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The Boat is My Family: Embodiment and Belonging in Shetland Fishing Communities

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The boat is my family: embodiment and belonging in Shetland fishing communities

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Katherine Shepard McNally

Lewiston, Maine

March 24, 2017

This thesis is for my mother, who gave me the world,
My father, with whom I've explored it,
And my grandmother, who taught me to sing its songs of praise.



*You all gave me life.
In return, I give you 72 pages about fish.*

Acknowledgements

Working on this thesis continues to be one of the most gratifying experiences of my life, and I use the present tense deliberately. In a sense, I have been shaping this piece of work for the last four years during fieldwork trips to the Canadian Maritimes and, more recently, to the Shetland Islands. In the process of doing fieldwork, writing, and reading, I have discovered that this field, and this thesis, asks the questions to which I want to dedicate my life.

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Abstract

On the Shetland Islands in Scotland, members of fishing communities describe the act of fishing as “a way of life.” With growing world populations putting ever more pressure on the oceans as a source of protein, there are increasing clashes between communities who extract marine resources and governments who limit that extraction. Shetland fishermen feel that when fishery policy makers do not consider the effects of policy on fishing communities, it threatens fishing as “a way of life.” By considering the forms of identity that Shetland fishermen create through metaphor, I analyze the ways in which Shetland fishermen use the bodies of fish and boats as forms to express fishing as their way of life. I argue that, through language, fishermen connect the fate of these non-human bodies to their own social lives. In this thesis, I therefore reconceive the relationship between Shetland fishermen and the EU in terms of biopolitics, because from the fishermen’s perspective, fisherman-EU interactions occur on the level of life and death, selfhood and bodies.

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Map of Shetland Island Fishing Communities



Source: maps.google.com

*The river is within us, the sea is all about us;
The sea is the land's edge also, the granite
Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses
Its hints of earlier and other creation:
The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone;
The pools where it offers to our curiosity
The more delicate algae and sea anemone.
It tosses up our losses, the torn sein,
The shattered lobster pot, the broken oar
And the gear of foreign dead men. The sea has many
voices,
Many gods, and many voices.*

-T.S. Eliot: *the dry salvages*

Introduction --- Making three stories talk

When I emerged from below deck, my seasickness was gone. I ate a few of the dry oatcakes that I brought for lunch and, at the skipper's invitation, I sat quietly in the mate's chair in the wheelhouse. He turned and looked at me over his glasses.

"You know, being sick is nothing to be ashamed of. We've all been there."

He was wearing a t-shirt that said *Fishing For Leave*. The European referendum was in less than a month. I asked him how he thought the vote would turn out.

"I think there's very little chance we'll be successful in leaving the European Union. I just don't know how Shetland fishing communities will survive afterward."

I thought of the elections, the refugees, the wars, the politicians, the fishermen, the fish... and I was reminded, once again, that there was no solid ground to stand on. I wanted to return to the dark of my bunk.

"We're coming up on the fishing grounds if you want to come on deck with us."

I nodded and went back below deck to dress. I pulled on my green rain boots, leaky and spattered with house paint, and zipped up the comically big, bright red boiler suit I'd borrowed. I climbed the steps to the deck and watched as a winch lifted a huge net. Fish, alive and silver and

gasping, flapped behind the neon netting. As they rose from the sea, brittle stars and scallops from the depths rained upon the deck. Clouds of gulls circled above, waiting for scraps, and I had the sense that I was witnessing the knots and patterned nets of economy that cycle here with the tides and with the seasons.



When I interviewed the engineer about the sinking of his ship, many years had passed, but he told the story of its sinking was still very close to the surface of his mind.

Beneath one hundred tons of fish, the bilge alarm began to blare to tell the crew that the boat was taking on water. Any buoyancy she had was taken up by the bounty the fishermen had caught. Her bow began to dip, and the engine shut down. As the rest of the crew prepared the life raft, the engineer ran down into the boat's belly and desperately poured oil into the engine, trying to resuscitate the pumps of his family boat. He heard the pumps growl and begin to chug out of their flat-line. He hadn't been fast enough. As he worked, water had started coming down the vents into the engine room, and he knew he had to abandon her. The world began to tilt as he ran up the stairs and joined his crew on the life raft. Together, they watched from safety as the boat capsized, and listened as her engines, still running, got faster and faster until they stopped. After that there was silence.

“And that's what kind of broke my heart.”

He showed me a framed photograph of the same ship for reference. It was displayed on the living room wall directly beside the photographs of his grandchildren.

“It was just because... because you looked after the engines. You looked after the boat. To hear them just tarring themselves to pieces...”

He paused and looked at the photograph.

“What do you mean when you say that watching the boat sink broke your heart?” I asked.

“It did. It was just...”

He looked down at his hands, and I didn’t know what to do with mine. I laced my fingers together nervously and was distinctly aware that the calluses there were from holding pens, not rope or netting or metal winches.

After a moment, he spoke.

“Well, what I was going to tell you is how that boat we lost was named after my grandfather’s boat.”

The engineer went on to weave his family history out of stories about the boats displayed in photographs on the wall (there were many). This one was the submarine where his father-in-law had been stationed in World War I. That one was the boat where he’d had his first position as a cook. Here was his father’s boat, and here was the boat that had sunk. The stories he told were about coming of age on the water and myths of grandfathers who had long ago ceased to be mortal men, becoming something like biblical patriarchs instead.

“My grandfather was a pioneer. He kind of started it all for us. He pushed his boat harder than anybody else, but he also took care of it. He knew that if you looked after your boat, your boat would look after you. Everybody looked up to him. When he retired, my dad became the boss, the skipper at sea. My dad was away after that, but I saw my grandfather every day. So, naming my boat after my grandfather’s boat was really... I don’t know what you’d call it. It was a tribute to him, I suppose.”

The crew had put everything on the line to buy that boat. Some of the men had mortgaged their houses. Thankfully, by the time she sunk, they had made enough money to buy shares in a new boat, which they named after the skipper’s first-born daughter.

I asked a skipper from the island of Whalsay why Shetland fishermen are willing to risk so much for their boats. He responded, “The boat is my family. That’s the whole thing.”¹



I was just about to leave the family that I’d lived with for a week. I said goodbye to the little girls who asked me to jump on the trampoline and to Mary, who helped me make rhubarb crumble. Jodie came out of the house and asked if I could do him a favor.

“Since you’ve been learning about the EU and the struggles of our fleet, I was wondering if you could pass these out for me as you travel on the Shetland ferries.”

He handed me a stack of flyers from the pro-Brexit organization, *Fishing for Leave*. I accepted them, but only because I didn’t know what else to do. It seemed inappropriate for me to distribute them but rude to refuse. Back in Lerwick, in my bunk at the Islesburgh Hostel, I took them out of my backpack. On the front, there was an image of a scrapyard, piled high with fishing boats. The caption read, “The Results of the EU Common Fisheries Policy” (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Image of fishing boat decommissioning in Denmark used in a *Fishing For Leave* campaign pro-Brexit flyer.

¹ I published a version of this introduction in Shetland’s *60° North Magazine*.



As an anthropologist, it is my responsibility to infer meaning from interviews and interactions that I experienced in a disjointed collage of fieldwork. In a way, it is my job to make stories “talk” to one another, to parse out the relationships between their seemingly unrelated shapes. It is an anthropologist’s job to do, ontologically, what art does symbolically and metaphor does linguistically: make sense of a relationship between forms from different domains.

These three vignettes represent three of the themes that reverberated throughout the experiences and conversations I had in Shetland island fishing communities in the summer of 2016: the EU referendum, family, and the “survival” of fishing boats. Their point of connection, I argue, hinges critically on the notion of “belonging”—within a family, a community, a tradition, an environment.

Narratives of belonging can be reconceived, then, as placing stories, symbolic frameworks that position one’s body in a network of other bodies. For this reason, belonging metaphors are deeply *embodied*; they suggest that a person’s relationship with their world represented in physical form and that belonging within that form is “meant to be.”

Anthropologists have provided various names for the common metaphorical connection between physical bodies and social belonging. It has been called “primordialism” (Geertz 1973: 259), “biologization” (Shils 1957: 142), and “reification” (Berger and Luckman 1966). However, when people make connections between human belonging and nonhuman bodies or nonhuman belonging and human bodies, those terms do not convey the full metaphorical significance. For these instances, Mel Y. Chen offers the term “animacies” to refer to the construction of humanness in non-human forms (Chen 2012). Because of its relationship with bodies, and

belonging within one's own body, Chen argues that animacies are definitively related to intimacies.

In Shetland, I found that fishermen and members of fishing communities often expressed their sense of belonging—to their environment, and to their boats—in terms that are otherwise associated with family (blood, bodies, names, and kinship terms). In the process of expressing how they felt they did or did not belong in those spheres, they often described the effects of the sea or the boat as transfiguring to their own bodies, in blood or in form. In the processes of describing their own humanity through nonhuman forms, fishermen and community members endowed the boats and the sea with metaphorical kinship and social aliveness.

This thesis follows these entwined themes of belonging, kinship, bodies, and selves, as they relate the relationship between Shetland fishermen and the European Union in the summer of 2016. It shows how, from the perspective Shetland fishermen, fisheries policy is not just the regulation of boats; it is the regulation of bodies. I return, especially, to the themes represented in the introductory vignettes, contrasting the phrase, “The boat is my family,” with the picture of boat destruction that I saw on the *Fishing for Leave* flyers. In the aesthetic and linguistic gap between these two “images,” fishing boats metaphorically come to life.

The boat destruction in that photograph, I learned, was the EU's regulatory response to a collapse of the UK whitefish fisheries at the end of the 20th century, concurrent with the collapse of the cod fishery in Newfoundland. The European fishing fleet was expanded in the 1990s, and a dramatic decline in whitefish landings followed. Between 1993 and 1996, the EU instituted a series of three Multiannual Guidance Programs (MGPs) to protect the ecosystem through the simultaneous reduction in fishing effort and the EU fishing fleet. Fish quotas were also reduced to all-time lows and the state offered fishermen the opportunity to sell their boats to the EU in a

series of government-buy-back programs that are often called “decommissioning” (OECD 2000: 44). From the EU perspective, MPGs were a successful fisheries management strategy. From the fishermen’s perspective, they were given a choice that was no choice at all: continue fishing at the reduced quota with little no money to live on or accept the state’s compensation and sail their boats to a scrapyard in Denmark to be destroyed.

When I asked members of Shetland fishing communities what they remembered about the period, some said that they remembered tears in some fishermen’s eyes as they boarded their boats for the last time. According to one woman from Whalsay, seeing boats leave for decommissioning was “like watching a funeral.” An important question rises from this observation: a funeral for whom? For the community as a whole? For the fishermen? For the physical boats? For whom is she grieving and why?



In order for something to die, it must first be alive. To explore this question of fishing and survival, then, the five chapters of this thesis are organized into three conceptual parts: death, life, and death. In the theoretical approach, I discuss the ways that fishermen—in Shetland and in general—have been aesthetically rendered as agentless, the living dead. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I discuss the ways Shetland fishermen use kinship metaphors to emphasize belonging with and to the structures—community, environment, and boats—that enable their way of *life*. In Chapter 6, I return boat destruction as a symbol of death. In each chapter, I reconceptualize the relationship between Shetland fishermen and larger national and supranational structures to interrogate the connection between bodily belonging and national belonging.

