

# Struggles to Control the Commons: Social Movement or Cultural Emplacement?

7/2/96  
WORKSHOP IN POLITICAL THEORY  
AND POLICY ANALYSIS  
513 NORTH PARK  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA 47403-8186  
Reprint Files -- CPR

paper presented at the 6th Annual Conference of the International  
Association for the Study of Common Property

Berkeley, California  
June 5-9, 1996

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## 1. introduction

In this paper, I examine a case like many of the others discussed in this conference: a set of villages with small-scale artisanal fishermen, in this case the fishing villages on the Peruvian shores of Lake Titicaca. In this setting, each fisherman has ready access to any portion of the fishing grounds associated with the village (they do not have private fishing spots). Moreover, this case displays what can be called “an informal system of common property management”. In each of the villages, the fishermen and their fellow villagers protect their fishing grounds. They defend these grounds by keeping a close watch for incursions into them, and by chasing away or otherwise attacking intruders.

My purpose in this paper is to discuss and compare three forms of analysis of these communal fishing grounds. The first view examines the local practices as a set of rules that allocates certain rights (access to fishing grounds) on certain principles (membership in village communities) in exchange for certain obligations (participation in the management and defense of these grounds). I find this view useful for many purposes. It facilitates comparison among different cases of common property management, and it permits dialogue among academics, resource users, administrators and other citizens. However, it also strikes me--in this case at least--as incomplete. It ignores the historical and cultural dimensions of resource management--or, if it does not ignore them, it downplays them systematically, which amounts to the same thing. It suggests that resources are understood by material frameworks of value measurement, in economic and ecological terms.

These limitations have led me to explore two other frameworks of analysis. To this end, I have temporarily revived an old-fashioned word, now little used, which can be applied to both of these other frameworks. The word is “struggles”. I use it to convey the depth of commitment of

the villagers to the control of their own lives and to suggest the scale of the on-going conflicts between the villagers and outsiders, particularly the state. The first of the frameworks involving “struggles” is the notion of “social movement”—the idea that fishermen might organize around issues of resource control, much as workers might organize around issues of wages, working conditions, and the like, or women might organize around issues of employment, education and physical well-being, or other, less well-defined populations might organize into social movements around environmental issues, or human rights, or, to take an example probably less popular with the present audience, the rights of gun-owners. Some contemporary social movements take the form of “identity politics,” in which a population organizes around some basic primordial identity, like race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation or physical disability. Since the Lake Titicaca fishermen are in many senses of the word indigenous, this notion of social movement might seem appropriate. However, this term tends to locate the struggle predominantly, or exclusively, within a public political arena, and to frame it in terms of national and international historical trajectories. I thus prefer an alternative form of casting the protection of fishing grounds as a struggle—a framework that I will provisionally call “cultural emplacement” which contrasts doubly with “social movement”. The adjective “cultural” contrasts with “social” to suggest that struggles involve daily life and collective memory, as well as formal political organization. The noun “emplacement” contrasts with “movement” to suggest that the people who are involved seek long-term autonomy and some measure of autarky, as well as transformations of a larger political whole. For this final framework, I will temporarily revive a second old-fashioned word, also little used now, which can be applied to this framework. The word, derived from the substantivist economic anthropology of the 1960s, is “embedded”; it suggests that resource management systems are thoroughly intertwined with local history, culture

and daily life.

Let me begin, though, with a brief presentation of the particular case.

## 2. Lake Titicaca fishermen

Lake Titicaca is an unusual lake in many regards: it is large (over 8000 km<sup>2</sup>), deep (with a maximum depth over 280 m) and located at a great elevation--3800 m above sea level.

Because of its location within the tropics and the modification of the climate by the lake, the area is warm enough to support agriculture. The lands close to the lake are densely settled by indigenous peasants, native populations of Aymara and Quechua speakers. About 10% of the households in the lakeshore villages catch fish on a regular basis; for these households, fish account for over half of their cash income (or, to be more precise, of the sum of their cash income and the cash value of the crops and animals that they consume themselves or trade for foodstuffs). However, these fishing households also engage in agriculture and livestock-raising. The twenty-odd native species of fish are restricted to two genera: one species of catfish and all the others are small to medium sized cyprinidonts. There are also two introduced species, rainbow trout and a medium-sized fish called silverside.

