6 Locality and Nation

Respatializing Rights Under Neoliberalism

IN 1991, THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT opened its 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone to foreign capital ventures. Prompted by a balance-of-payments deficit and a clause in the 1982 Law of the Sea requiring states to liberalize access to territorial waters if they are unable to fully exploit their own marine resources, the government introduced a new, far-reaching deep-sea fishing policy. According to the new policy, deep-sea resources would be tapped through joint ventures between foreign and Indian private companies. The incentive package offered to the foreign partners included easy financing and the supply of diesel fuel at international rates; license to export their entire catch, processing it onboard at sea; and license to use a foreign port as the base of operation. In return for these inducements, the Indian government would receive 12 percent of the foreign exchange earnings of the enterprises and the Indian partner would benefit from the transfer of technology (Sharma 2001; A. Subramanian and Kalavathy 1994; A. Sundar 1999).

That same year, the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) responded by launching an opposition campaign.[1] The organization joined hands with its erstwhile adversary, the Indian trawling sector, to demand state protection for domestic producers. In October 1993, the NFF and the Small Mechanized Boat Operators of India jointly submitted a memorandum to the prime minister demanding the revocation of all new licenses issued to joint ventures in deep-sea fishing and the enactment of a deep-sea fishing regulation act that would encourage the harvest of deep-sea resources by domestic fishers (National Fishworkers Forum 1993; *Indian Express*, October 25, 1993). The following year, the NFF and thirty-one other organizations and trade unions

from nine maritime states called for a one-day all-India fisheries strike. On February 4, most of the mechanized and artisanal fishers struck work and generated a total boycott of harbors and fish markets (*The Hindu*, February 5, 1994; *Indian Express*, February 5, 1994; Sharma 2001). In July 1994, the two sectors along with export merchants and the owners and workers of fish-processing, ice production, and net-making industries formally came together as the National Fisheries Action Committee Against Joint Ventures (NFACAJV) (*The Hindu*, July 18, 1994; *Indian Express*, July 18, 1994; National Fishworkers Forum 1994).

The NFACAJV's argument against joint ventures hinged on a few key points. First, even before the announcement of the policy, the catch per vessel had gone down in all sectors and, in contrast to the Commerce Ministry's estimation, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's own 1992 study of the Indian Ocean fishery suggested that the commercially viable fish available in the deep sea could be caught by existing domestic fleets if their operations were diversified (J. Kurien 1995; Sharma 2001). Second, past experiments with deep-sea fishing in the Indian Ocean had generated heavy losses, making it clear that the only way for joint-venture vessels to reap a profit would be to encroach on the resource-rich territorial waters, thus adding to the vulnerability of domestic fishers. Third, the license to process fish onboard without ever landing them onshore denied a participatory role for laborers in the Indian fish-processing industry.

In July 1994, the NFACAJV called for a "Black Day," when fishers across the country hoisted black flags on their boats and staged marches and demonstrations to demand an end to joint ventures. This was followed in November 1995 by a two-day national fisheries strike and a week-long hunger fast in May 1995 by Catholic priest Thomas Kocherry, chair of the NFF and convener of the NFACAJV, that was supported by relay fasts by fishers across the country. In response to the protests, the Indian government announced that it was temporarily suspending the issue of licenses, and it appointed a committee to study the problem, which submitted a report upholding the 1991 policy. The committee's report generated another protest on November 23 and 24, during which fishers struck work and fishing in the maritime states came to a virtual standstill. About 1 million people boycotted work at sea and in processing plants and fish markets as a show of protest against the policy. The government then constituted another committee, headed by P. Murari, that was composed only of government officials. The NFACAJV organized yet

another agitation and in May 1995, Thomas Kocherry went on an indefinite hunger strike in Porbundar, the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi. When the press and opposition parties came out in unanimous support of the fishers, the government finally agreed to expand the Murari committee to include six representatives from the fisheries sector, including Kocherry. In February 1996, after a comprehensive tour and survey of coastal states, the Murari committee submitted its recommendations, which included the total cancellation of all joint-venture licenses, the provision of training and subsidies to enable small- and medium-scale fishers to harvest the deep sea, and mandatory consultation with the fishing community on all fishery legislation and policy. When the government hesitated to implement the committee's recommendations, Kocherry began another hunger fast in Bombay on August 7, 1996, with support actions across the country carried out by the central trade union federations, the National Center for Labor, and the National Alliance of People's Movements. On August 10, fishers and dockworkers began an indefinite blockade of all major harbors, as a result of which the Ministry of Food Processing Industries agreed to stop issuing licenses and to begin implementing the recommendations. After another round of harbor blockages in March 1997, the Indian government agreed to cancel all licenses and issue no additional ones. It was a remarkable victory against globalization.

The collaboration against the deep-sea fishing policy reflected a notion of community that encompassed the fisheries sector as a whole, undifferentiated by sector, region, or class and extended to national scale. The NFACAJV called on the developmental state to renew its commitment to this community of fishers rather than to foreign capital. In a conversation about the antiglobalization protests, Thomas Kocherry pointed out the reasons for this unusual collaboration between the adversaries of the domestic fishing economy: "Initially, the entire struggle was around the contradiction between traditional fishing and trawlers, but when they realized that there was a bigger threat to face, they came together spontaneously. Previously the struggle was at the regional level; now it has acquired national dimensions."[2] Kocherry explained that the reorientation of the struggle around opposition to global capital necessitated a reframing of community in national terms.

This particular instance of a resurgent late capitalist nationalism is notably at odds with millennial expectations of the nation-state's demise. In the late 1990s, the striking consensus across the political spectrum in the U.S. academy and popular press over the interpretation of neoliberalism as a rupture

with previous forms of territorial power and affiliation (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Bhagwati 2004; Friedman 2000; Hardt and Negri 2000) obscured the continuities in nationalist and state-centered responses to globalization. By contrast, analysts of grassroots opposition to global capitalism in India and elsewhere have noted that activists and their supporters articulated a combined defense of national self-sufficiency *and* local resource rights (C. T. Kurien 1994, 1996; McCarthy 2005b; Patnaik 1995a, 1995b). In India, many of the 1990s social movements with broad ecological platforms that arose among tribal, fisher, and farmer populations called for the strengthening of the state as a barrier to unfettered transnational capital while articulating localized rights claims in terms of national political belonging. The symbolism of an earlier anti-imperialist nationalism informed such movements, which represented their cause as a second independence struggle, this time for the poor. Pinpointing economic self-reliance as a founding tenet of postcolonial state formation, antiglobalization activists argued that neoliberal restructuring was a betrayal of the promise of national independence.

In fisheries, the juxtaposition of state-led neoliberal deterritorialization and the opposition's call for a robust national territorial sovereignty suggests a shift in both economic policy and political organizing away from the projects of intermediacy in the 1970s and 1980s. Then, fisheries politics was juxtaposed against the national, bringing coastal fishers, the regional state, the transnational church, and other international migrants together in ongoing negotiations over the meaning of polity, economy, and community. For Dravidian fishers, communist priests, and Belgian engineers, the problem of national developmental hegemony and domestic capitalism had occupied center stage. It appeared that in the current situation the space of intermediacy carved out by these earlier negotiations had been eclipsed by a new emphasis on anti-imperialist *nationalism*. Through its mobilizations across the Indian coastal belt, the NFACAJV produced a space of national sovereignty as the ground of struggle.

Yet, when we turn back to Kanyakumari, a more complicated picture emerges. The 1990s was the decade of the most sustained antitrawling activity. Even though antiglobalization brought artisans and trawler owners together in campaigns across Indian city centers, in Kanyakumari, artisanal village after village passed resolutions against inshore trawling, engaged in pitched battles with trawlers at sea, harangued politicians to address the impact of trawling on marine resources, and mobilized in collective protests in strategic inland locations. Indeed, one could tell a very different story about

the southwestern fishery in the last decade of the twentieth century from that which begins this chapter.

This other story would most likely highlight two other pivotal events. In 1990, the government of Tamilnadu opened Kanyakumari's first harbor in Chinnamuttom village at the eastern end of the district to serve primarily as a berthing and launching pad for mechanized craft. Within a few years, the number of trawlers in Chinnamuttom and the adjoining village of Kanyakumari grew from three in 1987 to almost a hundred in 1995. Thus the district had two trawling centers—Chinnamuttom in the east and Colachel in the west—separated by a number of villages with artisanal majorities.

In 1993, the Indian Supreme Court reached a verdict in favor of the Kerala state government's 1989 decision to ban trawling during the monsoon months of June, July, and August. After the 1989 ban, the Kerala Trawlnet Boat Operators' Association had registered a case against the Kerala state government in the High Court of Kerala's capital city of Trivandrum, arguing that the ban was a violation of their right to livelihood as well as a detriment to the country's foreign exchange earnings from the export of prawn and other valuable species. When the Boat Operators' Association won a stay from the High Court that allowed them to renew operations during the monsoon months, the Kerala union affiliated with the NFF took the case to the Supreme Court. The protracted struggle between the Kerala trawling sector and the artisanal union finally ended with the 1993 verdict in support of the monsoon trawling ban. In his verdict, Justice Jeevan Reddy gave a decisive statement about development.

> We are of the opinion that the Government of Kerala is perfectly justified in adopting the attitude that the public interest cannot be determined only by looking at the quantum of fish caught in a year. In other words, production alone cannot be the basis for determining public interest. The government is perfectly justified in saying that it is under an obligation to protect the economic interest of the traditional fishermen and to ensure that they are not deprived of their slender means of livelihood. Whether one calls it distributive justice, or development with a human face, the ultimate truth is that the object of all development is the human being. There can be no development for the sake of development. Priorities ought not to be inverted nor the true perspective lost in the quest for more production.[3]

This verdict encapsulated the NFF's stance against capitalist development and recast development in terms of distributive justice. It signaled the court's recognition of artisanal fishers as producers with a right to protection by the state against the excesses of private capitalism. On a more practical level, the verdict increased the duration of trawler activity in Kanyakumari, because trawlers that used to fish from Kerala's harbors began coming to Kanyakumari during the monsoon months to escape the ban. Kanyakumari's trawler owners returned to their district sea with great apprehension. The Supreme Court verdict signaled a threatening consolidation of a fisher politics of territorial closure. In response to the militancy of Kerala's artisanal fishermen, Kerala's mechanized fishers had begun to police the entry of other trawlers into Kerala seas. Kanyakumari's mechanized fishers realized that, with increasing restrictions on their mobility, it was time to make a more strident claim to the resources of their home sea.

A decade ago, China historian Arif Dirlik pointed out the centrality of "the local" to contemporary political discourse. "It would seem by the early nineties that local movements, or movements to save and reconstruct local societies, have emerged as the primary (if not the only) expressions of resistance to domination" (Dirlik 1996: 22). The concern with the local as a site of resistance and liberation, he continued, is intimately linked to the emergence of a global capitalism. Dirlik connected the political centrality of the local to the renewed importance of "place" in millennial social movements. "The challenge," he reflected, "is how to recapture places for politics (and use-value) against their consumption into postmodernist privatization, where one place is scarcely distinguishable from another in an unending change of exchange-values" (Dirlik 1997: 6). Ecological movements, he argued, engage in a "critical localism" that recognizes that localities have been worked over by processes of historical transformation but still need to be appropriated from the onslaught of new, even more pervasive forms of capitalist modernization.

Like Dirlik, a number of writers have linked the symbolic valence of locality in the 1990s to a globalizing capitalism in a dialectic of power and resistance. But as mentioned, in Kanyakumari, as elsewhere on the Indian coast, opposition to global capitalism was expressed primarily through an anti-imperialist nationalism. What, then, did the turn to locality express? Longtime Kerala fishery activist A. J. Vijayan echoed Dirlik's notion of a critical localism in his assessment of southern fishery activism. "In spite of the national collaboration, the same contradictions and animosity continue to exist locally. In fact, I would say that they've even gotten stronger."[4] When I asked him why, he said, "We've realized more and more that the sea could become a desert. We see the urgency of conservation now more than ever before and the

need to defend local resources against overfishing. Ecological sustainability has become the most important issue for us." One could certainly argue that this expression of environmental ethics is the quintessential localist response to global capitalism. However, I would argue that for Vijayan, environmentalism provided not so much the tools to rethink globalization as the tools to reassert locality against national capitalism. Ultimately, the emphasis for him was on continuing the struggles against domestic capital through the postindependence period and engaging regional and national states to secure artisanal rights. In other words, mediating scales of society and state were crucially important to crafting a critical localism.