To more fully understand the stakes for fishermen in Shetland, as well as their response to the political atmosphere of Brexit, we must first analyze the ways that fishermen in general are

“pictured” in global biopolitics. In Chapter 1, I outline the aesthetic and metaphorical through which life and death are socially constructed and applied to bodies. To do this, I draw particular support from W. J. T. Mitchell’s work on aesthetics and biopolitics, Giorgio Agamben’s “Necropolitics,” and Judith Butler’s notion of the “grievable life” to analyze global images of fishermen. I discuss the recognizable and globally produced biopicture of fisherman as terrorist as a platform to contextualize the broader focus of this thesis: the enlivening of bodies—of fishermen, fish, and boats—in Shetland Islands. I finish the chapter by engaging with the scholarship of Fernandez, Sapir, and Crocker to discuss the ways Shetland fishermen use metaphor to animate their words.

I provide the historical and political background for my argument in Chapter 2. I discuss the 1990s whitefish crisis from the perspective of the European Union and the perspective of the Shetland fishermen. I show how, from the EU perspective, boat decommissioning corresponded with the successful rebound of the North Sea fishery. From the perspective of Shetland fishermen, however, entry into the EU is what precipitated the whitefish crisis, and the regulations put in place to alleviate it only made competition more difficult for Shetland fishermen who could barely contend with the large European boats that had entered their waters. I go on to briefly contextualize the Shetland fishing industry in 2016. To end, I outline the complexity of national identity in Shetland, and discuss the ways in which the national identities of fishermen do not match the national identity of nonfishermen in Shetland.

I discuss that divergence of national identity in Chapter 3, where I combine David Schneider and Marshall Sahlin’s dereification of kinship to discuss national identity and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. I argue that Shetland fishermen have created international, inter-island communities independent from their nonfishing neighbors, and I draw,

particularly, Appaduri's concept global cultural flows. I show the ways in which the pro-Brexit organization, *Fishing For Leave*, has used media to create an online platform, and a community, for UK fishermen.

In Chapter 4, I continue my discussion of kinship, particularly blood and body metaphor, to analyze the *Fishing for Leave* symbol of an anthropomorphized codfish. I continue by discussing the ways Shetland fishermen metaphorically blend human bodies, fish bodies, and the chemical properties of seawater when they talk about their own sense of community belonging. I discuss the ways in which this reified connection between male bodies and the sea is especially coercive in the realm of gender. Men feel they are expected to fish, and women are “matter out of place” on fishing boats. However, I note that it would be reductive to think of gender and labor in the stereotyped terms of western origin myths that restrict men to the public sphere and women to the domestic sphere. While fishing is primarily a male sphere, the primary function of fishing is to perpetuate family and reproduce the domestic sphere.

In Chapter 5, I show how that family is primarily produced in boats. I return to the phrase “the boat is my family,” and discuss the ways that fishing crews become symbolic families. I argue that, rather than an inanimate vessel, like a house, the boat is a family member for the crew as well. It “works” to help fishermen catch fish and keeps them safe in the dangerous waters of the North Atlantic. Fishermen further animate their boats with names from children and ancestors, metaphorically enmeshing past and present, work and family.

I return to biopolitics in Chapter 6 to illustrate the aesthetic mechanisms through which a government strategy to reduce fishing effort through destroying boats acted, symbolically, like an execution for Shetland fishermen and their boats. I make the comparison between the

photographs of boats that line the walls Shetland fishermen's homes and the images of boat destruction that came out of the 1990s decommissioning.

I conclude my argument with a plea to reengage the human body in discussions of resource use and politics.



A brief note on language

I quote Shetland residents throughout this paper, but I have chosen to translate all of the Shetland language into mainstream English. I understand that this is a political decision, that language is an embodiment of heritage and tradition in Shetland. However, I did not have the etymological information to transcribe my interviews faithfully into an island-wide recognized form of Shetland language, and doing it wrong seemed like the greatest injustice of all. Moreover, many people I spoke with chose to speak in Standard English so that I could understand. Translating those conversations into Shetland language for the sake of consistency seemed similarly artificial. I have kept a few, frequently used phrases in Shetland language. These include *bein' Whalsa'*, which means that a person is from the island of Whalsay, and *saat idda bløð*, which translates to "salt in the blood."

In addition, I use the word "fishermen" rather than "fishers," which is the genderless equivalent that is often used in fisheries literature. I do this because Shetlanders use the word "fishermen" to describe themselves, and I wanted to have consistency between the analysis and the dialog. Moreover, as I discuss in Chapter 4, there are no women fishers in Shetland and work on the water is traditionally done men. My thesis is primarily focused on that male sphere of belonging.

In the narrowest sense, a picture is simply one of those familiar objects that we see hanging on the walls... In a more extended sense, however, pictures arise in all other media—in the assemblage of fleeting, evanescent shadows and material supports that constitute the cinema as a “picture show”; in the stationing of a piece of sculpture in a specific site; in a caricature or stereotype realized in a pattern of human behavior; in “pictures in the mind,” the imagination or memory of an embodied consciousness; in a proposition or a text in which “a state of affairs,” as Wittgenstein put it, is projected.

-W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (xiii)

Chapter 1: Theoretical Approach --- Aesthetic and metaphorical transformations

Try to conjure a picture of global climate change. You might see rising seas, calving glaciers, displaced human and animal populations, oceans full of oil and void of life... but those are only the subjects suffering at the “hands” of the more pervasive object, climate change. If you really try to *objectify* climate change, try to imagine a form that embodies it as a global threat, I suspect you will find it difficult. Climate change is pervasive and spectral, like fog or gas, simultaneously unseen and felt, invisible but profoundly reality altering. Like heat, it is “something less conscious and more overflowing, radiance instead of a line, imminence instead of that famous bird’s eye view” (Taussig 2004: 31). Climate change is a *disembodied* threat, which makes it the most terrifying kind of threat of all: a threat without a body to target.

In times of fear, we need bodies to blame. As W. J. T. Mitchell writes in *Cloning Terror*, the so-called “War on Terror” is an Orientalist war waged against Arab and Middle Eastern peoples as the stereotyped embodiments of terrorism. Similarly, the American “War on Drugs” was, more accurately, a war waged against bodies of color (Mitchell 2011: 21). Mitchell goes on to illustrate the ways that these “wars” should be understood as such, both metaphorically and literally. In one sense, they can be understood metaphorically as “serious efforts to solve

systematic problems.” In another sense, the metaphor has been “made literal” in the systematic objectification of a pervasive problem, in the mapping of system-wide failures onto the living bodies of specific, and persecuted, human beings (Mitchell 2011: 22). These social-efforts-turned-wars exemplify the social construction of blameworthy bodies, which, as Mitchell argues, is fundamentally a question of image creation and aesthetics.

Art-making is a process by which we create pictures that embody meaning. As Gerhard Richter writes in *The Daily Practice of Painting*, “...art is making sense and giving shape to that sense” (Richter 1995 as cited in Mitchell 2005: xiii). Similarly, Jacques Rancière claims “politics in general is about the configuration of the sensible” (Rancière 2003, my emphasis). If both art and politics is concerned with creating “sense”, then perhaps images and image production—caricature and stereotype, pop art and propaganda—exist at the confluence of the two. In his influential essay, “The Pictorial Turn,” Mitchell writes that global modes of idea transmission have shifted from the “phonocentric” to the photocentric, that the “seeable” has displaced the “sayable” in the global representation of the real (Mitchell 1994: 12).

In a culture where images embody profoundly condensed metaphors for art, power, and politics, Mitchell argues that we need to pay more attention to picture production as reality production. In his monograph, *What do Pictures Want*, Mitchell argues that picture production is tripartite and combines “image” (the likeness, figure, or motif), “object” (the material form in which the image appears), and “medium” (the material processes that produce and reproduce the picture) (Mitchell 2005: xiii). When bodies are the medium through which images are objectified, the aesthetic form collides with Michel Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, which describes the apparatuses by which the state exerts its control over the physical bodies of the

population (Foucault 2003). In reference to Foucault's biopolitics, Mitchell has aptly termed these bodies-as-pictures/pictures-as-bodies "biopictures" (Mitchell 2011: 69).

When the iconoclastic tradition of destroying symbolically harmful images is applied to biopictures, the lives of real people are put at risk in the name of symbolic salvation. According to Achille Mbembe, "The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 2003: 11). Mbembe therefore extends the biopolitical into the realm of the "necropolitical." He argues that in order to exercise sovereignty, states must manifest power through the conspicuous preservation of life and deployment of death (Mbembe 2003: 12). In the dual context of aesthetics and necropolitics, an execution is a state production of public spectacle, an iconoclastic and ritualistic destruction of a harmful image, and a powerful deployment of necropolitics.

Human culture and everyday reality cannot be understood without reference to ecological relations and material culture. The words "ecology" and "economy" each have their root in the Greek word, *Oikos*, which means "household" (Gísli Pálsson 1991: 1).² The ecological destruction associated with climate change therefore has deeply personal ramifications for human productions—of material goods, of place-based belonging, of everyday reality. In the face of these destructions of "home," the world community searches for forms to personify mass ecosystem degradation and climate change, we produce and distribute agentive biopictures to blame. Generally, they are people, like fishermen, who extract natural resources to maintain their ways of life. In producing these biopictures, we come to see these ways of life, these people, as the representatives of climate change and environmental destruction.

² I thank Dr. Ethan Miller for introducing me to this etymological framework for thinking about ecology and economy.

In discussions about overfishing and the degradation of fisheries, many cite Garrett Hardin's influential 1968 article, "The Tragedy of the Commons." In the article, Hardin describes a parable of environmental destruction in a "Commons," a pasture that is used by many herdsman but owned by none. According to Hardin, each herdsman experiences all the benefits of a healthy, fed animal, but the negative effects that each new animal has on the grass of the commons is distributed evenly onto all the herdsman who use the commons. Because the marginal benefits of each animal is greater for each herdsman than the marginal damages of each animal, Hardin argues that, as rational maximizing individuals, the herdsman will continue to add animals to the commons until there is no grass left for any animals and the commons collapse (Hardin 1968).

Globally moving and seemingly endless in number, fish are a definitive common pool resource, and it is easy to apply "The Tragedy of the Commons" parable to the world oceans. In the maritime case, fishermen, like the herdsman, receive all the economic benefits of a successful trawl, but the damages that his gear causes to the seafloor and the trophic level damages he causes by removing large numbers of piscivorous fish are evenly distributed to all other fishermen and stakeholders.

In Hardin's world, fishermen will keep fishing until there are no more fish and the ocean ecosystems have been destroyed. He defines this key "tragedy" in terms destiny and futility:

The essence of dramatic tragedy is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of *the remorseless working of things...* This *inevitableness of destiny* can only be illustrated in terms of human life by incidents which in fact involve unhappiness. For it is only by them that the *futility of escape* can be made evident in the drama.
(Whitehead 1948 as cited in Hardin 1968, my emphasis)

The language that Hardin uses to define tragedy suggests that it is in the fundamental nature of the Commons herdsman—here, the fishermen—to be greedy. Since "The Tragedy of the

Commons,” this reified notion of the greedy fishermen has outlasted other suggestions that Hardin makes in the article, such as Malthusian controls of childbirth, and has greatly contributed to the global image of fishermen as the agents of ecosystem destruction.