Though fishing is quite ancient in this region--fish bones have been found in archaeological sites over a millennium old--there have been major changes in recent decades. Through the 1930s or so, fishermen used beach seines, harpoons, basket traps and cotton gill nets. Much of the catch was dried and bartered for foodstuffs. Major changes came with new fish species--trout were introduced in the 1940s and silverside in the 1960s. These coincided with gradual improvements in transportation networks and with changes in technology. The expansion of a commercial trout fishery in the 1960s led to the partial replacement of reed rafts by wooden rowboats and an almost total replacement of the native fishing gear by nylon gill nets. The first

trout cannery opened in 1961, shipping its product to mines, coastal cities and abroad; by 1965 there were 5, the year at which total harvests began to decline, and by 1969 the last trout cannery closed.

Despite these changes, the fish populations appear to be robust, and there are few signs of overfishing. Though the decline of trout seems to be due partly to overfishing--the trout swim up a few major rivers to spawn, and are easily trapped at the mouths--it is also due partly to competition from the silverside, and indeed, the trout are not locally extinct. They continue to be harvested and sold fresh, for local home consumers and to restaurants. Only one of the native species has become extinct, the largest top predator, and this extinction could plausibly be explained by competition from the faster and more aggressive trout and silverside, as well as by their predation on young, as by overfishing. There are two other important signs of the sustainability of the fishing. Estimates of sustainable yields can be drawn from trophic dynamics, beginning with the primary productivity of phytoplankton, and from the results of echo-sounding conducted in the lake. Both of these suggests that the annual harvest, around 8000 metric tons per year, is less than half of what could be maintained.

Of particular interest to the themes of this conference and this session are the village fishing territories. Each lakeshore village controls a section of the most productive littoral zone, from which outsiders are excluded. This limitation of access seems to be a key in the sustainability of the fishery. The villages throughout the region, both right on the shores of the lake and in nearby areas, have contiguous territories, including fields that are cultivated some years and left in fallow in others, and pastures. Though individuals own their particular plots, they are subject to village regulations which determine the crops that are planted and the years in which specific plots lie fallow. The permanent pastures, by contrast, are communally owned, but

only members of the village community can graze their herds on these pastures. The fishing territories are spatially and culturally an extension of these agricultural and pastoral lands. The borders which separate village agricultural lands continue into the lake to separate the fishing territories of villages. In each of the villages in the region, the members watch over the permanent pastures and the fallow fields to make sure that members of neighboring communities do not bring their animals into these lands to graze. Similarly, the villagers keep an eye over the aquatic portion of their communal territory to watch for boats that belong to members of other communities.

A number of features facilitate this protection of fishing grounds. The territories are small in scale, averaging 30 km<sup>2</sup> in area. The number of fishermen in each village is also small, averaging about 20. Moreover, many of the marriages in the region take place between individuals born in the same village, so that there are dense social ties within the village. In more than half the villages, the portions of the lake closest to land contain stands of an economically important reed, harvested by most households in the community, and thus increasing the number of community residents who are involved in patrolling aquatic territory. Nonetheless, the members of the community who do not fish--on an average, 90% of the total--support the communal fishing territories. They also look out for boats from other villages--a task that is easiest for the villages with high hills near to the lake, but possible in all areas, and would actively intervene if boats belonging to members of other villages were to land on the village's shores.

### 3. common property resource management

This case could fit squarely with a view that fishing territories like this can be understood as a form of common property resource management, itself a subset of the cases of natural

resource management. In the key work in this subject, Elinor Ostrom's Governing the Commons, the Lake Titicaca fishermen illustrate clearly at least five of the seven "design principles" of "long-enduring common-pool resource institutions" such as "clearly defined boundaries", "congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions," "collective-choice arrangements", "monitoring," "graduated sanctions," "conflict-resolution mechanisms" and "minimal recognition of rights to organize".(1990:90)