Spaces and Idioms of Protest

To what extent can we characterize the 1990s as having ushered in a shift in political imaginaries and practices? What do we make of the difference between late-twentieth-century expectations of an unmediated local-global encounter and the lived politics of mediation?

In some ways, the deep-sea fishing campaign presents a conundrum. Narrowly framed as a campaign of opposition to foreign capital intervention in the Indian fishery, it was wildly successful. More broadly conceived as opposition to all unsustainable fishing, whether foreign or domestic, it was less so. Furthermore, in Kanyakumari, a much broader consensus on antiglobalization than on antitrawling had developed. Writing about the parallel campaigns against deep-sea fishing and inshore trawling, political scientist Aparna Sundar comments that "in contrast to the struggle against trawling, the deep-sea fishing campaign in Kanyakumari district was conducted formally, in sites commonly agreed upon as 'political'—meeting halls, the Collectorate. . . . For all that the deep-sea fishing campaign was a 'campaign' and by definition time-bound, intense, and concerted, in Kanyakumari it nonetheless reflected a state of 'normal' or 'routine' politics" (A. Sundar 1999: 107–108).

In my own participation in the campaign against deep-sea fishing in Kanyakumari, this routinization of politics was palpable. Although it was through my involvement in this campaign that I was first drawn to researching the history of the coast, it was evident to me even then that foreign vessels did not convey the same immediacy of threat that local trawlers did. Much of the antiglobalization campaign was organized and orchestrated by social workers, church volunteers, and interlopers such as myself. We wrote letters to government officials, toured fishing villages to speak about the government's neoliberal turn, and wrote articles for the popular press on the resilient national opposition to the new fishing policy. The shared currency of nationalism paved the way to meetings with members of the government and press.

Returning to the coast for my research two years later, I was once again struck by the relative complacency of artisanal fishers in mobilizing against globalization. Far more commonly, they had to be encouraged by parish priests to attend protests held in front of the district collector's office, where we would gather under a covered area set up for protesters, shout slogans, and then disperse at a predetermined time. The discipline of these protests and their authorization by the police gave them an aura of predictability. I was left with the sense that the deep-sea fishing campaign was a trickle-down politics that lost meaning as it traveled to the Kanyakumari shoreline.

The distance between the campaign against globalization and the everyday reality of resource depletion was also reflected in the disintegration of the NFF in Kanyakumari. During my time in the district, the NFF was in disarray. Meetings were difficult to sustain, villagers had to be coerced into attending, and there was a constant turnover in leadership. Indeed, the immanent threat of foreign industrial fishing in the deep sea seemed of little immediate relevance to most fishermen and fisherwomen I spoke with. It was only when the national leadership of the NFF arrived in Kanyakumari for rallies and campaigns that its mass base would materialize.

On the other hand, antitrawling politics was fierce and spontaneous. Talk of trawler transgressions on the part of artisans was the stuff of daily conversation. Here, too, capital and community were in hostile conflict. However, here, both capital and community were spatialized as local, and it was precisely contestation over the cultural and political contours of locality that generated such hostility.

In the rest of this chapter, I take up these two trajectories in 1990s fishery politics: nationalization and localization. I consider who engaged in each space-making project, what tools they used, and to what ends. I argue that, rather than a rupture with fishery politics of the previous decades, antiglobalization in Kanyakumari provided new tools for domestic adversaries in the trawler wars of the 1990s. The language of ecology, locality, and nation circulated by the campaign against deep-sea fishing offered new ways to generate space and claim rights in the district's fishery.

Nationalizing the Artisan

Producing the artisanal fisher as a national political subject was a project of the NFF. Excavating a genealogy of naming offers some sense of the changes

wrought to the organization's mandate and membership over time. At the time of its founding in 1978 as the National Forum for Kattumaram and Country Boat Fishermen's Rights and Marine Wealth, the forum included artisanal fisher organizations from the three regional coastal states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, and Goa, where the battle against trawling was most intense. By 1983, the forum had expanded to include thirteen major regional fishermen's unions and was renamed the National Fishermen's Forum. In 1985, the forum was registered as a trade union. The final change of name occurred at the forum's annual meeting in 1989, when an opposition walkout by women members of the organization resulted in a serious rethinking of gender exclusivity. The choice of fish*worker*, however, was guided by other considerations too. Nalini Nayak, a longtime activist with the NFF who has been a key figure in bringing fisherwomen's concerns to the table, told me of the lengthy discussions that went into replacing *fishermen* with *fishworker*.

> The existing trade union movement didn't want to have anything to do with us because we weren't part of the industrial proletariat. They couldn't understand where we fit because the majority of artisanal fishermen own their own craft and gear. Then, within the NFF, there was the added sidelining of women's issues seen in the very choice of fisher*men* for the name of the organization.[5]

Fishworker signaled the place of fisher artisans within a national working class, checking both the romantic localism of *fisherfolk* and the gendered exclusivity of *fishermen*. It indicated a collective class identity that transcended the particularities of caste, region, and gender.

But things changed in the late 1980s. In 1989, the NFF organized a national demonstration called the Protect Waters, Protect Life March that culminated in Kanyakumari. The march brought together fisher groups and supporters from across the country who were opposed to the depletion of marine resources, and signaled the crystallization of a national ecological movement in the fisheries sector. The use of ecology as a rallying cry was a significant change in the NFF's mobilization activity because it reflected a shift from a primarily class-based stance against unequal access to technology, to a recognition that mechanized fishing and the intersectoral competition that it produced was leading to both economic and biological overfishing (National Fishworkers Forum 1989).[6] NFF ideologues now pointed to the inadequacy of class as a category for analyzing the dynamics of an economy characterized by natural resource harvest, common property, and private ownership of the means of production.

The deep-sea fishing campaign nationalized the artisan in a way that previous mobilizations had not. Through opposing the "new imperialism," the NFF was able to spatialize its artisanal constituency as national. At the same time, however, the discourses of ecology, nation, and locality that proliferated in this newly constituted national space were taken up by others for their own projects. I turn now to these projects within Kanyakumari.

Nationalizing the Church

The deep-sea fishing policy brought together erstwhile adversaries in the domestic fishery in an uneasy and episodic truce. It also elicited the censure of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) and strong words from the newly appointed chairman of its labor commission, Leon Dharmaraj, a native of Kanyakumari District. Dharmaraj had succeeded Arockiasamy as bishop of Kottar in 1990. After 1991, he mobilized the national church against the deep-sea fishing policy wholeheartedly. Locally, opposition to the policy also provided him with a means to unite the warring factions of his fisher congregation and to highlight the church's patriotism at a time when Hindu nationalism was ascendant.[7]

Bishop Dharmaraj appears to have wanted to take Kottar diocese in a decidedly socialist direction, a goal that comes out clearly in several of the circulars he issued beginning in 1991. Immediately after the announcement of neoliberal economic reforms by the ruling Congress Party, Dharmaraj issued a circular to coastal parishes that included a statement on communism and capitalism.

> The collapse of the Communist system in so many countries certainly removes an obstacle to facing the problems of marginalization and exploitation in an appropriate and realistic way, but it is not enough to bring about their solution. Indeed, there is a risk that a radical capitalistic ideology could spread which refuses even to consider these problems, in the a priori belief that any attempt to solve them is doomed to failure, and which blindly entrusts their solution to the free development of market forces. (*Kottar Newsletter*, July 1991)

Dharmaraj's response to the deep-sea fishing policy continued this line of reasoning. In another circular issued on November 15, 1994, Dharmaraj invited religious and lay members of the diocese to "promote social justice in a Christian spirit" by protesting peacefully against the "invasion of our seas by foreign fishing vessels." He urged all fishers to participate in the strikes organized by the NFF by not catching, selling, or consuming fish on strike days. In yet another letter he issued to the CBCI in his capacity as head of its labor

commission, Dharmaraj called on bishops in coastal dioceses to "motivate their flock to join the protest meetings. . . . By giving solidarity to this action," he concluded, "we indeed are preaching the Gospel" (Catholic Bishops' Conference of India 1994).

For both warring factions of the Kanyakumari fishery, the deep-sea fishing policy signaled a betrayal by the state, and they responded to the bishop's plea by jointly participating in some of the NFF's campaigns. However, their collaboration was tenuous. The frequency of intersectoral clashes on the Kanyakumari coast had risen sharply since 1993 as a result of several interlocking factors, including the successful spread of the Muttom Boat Building Center's motorized canoes, the construction of the new harbor at Chinnamuttom, and the entry of the NFF into the district. All these factors contributed to a more aggressive opposition between artisanal and mechanized fishers and each group's more strident articulation of sectoral identity. New terms—ecology, science, locality, and nation—accrued political weight and anchored the territorial polarization of sectors in the district.

Using the momentum provided by the 1989 Protect Waters, Protect Life March, the NFF began canvassing support in Kanyakumari's coastal villages for a district-level artisanal union. A section of the Kottar clergy responded to the NFF's work with a mixture of caution and alarm. The increasing militancy of fisher politics in Kerala and the participation of a vocal section of Kerala's Catholic clergy in the artisanal fisher campaigns had set off alarm bells in the Kottar church. This was the case despite the fact that Kottar Social Service Society (KSSS) work in *sangam* formation and intermediate technology had reflected an expanded sense of religious ministry that included the "secular" work of technological development. The bulk of the clergy had understood the KSSS's work simply as their way of filling a development gap left by the state. Rather than a direct challenge to reigning paradigms of development and authority, they promoted the KSSS as the effort by a benevolent clergy to secure a place for the poor in a modernizing nation.

Unionization, on the other hand, was a step that most of the clergy could not countenance. Parish priests from twenty of the forty-four coastal villages of the district took the matter before Bishop Dharmaraj. They alleged that Fathers Thomas Kocherry, Arulanandam, and Francis de Sales, the three priests spearheading the NFF's unionization effort, were fomenting violence on the coast in the name of the empowerment of the poor. They denied the validity of unionization as clerical activity by distinguishing technological innovation,

which *could* be accommodated as religious work, from unionization, which took clerical activity wholly into the realm of the secular. Rather than an expansion of the religious domain, they charged that union formation obliterated religiosity altogether.

Why were the priests who had encouraged the church's turn to development work now so resistant to unionization? A key reason appears to have been the threat of fisher autonomy. A union independent of church authority signaled a challenge to clerical leadership in a way that the KSSS *sangams* never had. Second, the formation of unions threatened to further escalate the violence on the coast by negating the possibility of common ground among fishers using different forms of technology.

In response to the clerical standoff, Bishop Dharmaraj invited the three priests to argue their case for unionization. Using the Second Vatican Council document *The Church in the Modern World*, which defined the church as an institution dedicated to both spiritual matters and material reality, Fathers Kocherry, Arulanandam, and Sales argued that institutions promoting social justice for the poor continued the work of Christ. Community, they maintained, could no longer simply be equated with a religious collective shepherded by priestly authority. Rather, the true Catholic community, the church of Christ on earth, was the community of the poor, and the clergy was morally obliged to subject itself to their struggle, not as leaders but as followers. They stated strongly that the mechanized sector was undermining the coast's moral economy by monopolizing and depleting the resource for personal profit. By flourishing at the expense of the lives of the wider community and of the sea on which they depended, they had placed themselves outside the bounds of the community of Christ.[8]

Despite a lack of resolution, Bishop Dharmaraj gave his support to the three priests and allowed unionization to continue. As the bishop of Kottar and the head of the CBCI's labor commission, he pronounced his support for the fisher poor and entrusted the NFF with the "Christian goal of ensuring the dignity of labor," which, he insisted, could not be compromised in favor of private property.[9] In his circular of May 11, 1991, Dharmaraj defined his position on the local conflict by stating, "The right to private property has been understood by Christian tradition as situated within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation: the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone" (*Kottar Newsletter*, May 1991).

