Fishing for space: Socio-spatial relations of Indian trawl fishers in the Palk Bay, South Asia, in the context of trans-boundary fishing

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CHAPTER 5

PLACE

A place to live and fish: relational placemaking among the trawl fishers of Palk Bay, India

Johny Stephen

This chapter has been developed into an article, which has now been published in Ocean & Coastal Management, 2014, Vol 102, pp 224-233.
Abstract

In Palk Bay (India), fishing is intrinsically tied to a complex and dynamic geo-political situation. The trawl fishers from India are finding it increasingly difficult to operate in the bay due to the strict enforcement of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) by the Sri Lanka Navy and the increasing animosity of the small-scale gill netters of Northern Sri Lanka, who accuse the Indian trawlers of encroaching and destroying their livelihood. In the multi-scalar nature of this conflict, it is easy for policy makers and researchers to get distracted by processes happening at different scales (regional, national) thereby ignoring the local processes that shape everyday fishing. By analysing the everyday lives and lived places of the fishers in the two trawl centres of Rameswaram and Mandapam, this article exclusively focusses on the scale of the local. A closer look at these centres, located in close proximity to each other, reveals substantial differences in the way fisheries are managed. The objective of this paper is to understand how one of these centres is able to manage its fleet better (better price for fishes, lower discards and higher compliance) than the other, increasing understanding of the dynamics of resource usage in Palk Bay to give clues for possible solutions. Through the ethnographic method, the research uses the concept of relational placemaking in analysing local fishery resource usage. By dialectically analysing the various social, political and economic processes both on land and at sea in each these centres, I conclude that the differences in management between them are an outcome of a series of complex interactions between several processes. Based on my analysis, I argue that the mismanagement of the Rameswaram fleet and the better managed Mandapam fleet cannot be attributed only to the relative strength of the institutional set up on land but should also take into consideration the conditions at sea. Thus, managing a complex fishery system requires a better understanding of the interaction of various processes that happen at different places of concern to the everyday lives of the fishers, moving beyond the limited narrow focus of several place based studies which focus on a singular place, social group and scale.
5.1 INTRODUCTION

The relation between a natural resource and its users is complex and multidimensional (Anderies et al., 2004). The access to natural resources and its usage is an outcome of a series of interactions between various social, political and economic processes (Forsyth, 2009; Cox, 2010; Mollinga, 2010; Smith & Stirling, 2010; Persha et al., 2011). Common property natural resource usage studies for the last three decades have concentrated in identifying some of these interactions either in parts or as whole (Agrawal & Chhatre, 2006; Ostrom, 1998, 2000; Basurto & Ostrom, 2009; Polasky & Segerson, 2009).

The scale of such processes and their interactions is an added dimension to natural resource systems such as fisheries (Berkes, 2006). Researchers generally tend to look at multi-scalar linkages of these processes (Berkes, 2010; Lorenzen et al., 2010). There are however a series of interactions which happen within the same scalar level, but between processes happening at different places. The outcomes of these interactions are rarely incorporated when studying resource usage. In this research, in a bid to understand the differences in the management of fisheries between two trawl fishing centres, I analyse the intra-local interactions between social, political and economic processes using the concept of relational placemaking (Pierce et al., 2011). Studying place from a relational perspective involves understanding a time-laden, dynamically networked web of social, economic and political processes in everyday lived places (ibid.). This relegation of place to the local however does not discount that placemaking also involves a networked multi-scalar process (Amin, 2004; Castree, 2003,2004; Murdoch, 2006). Given the scope of this article, I restrict this analysis to the everyday lived local places and only partially link the process of placemaking to processes happening at other scales.

The challenging conditions in which fishery is carried out in Palk Bay offers unique insights into the complexity associated with trans-boundary fisheries management (Scholtens et al., 2013, 2012; Stephen et al., 2013). In the politically charged context, the visibly multi-scalar nature of the Palk Bay fisheries often tends to blur local processes. In this paper I make a comparison between two trawling centres in Palk Bay namely Mandapam and Rameswaram (see Map 2), about 20 kilometres apart. Both the centres have a similar social and cultural composition, with a substantial number of recently immigrated boat owners fishing alongside a small but significant population of the 'locals’. The settlements differ in a few major respects; Rameswaram is closer to the International Maritime Boundary Line
(IMBL) with Sri Lanka than Mandapam, and fishers\textsuperscript{2} of Rameswaram are very much dependent on fish from Sri Lankan waters (Stephen et al., 2013; Scholtens et al., 2012). In addition, these centres differ in fleet composition, quality of fish catch, price of fish and in the willingness to comply with regulations. Why is this so? With this underlying question, the paper zooms in on the everyday places of the fishers to understand the processes at play. In particular I focus on two everyday places, namely place on land and place at sea. The objective of this paper is to try to better understand differences within the Palk Bay fleets and thereby look for clues for better governance of Palk Bay fisheries. At the same time I also aim to advocate the importance of considering intra –scalar dynamics when studying fisheries management.