Indeed, the Titicaca fishermen have been examined within a somewhat modified version of this perspective. Evelyn Pinkerton and Martin Weinstein bring issues of community strength (a topic which Ostrom rejects [1992]), of local-state co-management and of ethnic pluralism into this kind of rational choice game-theoretical analysis. They discuss the Titicaca fisherman in their lengthy report, Fisheries that Work: Sustainability through Community-based Management (1995). They establish a framework for small-scale fisheries that "divides fisheries management into seven general categories: policy-making and evaluation; ensuring the productive capacity of the resource; regulating fishery access; regulating fishery harvest; enforcing or implementing rules; maximizing benefits to fishermen"(12). Within each of these categories, they consider the management problems (e.g., paying the costs of fish habitat protection), the management functions (e.g., monitoring the habitat) and the property rights and duties (e.g., right/duty to protect fish habitat against other harmful uses). They cite the Titicaca case as "a skeletal prototype for all the rest of the cases." They note that it "occurs in the absence of the government's ability to manage, and thus shows the effectiveness of informal rules which have allowed sustainable harvest over centuries." (22).

They examine twelve other cases of fisheries management, including regional multi-arty systems to manage single-species fisheries, inshore and stationary fisheries, and multi-party

habitat protection and watershed restoration. These cases are drawn from Canada, the United States, Australia, Japan and Korea. They note that these cases, like the Titicaca village fishing territories, share a number of features--high level of dependence of the fishery, high vulnerability to non-sustainable use, strong identification with the fishing place, unwillingness or inability to transfer access rights out of the area, willingness to use mechanisms for equitable resource access, an ability to assert management rights on informal or formal bases, and a willingness to invest resources in management (179).

This abbreviated account of Ostrom and of Pinkerton and Weinstein suggests some of the strengths of this work. They can point to certain features of the Lake Titicaca fishery that lead fishermen to be willing and able to cooperate in certain ways that allow them to protect the fish resources from overexploitation. These features can be observed in other fisheries as well. This framework thus facilitates comparative analysis. Moreover, it is readily accessible not only to other researchers but to individuals outside academic contexts as well. It thus facilitates dialogue among researchers, managers, fishermen and other groups.

Granted these strengths, why might one turn to other frameworks at all? I have turned this question over in my mind. I certainly think that it is important for researchers to develop lines of analysis for one case that lead to an examination of other cases, and I think that it is urgent for researchers not to limit their audience to members of their own profession. However, I have felt for a long time that this resource management perspective is incomplete. In trying to pin down what troubles me about it, I keep returning to several features of it. Firstly, I find that it tends to operate in a short-term time perspective. It omits much of the historical context that I find crucial to my understanding of the Lake Titicaca fishermen, and at most leaves room for an examination of the policy-making process that involves fishermen and officials. Secondly, I find that it tends



to present a fairly benign view of governmental agencies. Indeed, Pinkerton and Silverman are quite optimistic about the possibility of co-management in which local communities and government agencies establish frameworks for the joint management of fisheries. They recognize that such agencies do not always defend the interest of small-scale fishermen or manage resources in sustainable ways, and they see that such agencies may be dominated by powerful and wealthy groups. This optimism about co-management suggests that the authors believe that representatives of government agencies and local communities can treat each other as good-faith participants in a process of negotiating agreements--a belief that the historical experience of the Titicaca region does not bear out.

#### 4. social movements

A couple of years ago, I was discussing these objections to the common property resource management view of the Lake Titicaca fishermen with Joe Spaeder, a graduate student in ecology at the university where I teach, and a participant in this conference. His own work with caribou management with Yup'ik Eskimo in southwestern Alaska gave him a familiarity with these issues. After we had been speaking for a while, he paused, smiled, and said that he understood. I wasn't thinking of the communal fishing grounds just as an institution to manage common property resources. He told me that I had been thinking of them as a social movement. At that time, I agreed with him. The idea of social movement was appealing for its greater social, temporal and ideological breadth.