Symbolically, images of fishermen pulling up large nets full of fish become especially damning in Hardin’s context of the commons and inevitable human greed (figure 2). It is also notable that the faces of the fishermen in such images are often largely inscrutable because of distance or rain gear, and this facelessness works to create a greedy everyman who has no identity but the insatiable desire to consume. In *Cloning Terror*, W. J. T. Mitchell writes extensively on the effects of facelessness in the creation of biopictures. Facelessness, Mitchell argues, has the dual effect of reproducing an unidentifiable terrorist, all the more threatening in his anonymity, and reproducing biopicture nobodies that the state can literally and metaphorically execute without remorse. Mitchell writes that both effects of facelessness emphasize a biopicture’s loss of human identity and a reduction to a state of bare life or “mere image” (Mitchell 2011: 99).



Figure 2. A photograph that Greenpeace describes as an image of overfishing.

One image of a shark fisherman in Bali provides an especially profound example of facelessness (figure 3). In this extreme example, the fisherman is wearing a ski mask as he piles shark fins beside him. It is unclear whether he is wearing the mask for his own anonymity as he engages in a particularly grisly form of fishing or to protect his face from the work. Whatever the original reason for the mask, in the image it has the unsettling effect of morphing him into an executioner, a thief, and a guilty person worthy of blame.



Figure 3. A shark fisherman and harvested shark fins. Bali, Indonesia

Linguistically and positionally, “animalness” has been used to convey sense of irrefutable “nature,” such as Hardin’s reified notion of the greedy fisherman. Like a rabid dog, the fisherman, who can help but consume until nothing is left, must be restrained for the good of all. Animalness has also been used to suggest helplessness and innocence, a life that needs to be saved because it cannot save itself. Fundamentally, the “animal” suggests a lack of agency, the absence of the fundamentally human ability to make choices and shape the world.

The state of “bare life” to which Mitchell refers in *Cloning Terror* is similar to Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the *Homo sacer*: a life that has the capacity to be killed but not sacrificed, a

life whose death cannot be grieved because it is void of grievable qualities of social liveness (Agamben 1998). For Agamben (1998) and Mitchell (2011), the production of the *Homo sacer*, is fundamentally an “animalization” of human beings. In her monograph, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable*, Judith Butler writes that “certain lives cannot be perceived as injured or lost unless they are first apprehended as living.” She goes on to write that “the ‘being’ of life is constructed through selected means; as a result, we cannot refer to this ‘being’ outside operations of power, and we must make more precise the specific mechanisms of power through which life is produced” (Butler 2010: 1). For Butler (2010), Mitchell (2011), and Agamben (1998), the fundamental mechanism of biopolitics is the power to endow bodies with humanness and to take it away.

As the images—and social context in which they are deployed—increase the animal qualities of the fishermen, they simultaneously decrease the animal qualities of the fish. In her monograph about the life-giving properties of language, *Animacies*, Mel Y. Chen suggests that humans and non-human animals exist in an imagined field of “ecologies (with interrelations between types) and ontological propositions (with divisions between types)” that form a cognitive map of sentience. They consider, in particular, how “the ‘stuff’ of animal nature...sometimes sticks to animals and sometimes bleeds back into textures of humanness” (Chen 2012: 89). In many of the images representing fishing, the fish begin to live social lives predicated upon the imminence of their deaths. According to Butler, recognizing the threat of death is a crucial step in understanding a body as vulnerable and interdependent, which are foundational claims of social belonging. Butler refers to this vulnerability as “precarity” and she argues that it is a fundamental quality of social liveness. We see some lives as precarious and

others as expendable, and for Butler this distinction is inherently biopolitical. For Mitchell, Foucault, and Chen, it is also a matter of aesthetics.

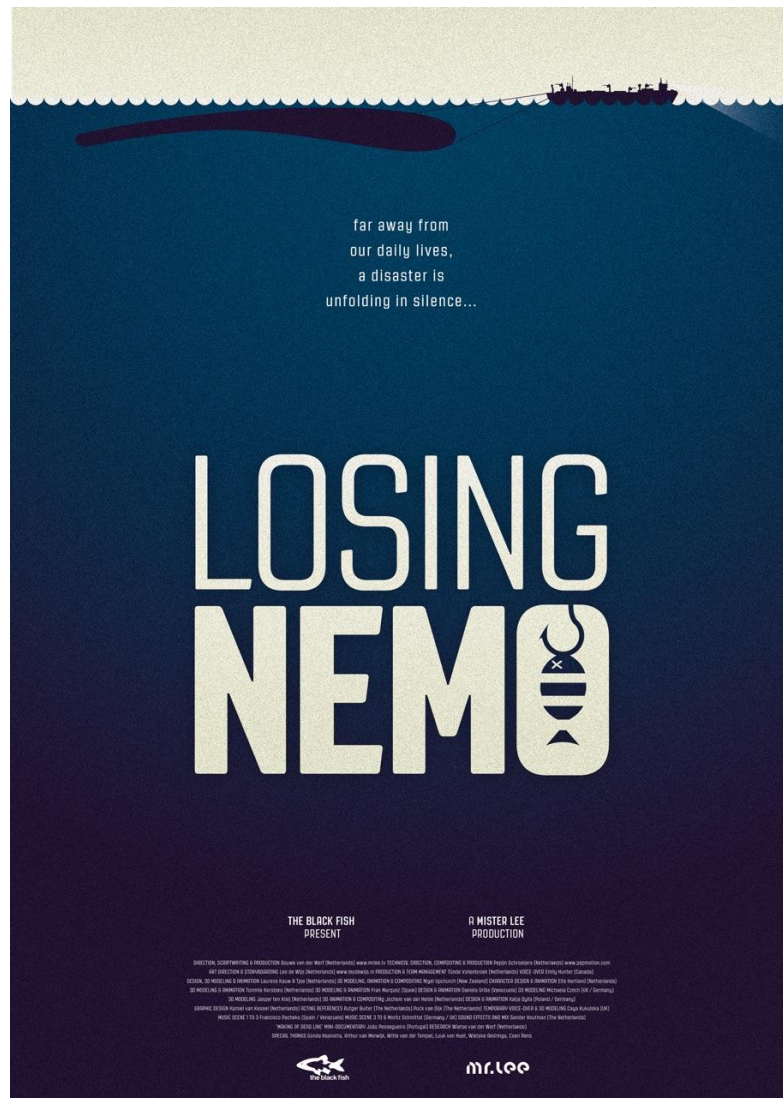


Figure 4. Promotion poster for the Black Fish animated short, *Losing Nemo*

While pictures of fishing often represent fishermen as faceless, greedy and socially dead they also often represent the fish as precarious and therefore socially alive. In the poster for the film *Losing Nemo*, a six-minute animated short about the world's oceans in peril, the fishermen are invisible, represented instead by a huge dark ship and drag net, and the fish are represented by a large clown fish dangling from a hook with ex's through its eyes (Figure 4). The title, *Losing Nemo*, cues us to see this dead fish as the beloved protagonist of the Pixar movie about

the adventures of a young fish and his father, *Finding Nemo*. In a meaningful role reversal, the movie poster suggests that humans are the hungry sea monsters roaming the ocean and that fish—who, in the Pixar film, love and lose and have children and parents—are the ones who deserve social belonging. In the poster, our own social lives are represented more in the dead fish than the in invisible fishermen piloting the boat. In the fish, which we know to be Nemo, we see our own families and childhood and the precariousness of life. We see the fishermen as agents of ecosystem destruction, a force of death that needs to be stopped.

If social liveness is a social construction, then the decision of which bodies should be attributed with grievable humanness is also a decision about which bodies are subjected to social death. In many of the aesthetic representations of the climate change, fishermen have been reduced to “bare life,” undeserving of sympathy or grief.



If commercial fishermen, in general, are represented through images, then Shetland fishermen, in particular, represent themselves through metaphors. In “The Mission of Metaphor in Expressive Culture,” James Fernandez uses metaphor to connect the worlds of word and image and form the semantic mesh between objective and subjective reality. For Fernandez, “pronominal subjects” (I, we, she, they) are “the essential inchoate subjects” (Fernandez 1974: 121). By “inchoate” he means that they exist without form, and so we need metaphors to embody their meaning; we need bodies to house our “selves.” We talk about political “landscapes” and discuss “fields” of scholarship. In short, every perspective requires a metaphor to organize it (Fernandez 1974: 119). Through metaphor, we transform the imaginary into the socially “real” by asserting a relationship between terms from different semantic domains (Sapir and Crocker 1977). As J. Christopher Crocker wrote in “The Social Functions of Rhetorical Forms,”

“symbolic activity does more than merely express reality: it actively structures experience”
(Crocker 1977: 34). It is the mechanism by which we order time, space, and ourselves.

In this thesis, I focus particularly on the ways that Shetland fishermen discuss their sense of belonging by talking about bodies—their own, their family’s, the bodies of fish, and the bodies of boats. By using other bodies—human and nonhuman—to embody their identities, I argue that they endow those forms with metaphorical kinship and social life. Contrary to the destructive image of I will use the subsequent chapters to represent fishing, especially, as a way of *life* in the Shetland Islands. I will show how Shetland fishermen animate and resuscitate bodies through metaphor.

Chapter 2: *Background* --- Shetland Fishermen and the European Union

The fishery

Every spring, the waters of the North Sea bloom. With the new availability of light and nutrients that have been accumulating throughout the dark winter, primary producer populations expand in a flurry of photosynthesis and other marine species follow, from tiny herbivorous zooplankton to cod and other large piscivorous fish. This periodic flux of light and nutrients, combined with the relative protection from the deeper waters of the North Atlantic, make fisheries in the North Sea some of the most productive and plentiful in the world.

At its latitude of sixty degrees north, just six degrees south of the Arctic Circle, the Shetland archipelago is the most northerly landmass in the United Kingdom, and it forms the boundary between the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Because of its proximity to both the North Sea and the coastal North Atlantic, the Shetland fisheries are abundant. More fish are caught in the waters around Shetland than anywhere else in the United Kingdom (Napier 2015).

People have been fishing in Shetland since the islands were settled 6,000 years ago. Throughout most of that history, fish were caught by hand in sixareens, rowboats crewed by six men who rowed more than forty miles off shore to access the productive fishing grounds, and later by sail in boats called smacks. In the last 150 years, the Shetland fishing industry has shifted from “a small scale subsistence economy to a large-scale commercial enterprise” (Napier 2015: 9). The abundance of North Sea herring and the technological arrival of, first, steam drifters and, later, purse seiners made Shetland an influential fishery by the end of the nineteenth century. But when fluctuations in the herring population made steady employment difficult,

many fishermen switched to catching whitefish,³ which continued to be abundant in the waters around Shetland throughout the 20th century (Napier 2015: 12-18).