After a brief description of the methods and methodology in the next section, I detail the results of my analysis in Section Three before discussing and concluding in Sections Four and Five.

5.2 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

5.2.1 Description of the Study Area

This study is part of my PhD research project on the socio-spatial relations of the trawl fishers of Rameswaram and Mandapam.\textsuperscript{3} Palk Bay is a shallow stretch of sea lying in between Southern India and Northern Sri Lanka (see Map 2). Palk Bay is the main source of livelihood for a fishing population of 262,560 on the Indian side (CMFRI, 2010) and approximately 119,000 on the Sri Lankan side (Scholtens et al., 2012; Stephen et al., 2013). This common stretch of sea between India and Sri Lanka was accessed by fishers for many decades. The fishers on both sides belong to the same Tamil ethnic group. In the year 1974 the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) was drawn, dividing what was once a common fishing ground into two distinct nation states (Jayasinghe, 2003; Suryanarayan, 2005). The political, social and economic processes surrounding Palk Bay have changed dramatically since this delineation, mainly attributed to the three decade long civil war in northern Sri Lanka (Sankaran, 1999; Mazumdar, 2011). The civil war (1983-2009) resulted in fishing by the Sri Lankan fishermen being restricted to the bare minimum on the Sri Lankan side (Lehman, 2013), whilst indirectly helping the Indian trawl fleets to expand to the point of becoming primarily dependent on the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Bay.
The transgression by Indian fishers has not been free of cost. The Alliance for the Release of Innocent Fishermen (ARIF), a civil society based initiative in India, estimates that 238 Indian fishers have been shot and killed by the Sri Lankan Navy and that another 80 are missing at sea.\(^4\) Indian fishers have for a long time put pressure on the Indian government to get Sri Lanka to stop these killings (Subramanian, 2007). After the end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lankan fishers from the Northern Province districts of Mannar, Kilinochi and Jaffna have slowly resumed their fishing activities. They now come face to face with the Indian trawlers, fishermen belonging to their own ethnic group\(^5\) (Tamils) and fishing in what is their waters. In addition to the occupation of their fishing space, Indian fishers are resented because they also practice trawling, a technique that is banned by Sri Lankan law and incompatible with local practices because the trawlers very often cut and destroy gill nets which are the main mode of fishing by the Sri Lankan fishers (Vivekanandan, 2001; 2004; 2010). The complexity of the conflict and resulting political climate is well documented elsewhere; readers are requested to refer to Scholten\ et al. \(2012; 2013\) and Stephen \textit{et al.} \(2013\) for a detailed descriptions on its geopolitics.

Five districts border the Palk Bay on the Indian side: Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam. Based on the method of fishing, marine fisheries in India are broadly divided into small-scale (predominantly gill netters but also among others include hook and line fishing) and trawlers. All trawlers irrespective of the considerable differences in their sizes and capacities are seen as the large-scale operators of fishery as they are mechanised (Platteau, 1984). Sometime in the early 1990’s the increased conflict between the small-scale fishers and the trawlers resulted in a unique set of rules for Palk Bay; the trawlers were allowed to fish three days a week and the small-scale fishers were allowed to fish for four days a week. The rules were enacted district wise and have come into being gradually over time along the three districts which have trawlers namely Thanjavur, Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram.

There are six major trawling centres and four minor trawling centres in Palk Bay. Of these centres, my interest is in the two centres closest to the IMBL, Rameswaram and Mandapam. Both these centres are in the district of Ramanathapuram and have different characteristics. In sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 I detail each of these centres and lay out the factors that show why access and use of resources differs significantly between them.
5.2.1.1 Rameswaram

Rameswaram is one of the main mechanised trawling centres in Palk Bay (see Maps 2 and 3). The harbour is situated on the Eastern part of Pamban island (also called Rameswaram island), close to the famous Hindu pilgrimage temple of Lord Ram. From my research I identified about 600 to 650 operational boats in Rameswaram. The official government statistics as per the Fisheries Department of Tamil Nadu, however, is about 1300. The difference is attributed to accessing subsidised diesel fuel hence many boat registration books are maintained without the actual boat (see Scholtens, 2006 for detailed description on the politics of diesel subsidy).

In Rameswaram two types of trawl nets are used: shrimp nets and fish nets. Both are bottom trawlers, but the fish nets are deployed a little above the ground. Both these nets are used in tandem, with the shrimp net being the most predominant throughout the year. Officially, pair trawling and sea cucumber fishing are banned, though both are practiced. Pair trawling for fish is practiced by boats both big and small, but the larger boats are more equipped for this and have the capacity to haul in larger catches, especially shoaling fishes such as oil sardines. A modified version
of the shrimp nets with weights attached to the bottom are occasionally used to catch sea cucumber for their high commercial value.

