



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
*Where leaders learn*

**Scholar-activist transdisciplinary research praxis for blue justice in  
South Africa: Perspectives from the South African Coastal Justice  
Network scholar-activist archive**

**PhD Thesis (by Publication)**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of**

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**By**

**TARYN PEREIRA**

**601p1016**

**SUPERVISORS**

**Distinguished Professor Heila Lotz-Sisitka Professor Kira Erwin**

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**Scholar-activist transdisciplinary research praxis for blue justice in South Africa: Perspectives from the South African Coastal Justice Network scholar-activist archive**



Taryn Pereira, June 2024

*“I look to my crewmates. They cross daily the inconstant boundary that divides our lives into the solid, the known, the terra firma – and the underexplored, the ephemeral, the everchanging. They are used to shaping a life on the elusive frontier between land and sea. But they know: this frontier is not binary; no boundary truly is.”*

*There is no real juxtaposition of the unfathomable and the solid. They stay afloat by keeping expectations fluid... In the sea, not knowing is part of being. Life is so.”*

*Anna Badhken – Fisherman’s Blues, 2018*

\*\*\*

*“Marginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation. In fact I was saying just the opposite: that it is also a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance.”*

*bell hooks – Marginality as a Site of Resistance, 1990*

\*\*\*

*“This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margins that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized / colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.”*

*bell hooks – Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness, 1989*

\*\*\*

*“Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge.”*

*Robin Kelley – Finding the Strength to Love and Dream, 2002*

\*\*\*

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all of the fishers, dear friends and family who have passed away recently and who were part of this journey with me in one way or another.

To Gavin Natal, Keith Jones, Xola Ngcangca, Norton Dowries and Solene Smith.

To Preven Chetty.

To Daniel Pereira.

To Samson Mokoena.

## Abstract

This PhD thesis is an applied study on the research praxis of transdisciplinary (TD) scholar-activists contributing to social movements for environmental justice on the coasts and in the oceans ('blue justice'). I wrote this thesis from my position as the coordinator of the Coastal Justice Network (CJN), which is a component of the Global Challenge Research Fund One Ocean Hub's TD ocean governance programme. The CJN is a grouping of South African TD scholar-activists working collaboratively in processes of knowledge co-production with small-scale fishers (SSFs) and other coastal communities. These SSFs are leading resistances to blue injustice from the margins of ocean governance. Within a solidarity and environmental justice orientation to TD ocean research, CJN researchers and SSFs have responded together to a wide range of blue justice issues between 2020 and 2024 and, in doing so, have co-generated an activist archive. This thesis draws on the activist archive to surface core practices and priorities for research that contribute to movements for blue justice. The study was developed as a PhD portfolio through five papers, with an introduction and conclusion.

The main aim of this study was to explore dimensions of scholar-activist TD research praxis and associated contributions to advancing blue justice in transformative ocean governance. In doing this, it sought to address some of the gaps in blue justice TD research, most notably the need for a deeper understanding of how to centre the voices and contributions of those most affected by environmental justice concerns. It also addresses the role of scholar-activist researchers practised as a form of political solidarity and reflexive co-engagement. The main research question is: *How can scholar-activist transdisciplinary research praxis contribute to advancing blue justice in transformative ocean governance in South Africa?*

Methodologically, the study uses a form of activist ethnography, which is a scholar-activist methodology that includes an explicit political commitment to engagement and to generating knowledge for activism purposes. Methods within activist ethnographic research include participant and self-observation, critically reflexive "thick" descriptions of context and practice, interviews and conversations, direct political

actions with activist partners and facilitation of mutual learning. At the centre of this work is the co-constructed scholar-activist archive, which offers a record of four years of such TD scholar-activist praxis. This thesis and the papers presented as part of the thesis all draw on the co-produced scholar-activist archive constructed out of the social movement work of the SSFs in collaboration with CJNI researcher's TD scholar-activist research praxis over four years, representing the type of activist ethnography referred to above. Compiling and organising the archive was one important level of analytical/synthesis work I undertook. I also drew on the archive to make visible key facets of blue justice work and reflected on this, making up three different levels of analytical work with the archive: 1) Constructing and organising the archive, 2) Selection of key foci in the archive, and 3) Meta-reflections.

Through this approach, I address the main research question via four sub-questions, each the focus of a paper in this PhD by publication.

- Why is there a need to advance scholar-activist TD practice in transformative ocean governance research? This question is addressed in Paper 1 (Chapter 2 of this thesis).
- How can scholar-activists in blue justice support just and inclusive views of ocean governance? This question is addressed in Paper 2 (Chapter 3 of the thesis).
- What methods in blue justice research enable plural knowledges and perspectives for co-engagement? This question is addressed in Paper 3 (Chapter 4 of the thesis).
- How is blue justice resistance expressed and acknowledged as a key feature of inclusive ocean governance? This question is addressed in Paper 4 (Chapter 5 of the thesis).
- What emerges as key lessons for scholar-activist TD researchers in blue justice? This question is addressed in Paper 5 (Chapter 6 of the thesis) and in the meta-reflection in Chapter 7.

The thesis as a whole offers:

1. Identification of a core practice, centred on “transformative space making” for care-ful, responsive and reflexive solidarity networks – ‘net-work’ – that allows community-based activists and social movements to leverage the kinds of research support they need when they need it.
2. Insight into participatory ocean governance and socially just ocean protection, practised through an ‘agonistic’ and counter-hegemonic knowledge co-production emergent from this form of TD scholar-activism.
3. Methods and guidance for these practices, with specific emphasis on agonistically plural and inclusive methods of blue resistance.
4. Insights into the positionality and ethical tensions of TD scholar-activist researchers.

The study offers an empirical case of how a CJN, through TD scholar-activist praxis, can contribute to blue resistance and blue justice. The reflective chapter (Chapter 7) shows that this type of TD scholar-activist praxis is not without challenges and limitations; through a reflexive review of these, the study offers direction for further research. It also points to the roles of scholar-activists working in solidarity with SSFs in pursuit of blue justice. Overall, the thesis offers an orientation for TD researchers interested in aligning their research praxis with social movements working in counter-hegemonic ways for environmental justice.

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## **List of Acronyms/Abbreviations**

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CJN	Coastal Justice Network
CMR	Coastal and Marine Research
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
DEFF	Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment
DEGS	Department of Environmental and Geographic Sciences
DMRE	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessments
ENI	Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (Italian: “State Hydrocarbons Authority”)
ELRC	Environmental Learning Research Centre
EMG	Environmental Monitoring Group
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
I&AP	Interested and Affected Parties
ICCA	Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and Areas
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MLRA	Marine Living Resources Act
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NCMSBP	National Coastal and Marine Spatial Biodiversity Plan
NPC	Non-profit Company
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
OEMP	Ocean Economy Master Plan
PASA	Petroleum Agency of South Africa
SANBI	South African National Biodiversity Institute
SDCEA	South Durban Community Environment Alliance
SSF	Small-Scale Fishers/ies
TD	Transdisciplinary
TDR	Transdisciplinary Research

TEEPSA	TotalEnergies EP South Africa
UCT	University of Cape Town
UKRI	United Kingdom Research and Innovation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# CHAPTER 1

## CONTEXT AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

This PhD thesis is an applied study on the research praxis of transdisciplinary (TD) scholar-activists contributing to social movements for environmental justice on the coasts and in the oceans ('blue justice'). I wrote this thesis from my position as the coordinator of the Coastal Justice Network (CJN). The CJN is a grouping of South African TD scholar-activists working collaboratively in processes of knowledge co-production with small-scale fishers (SSFs) and other coastal communities. These SSFs are leading resistances to blue injustice from the margins of ocean governance. Within a solidarity and environmental justice orientation to TD ocean research, CJN researchers and SSFs have responded together to a wide range of blue justice issues between 2020 and 2024 and, in doing so, have co-generated an activist archive. This thesis draws on the activist archive to surface core practices and priorities for research that contribute to movements for blue justice. The study was developed in the form of a PhD portfolio, through five papers, with an introduction and conclusion.

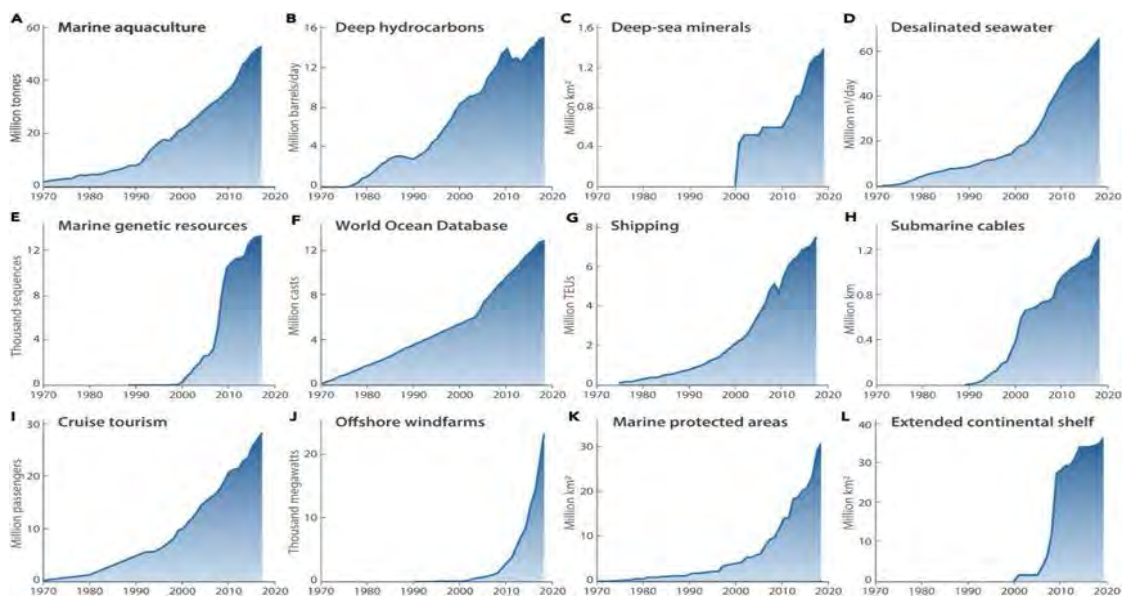
In this introductory chapter, I contextualise the study in terms of blue justice globally and in South Africa; the emergence of a TD research hub to respond to intractable challenges in ocean sustainability and governance; and the establishment of the CJN. I describe my background, positionality and praxis as an environmental justice scholar-activist and how this PhD emerged from this context. I present the research questions and the methodology for the co-production and analysis of the activist archive. I close this introductory chapter with an overview of the whole thesis and show how each paper and chapter addresses the research questions and sub-questions.

### 1.2 Context of Blue Justice in South Africa

#### 1.2.1 Global blue acceleration

We are living in the era of the poly-crisis or crisis system (Naess & Price, 2016) – made

up of what Bhaskar (2016) calls the crisis of the four “e’s”: the ecological crisis, the ethical crisis of ever-growing inequality, the economic crisis and personal existential crises. This crisis system is starkly evident in the present state of our oceans. The dire ecological threats to ocean health are widely recognised (see Bromley, 2008; Dolan & Walker, 2006; Hoegh-Guldberg & Bruno, 2010; Jacquet, 2009; Scheiber, 2001; Young et al., 2007) and include: collapsed fishing stocks; habitat loss; ocean acidification, temperature changes and shifts in abundance and distribution of marine species due to climate change; plastic pollution; and biological and chemical pollution (Hoegh-Guldberg & Bruno, 2010; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2019; Jacquet, 2009; Landrigan et al., 2020). There is a voracious global drive for the extraction of ocean resources, the claiming of ocean space and growing anthropogenic pressure on the oceans on multiple fronts (Halpern et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2017). This has been called the ‘blue acceleration’ (Jouffray et al., 2020). The profuse claims for marine space and resources have increased vastly over the past 50 years, with particularly steep increases since the turn of the century, in diverse sectors including marine aquaculture, offshore oil and gas production, seabed mining, shipping traffic, desalination projects, submarine cables, bioprospecting for marine genetic resources, expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and areas claimed by states as extended continental shelf (Jouffray et al., 2020; see Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1: The Blue Acceleration - global trends in a range of ocean sectors, 1970 – 2020**

Source: Jouffray et al. (2020, p. 47)

International discourse on the 'blue economy' promotes the ocean as the new economic frontier (Lodge, 2014; Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016; Wenhai et al., 2019), with untapped potential to be capitalised upon (Voyer et al., 2018). The blue economy, adapting ideas from the green economy with common roots in sustainable development frameworks (UN, 2014), makes claims about simultaneously improving human wellbeing, environmental health and economic growth (Childs & Hicks, 2019; OECD, 2016). It has become a catch-all concept interpreted and used by a diverse range of powerful stakeholders, even when claims are contradictory or mutually exclusive (Voyer et al., 2018); it results in 'power grabs' for marine resources that extend the profit-driven depletion of land-based resources that have brought us to the brink of ecological collapse (Barbesgaard, 2017). Global ocean grabs are justified as contributing to economic development (through generating new sources of energy and other extracted resources), solving hunger (through fisheries and aquaculture), addressing climate change (through blue carbon initiatives) and protecting the remaining biodiversity (through top-down conservation practices) (Barbesgaard, 2017).

However, dominant blue economy discourses favour the already powerful within the neoliberal and extractive political economy (Bennett et al., 2021); exclude and further marginalise local, ocean- dependent communities (Cohen et al., 2019); fail to integrate worldviews that perceive sacred interconnections of the ecological and the social in the ocean (McGarry, 2023), or to respect the ocean as a commons (Ertör & Hadjimichael, 2020). This has led to a growing recognition of widespread environmental injustices in the Anthropocene Ocean (Bennett et al., 2023), a framing which has come to be referred to as blue in/justice (Bennett et al., 2021; Blythe et al., 2023; Ertör, 2023; Isaacs, 2019).

Blue in/justice, developing from the theory and movements for environmental justice, considers how structural inequalities, including race, socio-economic status and gender, are compounded by blue economy implementation. These inequalities drive spatial displacement of local coastal communities, exclude marginalised groups and their knowledge from ocean decision making, and result in the unequal distribution of benefits and harms from ocean resource use (Blythe et al., 2023).

### **1.2.2 Blue economy and blue (in)justice in South Africa – illustrated through four maps**

The blue economy has been taken up very enthusiastically by African states (Childs & Hicks, 2019), as a route to development, economic growth and energy security. In South Africa, 'Operation Phakisa' is the government's driver of the blue economy (Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries [DEFF], 2019). It has been critiqued for its "aggressive business-friendly approach to resource extraction" (Masie & Bond, 2018, p. 314), and has been driving resource conflicts and blue injustice (Sowman et al., 2023). It is estimated that 98% of South Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) has been allocated for mineral and hydrocarbon prospecting (Centre for Environmental Rights [CER], 2017); there has been a proliferation of approvals of new coastal and seabed mining and offshore oil and gas projects over the past five years (Le Fleur et al., 2023; Sowman et al., 2023). Civil society and researchers concerned about the cumulative impact of these extractive blue economy activities have attempted to monitor and map them. Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3 give a sense of the vast extent of proposed and approved extractive blue economy activities in South African ocean space.