The whitefish crisis and EU response

Then, at the end of the 20th century, fish stocks began collapsing around the North Atlantic. In the 1989, Norway called a moratorium on fishing capline in their waters.⁴ In 1992, Norway declared the moratorium on cod. In the same year, the whitefish fishery around Shetland began to plummet as well. State regulatory agencies needed to reduce fishing effort rapidly, so in 1992 the UK representative for the EU Common Fisheries Policy announced the decommissioning program (OECD 2000: 44). The goal of decommissioning was to use three Multiannual Guidance Programs (MAGPs), between 1993 and 1996, to decrease overall UK fleet tonnage and engine power (boats) by 10.5% and reduce activity (fishing effort) by 8.5% (OECD 2000: 44). This required a dual approach: a reduction of fleet size through a government-funded-buyback-program (decommissioning) and a reduction in fishing quota. In addition, the MAGPs also limited the number of days boats are allowed to be at sea, made new laws governing the transfer of fishing licenses (OECD 2000: 44).

The strategy worked. With the global flux of fish stocks and changes in recruitment in fish populations, it is difficult to point to any single management strategy, definitively, as the cause for ecosystem health. But today, the Shetland whitefish stocks are doing well. In 2016, more fish were landed in Shetland than in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland combined (personal communication, Dr. Ian Napier). Moreover, 23% of the skippers in Scotland whose

³ Whitefish is a term for a number of dimersal fish species, such as sol, halibut, haddock, cod, monkfish, and hake.

⁴ Capline is a small forage fish, like smelt. It is also food for larger fish, such as cod.

boats were destroyed in decommissioning actually returned to fishing when the whitefish stocks rebounded (OECD 44).

Shetland and the European Union

From the Shetland perspective, the whitefish crisis—and its alleviation—was more complicated. The 1970s was a time of dramatic change for Shetland communities. Oil was discovered in the North Sea and a British Petroleum oil terminal was built on Sullom Voe in Shetland. The outer island communities of Burra and Whalsay were connected to the Mainland of Shetland by a bridge and a car ferry respectively, and televisions and telephones both became mainstays in Shetland homes (Byron 1986).

1970s Shetland was shifting topography of connection, travel, and industry, which was only further complicated by the United Kingdom entry into the European Union in 1973. Upon entry, the European Economic Community acquired the UK fisheries and UK fishermen became subject to the EU Common Fisheries Policy. When the United Nations Law of the Sea III (UNCLOS III) created and formally adopted exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in 1982, the UK retained sovereignty in its twelve-mile near shore waters, but any European vessel was allowed to fish within the 200-mile European EEZ (UNCLOS 1982: part V, article 55). Large boats from around the EU began to fish in the productive waters around Shetland, and it was difficult for Shetland fishermen to compete.

Recognizing in 1983 that this increased competition was endangering the North Sea and North Atlantic fishery, the EU created two regulations to further protect EU coastal fisheries: the first established “a general regime for conservation and management of fishery resources” in the form of total allowable catch limits (TACs) and quotas for fishermen; the second established

more specific “technical conservation measures” to limit fishing effort, such as regulating the mesh size of fishing nets and limiting the number of fishermen’s days at sea (Penas Lado 2016). These regulations were good for the fishery, but they further limited Shetland fishermen’s ability to compete in the former UK waters that were now open to the EU fleet. The fishermen I spoke with cited entry into the EU and the subsequent 1983 regulations as the beginning of the end for their way of life. With restrictive quotas and the construction of the Sullom Voe oil terminal, many fishermen left the fishing industry to become oilmen. The number of fishing boats in Shetland harbors shrunk.

When the fishery collapsed in 1992, fishermen blamed the EU for allowing large foreign ships into the waters around the UK and then limiting the ability of UK fishermen to compete. Decommissioning was the final straw. Shetland fishermen recognize that it saved the fishery. Many fishermen I spoke with told me that something had to be done, that the MAGPs likely helped save the fish stocks. But from the perspective of Shetland fishermen, their communities became a casualty of a larger bureaucratic problem made by people who, according to Shetland fishermen, did not consider the lives of UK fishermen, especially fishermen in Shetland.

Fishing in Shetland today

Today, there are five fishing communities left in Shetland: the town of Scalloway, the islands of Whalsay and Burra and Out Skerries, and, to some extent, the capital town of Lerwick. It was in those islands and towns that I conducted my research in the spring and summer of 2016. Each had boats from the three sectors of the Shetland fishing industry: inshore shellfish, near-shore whitefish, and deep water pelagic.

While fishing communities and fleet sizes are diminishing, fishing still constitutes a third of Shetland’s annual income, more than oil, gas, agriculture, tourism and creative industries

combined (Collins 2015: 5). This diminishment in boats and expansion of industry is likely because many countries land fish in Shetland, but the large boats that are fishing in the North Sea are more difficult for family-based crews to afford in Shetland.⁵ It is likely that the fisheries revenue from Shetland fisheries has more to do with the volume of fish—from Shetland boats, UK boats, and EU boats—that are landed and transported from the fish markets in Lerwick and Scalloway than jobs on the water for Shetland fishermen.

When I was in Shetland, Shetland fishermen were cautiously hopeful. The fishery was doing well, the cod stock had tripled in the last decade, and a new whitefish boat manned by young men from Whalsay had just entered the Shetland fleet. This hopefulness was shadowed, however, by the prospect of a revised Common Fisheries Policy, which contains more regulations that affect Shetland fishermen, but do not consider their input.

National identity

In Shetland, national identity is a complicated and contested question. As a borderland, and as a collection of islands, the landmass of Shetland is defined by its physical remoteness, and remoteness is relational. In discussing the periphery one must also define the center, and the choice of geopolitical center is particularly contested in Shetland. Shetland is a Scottish archipelago. Scotland is a country that covers one third of the island of Great Britain. Great Britain and Northern Ireland are both under the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. Because of this multinational hierarchy, Shetland's geopolitical "center" is contextual. In some cases it is Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. In others it is London, the capital of the United Kingdom. By plane, London is closer to the Mediterranean Sea than it is the Shetland Islands.

⁵ Unlike many countries around the EU, where companies own many boats and pay fishermen to fish, most Shetland fishermen are still the owners and the operators of their boats.

Historically, Vikings invaded the Islands in the 9th century and established a Norse earldom. The Islands were under Norwegian rule until 1469, when the king of Norway, Christian I, ceded the Islands to Scotland as a security against the payment of his daughter's dowry. Shetland became part of Scotland, but slowly and sometimes painfully. Shetland retained its Scandinavian culture, language, and laws until 1611 when the Privy Council of Scotland decreed that Shetland must be subject to Scottish Laws. This began a period of rapid top-down Scottishization wherein the Scottish language (Scots) became the official language of the church, the courts, and the education system. Many of the Scots in Shetland during this time were feudal landowners who treated their Shetland tenants poorly. In the 1820s, Scottish lairds removed Shetland tenant farmers from rich soil and forced them to relocate their crofts to poorer land. Common lands that had fed centuries of Shetland families were plowed for the crops of private Scottish landowners. The Scottish lairds ruled Shetland in semi-serfdoms until the very end of the 19th century. Before the feudal rule was lifted, over a quarter of Shetland's population had left for New Zealand, America, and Canada.

Rather than lose their Norse linguistic heritage when the Scottish arrived, Shetlanders created a third, hybridized language that combined their native language, Norn, with the language of their colonizers, Scots. In 1928, Faroese linguist, Jakob Jakobson, created a dictionary of Norn and its derivative languages. He provided a sentence from Shetland folklore: "Mi midder kaller o me." In Norn, the same phrase is written: "Min móðir kaller á mik." In English it means "My mother calls on me" (Jakobson 1928 *as cited in* Graham 1984). To this day, the Shetland language contains words from Old Norse and Norn as well as lowland Scots and English (Graham 1984). Shetland language, therefore, embodies the history of conquest in the Shetland Islands.

Shetland, geographically closer to the historic homeland of Norway than the more recent nation of Scotland, still maintains elements of Scandinavian traditions, such as celebrating the Viking fire ritual, Up Helly Aa, and Norwegian Constitution Day. Many Shetlanders have traditionally Scandinavian last names and the Shetland language is a composite of Scots, English, and Norn. Many of the fishermen I spoke with were proud of their “Viking blood,” metaphorically substantiating their historic Scandinavian association with symbols of kinship and genetics.

The center-periphery relationship between “nation” and Shetland is further complicated by the addition of the European Union. Though the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union on June 23rd, 2016, the United Kingdom will remain within the Europe until the British parliament formally triggers the split by invoking Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. Brussels, the seat of the European Union, is therefore the third and most removed geopolitical “center” for people in Shetland until the split between Europe and the United Kingdom is finalized. For fishing communities, much of the legislation that affects their lives happens in Brussels.

Shetland has had an opportunity to assert its connection to wider international structures twice in the last five years. In 2014, the Scottish Independence Referendum asked Scottish voters whether Scotland should be an independent country rather than connected to the United Kingdom. In 2016, the European Union Referendum asked United Kingdom voters whether Britain should leave the European Union or remain within it. In both cases, Shetland as a whole voted to remain connected to the wider international superstructures that support its infrastructure, education, tourism, and government agencies with funds. Of the Scottish council areas that voted in the Scottish Independence Referendum, Shetland was the fourth highest vote to

remain (BBC.com). Of the council areas that voted in the European Union Referendum, Shetland voted 56.5% to remain (BBC.com). Interestingly, those results were not represented in my interviews with Shetland fishermen.

I was in Shetland conducting interviews with fishermen and fishing community members in the weeks immediately before and after what has come to be known as “Brexit”, or the British exit from the European Union. Most of the fishermen I interviewed turned the conversation, almost invariably, to the EU Referendum and the Common Fisheries Policy, and many extolled the virtues of Brexit as the last hope for the British fishing fleet. I asked each fisherman whether he felt Scottish, and many fishermen replied that they did not. Sidney told me that even though Scotland was on his EU issued passport, he does not feel Scottish, that he is a Shetlander “first and foremost.” Anthony replied similarly. When I asked him why he did not feel Scottish, he said, “I suppose Shetland people are just different. We’re more reserved. If you go to Scotland they’re more forward. Shetland people tend to be more humble. I suppose we’re just different. We were more connected to Norway and Faroe.” Duncan, too, thought that people in Shetland were different from the people on the mainland of Scotland. He said, “I think Shetland people are humble. If you go to the mainland, I wouldn’t say that they are so humble. That’s maybe how I would describe a Shetland person; we’re humble and maybe we appreciate what we have.”

There were, of course, Shetland fishermen who told me that they feel Scottish and opposed Brexit. But in each interview with a “Remain” fisherman or fishing community member, the individual who held those views asked me to keep their identities anonymous, for he or she feared the disapproval of fellow community members. As one fishermen said, “I do feel Scottish. I don’t think Scotland should separate from the UK, and I don’t think we should

separate from Europe. But I really don't want to get political. I don't want to talk about that. Some people get very upset about that.”

Most of the fishermen I spoke with in Shetland did not support the national politics represented by the Shetland majority in the 2015 Scottish Referendum or the 2017 European Referendum, which suggests that the majority of Shetland fishermen are occupying a different lived experience, a different relationship with national and international politics, than their non-fishing neighbors.

“When we call it ‘our’ landscape, we mean it as a physical and intellectual reality.
There is nothing chosen about it.”

-James Rebanks, *A Shepherd's Life* 2015

Chapter 3: *Kinship and Nationalism* --- Islands within Islands

In a sense, national identity in Shetland is situational. Most of the fishermen I spoke with chose to identify with Great Britain, but not Scotland or the EU. People who were not associated with the fishing industry associated with both Scotland and the EU. The difference, I argue, rests in the symbolic boundaries that delineate reality and define belonging in fishing communities but not in the wider population of Shetland. As a profound form of multigenerational metaphorically embodied belonging, family is one of the most coercive ways that bodies are “placed” in society. Fishing is a family business in Shetland, passed from father to son and uncle to nephew, and fishing communities are largely composed of fishing families.

