrastive languages of valuation. Furthermore, the brief survey cannot substitute for in-depth ethnography, but it does indicate that Salango’s fishers are aware of the importance of whales and dolphins; hence, they have potential to become valuable allies for whale conservation in the future.

IV. Policy Discourse: NGOs and Ecotourism Discourses

The Ecuadorian scientists who work on the cetacean bycatch problem are affiliated with NGOs that carry out original scientific research on whale conservation. These include FEMM (Fundación Ecuatoriana para el Estudio de Mamíferos Marinos), Pacific Whale Foundation, Yaqu Pacha, Museo de Ballenas [the Whale Museum], Instituto Nazca de Investigaciones Marinas

[Nazca Institute for Marine Research] and Fundación Natura. These organizations have different goals and forms of operation. For example, Museo de Ballenas disseminates scientific information to the public and also carries out research on humpback whale biological parameters. In contrast, Nazca Institute implements policies for environmental management on a large marine reserve in the province of Esmeraldas. It would be hard to group all of these conservation NGOs together except to say that they all carry out some form of scientific research and they have purposive interest in whale conservation.

The focus on sustainable development by whale conservation NGOs is directed at two goals, to gain the support of the government agencies, and to gain the support of the communities that inhabit the coastline. The NGOs have been successful in convincing the Ecuadorian government to oppose Japan's whaling proposals in the International Whaling Commission [IWC] and other international arenas (MAE 2010). NGOs have also collaborated with the Ministry of the Environment in the adoption of national guidelines for whale conservation (MAE 2010; 2012; 2013). These guidelines include recommendations to utilize whale conservation for the promotion of ecotourism as a sustainable industry on the coast of Ecuador.

Similar arguments about sustainable development have been disseminated to the Ecuadorian public through news media (El Universo 2008; 2011). The reasoning behind these proposals was explained to me by Cristina Castro, the director and head researcher of the Pacific Whale Foundation in Puerto López, who explained "I am a conservationist, but I also think about people... [so] I am not trying to conserve an animal just because it is beautiful. I want to conserve it because it is economically beneficial to people." She described whale-watching tourism as a motor of development in Puerto López, where it has buoyed the local economy (C. Castro interview 8/18/12).

There are many other actors and stakeholders in the scenario of whale

conservation in Ecuador. Government agencies include the Ministerio del Ambiente [Ministry of the Environment], the Sistema Nacional de áreas Protegidas [National System of Protected Areas], the Secretaría Técnica del Mar [Technical Secretariat of the Oceans], the Subsecretaría de Recursos Pesqueros [Sub-secretariat for Fishery Resources, which is part of the Ministry for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries] and the Instituto Nacional de Pesca [National Fisheries Institute]. In addition, the fishermen are represented by fishing cooperatives which have local chapters and national affiliates. Communities up and down the coast of Ecuador have their own councils and local development associations. Operators of businesses related to whale watching and ecotourism have also entered the picture as stakeholders.

Within this multi-stakeholder framework, the NGOs have adopted a perspective which attempts to use sustainable development as a model for addressing the challenges posed to whale conservation. There are two aspects of their strategy. First, they have promoted whale watching as a source of tourism which can help local residents earn income. Second, the NGOs have supported the creation of protected areas and nature reserves which are tools for biodiversity management. The two initiatives are seen as mutually reinforcing, since the wildlife refuges will draw tourists and the tourist industry will support and maintain the protected areas.

Hence, Ecuador's whale conservation NGO scientists rely upon on a language of valuation which emphasizes the economic value of nature conservation in terms of tourist industries. This tactic seems calculated to gain the attention of government ministers, who often think in terms of quantifiable revenues. Since the Ecuadorian government has ignored calls for an urgent response to cetacean bycatch, the economic argument is the only reasonable gambit to gain government support. Thus, the focus of whale conservation NGOs on monetary valuation does not fit with Martínez-Alier's

expectation for pro-poor environmentalism, which can be expected to utilize a diversity of valuations such as indigenous rights and cultural identity. This contrast will be emphasized in section VI, when I will examine the discourses of coastal residents who depend on fishing, and who express the value of their livelihood and their attachment to the coastal habitat.