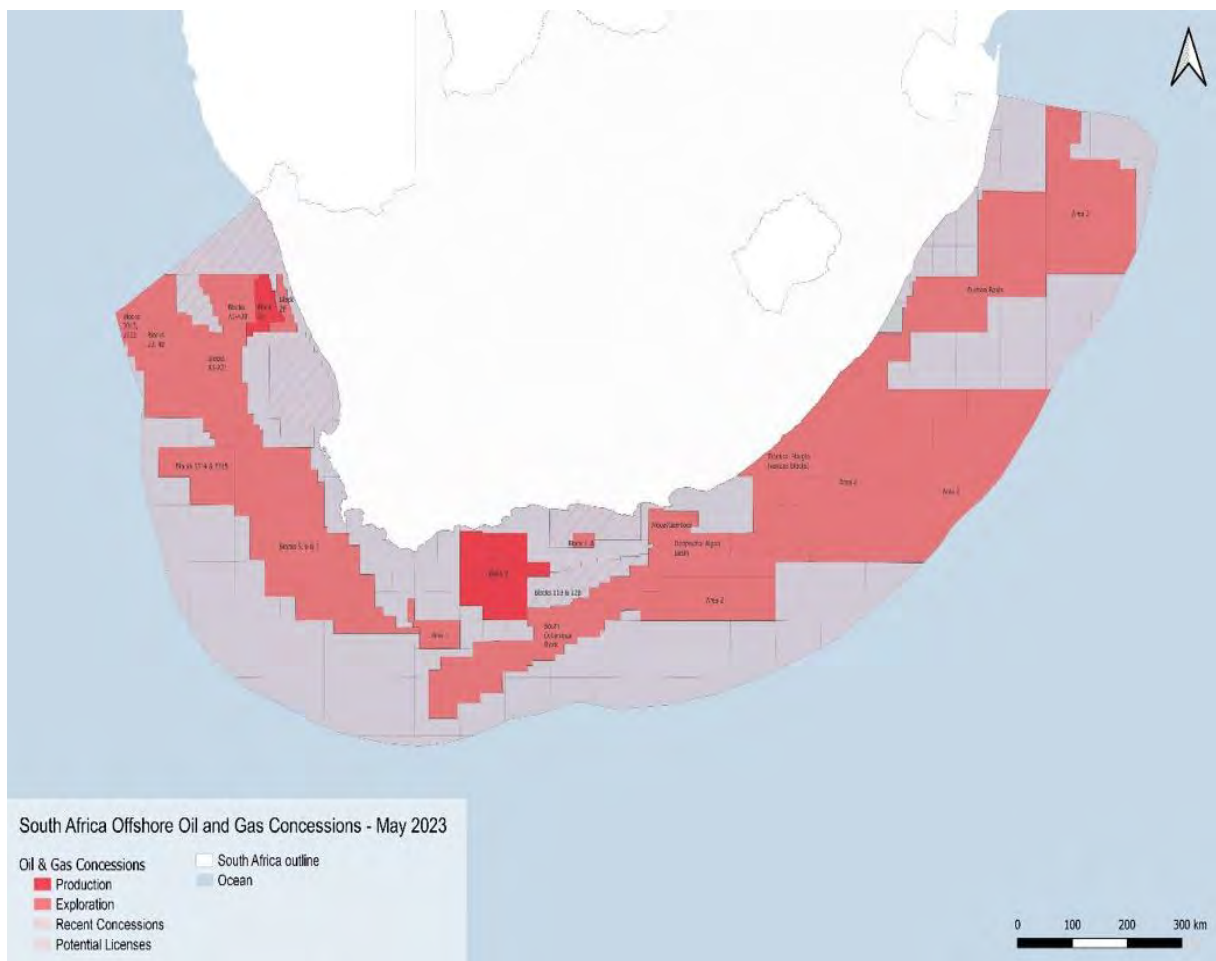


**Figure 1.2: Map of approved applications and operations related to mining and oil and gas on the West Coast, South Africa**

Source: Prepared by the One Ocean Hub team at UCT EGS – May 2023

Figure 1.2 is a map produced and regularly updated by the One Ocean Hub research team based at the University of Cape Town's Department of Environmental and Geographical Science. The map highlights the large number of concurrent and adjacent applications for prospecting and production of mining (for heavy mineral sands and diamonds) and oil and gas along the West Coast of South Africa (One Ocean Hub, 2023). The map is based on data that these researchers have gathered and synthesised from applications made available through public consultation

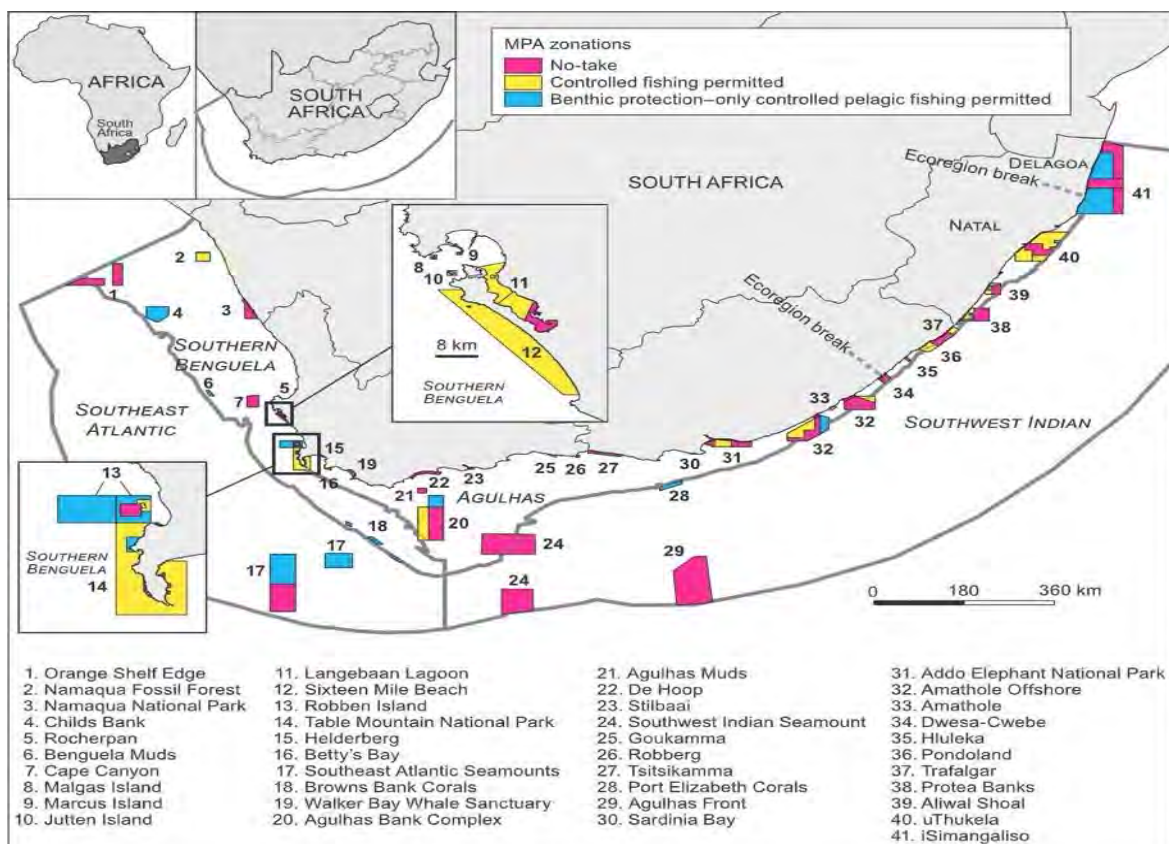
processes. This was carried out in response to concerns about the proliferation of extractive activities along this stretch of coast and a lack of monitoring of the combined impacts of these activities taking place concurrently and adjacently. The *cumulative* impacts on water, biodiversity, marine life, associated infrastructure, access to the coast and fishing grounds, local livelihoods, cultural heritage and sense of place made more visible through this map are of grave concern to coastal communities (One Ocean Hub 2023).



**Figure 1.3: Map of South African offshore oil and gas concessions, as of May 2023**

Source: Data received from Petroleum Agency South Africa, in line with a Promotion of Access to Information Act No. 2 of 2000 request submitted by the Legal Resources Centre on 12 October 2022. Compilation of data on map done by Power Shift Africa and the Fossil Fuel Atlas Project

Figure 1.3 is a map of the offshore oil and gas concessions in South Africa's EEZ, showing blocks already under production, those approved for exploration, and those available for potential licenses as of May 2023. This map has been produced from data obtained by the Legal Resources Centre through a Promotion of Access to Information request submitted to Petroleum Agency SA – there was previously no map in the public domain showing the full extent and status of these concessions. Offshore oil and gas exploration and production carries myriad threats to the socio-ecological-cultural health of the ocean and coastal communities (Andrews, 2021; Barron et al., 2020; Gill et al., 2012). These include the impacts on marine life from exploratory seismic survey activities, the environmental impacts on land and sea from the infrastructural and production activities associated with oil and gas extraction, the risks of oil spills, and the climate change impacts of the continued burning of fossil fuels. As the blue economy is rolled out, MPAs are held up as the favoured solution for ecosystem protection, relied upon to provide sanctuaries for biodiversity amid the growing pressures of human activity in the ocean (Jenkins & Houtan, 2016; Kirkman et al., 2021).



**Figure 1.4: South Africa's MPAs boundaries and zones**

Source: Kirkman et al. (2021, p. 393)

Figure 1.4 shows South Africa's 41 MPAs. Twenty new or expanded MPAs were gazetted in 2019 (DEFF, 2019), taken up under Operation Phakisa as "a strategic initiative that would support sustainable development of economic opportunities in South Africa's ocean space" (Sink, 2016 in Kirkman et al., 2021, p. 390; DPME, 2015). South Africa aims to meet the international target of 30% MPA coverage by 2030 (Peer et al., 2022).

But for SSFs and other ocean resource-dependent local communities, MPA expansion also means the further loss of ocean space and further restrictions on their livelihoods and ocean relationships. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in South Africa have a troubled and violent history of forced removals and dispossession through enclosures of customary lands and waters (Sunde & Isaacs, 2008); they continue to have significant social impacts on the communities living in or adjacent to them (Sowman & Sunde 2018). The ecological effectiveness of MPAs is contested (Pendleton et al., 2018; Sowman & Sunde, 2018), and a comparison of Figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 shows that extractive ocean activities are continuing all around MPAs, while their focus is on restricting fishing and other forms of local resource harvesting. Despite shifts in policy towards co-management of MPAs with affected communities, particularly with rights-holding SSFs, this is not yet happening in practice in any of South Africa's MPAs (Kirkman et al., 2023). The burden of spatially based conservation measures such as MPAs falls disproportionately (and therefore unjustly) on the local communities whose lives and livelihoods are curtailed and criminalised through "no-take zones" and other regulations. A no-take zone is the most restrictive Marine Protected Area zonation - a designated section of the ocean where all harvesting of marine resources is strictly prohibited.

South Africa's SSF policy (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry [DAFF], 2012) is a progressive human-rights-based and ecosystem-based framework. It is the culmination of an extensive participatory policy development process driven by fishing communities and their civil society partners (Isaacs, 2016; Sowman et al., 2014) The SSF policy aims to

... provide redress and recognition to the rights of Small-Scale fisher communities in South Africa previously marginalised and discriminated against in terms of racially exclusionary laws and policies, individualised permit-based systems of resource

allocation and insensitive impositions of conservation-driven regulation. (DAFF, 2012, n.p.)

Figure 1.5 shows the location of coastal and inland SSF communities, as presented by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) SSF directorate (DFFE, 2023). Since 2019, approximately 270 SSF cooperatives have been allocated fishing rights nationally (J. Sunde, personal communication, 18 March 2023). Despite this progress in the recognition of rights, the implementation of the SSF policy has been fraught with challenges and disappointment for SSFs (Sowman & Sunde 2021; Sunde & Erwin, 2020) and has fallen far short of the commitments made in the policy.



**Figure 1.5: Small-scale fisher communities in South Africa - from a presentation made by DFFE SSF Directorate on 29 July 2023**

Source: <https://ecsecc.org/datarepository/documents/dffe-abongjile-ngqongwassf-presentation-for-the-ec-wAkoF.pdf>

All of this takes place in a marine policy and governance environment in South Africa that is fragmented, overlapping and yet uncoordinated, untransformed in terms of power and inclusion and ineffective in terms of protecting ocean ecosystems (Le Fleur

et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2020; Sowman & Sunde, 2018; Chapter 3 of this thesis). Contemporary policy agendas and planning tools for ocean governance, such as Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Fisheries Resource Allocation and Ocean Economy Master Planning, continue to exclude SSFs, despite the hard-won recognition of their rights to be fully and meaningfully included. The compounding and converging pressures on ocean-dependent communities, through the “creeping enclosures” (Murray et al., 2010, p. 367) and increased claims for ocean resources and space represented in Figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 above, are accelerating just as historically marginalised SSFs have finally had their rights recognised. These SSFs have thus argued that the implementation of the blue economy leads to injustices (Masifundise, 2017; 2021) and have enacted resistance to these injustices in diverse ways.

The detailed dimensions of ocean governance, blue justice and blue resistance in South Africa are explored in depth in Papers 2, 3 and 4 (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) of this thesis. For this introductory chapter, I have tried to present, in brief, a contextual framing of blue justice pressures internationally and in South Africa to set the scene for a discussion of the transformative ocean research being called for to address these challenges.

### **1.3 Study Context: The One Ocean Hub and Transdisciplinary Research for Transformed Ocean Governance**

There are mounting calls for transformative ocean research to address the intractable challenges facing the ocean (Franke et al., 2023; Lombard et al., 2023). What is the transformative research that transformed ocean governance needs? This broad question has been taken up by the One Ocean Hub, a collaborative TD research programme, funded by the United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI’s) Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF). The One Ocean Hub was established in 2019; this is the project that currently employs me as a researcher.

The GCRF is a key component in the UK’s ODA (Official Development Assistance) strategy which puts research at the heart of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (One Ocean Hub, 2021). The GCRF aims for transformative research approaches to address the Sustainable Development Goals through research to improve lives and opportunities in the developing world (UKRI, 2023a). Part of the

theory of change of the GCRF research hubs is an acknowledgement that “success in development requires a depth of understanding that can only be achieved through equitable partnerships and engagement of diverse stakeholders such as industry, civil society, NGOs and governments” (UKRI, 2023b, p. 3). In 2019, the GCRF announced the launch of 12 new interdisciplinary research hubs addressing a range of ‘intractable development challenges’; one of these was the One Ocean Hub. The One Ocean Hub (2019) aims to:

... transform our response to the urgent challenges facing our ocean. Its research seeks to bridge current disconnections in law, science and policy and integrate governance frameworks to balance multiple ocean uses with conservation. It strives to empower the communities, women and children, most reliant upon the oceans, to inform decisions based on multiple values and knowledge systems.

The One Ocean Hub is made up of over one hundred researchers, carrying out research related to ocean challenges in South Africa, Namibia, Ghana, Fiji and the Solomon Islands as well as at an international level focused on international ocean governance. It aims to provide an enabling environment for challenge-led ocean governance (<https://oneoceanhub.org/about/>).

The One Ocean Hub, as articulated in a multi-authored policy brief in 2021, is “conceived as a lab for testing the potential of a model for transformational change ... and is rooted in the co-development of fair partnerships” (One Ocean Hub, 2021, p. 2). The One Ocean Hub seeks to break new grounds in the wider understanding of research for development, most notably in research ethics and in the role of vulnerable communities and traditional knowledge holders in research, through innovative use of the arts and transdisciplinarity (One Ocean Hub, 2018; see also Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis).