In fishing communities, then, the ties between work, community, and family are powerfully enmeshed. As a form of anthropological research, kinship studies have historically addressed forms of relatedness that are the result of birth and the law. In most Western societies, like Shetland, these relationships are generally symbolically substantiated in “blood,” which implies that the quality and intimacy of familial relationships is determined by biology. For fishing communities, family membership and work aboard boats *seems* like both a physical and an intellectual reality.

This reification of kinship and belonging diminishes the many forms of interconnected and mutually constituted belonging that occurs between people who are not genetically related but call each other family. In his 1968 monograph, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*,

David Schneider argues that blood as substance is quite distinct from “the kind of relationship or code for conduct which persons who share substance, blood, are supposed to have” (Schneider 1968: 91). In distinguishing between relationship *as substance* (blood) and relationship as *code for conduct*, Schneider moves kinship out of the sphere of biological determination and into the realm of culture. He uses this to describe the American category of “in laws,” people who are related to ego by law but whose relationship with ego is *as if* they were related “by blood.” For Schneider, this kind of fictive kinship extended to people related by “law” but not by “blood” suggests that all kinship relationships are based on blood as a metaphor of familial codes for conduct rather than a deterministic substance.

Marshall Sahlins goes farther than Schneider to dereify kinship. In his monograph, *What Kinship Is—And Is Not*, Sahlins writes that “kinship categories are not representations or metaphorical extensions of birth relations; if anything, birth is a metaphor of kinship relations” (Sahlins 2013: i). Sahlins argues that kinship is a quality applied to relationships between people who are intrinsic to one another’s existence, who create “intersubjective belonging” for one another. In the American context, kinfolk often also share lived experiences: the people who call ego kin also feel her suffering and her successes. For Sahlins, this symbolically formulated and culturally variable set of relationships in which people “symbolically live each other’s lives and die each other’s deaths” more accurately belongs in the cultural realms of magic and sorcery than in that of biology (i).

If kin are people who create intersubjective belonging, then a loss of kin constitutes a loss of belonging. “Kinship,” therefore, entails a kind of *personal* identity formation and maintenance that is predicated upon a network of intersubjective belonging. For a portion of my research in Shetland during the summer of 2016, I lived with a fisherman’s family on the island of Whalsay,

home of many successful Shetland pelagic and whitefish boats. On my first day there, the family took me on a drive across the island. They pointed out the houses of their cousins, second cousins, aunts, grandparents, and siblings. They showed me the hills where they played as children and pointed to the foundation of their first tiny house, where their first children were born. For that family, a drive across the island was a drive through time; it was evidence—physically inscribed upon the land—of their family history and part in the larger Whalsay community.⁶

On Whalsay, family, community, and the island itself connect at multiple nodes. They intertwine and reinforce each other to form a complex matrix of belonging. Residents refer to this sense of belonging as “*bein’ fae Whalsa*”,⁷ or “*bein’ Whalsa.*”⁸ In describing themselves by naming a place, people in Whalsay substantiate their own community interconnectedness *and* their own personal identities with the physicality of the land. In this way, the island itself becomes a metaphor for the community, the community a metaphor for the island.⁹

The interweaving of family and community means that the cultural acts—the codes for conduct—that constitute family intersubjective belonging are also connected with community intersubjective belonging. Because this family and community belonging is described by belonging to the land—to the island of Whalsay—the land, like blood, becomes the substantiation for community connectedness. As Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern write

⁶ I published a previous version of this paragraph in the Autumn 2016 issue of Shetland’s *60° North Magazine*

⁷ “Being from Whalsay”

⁸ “Being Whalsay”

⁹ Concepts of “belonging” generally have romanticized positive overtones for English speaking cultures (MacIntyre 1995: 30, Edwards and Strathern 2000: 152). Their reverse, exclusion, has negative overtones, and aligns individuals who are either marked by the community or have marked themselves as “excluded” with Mary Douglas’s concept of pollution: “matter out of place” (Douglas 1970). In discussions of belonging and exclusion, anthropologists therefore risk falsely characterizing communities at the poles of amity and conflict, both of which romanticize and misrepresent rural life. But “belonging” has positive overtones for people in Whalsay, too. In our drive across the island, the family I stayed with chose to represent their island to me in a way that emphasized belonging. The Whalsay they described has a complex matrix of family, community, and place. Perhaps they were showing me the island as they want to see it for themselves.

in “Including our Own,” an article about belonging and kinship in a rural English town, people from Whalsay “construct chains of association that enlarge their own sense of belonging to families by belonging to a place” (Edwards and Strathern 2000: 151).

The interconnectedness of kin, community, and land further emphasizes the roles that intersubjectivity and imagination play in connecting people and place to create a sense of belonging. For this reason, in his monograph, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that discussions of nations, large-scale communities, also belong in the same analytical sphere as kinship (Anderson 1991: 5). On the Shetland Islands, like most Western cultures, discussions of both kin and the nation share “blood” and “land” as seemingly innate representations of belonging (*our blood, our land*).

Because nationalism metaphors draw upon—and are supported by—kinship metaphors, the study of how families are metaphorically produced is crucial to the study of how the nation is metaphorically produced. At its most fundamental dimension, kinship is an organized way to demarcate “insiders” and “outsiders,” kin—and their metaphorical equivalents—being the closest “insiders” of all. As Anthony P. Cohen writes in *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, “When the inhabitants of a Shetland island talk of ‘their community’, they refer to an entity, a reality, invested with all the sentiment attached to kinship” (Cohen 1985: 13). Like nationalism, kinship is composed of imagined boundaries represented through a system of symbols that one group of people deploys to distinguish itself from another group of people.

Often these delineations of community are not constituted physical landmarks, like rivers, mountains, or seas. Rather, they are imagined lines of community allegiance, variously drawn up by national governments or members of small island communities, which distinguish one group from another. Benedict Anderson (1983) and Anthony P. Cohen (1985) argue that the borders

drawn by natural landmarks might be easier to see and harder to cross, but the cultural significance of their physical forms is socially constructed. They are just as symbolically maintained as those invisible lines of kinship and relatedness. The question of national identity, like the question of kinship, is therefore a question of borders: where they are, whom they do and do not include, the symbols of which they consist, and the ways in which those symbolic systems are maintained.

Like Schneider's codes for conduct that delineate who is and who is not in a given kin-group, the boundaries that divide the various forms of place-based belonging are symbolically constructed and symbolically maintained. As Anthony P. Cohen writes in his 1985 monograph, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, "The sea may divide one island from another, just as the parish border might mark the beginning and end of a settlement. But these boundaries are symbolic receptacles filled with the meanings that members impute to and perceive in them" (Cohen 1985: 19). While the sea is a physical barrier that separates island from mainland, or one island from another, it is a socio-cultural barrier, a delineation of community, only insofar as it is a receptacle of symbolic distinctiveness for the communities on either side of it. National identity, Cohen writes, is not merely the comparison of Scottishness and Britishness, it is Scottishness refracted through the prism of personal experience (Cohen 1985: 14-15).

Many Shetlanders I spoke with—fishermen and non-fishermen—felt they had more in common with residents of the Faeroe Islands, the Orkney Islands, the Outer Hebrides, and the Irish Isles, than they did with people from the mainland of Scotland. The ease with which people can be transported to new places—in a plane or through the portals of social media—allow these communities to be more interconnected than ever. People from islands all over the world are

more able to recognize the similarities and differences of their respective experiences in a way that has produced the identity of being “an islander.”

One of the most powerful examples of the global “islander” identity is represented in the Island Games, a biannual competition of island communities from “Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, the North Atlantic to the Caribbean” (www.iiga.org). As the Games’ organizers write on their website, island pride and interisland camaraderie is one of the goals of the International Island Games Association:

There’s just something about islanders. Growing up in small communities surrounded and shaped by the sea instills in us an independent spirit, a fierce pride in our culture and heritage — perhaps even a touch of stubbornness. It’s what gives Games competitors the will and determination to train hard, defy the odds and reach for gold. Thanks to the Island Games, athletes no longer have to look to the mainland to compete at international level—they have the chance to represent their own community and raise the profile of even the smallest island (www.iiga.org).

The use of plural personal pronouns suggests that the International Island Games Association is referring to a global community of islanders that have iterations of a single experience, namely the challenges of living as a rural periphery separated, culturally and physically, from a mainland.

This sentiment aligns with conversations I had with people in Shetland about their experiences in other island communities. Sidney Sinclair, a retired fisherman and former member of the Shetland football team, told me about his experience in the Faeroe Island Games:

Staying in Faroe, we stayed in people’s houses and you were just made to feel at home... That’s one thing that I noticed when I was in Faeroe, we were on different decks, different boats, and I would go along dese house where I knew some of the boys were staying. They would open da door and say, ‘Come and set de in.’ ‘Come and set de in’ means come in and sit down. That’s just the same as we’d say it at home in Shetland.

Sidney went on to describe the ways he felt at home in the landscape, beside the sea, and among the families in Faeroe because all of it reminded him of his life in Shetland. The Island Games, and the global island communication that they represent, has allowed members of island communities to imagine iterations of home in the new islands that they encounter through the portals of media and the unifying experience of sport.

In his 1996 monograph, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Appaduri discusses the impact that technology has had on the “prisms of personal experience.” According to him, in the world of media in particular there have emerged of new landscapes of consciousness, new transregional and transnational communities that are shaped by the “global cultural flows” of people, media, technology, money, and ideas (Appaduri 1996).

For Appaduri, Shetland’s geographical remoteness from the centers of power (Edinburgh, London, and Brussels) does not automatically equate to political or cultural remoteness. Instead, remoteness is imagined. He writes that “...the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media” (Appaduri 1996: 54). Appaduri’s global cultural flows open up a space to reconceive community as truly imagined, where people who happen to live in physically adjacent houses might occupy entirely different socially constructed and symbolically maintained realities.

In the same way that media have enabled islands to create an international community and sense of shared “islander” experience, fishing communities have also created an international community by relating to each other and helping each other online. In the same way that the Island Games provides Shetland with an international community of islanders, the UK-wide fishermen’s organization, *Fishing For Leave*, provides Shetland fishermen with a polylocal

community of fishermen, people who reflect Shetland fishermen's struggles and experiences more than even adjacent non-fishing communities in Shetland.

Each of the United Kingdom's constituent countries (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) have twelve-miles of peripheral national waters, which are fished for the most part by small-scale shell-fishermen and white fish trawlers. However, beyond the twelve-mile limit, the United Kingdom's waters are interconnected with a 200-mile exclusive economic zone, which is controlled by the European Union Common Fisheries Policy. The UK fishermen in those waters are in near-constant communication over Facebook Messenger, cell phone calls, text messages, and radio. As pelagic skipper, George William Anderson, told me:

Oh the boys and me we talk all the time, we text all the time, we're on Facebook and all that media. We meet up for a chat. It's just passing on information. Some of the boys are older than me and some of them are younger than me. That communication has to go on. It's the only way you can work. I have friends in Ireland, Scotland, England, and Norway that I can speak to. If you give information, you get good information back... when you're out at sea and you're fishing, if the telephone doesn't ring, you know you're in the wrong place. If the telephone rings you know you're in the right place because everyone wants to know where you're at and what you're catching.