This statement in support of common over private property, which sounded remarkably like the NFF's own language, sealed the bishop's vote in favor of the NFF and alienated a number of the Mukkuvar clergy, who continued to see the NFF's work as a threat to the church and a source of divisiveness within a caste that was already disempowered. These priests would, in the mid-1990s and with the urging of state officials, embark on a peacekeeping mission that sought to both reinforce their authority over the coast and bring the warring factions of the fisher Catholic population together under the banner of caste and faith.[10]

Artisanal Militancy and the Production of Locality

For fisher artisans, the 1990s was a period of consolidation. Previous projects of intermediacy and the newly circulating discourse of ecology grounded a sense of local moral community that excluded trawler owners who shared the same caste and faith. This reconstituted community had a territorial basis (the 3-mile zone), a technological basis (artisanal craft and gear), and an ecological basis (a symbiotic relationship with the marine resource). Most important, it was the assertion of belonging to a locality. Consider this statement by Constantine, a district leader of the NFF: "Trawlers can go anywhere to fish, but we have to rely on our local sea and protect it for our children. Who else will do it? Certainly not the state or the church! We have to because *kadalamma* is our mother and without her, we will die." This striking convergence of an older sense of the sea as an unpredictable, all-powerful force with a more recent recognition of its vulnerability contributed to artisans' sense of collective destiny—even a new kind of caste status—as the protectors of the sea against the threat of trawling.

Apart from being a threat *to* the sea, trawler ownership now signaled an uprooting *from* the sea and, by extension, from community. This reconstitution of community is expressed strongly in this explanation provided by Selvaraj, a fisherman who participated in the firebombing of a trawler owned by a friend's relative. When I asked him how a population sharing caste and faith came to be so divided, he explained, "It's because the trawler owners have forgotten who they are and what they know about the sea. You see, anyone can use a trawl net—a farmer, a teacher, even a bureaucrat! But when we go out to sea, we have an instinctive sense of where the fish are. We can read the water like others read the land. It's this shared sense of the sea that makes us a community."

Opposed to a new moral community expressed through what Liisa Malkki (1995) has called a "sedentarist metaphysic" was the trawling class, characterized in artisanal fisher discourse as mobile, accumulative, and profiteering. Although artisanal fishers also have historically migrated to other parts of the coast to fish during their local lean season and continue to do so, they now affirmed a rootedness in locality that they claimed trawler owners had lost. Connected to trawler mobility was their privileging of personal gain over social responsibility and of private wealth over marine wealth. I was told several times that as trawler owners grew richer, they contributed less and less to the church fund from which the needs of the village poor were met. This social irresponsibility was expressed further in their immoral neglect of the future of the resource.

As early as 1987, the demand for a monsoon trawl ban in Kerala began to be echoed in Kanyakumari. That year, the *kattumaram*-dominated village of Kanyakumari, at the eastern end of the district, decided to take matters into its own hands. In the presence of a Tamilnadu Department of Fisheries official, the village council forced the approximately ten trawler owners in the village to sign an agreement containing two clauses: (1) to observe a monsoon trawl ban of five months in order to protect fish stocks during the spawning season and (2) to leave the shore after 6 a.m. and return before 6 p.m. to promote the visibility of their operations and reduce the chance of damage to the gear and craft of artisanal fishers. When the mechanized boat owners argued that these rules were at variance with the rules framed in the 1983 Tamilnadu Marine Fisheries Regulation Act, council members pointed out that the act does allow the issuing of local notifications to prohibit the catching of fish in any period (Section 5d) as well as for the determination of other fishing times (Section 5e). The Department of Fisheries official present was content to support the informal agreement without giving it any legal status, which appeared to him to be the best way of solving the law and order problem.[11]

In general, and in keeping with the parameters of the 1983 act, the Tamilnadu Department of Fisheries continued to promote the simultaneous development of both sectors and to resort to local agreements to deal with their increasingly more conflictual relationship. As V. Raman, the secretary of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries of the government of Tamilnadu, explained to me, "We believed in integrated development that promotes both sectors. Each has its own range; each has a different level of operation. In the inshore area, the goal is to motorize traditional craft in order

to improve efficiency and increase catches. Beyond the 3-mile zone, trawlers need to be encouraged. So we envision encouragement and coexistence of both."[12] The Department of Fisheries chose to ignore the visible signs of stock depletion and the dire need for resource management, opting instead to interpret artisanal militancy as a sign of "ignorance and superstition." As several department officials indicated, standing by local agreements was simply the quick and easy way of dissipating tensions on the coast and of assuaging the volatile passions of fisher artisans. Even when they agreed that resource management was needed, they were quick to assure me that this recognition was in no way spurred by artisanal fisher activism against trawling, which was driven purely by "jealousy" and had no "scientific basis" whatsoever.[13]

In tune with its commitment to "integrated development," the Tamilnadu Department of Fisheries increased its subsidies for motors at the same time that it began construction of a new harbor in Chinnamuttom village at the eastern end of the district in 1989. The Chinnamuttom harbor facilitated the launching and berthing of mechanized boats, so that they would no longer have to travel to Colachel's natural harbor at the western end of the district (Department of Fisheries 1990). By 1991, one year after the harbor was opened for operations, the number of trawlers in the two villages nearest the harbor alone had increased exponentially from a mere ten in 1987 to approximately one hundred. In addition, the number of trawlers in and around Colachel continued to increase, so that trawlers were concentrated on the eastern and western ends of the district's coastal belt.

The first appropriation in 1987 of the Tamilnadu Marine Fisheries Regulation Act for enforcing a local agreement to curb trawling set the stage for future actions at the village level. Increasingly, the terms adopted by artisanal villagers in appropriating the act reflected the language politicized by the NFF. Interestingly, even though the NFF's own unionization work moved in fits and starts and was met with a lukewarm response, its message of artisanal fisher rights and the link it made between artisanal fishing and marine resource conservation did circulate and spurred activity in different fisher organizations. As in Kanyakumari village, the councils of other villages with an artisanal majority became focal points of sectoral consciousness and began exercising their authority to curb trawlers. In addition, another organization—the Kanyakumari District Kattumaram Vallam Meen Pidi Thozhil Pathukappu Sangam (Association for the Protection of Kattumaram and Vallam Fishing)—was formed in 1993 at the initiative of motorized *vallam* fishers

with the express purpose of protecting artisanal fishing from trawler aggression. This association was backed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which heralded its emergence outside clerical initiative as the much-awaited sign of "genuine class consciousness" on the coast.[14]

The turning point for artisanal activism was 1993, when the militancy spurred by the NFF's discourse of ecology was further strengthened by another material factor. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the price of cuttlefish had been slowly rising in the world market for fishery products, with Japan leading the charge as its main importer. As had happened earlier with prawn, the Kanyakumari sea was discovered to be rich in cuttlefish, which were found mainly in the region just around the 3-mile boundary that separated the inshore zone reserved for artisanal fishers from the offshore zone. This coincidence—one might call it the agency of the cuttlefish in nesting in a particular section of ocean space—sealed the class polarization. As its price rose and cuttlefish became the most coveted species caught off the Kanyakumari coast after prawn, the NFF, the Association for the Protection of Kattumaram and Vallam Fishing, and an increasing number of village councils began to independently demand trawler regulation. The terms in which they made their demands marked a shift from a moral economy argument based mainly on distributive justice to one framed in the language of ecology. Trawling must be regulated, they argued, not only because of the economic disparity between the mechanized minority and the larger community of fishers and the damage that trawl nets caused to artisanal fisher craft and gear, but also because of the need to preserve the marine resource for future generations. Even though *vallam* and *kattumaram* fishers began using more ecologically destructive fishing techniques—nets with smaller mesh sizes and fuel-intensive motors—in order to compete with one another and with trawlers for a diminishing resource, they invoked an ecological sense of community to contest trawler activity.

A series of clashes took place between 1993 and 1995, all during the months of August and September, when cuttlefish was found in abundance in the inshore area.[15] Once again, Kanyakumari's village council provided the leadership. In 1995, Kanyakumari's trawler owners submitted a petition to the district collector of Kanyakumari arguing that their craft were idle for fear of artisanal attacks and that artisanal craft should remain within the 3-mile inshore zone and not cross into the zone for mechanized craft.[16] The collector forwarded their demand[17] to the commissioner of fisheries in Madras, who

dismissed it, stating that the 1983 act reserved a zone only for artisanal and not for mechanized craft.[18] In response, the trawler owners of Kanyakumari and Chinnamuttom decided to challenge the commissioner, the district collector, and the assistant director of fisheries in Kanyakumari in the Madras High Court.[19] The Madras High Court gave an interim injunction staying the order of the commissioner of fisheries for two weeks, within which time the local parties were to come to a new agreement. On the day before the two-week period expired, the trawler owners proceeded to fish armed with the court order and police protection. In reaction, artisanal villagers caused serious damage to their houses and literally evicted them from the coast.[20] Once again, both factions met with the district collector and the assistant director of fisheries and came up with a new agreement that reduced the trawl ban period from five months to three and a half months. Even though the agreement was not legally notarized by the Department of Fisheries, the village council members took it upon themselves to literally carve the text of the agreement on a stone tablet, which was then placed in front of the village's Lady of Ransom Church. As G. Stephen, one of the village councillors, remarked: "We didn't need the government to endorse the agreement; we had Mother Mary as our witness. We know best what is just: where to fish, how to fish, and how to protect the sea."

These recent discursive trends of appealing to the Virgin and expressing collectivity in terms of a highly localized—indeed naturalized—notion of ecological subjectivity suggest a form of spatial and cultural self-enclosure that reproduces the hegemonic divide between coast and inland. However, the stone tablet's references to the 1983 act and the repeated efforts by artisanal village after village to seek state recognition for their agreements make it clear how internal the state had become to their sense of political collectivity.

This expression of artisanal rights constituted a new moral economy of the artisan. However, this reconstituted moral order was by no means distinct from the state. Indeed, many of Kanyakumari village's fishermen and fisherwomen invoked none other than the figure of M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) as the moral authority behind their cause. Significantly, they made a point of distinguishing between the district state officials whom they encountered in their local negotiations with trawlers and the idea of a moral state as exemplified by the years of MGR's rule, using the figure of MGR to criticize state embeddedness in local power relations. But they did so to articulate an ideal relationship to the state rather than to assert their autonomy. Artisanal fishers' use of state laws such as the 1983 act and of state authorities such as MGR in redefining community exhibits their sense of themselves as a population

very much in dialogue with the state if not wholly within its parameters. As I show in the final section, by the mid-1990s, artisanal fishers began to explicitly express this intimate link to the state in the language of citizenship.