Transdisciplinary (TD) research is one strategy for achieving “science with society” – emerging from the growing acknowledgement that academic researchers could and should do more to directly address the crises of society (Lang et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2022; Max-Neef, 2005). This is an explicit goal of the GCRF, evident throughout its discourse and, significantly, in the fact that the research funding forms part of the UK government’s ODA commitments. Lang et al. (2012, p. 26) define transdisciplinarity as a “reflexive, integrative, method-driven scientific principle aiming

at the solution or transition of societal problems by differentiating and integrating knowledge from various scientific and societal bodies of knowledge”. Transdisciplinary (TD) research promotes knowledge co-production among diverse knowledge holders towards the addressing of ‘real world’ problems. It does not approach the object of its research as a neutral object to be studied, but as a particular challenge to be solved; it is therefore “value-laden” and “guided by a transformational perspective” (Popa et al., 2015, p. 46). The relational turn in sustainability science is a paradigm shift that emphasises the importance of understanding relationships, networks and interdependencies in addressing complex sustainability issues (Walsh et al., 2021; West et al., 2020). This approach moves away from viewing elements of sustainability in isolation and instead focuses on the dynamic interactions and networks that shape social-ecological systems. Transdisciplinarity has become the dominant research approach for achieving this relational and transformative sustainability science (Hirsch-Hadorn et al., 2006).

In practice, aspirations towards ‘transformations’ – in research, in governance, in society – remain quite nebulous and widely interpreted. There are still large contradictions and gaps in the theory and practice of transformative sustainability research (Lawrence et al., 2022). What needs to be transformed, and who are the agents of transformation? What kinds of learning, research and relationships can enable radical, socially just and peaceful transformations for sustainability? These questions are being critically grappled with by environmental justice scholars (Rodríguez et al., 2023) and environmental learning communities of practice – including, notably, through the ‘T-learning’ project (<https://transgressivelearning.org/>) led by the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) at Rhodes University.

It was through the T-learning project that my colleague, Dr Dylan McGarry, was invited to become part of the initial team that successfully developed the One Ocean Hub proposal. It was also through the T-learning project, specifically through my involvement in the ‘Changing practice courses for water activists’ led by Dr Jane Burt (Burt, 2020), that I became connected to the ELRC. I was then invited to join the One Ocean Hub team based at the ELRC, headed up by Dylan McGarry. Our role in the One Ocean Hub from the outset was explicitly to develop and share transgressive methods for learning and thinking about TD ocean research in new ways (see Chapter

4 of this thesis). It was also to develop solidarity networks that bring ocean researchers into more accountable and politically rigorous (Temper et al., 2019) relationships with community-based social movements addressing environmental injustices in the ocean.

#### **1.4 Scholar-Activist Transdisciplinary Responses for Blue Justice:**

##### **Establishment of a Coastal Justice Network**

##### **1.4.1 Gap between transdisciplinary sustainability research and environmental justice movements**

There is a gap between TD sustainability research that aims to contribute to transformations in environmental governance and the grassroots social movements that are struggling against environmental injustice, working towards transformations in counter-hegemonic ways from the margins. Transformations for sustainability – implying fundamental, systemic change – need to address the deep root causes of unsustainability. As such, transformations are radical – referring to change at the root. Scoones (2016) argues that transformations to sustainability require a politicised understanding of resources and sustainability; for Gillard et al. (2016), if transformation is to be empowering and pro-poor, it requires a politicised critique and resistance of harmful power relations. Rodríguez et al. (2023, p. 8) articulate a radical social perspective on transformations as “addressing social justice and power issues, as well as environmental ones, in the transformation process”. Radical approaches to sustainability transformations therefore confront and challenge the underlying common sources of inequity, injustice and unsustainability, such as capitalism, patriarchy and racism (Rodríguez et al., 2023).

The “systemic, multi-dimensional and intersectional” approaches of environmental justice activist movements (Temper et al., 2018, p. 747) mean that they are particularly well positioned to contribute to just transformations to sustainability. Sustainability transitions often begin in ‘niches’ at a local level, which can then drive wider systemic changes (Geels, 2010); social movements can create and inhabit such niches (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015). The knowledge and learning of social movements are often overlooked or undervalued by academics (Choudry, 2020). Specifically, movements for environmental justice and “environmentalism of the poor” have been largely

overlooked in mainstream approaches to sustainability transformations (Harley & Scandrett, 2018; Temper et al., 2018). Most TD sustainability research recognises that Indigenous and local communities have important ecological knowledge and are the most directly affected by changes in environmental health and therefore promote the inclusion of local knowledge holders (Lawrence et al., 2022). However, the political agency and activist strategies of grassroots social movements are not often well understood or supported by sustainability researchers (Rodrigues et al., 2023; Temper et al., 2018). Nancy Fraser distinguishes between radical transformative approaches, described above, and an affirmative approach to change, which can also be referred to as 'reformist'. This approach aims at bringing about change through improving the existing structures of society but ultimately leaving intact the conditions that have led to inequities and unsustainability (Fraser, 1995 in Rodríguez et al., 2023). The approaches and "theories of change" of many TED sustainability research projects tend towards affirmative or reformist change. These approaches hope to bring about change through rigorous, interdisciplinary research findings, co-generated through inclusive participatory methods and presented to policymakers in the most persuasive, accessible and solutions-oriented way, to result in policy and practice change (Mitlin et al., 2020). As Cox (2015) argues, few academics have undergone the political learning that social movements have; he proposes that this might explain the persistence, even in change-oriented research, of trusting in existing institutional frameworks as pathways to substantial social change. Social movements know from their collective experiences that "good arguments and empirical research are only as effective as the social agents who deploy them" (Cox, 2015, p. 39). They are guided by a theory of change which includes organising, mobilising and struggling against the status quo, not assuming the goodwill of decision-makers but using co-produced knowledge to build more effective strategies of resistance and produce alternatives (Mitlin et al., 2020). Resistance and socio-environmental conflicts are understood as catalysts for transformations in this framing (Rodríguez et al., 2023).

These different "theories of change" are not mutually exclusive; affirmative and transformative approaches to change can support one another. However, while TD sustainability researchers increasingly embrace the language of social and environmental justice, the underlying ethics, values and approaches to change of sustainability versus environmental justice often remain poorly understood or accepted

by researchers. This makes it challenging for many to align themselves in solidarity with environmental justice movements working in a politicised way for radical transformations (this is explored in further detail in Chapter 2).

This was a gap that I explicitly set out to explore and address through my position in the One Ocean Hub, through nurturing reflexive scholar-activist networks for bringing the transformative ocean governance research agenda of the One Ocean Hub into closer alignment with social movements for blue justice.

#### **1.4.2 The emergence of the Coastal Justice Network**

The inclusion of researchers grappling with methods and concepts for transgressive TD research (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015) and scholar-activists with very well-established networks of SSFs and environmental justice organisations building movements for blue justice meant that there were possibilities within the One Ocean Hub for pushing the boundaries of TD ocean research. The different research programmes, happening at different scales and via a range of inter- and TD collaborations, were woven together through an emphasis on learning, reflexivity and ethics. This entailed a large and explicit commitment, within the core objectives of the project, to simultaneously address injustices in ocean governance (“out there”) as well as to address injustices within academia (“in here”). This included giving close attention to issues of power dynamics in North-South research collaborations, of the need to redress past epistemic injustices within sustainability science broadly and marine science specifically, and deep ongoing considerations of the ethics of engaged research. These values-based practices were facilitated through regular learning gatherings called ‘The Living Aulas’ (‘living classrooms’), a concept adopted from the T-learning project and through the Hub Code of Practice, an iteratively developed code for guiding fair and equitable research partnerships (One Ocean Hub, 2022a). The One Ocean Hub programme was designed to include a *work package zero*, which was intended as a dedicated work package at the outset of the project for “surfacing critical matters of concern to guide and inform One Ocean Hub research, committed to supporting sustainable transformative governance of the oceans” (McGarry et al., 2019, p. 3). For our team based at the ELRC, this work package zero focused on the development of

an Empatheatre<sup>1</sup> public storytelling project called *Lalela uLwandle* (<https://www.empatheatre.com/lalela-ulwandle>) – this is discussed in depth in Chapter 4 of this thesis. In short, through the research-as-theatre-making methodology of Empatheatre, diverse narratives and concerns related to human-ocean relationships surfaced and were brought into conversation with one another, with a wide public audience and with the researchers of the One Ocean Hub. Prominent among the surfaced concerns were those related to coastal injustices – historical injustices that are unacknowledged and unhealed, present injustices exerted through ongoing exclusions of marginalised people from coastal space, and concerns about future injustices caused by the extractive ocean economy (Erwin, 2020a).



Figure 1.6: Flyer advertising the *Lalela uLwandle* Kwazulu-Natal tour, October 2019

<sup>1</sup> *Empatheatre* is a research-based, theatre-making methodology with proven transgressive learning outcomes. A script is developed and performed, drawing on data generated through a co-engaged research process, in which co-participants – consisting of actor-ethnographers with varying backgrounds and knowledges – work to research a matter of concern or central question. Through these explorations, the team sets out to shape the data into an engrossing and relevant true-to-life theatrical experience. Such experiences are intended to offer theatrical epiphanies that speak emotively to the realities of the situation, and above all to honour the informants’ narratives – narratives which are carefully woven into the messaging fabric of the play. Performances are then played to strategic audiences, often made up of people with diverse, even conflicting, views on the central concern represented in the play. Post-play facilitated dialogues allow for another layer of reflexive data to emerge (Empatheatre et al., 2018).



**Figure 1.7: Photographs from *Lalela uLwandle* performances and post-show discussions**

Through working closely with Kira Erwin at the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology and with civil society partners, particularly the South Durban Community Environment Alliance (SDCEA) and the KZN Subsistence Fishers Forum, we positioned the research and performances of *Lalela uLwandle* to support ongoing efforts for more inclusive and just ocean governance. We were able to bridge research and specialist legal knowledge from the One Ocean Hub into a civil society campaign to resist a non-consultative application for offshore oil and gas exploration off the KZN coastline (Natural Justice, 2021). In dialogue with the civil society partners who we worked closely with on this project, the need and opportunity were identified to develop a knowledge-action network for responding to the blue economy in South Africa, bringing together SSFs, environmental justice organisations and researchers.

The next step in the development of the CJN took place at the Transformed and Transformative Ocean Governance Conference, hosted by The Institute for Coastal

and Marine Research (CMR) at Nelson Mandela University in January 2020<sup>2</sup>. I coordinated and chaired a panel of civil society activists, to discuss the question of why we need partnerships between social movements and researchers to bring about transformed and transformative ocean governance. Sherelee Odayer from SDCEA, Khalid Hoossein from Wild Oceans and Christian Adams from The South African Collective of SSFs were panellists. I asked them each to speak about their organisation and their constituents' concerns about ocean governance and any advice they may have for researchers about working with social movements. Some of the points made by the panellists were as follows:

*Don't be afraid of our methods – they might seem radical or risky to you but protests and court actions are a last resort when nothing else has worked.*

*Don't just give us your papers and then expect us to be able to use them effectively. Don't just take data from us and then leave.*

*We can't have a divide between academics and activists any more. We need each other.*

*We want researchers to inform us about when we can comment on new bills and policies, so that we can properly participate.*

*We want memoranda, evidence, and letters of support from scientists to the government. We want to see researchers lending their support publicly towards environmental justice, towards protecting the planet from climate change and the ecological crisis. This can't just happen through scientific papers and reports.*

This panel helped to further develop the idea of bringing One Ocean Hub research and researchers into closer alignment with grassroots social movements and give some further direction in terms of a co-developed ethics and research agenda for this emerging network. Regular discussion among the South African One Ocean Hub researchers in the 'Critiques of the Blue Economy' working group focused on the intense and accelerating pressures facing SSF communities because of the implementation of the blue economy and on the kinds of research that could best

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cmr.mandela.ac.za/News-and-Events/Conferences/Transformed-and-Transformative-Ocean-Governance-Co/Conference-material>

support their struggles for recognition in ocean governance. Scholar-activists from the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Department of Environmental and Geographic Sciences (DEGS), specifically Jackie Sunde, Merle Sowman and Philile Mbatha, had extremely deep, long-standing relationships with SSFs and other coastal community groups, and a shared commitment to making the One Ocean Hub research useful and responsive to the needs of these groups. Anna James and Buhle Francis joined our ELRC One Ocean Hub team in late 2019, and both brought significant knowledge and experience in popular education and community organising.

Fisheries are at the centre of critical marine social sciences (Ertör & Hadjimichael, 2020). Small-scale fishers (SSFs) and other coastal knowledge holders have profound, intergenerational, cultural and practical knowledge of the ocean, and many, including many women fisher activists, play a leading role as ocean defenders – standing up against powerful role players who inflict damage upon ocean ecosystems in their pursuit of profit. At the same time, SSFs are particularly impacted by the top-down imposition of science-based environmental regulation of their lives and livelihoods, through fishing allocation quotas, MPA zonations, MSP, and the other technical, managerial tools of ocean governance. When these are applied without the inclusion of local ecological knowledge and without a genuine critical commitment to addressing power inequalities that are rooted in colonialism and apartheid, they result in the deepened marginalisation (and even criminalisation) of SSFs, while extractive 'ocean grabbing' in the name of the blue economy takes places all around them. In South Africa, some of the most significant victories for a more just ocean governance have been achieved through the sustained activist engagement of SSFs and their social partners (see also Chapter 3 of this thesis). Therefore, TD initiatives that make claims towards the transformation of ocean governance must find authentic ways to respect and amplify the knowledge, politics and voice of SSFs within ocean governance.

In early 2020, I planned a series of focus group discussions and expansive learning workshops bringing community-based activists and researchers together to explore the parameters of a potential knowledge-action network for just ocean governance. However, in reality, the network grew more quickly and spontaneously than I had anticipated, catalysed in large part by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, with

the onset of COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns, it was quickly brought to our attention that SSFs and others in coastal communities were facing significant oppression because of the lockdown regulations (Sowman et al., 2021). There was an urgent need to facilitate communication with and between isolated SSFs at this time to share up-to-date information and advice. We, therefore, motivated to the One Ocean Hub that a portion of our research funds should be reallocated towards mobile data and airtime for SSFs. This was approved, and we established a WhatsApp group, to enable the sharing of up-to-date information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and regulations, for SSFs to report local rights violations, and to share caring, learning and solidarity – mirroring many other such networks that emerged at the time of COVID in South Africa (Kulundu-Bolus et al., 2021).

This WhatsApp group – called the ‘SSF leaders One Ocean Hub group’, established in April 2020 has grown steadily over the ensuing years and remains very active, with close to 80 members from along the South African coastline now receiving weekly data bundles and airtime. This chat group has become a virtual convening space for SSFs, representatives of environmental justice organisations and a sub-set of One Ocean Hub researchers who identify as scholar-activists.

Given my interest in the learning and praxis of scholar-activists seeking to be in solidarity with community-based social movements, I took up a coordination and facilitation role among this group of researchers. In the emergent and unprecedented context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not have a pre-conceived plan or agenda for this small network. We met regularly to discuss our support of the SSF leaders' WhatsApp group, both in a practical sense (*What are we being asked? How should we respond?*), and in a reflexive sense (*What are we learning? What are the implications of working in this way? What are some of the unanticipated consequences or blind spots?*). A lot of our collective work in 2020 was responding to rights violations against SSFs by law enforcement or conservation officials who were bluntly enforcing lockdown rules; we did this by connecting fishers to legal advice, writing to government officials to report these violations and articles for the media, among other things.