The idea that whale watching ecotourism can replace artisanal fishing also presupposes the neoliberal ideal that fishers can freely choose to switch their livelihood from a fishing based income to a tourism based income. This belief seems founded upon the image of the rational and free decision making individual at the center of neoliberal market ideology (Castree 2010). However, as Bauer's (2007) ethnographic work has demonstrated, most residents of Salango do not have the capital or the skills to work in tourism based enterprises. Nevertheless, the government's discourse continues to encourage communities to shift their livelihoods away from artisanal fishing and toward tourism based livelihoods, but does not provide infrastructure or support that could facilitate such a transition (Bauer 2007, 124). Hence, the myth of a free and rational individual unfettered by social inequalities is part of the discourse of transition from fishing to tourism.

A third problematic aspect of research carried out by NGOs on bycatch is the identification of artisanal fishing fleets as the cause of cetacean bycatch. Although it is technically true, it can also be understood as laying the blame for the problem on a single stakeholder group. By portraying artisan fishers as ecological culprits, the whale conservationists may inadvertently suggest to government officials or international agencies that this group of coastal residents has inherent tendencies to environmental destruction, while ignoring systemic factors. This is similar to the global debates about land degradation in which Way (2006) identified a tendency to "blaming the poor", a discourse which allowed policymakers to ignore complex society-ecology linkages and also "served to absolve other actors of their responsibilities."

Hence, three features of whale conservation discourses in Ecuador display the features of neoliberal conservation: the focus on monetary valuation to the exclusion of other values, the myth of the individual who can freely choose tourist livelihoods over fishing, and the “blaming the poor” stance.

V. Policy Practice: The Creation of Protected Areas

The idea that environmental conservation contributes to economic development has been a primary rationale for the expansion of protected areas (PAs) in Ecuador and Peru (Naughton-Treves et al. 2006). Protected areas are administratively defined zones where human activities are restricted for the purpose of species or habitat preservation. A marine protected area (MPA) is an ocean or coastal area “which has been reserved by law or other effective means to protect part or all of the enclosed environment” (Hoyt 2009). For the Ecuadorian NGOs the strategy of creating protected areas has been successful in gaining government support, largely because an international consortium of conservation NGOs has been able to secure overseas funding for both marine and terrestrial protected areas (Bravo 2004).

On the coast of Ecuador, there are three main initiatives to create and maintain protected habitats for marine biodiversity which have been central in the efforts of NGOs working in whale conservation issues. The Machalilla National Park was established in 1979. The Galera -San Francisco Marine Reserve was created in 2008, and the Puntilla de Santa Elena Reserve for Marine Coastal Wildlife was also established in 2008. The marine reserves set up a framework for the use of marine resources under the oversight of “inter-institutional management” (Castleberry and Riebensahm 2011). The national park has a stronger mandate and exercises authority to exclude or expel persons who practice agriculture, graze livestock, fish or hunt within its boundaries (MAE 2007, 10). The three protected areas are administered by

the Ministry of the Environment, and are coordinated by the strategic plan of the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP).

Are these protected areas successful in mitigating cetacean bycatch? According to scientists who work in the Galera-San Francisco Marine Reserve, there has been some success in educating the fishermen not to use the gear most likely to entangle humpbacks (Alava et al. 2012). According to the Nazca Institute, the Galera-San Francisco Marine Reserve is viewed favorably by the communities within its boundaries, which became “immediately supportive of Nazca’s interests in creating a marine reserve in the region” (Castleberry and Riebensahm 2011, 4). Working with seven villages in the reserve, Nazca has initiated a program called PESQAR to promote fishing practices that protect wildlife while simultaneously “improving the quality of life of local artisanal fishermen and their communities” (Castleberry and Riebensahm 2011, 4).