In Rameswaram a salary cum incentive system is in place to pay the crew. A weekly salary (for three sea going trips) of 600, 500 and 400 Indian rupees are paid to the skipper, the second skipper and labourers respectively. In addition to this about 7.5 to 8% of the total value of the catch is given as bonus incentive to the skipper, and 4-5% to the second skipper and labourers. Salaries are topped by weekly ‘tips’ of Indian rupees 100 to 150 per week for each of the crew and skipper if they show up to work for all three trips. Economically, the salary system transfers risks substantially to the owner. This is opposed to the share system, normally practiced in other trawl centres of Tamil Nadu and in some other states in India, wherein the risks is spread between the capital and labour (Kurien, 2000; Geetha et al., 2014).

Social, economic and political processes on land
Interactions between castes are key to understanding the everyday processes on land. There are four main caste groups in Rameswaram: the **Seruwai**, **Kadayars**, **Paravas** and **Thevars**. Of these the **Seruwai** and the **Kadayars** are often referred to as the ‘sons of the soil’ i.e. they are seen as the traditionally ‘local’ inhabitants of the island. The others are seen as immigrants in search of a livelihood in Rameswaram. The social composition of Rameswaram is summarised in Table 5.1. Though there are multiple narratives on how the migrant **Paravas** and the local **Seruwai** came to loggerheads against the backdrop of smuggling which was rampant in the late 1970’s, it is now mostly acknowledged that it was a fight between ‘locals’ and the immigrant community. During a skirmish where **Paravas** felt threatened, they brought in the **Thevars**, to give them protection. They were employed in petty jobs but were mainly involved in protection of the assets of Paravas. The political and economic clout of Thevars in Rameswaram in recent times coincides with the caste’s increasing influence in Tamil Nadu politics (Pandian, 2000). There are 11 trawl owners associations in Rameswaram, the membership of which does not coincide with caste/religion. However, all castes are fairly well represented in the associations.

Social, economic and political processes at sea
The length of the boats in Rameswaram can range anywhere between 30 to 60 feet and the engine capacity can range from 70 to 170 horsepower (Table 5.2). The largest boats now constitute 5% of the total fleet, offering greater speed, storage and stability. These increased capacities also give distinct advantages when fishing
in Sri Lankan waters. Operating larger boats has its own risk, if apprehended by the Sri Lankan navy or in case of a low catch, the losses are high considering the high input costs.\textsuperscript{10}

Small trawler owners in Rameswaram resent the presence of the larger boats as they feel that the larger ones are catching more than what the sea can offer. The presence of these larger boats is also of very serious concern to the Sri Lankan fishermen, who claim that their ecosystem is under greater threat from these boats (Stephen et al., 2013). The bigger boats are illegal on many counts including length and engine capacity as prescribed by the Tamil Nadu Marine Fisheries Regulate Act (TNMFRA). Efforts to regulate larger boats among the owners themselves on grounds that it is a destructive fishing practice have not been a successful. Instead, fishers tend to move towards these larger boats and their advantages, despite requiring greater investments.

The smaller boats constituting about thirty percent of the total fleet, fish closer to the Indian shore. The middle range boats fish between Katchatheevu and Thalaimannar (across the IMBL). The bigger boats generally fish well into the Sri Lankan boundary, fishing very close to major locations in Sri Lanka such Thalaimannar, Neduntheevu and Nainatheevu (Map 2). Their powerful engines give them the power to run through a larger area quickly in the cover of the darkness. Sometimes, when local fishing grounds are good, the big boats also fish inside the Indian territorial waters. The close proximity with the IMBL and the reality of facing the navy on a daily basis substantially affect the way fishing is done in the sea. There is a clear sense of alienation of the fishing grounds (place in the sea) for the Rameswaram fishers. The knowledge that their current fishing grounds across the IMBL is not a reliable and secure source of livelihood in the long term, drive the fishers to catch as much as possible in the time they can.

\subsection{5.2.1.2 Mandapam}
West of Rameswaram lies Mandapam, divided into two landing centres. My research was on the North Mandapam landing centre which is situated in the Palk Bay. This landing centre in turn is divided into two parts: the Western part is called the ‘Masudi road’ (translated as the mosque road) and the Eastern part is called the ‘Koviladi’, separated by an Indian Coast Guard station (see Map 2). In total I have counted approximately 500 boats in Mandapam. The fishing equipment used in Mandapam is the same as in Rameswaram. However, in Mandapam, there are two systems in
place for crew salaries, one the same as in Rameswaram and the other where the crew gets 20% of the total value of the catch to share among themselves. The skipper gets 1 or 2% more than the others, in addition to the weekly tips. However, only about 5% of the fishers in Mandapam practice this type of a system.

**Social, economic and political processes on land**

Mandapam is also a multi-caste and cultural landing centre. In terms of absolute numbers, the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute census (CMFRI, 2010) shows that the Hindu and Christian fisher folk households are larger than that of the Muslim fisher folk, though without distinguishing between small-scale and trawlers. The Muslims and the *Konars* are the traditional ‘local’ castes/groups in Mandapam. Unlike in Rameswaram, there appears to be no tension here between the different castes when it comes to fishing. The social groups of Mandapam are summarised in Table 5.3.