From early on, our explicit position of taking a stand in solidarity with SSFs on a range of justice issues was questioned and even censored by other One Ocean Hub researchers. We learnt that in a large TD research programme such as the One Ocean

Hub, there are different understandings and approaches to transformations. While these are not necessarily irreconcilable, there are perceived risks for some researchers of being associated with strategies that are critical of the state (This is discussed in depth in Paper 1 [Chapter 2] in this PhD). As a result, we developed a distinct and separate name, the CJN, to refer to the group of scholar-activists working in support of SSF communities.

What started as a space of gathering for One Ocean Hub researchers concerned with addressing issues related to fisher rights violations due to the pressing realities of COVID-19 has grown over time into the CJN. The CJN is made up of around 10 scholar-activists from four South African universities. We are all part of other networks, including environmental justice networks, popular education networks, land reform networks, lawyer networks, marine science networks, and artist networks. Through the CJN, we connect the resources, knowledge and support in these wider networks to the SSF leaders' network in support of the struggles and resistances led by these fishers. In November 2020, we shared the following statement on our role in the SSF leaders' WhatsApp group, based on the concerns and requests for research support that had been articulated by the group's participants (see Figure 1.8).



**Figure 1.8: A statement of CJN's role, shared with the SSF Leaders WhatsApp Group in November 2020**

As scholar-activists, we have been learning the praxis of situated solidarities through grounded experience, through re-orienting our engaged research activities to respond directly to the priorities identified by SSFs, through the critically reflexive space of the

CJN, and through trying to mediate this learning into the broader TD One Ocean Hub, as will be elaborated further across the chapters of this thesis.

The CJN and the small-scale fisher leaders we work with have been participating together in formal ocean governance processes, responding to socio-environmental injustices as they occur, engaging with wider networks in legal battles to defend environmental and human rights, carrying out co-engaged research into SSF experiences of and responses to the blue economy, and co-generating an activist archive of blue justice resources, for the past four years.

### **1.5 Who are the small-scale fishers?**

South Africa has many important archaeological sites that have, in recent years, shifted global paradigmatic understandings of early humans. In 2011, the oldest known human drawing was found in the Blombos Cave, in the southern Cape (Henshilwood *et al.*, 2018); also present in the Blombos Cave are large quantities of shellfish and fish remains, as well as marine shell beads, from the Middle Stone Age (van Niekerk, 2011). These tell us that human beings have been harvesting, eating, and deriving symbolic meaning from marine resources along our coastline for close to one hundred thousand years – since ‘the dawn of humanity’.

In precolonial times, indigenous coastal communities that included Khoi, San and Nguni-speaking people would fish and forage for a wide range of marine species for subsistence, medicinal and spiritual uses. Marine resource use was governed by customary knowledge and seasonal practices and was deeply embedded in social and cultural life (Walker, 2008; Whitelaw, 2009). This way of life was disrupted through waves of colonial dispossession from the mid-1600s, which restricted access to fishing grounds and introduced European methods of fishing and coastal tenure that marginalised customary fishing practices. The growing industrialisation of fisheries through the 20<sup>th</sup> century further displaced traditional fishers. During Apartheid, Black, Coloured and Indian fishing communities were forcibly removed from many coastal areas in both urban and rural South Africa, and traditional fishing livelihoods were characterised as ‘informal’ or even illegal under restrictive regulatory systems. With the onset of democracy in 1994, new policy and governance frameworks were developed, that sought to redress past injustices and bring South Africa’s progressive,

rights-based Constitution to life. The Marine Living Resources Act of 1998 aimed to transform fisheries governance but failed to adequately recognize the distinct identities and contributions of small-scale fishers. The Small-Scale Fisheries Policy, an amendment to the MLRA which was gazetted in 2012 after an extensive campaign and co-development process led by fishers and their partners in civil society, was a major step in acknowledging small-scale fishers and in setting out the trajectory for redistribution of rights and access in fisheries (DAFF, 2012). However, the interpretation of the SSF policy in its implementation has been weak, slow, and inadequate in terms of meaningful transformation (this is further explored in Chapter 3). The acceleration of the Blue Economy, with its enclosures of coastal and marine space and its favouring of commercial fishing interests, drives and deepens the marginalisation of small-scale fishers in the present.

Thus, the story of marine resource use and access along the South African coastline over time mirrors the layered, historical-social-ecological-political-economic relations at play in this context (Sunde & Erwin, 2021). The South African fisheries sector today reflects the structural history of racialised economic exclusion, dating back to colonial and apartheid era policies that concentrated fishing rights with white-owned commercial enterprises and forced Black communities away from the coast. Post apartheid policies have aimed to redress these injustices on paper, but the dominance of neoliberal capitalist economics has consolidated fishing rights with an already powerful, still largely white owned, commercial sector. Scientific management discourse is hegemonic in the state's management of the marine commons, and this management is carried out through exclusion rather than inclusion, despite democratic commitments to inclusive co-management (van Sittert, 2003).

### **1.5.1 Like a lamp without paraffin - Small-scale Fisheries in contemporary South Africa**

Under apartheid, only commercial and recreational fishers were recognised in South African law (Sowman, 2006). With the transition to democracy, the new government expressed their commitment to addressing past imbalances, uplifting impoverished coastal communities, and bringing about equitable access to marine resources (African National Congress, 1994). The Marine Living Resources Act (MLRA) of 1998 recognised three categories of fishers (Republic of South Africa, 1998). These were:

*Commercial fishers*: large-scale, industrialised and small to medium enterprises that operated under long-term commercial fishing rights, with a focus on high value species for domestic and export markets;

*Recreational fishers*: required to purchase a recreational fishing permit to fish for personal consumption, sport or leisure, are subject to bag limits and closed seasons and are not allowed to sell their catch; and

*Subsistence fishers*: defined in the MLRA as a person “who regularly catches fish for personal consumption or for the consumption of his or her dependants, including one who engages from time to time in the local sale or barter of excess catch, but does not include a person who engages on a substantial scale in the sale of fish on a commercial basis” (Republic of South Africa, 1998).

The terms *artisanal fishers* and *traditional fishers* are sometimes used interchangeably with *subsistence fishers*. Some of the characteristics of subsistence fishers that were further articulated by the Subsistence Fisheries Task Group (Harris *et al.*, 2002) were that subsistence fishing activities are local; customary, cultural or traditional; undertaken for personal or family use; primarily for nutritional needs; based on minimal technology; and undertaken by people with low cash incomes (Branch *et al.*, 2002).

The legal recognition of subsistence fishers in the MLRA was a significant milestone towards addressing historical and racialised socio-economic exclusions. However, the constraining definition and continued marginalisation of subsistence fishers relative to the white dominated commercial and recreational sectors, particularly in relation to their ability to access markets to sell their catch, meant that the socio-economic needs of fishing communities were not addressed through this policy. In 2005, when so-called subsistence fishers in the Western Cape were excluded yet again from the fishing rights allocation process, they brought legal proceedings against the Minister of Environmental Affairs in the Equality Court (George K. and others vs. the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2004). This mobilisation was supported by the Masifundise Development Trust and the Legal Resources Centre (Sowman *et al.*, 2014). The court found in favour of the applicants, and ordered the Minister responsible for fisheries to develop a new policy that would amend the MLRA to recognise the full Constitutional rights of SSF, and to allocate appropriate fishing rights

to this group (Sowman *et al.*, 2014). A national task team was established to draft this policy, which included fisher representatives and civil society. This group mobilised and advocated for a paradigm shift in fisheries management towards a more people-centred approach that recognised fisher rights as human rights and acknowledged the importance of equitable access to marine resources for poverty alleviation (Sowman *et al.*, 2014). Thus, small-scale fishers and their social partners were instrumental in drafting a progressive SSF policy that sought to redress the historical exclusions of subsistence and small-scale fishers and bring about transformative justice in South African fisheries.

The SSF Policy defines small-scale fishing broadly to include subsistence fishing. This followed an international trend to include subsistence, traditional and artisanal fisheries under the umbrella term 'small-scale' (FAO 2014). Small-scale fishing is defined as:

The use of marine living resources on a full-time, part-time or seasonal basis in order to ensure food and livelihood security. For the purposes of this policy, fishing also means the engagement (by men and women) in ancillary activities such as, (pre and post harvesting, including preparation of gear for harvesting purposes), net making, boat-building, (beneficiation, distribution and marketing of produce) which provide additional fishery-related employment and income opportunities to these communities (DAFF, 2012).

A small-scale fishing community is defined as:

...an established socio-cultural group of persons who are, or historically have been, fishermen and -women, including ancillary workers and their families; have shared aspirations and historical interests or rights in the harvesting, catching or processing of marine living resources; have a history of shared Small Scale fishing activity but, because of forced removals, are not necessarily tied to particular waters or geographic area; and were or still are operating near or in the seashore or coastal waters where they previously enjoyed access to marine living resources, or continue to exercise their rights in a communal manner in terms of an agreement, custom or law; and who regard themselves as a community (DAFF, 2012).

The SSF policy recognises community-based rights rather than individual rights – this was a feature that fisher representatives had pushed for in the policy development

process, to avoid the closure of the commons through individual quotas. However, this aspect of the policy has been narrowly interpreted by DFFE (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment) in its implementation of the SSF policy. The SSF Regulations (DAFF, 2016) require that fishers must belong to a cooperative in order to be eligible for fishing rights – this drastically limits the possibilities for self-determined community organisation in the original spirit of the SSF policy (Auld and Feris, 2022), and does not recognise the situation of individual or family-based subsistence fishers in urban areas who may not see themselves as part of a clearly constituted fishing community (Sunde and Erwin, 2020). The SSF co-operatives are a contemporary site of contestation for small-scale fishers. The top-down, state-led bureaucratic processes through which these co-ops have been formed, and members of the co-ops verified and selected, have been fraught with challenges and inconsistencies. Many genuine small-scale fishers have been left out of the co-operatives, and others have resisted what they experience as a rigidly enforced ‘one size fits all’ approach to co-ops which does not align with their ways of practicing their livelihoods (Sunde and Erwin, 2020). These fishers are now forced to either buy recreational permits, or to carry out their livelihoods illegally, in order to put food on the table.

Those SSF who have been included and therefore ‘formalised’ in a co-op, have to adhere to tight regulation and compliance protocols, which places a massive administrative burden on them. Delays in meaningful redistribution of fishing allocations towards the small-scale sector, no progress in the declaring of special fishing areas for small-scale fishers, no co-management of fisheries resources or marine protected areas, and a lack of financial or capacity development support to be able to realise the full potential of their rights, leaves small-scale fishers deeply marginalised despite over thirty years of progressive policy commitments. In a workshop with Eastern Cape small-scale fishers in 2021, a metaphor was shared by a participant, that sums up this situation. Maxwell Pekayi, who was then the chairman of the Kei Mouth SSF co-operative, said *“We know how to fish, but we do not know how to run a co-op the way government says we must run it. Now we are told we have rights but we cannot use them. We have been given a lamp, but there is no paraffin”*. (Coastal Justice Network and Eastern Cape Small-Scale Fishers workshop, November 2021 – report available in the coastal justice archive, [here](#)).

## 1.5.2 The 'SSF Leaders One Ocean Hub' WhatsApp Group

The small-scale fishers with whom the Coastal Justice Network worked most closely through the 'SSF Leaders' WhatsApp group were a group of around 85 people. Demographic detail about the members of this group is shared in Table 1.1

**Table 1.1: Members of the 'SSF Leaders One Ocean Hub' WhatsApp group**

<b>Small-scale Fishers</b>			
<i>Province</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>
KwaZulu Natal	1	5	6
Eastern Cape	26	36	62
Western Cape	8	7	15
Northern Cape	1	1	2
TOTAL	36	49	85
<b>CJN Scholar-Activists</b>			
<i>University</i>			
Durban University of Technology	1		1
Rhodes University	3	1	4
Nelson Mandela University	1		1
University of Cape Town	4		4
TOTAL	9	1	10

Of the 85 small-scale fishers in the group, all but two are Black. Of the 10 CJN scholar-activists in the group, three are Black and seven are white.

Fishing practices and identities are distinct in different regions, with key differences and specific challenges. I have worked particularly closely with the group of small-scale fishers from the Eastern Cape, which is where I live. Even within this regional grouping, there is a lot of diversity in fishing practices and identity, including: shore-based rod and reel fisherwomen and men; women who harvest seaweed, mussels and oysters; and chokka (squid) fishers (predominantly men) who have in the past worked for white owned commercial squid fishing companies. Eastern Cape small-scale fishers have, for the past five years, been most focused on struggles related to: establishing and managing their co-operatives; negotiating equitable contracts with private partners in the squid and abalone sectors; and defending their rights in relation to marine protected area enclosures and extractive developments such as oil and gas.

While fishers in different areas and provinces are responding to different, but linked, challenges, there are also shared goals and solidarity across the regions and contexts. These relate to broad struggles for meaningful transformation and redistribution in the small-scale sector, and for protection of the ocean commons, although what this requires and what fishers most pressing needs are, differs in different contexts. There are ongoing strategic discussions between and amongst SSF and their social partners about strengthening regional and national organisations of fishers, so that their interests can be better represented in formal governance spaces. These SSF struggles and visions are explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

At the first in-person workshop of Eastern Cape SSF leaders that we (the One Ocean Hub / CJN team based at Rhodes University) organised in 2021, after a year and a half of online interactions during COVID-19, we started the workshop by asking everyone to share their first memory of the sea. Here are some of the memories that were shared – reproduced here with full consent of the participants, and as a way of conveying some of the texture of Eastern Cape SSF identities. These excerpts are present in the full workshop report, which can be accessed [here](#).

*My father was a fisherman, my mother collected mussels. She used to sell these mussels at a white owned shop. The shop owner would record our harvest, then in the*

*holidays we could get shoes, dresses, school uniforms, jam and other treats, with the credit from our mussels. This really motivated me to be a businesswoman in the fishing sector - Zodwa Shoco from Benton Fishing Primary Co-operative*

*Our mothers would harvest mussels and seaweed from the rock pools. The children helped them carry the stuff home. We learnt all about the weather, all about the phases of the moon and the tides – this is where I grew so much love for the sea – Nomalinge Menziwa from Umlibo Fishing Primary Co-operative*

*I remember being on the beach as a kid when we were going fishing and seeing rangers on their horses. The rangers tried to grab us and said they would put us on their horses and take us to jail. This was so terrifying to me – Mzamo Mrwanqana from Ekuphumleni Fishing Primary Co-operative*

*I was born on a farm near Alexandria, and that is where I grew up, until we were evicted and forced to move to a new township near Cannon Rocks. My grandmother worked in the oyster industry. I have memories of oysters and fishing my whole life. Fishing is everything for our family. Boys and girls go fishing. I often go on fishing outings with the women in my family, my sisters, my mother and our kids. We sleep in tents made of black bags and cook the fish right there on the beach – Melisa Pullen from Moeg Gesukkel Fishing Primary Co-operative*

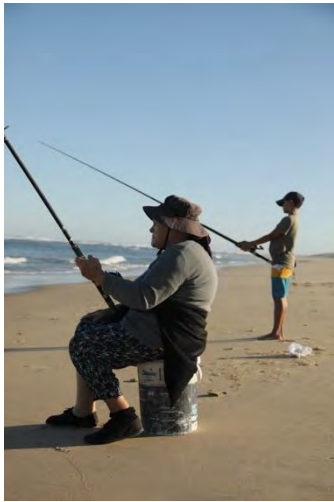
*When I was 12 or 13 years old, I watched my dad and asked, ‘what are you doing with these sticks?’. My dad said, ‘come with me’. He taught me to fish in the river and the sea. He eventually even took me on a boat to sleep in a cabin and fish in the deep sea. When young people started smoking and doing drugs, me and my father taught them to fish to get them off the street – Joseph Marais from Kowie Fishing Primary Co-operative*



1 – Vuyane Jamce, standing in Ngomane outside of Dwesa-Cwebe Marine Protected Area (MPA), pointing towards the place inside the Protected Area, where his grandparents and other family members are buried, and which he can no longer easily visit



2 - Jacky Sabungqu and two other fishermen from Masakhanye SSF Co-operative, in Mpume Village outside of Dwesa-Cwebe MPA, with certificates confirming the recognition of their SSF rights. Since having been awarded these rights, these fishers were arrested inside of Dwesa-Cwebe MPA on charges of poaching



3 - Anna Tities, from Moeg Gesukkel SSF co-operative, fishing at Cannon Rocks with her grandson.