However, a different story has emerged in the Machalilla National Park, where the park management authority reports that the artisanal fishermen do not feel it is beneficial to live within the boundaries of a protected area; residents also perceive that income generated from tourism does not benefit those who live in the park (MAE 2007, 35). Other communities in within the MNP have expressed similar negative perceptions of the park’s impact on their material well-being (Fiallo and Jacobson 1995). The regulatory framework which created Machalilla National Park does not permit local residents to carry out fishing or diving for “extractive purposes” in the park. This is a very different situation from the one in Galera-San Francisco, where local communities have the right to continue fishing activities.

Machalilla National Park was not designed for the purpose of whale conservation, but it is a well known breeding area for humpback whales and it is the location of the most highly developed whale-watching tourism operations in Ecuador (Barragán 2002; Scheidat et al. 2000). According to

Alava et al. (2012), it can be used as the model of a future MPA to be designed for whale conservation.

Other conservation measures are not zone-specific, but are currently implemented nationwide in Ecuador’s marine zones. Since 2008, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries has been carrying out an extensive program of conservation of fish stocks, with funding provided by the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB 2009). This program has produced a series of new enforcement measures, including closed seasons when fishing boats are not permitted to sail during two months of the year; in addition, there is a separate closed season for each ocean species that is harvested.

VI. Reactions to Policy: Artisanal Fishers

Do fishers living in the vicinity of Machalilla National Park support the idea of a protected area for whales and other wildlife? Do they perceive policies for whale conservation as something positive, which can benefit their own communities? If so, it would support Martínez-Alier’s “environmentalism of the poor” hypothesis. However, if the fishers see the protected area as a threat to their livelihoods, it would support a different hypothesis.

The alternative hypothesis is derived from the work of Daniel Pauly (1997), who argues that economic stresses on artisanal fishers are likely to cause them to adopt a position of resistance against conservation policies. Artisanal fisheries (small-scale fisheries) may be defined in terms the size of the craft, the type of the fishing gear, and the presence or absence of motorized propulsion (Jacquet and Pauly 2008). According to Pauly (1997; 2006), the main socioeconomic processes operating in the artisanal fisheries are: 1] competition between industrial fishing fleets and artisanal fleets for the same resources, and 2] a response to declining catches by which the fisher

tries to maintain the standard of living by increasing the effort per unit of catch.

Hence, based upon Pauly's conceptualization, I hypothesize that artisanal fishers in Salango are likely to view the marine protected area as a threat to their livelihood, provided that they are experiencing competition with industrial fleets as well as declining catches. When I administered the survey, I did not ask specifically if respondents would support future restrictions on fishing in order to protect whales and dolphins, because they would surely oppose such restrictions. Instead, I merely asked if they experience any problems with the current MPA corresponding to the marine habitats within Machalilla National Park.

From the first moment of beginning the survey, the conflict was evident. A man I met on the beach in Salango, "The government doesn't want to allow us to fish. They say that we have to work in tourism instead of fishing, but we can't work in tourism" (Interview, Mr. González, 8/15/2012). Ecotourism is hardly an economic alternative for the residents of Salango, according to anthropologist Daniel Bauer (2007), who observed that the national park does not issue tour guide licenses to whale watching guides who are based in Salango. Bauer also pointed out that other critical forms of support such as loans for microenterprises are not forthcoming, in spite of the national government's heavy emphasis on tourism for economic development on the coast.