Kanyakumari village's reinforcement of the monsoon trawl ban caused a chain reaction. Beginning in August 1993, village after village began to target trawling boats. In August 1993, motorized *vallam* fishers belonging to the Association for the Protection of Kattumaram and Vallam Fishing burned three of Colachel's trawlers, which they claimed had come into the 3-mile zone and destroyed two cuttlefish nets. In August 1994, motorized *vallam* fishers from Muttom village, which had the highest concentration of motorized craft, seized seven Colachel boats and took them to Muttom. In 1995 came the biggest conflagration of all. In August, then Tamilnadu fisheries minister Krishnakumar visited Colachel to survey the shore for the proposed construction of a harbor. In anticipation of his visit, Colachel's boat owners anchored their boats at sea. News of the minister's visit and the proposal to construct yet another harbor in the district created an uproar among artisanal fishers. To register their protest against this sign of collusion between state and mechanized sector interests, motorized *vallam* fishers from the villages of Muttom, Enayamputhenthurai, and Kadiapattanam spirited away four boats to Muttom. In retaliation, Colachel's boat workers caught two *vallam*s and fifteen *kattumaram*s and locked up fifty-two fishermen in the boat union office in Colachel. It took a meeting with the superintendent of police, the collector, and the Kottar bishop for each group to release its captured people and craft. Despite the mutual compromise, tempers were running high. Two days later, Colachel boats damaged the hooks and lines of two *vallam*s, which were fishing at the 3-mile border. In response, *vallam* fishers from seven different villages joined hands and burned fourteen boats anchored offshore in the sea adjacent to Colachel. In a final retaliation, Colachel boat workers turned on neighboring Kodimunai village, which was seen as complicit in the attack, and caused extensive damage to houses and artisanal craft. When three priests arrived to try to intervene, Colachel trawl boat workers took the unprecedented step of locking them up in the church. It was only then that the police arrived in force and ended the fighting with a display of gunfire that claimed the life of one *vallam* fisherman.[21]

Trawler Defense and Discourse of Science

Although they signed the 1995 agreement, Colachel's boat owners were incensed at this instance of what they perceived as the "tyranny of the majority"

endorsed by both the state and the church. Their suggestions for alternative agreements, such as a three-three arrangement—each sector fishes three days of the week, with Sunday as a day of rest—which held in districts further north on the east coast, or the month-and-a-half trawling ban held in Kerala, had been shot down by the *vallam* and *kattumaram* fishers. In addition, the prospect of being hemmed in between an aggressive artisanal sector in the inshore area and foreign vessels beyond territorial waters caused even greater anxiety.

The Indian government's decision to license foreign vessels was especially devastating for the mechanized fishers, who had adopted the local self-image as representatives of national development. Beginning in 1987, in response to a rise in artisanal militancy, mechanized fishers embarked on a strident politics of representation as a modernizing force that would elevate their community from premodern obsolescence to national prominence. They began to speak of themselves as part of a modernizing middle class defined by its commitment to development. Many of Colachel's mechanized fishers diversified their investments, buying land as well as more trawling boats. The ownership of property away from the coast brought them into greater contact with interior caste groups and gave them a new affiliation with other economically mobile communities. Interestingly, they began to describe their own set of changing values by using the primitivizing language used by inland castes and government officials to distinguish coastal from agrarian culture. A disposition to save money rather than spend it rashly on liquor, to foster an ethic of cleanliness, to resolve conflict through dialogue and not force, and to give up insular thinking to foster ties with other communities are some of the ways that they characterized their cultural transformation from primitive to modern Mukkuvars. Consumption practices also changed dramatically. Big concrete homes, motorcycles, and cars became more common sights in Colachel and with these came a sharp rise in dowry rates. By the early 1990s, the dowry demands in Colachel were the highest in the district as a whole, reaching an upper limit of 10 million rupees. Along with lavish homes and exorbitant dowry rates, women's domestication also became a symbol of household status. These markers of "civilization" further insulated Colachel from other artisanal villages.

In response to artisanal redefinition of the marine commons in terms of the moral economy of artisanship, Colachel's mechanized fishers invoked national citizenship as the basis of *their* right to the resource. Faith in modern

technology was pivotal to this identity. Their crusade as an embattled coastal minority committed to national development depended on the reverse image of a tyrannical artisanal majority manipulated by regressive local forces. One means that trawler owners adopted in expressing their opposition was the written word. The Colachel Boat Union printed and widely distributed pamphlets discrediting the mobilization work of their artisanal adversaries. One such pamphlet, "Boat Work and Fishermen's Development: The Real Story," is representative of their overall message and begins with a strong statement in favor of modernization.

> It is not wrong for people practicing traditional methods to change with the times and adopt new ones. This is evolutionary growth. People who used to walk now travel in vehicles. People who lived in caves now live in mansions. They used to use leaves to cover themselves; now they wear colorful clothes and live in sophisticated surroundings. They ate raw meat and now they eat cooked food. In agriculture, single cropping has given way to cultivating the land three times a year.
>
> But: It is a mystery that the fishermen who used *kattumarams* and *vallams* are still not accepted by many when they start using mechanized boats to catch fish. Are these people living in this century? Are they regressing? Are they being kept from developing by others?

The pamphlet distinguishes a generic "people's" natural evolution to modernity from the artisanal fishers' manipulative regression "by others." Significantly, *kattumaram* and *vallam* fishers are not even attributed with the capacity to be self-willed because if that were so, the pamphlet implies, then they too would "naturally" believe in evolution. As it stood, however, they were "regressing" and being "kept from developing." We learn from other pamphlets that this regressive force is the clergy, who "instead of preaching and tending to religious matters march on the streets like Communists and incite ignorant fishermen to violence." These pamphlets denounce the un-Christian values of the artisanal sector, which "only practices violence while the trawlers multiply the fish just as Jesus did." In contrast to these "bad" fishers and priests are the trawler owners, who "contribute financially to Catholic festivals and to the upkeep of parish churches" and have "given the Mukkuvar caste a national name."[22] Through these publications, Colachel's mechanized fishers underscored the greater contribution of trawler over artisanal fishing to the building of caste, church, and nation.

Significantly, the spatial polarization of Colachel from surrounding villages by sectoral affiliation produced a discursive erasure of class within the mechanized sector. As Colachel came to be known as the boat village, the owners and laborers (or coolies, as they are called in Kanyakumari) within the mechanized sector came to be defined collectively as the boat fishers. Even within Colachel, villagers refer to the collective of boat owners and coolies as the village's majority, although there are many more owners of artisanal than of mechanized craft. This erasure of class was made possible by several factors. First, the polarization of Colachel and artisanal villages and the increasing violence against trawl boats and coolie laborers at sea produced an identification of boat coolies with their employers. Second, despite a decisive shift in the mode of production, boat work continues to be structured in many of the same ways as artisanal production. For instance, the term *thozhilali*, or worker, is still used to refer to both owners and coolies in the boat sector, even though an increasing number of boat owners are now absentee capitalists who no longer participate in fishing. Also, boat fishing is organized as a share system and not as a wage system, which generates a different experience and consciousness of work. Although the distribution of shares—65 percent for owner and 35 percent for coolies—is far more hierarchical than in most forms of artisanal fishing—where owners get only one more share than the coolies—coolies leap to the defense of boat owners and argue that the share system allows them to accumulate savings and eventually invest in a boat of their own. Rarely does a coolie speak of the distribution of shares as unfair. They all point to the level of investment required as justification for the owner's far higher share.

Boat workers fall into two groups. One group consists of older fishers who lost their craft and gear to debt or dowry[23] and turned to coolie work on the boats. The second, rapidly expanding group consists of young men between the ages of 14 and 30. Most of their fathers were either artisanal fishers with their own craft and gear or recent members of the village coolie workforce. Although many of them have *kattumaram* and *vallam* fishers in their families, these young men, who grew up on a polarized coast, consider artisanal work beneath them. Rather than learn the painstaking skill of artisanal fishing from their fathers or uncles, they prefer to work on the boats with an eye open for making the move from worker to owner. An added deterrent to their participating in artisanal work is the fact that, from time to time, the coastal tensions between Colachel and surrounding villages have translated into attacks on the *vallam* and *kattumaram* fishers *within* Colachel.[24]

What Colachel has experienced, in effect, is a deskilling of the labor force, as more and more boat owners are opting for employing coolies in the 20 to 30 age range who are far less skilled than the older group trained in artisanal fishing. Advanced technology has thus allowed for the absorption of unskilled youth in the only occupation where they are competitive and can assert traditional or caste rights. Although a number of young men spoke of having changed boats often in reaction to "employer greed" and work conditions, their lack of artisanal fishing skills, the much higher profits of boat work, and the difficulty of mobility into other sectors of the economy keep them from leaving the mechanized sector altogether.

With the escalation of violence in the 1990s, Colachel's young boat workers began to form their own associations. Significantly, and despite the fact that many of them did suffer from poor wages and working conditions, these associations were not labor unions and never claimed to be. These were essentially institutionalized gangs that acted as muscle for boat owner–employers. Interestingly, most of these associations carried saints' names, such as the Antoniar Sangam (St. Anthony's Association) and the Kuzhanthai Yesu Sangam (Baby Jesus Association), and claimed to be working for "village uplift."[25]

In response to the combined threat of artisanal fishers on one side and foreign vessels on the other, both owners and workers in the mechanized sector began to selectively deploy ecological discourse, combined with a heavy dose of nationalism. Interestingly, their arguments against the Indian federal government's decision to license foreign vessels ran parallel to those of artisanal fishers against the Tamilnadu state government. These statements from boat owners and workers in Colachel reflect some striking similarities with artisanal arguments against trawling.

> They are not allowed to fish here; only in the deep sea. But they violate the permit and come to the inshore where local fishermen fish. For us, this is very damaging. Where we cast our nets, they do pair trawling with two vessels and one net. Because of this, we get absolutely nothing. After coming back with empty nets over and over, we finally gave a report to the Fisheries Dept saying "foreign vessels are trawling close to the shore and this is damaging our livelihood so please restrict their operations." They took no action.
>
> They have a zone. If they stay there, there's no problem. Most of us have taken out loans from the bank to purchase fishing boats. If the resource is

> destroyed, what'll we do? We have to meet loan payments, interest payments, and already our wives have no gold in their ears or around their necks. What'll we do?[26]

Even while arguing that foreign vessels transgressed into the territorial sea reserved for domestic craft and depleted the national resource, mechanized fishers insisted on the sustainability, indeed the *necessity*, of trawling. Most vehemently denied the applicability to their own work of the ecological arguments they themselves used against foreign vessels. Consider the following statements that are broadly representative of the way boat owners and workers characterized the nature of boat work:

> Only if we trawl is there catch for others. With the trawl net, we bring up plants for small fish and then cuttlefish gather to eat the fish. Without trawling, small fish would just hide.
>
> Fish life is very short so we need to catch them before they die. Prawn has to be caught within five months. *Kattumaram* and *vallam* fishers don't let us trawl close to shore, but they're not able to catch these prawns so they just die.
>
> The monsoon trawl ban is rubbish. I don't believe that eggs are destroyed by trawling, or that the catch will go down or is going down. Only with mechanized boats operating can India's annual income grow.
>
> There will always be fish here. More fish come as we catch them. It's just a question of the tide coming in and going out.[27]

This infighting within the fishing community was a distraction, they insisted, from the *real* problem of globalization, which was the actual reason why fish stocks were being depleted.

Nationalizing Trawling

The 1995 attack on Colachel damaged the craft of many boat owners and reflected new heights of artisanal militancy. In particular, it hurt the assets of Selvanayagam, a prosperous Mukkuvar who owned five trawlers, was a private seafood exporter to Japan, and had a net-manufacturing factory inland where more than 50 percent of the employees were Hindu Nadar women. After some deliberation, a group of Colachel's boat owners led by Selvanayagam decided to seek out S. P. Kutty, the Tamilnadu state secretary of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People's Party) and its sister organization, the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM; Movement for Economic Self-Reliance),

both offshoots of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Volunteers' Organization).

As mentioned briefly in the Introduction, the RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP; World Hindu Council) achieved coastal notoriety in the early 1980s by orchestrating a series of attacks on the coast. In early 1982, from March to May, activists from Hindu nationalist organizations and Hindu low caste agriculturalists whose lands bordered the coast clashed repeatedly with Mukkuvar Catholics. Tensions between Hindus and Christians were not new. They had arisen as early as the 1930s, when the southwestern region first witnessed political mobilization along religious lines. However, the crucial factor distinguishing this phase of Hindu nationalist mobilization from previous ones was the focus on space. As Catholic fisher artisans and trawler owners were making territorial claims of their own over land and sea, Hindu nationalists began to highlight the importance of Kanyakumari in the sacred geography of the "Hindu nation." To "liberate" this landscape from "imperial" Christianity, Hindu activists embarked on a project of reclamation. Hindu idols and other iconography would "appear" at church sites and along public thoroughfares that activists would then claim as part of a national sacred geography. These acts of appropriation were for the most part unaccompanied by physical violence, but this ended with the siege of the coast in 1982. Over a period of two weeks, vigilante Hindu squads attacked coastal fishing villages, burning churches and leaving Hindu symbols standing in their place, leveling homes, destroying fishing craft and gear, and literally driving Catholics into the sea. The attacks embodied the worst excesses of orchestrated mob violence, but they were framed in terms of a spontaneous nationalist defense against an alien faith. Within Hindu nationalist discourse, Catholicism had been transformed from a faith tradition with a long history of engagement with coastal dynamics into an aggressive residue of European colonialism, and the coast had been transformed from a borderland of a pluralist nation into a space of extraterritorial loyalties. Hindu majoritarianism negatively affected Christians across the district during that period, but the geographic isolation of Catholic fishers made them a particularly easy target. Existing discourses of Catholic primitivism, particularly Catholics' outsider status in relation to agrarian modernity, rhetorically buttressed their scapegoating.