4 - Anna Tities, from Moeg Gesukkel SSF co-operative, protesting against seismic surveys for oil and gas



5- Ronnie Minnaar and another fisher from Koukamma SSF co-operative outside the security gates for 'Eerste Rivier Strand', an affluent gated community that restricts access to the coastline



6 - Fishermen from Koukamma SSF co-operative, on the rocky shore that they now struggle to access, with the mansions of Eerste Rivier in the background.

**Figure 1.9: Gallery of images of fisherfolk from the Eastern Cape, representing a range of issues and struggles for Eastern Cape SSF. All photographs credited to Luke Kaplan**

While there is a lot of solidarity, shared identities and visions between different groups of small-scale fishers, there are of course also tensions between and across the groups represented in the 'SSF Leaders' network. While all are marginalised fishers struggling against oppression and rights violations, there are significant differences. There are some tensions across the provinces. Many SSF in the Western Cape (and to some extent the Northern Cape) have access to small boats, have arguably greater access to markets and to social networks of NGOs, lawyers and journalists who can offer support and visibility. Many fishers in the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu Natal live in more isolated rural communities, have no access to equipment such as boats or cold storage facilities, and have far less visibility or power in the SSF policy debates. There are tensions and siloes across some groupings based on Apartheid era racial categories which persist today. There are many fishers who have been left out of the SSF co-operatives, who remain utterly marginalised and disenfranchised. There are some who reject the label 'small-scale' and prefer to identify as subsistence fishers. There are some who see their SSF rights as a stepping-stone to large scale commercial fishing, and others who fiercely defend their customary fishing practices and ocean custodian identity. There are some people who identify as SSF and yet, others say, are not 'genuine' fishers and are instead exploiting the label for their own benefit or political clout. There are some SSF who are open to the idea that offshore oil and gas might be good for the economy and therefore good for fishers, and many others who are profoundly opposed to oil and gas and other extractive developments in the ocean. There is no single homogenous small-scale fisher identity.

## **1.6 My Role as a Scholar-Activist Researcher in the Coastal Justice Network**

### **1.6.1 Background in environmental justice movements in South Africa**

I came into the One Ocean Hub after a decade of working for the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), one of the oldest environmental justice organisations in South Africa ([www.emg.org.za](http://www.emg.org.za)). My official job title at EMG was 'researcher', and as a member of the Water and Climate Change team at EMG, I carried out participatory action research related to water services inequalities in the City of Cape Town and other municipalities. This research was taken up by the South African Water Caucus, a network of community-based water activists, in their campaigns for water justice. Although I had spent six years at a university prior to this, the EMG and South African

Water Caucus are where I first received a critical political education. This is where I learnt about the strategies and politics of social movements in post-democratic South Africa; it is where I was generously but firmly educated about intersectional injustice, and my complicity in it as a White privileged woman. This is where I was humbled as to the limits of my knowledge and learning, but also challenged to contribute what I did have in terms of knowledge, skills and social capital towards supporting struggles for environmental justice. There were important critiques levelled at NGOs by their community-based partners during this period – well captured in an article by Ayanda Kota (2014). As NGO-employed professionals, we received funding to carry out work with underprivileged communities; the inescapable reality is that some of us received salaries to do the work of movement building, while many others did this work as unemployed volunteers. As foreign-funded organisations, we faced important critiques and scrutiny about being accountable to our funders rather than being accountable to the communities we worked with. At EMG, we had a strong culture of reflexive learning within the organisation and with our Community-Based Organisations (CBO) partners; this enabled a careful, critical, ongoing engagement with these tensions and responsibilities. Through the mentorship and friendship of Jessica Wilson, Thabang Ngcozela, Thabo Lusithi, Zukiswa Hani and others, I unlearnt and relearnt my way into a more confident identity and practice as an activist.

In 2012, EMG partnered with the ELRC to run a Changing Practice Course for Water Activists, facilitated by Jane Burt (Burt, 2021). As a co-facilitator on this course, I learnt a huge amount about social movement learning, cognitive justice and solidarity. At the end of the second Changing Practice Course for Water Activists, an important learning question emerged – this had to do with the absence of solidarity-based relationships between community-based environmental justice activists and professional scientists. Activists struggled to get any support from scientists in gathering and analysing evidence of the pollution that was making them sick. There were barriers related to cost and to the inaccessibility and distance of professional scientists from communities most impacted by environmental injustice. Activists know that mining companies have scientists who work for them – why would no scientists work for or on behalf of communities? It was a challenging and upsetting experience for mining-affected activists seeking support from scientists in running lab-based tests on the soil and water samples the activists had collected and receiving no response. They felt they

were ignored and deemed unimportant by the scientists, despite living with the hazardous pollution and

being on the ‘frontline’ collecting evidence of the illegal environmental damage caused by the mine (Komane & Mahlangu, 2018). When the opportunity arose for me to do a master’s at the ELRC, I decided to use it as an opportunity to work with this question of a lack of solidarity from scientists/academics towards community-based activists. I developed a master’s proposal to explore pedagogies of solidarity within TD water research. However, when I joined the One Ocean Hub, I brought this question with me and adapted my research to consider questions of solidarity within TD ocean research. Over time, and with an upgrade of the master’s to a PhD in 2023, my core question has evolved. However, my central concern and interest remain a personal and intimate one: How can I contribute most usefully and meaningfully to social movements for environmental justice? This PhD has been my own “changing practice project” (Burt, 2021), exploring my role as a researcher positioned within institutional academia in relation to the social movements that I consider to be the most legitimate and hopeful spaces of possibility for social change.

### **1.6.1 Theoretical lenses**

My work is grounded in a living and relational praxis, which is mostly oriented towards the social movements with whom I closely work, in which I am both an insider and outsider. As a scholar-activist, dancing along the hyphen between those identities, I often do not feel that theory is a starting point for me or my work. However, through this PhD, I am coming closer to finding my own relationship to theory, and to a recognition of the theories that already live in me, without me necessarily naming them as such.

As I have reflected on my own most closely held ways of making sense of the world, in conversation with my critical friends, colleagues and mentors, the following (nested) theoretical lenses have come into clearest focus. These are the grounded theories, practised as a form of low theory” (Wark, 2021)<sup>3</sup>, that have accompanied me

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<sup>3</sup> Wark (2021) offers a “low theory” approach to working with theory – as a form of philosophy from

throughout this study and that will be used to reflect synthetically on the whole thesis in Chapter 7.

### ***1.6.1.1 Political ecology and environmental justice theory***

Political Ecology is an interdisciplinary theory that considers the relationships between politics, economics and the environment and focuses on structural inequalities, historical legacies and socio-political contexts to explain environmental degradation. Political Ecology provides a lens to understand environmental change as a deeply political and contested process. Closely related to Political Ecology is Environmental justice, which is both a theory and movement. Environmental Justice is the language and the organising theory of the social movements that I have been a part of over the past 18 years.

Environmental justice was first conceptualised in the United States in the 1980s and referred to the disproportionate environmental harms concentrated in and experienced by Black and socio-economically oppressed and marginalised communities (Bullard, 1994; Cutter, 1995). Polluting industries and hazardous waste sites, with detrimental impacts on human and ecosystem health, were most often developed close to Black, Indigenous and Latino communities, leading to the interlinking of the ideas of environmental injustice and environmental racism (Bullard, 2019; Pellow & Brulle, 2005). Environmental justice has grown and diversified as a theory and as a movement – now encompassing wider experiences of a disproportionate burden of environmental harm and exclusion for certain groups of people and a disproportionate accumulation of environmental benefit and access for other groups of people. Questions of unequal access and recognition within environmental governance are also considered within contemporary environmental justice understandings. The political ecologist Martínez-Alier has theorised environmental justice as an “environmentalism of the poor” (2005)

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below, generated with “the displaced, the marginal, and the recalcitrant and—through them—the possibility of a new world” (Wark, 2021, p. 144), which reflects the Acknowl-EJ’s approach to environmental justice theory and praxis (Rodríguez et al., 2023) and aligns with intentions of blue justice praxis (e.g. Bennet et al., 2021), which are in focus in this study. It aligns with the approach of TD scholar-activist research explored in this study.

and summarises it succinctly:

The poor and the Indigenous are at the frontlines of extraction and waste disposal. They are increasingly disrupted by neo-colonial incursions in search of fossil fuels, metals, biomass. They are also the main actors of a just socio-ecological transition unless repression and fear hinder action. In many instances, mobilizations have led to successful outcomes. (Martínez-Alier, 2023, p. xi)

This has been extended by Rodrigues et al. (2023), reflecting on the Acknowl-EJ network's<sup>4</sup> framework for sustainability transformations, which recognises that ecological conflict and resistance to environmental injustices are often productive catalysts of change that can advance radical alternatives.

We see conflict and alternatives as intertwined processes. Environmental justice struggles are spaces of reimagination, where one's and the other's ways of thinking, seeing the world and doing are disputed and reshaped in a dynamic and multiscalar learning process. Moreover, alternatives can be both the result or the root of resistance processes. ... Thus, social movements, resistance and alternatives are linked processes. People move across these spaces, protesting and engaging in rebuilding when they need to. (Rodríguez et al., 2023, p. 12)

This understanding of conflict and resistance as sites of productivity resonates with Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism (1999). Within this framing, contestation and struggle are understood not as obstacles to democracy or progress, but as essential to creating new possibilities for transformation and regenerative futures. Mouffe argues that democracy thrives when conflicting perspectives are engaged in an ongoing, open-ended way – the 'agonistic' space – rather than being suppressed or smoothed over through consensus. This requires that political space is kept open for dissent, ensuring that different ways of knowing the world are able to contest power. Viewing Acknowl-EJ's framework on resistance as a catalyst for change through Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, we can understand struggles for

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<sup>4</sup> The Acknowl-EJ is a "sister network" to the T-learning network developed under the International Science Council 'Transformations to Sustainability' programme, with members of this network contributing to the development of the One Ocean Hub proposal to the GCRF. Acknowl-EJ is a network that focuses on the development of scholar-activism for environmental justice (Rodríguez et al., 2023).

environmental justice as agonistic spaces where different ways of knowing enter into productive conflict, allowing for plural, situated and locally embedded alternatives to emerge.

The recently emerging theory and practice of *blue justice* as a distinct type of environmental justice is particularly relevant to this study (Bennett, 2021; Blythe et al., 2023; Ertör, 2023; Isaacs, 2019). Blue justice theory is considered in more depth in Paper 4 (Chapter 5 of this thesis); in brief, it builds on environmental justice theory to consider the intersecting dimensions of distributive justice, recognitional justice (including epistemic justice and hermeneutical justice) and procedural justice concerning ocean space, resources and governance. By ocean governance, I mean the policies, institutions and decision-making practices that shape how marine resources are used, protected and shared. I will explore how all these dimensions of (in)justice are manifest in contemporary blue injustices in South Africa. For this study, I will bring the Acknowl-EJ network's understanding of resistance as a catalyst for just transformations, with Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, into conversation with the emerging blue justice literature, in discussions of the blue resistance being practised by SSFs and their partners.

This thesis explored the implications of an environmental justice approach to TD research praxis. The explicitly political, justice-oriented and resistance-oriented mode of environmental justice brings a different perspective to all aspects of TD research. For example, the environmental justice-oriented TD researcher is inevitably a *scholar-activist* TD researcher (Apple, 2016; Cox, 2015; Routledge & Derickson, 2015). The research agenda in environmental justice TD research is co-developed throughout the life of the research engagement in an ongoing, responsive and emergent way to feed directly into the struggles of social movements. Knowledge co-production is a fundamental feature of research approaches to address intractable socio-ecological crises (Norström et al., 2020). *Knowledge co-production for environmental justice* entails knowledge co-production by grassroots activists and academics – recognising that social movements are important producers of knowledge that do not only enact politics but are facilitators and generators of diverse knowledges (Temper & del Bene, 2016). The learning, knowledge and strategies of *social movements* thus become centred on environmental-justice-oriented TD research (Choudry, 2013; Cox, 2015).

The following excerpts from Choudry (2013) set out a thorough description of the kind of scholar-activist TD research process that emerged in this study:

At the heart of this approach is centring the importance of relationships with movements and communities in struggle, and political commitments, which also relate to intellectual work that arises from and informs them, rather than whether one employs particular methodologies or theoretical frameworks - not because these are unimportant, but rather because these do not guarantee a person's activism. (Choudry, 2013, p. 143)

The activist research processes described here are embedded in relations of trust with other activists and organisations that develop through constant effort to work together in formal and informal networks and collaborations. These networks are spaces for the ongoing sharing of information and analysis. They allow for the identification of research that is most relevant to particular struggles and communication of that research in ways that are meaningful and useful for movement building. They are invaluable in the production, validation, vetting, or 'getting the research right' in the applications, strategic considerations, and dissemination of the research. But research spaces can also be spaces of organising. In some cases, the research process itself can be a form of organising, building, and strengthening communities, movements, and alliances. (Choudry 2013, p. 144).

Derickson and Routledge (2015) propose a 'politics of resourcefulness' to guide scholar-activist praxis - this can be expressed through the redirection of academic privilege and resources towards advancing the work of their marginalised collaborators; framing research questions and activities to directly answer questions that social movements identify; and carrying out research and advocacy directly related to the unjust exclusions and threats to marginalised knowledge holders. Juris (2008) encourages researchers to practice 'pro-active solidarity' with activist partners, which is both politically engaged and collaborative. Vakil et al. (2016) write about a 'politicised trust' which requires not only a mutually respectful working relationship but also an ongoing building of political solidarity. Relational considerations within environmental justice TD research, therefore, need to include *solidarity* and *political rigour* to address power and positionality within scholar-activist research networks (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; Temper et al., 2019). The ethics of environmental justice TD research have to extend beyond tick-box ethics protocols to be *critically reflexive and counter-hegemonic*.

All of these concepts are woven through the papers in this thesis and are reflected upon together in the final meta-analysis in Chapter 7.

### **1.6.1.2 Reflexive co-engagement practice**

In this study, I drew on collective work carried out by the CJN scholar-activists with SSFs. The nature of this relational, networked scholar-activist praxis is counter to the usual academic emphasis on individual achievement. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this PhD thesis, it was important to lift out and make visible my own praxis and contributions.