The fisherman's comment expressed a feeling that the government is biased against small scale fishers. Indeed, such a sentiment seems justified. An official report issued by the Subsecretariat for Fishery Resources [SRP] (Arriaga and Martínez 2002), and another issued by the Interamerican Development Bank [IDB] (2009) both claim that artisanal fisheries are responsible for the decline in fish stocks in Ecuador's coastal waters (2009). These reports reflect the prejudice that artisan fisheries are ecologically harmful, inefficient and

noncompetitive. The solution to these deficiencies, according to the SRP and IDB reports, is to make artisanal fisheries more competitive in the world market through investment in infrastructure. However, the investment program is selective, and excludes the smaller fishing towns like Salango. Some of Ecuador's larger fishing harbors have received the investments in building quays and facilities for fish processing, but Salango has received no such public investments.

Another problem which came up during my survey was the competition between industrial fleets and artisanal fleets. A factory located on the beach at Salango is operated by the Empresa Pesquera Polar, S.A., which is supplied by its private fleet of trawlers. Local fishers complain that the factory steals the fish, by the advantage of having the largest boats and unfairly using nets with smaller mesh holes. One Salango man explained, "We are required by the authorities to use nets with a minimum size mesh hole, and we can't catch fish that are below a minimum size. But the industrial trawlers, they are allowed to catch everything in the ocean" (Interview, Mr. Toro, 8/15/2012). He continued, "the authorities [Subsecretariat of Fishery Resources] always enforce the rules on the mesh size on us. They come here and examine our nets carefully. But they don't do that to the industrial fishers." Another man added, "In one day, they catch 2 to 3 tons, but we can't catch that much even in a whole year!" (Interview, Mr. Pincay, 8/16/2012).

Within this scenario of competition with industrial fishers, the Salango fishers also resent the suggestion that artisanal fishing is ecologically destructive. They are proud of their livelihood, and see it as a positive contribution to the society. "We produce food for people to eat", explained one man. "But the industrial boats, they catch fish of every size and it is ground into fishmeal to produce food for pets. In contrast, we are contributing to feed the citizens of our nation." Another Salango resident pointed out, "Because of the fish meal factory on our beach, the air stinks and there is

pollution released near the shoreline. That's the reason we can't attract tourists to our town" (Interview, Mr. Reyes, 8/16/2012).

Perhaps the greatest resentment is directed toward the administration of Machalilla National Park, which has begun enforcing the prohibition on fishing within its waters. In 2012, two men were arrested for fishing with diving gear and harpoons, and they suffered the confiscation of their catch as well as their diving equipment. I spoke with one of the men who had been arrested, and he explained that the national park has only recently begun to enforce the restrictions. Another local fisher explained, "They keep closing off more and more zones, and slowly we are left without any place to work" (Interview, Mr. Gutiérrez, 8/16/2012).

The discourses elicited by my survey in Salango suggest the following reactions to the protected area of MNP. First, the artisan fishers feel that the national government is biased against them and applies the regulations unfairly, without the same rigor applied to industrial fishers. I saw no evidence that this is true, but I follow Pauly's (1997) hypothesis that the fishers' perceptions are a psychological and cultural product of the competition between industrial and artisanal fisheries. In the context of this competition, the artisan fishers resent the idea that their way of life is environmentally destructive and should be replaced by tourism. Hence, not only their material economic condition but also their cultural identity as fishers is threatened by the government's promotion of ecotourism as a replacement for fishing.

Finally, the Salango fishers' identification with their heritage is also threatened by the closing of the national park zones to fishing. Salango is recognized by the government as an indigenous *comuna*, and is part of an indigenous nation known as the Pueblo Manta. During the 20th century, Salango developed a communal system of artisanal fishing based on teams that used seine nets pulled by a rowboat and anchored on a nearby island, the Isla Salango (Southon 1987). Hence, the residents are especially resentful

that the Isla Salango is now off limits and protected by the national park's jurisdiction. One of the local fishers commented, "If my father fished these islands, and my grandfather fished them, and my great-grandfather, then they belong to me and I am going to fish there" (Interview, Mr. Rodríguez, 8/17/2012).