Being the dominant community, the Muslims of the area have a larger say in local politics in Mandapam. In particular there is a leader, *Thanga Marakayar*, whose presence is very influential both in fishing and land-based activities. He belongs to the ancestral “*semmati*” family. His lineage, political patronage and wealth make him an important traditional leader in Mandapam. Traditionally Muslims have informal religious institutions called ’*Jamats*’, which also look into fishing issues (Bavinck, 2003). Among the Muslim trawl fishers of Mandapam however, issues of fishing were largely dealt with by the trawl owner associations.

There are 7 boat owner associations in Mandapam with a similar caste heterogeneity as in Rameswaram. However the difference is the presence of a functional federation called the ‘*Mathiya Sangam*’ (created in 2007) which serves as a vehicle to solve inter-association disputes and enforce rules pertaining to fishing. The associations and the *Sangam* have their own set of rules and are effective in enforcing them.

**Social, economic and political processes at sea**

Mandapam fisherfolk have two options: either to fish close to the island of Katchatheevu, or to fish in the north very close to the Indian shore. Squid are abundant nearer to the Indian shore while shrimp are available near Katchatheevu closer to the IMBL. Fishers here normally avoid crossing the IMBL, though they do admit to crossing the IMBL occasionally.
The length of the boats range anywhere between 30 to 45 feet and have an engine capacity between 70 to 120 horsepower. Larger boats are not allowed in this centre by the boat owner associations (Table 5.2). The associations have now banned any new boats or any increase in the size or engine capacity. This is strictly enforced. Traders claim that the fish in Mandapam are better sorted and the quality is better than that in Rameswaram.

The owners have a sense of ownership of the sea (which is predominantly within Indian waters). Local regulations as discussed in section 4.2.2 are followed in the aim to protect the ecosystem for sustained fishing grounds.
Table 5.1: Caste/religious composition of Rameswaram

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social groups (castes)</th>
<th>Relation to fishing</th>
<th>Relation to fishing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seruvai</strong></td>
<td>• Original in-habitants of Rameswaram.</td>
<td>• Own about 10 % of the trawl boats in Rameswaram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Traditional occupation linked to the temple.</td>
<td>• Dominant in terms of leadership among the trawl owner associations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seruvai dwellings concentrated much closer to the temple.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Politically influential caste in the island.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Predominantly Hindus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Kadayars**           | • Original in-habitants of Rameswaram. | • Very meager ownership of trawlers, but are the dominant group when it comes to small-scale fishing. |
|                       | • Settlements spread all over the island of Rameswaram. | |
|                       | • Traditionally small-scale fishermen. | |
|                       | • Still very much part of the small scale fishery of Rameswaram island. | |
|                       | • Both Hindu and Christian Kadayars present. | |

| **Paravas**            | • Migrants from Mookaiyur, a village which is about 90 km to the south-west. | • Own about 60% of the trawl boats in Rameswaram. |
|                       | • Traditionally a fishing caste, once seasonal migrants to Rameswaram they have now settled down in village called Thangachimadam (See Map 3). | • No dominant leaders from this caste among the trawl owner associations, Split on lines of class (big trawlers vs small trawlers) |
|                       | • Seen as recent migrants. | |
|                       | • Predominantly Christians (Roche, 1984; Gupta, 1985). | |

| **Thevars**            | • A dominant caste group in the hinderlands of Ramanathapuram district but with little or no presence in Rameswaram until very recent(Pandian, 2000). | • Very meager ownership of trawlers. |
|                       | • Recent migrants in Rameswaram. | • Very dominant caste in money lending for fishing operations. |
|                       | • Politically influential caste in the hinterlands, and increasingly challenging the Seruvai caste’s dominance in Rameswaram. | • Dominate land based activities related to fishing such as loading and unloading fishes. |
|                       | • Thevar dwellings are concentrated near the harbor. | |
|                       | • Predominantly Hindus | |
Table 5.2. This study has been able to classify the trawl fleet of Rameswaram and Mandapam as below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of the boat in feet</th>
<th>Horse Power</th>
<th>No of Crew (men)</th>
<th>Diesel consumption in liters per trip</th>
<th>Percentage of boats in Rameswaram</th>
<th>Percentage of boats in Madapam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32 to 42</td>
<td>80-120</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>200 to 250</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 to 45</td>
<td>80-120</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>300 to 350</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 50</td>
<td>140-170</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>400 to 450</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and above</td>
<td>140-170</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>450 and above</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Caste/religious composition of Mandapam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social groups</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Relation to fishing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>• A dominant group in Mandapam.</td>
<td>• Own about 30% of the boats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Considered as the local residents of the place.</td>
<td>• Dominant group in Mandapam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Traditionally sea faring merchants, some of them had taken up fishing (McGilvray, 1998).</td>
<td>• Presence of traditional leader- Thanga Marakayar. Though not directly involved in fishing, his leadership is acknowledged by the trawl owners as an final appellate authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Large section of the muslim population in Mandapam not directly involved in fishing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paravas</td>
<td>• The Paravas here are from the same group Thangachimadam.</td>
<td>• Own about 60% of the boats in Mandapam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some of the Paravas worked from Rameswaram, while others chose Mandapam.</td>
<td>• Represented well in the boat owner associations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seen as recent migrants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konars</td>
<td>• Traditionally herders and milk producers (Moffatt, 1997).</td>
<td>• Own about 5% of the trawlers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.2 Data Collection