After that initial spate of violence in 1981 and 1982, overt clashes ended, although religious hostilities persisted in more everyday form. Most insidiously, notions of Catholic foreignness acquired new political purchase. It was

therefore particularly significant that Colachel's trawler owners sought the support of the very Hindu nationalist organizations responsible for the anti-Catholic pogroms a mere decade earlier. Selvanayagam explained his reasons for seeking Hindu nationalist support.

> We sought their support for two reasons. One, the BJP is the only party not involved with the artisanal sector. They also have no support at all in the coastal areas because we're all Christians. So it helped them to get the support of the mechanized sector. Second, if the *kattumarams* and *vallams* attack Colachel, then those fishermen can't go inland because they have to pass through the Hindu Nadar villages which are controlled by the BJP and the RSS.

Selvanayagam's astute territorial logic mirrored Hindu nationalist strategy in the clashes of 1982. Just as they did, he fell back on the geographic location of communities to orchestrate a Hindu invasion of the coast. Because the "Catholic coast" is literally hemmed in by the "Hindu interior," Selvanayagam explained, the BJP was the best answer to artisanal fisher aggression. On a more personal level, an alliance with the RSS and the BJP also ensured protection for his inland net factory, which he feared would be an easy target of artisanal anger.

The BJP's S. P. Kutty provided his own interpretation of Colachel's turn to Hindu nationalism.

> Colachel people have joined the BJP because their rise in financial position and education has caused them to revolt against the Christian hierarchy. One young man said to me "As long as we are poor and uneducated, we did not know what priests were doing. But now we know after having gotten some status. Now we understand how these fathers behave. In this district, it's a common saying that when fishermen are at sea and on shore drinking arrack and unconscious, their womenfolk are at the mercy of the priesthood. This has been happening for hundreds of years.[28]

Kutty's reasoning follows the logic of Sanskritization, a term used by anthropologist M. N. Srinivas to describe the adoption of upper caste practices by upwardly mobile low castes: With material "status," Christian fishers had begun to reject the symbols of their cultural inferiority and aspire to a cultural identity that was commensurate with their newfound social capital. Hinduism provided them with the cultural status that was missing within the Christian fold and served as a weapon against their clerical oppressors. This interesting

reversal of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century conversion narratives, with Hinduism providing the escape from the cultural hierarchy of Christianity, was especially striking because Colachel's fishers did *not* convert to Hinduism. Speaking of the presence of Christian fishers within the BJP, Kutty explained that conversion was not a goal of the party.

> They were considering conversion but I said, we don't want you to convert. Don't come to the Hindu fold; just understand your country. Ninety-nine percent of Christians and Muslims think BJP is a Hindu party. But we just say that there won't be any appeasement, that we'll only give you clean government. But if you feel you've come from Pakistan or Rome, we won't tolerate it.[29]

In his defense against "church poison" about the BJP forcing conversions, breaking mosques, destroying churches, and taking away minority rights, Kutty countered that the party had every intention of enforcing a common civil code in place of the existing personal laws for religious minorities but that this goal was a mark of the party's secularism. Referring to a 1995 Supreme Court judgment on Hindutva,[30] the term coined by Hindu nativist ideologue V. D. Savarkar for political Hinduism, he exclaimed, "Even the Supreme Court has given the verdict that Hindutva is a way of life. It doesn't mean Hindu religion. It is Bharatiya culture. BJP stands for Indian culture. But in Christianity and Islam, the preaching is that wherever you live, you are under Pope and Prophet." Kutty was careful to distinguish the BJP's position on conversion from that of its sister organization, the VHP. "The VHP is a religious organization while we are a political party," he explained, adding quickly that the VHP also did not conduct conversions; it only helped minorities "find their way back to Hindu culture through reconversion." Indeed, Kutty proclaimed, "The BJP believes in religious tolerance. We don't expect all our members to be Hindus. They can follow whatever religion they wish, as long as they are patriotic to Bharat and its Hindu culture."[31]

This restatement of Hinduism in assimilative, cultural nationalist terms that rejected the need for religious conversion clinched the BJP's arrangement with Colachel's mechanized boat owners and workers. On their part, the fishers from Colachel who approached Kutty admitted to considering conversion initially as a way of striking out at the state, the church, and their artisanal adversaries. They cited the instance of an earlier revolt in 1964 against the Catholic Church in Idinthikarai, a coastal village in neighboring Tirunelveli

District. During that revolt fishermen converted to Hinduism under the guidance of the VHP to escape the church's fish tax (see Sivasubramanian 1996). However, Colachel's fishers ultimately decided that conversion was too far a step to take, and, besides, the RSS and the BJP had not made their support conditional on conversion. In speaking of their decision to collaborate with the BJP, most of Colachel's boat owners and workers referred to their decision not to convert as evidence that they had done only what was absolutely necessary to ensure their livelihood and protection against more violence. As Sahaya Antony, the Colachel fisherman nominated as president of the newly formed BJP fishermen *sangam*, stated:

> We only voted for the BJP. We didn't change our religion. And also, it's only after joining the BJP that I see that it's not them who are religious fanatics. It's the church! In fact, the fathers were behind the problem. If they had taken steps, this trouble would not have gotten so bad. They should be neutral and for peace, but they are on one side. Our own Christian leaders support and encourage trouble so why shouldn't we go to the BJP? We didn't change religion or anything. But because of the BJP, we were safe.[32]

In simultaneously defending their faith while disavowing the church, Colachel's trawler owners spoke of two kinds of spatialized majority-minority dynamics, one local and the other national. Speaking of the local situation, they expressed their sense of being a threatened "coastal minority" that was besieged by the combined forces of artisanal aggression and religious orthodoxy. To defend their minority status on the coast, they explained, they had to turn to a national majoritarian force that could curb the local power of the church and artisanal fishers. In effect, this was a restatement of federalism in which a local economic minority took recourse to the protective force of Hindu nationalism to ensure their economic rights in the face of local religious power. The national situation, they maintained, would humble the coalition between artisanal fishers and clergy, because at the national level, they were minorities both economically and culturally. In delineating "community" from "nation," Colachel's mechanized fishers actually pointed to a line between coast and inland where, they stated, community ended and nation began. Significantly, nation was equated with the absence of the church and the presence of inland castes. If the *vallam* and *kattumaram* fishers attacked Colachel, they strategized, "we can escape to the interior Hindu Nadar villages which are controlled by the BJP and the RSS. The Bishop is scared now

because he knows that, if they attack us, we have the RSS on our side. The church can't tell us what to do anymore. We're with the BJP now."[33]

Sahaya Antony and other mechanized fishers characterized fisher activism in Kanyakumari as communitarian and political, which they contrasted to artisanal fisher activism in Kerala, which was "valid" because it was scientifically grounded and nationally recognized. "It's only because *vallams* and *kattumarams* are the majority here," they complained, "that this agreement has been forced on us. In Kerala, the ban is for a valid reason—to protect spawning—and the national government has recognized it. Here we have a ban only because there is majority rule." John Rose, a Colachel boat owner who became the cashier of the BJP fishermen's *sangam*, declared that communism was the ideology behind this community-based majority rule and the clergy's weapon against the rise of a lay coastal leadership.

> Priests are responsible for all this fighting—Father Sales, Father Kocherry. Our community has many illiterates. When money is available, they send children for education. Especially in Colachel, there are many educated people now. Before we used to just be quiet. Now we answer back, and the church doesn't like that. That's why the parish priests have gone communist and say that the trawlers are destroying fish eggs. So we boat owners opposed the church and joined the BJP. BJP didn't look for votes like other parties that answer to the artisanal majority. The BJP and SJM are more interested in the right to work for all citizens. That's why they oppose the foreign vessels and support us also. They understand that no one has right to stop work.[34]

In addition to the RSS's paramilitary strength and the BJP's political support, the SJM's particular variant of economic nationalism was a crucial attraction for Colachel's boat owners. Like the NFF, the SJM opposed the Indian government's 1991 deep-sea fishing policy. But unlike the forum's opposition to both foreign and domestic capitalization of the fishery, the SJM advocated the more rapid spread of trawling technology across the Indian fishery. In 1995 the SJM undertook an awareness campaign among fishers by conducting a *jala yatra*, or water pilgrimage, from Somnath on the west coast to Vishakapatnam on the east coast. In SJM national co-convener S. Gurumurthy's words, "The pilgrimage sought to unify the national mind against the threat of foreign capitalist vessels.[35] Upon reaching Vishakapatnam, SJM, BJP, and RSS leaders organized a conference on the deep-sea fishing policy. In his message to the participants, D. B. Thengadi, RSS member and founder of the SJM, defined

Swadeshi as a call for "envisaging globalization on the principle of Hindu economics. Our task is to project a philosophy of globalization on the principle of Vedic guidance for International Trade" (Swadeshi Jagaran Manch 1995).

Within the SJM framework, the Hindu nation is composed of concentric circles of family, group, caste, and community functioning organically through the operation of the unifying principle of *dharma* (duty). From this perspective, the state is not the force of nation building; rather, the nation predates the state and provides its cultural ethos. Interestingly, because the cement of society is the "duty" that binds people who inhabit different kinds of social relationships, the integrative and redistributive functions of the state are deemed irrelevant. Rather, society appears as an organism functioning according to essential cultural principles, outside the purview of the state.

However, this vision of society as a cultural organism functioning outside state machinery does not preclude the crucial role played by capitalism. Interestingly, unlike socialism, which is defined as completely outside the cultural framework of Hinduism, SJM leaders maintain that capitalism *can* be indigenized and indeed that Indian capitalism is easily reconciled with the functioning of *dharma*. Speaking of this indigenized capitalism, Gurumurthy explained: "We will have capitalism, but nationalist capitalism like Japan does. Indian capitalists will not be greedy. They will spend large amounts for Dharmic purposes." Within this vision, indigenous capitalism will flourish, and Indian capitalists will contribute to the overall uplift of the country as a part of their patriotic duty.[36]

The SJM's articulated commitment to the capitalist development of domestic fisheries provided Colachel's fishers with the assurance of support against both local environmentalism and global capitalism. Against the artisanal sector's claim to common property, trawler owners and workers asserted their right to private property as a means to developing the national resource. Against the church's local religious authority, they asserted their national citizenship. This reliance on the nation—and a particular class perspective on the nation—secured their alliance with Hindu nationalism.

Enforcing Locality

Colachel's turn to Hindu nationalist support signaled an exacerbation of coastal tensions and threatened a repetition of the Hindu-Catholic clashes that had inflamed the coast in 1982, only this time with Colachel on one side with the BJP, RSS, and SJM, and the Catholic Church and artisanal fishers on the other. Once the clashes subsided, the two officials in charge of maintaining law and order in Kanyakumari District—the collector and the revenue divisional officer—and the assistant director of fisheries for the district called on the Catholic Church to act as a mediating force between the warring fishers and between community and state.