Given these responses to the Machalilla National Park, it is unlikely that fishers in this community would support additional area closures or closed seasons or gear restrictions in the name of whale conservation. This exposes the limitations of the NGO scientists' discourse that tourism based on whale watching is an economic panacea that will compensate for the income lost from fishing. As the fishers' responses show, resentment of the national park is based on the closure of areas which local villagers believe to be theirs by inheritance. Furthermore, they resent the portrayal of artisanal fishing as ecologically destructive. In contrast, the NGO discourse emphasizes only monetary values of whale conservation, while ignoring the identity claims of the local fishing communities.

From the local fishing community's perspective, whale conservation, ecotourism and protected areas for biodiversity appear to be a form of top-down, exclusionist conservation. However, this does not mean that whale conservation is truly a form of neoliberalism, but only that it has the appearance of neoliberalism from the perspective of the fishers who live in the context of struggle and competition against industrial fisheries. In the next section, I will suggest possible ways of reframing the discourse of whale conservation, in order for local fishers to perceive it in the future as a pro-poor environmentalism.

VII. Recommendations for Future Policy

The discourse of nature utilized by whale conservation NGOs should be

reframed. In this manner, the local fishers on the coast of Ecuador can become allies of the whale conservation effort. The following elements should be included in order to reframe whale conservation locally as something similar to “environmentalism of the poor.”

- 1] Support for artisanal fishing as a livelihood: Identity associated with livelihood must be taken seriously. The termination of fishing activities should not be stated as a main policy goal. Rather, the identification of fishers as hard-working people who carry out an honorable livelihood should be central to any effort to promote whale conservation measures. Recognition of artisanal fishing as a potentially sustainable livelihood is a basic requirement for gaining the cooperation of fishing communities.
- 2] Recognition of local identities: Identities associated with place and residence must also be taken into account. The people of Salango consider themselves to have pre-Columbian roots in their place of habitation, and they claim a traditional right to continue to use coastal resources. The best way to ensure their compliance and support for conservation policies is not brute enforcement, but through recognition of their rights, and the creation of a co-management regime.
- 3] Opportunities for participation in habitat management. Marginality is a basic part of the self-image of artisanal fishers in the small beachfronts such as Salango. They feel that government agencies are working against them, and they face declining catches in the face of competition with industrial fleets. The use of force to impose environmental conservation regimes simply aggravates their sensation of marginality and helplessness. Instead, it would be more effective to empower these communities and energize them to become effective allies of whale conservation.

The recommendation proposed here for bycatch mitigation is no different than what the NGO scientists have already proposed in terms of gear modification, closed areas and closed seasons. However, the proposal here is

to re-frame the goals and purposes of whale conservation in a discourse of nature that moves away from neoliberal emphases on competitiveness. The following elements have been identified through the analysis provided here: affirmation of cultural identity, livelihood sustainability, identification with locality and economic marginality. These factors were already cited by Martínez-Alier, et al. in their definition of the environmentalism of the poor as based upon multiple criteria and not upon monetary valuation alone.

One encouraging example may be taken from the work of the Nazca Institute for Marine Research, carried out in the Galera-San Francisco Marine Reserve of Esmeraldas Province. There, the Nazca Institute has been encouraging the fishers to stop catching lobsters during the six months (January -June) when lobster fishing is prohibited. However, what could the lobster fishers do to survive during the closed season? To encourage their compliance, the Nazca Institute encouraged inshore fishing for shrimp or whitefish; however, inshore fishing is only possible as long as industrial fishing vessels are prohibited from fishing within the reserve (Castleberry and Riebensahm 2011, 23). In other words, the NGO researchers understood that the fishermen are politically marginal and live within the conflict between industrial fishing and artisanal fishing. The NGO can help the fishing communities by advocating for government policies that will favor artisanal fishing over industrial fishing.