The article is based on a detailed ethnographic study I did in the two fishing centres from September 2011 to February 2013, after the completion of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Ethnographic studies have been used widely in understanding complex socio-ecological situations (Miller and Van Maanen, 1979; Fabinyi et al., 2013; Jacob et al., 2013). Ethnography is a qualitative method which studies people in their own environment using participant observation and direct interviewing. Ethnographic accounts are both descriptive and interpretive; descriptive, because they detail crucial aspects of the lives of the people, and interpretive because the ethnographer interprets these crucial aspects solely based on his or her own observations (Fabinyi et al., 2010) in an attempt to get a comprehensive understanding the lives of people being studied.

In total, 180 days were spent in both the centres. Apart from ethnographic observations, fifty-six in-depth, semi-structured open interviews were conducted with the trawl boat owners of both the centres. The interviews followed up on a pilot study of twenty-six semi-structured interviews in the centres (September and October 2011) to identify caste and religious diversity among trawl owners, enabling purposive sampling (Bryman, 2008). I also held two focus group discussions with trawl boat owners, one in each of the centre. In addition, seven key respondents representing different types of trawl boats (large, small and medium), three from Mandapam and four from Rameswaram, were chosen and interviewed individually on a monthly basis regarding their fishing activities. Oral histories of three separate boat owners were recorded, two from Rameswaram and one from Mandapam. In addition to the boat owners a few other actors directly or indirectly connected with fishing were also interviewed. These included fish marketers, shopkeepers, local residents, government officials and former smugglers. The detailing of inter-caste dynamics in these centres is one aspect of explaining the socio-political process. To highlight the interactions, I focus mainly on dominant oral narratives and discourses about caste dynamics in both the landing centres. This was challenging with many competing and sometimes contrary narratives, however over the course of the research it was possible to interpret some of the inter-caste relations based on these narratives.

A survey using random sampling of 10% (120 samples out of a population of approximately 1200 trawlers) was undertaken both in Mandapam and Rameswaram to estimate the number and details of the trawler units which actually went fishing.
on a regular basis. It included twenty-one questions collecting demographic details on owners and crew along with technical information on the boats themselves. The results were also used to cross check if the diversity among the fleets was present in both Rameswaram and Mandapam.

5.2.3. Place and Relational Placemaking

5.2.3.1 Place and placemaking
A key concept is ‘place’ at the local level. While ‘place’ is a commonly used word, it also imbues a complex set of meanings. Generally speaking, place denotes a particular point on the earth’s surface, a particular location (Creswell, 2004). This geographic reference of place need not always be real or tangible and can also often be used in abstraction, for example when we say someone or something has a special place in our hearts. Thus as suggested by Creswell (ibid., p. 110) “place is more than a question of ontology (what exists) but, perhaps more fundamentally a question of epistemology (how we know this)”. True to this, ‘place’ has been addressed in different ways in different disciplines, each approaching place based studies from a different angle (Trentelman, 2009). In this paper, place is approached through the perspective of human geography, where place is created through the interaction of physical environment and various social processes (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). “A sense of place” is forged through the interaction of both physical settings and social processes. Over the years Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1975) seminal work in highlighting the human element has triggered a variety of research on the phenomenological aspect of place (for example see Trentelman, 2009; Sampson & Goodrich, 2009; Urquhart & Acott, 2013). Thus a common portion of sea between two countries would become more than just a total of the physical attributes that makes up that space. In addition to the oceanographic attributes such as tides, waves or depth contours, the presence of the administrative boundary, the IMBL, in many ways controls fishing activity and modifies behaviour. For its fishers, this portion of sea then becomes ‘our’ fishing ground (sense of ownership) as opposed to the other portion of the sea lying across the boundary as ‘their ‘fishing ground (sense of alienation). Any fishing across the boundary is ‘illegal’. The sea thus become something imbued with legal meanings and these meanings in turn affect the way fishing is done.
5.2.3.2 Relational placemaking

