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Volume 45, 2018 - Issue 1

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Blue growth: savior or ocean grabbing?

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Pages 130-149 | Published online: 30 Oct 2017

Cite this article | https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1377186 | Check for updates

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Abstract

While the global rush to control land resources is well established, ‘power-grabs’ in relation to marine and coastal resources are less well researched. Under the banner of ‘blue growth’, such power-grabs are taking shape through global policy processes that purportedly align the needs of the poor with profit interests and climate change concerns. This contribution critically interrogates these policy proposals and situates them within broader neoliberalization of nature debates. It is argued that the policy proposals fail on their own terms and are a form of ‘antipolitics’ that precludes more radical visions of addressing environmental and climate change issues. In an attempt to challenge this, small-scale fishers’ movements are increasingly framing their opposition in terms of the broader struggle for ‘food sovereignty’.

Keywords:

blue growth | ocean grabbing | natural capital | food sovereignty | anti-politics

Acknowledgements

Special thanks for several years of discussions, as well as comments on earlier drafts of this paper, to Carsten Pedersen, Anders Lund Hansen and Eric Clark. Wim Carton, Seth Macinko and three anonymous reviewers also gave very helpful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1 As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, though, it is important to acknowledge that the SIDS rhetoric here around livelihoods etc. is often far from reality, where it is often more aligned with the interests of transnational corporations.

2 The debates on the appropriateness of primitive accumulation vs. accumulation by dispossession are ongoing. A range of authors working on neoliberal conservation retain Marx's concept of primitive accumulation (e.g. Buscher 2009; Kelly 2011).

3 Àrnasson has published extensively and has worked as an advisor to the FAO and the World Bank on fisheries for decades.

4 Supplementing earlier common property theorists (e.g. Ostrom 1990; Bromley 1992).

5 And, most recently, negotiations of adding a legally binding instrument under UNCLOS concerning 'Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine and Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction' have been initiated (IISD 2016b).

6 Interview on the Credit Suisse company website following the World Ocean Summit in June 2015 (Staufer 2015).

7 Though also a few in the Global South; see Longo, Clausen, and Clark (2015) for an overview.

8 The CFI follows a stream of other, now defunct, international coalitions and partnerships of similar actors that had to close down due to lack of funding, including the World Bank's Global Partnership for Oceans (GPO) and the 50-in-10 initiative. Both of these had largely the same content and approach as the CFI. See WFFP and WFF (2013) for reactions from fisher peoples' movements to the GPO.

9 As pointed out in the document, 'coastal' in this instance refers to all fisheries within the EEZ.

10 From the Blue Carbon Initiative's website (BCI n.d.).

11 See also the report Our shared seas: a 2017 overview of ocean threats and conservation funding by the California Environmental Associates (2017, 18–21) that makes the same point.

12 For critique from the two fisher peoples' movements (that is, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF)) of the CFI, see WFFP and WFF (2015a), and for blue carbon see WFFP and WFF (2015b).

Additional information

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