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Postscript

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The twelve commentaries on the Manifesto for the Marine Social Sciences take various approaches and possess different merits. Some are more practical, while others have a theoretical purpose; some focus specifically on capture fisheries (which is where many in the field of marine social sciences started), whereas others embrace a fuller range of marine pursuits; some are more supportive, while others take a critical stance. All this is well and good—the social sciences are after all not homogenous but thrive on debate.

In wrapping up this first conversation on the agenda of the marine social sciences, we choose to emphasize three points. First, many commentators appear to recognize what Pauwelussen (2020) calls “the multiplicity of marine realities,” which is also highlighted in the Manifesto. Frangoudes and co-authors (2020) thus emphasize the role of gender in fisheries, Vandergeest and Marschke (2020) unpack the research agenda for labor in industrial fisheries, Khan (2020) pleads for diversification of the range of social sciences included, and Knol-Kaufmann and Arbo (2020), to mention just a few, the need to broaden the focus to a range of “blue growth” activities and engage with “ocean futures.” Charles (2020) revisits a set of global themes that also deserve attention, while Burbridge (2020) takes the stacked policy agenda by the horns and highlights the utility of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) in helping to solve critical issues of interference. Referring to the fact that “anthropologists have encountered ways of understanding and ordering marine reality that challenge the western-secular frameworks on which marine social science is commonly based,” Pauwelussen (2020) finally pleads for more ontological and methodological openness. For this, as Hornidge and Schlüter (2020) point out, we also need to engage in concept and theory production.

Second, some commentators have taken positions on the “political nature” of some points included in the Manifesto. Thus, Steins and co-authors (2020), reflecting on the “bias” toward small-scale fisheries (MMSS 2.2.2), conclude that: “Being seen as ‘advocates’ pressing the case for one particular group or outcome is likely to damage the still fragile position the social sciences have in this context.” Similarly, Kraan and Linke (2020) disapprove of the “normative nature” of some statements, and even of the designation “Manifesto,” which is supposed to have a “political connotation.” But Scholtens and Bennett (2020) take an opposite position, arguing that: “research agendas that present themselves as apolitical... may in fact be quite political by implicitly legitimizing and reproducing a status quo” and praise the Manifesto for “holding the middle ground.” Rather than apologizing this way or the other, we conclude that the availability of “bias” is just as much an issue of debate in this Manifesto as in other documents of this kind.

Finally, we draw attention to the fact that the Manifesto, and the majority of commentaries included in this issue, largely reflect the views of what Kurien (2002) calls the “temperate minority,” otherwise known as the Global North, with only a few commentaries (Sridhar 2020; Khan 2020) originating from the “tropical majority,” or the Global South. We therefore call on social science scholars based in the Global South to add to the Manifesto as it stands now; we also call on other marine social scientists to continue the conversation that has been started.

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