The decision to demarcate within a portion of the sea an IMBL thereby dividing the waters into two national territories is generally undertaken at a different place and at a different scale, most likely at the national scale. If one of the nations is in civil war and if this portion of sea is strategically important, decisions taken at the nations’ capitals are related to processes that actually happen at sea. Processes such as fishing restrictions, security deployment and monitoring, are determined at the respective capital cities based on activities that happen at the sea. In other words place becomes both the cause and effect of the various processes that go into making the place. Placemaking thus is relational and dynamic to the constantly changing social, economic and political processes that happen between these places. It is this relational aspect of placemaking that lies at the core of this paper. Relational placemaking according to Pierce et al. (2011) “…is the networked politics of placemaking. It draws on scholarship and insights about place, politics and networks by explicitly recognising the flexible, multi-scalar and always developing meanings of place: meanings that are produced via socially, politically and economically interconnected interactions among people, institutions and system…” (ibid., p. 59). This is the analytical point of departure. Human geographers have largely focused on the multi-scalar aspect of placemaking (Swyngedouw, 2010; MacKinnon, 2011; Tomaney, 2013), predominantly looking at how local placemaking is affected by what happens at the national or global scale. I argue that while multi-scalar interconnectedness is important in the making of place (see Stephen et al., 2013), the interconnectedness of the various places of the same scale is equally important in placemaking. The relational placemaking between different locales in the same scale is a largely unexplored concept. In this article the interrelations between two everyday places are investigated and compared. Before detailing the significance of these everyday places, let me briefly engage with placemaking and its significance in natural resource management.

5.2.3.3 Relational placemaking and natural resource management

‘Place attachment ‘and ‘sense of place’ are concepts which have been engaged with in great detail by scholars in natural resource management (Stedman, 2003; Trentelman, 2009; Sampson & Goodrich, 2009; Urquhart & Acott, 2013). The importance of place studies in natural resource management has therefore now been quite well established (Cantrill, 1998; Cheng et al., 2003; Bodin & Crona, 2009;
Brehm et al., 2013). For most of these studies Tuan's (1975) concept of ‘sense of place’ has been the foundation on which they have explored natural resource use. In this research I analyse place through a relational framework, engaging with two important places in the same scale.

1. Place at sea - the place where the fishermen fish. Looking at processes at sea.
2. Place on land - The place where the fishermen live. In this paper I specifically focus on public place\(^{11}\) (as opposed to private) and its connection with everyday lives of the fishermen on land. This includes understanding processes that affect fishers’ work, looking at various interactions in their day to day activities and in understanding the significance of these daily relations in terms of resource usage.

### 5.2.3.4 Caste and relational placemaking

The making of a place is closely related to the dynamics between the social groups or communities that live in a place (Sampson and Goodrich, 2009; Trentelman, 2009). In Indian society, caste is a major factor that contributes towards the formation of social groups. It also forms the basis of identity and social stratification (Beteille, 1996; Dirks, 2001; Desai and Dubey, 2012; Sharma, 1999; Rao, 2009). Gadgil and Malhotra (1983) have argued that inter-caste relations are crucial in the sustainable use of natural resources. Deb (1996) studying two co-habiting fishing castes in Karnataka attributes the divergent adaptations both institutionally and technologically to modern fishing practices to the caste differences.

During the course of this research I found that caste very much formed the basis for social groupings in both the landing centres.\(^{12}\) Hence conceptualising relational placemaking in these two trawl centres has to take into account the inter caste dynamics and their effect on various social, economic and political processes.

### 5.3 RESULTS

Why does the trawl fishery of Mandapam show signs of better management, like compliance to local rules, better price for fishes and less refuse, when compared to Rameswaram? The results from the ethnographic study carried out in the two centres show that the fishery in Mandapam is better managed because of the dia-
lectical relation between processes both on land and at sea. The causality of better management in Mandapam cannot be attributed only to process happening at one place but rather is a result of the dynamic interactions of processes in both these places. The same explanation (dialectical relation) hold true when explaining the lack of good management practices in Rameswarm. The results can be summarised as in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: comparing the processes that affect fishing in two places in both the landing centres**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rameswaram</th>
<th>Mandapam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place on Land</strong></td>
<td>Multi caste; Complex caste relations; Multiple local power centres; Lack of coordination both within and between boat owner associations.</td>
<td>Multi caste; Complex caste relations; Better coordination between boat owner associations; Singular source of local power and authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place at Sea</strong></td>
<td>Lack of resources on the Indian side of Palk Bay; Intense and complex negotiations with Sri Lankan Navy; Politically charged fishing space leaving fishermen a sense of alienation from their fishing grounds.</td>
<td>More fishing space on the Indian side; Conflict more with the Indian fishermen; No threat of the Sri Lankan navy; More a place of fishing and an increased sense of ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource use as a result of the dialectics between both the place on Land and in Sea</strong></td>
<td>Little or no adherence to fishing regulations of the local associations; Increasing trend towards bigger boat and engines and potentially towards more destructive fishing.</td>
<td>Better compliance to fishing regulations of local associations; Better quality of fishes and better value to fishes; Lesser discards Restrictions to increase fleet capacity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 DISCUSSION

5.4.1 Rameswaram

5.4.1.1 Placemaking on land

“They are very aggressive fishermen”.13
(A fisherman belonging to Seruvai caste on the describing the Parava fishermen)

“They will know the difficulty of a fisherman only if they are one”.
(A fisherman belonging the Parava caste explaining about the Seruvai fishermen who talk about certain fishing restrictions being implemented in Rameswaram).