All three state officials explained their decision to approach the church as a necessary measure to deal with a population that recognized religious authority above state authority. Significantly, they distinguished coastal peacekeeping in Kanyakumari from that in other parts of the Tamilnadu coastal belt where the fisher population is Hindu or multifaith in character. "Here, they are not integrated into the wider society," the collector explained, "and so we have to deal with them more carefully. They're like a sea tribe; they don't understand the laws that govern the rest of the society. They're very volatile and superstitious, and they don't respect state authority. Only the church can tell them what to do."[37] Along the same lines, the revenue divisional officer, who organized several peace talks between artisanal and mechanized fishers, also protested that the fishing community respected only church authority. "If you want to attract their attention," she said in an exasperated tone, "you only have to ring the church bell and they'll come running. And if the *government* requests them to attend a meeting, they won't move an inch!"[38] Most telling was the reaction of the assistant director of fisheries, who had worked with coastal populations for more than three decades. In the middle of a conversation, he confessed that the Kanyakumari fishers were a group that he just "cannot relate to." When pushed on why a population of fishermen and fisherwomen would seem so alien to a fisheries official, he finally answered that it was because they were "even more inward-looking than other fisher communities."[39] Although these officials acknowledged that the emergence and spread of lay institutions on the coast represented competing representative authorities, they assured me that all such secular institutions were ultimately subject to the sway of clerical power and therefore could function best when brought under the umbrella of the church.[40] In effect, their answer was to devolve more responsibility to the "natural leaders" of the coast and fall back on the "traditional" identities of caste and religion to mitigate the class tensions generated by development modernization.

This raises the question of why, after forty years of development intervention, state officials continue to characterize Catholic fishers as an insulated community outside the parameters of state power. Why do they see coastal

conflicts as problems of intracommunity law and order when artisanal fishers have consistently demanded that the state intervene in the local fishery to regulate trawling?

The state's willful disregard of its imbrication in the makeup of coastal community through forty postindependence years is a mode of bureaucratic practice that has hardened in the postliberalization period. As Partha Chatterjee (1993) has argued, the developmental state has long exhibited the propensity to distinguish the spaces of policy and politics. For most Tamilnadu Department of Fisheries officials, artisanal activism is simply community politics and cannot be used as a means to craft state policy. As should be clear from the discussion of the Community Development Program era in Chapter 4, this attitude toward the targets of state developmentalism is of earlier vintage. However, I would argue that the recourse to community in the 1990s in Kanyakumari also signaled a departure from the 1950s understanding of community. One key difference was in the privileging of religious authority and not state mediation in resolving rural social ills. The 1950s developmental state recognized rural social hierarchies as a problem to be solved by state intervention, but the wealth generated by the Blue Revolution obscured increasing coastal conflict and inequality. In the 1990s, law and order became a much more pressing concern than wealth redistribution, and, in this cause, church mediation was enlisted. The purpose of church mediation was to respatialize Mukkuvar artisans as resolutely local by binding them to a single, spatially circumscribed authority. In turning to the church, district officials sought to use clerical patronage to curb artisanal maneuver. To put it differently, "community" came to serve as a means for the liberalizing state to protect the conditions for capital accumulation and disregard distributive justice.

This disregard, even dismissal, of social policy in favor of a narrowly defined economic policy is symptomatic of a more general disaffection in the postliberalization period with the role of the state as an engine of social change. Significantly, this growing disregard for the social dimensions of state policy has coincided with the call for decentralized management of resources and devolution of authority to the community.[41] One would expect that the valorization of devolution would provoke a reappraisal of the rigid divide between policy and politics and between state and community. What we see instead is a hardened stance against local politics. Most fisheries officials contrast fisher politics, which they regard as whimsical and reactionary, with "real" development and conservation work, which they locate firmly within

the domain of science. This instinct to rationalize development as a neutral zone set apart from the vicissitudes of political life echoes James Ferguson's (1994) characterization of development as "an anti-politics machine." As several department officials indicated, for them devolution meant standing by local agreements, which was simply the quick and easy way of dissipating tensions on the coast and assuaging the volatile passions of the fisher population. Even when they agreed that resource management was needed, they were quick to assure me that this recognition was in no way produced by artisanal fisher activism against trawling.

What this has meant in Tamilnadu is that the political ramifications of developmental intervention are systematically placed outside the boundaries of state responsibility. This negligence is seen in every dimension of the government's approach to its fishery, despite its purported commitment to resource management. Unlike the Kerala government, which has responded to pressure from the substantial numbers of mobilized artisans in its largest industry, commissioned scientific studies of resource depletion, and legislated regulatory measures to curb stock depletion, the Tamilnadu government has done next to nothing to look into artisanal fisher complaints of stock collapse and increasing social vulnerability. Rather, the Tamilnadu Department of Fisheries has counted on the steady rise in value of fisheries products and the increasing number of species in demand for export and has remained complacent and unresponsive on the issue of resource management. It has not responded to artisanal activism to determine ceilings for the number of mechanized boats in any fishing port or for the state as a whole. Trawl net mesh size, which determines whether juvenile fish are caught, also remains unregulated. Finally, the linchpin of the 1983 Tamilnadu Marine Fisheries Regulation Act—the prohibition of mechanized boat fishing within 3 nautical miles from shore—is also basically unenforced because patrolling capacity is limited. All in all, mechanized boat fishing in the state remains fundamentally unregulated and subject to the local agreements made with artisanal fishermen.

To some extent, the argument of fisheries officials that fishermen are best left to decide fishing rules through local agreements has merit. Officials argue that any effort to impose formal laws would have no effect because fishermen will simply not respect them. However, there are several problems with this argument in favor of localized, informal regulation. First, because such agreements have no legal status, they can and are overridden by state courts,

to which trawler owners have routinely turned. Second, as I have argued, the state's willingness to turn over regulation to the local level stems from its understanding of conflict as a problem of law and order rather than one of resource conservation and social justice. For fisheries officials, local regulation is a quick fix for coastal turbulence but should in no way be confused with the science of conservation. This attitude has allowed the Tamilnadu Department of Fisheries to relinquish authority over the course of fisheries development to the free market just when the negative fallout of development is most acutely felt. Finally, in Kanyakumari the church's role in overseeing informal agreements has increased fisher frustrations over their lack of access to the state. As I show in the next section, these frustrations expressed by both artisanal and mechanized fishers have led not to the rejection of the state but to a rejection of church mediation, which they have increasingly experienced as a limit on their rights of citizenship.

The Coastal Peace and Development Council

In November 1995, at the behest of the assistant director of fisheries, the district collector, and the revenue divisional officer, the Kottar church established the Coastal Peace and Development Council. Although the council was established as a "coastal people's body," it came under the jurisdiction of the church and had a clerical leadership. The council's general body consisted of one representative from each coastal village, three representatives from each of the three trade unions, one parish priest from each six-village zone, a priest appointed by the bishop to be the director of the council, a coordinator from the fishing community who was not an active fisherman, the vicar-general of the diocese, and a set of four nominees selected by the bishop. The assistant director of fisheries was an invited guest at the council and was requested but not required to attend. Significantly, it was Father Selvaraj, the priest reputed to be sympathetic to the boat sector, who was chosen as director. Although most artisanal fishers resisted this decision, the bishop thought that Selvaraj's presence was necessary to inspire the mechanized sector's confidence in the council and bring them to the table. Equally significant was the hierarchy of goals elucidated by the council: It was intended primarily to be a peacekeeping force, with a secondary concern for resource management.

The council wielded three key shared elements in its efforts to foster coastal peace: religion, caste, and nationalism.[42] Father Jesudoss, an older Mukkuvar priest who has served in coastal parishes for more than forty years,

often began council meetings with a prayer for peace. He spoke of Christian forgiveness, the community of Christ, and the natural advantage that Kanyakumari's fishers had over others who did not share the same faith. "You are all one community," he reminded the gathered fishers, "and have always been one community. We have always been able to work out our differences as a family. Surely we can still do that?"[43] The language of sin and redemption was a crucial ingredient in council discussions. Hearing the clergy slide back and forth between using cost-benefit analysis and using the language of sin and redemption to address fisher grievances, one got the distinct sense of the flexibility of church authority over its fisher congregation and the state's role on the coast as mere onlooker onto dynamics internal to a bounded community.

The call for Christian community in the face of divisive influences was buttressed by shared caste status. For the Mukkuvar clergy, the council provided an arena in which to address caste concerns and ultimately to consolidate caste power within the church. Those who had witnessed Nadar ascendance to power in the 1960s with resentment saw in the council an opportunity to secure representative authority over the coast and to wield this authority in staking a greater claim to church resources. The council was to provide a corrective to the imbalance of caste power between Nadars and Mukkuvars in the district as a whole, an imbalance that they believed also structured the church. It was to be the voice of the Mukkuvar community as a consolidated low caste Catholic population. In council meetings and during interviews afterward, the clergy repeatedly invoked caste uplift as a reason for reconciling sectoral differences. When I asked about the resource question and the parallels between the intersectoral violence in Kanyakumari and in other districts, I was told, "We are a backward caste and have always been one. This *sahodarar yudham* [war of brothers] is not helping us achieve a respectable standard of living. First we must stop the war; then we can turn to other issues like resource management."[44]

The council's emphasis on strengthening community ties to foster peace was a return to the turbulence of the early days of mechanization. As they had then, the Mukkuvar clergy associated with the council urged fishers to think of themselves in cultural, not class, terms. Although the clergy did not laud mechanization as the answer to the underdevelopment of the community, as they had in the 1950s and 1960s, they did warn that class war would be to the detriment of the community as a whole. The explicit invocation of caste in their articulation of community was also a shift from the 1960s. As part of

their council work, the clergy underscored the need for caste uplift and representation at a time when other low castes were benefiting from affirmative action and increased participation in the Indian public sphere. Both locally and nationally, they pointed out, Mukkuvars needed to make their mark on India and become a visible part of the national mainstream.

The Breakdown of Peace Talks

Three months later, in September 1996, almost exactly a year after the 1995 clash, the uneasy truce that had been maintained since the establishment of the Coastal Peace and Development Council broke down. Five boats from Colachel and one each from the nearby villages of Vanniyakudi and Chinnavalai that were operating within the 3-mile zone were captured by approximately 200 *vallam* fishermen and taken to the Muttom village shore, where four boats were burned and three were sunk. Some of the boat fishermen onboard were beaten severely.[45]

Immediately after the clash, the Coastal Peace and Development Council called an emergency session. The meeting was in an uproar. Fathers Selvaraj and Jesudoss began the session by distinguishing between the actions of the two factions. Although blame must be placed on both sides, they asserted that there was no justification for the attacks on the boats and for the financial loss incurred by the owners because of the destruction of their craft. The actions of the fishermen on the boats did not warrant the severity of the punishment they received at the hands of the *vallam* fishermen. The fishermen on the boats had committed a *kuttram* (sin), but the *vallam* fishermen had committed a *maha kuttram* (great sin).

After days of negotiation, no resolution was found for the 1996 clash. The *vallam* fishermen were unwilling to compensate the boat owners for their loss, and the boat fishermen refused to work toward a new agreement without compensation. Bernard, the DMK Legislative Assembly member for the Colachel constituency, also attended the meetings and tried to wield his political influence and image as a lay representative of the community to foster good will between the two sides. But neither side was willing to budge, and each side found fault not only with the other but also with the church.