The following excerpt from my reflexive research journal expresses some of the discomfort and tension I felt in this regard:

*My research is concerned with how we learn and practice solidarity as scholar-activists – as such, I am grappling both with theories of solidarity, and the ethical practising of it, in each moment, and in every move that I make with others. I am also grappling with how I communicate this, write about it in a thesis, share it in a form that has integrity, that has meaning for me and for others, that expresses my authentic voice but that doesn't centre me (where is the solidarity practice in pursuing the individual attainment of a doctoral degree?).*

*As transdisciplinary researcher, I am grappling always with how my work interconnects with others, both fellow researchers in a range of disciplines, and the coastal activists we want this research to be in service to – a constant sensitive reaching out of tentacles to brush up against others, to sense where they are, what they need from me, what I need from them, where the tensions or creative energies are being generated between us, how to build bridges and how to hold boundaries, when to draw closer and when to withdraw.*

*Within all of these many multi-layered and entangled relationships, collaborations and responsibilities, it is almost impossible to hold onto a clear sense of individual practice. There is no beginning and no end.*

*In this context, developing a rigorous reflexive practice is essential, for any learning and meaning-making to be possible, for any sincere and wholehearted perception of what it is I am doing, and how.*

Scholar-activist TD praxis entails navigating tensions in multiple dynamics – for example, navigating the tensions between different disciplinary traditions within academia; between different modes of engagement practised by different groups – for example, oppositional vs collaborative strategies; and between different groupings within social movements who are often competing for scarce resources. The most intimate and ever-present tension for scholar-activists to navigate, however, is that of their own identities. Scholar-activists face constant pressure to shift from “thinking activist” to “radical academic” (Cox, 2015). Activist ethnography, a scholar-activist methodology which closely aligns with our methodology within the CJN, employs the “procedural virtues” of reflexivity and relationality (Reedy & King, 2019). Scholar-activists learn with and from social movement partners as work together unfolds, in the pursuit of dialogical, co-constructed political aims (Bisaillon, 2012). It involves reflexive co-engagement with activist partners to bring about positive change in both research practice and activist practice and constant reflexivity based on a recognition of the tensions within the self and between one’s different roles (Frampton et al., 2006). It involves ‘insider-outsider’ representation and contributes to radical reciprocity (Craven & Davis, 2013). This radical reciprocity means that scholar-activists aim and offer to contribute to activists organising efforts in the ways that they can, to reciprocate the time, energy and knowledge that activists contribute to research efforts. Checker (2014) sounds an important note of caution here, for scholar-activists to be vulnerable and humble in their offerings, and in their declarations of privilege, to ensure not to overstate what kinds of influence they actually have, and what their limitations really are.

There is an ongoing reflexive interrogation of one’s identity and practice as a scholar-activist and an acceptance and acknowledgement of the tensions and conflicts that arise from this identity – seeing these as being of value in the researcher-activist process. There is a heightened sensitivity to power relations that arise through the identity conflicts within the scholar-activist self.

Radical vulnerability within scholar-activist collaborations involves opening oneself up, including to critique and backlash (both from colleagues in academia and social movements) – but this radical vulnerability is an important mode of “enabling ... epistemic and ethical responsibility in relation to politically engaged alliance work” (Chowdhury et al., 2016, p.1800). Embodied, practised values such as “solidarity and responsibility, trust and hope, vulnerability and reflexivity” help scholar-activists to navigate their identities and praxis ethically (Nagar, 2014, p. 3).

The role that I have played within the CJN is that of a coordinator and a responsible participant (Temper et al., 2019), taking care of the holding of reflexive thinking and planning spaces for this group. Since I was engaged in a study considering the role and praxis of scholar-activists concerning community-based activists, I was in a position of grounded research within the CJN, studying the processes and practices that I was inside of. This is consistent with the deep, vulnerable and critically reflexive praxis that has been identified as a core feature of ethical scholar-activism (Nagar, 2014). It is also a useful role to make explicit and visible, particularly in the context of urgent and responsive activist work, in which taking the time to step back and reflect is seldom prioritised.

Over time, through the deep reflections on both theory and practice, on both the injustices ‘out there’ in the Blue Economy and ‘in here’ in the knowledge economy, my reflexive capacity was deepened through engagement with theory, and vice versa. I was deeply involved in the nitty gritty daily crisis management of responding to urgent rights violations of fishers through COVID lockdown and through the bungled process of squid rights allocations in the Eastern Cape. In that mode, I was not able to theorise on what was being learnt, produced or practiced. That is one kind of ‘insider’ mode – inside the pressing daily work of activist solidarity. In stepping back from active CJN and SSF group coordination to write this PhD, I experienced more of an ‘outsider’ mode – quickly losing track of the intricate details of unfolding processes, but able to gain a sense of the ‘whole’, and of the relationship of the ‘whole’ to wider experience and ideas about social movements, environmental justice, just transformations and so on. Another kind of insider – outsider movement exists through being a scholar-activist. I was at times deep inside of the management and coordination of the research agenda of the One Ocean Hub; especially as I took on the role of the Country

Director in 2022/23. At other times I was right on the periphery – I was not part of the initial establishment of the One Ocean Hub, and I also withdrew from the core Hub activities towards the end of the project as I had to focus on this PhD. At times when I was working very intensively with the small scale fishers on pressing matters, I also felt that the research deliverables for the One Ocean Hub were a very distant thought. Therefore, I have experienced insider-ness and outsider-ness in both the academic and activist contexts, at different times. Being able to reflect on the different perspectives I have on these contexts, and on my role and practice in them, from these different vantage points, has deepened my reflexivity and my praxis.

This is not an easy role to play, and I have (and still do) grappled intensely with self-doubt, uncertainty, imposter syndrome both in academic spaces and activist spaces, worry about whether I was intervening too much, or too little, being too much of a scholar, or too much of an activist. This work has entailed a lot of questioning and vulnerability. In practice, some of the ways that I have approached the ongoing praxis of self-reflection has included regular reflexive debriefs with trusted colleagues, as well as reflexive journaling, of which I have included some extracts in this study. I have also tried to be as clear and open as I can be about who I am and what I am working on, in all spaces, to open myself up to critique and to reassurance. This has meant being very open in the transdisciplinary research space about my activist identity, which refuses to be neutral or seek apolitical consensus on issues of justice. It has also meant being very open in the activist space about my academic identity, and the fact that I am doing a PhD that is connected to the work we are doing together in social movement building. In 2021 – 2022, I participated in a short course called ‘Reflective Social Practice’, which entailed the deepening of my reflexive observation practices – this was immensely supportive in this PhD journey. Chapter 6 opens up more discussion of the ethics and reflexivity of scholar-activist work.

I organised several CJN strategic retreats and monthly online meetings, where we followed an agenda that always gave space to both pressing justice issues and reflexive discussion, asking questions of ourselves and each other about the impacts (negative and positive) of our ways of working (see Box 1).

***Box 1: Guiding questions for reflexive CJN debriefing conversations after research engagements, public meetings, fieldwork etc.***

- What was our practice in this meeting?
- What did we enable, or open space for?
- What did we miss, or what tensions did we contribute to?
- How should CJN respond to what arose in this meeting?
- What did we learn about ocean governance?
- What did we learn about solidarity/scholar-activist practice?

Through the contained reflexive space of the CJN, we were able to leverage useful and responsive knowledge co-production with the participants on the SSF leaders' group. These engagements were also deeply reflexive and involved ongoing negotiation of a code of practice for the WhatsApp group<sup>5</sup> and ongoing discussion of the differentiated roles and contributions of researchers, fishers and civil society representatives. The co-produced knowledge which is presented in the CJN archive (see section 1.7) is the result of ongoing, networked, reflexive co-engagement between scholar-activists and SSFs.

I have also played a role in bridging the activist priorities and concerns that emerge from our reflexive co-engagement with the SSF leaders' group into the wider TD One Ocean Hub. I have particularly done this over the past two years as I have been the country co-director for the One Ocean Hub in South Africa and therefore responsible for chairing our monthly country meetings. Through this platform, I have consistently raised the blue justice concerns emerging from our activist networks and advocated for wider solidarity and support from One Ocean Hub researchers for these struggles.

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<sup>5</sup> available here:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/17jzEk9r3dWn1W6dliKdHNTI8NWeWIC9O/edit?usp=drive\\_link&oid=111262970928996776270&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17jzEk9r3dWn1W6dliKdHNTI8NWeWIC9O/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=111262970928996776270&rtpof=true&sd=true)

In the development of this PhD thesis, I collected, organised and analysed the collectively produced coastal justice archive. This represents another important role that scholar-activists can play in social movements – making visible and available the knowledge contributions of social movements, which can otherwise remain overlooked and undervalued. Activist archives can be sources of learning, reflection and movement building for social movements. This is my hope for the scholarly work that has gone into lifting out the coastal justice archive in this study.

## **1.7 Research Questions**

### **1.7.1 Main research question**

The main aim of this study was to explore dimensions of scholar-activist TD research praxis and associated contributions to advancing blue justice in transformative ocean governance. In doing this it sought to address some of the gaps in TD research, most notably the need for a deeper understanding of how to centre the voices and contributions of those most affected by environmental justice concerns. It also addresses the role of scholar-activist researchers, practised as a form of political solidarity and reflexive co-engagement.

The main research question is:

*How can scholar-activist transdisciplinary research praxis contribute to advancing blue justice in transformative ocean governance in South Africa?*

### **1.7.2 Sub-questions**

#### **1.7.2.1 Sub-question 1**

Why is there a need to advance scholar-activist TD practice in transformative ocean governance research? This question is addressed in Paper 1 (Chapter 2 of the thesis).

#### **1.7.2.2 Sub-question 2**

How can scholar-activists in blue justice support just and inclusive views of ocean governance? This question is addressed in Paper 2 (Chapter 3 of the thesis).

### **1.7.2.3 Sub-question 3**

What methods in blue justice research enable plural knowledges and perspectives for co-engagement? This question is addressed in Paper 3 (Chapter 4 of the thesis).

### **1.7.2.4 Sub-question 4**

How is blue justice resistance expressed and acknowledged as a key feature of inclusive ocean governance? This question is addressed in Paper 4 (Chapter 5 of the thesis).

### **1.7.2.5 Sub-question 5**

What emerges as key lessons for scholar-activist TD researchers in blue justice? This question is addressed in Paper 5 (Chapter 6 of the thesis) and in the meta-reflection in Chapter 7.

## **1.8 Methodology**

### **1.8.1 Co-constructing the scholar-activist archive**

In my scholar-activist collaborations within the One Ocean Hub, focused on the formation of the CJN, I have practised a form of activist ethnography (Craven & Davis, 2013; Frampton et al. 2006; Reedy & King, 2017). Activist ethnography is a scholar-activist methodology that includes an explicit political commitment to engagement and to generating knowledge for activism purposes (Bisaillon, 2012). Methods within activist ethnographic research include participant and self-observation, critically reflexive “thick” descriptions of context and practice, interviews and conversations, direct political actions with activist partners and facilitation of mutual learning (Reedy & King, 2017).

Through being part of the movement for blue justice together, CJN scholar-activists and SSFs have co-generated a large collection of materials. In this mode of knowledge co-production for environmental justice, the researcher is not the expert; the primary role of the researcher is often as a facilitator or coordinator of networked learning spaces. All in the network are co-researchers and co-activists (Kitchin & Fuller, 2004); with respect and openness to diverse knowledge contributions, recognising the value

of experiential, intergenerational and situated contextual knowledges of local activists and the theoretical and disciplinary knowledges of researchers.

Choudry and Vally (2018) recognise the value of alternative, informal archives that are constructed by activists during their struggles. They emphasise that social movements are not only sites of social and political action but are also important sites of learning and knowledge production (Choudry & Vally, 2018). They also argue that activist archives can be invaluable repositories of ideas, histories and practical resources that can “reveal the nuts and bolts of how people have collectively organised and operated” (Choudry & Vally, 2018, p. 5).

Activists often find it challenging to keep detailed records of their work due to resource constraints, other pressing priorities, loss of data when people leave organisations, and so on. Therefore, the compiling of an activist archive is a useful and important role that scholar-activists can play in support of social movements (Flinn, 2010; Ramamurthy, 2013). An archive can be a helpful resource for activist learning and reflection; it serves as a record of resistance and attempts to build alternatives (Choudry & Vally, 2018). By making these struggles legible and visible to future activists, an archive can offer hope and the sense that another world is possible (Flinn, 2008).

The knowledge co-production referred to in this thesis refers to the knowledge that is held in the coastal justice archive. These are the archived materials related to the co-engaged work that SSF and scholar activists undertook together in responsive ways as issues related to ocean governance arose. This is the co-produced knowledge that was of immediate value, importance and usefulness to the small-scale fishers; it was useful for strategic moments (for example at particular stages of policy consultation), and it is useful to now have it in a systematically organized archive, which is accessible as a public record of participation of SSF in diverse aspects of ocean governance over a four year period. This is evidence of the sustained and committed efforts of SSF to contribute their voices and knowledge to ocean decision making. This archive is something that was discussed and, in fact, asked for by SSF in our participatory deliberations about what kind of research is most useful. My role as a scholar activist who was carrying out research on the processes of learning and working together was made explicit in all collaborations (see ‘WhatsApp code of conduct’ – link [here](#); and

approved ethics application, Appendix A). This thesis is the meta-analysis of the coastal justice archive. Therefore, I am not claiming that this thesis itself is co-produced knowledge. My role as a PhD scholar in writing up this meta-analysis is distinct and is my own individual contribution. The question of co-authoring some of the papers that are presented in this thesis was a consideration for me, and I explored this possibility. I had honest conversations about this with several fishers who I worked closely with in other kinds of knowledge co-production – in the writing of policy submissions or letters to government Ministers, for example. When I asked if they would be interested in writing something with me that was more reflective about the process of working together, there was some initial interest. But when it came to the practical commitment that this required, in terms of meeting to discuss ideas or exchange thoughts via voice notes, the interest soon dwindled, and I quickly let it go, as it did not feel right for me to place additional pressure on fishers to contribute in this way. Co-writing press-releases, media articles, blog posts, and policy comments – these were useful co-production activities that served the pressing needs of fisher activists and the movement for fishers' rights. I felt that to force a process of co-engaged writing of the papers in this thesis would be a performance of knowledge co-production that would only serve my own academic ends and would not serve the fishers. Their voices are contained richly and resonantly in the Coastal Justice Archive. This thesis is my voice, and the voices of other scholar activists engaged in the academic writing process with me.

### **1.8.2 Analysis of the archive**

This thesis and the papers presented as part of the thesis, all draw on the co-produced scholar-activist archive constructed out of the social movement work of the SSFs in collaboration with CJA researcher's TD scholar-activist research praxis over four years, representing the type of activist ethnography referred to above. Compiling and organising the archive was one important level of analytical/synthesis work that I undertook. I also drew on the archive to make visible key facets of blue justice work, and I reflected on this, making up three different levels of work with the archive, outlined below.

### **1.8.2.1 Level 1: Constructing and organising the archive**

Over the past four years, CJNI researchers and SSF activists have:

- participated in and submitted comments to dozens of public consultation processes related to ocean governance;
- workshopped, summarised and translated new policies and reports as they have been released;
- co-produced political public storytelling processes;
- written open letters, statements and media pieces; and
- participated in and contributed to several legal proceedings related to blue injustices.

These materials were stored in an ad hoc way in WhatsApp groups, inboxes and workshop resource packs. In doing the work for this thesis, I organised these diverse materials into an archive, which is linked to a spreadsheet detailing the timeline of scholar-activist engagement with ocean governance from 2020–2023. This has enabled a descriptive analysis of the knowledge and strategies for blue justice co-developed over this time.