The above conversations are an indication of the animosity between the fishers of the various castes in Rameswaram. The Seruvai and of late the Thevars are perceived to be the dominating caste on land, both in sheer numbers and economic and political connections. For many of the Seruvai fisher leaders, fishing is only a secondary activity and the leadership in fishing associations gives them other privileges (such as easy access to the media) and political patronage (Stephen et al., 2013). The Parava fishers are split along class lines (big vs. small boats). Power is split both between and among the castes when it comes to various activities related to fishing, leaving no dominant leader or group in Rameswaram. The Seruvai or Parava leaders are unable to completely dominate the trawl owner associations because of a third equally dominant caste, the Thevars.

Decisions made on fishing practices by one association are not followed by the others, very often the members within the same associations do not follow certain regulations made by the associations. This includes attempted regulations on land such as setting a minimum price of fish during lean seasons or agreeing on labour wages on land. In 2008 there was an attempt to unify the associations but this did not succeed.

5.4.1.2 Placemaking at sea

The Indian fishing grounds for Rameswaram fishers are very restricted: the distance between the landing centre to the IMBL is only 12 nautical miles. For a fleet of 600 to 650 boats this is a very small area. Therefore, the Rameswaram fishers effectively have to deal with the Sri Lankan Navy and their fishers more than with the small-scale fishers of India. On a typical day in the fieldwork period, fishers reported
that the Sri Lankan navy boats position themselves in a fence-like formation along the boundary near the island of Katchatheevu warding off any Indian boats from entering Sri Lankan water till dusk. At night, however, the navy boats retreat to their bases and only a couple of patrol boats remain. So just after dusk the bulk of the Rameswaram trawlers (barring the smaller ones) enter the Sri Lankan waters, using the cover of night and the small window of time to catch as much as they can and get back by morning. Consequently, they need better engines and better boats to do so. Over the years, they have been increasing the size of their boats and the engines for this purpose despite Indian government rules disallowing engines greater than 150 horsepower. The presence of the navy also means that the sorting of the catch has to be done in the dark to avoid naval attention. The sorting is of a lesser quality, decreasing the value of the catch as many of the potential valuable fish are discarded. The risk involved also means that the labourers in Rameswaram need to be adequately compensated, especially the crews as they are the most affected by the navy. As such, the place at the sea for Rameswaram fishers is a politically charged one (Sathiya Moorthy, 2012; Suryanarayan, 2005), a place where everyday life is dependent on dodging and negotiating fishing areas with an institution like the Navy.

5.4.2 Mandapam

5.4.2.1 Placemaking on land

“All decisions here are taken by through associations”.
(Konar fishermen discussing decisions on fishing regulations.)

“Isn’t Markayar there? That is the reason why everybody obeys”.
(Rameswaram Parava fisher on asked why Mandapam is better able to regulate fishing.)

The above conversations are indicative of a better organised fishery in Mandapam. For all the fishers of Mandapam, the interactions on land in Mandapam are governed by the boat owner associations and the influential leader (Mr Thanga Markayar). I have not come across any concrete cases of his direct involvement in disputes, but he is recognised as the final appellate authority of the region, making it possible for all in Mandapam to adhere to the decisions made by the associations. His authority also extends to other actors on land, such as traders, meaning that the associations are able to enforce local regulations on activities associated with fishing such as fixing minimum labour wages and fish prices. Some of the recent
rules include restrictions on introducing new boats and boat and engine size upgrades. During interviews, fishers were clear on the rationale for these measures: they felt that Mandapam had reached its full capacity and that there is a need to regulate new and bigger boats, which they felt are harmful for the ecosystem. A rather interesting regulation is the seasonal permission of pair trawling. All the associations came to an agreement that the fishers could use pair trawling during the months from January to March (a method which is officially banned by the Fisheries Department). In response to questions about the environmental impact, the trawl fishers themselves felt that certain types of shoaling fishes, such as sardines, can only be netted by this method. Also, during certain seasons fin fish fetch better prices than the shrimps, so pair trawling also makes economic sense to catch the fin fish.

The ‘local’ control over fishing activities was very clear. There was a sense of responsibility on land with a final appellate authority for any appeal, who did not necessarily need to be available. Mandapam was looked upon as ideal landing site even by the Rameswaram fishers and many of them attributed to the strength of the ‘locals’ in enforcing rules. The locals included the Muslims, some of the local castes and the leader Thanga Marakayar.