After the breakdown of talks, Colachel's boat owners argued that they could not trust the council to arrive at a reasonable solution to the impasse because of the church's role in precipitating the crisis. They pointed out that it was the church's role in development that first began the motorization drive

and the ensuing violence. The church was not neutral, they complained, because the influence of communism on the clergy limited their ability to see the significant contribution that boats had made to the development of both community and nation.[46]

On their part, *vallam* and *kattumaram* fishermen expressed their frustration and resolved to seek alternative channels to address their concerns. The council, many stated resolutely, had made it more difficult to get justice. They found that when they tried to meet state officials directly to express concerns over livelihood, their complaints were deflected to council director Father Selvaraj. Voicing his frustration about this growing trend, Bergmans, the president of the Association for the Protection of Kattumaram and Vallam Fishing, exclaimed, "We are not interested in being in the Council any longer. I spoke out strongly last year. This year, because I've been incorporated into the Council, I've been silenced. Previously, the Collector would call me to discuss issues. Now he doesn't. If we approach the Collector or Revenue Divisional Officer with a complaint, they tell us that they'll only talk to Fr. Selvaraj!"[47] Bergmans and other *vallam* fishermen pointed to the process in Kerala as an ideal to emulate: "There, the government listens to fishers, and the church has no say in fishing matters. Why is the church interfering here? The priests don't have the power to do anything anyway. Every time we demand punishment for the boats, they say, 'The Council cannot punish, so go to the government.' Well, we'll just forget about the priests then and go straight to the government!"[48]

However, *vallam* and *kattumaram* fishermen admitted to also being frustrated by the state's discrepant treatment of the two sectors. They pointed out that, in the negotiations that followed the clashes of 1995 and 1996, the boat owners had been allowed to represent themselves before the ADMK representative, the revenue divisional officer, and the collector, whereas these state officials had requested the presence of the parish priests of the artisanal fisher villages involved in the conflict. This, they concluded, meant that the state did not consider the NFF or the Association for the Protection of Kattumaram and Vallam Fishing adequate to the task of representing their members.

Third, many of the *vallam* and *kattumaram* fishers thought that the emphasis on peacekeeping meant that, most often, their attacks on trawlers were interpreted as a worse sin than the more subterranean violence of resource depletion committed by the trawlers. They pointed to the reactions of the clergy to the 1996 clash as evidence. "Why were we the only ones to blame?" a few

members of the Association for the Protection of Kattumaram and Vallam Fishing exclaimed. "It was the boat owners who committed the first wrong by breaking the 1995 agreement!" One of the fishers ended the conversation by stating emphatically, "It is time for war, not peace. So what if we're all brothers? We'll attack the trawlers if we think they're not obeying the rules of the coast!"[49]

The breakdown of peace talks was not even resolved by a dramatic incident that occurred the following month. In early October, artisanal and mechanized fishers operating near the Chinnamuttom harbor caught three foreign vessels poaching in territorial waters. They surrounded the vessels, climbed aboard, forced the vessels to anchor near the shore, and took catch and sailors hostage. In a statement to the press, the mechanized fishers of Kanyakumari village drew attention to the depletion of the marine resource by foreigners and the suffering of Indian fishers. "We were forced to catch the vessels," they stated, "because the government refused to heed our complaints and take action. It was only then that our community people all gathered together and decided that we somehow have to catch a foreign vessel. Only then would the government take proper steps" (*The Hindu*, October 15, 1996). The Coastal Peace and Development Council tried to capitalize on this "heroic defense of the national resource" (*Kottar Newsletter*, November 1996) by both artisanal and mechanized fishers in order to reinitiate regular council gatherings. However, both sectors expressed their increasing suspicion and disillusionment with clerical mediation and resolved to address their concerns through independent channels.

The power that the council continued to assume over the coast, despite a growing disillusionment with the peacekeeping process, culminated in an unprecedented step taken by fisher artisans in June 1997. Artisans from Kovalam village launched an attack on trawling boats, after which the boat owners approached the council for justice. Father Selvaraj called a meeting during which a decision was reached by all present to forbid Kovalam's artisans from fishing for a week. This provoked an outraged response from the village council, whose members approached the Kanyakumari District Fishermen Sangams Federation for help. After discussions with the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies, the federation's apex body in Kerala, Kovalam's villagers and the federation board decided to wield secular law against their religious leadership and take the council to court. "We needed to teach the church a lesson," explained Vincent, one of Kovalam's councillors, "so the priests realize that they can't stop us from fishing. Let them stay behind the pulpit where they belong!"[50]

By making the unprecedented move of taking the church to court, Kovalam's villagers signaled a wholesale rejection of the compact between state and church that upheld the church as the main representative authority of the coast. For the first time in the history of the coast, Catholic fishers wielded state law against their religious leadership, accused the clergy of overstepping the limits of their authority, and demanded their right as citizens to oppose church decrees. If the church worked against the poor, they asserted, it could no longer be the moral backbone of the Catholic community.

In their petition, they called on the state as benefactor of the poor and patron of the artisan to recognize and protect their rights as custodians of the local sea and to regulate trawling. Significantly, the village councillors who drafted the petition on behalf of fifteen artisanal fishing villages made a point of distinguishing between the district officials whom they encountered in their negotiations with trawlers and the state as a moral umbrella that, unlike the church, transcended the vicissitudes of local politics. At the same time, the petition also held the state to a higher standard. Cataloguing the many transgressions of justice enacted by church and state in support of Kanyakumari's trawler owners, the petition called on the court to bring justice to artisans by reinstating "MGR *rajyam*" (MGR rule). By claiming a privileged link to this moral state through the figure of MGR and by using the courts to stage their protest, artisanal fishers expressed a demand for justice—indeed, for equal citizenship—that fused patronage and rights.

Conclusion

ON DECEMBER 26, 2004, the Asian tsunami struck the Indian coast, causing catastrophic destruction of life and livelihood. The southern coastal belt was the worst affected. Among southern districts, Kanyakumari faced the worst losses after Nagapattinam: 1,500 fisher lives, 7,800 coastal homes, and more than 10,000 boats, 1,000–1,500 motors, and 30,000 nets. It was a disaster of overwhelming proportions, particularly for a population whose lifeline is the sea. Some of the most poignant testimonies from fisher survivors spoke of their sense of betrayal and fear, how fishing nets and boats became death traps for many fleeing the waves, their bodies entangled in nets and thrown against boats. "The nets that fed us have killed us," one coastal villager said; another spoke of the tsunami as *kadalamma*'s (goddess of the sea) vengeance for profligate resource exploitation.

In some ways, the outpouring of concern and support for coastal inhabitants was a notable departure from the historical negligence of coastal problems. The disproportionate harm experienced by fishers put them in the spotlight like never before. Aid flooded in. Newspaper coverage of the coast was sympathetic and highlighted the suffering of fisher families and the collaboration of civil society organizations and individual citizens in cleanup, housing construction, and distribution of food. I have not been back to Kanyakumari since the tsunami, but I have followed the rehabilitation process from a distance through conversations with friends and through the many publications put out by the Tamilnadu government, nongovernmental organizations, and activist movements in the fisheries sector.[1] In what follows, I address some of the concerns raised by fisher artisans and their activist supporters that reflect

many of the problems associated with the political economy of fishing and cultural perceptions of coastal populations.

One of the main concerns was the assessment of loss and compensation. Did compensation mean giving back to each family what they had lost: a two-story house for a two-story house and a hut for a hut, a trawler for a trawler and a *kattumaram* for a *kattumaram*? Or did reconstruction mean a move toward equality and trying to ensure that new assets were more equally distributed? Who would be given priority? Would the rich get their boats first and then, with whatever money was left, *kattumarams* be provided to other fishers? Or would the poorest get what they had lost and only after would the well-to-do get their losses covered? What about laborers who had no assets of their own?

In most instances, it quickly became clear that existing social hierarchies of class and caste were giving shape to the rehabilitation effort. First was the class question. Fishing assets have always been privately owned, usually by nuclear family units, although many owners in both artisanal and mechanized sectors employ laborers on their craft. Unlike in the artisanal sector, however, where individuals shift status from owner to laborer depending on whether they are operating their own or someone else's craft, the division between owner and laborer on trawlers is fairly rigid. I have yet to encounter a trawler owner who labors on another's craft, although trawler laborers are sometimes owners of artisanal craft. After the tsunami and depending on the coastal region, laborers who previously had no fishing assets of their own were either given boats indiscriminately (more on this later) or were prevented from receiving boats by their trawler owner-employers, who feared losing a captive labor force. In some areas, such as parts of Nagapattinam District, trawler laborers formed their own unions to demand equal treatment as an affected population in their own right. In other areas, such as Kanyakumari, where the sectoral divide had ensured the more effective subordination of a trawler proletariat to owners, the needs of trawler laborers failed to be adequately addressed.

Second was the caste question. In Kanyakumari, where low caste fishers constituted the overwhelming majority of coastal dwellers, there was less opportunity for caste discrimination. However, farther north, Dalit inhabitants (the former untouchable castes who occupy the lowest rung of the caste ladder) were often disregarded in favor of fisher castes whose claim to coastal resources was assumed to take precedence. A starker form of caste

stigma also came into play. In relief shelters, caste segregation was prevalent, with fisher castes permitted to physically separate themselves from Dalits. Indeed, such stigmatization was not limited to tsunami victims. Government bodies overseeing the relief effort also employed Dalits for some of the most menial tasks associated with "polluting" labor, such as the cleanup of corpses, reproducing long-standing understandings of how caste, labor, and status are tied.

The trend of privileging fisher castes was exacerbated by the Tamilnadu government's choice of dominant local organizations to administer coastal relief: in the north, fisher *panchayats*, and in the south, the Catholic Church. In line with what Tania Li calls neoliberal "governance through community" (Li 2007), the assumed isomorphism between territory, authority, and community resulted in the overlooking of internal coastal schisms of class, caste, and family. In some cases, adequate oversight ensured checks on the unevenness of relief. In Nagapattinam, for instance, the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) coordinated the relief effort out of the district collectorate alongside the Social Needs Education and Human Awareness nongovernmental organization (NGO). Together, the two organizations, one a fisher activist organization and the other a broader social organization, formed the Resource Center for Tsunami Relief through which money and effort were channeled. By contrast, in Kanyakumari, responsibility for coastal recovery was predictably relegated to the Catholic Church. The diocesan Kottar Social Service Society (KSSS) served as the coordinating body for setting up refugee camps for displaced fisher families, distributing food and clothing, and organizing housing construction. Significantly, it was not just the government that delegated authority to the church. Organizations working on the coast that have been critical of the church's representative monopoly, such as SIFFS, also decided to work under its auspices to ensure better coordination of the relief effort. Although the KSSS appears to have operated transparently, a number of fishers and NGO groups I corresponded with perceived the choice of the church as yet another instance of state neglect.

Coastal land expropriation was another key concern in the aftermath of the tsunami. Coastal land is prime real estate coveted by the tourism, aquaculture, and other industries. Customary rights to coastal land and livelihood have long served as a partial barrier to corporate takeover of seashore property. After the tsunami, these industries set their sights on the evacuated shoreline. As Naomi Klein (2007) noted in her book on disaster capitalism,

the tsunami was seen by many corporate investors as an opportunity to open up common property previously out of reach to private investment. This was especially the case in Sri Lanka, where the alienation of coastal land occurred at a precipitous pace. In Kanyakumari, by contrast, the presence of the Catholic Church as a long-standing institutional authority appears to have prevented privatization. This does not mean, however, that incentives to evacuate the coast were not on offer. Understandably, fishers and other coastal dwellers in southern India expressed fear at the prospect of another tsunami and living with that sense of vulnerability. Information about the infrequency of tsunamis could have gone a long way toward dispelling such fears, allowing coastal inhabitants to make a more informed choice about rehabilitation. However, in most instances government officials conveniently assumed that permanently relocating inland would be preferred by coastal dwellers, an assumption that rested on the desire to free up coastal land and on sedimented beliefs about a coastal culture of poverty and backwardness. The Tamilnadu government did not make relocation away from the coast mandatory, but its incentive package of land and $3,388 for housing construction in the inland was a serious push factor, especially compared with the absence of any financial assistance to rebuild on the coast. Although the Tamilnadu government insisted that its relocation scheme was intended purely for the safety of fisher families and not to make coastal land available to other industries, suspicions remained alive and well that alienated land would quickly be siphoned off by the far more powerful hotel or aquaculture lobby.