The use of media that George William describes exemplifies the ways in which Appaduri's *mediascapes* and global cultural flows are redefining the ways fishermen do their jobs, structure their reference groups, and create community.

In Shetland, the *Fishing for Leave* campaign emphasized fishermen's British identity by focusing on the United Kingdom's 200-mile territorial waters where many fishermen from across the UK collaborate as a fish-finding, fish-dependent community. In the context of Brexit and the Common Fisheries Policy, this emphasis of Britishness is not in contrast with fishermen's simultaneous evoking of their Scandinavian identity. Many Shetland fishermen hoped that after Brexit, the UK fishing industry would become more like the Norwegian fishing industry. *Fishing*

For Leave, and the *mediascape* it created, allowed Shetland fishermen to express their simultaneously felt national ties to the United Kingdom and to Norway without conflict. This network of fishing communities in the UK and Scandinavia create the kind of polylocal belonging that Appaduri writes is characteristic of the modern world. For fishermen, social media enables a rhizomal form of community belonging—*islands within islands*—of people that depend upon fish to survive.

Da Nort

*I leak da Nort, fir A'm grippit dis laand,
Hit's bred i my bane, true and deep;
Da sights an da soonds, da seas an da dance,
Dey'll be dere, aa aroond whaar I sleep.*

The North

*I like the North, for I'm gripped by this land,
It's bred in my bone, true and deep;
The sights and the sounds, the seas and the dance.
They'll be there, all around where I sleep.*

-Mary Helen Odie¹⁰

Chapter 4: Kinship and Bodies --- Animacy

It may seem ironic that the full title of the pro-Brexit UK fishermen's organization is *Fishing for Leave: Save Brittan's Fish*. Fishermen do not "save" fish; they catch fish and kill fish so that we can eat fish. The symbol of *Fishing for Leave* is similarly perplexing. It is an image of Britannia, the Athena-like goddess of Great Britain, transfigured into a codfish (Figure 5). In this British warrior fish, *Fishing for Leave* is mobilizing, and militarizing, national symbology on behalf of UK fishermen. Unlike the dead fish in the *Losing Nemo* poster (figure 4), this codfish is very much alive, and it is fighting for fishermen to continue fishing in their national waters.

The *Fishing for Leave* codfish is a perversion of international campaigns that associate fishermen with the death of marine life. If *Fishing for Leave* is deploying the fish as a warrior, then we must ask whom it is defending. Because *Fishing for Leave* is a fishermen's organization, it seems clear that the warrior fish would be defending fishermen. However the poster tells us that the warrior fish is fighting for Britain's fish. As fishermen have been represented in global media, these two campaigns seem mutually exclusive; fishermen are shown as war-like agents of ecosystem death. However, with image of the warrior codfish, *Fishing for Leave* is suggesting that the fish and the fishermen are on the same side. If, as Judith Butler writes, recognizing the threat of death is a crucial step in understanding a body as vulnerable and interdependent, then this warrior fish is symbolically tying the life of fishermen to the life—and death—of the fish.

¹⁰ Translation by Katherine McNally

Through metaphor, Shetland fishermen tie their own bodies and identities to the bodies of fish and the chemical properties of the sea.



Figure 5. Classical image of Britannia paired with the symbol for “Fishing For Leave” the pro-Brexit fishermen’s organization: Britannia embodied in a codfish.

Fishing-based community structures shape fishermen’s physical and historical conceptions of self. When I asked fishermen in Shetland why they decided to fish, most responded in the same way as Arthur from Scalloway: “Fishing is in my blood, and it goes back a long way. If you’re from a fishing family, fishing is ingrained.” Similarly, Jimmy from Whalsay said, “Fishing is just in the blood here. There’s *saat idda blød*. I never wanted to do anything else. I’d never leave. This is my home.” As Simon Collins, executive office of the Shetland Fisherman’s Association, told me, “Fishing is deep in them and in their families. It’s definitely still a business, but it’s also their way of life. [Shetland fishermen] have a different perspective on the industry. As they say, salt is in their blood.”

This mixing of the salt of the ocean with genetics and blood is a biologization of culture that reifies fishing identity by conflating cultural traits with fixed biological reality. It suggests a blending of work, family, and environment as if all are contained in the DNA of fishermen. These biogenetic metaphors are employed to illustrate the transfiguring effect that the ocean has on bodies and on identity. When I asked Jamie, a twenty-one year old fisherman from Whalsay, what he does in his free time, he told me that when he and his friends get home from a week at sea, they often race sailboats in the Whalsay harbor or take small boats out for the day to leisure fish near the shore. Sidney of Scalloway also told me about fishermen who decide to fish in their free time. He said, “They just jump in another boat, a small boat, and fish in the time off. There’s nearly a fin on their back. Understand? It’s just in their DNA. They *have* to be on the sea.” Through fishing, fishermen are also metaphorically transfigured by the ocean. The sea is inscribed into their very genetics and makes fishermen themselves more fish-like with fins and gills. The fish and the sea embody their sense of self-worth, success, and identity.

In his essay, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States,” Clifford Geertz refers to symbolic systems based on blood, birth, and bodies as “primordial” attachments (Geertz 1973: 259). He writes that while the meanings of these primordial symbols clearly differ from one culture to another, they always “seem to flow from a sense of natural” (Geertz 1973: 259). According to Edward Shils, these reified, blood-based symbol systems are especially coercive because they biologize cultural qualities (Shils 1957: 142). They make the fusing of community life and personal identity with work and the environment biologically substantiated and therefore seemingly indisputable.

Forms of belonging and community that are substantiated in biogenetic metaphors are therefore particularly powerful because they imply innate qualities. When they are employed in

the context of community and nationalism, they work to elevate the powerful connection of kin to the level of the community and the nation. Unlike the aesthetic animalization of fishermen in popular culture that removes agency from fishermen and reduces them to impulse and greed, this biogenetic blending of human and animal bodies works on similar levels of kin-based, community-based, and national belonging. It suggests that the bodies of fishermen belong in the sea, and are as adapted to life in the water as a fish is. It suggests that without fish, fishermen could fully realize themselves.

Because of the expectations articulated through metaphor, there are some young men who feel trapped by the coercive nature of fishing-dependent family and community membership. There are some men who do not like to fish and do not want to fish, but feel forced into the profession even though they have other economic opportunities. I spoke to one young man from Whalsay who comes from a family of fishermen. He is on the Whalsay football team, but he feels like his membership in his family, in the Whalsay community, and on the Whalsay football team is contingent upon being a fisherman. He gets debilitating seasick and he does not enjoy the long days of physical labor, but he makes good money so he continues to do it to support his children and remain part of the community and the team. For him “belonging” in Whalsay was contingent upon being a fisherman. If he had chosen not to fish, he would have been acting against his own family and his metaphorically inscribed body. As Richard Handler writes, these nature-based metaphors imply “a sense of wholeness and boundedness” of family and community collectivity tied to the environment wherein blood is the “natural essence of a greater whole” (Handler 1988: 40). In this way, fishermen are also describing their fictive kinship with other fishermen who share *saat idda blød*.



In this discussion of kinship, family, and cultural ideologies of the body, I am somewhat conspicuously speaking of the male body. From a reductionist standpoint, the shore divides the traditional realms of work and gender; traditionally, Shetland women worked on the croft, knit, and raised children, and men worked at sea for family income. Jane Nadel-Klein and Dona Lee Davis refer to this trope as the “working / weeping” dichotomy in reference to the poem, “Three Fishers,” by Charles Kingsley, in which fishermen’s wives are doomed to wait at home and weep while the fishermen work and drown in the ocean. As Nadel-Klein and Davis write, this popularized image of women in fishing communities diminishes “the number of highly specialized roles [women] play in production and domestic management, as well as linking fishing communities to the outside world” (Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988: 7).

According to Shetland fishermen and members of fishing communities, women do everything in the fishing industry other than work on the water. From organizing finances, communicating with distributors and government representatives, to baiting lines, raising children, and working as gutters in island fish factories, women and the work they do are absolutely crucial to both the production *and* the reproduction of the Shetland fishing industry.

In the summer of 2016, there were no female fishermen in Shetland, and according to Shetland skippers, there are few women, if any, working on the water in the whole of the British fishing fleet. In Shetland, the element of fishing work that happens on the water is exclusively work done by male bodies, but it would be a mistake to suggest that women, and the work that they do, are not crucial to the success of the fishing industry. Men are, traditionally, the community members that work *on the water*. However, as Jane Nadel-Klein and Donna Lee Davis writes, that does not mean that male bodies are the only ones that work in the fishing *industry*.

While “professional” fisherman is a role held only by men, that does not mean that the ocean is a *restrictively* male sphere. Female children and family members often help men on “leisure” fishing trips, catching fish for supper but not for income, and near shore shellfishermen sometimes ask female family members to help with the catch. All of the marine biologists that I met at the North Atlantic Fisheries College were women, and each of them had been to sea with male fishing crews to conduct research. I also heard about women in Shetland who joined the merchant navy and trained to be cadets and deck officers. In the fishing industry, however, women are welcome to visit, help, and learn on the water, but they are not welcome to stay or to lead. In a sense they are always interlopers on fishing boats, made welcome only through male permission. Women are often permitted, but their bodies are matter out of place and not subject to the transformative effects of the sea (Douglas 1966).

When I asked Shetland fishermen why this gendered division of labor spheres exists, all were perplexed. I asked John from Out Skerries why women do not fish in Shetland. He replied, “I mean, I’ve seen women at sea... but just sometimes on those small boats. They’re capable and they enjoy it, but I don’t know why there’s not any fishermen, women fishermen I mean. It’s something I’ve actually never thought about. I really don’t know.” I spoke with another fisherman (who asked not to be identified) about whether he would want his children to enter the fishing industry. He replied that he absolutely would if his child was a boy, but he would not if his child was a girl. I asked why he would not want his daughter to be a fisherman. He replied, “Well, it is a hard life. I wouldn’t want her to go through that, but I would want my son to follow in the footsteps. I’m not really sure how to answer your question. Why would any woman want to go to sea? Why would they?” I responded to his question with another question: “Well, why did you want to go to sea?” He thought for a minute before he responded, “Because I was born

into it,” suggesting that the transfiguring ocean metaphors—“There’s saat idda blød,” “There’s practically a fin on their back,”—are only applied to men.

Anthropological studies of gender have long recapitulated the heteronormative roles of men and women laid out in Western origin myth. Male bodies are generally associated with modes of production and the public sphere—work and professional life—and female bodies are generally associated with modes of reproduction and the private sphere—the family and the home (Rosaldo 1974: 23). It would be easy to reiterate this gendered division of labor in describing Shetland fishing communities; men are fishermen and women are not. However, as post-modern and feminist anthropology has shown, this gendered topos devalues the work of women and reifies the relationship between women and the home. In the Shetland context, the prescription of traditional gender roles also hides the most powerful and culturally salient work of fishing in Shetland: the reproduction of the domestic sphere and the continuation of family.