Table 1.2 provides a summary of the contents of the archive and links to the relevant folders.

**Table 1.2: Summary of the contents of the CJNI scholar-activist archive**

<b>Coastal Justice Archive Folders</b>	<b>Number of files</b>	<b>Link</b>
Ethics and codes of practice	7	<a href="#">Link to Ethics and codes of practice folder</a>
CJNI-SSF workshop reports	11	<a href="#">Link to CJNI-SSF workshop reports folder</a>

Court judgements and affidavits	11	<a href="#">Link to Court judgements and affidavits folder</a>
Letters to government officials	25	<a href="#">Link to Letters to government officials folder</a>
Pamphlets and summaries	47	<a href="#">Link to pamphlets and summaries folder</a>
Policies	9	<a href="#">Link to Policies folder</a>
Press statements, open letters and media articles	35	<a href="#">Link to Press statements, open letters and media articles folder</a>
Public comments and appeals	35	<a href="#">Link to Public comments and appeals folder</a>
SSF and blue justice research	16	<a href="#">Link to SSF and blue justice research folder</a>
Hyperlinked timeline of ocean governance engagements	1	<a href="#">Link to hyperlinked timeline</a>

### **1.8.2.2 Level 2: Selection of key foci in the archive**

As an orientation for this study, Paper 1 (Chapter 2) sets the scene by looking reflectively across the archive, in conversation with the literature on TD research and social movements to answer sub-question 1: “Why is there a need to advance scholar-activist TD practice in transformative ocean governance research?”

As the next level of analysis of the coastal justice archive, I undertook three ‘deep dives’ into the archive. In these curatorial deep dives, I closely considered a selection of materials in the archive to explore my sub-questions 2, 3 and 4. This is a curatorial

process of 'framing' (Bal, 2012), which is sensitive to the audience and to the purpose of the framing and selection of particular materials from the archive. I selected the archival materials that would help to make visible the contributions of scholar-activist TD praxis to advance blue justice in transformative ocean governance in three contexts.

In the first deep dive, represented in Paper 2 (Chapter 3), I considered a selection of materials generated through participating in public processes related to the Ocean Economy Master Planning process, MSP and MPA management; I also lifted out materials co-produced in several CJN-SSF workshops. These materials were selected and analysed in relation to sub-question 2: "How can scholar-activists in blue justice support just and inclusive views of ocean governance?"

In the second deep dive, represented in Paper 3 (Chapter 4), I considered the materials generated through the Empatheatre public storytelling process for *Lalela uLwandle* – this included data generated through iterative script development, the post-show discussions, and the materials generated through this engagement for the civil society objections to offshore oil and gas exploration. This analysis of this selection from the archive helped to answer sub-question 3: "What methods in blue justice research enable plural knowledges and perspectives for co-engagement?"

In the third deep dive, represented in Paper 4 (Chapter 5), I lifted out materials generated through SSF resistance to blue injustices, including resistance to procedural injustices, recognitional injustices and distributional injustices. I honed in specifically on the affidavits of SSFs and other ocean defenders that formed part of the court cases to interdict seismic surveys on the Wild Coast and the West Coast of South Africa. The analysis of this selection from the archive helped to answer sub-question 4: "How is blue (in)justice resistance expressed as a key feature of inclusive ocean governance?"

### **1.8.2.3 Level 3: Meta-reflections**

A final level of analysis consisted of looking across the entire archive and carrying out a reflexive meta-reflection. In Paper 5 (Chapter 6), I undertook a close consideration of the particular ethical tensions and contradictions in the scholar-activist TD identity. Through an analysis of the reflexive conversations of CJN researchers thinking together about our role in all the activities and practices represented in the archive, I explored sub-question 5: What emerges as key lessons for scholar-activist TD researchers in blue justice? – this question is partly addressed in Paper 5.

Finally, in Chapter 7, also addressing sub-question 5, I undertook a synthetic meta-reflection on the archive and the deep dives offered through the papers. Through a nested environmental justice/blue justice/scholar-activist knowledge co-production framing, I offer final perspectives on the main research question: “How can scholar-activist TD research praxis contribute to advancing blue justice in transformative ocean governance in South Africa?” I identify gaps in this study and offer recommendations for further scholarly work drawing on the coastal justice archive.

### **1.8.2.4 Ethics application and approval**

I received ethical approval from the Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee (EF-REC) for this study, application reference number 2023-7072-7409. My approved ethics application, approval letter, research information letter, research consent form and gatekeeper letter are all attached as appendices (Appendix A).

## **1.9 An Overview of the Chapters and Five Papers in this Study**

**Chapter 1:** In this introductory chapter, I have given an overview of the context for this PhD study. The implementation of the blue economy in South Africa has given rise to blue injustices experienced most intensely by marginalised coastal communities. While the need for transformative ocean research for transformative ocean governance has been recognised, the knowledge and resistance practices of social movements resisting blue injustices have largely been overlooked by TD ocean researchers. Social movements of grassroots activists resisting environmental injustices hold important learnings and potential for change and radical alternatives.

The gap between dominant TD ocean governance research and social movements, might be addressed through scholar-activist knowledge co-production for blue justice. This study aims to identify some of the core practices and priorities for scholar-activist TD research to contribute to blue justice. In this opening chapter, I introduced myself and my role in the study, and the theoretical perspectives of environmental justice and scholar-activist solidarity that I drew on as a form of 'low theory' throughout this study. I present the research questions and the methodology of constructing and analysing an archive of co-produced coastal justice materials.

**Chapter 2** presents 'Paper 1', entitled 'Surfacing solidarity praxis in transdisciplinary research for blue justice'. This paper was published in *Ecosystems and People* in October 2023. I am the first author and Kira Erwin is the second author. This paper addresses sub-question 1: Why is there a need to advance scholar-activist TD practice in transformative ocean governance research? The paper develops an argument for scholar-activist TD praxis in ocean governance and points to the possibilities and roles of TD scholar-activists to contribute to blue justice.

**Chapter 3** presents 'Paper 2', entitled 'Towards counter-hegemonic ocean governance: Small-scale fisher engagement in marine decision making in South Africa'. This paper has been submitted to *Marine Policy* where it is under review. I am the sole author of this paper. This paper offers a scholar-activist praxis process for surfacing a fisher-led view on ocean governance, covering 1) policy critique and 2) practices that co-create alternative spaces for ocean governance deliberations for fishers. It reveals how this enables a bottom-up perspective on ocean governance.

**Chapter 4** presents 'Paper 3', entitled '*Lalela uLwandle: An Experiment in Plural Governance Discussions*'. This was published as a chapter in *The Palgrave handbook of blue heritage*, edited by Rosabelle Boswell, David O'Kane and Jeremy Hills, and published in 2022. For this paper, Kira Erwin is the first author, I am the second author, and Dylan McGarry and Neil Coppen are the third and fourth authors, respectively. I was part of the research, script development and facilitation team for *Lalela uLwandle*, and I contributed to research design, data collection, data analysis and writing for this paper. In particular I led the sections of the paper that speak about the contribution of *Lalela uLwandle* to the civil society response to offshore oil and drilling. This paper offers a scholar-activist praxis method developed in the One Ocean Hub that allows

for plural perspectives in ocean governance and points to the emergence of networked solidarity among researchers and activists. This method was important for surfacing SSF knowledge and experience, transgressively challenging power relations in public and highlighting the intersectionality of scholar-activist TD praxis.

**Chapter 5** presents 'Paper 4', entitled 'Blue resistance: Small-scale fishers and the CJN respond to blue (in)justice in South Africa'. This has been submitted to the *Journal of Human Rights Practice* where it is under review. I am the sole author of this paper. This paper offers a perspective on how blue justice is reflected in the resistance knowledges of fishers. It argues that surfacing such knowledge is an important dimension of ocean justice TD research if the human rights of ocean defenders are to be respected.

**Chapter 6** presents Paper 5, entitled 'Trail-markers for an expanded ethics of engaged scholar-activist sustainability research'. This has been submitted to the *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* where it is under review. I am the sole author of this paper. This paper offers a perspective on how scholar-activists can deepen their reflexivity in TD scholar-activist research for blue justice. It tackles the complex issue of ethics approvals and processes in TD research and offers some guidance for TD researchers moving forward.

**Chapter 7** presents a meta-reflection across the coastal justice archive as explored in the rest of the thesis. This chapter synthesises some of the key lessons learnt from the study on 1) scholar-activist TD research and 2) Blue Justice in ocean governance and offers recommendations for further research 1) to generate further perspectives from the scholar-activist archive, 2) to advance blue justice in ocean governance, and 3) for TD scholar-activist research.

*NOTE TO THE READER: As this is a PhD by publication and each paper is written as an 'independent piece' as submitted to journals and edited book, there is an inevitable duplication of some aspects of this chapter which contextualises the whole study and its approaches across the papers, particularly in the sections of the papers that deal with contextualisation, and methodology. Also, the papers have been lightly edited for meaning and flow.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### PAPER 1: SURFACING SOLIDARITY PRAXIS IN TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR BLUE JUSTICE

This paper has been published in a Special Issue of *Ecosystem and People*. The published version of the paper is attached as Appendix B. The original citation of the paper is as follows:

Pereira, T., & Erwin, K. (2023). Surfacing solidarity praxis in transdisciplinary research for blue justice. *Ecosystems and People*, 19(1), 2260502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26395916.2023.2260502>

I am the first author of this paper, and I was responsible for conceptualising the paper, carrying out the analysis and writing the first draft. My co-author Prof. Kira Erwin contributed editorial comments and writing in the final draft.

This paper is the first paper in this PhD by publication which investigates dimensions of transdisciplinary scholar-activist praxis in advancing ocean governance in a South African Coastal Justice Network. This paper argues for the role of scholar-activist transdisciplinary praxis in re-orienting ocean governance research to be in solidarity with social movements struggling for blue justice. It addresses the first sub-question of this study: *Why is there a need to advance scholar activist transdisciplinary practice in transformative ocean governance research?*

#### **Abstract**

In this article, we centre the knowledge and contributions of environmental justice social movements towards transformations for sustainability in transdisciplinary (TD) research. Scholar-activists within research teams can help bridge networks of scholars

with social movement networks to build strongly engaged and relational TD research. We draw on reflections and learnings from the Coastal Justice Network (CJN), a scholar-activist network working in solidarity with small-scale fishers (SSFs) and other blue justice movements in South Africa. We discuss some of the alignments, possibilities, and tensions inherent in this mode of TD research. Lastly, we suggest approaches for bridging the academic-activist divide within TD ocean research, including the inclusion of scholar-activists who have established relationships with social movements in TD teams, ensuring adequate time and learning spaces for developing relational capacities such as reflexivity and solidarity and embracing and learning from the messy politics of alliance building.

## 2.1 Introduction

Transdisciplinary (TD) research is one of the ways that academia has responded to the global poly-crises we face (Hirsch-Hadorn et al., 2006; Lang et al., 2012). The growing urgency of the global environmental crisis has compelled sustainability researchers in particular to address the ‘science-society’ gap in socially engaged, transformative and reflexive ways (Jahn et al., 2012; Lang et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2022). Transdisciplinary (TD) research that focuses on sustainability promotes the co-production of knowledge through participatory, inclusive partnerships with diverse stakeholders grappling with environmental concerns. This type of research is a well-established (albeit still subject to a divergent range of interpretations and applications) and well-funded mode of research that is viewed by some as *the* model for sustainability science (Hirsch-Hadorn et al., 2006; Görg et al., 2014 in Healy 2019).

One of the core practices of this kind of research is to establish multi-stakeholder networks (Hirsch-Hadorn et al., 2006; Lang et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2022). To sufficiently respond to intractable socio-ecological challenges and to encourage knowledge co-production, these networks include government officials, policymakers, NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs). There has been increasing recognition of the need to give careful attention to the relational aspects of these research partnerships (West et al., 2020). There remains, however, a relative lack of attention within TD theory and practice to critical and ethical engagements between TD researchers and social movements of marginalised people working in counter-hegemonic ways towards environmental justice (Temper et al., 2018).

In this article, we explore how a scholar-activist orientation might contribute to bringing sustainability TD research closer to grassroots social movements. We do this by discussing how the CJN emerged from a large TD research project, the GCRF One Ocean Hub, that works towards inclusive and just ocean governance. The CJN is convened by scholar-activists, including both authors, within an existing TD research network. The One Ocean Hub is an international TD research programme across five countries with a vision of “fair and inclusive decision making for a healthy ocean whereby people and planet flourish” (<https://oneoceanhub.org>). This TD project has as its mission to “bring together coastal people, researchers and decision-makers to value and learn from different knowledge(s) and voices to collaboratively influence decisions and practices shaping the future of the ocean for justice and sustainability” (University of Strathclyde, 2022, n.p.). Undertaking research of this kind must recognise South Africa’s violently racist history, established through colonialism and apartheid, that dispossessed Black people of coastal territories, livelihoods and relationships with coastal and ocean resources. Forced removals from coastal areas made way for White elites and private developments but also occurred in the name of biodiversity conservation (Peer et al., 2022). Under democracy, there are ongoing manifestations and impacts of displacement and exclusion of coastal people from coastal spaces (Mafumbu et al., 2022). From the inadequate consultation and involvement of coastal users in decision making to the exploitation and marginalisation of SSFs (SSFs) to the criminalisation of customary livelihoods in MPAs, these injustices continue to reproduce historic exclusions (Sowman & Sunde, 2018). Ocean policy and governance in South Africa are deeply fragmented (Taljaard et al., 2019), resulting in the contradictory and ineffective implementation of even the most progressive policies (Sowman & Sunde, 2021), and enabling ‘blue economy’ frameworks to be rolled out in undemocratic and socio-ecologically unjust ways (Bond, 2019). In response to all of this, social movements of SSFs and other community groupings along the South African coastline have coalesced to mobilise for ‘blue justice’ (Bennett et al., 2021; Isaacs, 2019). We argue that TD research that aims to work towards ocean justice and sustainability needs to engage with and be responsive to these social movements.

We begin the article by giving an overview of how and why the CJN emerged from the One Ocean Hub. We then offer a discussion on some of the opportunities for both TD researchers and social movements to create networks and relationships that hold mutual benefits. This can expand the possibilities for strategically working together towards shared goals. We also discuss the challenges in this work that arise for different stakeholders around solidarity practices between academic researchers and social movements, as well as the politics of engagement that emerge with government and other stakeholders. Lastly, drawing from our own experiences convening and contributing to the CJN, we offer some suggestions for embedding scholar-activists within TD research networks as bridge builders (rather than gatekeepers) between academic and activist knowledge holders. Despite challenges in how TD practitioners encounter and negotiate the power dynamics and politics within their networks, we explore how these tensions can have productive learnings for TD researchers and environmental justice activists wishing to work together. We hope that this article contributes to reflections on how scholar-activism might bring sustainability to TD research for inclusive ocean governance closer to social movements working for blue justice in ethical, politically rigorous and productive ways.