The way that rehabilitation schemes were elaborated gave little consideration to the specificities of fishers' relationship to coastal land: first, that living on the shore, even in vulnerable thatched huts, was a great convenience for their livelihood; second, that coastal inhabitants belong to a population with strong historical attachments to place; and finally, that rehabilitation schemes that sought to shift fishers inland disregarded the importance of coastal land as an asset, particularly for the most marginalized. Land ownership on the Tamilnadu coast is a tenuous business, with most coastal land officially classified as *poromboke* (government land), but in practice the coastal land comes under the jurisdiction of customary authorities of one kind or another. Although such land is recognized as having use but not exchange value, people commonly build houses and "sell" the land valued at the cost of the house. With the increase in coastal wealth over the last forty years, families with marriage-age girls and no other assets will often sell their land in this way to meet dowry demands. The alienation of coastal land thus hits at the most vulnerable among fisher populations.

The most serious concern raised by fisher artisanal organizations was the flood of capital investment into the Tamilnadu fishery. Immediately after the tsunami struck, the unprecedented volume of aid targeted at affected populations rapidly became evident. Some of this funding, much of it from the European Union, was for fishing assets. India has a long history of experiments with inappropriate technology transfer that have resulted in class division and the depletion of particular marine fish species. In light of the preponderance of evidence that technology transfer needs regulation, the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Agreements (CFFA), based in Brussels, has insisted that the minimum standards for vessel transfers should include compliance with local requirements and adherence to genuine needs assessments rather than to European Union demands, compliance with local development priorities for job creation and for improving average income levels and working conditions, and assurance that vessel and gear transfers have positive social and environmental impact. In the posttsunami recovery, however, the influx of fishing assets was permitted without regard to these criteria.

The unregulated distribution of boats for the sole purpose of enhancing the productive capacity of fishers provoked an immediate response from fishery activist organizations. They pointed out that Tamilnadu's marine fishery had reached overcapacity in the 1980s, after which fishing craft recorded steadily decreasing catch volumes. This would be the time, they insisted, to rethink the developmental trajectory of the fishery and shift it in a more ecologically sound direction. This meant refusing technology transfers that were unsuitable for a multispecies tropical fishery dominated by artisanal beach-landing craft and incapable of supporting the larger capital-intensive craft that required harbor facilities. It also meant a serious commitment to diversifying employment options for coastal dwellers so that they did not have to rely on a dwindling resource for their livelihood. However, the governmental response was fairly typical. Instead of appointing a commission to look into fishery management issues, the Tamilnadu government embraced the influx of boats and authorized their distribution. Not only has this exacerbated existing problems of overcapitalization, but the poor quality of the boats has also further threatened the safety at sea of a population whose security is ostensibly of paramount importance in the rehabilitation process.

These aspects of posttsunami rehabilitation reproduced key problems faced by Kanyakumari's fisher artisans: their circumscription as religious subjects, the threat to resource sustainability and livelihood of an overcapitalized economy, and the assault on common property, both shore and inshore sea, by processes of privatization. They point to the enduring legacy of historical processes of coastal primitivization and capital accumulation that have made it easy for governments to distinguish the particular claims of fisher artisans from universal questions of citizenship rights and sustainable development.

Arguments

In this book, I have made three key arguments. First, I have highlighted the importance of prior histories of claim making as the grounds for postcolonial democracy. Contemporary fisher rights politics has clear continuities with past forms of political maneuver, in its use of patronage as an idiom of rights, in the significance given to caste as a form of political collectivity, and in the centrality of space in making claims. Fisher politics, I have argued, suggests the need for greater attention to sedimented forms of power and protest that give meaning and shape to the practice of rights in any given context. Furthermore, fisher politics shows the processual character of rights—how rather than deriving from a fixed juridical order, the practice of making claims is itself constitutive of rights. Such an understanding of rights as emergent cuts against a perspective on rights shared by both modernists and antimodernists in which postcolonial democracy is a derivative modernity echoing a European original. I have argued instead that we need to think about democracy as a politics rather than as a historical condition, one with continuities into regional pasts of claim making.

Recently, anthropologists inspired by the work of Giorgio Agamben (1998) have emphasized the resurgence of a form of sovereign power that reduces political subjects to "bare life" (e.g., Biehl 2004; Caton 2006; Fassin and Vasques 2005; Feldman 2007; Hoffman 2007; N. Sundar 2004). Some scholars focus on the transformation of society into a camp where the rule of force substitutes for the rule of law, whereas others follow Agamben in arguing that rights today have been emptied of any meaning or force. This scholarly response to contemporary excesses of power, most notably seen in the global "war on terror," is understandable, but the faithful application of Agamben's framework threatens to substitute a theory of power for an ethnography of politics when we most need to attend to the resilience of political aspiration and practice.

Jacques Rancière's critique of Agamben and Hannah Arendt is instructive in this regard. In his essay "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" (2004), Rancière takes issue with Arendt and Agamben for, each in his or her own way, depoliticizing rights through a form of "consensus." Rancière argues that Arendt, in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), limits real rights to the rights of the citizen, in the process emptying anything beyond the sphere of citizenship of political meaning. Rights are rendered tautological in her account: "The rights of the citizen . . . are the rights of those who have rights" (Rancière 2004: 303). Arendt thus "anthropologizes" the subject of rights by giving him social flesh and predetermines the domain of politics as the domain of normative citizenship. By contrast, Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1998) identifies the sovereign as the ultimate arbiter of rights. In focusing on the ability of the sovereign to step outside the law and reduce the citizen to bare life, Agamben predetermines the domain of politics as that of sovereign power. He makes rights void: "The rights of the citizen are the rights of those who have no rights" (Rancière 2004: 303).

Rancière maintains that both Agamben and Arendt establish a consensus between law and fact that does not allow for the play of politics. Both writers foreclose the possibility of investing political life with new meanings and of claiming political belonging and entitlement in terms that expand the parameters of rights. By contrast, Rancière argues for "dissensus," or the openness of political process and the ongoing formation of the political subject. To quote him again: "The very difference between man and citizen is not a sign of disjunction proving that rights are either void or tautological. It is the opening of an interval for political subjectivization" (Rancière 2004: 304). Against Agamben and Arendt, Rancière argues that politics is not a *sphere* but a *process* driven by the dialectic of the human and citizen through which the parameters of rights are consistently redrawn.

In this book, I have taken up Rancière's call for treating rights politics as a process of political subjectivization rather than as a standoff between a circumscribed sphere of objectified, exclusive rights and excluded subalterns, or as an obsolete form of consciousness. The idioms and practices that fishers use to lay claim to rights demand a more elastic framework that does not preemptively close off the dynamics of subject formation. It requires seeing the horizon of rights as open and generative of politics. Fishers did not simply reject or insert themselves into statist rights discourse. In the interplay of fisher claims and state responses, we see give on both sides. Mukkuvars'

use of idioms of relationality has pulled state actors into new obligations. At the same time, as self-proclaimed clients of the state, Mukkuvars now think of themselves as political subjects of new communities of affinity extending beyond coastal lines. This is by no means a closed universe; rather, new political currents render fluid the terms of negotiation, the idioms of rights, and the forms of political subjectivity.

A second argument that runs through this book is about space and hegemony. Artisanal fisher rights politics in Kanyakumari exemplifies the spatial unfolding of a Gramscian notion of hegemony. Space making has been an instrument of both rule and rights, with sovereigns and subalterns mobilizing geographic imaginaries and practices in their political projects. In the southwest, a cultural common sense has been elaborated through the production of geographic distinctions, lending culture an environmental cast. However, it is equally the case that the meaning of space is not fixed. Indeed, the struggle over rights in the region has been a battle over competing forms of space making. Understanding the dialectic of rule and opposition in terms of the production of space allows me to both denaturalize the link between culture and geography and see how space itself is an essential ingredient in struggles for rights.

Fisher rights politics was not simply a form of negotiation *within* spaces of power; it also generated political geographies. Fisher Catholics produced new spaces—of regionalism, common property, alternative technology, and fisher citizenship—that challenged the circumscription of the coast as a domain of religious patronage antithetical to a politics of rights. As I have shown in Part 2, each of these space-making projects opened up the coordinates of coastal space and of fisher political subjectivity. By embracing a regional political imaginary, fishers laid claim to a polity that exceeded the spatial and temporal limits of coastal locality. In invoking filial links to Tamil state populists, Mukkuvars carved out a political space of regionalism that contravened a scalar model of encompassment privileging the church as the primary intermediary between coast and state. Similarly, they appropriated state managerial dictates to reinvigorate forms of marine common property. As the class war on the coast escalated, the Tamilnadu state government sought to contain this "law and order" problem by territorially separating artisanal and trawling craft. Artisanal fishers were relegated to the 3 miles closest to shore, whereas trawlers were to ply offshore waters. Instead of submitting to territorial containment, however, Mukkuvar artisans claimed the 3-mile zone as a fishing commons materially underpinning a new legal subject: the artisanal sector. By the 1990s, both territory and artisan had exceeded the bounds of the 3-mile zone to stand in for a global marine commons and the conservationist national subject.

Mukkuvar politics of space making suggests a rethinking of cultural difference as the quintessential expression of nonelite politics. The assumption that elite power works through a claim to universality, whereas subalterns contest power through a politics of difference, informs much social theorizing on subalternity. Within the literature on space, this equation of subalternity with alterity finds echoes in the notion of "place" (e.g., Basso 1996; Escobar 2001; Ramaswamy 2004; Tuan 1977). Although space is typically represented as a modality of power, by contrast place is an ethics of resistance. Space symbolizes the sweep of a rationalized, modernist imagination that disregards the particularities of experience. Place, by contrast, is intimate and personal and resists generality. Even in Marxist scholarship that typically resists notions of alterity, one finds an equation relating place to an anticapitalist politics (Dirlik 1997; Harvey 1997).

This distinction between space and place threatens to reinscribe the opposition between the universal and the particular, society and community, or reason and feeling. Furthermore, it obscures the role of nonelites and oppositional movements not only in claiming *place* but also in reconceptualizing *space*. Opposition to state power or social exclusion does not always involve a simple claim to difference, to particularity, or to localized autonomy. As I have shown through the example of fisher spatial practices, the most particularistic expressions of community can also express an encompassing vision of changing both the polity as a whole and the terms of participation in it. In other words, subaltern politics can make universal claims and, in doing so, change relations of hegemony.

Finally, I have argued for an understanding of subalternity in relational, processual terms. Rather than see fishers as nonmoderns inhabiting a bounded world of affect and hierarchy or as moderns captured by a statist logic, I have argued for the need to see how they constitute themselves as subjects of rights in a dialectical relationship with existing hegemonies. In the postcolonial period, one can see this dialectic playing out clearly in the arena of development. What is most interesting to me about the development process is that, despite the state's effort to render it an antipolitics machine, it has created a charged political arena that is constantly reworked by competing meanings

and demands. Rather than producing docile subjects or insurrectionary Others, then, the state system actually opens up new spaces for the articulation of subaltern rights and sovereignty. This suggests that we need to understand state and community as mutually implicated and postcolonial citizenship not as a derivative, juridical construct that is a less authentic expression of cultural subjectivity but as a dynamic, locally constituted process through which people understand their relationship to territory, community, nation, and state.

What does this mean for resource conservation? As I hope to have shown, an approach to conservation simply as state science or as community practice is inadequate for sustainable resource use. The thorough implication of states and communities through the development process suggests that any effort to redress the ills of development has to be a joint one. The efforts by both artisanal and mechanized fishers to draw state actors and institutions into their resource conflicts suggest that they are more than willing to recognize a role for the state in regulating the fishery. The question remains, however, whether the state is willing to recognize the knowledge and practices of local actors as a valuable contribution to the conservation effort and whether it is willing to challenge the current emphasis on capital accumulation to seriously address the goal of conservation. At the moment, the Tamilnadu state government is far from committed to marine resource conservation, as evidenced in its convenient interpretation of coastal conflict as a problem of intracommunity law and order and its approach to posttsunami reconstruction. However, the increasing number of social movements in Tamilnadu that articulate citizenship rights in terms of resource rights may just force the government to pay more than lip service to the idea of resource renewal. At its core, resource renewal envisions new priorities: of the livelihoods of small producers over production for profit and of domestic consumption over the rapidly expanding export trade in fish.

Reference Matter