*O Father, King of earth and sea,
We dedicate this ship to thee.
In faith we send her on her way;
In faith to thee we humbly pray:
O hear from heaven our sailor's cry
And watch and guard her from on high!*

-From *The Navy Hymn*¹¹

Chapter 4: *Kinship and Boats* --- Living Room Fleets

In the houses of Shetland fishermen, models and photographs of family boats line the walls intermingled with pictures of family members. If, as Edwards and Strathern write “persons belong to one another through what belongs to them” (Edwards and Strathern 2000: 153), then boats are profound vessels for and of belonging. Before the 1970s, Shetland fishing boats were funded through networks of community loans, which meant that the entire community had a stake in the boat’s success. Upon entry into the European Union in 1973, and the resulting competition from European, Russian, and Norwegian boats, boats in Shetland got bigger, and communities could not afford to finance them any longer; new fishermen had to mortgage their houses to get loans from the banks. Boats, and the wealth accumulated from their success, began to become more concentrated in the hands of families. As fishing became more mechanized and fewer men were needed to do the same amount of work, fishing jobs became concentrated within families as well. For young people in Shetland who do not have a family connection with a fisherman, it is difficult to get a position on a fishing boat.

In the new landscape of technology and politics, the relationship between boats and belonging has changed connotations. What used to imply community belonging now more accurately implies family belonging. Many of the crewmembers on Shetland fishing boats are related “by blood.” On the *Adenia*, for example, the engineer and the cook are brothers and their

¹¹ Verse date and author unknown

father is the skipper. But, according to the skipper, the other crewmembers that are not biologically related are part of the “family” as well. Though only some of the crewmembers are “biologically” related, all of the crew is considered “part of the (crew) family.” One meaning of the phrase, “The boat is my family,” is therefore that boats represent constructed families that enact symbolic bonds of kinship and relatedness.

These crew families are ritually created and maintained. Traditionally, male children are increasingly exposed to the fishing profession through experiences on the water. First, older male family members teach male children to maneuver small boats close to shore and take them on their first fishing trip around the age of ten. Then, when a young man joins a fishing crew, he generally begins as the cook, often enduring the disorienting and debilitating seasickness of his first trips at sea as he cooks three meals a day for the rest of the crew. When the skipper feels that the young man has learned, by cooking through sickness, how to work on the boat and be a member of the crew, then the job of cook is often taken over by an older crew member who does not experience seasickness and cannot lift heavy gear as easily as a young man can.

I spoke with many young men who went through this, and many pointed to it as the experience that taught them how to take care of themselves and take care of others. As the cook, these young men are crucial to the work that is done on the boat, but they simultaneously removed from the rest of the crew working on deck. In addition, they have only recently removed themselves from their previous social state on land. Through this ritual separation, the young men were both culturally disoriented as well as physically disoriented from sickness. In this way, they are the quintessential liminal personae, simultaneously instrumental and structurally invisible. According to Victor Turner, this liminal, interstructural period between social states is the defining characteristic of *rites de passage* (Turner 1967: 93). Here, young men

are transitioning between cultural states *and* physical realities, from being children—of the land and the home—to men—of the sea and the crew.

For Turner (1967) and for Mary Douglas (1966), the young men's physical disorientation and seasickness constitute a kind of pollution, which is a definitive quality of the liminal state (Turner 1967: 97). When the young men become comfortable with their own sickness and with work on the boat, the skipper completes the *rite de passage* by allowing the young men to rise from the state of pollution associated with cooking while sick to the more stable state of deck crew. By completing the rite, the skipper is symbolically cleansing the ritually unclean. As Duncan Cumming from Trondra told me, "I couldna really cook before I went ta sea. I coulna wash my own clothes. My mam had always done that. But when ya hae ta fend for yoursel and for da crew, you're sure ta grow up when you're at sea." For Shetland fishermen, the process of becoming a recognized member of the crew family involves the forms of discomfort and camaraderie that occur on the sea, and with the change in the bodily realities of movement and time that fishermen experience on boats.

This metaphoric extension of kinship is represented by the boat itself, which becomes a symbol for both the "crew family" and for the families of the crewmembers on land. The use of family and blood metaphors to indicate belonging aboard boats suggests that fishing crews take on qualities that are analogous to families on land. According to Schneider:

The biological facts [of families] are transformed by the attribution of meaning into cultural constructs and they then constitute a model of *commitment*, for passionate attachment which is one side of trust, and for the unreasoning and unreasonable set of conditions which alone make "solidarity" really solidary, and make it both enduring and diffuse (Schneider 1968: 117).

Kinship is system of symbols based on the metaphor of genealogy that people employ to explain their relationships with others. The use of kinship terms and biogenetic "blood" metaphors is

especially powerful because they imply an ineffable relationship between people and things that it seems *as if* it were innate. Schneider writes that kinship terms symbolize relationship between people so strong that seems like a fact of nature (Schneider 1968: 116). When Shetland fishermen use biogenetic metaphors and kinship terms to explain their relationship with their crew and with the boat, it implies a bond so potent that it becomes reified, or seemingly genetically inscribed (Berger and Luckman 1966).

While it is common to hear people in Shetland refer to fishing boats by their home harbor (“That’s Whalsay boat” or “That’s a Burra boat”) it is also common to hear people refer to fishermen by the boat they work on, replacing their family name with the name of their boat. In a conversation with the owner of Blydoit’s fish shop in Scalloway, I talked about how I had gone fishing after dinner on Whalsay with a fisherman named Josie and his young niece, Fae.

“Josie Adenia?” He clarified,

“No, his last name is Anderson” I said.

“Yes, but he’s the engineer on the Adenia.”

In her essay, “Exploring Iñupiat relatedness,” Barbara Bodenhorn suggests that labor enacts kinship. She, like Schneider and Sahlins, makes the distinction between *being* biological kin and *acting* like biological kin, and argues that the latter, not the former, is what renders the kinship “real.” It is impossible, to be kin on one’s own, and for Bodenhorn, “the basic idiom with which to talk about daily life revolves around interactions among relatives” to whom you belong and who belong to you (*my friend, my teacher, my colleague*) (Carsten eds. 2000: 136). For Bodenhorn, “belonging” and “kinship” are both performative, but bonds of kinship are primarily defined as those between individuals who *act* as though they are related by blood. Kinship bonds are therefore “renewed and kept viable through a myriad of reciprocities: shared tools, food,

labor, political alliance, ceremonial participation, and simply company” (Carsten eds. 2000: 136).

Boats allow fishing crews to inhabit a formerly inhabitable realm: the cold and often rough waters of the North Sea and North Atlantic. For Shetland fishermen, the boat is a shared living space, like a household, that the fishermen all work to maintain, but it is also more animated. Rather than a detached stage for labor, or even a floating home, Shetland fishermen often describe the boat itself as an actor in the kin-like network of dependency and production on the ocean. As one skipper from Scalloway said of his boat, “I took care of her, so she took care of me.” The female personification of boats in Shetland is consistent across English speaking cultures, but Shetland fishermen go further. In describing their boats sinking, many Shetland fishermen vivify their vessels. Like the engineer in the introduction, they describe the mechanisms of the boats like parts of a body—belly, heart, lungs, blood. As Mark Fullerton from Burra describes it, “When your boat sinks, it’s very sad. It’s like something has died.”

Fishing licenses are generally passed down through families from father to son, or to another male descendant (such as a nephew) who has expressed the most interest in fishing. Boat licenses, then, follow lines of kinship and descent, and boat names often follow boat licenses. In my fieldwork during the spring and summer of 2016, I recorded four naming systems for boats in Shetland fishing communities, three of which are family-based.

The first is maintaining a single name across many generations of crews and boats. In Whalsay, there is a boat called the *Research*. The first *Research* was a sixareen, a six-oared rowboat from the days of the deep water *Haaf* fishery (c.1730-1881). When the *Research* sank, they built a new boat and named it the *Research* as well. The *Research* today, is a pelagic boat that trawls for herring in the North Sea. It is the seventh generation of the *Research*, and

members of its crew are descendants of the original crew on the original *Research*. This method of naming was also represented in the introductory story. The boat that sank was named after the engineer's grandfather's boat as a tribute to his grandfather's memory.

The second family-based naming method is naming a boat after a living person. In these cases, the fishing license owner generally uses the name of female biological relatives, his first-born daughter, his wife, or his sister. Generally, the name of the boat is the female biological relative's first and middle name: the *Anna Marie*, or the *Sarah May*.

The third family-based naming method involves the boat's identification number. All boats registered in Shetland have a Shetland identification number, which is LK—for Lerwick harbor—followed by three numbers. Skippers often choose to keep a family's identification number, or choose an identification number that used to be in their family. Duncan Cumming, for example, works on a boat that still has the identification number that his Grandfather chose for the first family boat.

The fourth naming method is not based on family descent. Rather, it emphasizes *crew* unity and belonging. In this method, all members of the crew who own shares in the boat propose names, and the crew votes as a whole for a name to represent them.

As Pierre Bourdieu writes in "Social Space and Symbolic Power," "the performative power of designation, of naming, brings into existence in an instituted, constituted form (i.e. as a 'corporate body')" (Bourdieu 1989: 23). By naming the boats, fishermen are endowing them with "corporate bodies" and metaphorical personhood. For boats *and* fishermen, boat names enable a mutually constitutive form of identity formation. Names not only incorporate boats into the lineage of fishermen's families, they also make fishing crews into boat families. Boats in

Shetland are therefore powerful multivocal symbols, complex models of and models for family (Geertz 1966).

“The boat is my family.”
-Skipper of the *Adenia*

Chapter 5: *Necropolitics* --- A Funeral of Boats

In Shetland fishing communities, fishermen endow boats with metaphorical personhood. By personifying boats with family names, female pronouns, and human body parts, many fishermen describe their boat as a partner or a family member rather than a tool or a machine. Fishing as a cultural act, then, is deeply concerned with the lives of bodies, not only the real bodies of fish and fishermen but also the imagined bodies of the boats themselves and the people—living and dead—that the boats represent. As states increasingly take control of fisheries in the face of global climate change and resource depletion, they are therefore engaging in a multifaceted biopolitics of both the objectively real and the imaginary.

From a destructive, iconoclastic perspective, it is easy to predicate the biopolitics of the objectively real—the fish and the fishermen—over the biopolitics of the imaginary—the identities and ancestors embodied in a personified fishing boat. As W. J. T. Mitchell writes, “A metaphor is, from the standpoint of logic, a category mistake, and an image is a simulation, an imitation, not the real thing” (Mitchell 2011: xvii). In short, it is easy to point out that boats are not objectively living. However I, like Mitchell, strive instead for an analysis that “recognizes and embraces *both* the unreality of images *and* their operational reality” (Mitchell 2011: xviii). Boats, as symbolic images and as catchments of metaphor, illustrate the ways in which the imagination is “a constitutive core of reality” (Mitchell 2011: xvii).

Boats are not only models of living bodies, vivified through metaphor. They are also models for the living bodies of the fishermen that work aboard them (Geertz 1966). Without fishermen, boats cannot be personified. Without boats, fishermen cannot work on the sea, let

alone enact the kin-based identities that they associate with the sea. In this way, boats and fishermen engage in a kind of mutual identity creation based in work and survival. Neither can live a social life without the other.