Perhaps the sharpest way to contrast these perspectives is to trace the alternative forms of access to fishing that they envisage, even if they do not always mention them explicitly. For the common property resource management perspective, the alternative is no management at all: an open access fishery, likely to decline because of overexploitation and overinvestment in gear and

craft. The state is often either absent, or present in a neutral-to-benign role--as guarantor of contracts and agreements, as a purveyor of environmental data, and so forth. For the social movement perspective, the alternative is control of the fishery by the government--a system in which licenses might be issued, at considerable expense, to some villagers and to some non-villagers.. This view brings forward the fishermen's sense that the state is at best a difficult and unreliable provider of public works such as schools and clinics, and more often a meddling opponent.

The notion of "social movement" helped bring into view the fact that these village fishing territories involve far more than a set of fishermen, an area in a lake, and some fish. Firstly, this effort to defend the community led directly to a concern about state incursions on the autonomy of the villages in managing their own affairs. More specifically, if the licenses which the state grants to fishermen were taken seriously, then individuals from other lakeshore villages, or from other areas altogether, could expect policemen or navy officials to back them up in their conflicts with villagers who sought to exclude them. About half of the fishermen have paid the two dollars or so that it costs to obtain a license, a percentage that has remained fairly stable between 1979 and 1993, when fishermen censuses were conducted. The purchase of the license can best be taken as a kind of insurance against the risk of paying fines or bribes when a policeman would stop a fisherman on land, often on way to market. By having a license, a fisherman makes it more difficult for a policeman to demand money as a fine for some petty, if not entirely imaginary, infraction. Though the Ministry of Fisheries can grant access to fish anywhere in the lake--a body of water that in the government's view belongs to the state--the licenses are not used to gain entry into the fishing territories of other communities. Membership cards in organizations, registration certificates and the like are important tokens in transactions. Though the villagers

have been successful in retaining control over the access to fishing grounds, they express a degree of concern. This concern stems in part from the great weight that documents of all sorts carry throughout Peru, in part from the fear that the government has some new scheme up its sleeve. The few cage culture projects for trout in the early 1980s that were not run by villages led many villages to worry that the government would expropriate their fishing grounds, for example.

Secondly, it is noteworthy that the large number of non-fishing households in these villages--about 90%, on an average--also supported the defense of fishing territories, by keeping an eye out for outsiders' boats and by challenging outsiders who land on village beaches. Thirdly, the language which the fishermen use to describe the fishing was not one of optimizing or maximizing incomes or effort, but rather a discourse, familiar throughout the Andes, of defense of community: of protecting the integrity of the village's territory from incursions by outsiders. These extensions of the concern beyond fishermen and beyond fishing zones could be taken as a sort of habit, a touchiness that has developed from many incursions. It can also be taken as reflecting a political ideology--that a proper peasant community includes a variety of sorts of territory such as fishing grounds, fields and pastures, and that it is the obligation of community members to defend their boundaries.

Fourthly, this defense of village life extends beyond the control of territory itself to a broader set of issues over village autonomy. Directly linked to fishing is the concern over the control of markets. Government ministries have attempted to restrict sale of fish to the markets held in the small towns in the area, and not to permit this sale in the village marketplaces. Though the towns are indeed small--some have populations of under a thousand--they do have a much stronger presence of government agencies, with post offices, police stations, and the like.

The vendors in the town markets are more likely to be urban rather than rural, to use metric units rather than the customary measures, to buy and sell for cash rather than to barter for foodstuffs, and to pay a market tax--all features opposed by the fishermen's female relatives, the ones who trade their catch.

In this view, then, the control of fishing territories is part of a social movement in which the Indian villages of the region seek to oppose government interference and control. This view explains the fishermen's willingness to patrol their territories and to exclude outsiders as part of their participation in this movement. It implies that they view the lake and the fish, not only as a source of food and income, but as contested terrain in a political struggle to which they are committed. For the moment, I'll keep open the question of whether this view complements or contradicts the natural resource management perspective--though I will point out that there are social exchange, rational chance game theory models of social movements, just as there are of fishing territories. The social movement perspective, by framing the defense of fishing territories differently, opens up new research questions: on the history of relations between villages and the state, on the position of issues related to fishing within the agendas of peasant political organizations, and the like.