VIII. Conclusions

At the macro-scale, transnational level, Ecuadorian NGOs' whale conservation ideals have the appearance of "environmentalism of the poor", providing for local ecotourism development via protection of natural species. However, at the micro-scale level of the local fishing community, the policy stance of creating areas protected for whales looks as though it would harm

poor people. Why is there such a discrepancy in appearance between micro and macro levels? The efforts of government ministries to administer and control marine resources have produced a climate in which local communities are hostile to scientific conservation efforts.

Nevertheless, it is possible to increase social support for whale conservation if conservation NGOs will support the aspirations of coastal communities to continue fishing as a livelihood. To mitigate the incidence of cetacean bycatch it is necessary to create a social environment conducive to co-management, “management shared between affected communities and governmental agencies or nongovernmental organizations” (Treves et al. 2006). The Ecuadorian government should abandon the polarized language that portrays fisheries as the “devil” and ecotourism as the “angel.” NGOs can facilitate this change, by promoting policies to empower local communities with positive incentives for the adoption of sustainable fishing practices. In this manner, whale conservation can be renovated to become a pro-poor environmentalism at the local level.

The precondition for gaining collaboration of artisan fishers in Ecuador in cetacean bycatch mitigation is to provide social support for the modification of their fishing techniques. Social support would include political support for measures that protect the rights of the most vulnerable communities to continue fishing. Instead of portraying artisan fishers as enemies of the environment, they must be treated as partners in conservation. As one Salango boat owner commented, “We want to help prevent the species from disappearing, but if you prohibit something then it is also necessary to provide alternatives.” The NGOs for whale conservation should take it upon themselves to research and promote sustainable alternatives for artisanal fisheries at the local level, instead of promoting ecotourism as a single global solution.

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Políticas de Protección de Ballenas en la Costa del Ecuador: ¿Ambientalismo de los Pobres o Conservación Neoliberal?

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Tatar, Bradley (2014), Políticas de Protección de Ballenas en la Costa del Ecuador: ¿Ambientalismo de los Pobres o Conservación Neoliberal?

Resumen El propósito de lo siguiente es dar la mirada sobre las interacciones entre las redes de activistas transnacionales, las autoridades gubernamentales y las comunidades que practican la pesca artesanal en la costa del Ecuador. Centrando en el problema de bycatch (captura incidental) de los cetáceos, empleo la noción de “discurso de la naturaleza” para identificar los lenguajes de valoración que sirven a los habitantes del litoral costero para concebir el estado del ambiente. Las ONGs [organizaciones no gubernamentales] emplean los criterios científicos para sostener que las flotas de pesca artesanal amenazan las ballenas jorobadas, pero ésta caracterización coincide con los esfuerzos de los ministerios del gobierno y las agencias de desarrollo a tildar la pesca artesanal como dañina al ambiente, ineficiente y con bajas niveles de productividad. A cambio, haciendo un sondeo y entrevistas con los habitantes de una comunidad costera, descubrí que los pescadores no están de acuerdo con la caracterización como depredadores del ambiente. Por su parte, ellos se amparan con discursos de orgullo de su oficio, la identidad indígena, los derechos al territorio ancestral, y la marginalidad social. Con enfoque en el conflicto que rodea el área marina protegida [AMP] del Parque Nacional Machalilla, sostengo que imponer restricciones adicionales para mitigar la incidencia de captura incidental de cetáceos no ganara la aceptación en las comunidades que viven de la pesca artesanal. Entonces, los pescadores del sitio perciben el lenguaje de protección para las ballenas como una amenaza a su oficio, aunque aparenta ser ambientalismo a favor de los pobres a nivel macrosistémico (internacional). Para paliar la desarmonía, las ONGs deben de respaldar las aspiraciones de las comunidades costeras a continuar la pesca como oficio, y así caracterizar la protección de ballenas como una forma de

“ambientalismo de los pobres”.

Palabras clave Ambientalismo, políticas de conservación, ecoturismo, áreas marinas protegidas, pesquerías, ballena jorobada