If Shetland fishing boats live social lives, then they can also die social deaths. In the rounds of decommissioning, Shetland fishermen felt that they were given the choice between maintaining the economic lives of their “real” family and ending the social life of their boats, symbols that embody not only partnership and kinship but also fishermen’s own distinct sense of self. Though the state presented decommissioning as a choice, fishermen I spoke with felt torn between two forms of death, economic on one hand and social on the other. In informal conversations I had with members of Shetland fishing communities, a number of people recalled watching fishermen cry as those fishermen boarded their boats for the last time. As one woman told me, watching boats leave for decommissioning “felt like a funeral.”

According to Achille Mbembe, states must manifest power through the conspicuous preservation of life and deployment of death in order to exercise sovereignty (Mbembe 2003: 12). According to Mitchell, the state controls and deploys imaginary deaths, or the death of symbols, just as powerfully as, if not more powerfully than, literal death. War is an obvious example of necropolitics and, as Mitchell writes, all wars “deploy images and the destruction of images as attacks on the collective imagination of a population” (Mitchell 2011: 21). In destroying boats, the state destroyed symbolic bodies and the metaphors they contained. In so doing, they inadvertently created a spectacle of death, a symbolic execution. To return to the iconoclastic perspective, it is clear that the bodies of fishermen are still alive after the bodies of their boats are destroyed, but I argue that fishermen perceive their *social* lives to be tied with the social lives of their boats. When the boats metaphorically die, fishermen fear that they will too.

The fishermen's predication of social aliveness on the ability to fish has traces of Marx, who primarily defines what it means to be fully alive through work. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx illustrates the effects of alienation from work in a craftsman/capitalist worker dichotomy. Marx argues that the craftsman has control over the means and the products of production and can therefore practice the creativity that defines human identity and fulfillment. For Marx, this means that craftsman is more *alive* at work than the factory worker because the craftsman "feels at home in his work," or feels that his work is an extension of himself. In contrast, he argues that industrial capitalist modes of production alienate workers from their labor and therefore undermines their humanity:

...In his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home (Marx 1844: 31).

The capitalist worker's labor is instrumentalized and therefore alienates the worker from his sense of self. Marx argues that capitalist modes of production remove the worker's creative consciousness and diminishes his human identity. In Marx's framework, industrialization reduces the laborer to the level of an animal: reactionary existence without agency or consciousness. It removes him of his ability to belong in his own body.

Marx's representation of workers in industrial capitalist systems brings to mind Giorgio Agamben's figure of the *homo sacer*, members of society that have been reduced to "bare life" (Agamben 1998). As João Biehl writes in "Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment," "in the body of the *homo sacer*, political and social forms of life (and thereby intersubjectivity) have entered into a symbiosis with death without it belonging to the world of the deceased" (Biehl 2001: 140). Like Marx's description of the industrial capitalist laborer, the *homo sacer* lives outside the

socio-cultural world of humanity. Like animals, both Marx's industrial laborer and Agamben's *homo sacer* live without the ability to control their worlds. They die without their deaths having any social meaning, because, in living without identity or agency, they are already socially dead.

These conditions of "bare life" or "living death" constitute a form of necropolitics wherein the state dehumanizes people by removing them from the conditions that defined their identities and their agency as human actors. For Marx, Agamben, and Biehl the apparatuses of government create and perpetuate this quality of non-life. According to Foucault, "Modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (Foucault 1980: 143 *as cited in* Biehl 2001: 139).

In order to be fishermen, people need to be able to fish. Within the context of their fishing-based identities, families, and communities, Shetland fishermen who cannot fish cease to be socially alive. When I asked fishermen in Shetland whether they ever considered any other profession, many responded with echoes of Marx and Agamben: "I never considered doing anything else. I would have died in a nine to five," "I wouldn't have survived in an office." While death is a common colloquial metaphor that does not always imply serious risk to identity, fishermen explained the ways in which fishing was connected to their professional identity by describing their influence on boats and within crews: "On my boat, I'm working for my self," "Everyday is different, and I have ta think on my feet to solve problems." According to Marx, the creative agency that many Shetland fishermen associate with their work is exactly what, for him, makes people most "alive" (Marx 1844: 31). For fishermen, the work of fishing is an extension, an expression, and a creation of self. This agency, combined with the powerful connection between fishing crews, families, and communities constitutes a profound and

complex fishing identity. The loss of that identity amounts to a multifaceted form of social death. The lives of fishermen are therefore tied to the lives of boats.

In public executions, the state harnesses the power of images and the ritualistic destruction of images to emphasize its diffuse power. If it is to be meaningful, an execution must be an act of iconoclasm, the mutilation of a symbolic image that is reproduced “in verbal reports and rumors, in the memory of an impression, in photographs that can be propagated indefinitely” (Mitchell 2011: 98). Photographs of the boats destroyed during decommissioning continue to be deployed by UK fishermen, including fishermen in Shetland, to illustrate the pain that the Common Fisheries Policy has caused in Britain’s fishing communities. In their widespread distribution among fishing communities, the images of destroyed boats become corpse-like biopictures, “only an image—a still inanimate, motionless relic of what once was a living form” (Mitchell 2011: 97).

Within the framework of social death and destroyed boats as dead bodies, we can reinterpret the photographs and models of boats in the houses of Shetland fishermen. The photographs of boat “corpses” form ghostly twins, both similar and opposite, of the photographs of “living” boats that line the hallways and living rooms of fishermen’s houses. Against that foil of boat death and destruction, the photographs of intact boats become an especially salient and multi-vocal symbol of life. And yet, for those who understand the importance of boats in Shetland, the photographs of boat destruction almost reanimates the vessels by endowing them with the partially alive taboo qualities of the dead (Mitchell 2011: 97). The images of “dead” boats from decommissioning have therefore initiated the construction of a further image, the image of martyrs dying at the hands of the state.

For those who understand the meaning of boats in Shetland—and in other UK fishing communities, the photographs of “dead” boats signify the hybridized martyrdom of the boats and the fishermen, and create the perfect vehicle for distributable propaganda. The *Fishing For Leave* campaign, reproduced the state “boat execution” in photographs on many of their political pamphlets with the caption “The Results of the EU Common Fisheries Policy” (Figure 6). In this pamphlet, *Fishing for Leave* is not only portraying the EU Common Fisheries Policy as a flawed and poorly implemented set of regulations. They are also deploying the photograph as an image of boat martyrdom that represents the EU Common Fisheries Policy as a bearer of death for all UK fishing communities and a threat to the identity of all UK fishermen.



Figure 6. Image of fishing boat decommissioning in Denmark used in a *Fishing For Leave* campaign pro-Brexit pamphlet.

In Shetland fishing communities, the biopolitics of the objectively real—the fish and the fishermen—is powerfully articulated with the biopolitics of the imaginary—the social lives embodied in fishing boats. For a society to survive, the state may need to work on the coercive and definitively destructive level of necropolitics. In the example of the 1990s UK whitefish crisis, the fishery would likely have collapsed without the rapid intervention of the state.

Unfortunately, that intervention entailed the destruction of powerful symbols for UK fishing communities, people who already had a longstanding distrust of the EU regulations. In destroying fishing boats, the EU Common Fisheries Policy inadvertently precipitated an iconic event, an image of death that transformed boats-as-social-bodies to boats-as-martyrs. The photographs of the destruction had profound political ramifications for the relationship between EU governmental bodies and UK fishing communities.

“The frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated. They themselves are operations of power.”

-Judith Butler, Frames of War: When is Life Grievable (2001: i)

Conclusion --- Hybrid bodies and political representation

Understanding fishing as a “way of life” for fishing communities and simultaneously recognizing the need to reduce global fishing effort requires holding two realities simultaneously and creating sense of them in relation to one another. Like metaphor, fisheries anthropology requires the collision of conceptual truths and the challenging the conceptual ordering of “things.” If there were a simple answer for which truth to predicate over the other, a universally beneficial way for policy makers to “act,” then there would be no conflict between EU officials and Shetland fishermen. It is not my goal in this thesis to support one form of ecosystem management over another.

Rather, I have sought to render the lives of Shetland fishermen apprehendable to a wider audience, to engage fruitfully with fishermen’s own conceptions of self and life in contrast to the recognizable trope of commercial fishermen as agents of destruction (Butler 2009). I have shown that fishermen described their own sense of belonging in terms of both human and non-human bodies. For them, community, crews, and boats, are metaphorically connected to family and family members. Fundamentally, I have sought to reinvolve the human body in the political discussions of fisheries management.

Without fish and boats, people cannot be fishermen. Fishermen are hybrid forms, mutually constituted by machines, by animals, and by humans. In metaphorically intertwining their own bodies and survival with the bodies and survival of both fish and boats, Shetland fishermen construct forms of belonging that powerfully question the hierarchies of nature,

humans, and machines. Fishermen cannot fish without boats, but neither can boats fish without fishermen. Their identities as social beings depend upon each other.

In fisheries economics, boats are discussed economic in units of fishing “effort,” which describes the boat’s physical qualities and technological ability to catch fish (size, speed, fish finding devices). In this light, destroying boats is a rational means of rapidly reducing fishing fleet capacity and taking pressure off an at-risk ecosystem. However, when boats are seen as bodies—human bodies—then the destruction of boats becomes a necropolitical act; it becomes synonymous with the destruction of fishermen.



To reground my discussion in the realm of actionable response, I will describe an experience I had on the island of Whalsay. I had just finished interviewing a retired skipper, when his wife, Sarah, entered with a box of family photographs. Many of them were wedding photographs. Almost all of the photographs of the family as a whole, bride and groom at the center, were taken in front of their family boat, as if it were a particularly tall family member asked to stand in the back. In addition to the photographs, Sarah took out a letter she had written about ten years ago. It was a letter to a government representative that she had never sent, in part because she did not know to whom she should address it. I have transcribed it, and I share it here with her permission.

Sarah’s Letter

I am a 49 year old fisherman’s wife, mother, carer in the community, and a housewife. I have lived all my life on the beautiful remote island of Whalsay in the Shetland Islands. My way of life is a far cry from your professional status. But what we may have in common is that I want to see the industry, in which I have grown up and am extremely proud to have been a part of,

survive and be allowed to continue as our main means of income. Your part in this is an extremely important one. We need your help.

You need to send people to our shores to experience the reality of the situation. That would mean going out to sea on the fishing vessels and seeing how they fish. A skipper leaving port is not only concerned as to where to go to catch the fish, he has his crew's lives in his hands. The crew must also be dedicated. They must work like a team and act like a family.

This confusion could be dealt with much easier if you would communicate with the people in the heart of this industry. I have little faith in how far up the ladder my letter will travel, but I would very much appreciate an answer from someone in a high rank who would find the time to take a genuine interest and try to help us, who will work with us not against us. This means the difference in our community in Shetland, Orkney, the Eastern Isles, Ireland, and the North East Coast of Scotland surviving as communities.

Sarah's request that government officials visit the shores of Whalsay is the simplest way to reintegrate the human body into political discourse. Through conversation, officials might be able understand what fishermen mean when they say that fishing is their "way of life" and engage more fruitfully with the community-level ramifications of fisheries policy. In meeting the officials that represent them, fishermen might come to feel more involved in the otherwise detached and impersonal processes that affect their future, their community identity, and their forms of embodied belonging. Through meaningful interactions, and mutual efforts to listen, fishermen and government officials can humanize each other.

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