##### 5. cultural emplacement

As I reflected on my conversation with Joe Spaeder, I found myself doubting the appropriateness of the social movement model. Yes, it opened up new questions, and it somehow felt right. It did allow me to address the involvement of non-fishermen, and of issues not directly concerning fishing. I had that "it's on the tip of my tongue" experience in trying to name what I didn't like about this perspective. The deficiency that I first hit upon, and that has remained with me, is the term "movement" itself. In the rather plodding way that academics sometimes try to be

witty, I said, “The fishermen aren’t involved in a social movement. They’re not trying to move anywhere at all. They just want to stay put!” Although I don’t want to get too far off into some arcane discussion of metaphors buried deep in the English language or in European thought, it does seem to me that the word “movement” implies change and direction. It suggests that the participants within a movement are trying to shift some collectivity of which they form part from one place to another, to alter its course from one path to a different one. In a broad sense, then, social movements occur within public space, and their participants are citizens of the collectivity that occupies the public space--in some cases, their participants are trying to achieve or broaden citizenship. To take part in a social movement is to participate in the collective history of some larger whole.

However, this model, though not entirely inappropriate, is not a perfect fit for the Titicaca fishermen and other villagers. They are not fully citizens of Peru: though they are registered with national agencies and carry national documents, the state often discriminates against them and renders their cultural and social specificity invisible. Nor does their opposition of the villagers to the state take place within a public sphere. This comes, I believe, because the fishermen are not only seeking to restore a different balance to their relations with the state; they are also seeking a degree of autonomy, a separation and withdrawal from the state. In this sense, the model of social movement shares a defect with the resource management view, though perhaps to a lesser extent: it imposes alien models of political participation, of citizenship and subjectivity. I guess that I’m borrowing here from the critique of the post-Enlightenment bourgeois individual self.

As an alternative--I’ll leave it to you to decide whether it’s a modification of the social movement view or something entirely different--I’ve settled on the phrase “cultural emplacement”. It contrasts doubly with social movement, with cultural replacing social and

emplacement replacing movement. The idea is that the fishermen and the other villagers draw, not only on active political engagement in a public sphere, but on many cultural domains. This topic raises the theme of cultural and historical embeddedness that I had mentioned earlier. Of the many possible domains which could be discussed, I'll mention only two. The first is memory, the dense web of memory of earlier events that develops in oral, face-to-face communities, reinforced in the Andean case by frequent village-wide assemblies, by the tradition of collective work parties that make many village institutions, such as roads and schoolhouses, literally the product of the villagers' work, and by an annual cycle of festivals that link the villagers to their territory and that give ritual and religious significance to this territory. The second is daily life: the patterns of greeting, of sharing meals, of conversation that mark peasants and fishermen as fellow Indian villagers, and that set Spanish-speaking town dwellers and government officials apart as a separate category.

In this view, then, the protection of fishing territories is not only a struggle against the state; it is part of the collective effort to maintain local autonomy, to assure a degree of autarky, and to protect the ongoing ties between the villagers and the territory from which they have maintained their subsistence for generations. The fishing grounds are no longer just a resource, as in the first perspective, not just contested terrain in public debate as in the second, but part of the fishermen's lives. Though I believe this strongly, I also seek equally strongly to reject a view that the Indians wish somehow to have all whites disappear and to have the Spanish Conquest undone: or rather, the few hints that have something like this in mind--the myths of the Incas who will return--form a very minor part of their understandings of their world. They have a kind of view of the state that I occasionally think of as monarchist--the president and the flag are important symbols to them, ones that confer legitimacy on their internal village affairs, and,

much as a good king provides public works, the villagers often seek support from the state; they're glad to have the government send health workers to clinics, they want schools for their villages, and they like the many items that they can purchase, from tools to clothing to bicycles to radios. But the tools that they buy can allow them to expand their territory, in a sense: buying outboard motors that let them go further into the lake, or buying machetes with which they can clear areas in the Amazon forest to plant with coffee. The clothing that they buy is often a distinctive form of dress, different from urban fashions even though it is manufactured. The bicycles can make it easier for them to travel between their homes, their fields, their pastures and the markets. And the appeal of a radio is that it plays Andean folk music and receives the news and information programs in the indigenous languages.

It may seem quite a leap from the management of common-property fishing territories to native language radio. But I think it's a leap worth making. I'll close here, and ask for questions.

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