5.4.2.2 Placemaking at sea

Mandapam fishers have a larger fishing area inside Indian territory, so they have much less interaction with the Sri Lankan navy and thus have more space and time to set the net and fish. Fishers have reported that due to the ease of fishing in Mandapam, the fish are well sorted and are of better quality, thereby fetching better prices. The amount of trash fish also drastically reduces with better sorting. The simple task of being able to switch on a light and sort the catches at sea gives them enough time to sort the fishes well. The consistency in catch value also keeps the crew happy with their wages and their stable income from the sea.

However, the Mandapam fishers are used to getting into conflict with the small-scale Indian gill netters of Palk Bay, who often find their nets damaged by trawling operations. This is often caused when the boats fish too close to the Indian shore. This conflict however is resolved at the level of the boat owner associations or their leaders and very often does not involve other actors such as the fisheries department, a phenomenon we have seen in other places in the same region (Bavineck, 2001). The place at sea is thus much less stressful than the
Rameswaram fishers as the Mandapam fishers do not need to dodge the navy. The existing conflict with the small-scale fishers is dealt with at the scale of the fishers themselves. The place at sea for the Mandapam fishers is thus more than just a place of fishing. As mentioned in this section, the local rules were also aimed at protecting the environment for a better catch tomorrow. The fishers here feel a better sense of ownership of the place of fishing. They are aware that that this place is required to sustain a livelihood in future. Thus the place at sea is ‘owned’ by the fishers of Mandapam.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Why do two trawl centres separated from each other by only 20km show such a qualitative difference in their fleet, catch and compliance to local rules? Rameswaram does not adhere to limits to boat capacity or fishing gear such as pair trawling because of the lack of centralised power or authority on land. The caste dynamics in Rameswaram make it difficult for any one caste to dominate as an authority. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that in Mandapam the fishing fleet is better managed due to the presence of a dominant group, the Muslims, and their leader. In Mandapam the local regulations such as the ban on new entrants into fishing, the ban on larger boats (both in size and engine capacity) and seasonal ban on pair trawling are followed meticulously.

This rather straight forward argument does not factor in the processes at sea, the place of fishing. Fishers in Mandapam with larger sea area within Indian territorial water are not under any pressure to fish intensively. One could also feel a sense of ‘ownership’ of the sea and of the fishing grounds among the fishers of Mandapam. A place that they think requires certain amount of preservation considering that it would be the source of future livelihood. Rameswaram fishers on the other hand are under immense pressure to fish in what are alien waters. The alienation from the fishing grounds and the threat of the Sri Lankan Navy constantly hanging over them drives fishers of Rameswaram to fish as much as they can, at night and as fast as possible. The non-compliance of rules by the Rameswaram fishers can then also be attributed to the above-mentioned uncertainties and processes at these fishing grounds in terms of access and ownership.

Through this paper, there are two interventions that I make in place based resource studies: firstly, the incorporation of concept of relational placemaking, a
concept used widely in geography (Pierce et al., 2011; Marsden, 2013) and secondly the dialectical relations between places at the same scale. This article argues for building a multidimensional and relational approach when it comes to understanding resource management. When a relational framework is used (ibid.) they very often tends to be analysed through multi-scalar levels. Thus, relationality can also be equally relevant between different places on the same scale. Any intervention in this case would therefore require factoring in this relational and dynamic aspect of every day places.

End notes

1. Processes here refer to the ways in which individuals and groups interact, and establish relationships. These interactions are often aimed at meeting and achieving certain social, economic and political ends.
2. Fishers henceforth refers to the trawl owners and laborers unless mentioned otherwise.
3. This PhD falls under a larger research project with the acronym REINCORPFISH that aims to understand and contribute to the resolution of fishery conflicts in the Palk Bay.
4. Personal communication with ARIF co-convener Mr Arunalandam.
5. The civil war in Sri Lanka was fought along ethnic lines, with the Tamils (minority) pitted against the Singhalese (majority). The Tamils in India were largely seen sympathetic to the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka.
7. Personal communication with the Inspector of Fisheries, Rameswaram, in January 2011.
8. Pair trawling is method of trawling wherein two boats are used in fishing. It is technically referred to as High-opening bottom trawl net. This technique was first introduced in the region by an FAO project in the 1980's and was since actively propagated by the Government. However this technique has been banned by government citing environmental concerns.
9. Thevars is an umbrella term used to denote a group of castes; including Kallars, Agamudayars and Maravars.
10. Large boats consume more fuel and the maintenance of the bigger boats is more expensive.
11. Public space was chosen because this is where the interactions between communities were clearly observable.
12. Though not very obvious in the beginning, as the research progressed it became
increasingly clear that individual fishers often identified themselves first with their caste when it came to social interactions. Subtle usage of the words namely “us” and “them” in conversations usually referred to caste groupings.

13. Translations based on my proficiency in both Tamil and English. I am a native speaker of Tamil and have a good working knowledge of English.

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