## **2.2 The Coastal Justice Network**

'Ideal-typical' TD research processes, as described by Lang et al. (2012), aim to ensure "collaborative problem framing and building a collaborative research team" (Lang et al., 2012, p. 28). The international group of researchers who designed the One Ocean Hub programme successfully motivated the necessity of a "work package zero" to the funders – a process-focused package of activities that preceded the development of detailed research and co-design plans. This work package was intended as a space for establishing relationships and networks and building a shared code of practice. This resonates with what Horcea-Milcu et al. (2022, p. 195) call Phase 0 of TD research, which is dedicated to "setting up a TD process" before moving to the co-developing research agendas and plans with partners. This "work package zero" proved to be very important for the initial stage in terms of allowing the time and space for TD researchers to form relationships with one another. It also allowed space and time to bring pre-existing networks of collaborators into a conversation about what they

would like to work on together under the broad project vision of transformations in ocean governance.

Within the One Ocean Hub were a few researchers with established relationships with environmental justice organisations, others with long-standing relationships with SSFs and their organisations, and some with networks spanning these groupings. These networks have been actively involved in defending the human rights of SSFs, including: advocating for and contributing to a transformative SSF policy (Sowman et al., 2014); raising awareness of and providing support against historical and contemporary exclusions from MPAs that overlap with traditional fishing grounds (Sowman & Sunde, 2018; Wicomb, 2015); SSF's inclusion in fisheries governance (Kolding et al., 2014) and, more recently, supporting SSF's resistance to seismic explorations for deep-sea oil and gas which pose risks to their fishing grounds (Sunde, 2022). Over the first year and a half of the One Ocean Hub, a group of about 10 One Ocean Hub scholar-activist researchers (including both authors) from four universities across the country, started to meet regularly online. These meetings were initially focused on articulating a critique of the blue economy. Later, we discussed the pressing issues identified by our social movement partners and what we were able to contribute to these struggles from our position as researchers within this TD network.

In March 2020, everything came to a standstill with the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and resultant lockdowns. It was quickly brought to our attention that human rights violations were being experienced by SSFs under the strongly enforced South African lockdown regulations. Remote coastal fishing communities were struggling to access food, drinking water and other basic services; many fishers were being harassed or even arrested by law enforcement officials for carrying out the work that produced their livelihoods (Sowman et al., 2021; Sunde & Erwin 2020). The impacts of COVID-19 and lockdown regulations exacerbated the existing marginalisation and vulnerability of SSFs within ocean governance in the country. Some SSF leaders reached out to researchers in our group asking for support in terms of updated information about the lockdown regulations and advocating their right to fish as an 'essential service'. We decided as a matter of urgency to motivate that some of our research budget from our funder be reallocated towards airtime and mobile data for SSF leaders along the coastline so that they could be in contact with one another and

with a wider network for sharing information, advice and support in responding to the pandemic. Through advice and discussion with SSF organisations and researchers with existing relationships, nominations were made of SSF representatives who were well positioned and mandated to share any information they received widely within their communities. We set up a WhatsApp group and added all the nominated SSF leaders, researchers and civil society partners committed to working in solidarity with SSF. WhatsApp is a mobile app widely used by social movements in South Africa and is a low-data, accessible platform for text-based communication. This WhatsApp group was an emergency solidarity intervention – we did not yet have a clear long-term vision for it, and it was not part of our planned research activities. Three years later, this group continues to form a core communication and strategy platform for the SSFs and scholar-activists in the group.

The initial group of scholar-activist researchers met more regularly (every week for the first few months, shifting to once a month, which continues to the present) to have reflexive and strategic discussions about our roles, responsibilities and response-abilities (Bozalek, 2020; Haraway, 2016) concerning the WhatsApp group, and the issues raised on this group by the SSF leaders. During 2021 and 2022, we became increasingly networked within an emerging social movement focused on environmental justice and the oceans and coasts. Through practising solidarity with SSFs and civil society, we were publicly vocal about injustices that arose along the coast. In this learning-through-doing process, we experienced the challenges and opportunities that scholar-activism and its relationships with social movements hold for TD research projects and vice versa. Partly in response to these challenges, we came to call ourselves the CJN. The CJN enabled a core group of researchers, rooted within wider networks, to facilitate collective responses to advance blue justice along the South African coastline. The following sections outline some of the alignments and tensions between TD research projects and social movements and how scholar-activists can assist in navigating these.

### **2.3 Transdisciplinary Research and Social Movements**

Transdisciplinary (TD) research is inherently political. It is discussed in this paper through the lens of the “social engagement” school of transdisciplinarity (Lawrence et al., 2022), which seeks the involvement of different academic disciplines and

knowledge holders outside of academia in co-developing transformative solutions to real-world problems. It is engaged in political work in the broadest sense – through involvement in activities which include cooperation, negotiation, meaning-making and conflict within and between groups of people (Leftwich, 2004). Transdisciplinary (TD) research is also explicitly political in that it seeks to make research more responsive, inclusive, influential and useful in societal decision making. In its orientation towards addressing societal challenges and contributing to “transformations for sustainability”, TD research is guided by “specific normative socio-political goals” (Lawrence et al., 2022, p. 51) towards the realisation of “the common good”, where the common good is generally understood to include political justice (Lawrence et al., 2022). Marshall et al. (2018, p. 2) articulate “the processes of knowledge co-production in TDR [transdisciplinary research] as being influenced by and exerting influence over the wider politics of the knowledge-action interface”.

Although transdisciplinarity emerged from concerns about the ‘silo-ing’ of scientific disciplines and aims to address power imbalances in knowledge production, dominant TD research discourse can appear blind to its own centring of scientific paradigms even as it aims for more egalitarian knowledge co-production. This contradiction is present in the language of TD research – the term ‘transdisciplinary’, and the transcendence it implies of the boundaries between different disciplines as well as of the boundaries between academic knowledge systems and all other knowledge systems remains a very academic term (Cockburn, 2022). Knowledge holders outside of academia do not think of their knowledge as belonging to or emerging from a discipline. Furthermore, TD literature often speaks about “academic and societal actors” as if academia is outside of society; this conception of academics as distinct from the rest of society is also problematic in its myopic centring and differentiating of academics. Within “strong” transdisciplinarity (Max-Neef, 2005; Ross & Mitchell, 2018) there should not be this false binary of academic and societal knowledge, but rather a conception of social networks of knowledge and action in which academic knowledge and contributions are one strand interwoven with many others. For example, academic knowledge that is attained through the scientific method, interwoven with the place-based indigenous knowledge of fishers, interwoven with the political strategy knowledge and practice of an activist.

Transdisciplinary (TD) research is an activity system that is itself “permeated with political dynamics” as “differently empowered actors with competing aims and interests, negotiate and sometimes struggle to ensure their objectives are met” (Healy, 2019, p. 502). The larger politics of the knowledge-action interface is frequently acknowledged in TD research; however, the ways in which different knowledge holders encounter and negotiate the power dynamics and politics within their TD networks is an under-developed aspect of TD research (Cundill et al., 2015; Wolff et al., 2019). While the political nature of transformations to sustainability is acknowledged by some (Jørgensen, 2012; Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015; Temper et al., 2018; Stirling, 2019), most literature on TD for transformations to sustainability remains focused on discussions on the robustness, validity and integration of co-produced knowledge with minimal analysis on the politicised nature of working across disciplinary and academic-activist boundaries. There is also little literature within TD’s scholarly work on what it means to take a political stance when TD research projects come up against the government or private business agendas that reproduce inequality and injustices.

The CJN emerged as a negotiation and navigation through some political tensions between disciplines and individual researchers within the TD network. Different researchers within the One Ocean Hub in South Africa have different relationships with government departments. Diverse networks and skill bases are a strength of TD research networks. However, it can also create tensions within these networks when some researchers wish to take more assertive political stances in their work. One of the reasons that the CJN came to be was to create some distance from the broader One Ocean Hub community of researchers. Several justice issues had emerged early in the One Ocean Hub, specifically around extractive oil and gas and its impact on fishers and around the killing of fishers in marine protected spaces by conservation officers as supposedly “anti-poaching” measures. We learnt that not all our colleagues were comfortable when we took a public stand against human rights abuses and oil and gas applications in the oceans. A few colleagues felt that even if they agreed in sentiment, particularly about extractive mining, taking a public position could compromise their existing relationships with government officials if they added their names to One Ocean Hub letters to ministers. Being seen as oppositional to the government holds professional risks for many marine scientists who rely on certain

government funding and networks to do their work. Creating a separate group within the TD network called the CJN enabled us as scholar-activists to more freely vocalise injustices and work in solidarity with our civil society and social movement partners.

This allowed us to stand by our political principles at the core of our research projects and, importantly, built trust and solidarity with our key partners. For example, when fishers in IsiMangaliso were killed by conservation officers, it was the CJN, not the One Ocean Hub, who wrote publicly about this oppressive violence impacting fishers. Increasingly, we started to write/speak as the CJN, although always acknowledging being a part of the One Ocean Hub.

In larger One Ocean Hub meetings, we reported back on the CJN activities and why these held relevance for the broader objectives of the TD research. Making spaces for discussion and dialogue within the One Ocean Hub enabled TD researchers throughout the network to collectively strategise how those wishing to support socio-environmental justice activities could do so without compromising their relationships with government officials who were key partners on other projects. This does not suggest that navigating these different positionalities and political strategies is without tensions. Certainly, there have been some frustrations and conflicts concerning the different methods of engaging with stakeholders outside academia, the role of science in taking a normative political stance and the different interpretations of the role of TD research.

Many TD sustainability researchers remain uncomfortable inhabiting a political identity – the “explicit attention to normative goals is unfamiliar territory for many researchers” (Lawrence et al., 2022, p. 51). Particularly for those with disciplinary training in the natural sciences, concerns about *remaining neutral* and *not being political* can be very challenging to shift (Isopp, 2014; Latour, 2004). This may partially explain why, even among TD sustainability researchers committed to values of participatory, inclusive, co-engaged research with diverse stakeholders responding to environmental concerns, there is hesitancy in acknowledging the importance of social movements (Temper et al., 2018) and a lingering discomfort about being associated with political action.

The radical, systemic shifts in values, structures and governance needed for sustainable and just socio-ecological systems require high-quality TD research. Equally, however, these systemic shifts need politically engaged, transgressive, and at times, unruly and disruptive approaches to the stubborn reproductions of inequality and exploitation inherent within current economic and social structures. It is frequently social movements that lead these kinds of politically engaged processes at global and local scales (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015; Martínez-Alier et al., 2016; Scoones, 2016; Temper et al., 2018; Stirling, 2019). Social movements, as distinct from broader civil society, are “a sustained mobilization of ‘challengers’ (individuals and organisations) that are located in the subordinate positions of a social field that seek fundamental changes in the social field, and that encounter resistance to those changes from the “incumbents” located in the dominant positions of the field” (Hess 2022, p. 58). In the Global South, and indeed for “subaltern” (Gramsci, 1957) communities globally, social movements are crucial spaces of political organisation, knowledge production and strategies for bringing about emancipatory transformations and alternatives.

Globally, fisher people and their communities have organised and mobilised to respond to the range of “blue injustices” (Bennett et al., 2021; Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2019; Ertör, 2023). In South Africa, fisher people, their communities and wider alliances of civil society organisations and researchers have also engaged in organised resistance to diverse justice issues concerning ocean decision making. These emerging social movements are particularly concerned about the rampant expansion of mining and oil and gas extraction along the South African coast and ocean; the realisation and protection of the human, customary and environmental rights of SSFs and their communities; and meaningful inclusion of coastal communities – particularly of women, whose contributions to coastal livelihoods are profoundly marginalised – in ocean governance and co-management. Grassroots social movements, such as the one emerging in South Africa addressing environmental justice and the oceans, are at the forefront of both experiencing and responding to environmental injustice (Chesters, 2012). Social movements have enormous, often unrecognised, learning and knowledge to contribute towards knowledge generation for sustainable practices (Choudry, 2015). They hold “subjective knowledge” based on their particular positions, identities and experiences (Brem-Wilson, 2014). They are the eyes, ears and bodies on the frontline of socio-ecological injustices. They also

collectively hold direct knowledge about broader social, ecological and political dysfunctions that reveal otherwise hidden social relations that hold 'wicked' socio-ecological problems intractably in place (Choudry, 2020). The 'systemic, multi-dimensional and intersectional' approaches of environmental justice movements mean that they are particularly well positioned to contribute to just transformations for sustainability (Temper et al., 2018, p. 747).

Therefore, TD research that positions itself as a contributor to socio-ecological transformations needs to prioritise inclusion and collaboration with social movements. Yet there are limited examples of how TD research connects with social movements to co-generate knowledge and impact decision making. In addition to the historic discomfort of some scientific disciplines with taking a political stand to protect ideologies of scientific objectivity, some TD scholars have concerns about the 'radical' or 'destructive' nature of activists within social movements, and about the legitimacy and depth of representativity within social movements. As outlined earlier for some TD research scholars being seen as aligned to social movements creates immediate risks of damaging hard-won relationships with authorities towards whom social movements may take an oppositional stance.

This wariness to partner goes both ways – many activists within social movements are sceptical and guarded about partnering with academics and researchers. Based on past (and often present) dynamics of power and privilege, partnerships with researchers have been experienced as extractive and exploitative of social movements (Gutierrez & Lipman, 2016; Maxey, 1999; Vakil et al., 2016). Activists resent being viewed by academic researchers as objects of knowledge, rather than knowledge producers in their own right (Juris, 2008). There is also a sense of being exploited for academic gain (Edelman, 2009) where the research benefits academic career paths more than social movement objectives. Many activists are researchers, with their own theories and concepts (Burt, 2019; Choudry, 2015; Martínez-Alier et al., 2016), but academics often undermine their knowledge as being insufficiently rigorous. At other times, their knowledge alerts academics to important new areas of research but becomes co-opted and repackaged to align with academic conventions, without adequate acknowledgement or benefit sharing of the outcomes of the study (Cordner et al., 2012; Dawson & Sinwell, 2012; Gillan & Pickerill, 2012). This can leave strategic

research needs identified by social movements “unfunded, incomplete, or generally ignored” (Frickel et al., 2010, pp. 444–445).

Despite the commitment in TD theory to equitable, deeply co-engaged knowledge production with diverse partners, in practice, approaches to co-engaged research (especially with marginalised groups) often proceed with the acceptance that inevitably the researcher is leading the process. Here, researchers try to be as ‘participatory’ as possible within the paradigm of researcher-led enquiries. Several reviews have highlighted that TD research in practice faces challenges in mitigating power imbalances and implementing strong, empowered engagement with non-academic partners (Lang et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2022; Wolff et al., 2019). Of serious concern to scholar-activists is the risk that some TD research projects may co-opt the ‘appearance’ of social movement participation without taking up the knowledge or struggles of these movements in meaningful ways. For example, Healy (2019, p. 521), writes about how social movements are used for conferring legitimacy on governmentality in a neoliberal policy environment, “enabling the [European] research policy community to lend “visible” support to projects with radical policy objectives ... while leaving dominant, neoliberal policy trajectories of ecological modernisation intact”.

How TD research projects navigate these tricky politics is particularly important to pay attention to in the context of efforts to transform ocean governance. Like elsewhere in the world, in South Africa, marine decision making remains extremely unbalanced in terms of its reliance upon marine and fisheries science – disciplines that are dominated by normative scientific frameworks, and resistant to integrating knowledge and paradigms from the social sciences (Green, 2022; Harden-Davies et al., 2022), and even less so the local ecological knowledge of coastal communities. There is a particular danger in ocean governance of “de-peopling and de-politicization” (Bennett et al., 2021, p. 5), as if the ocean is an empty territory. The treatment of the ocean as an under-used frontier, usually under the banner of the blue economy, leads to claims for marine resources by powerful actors, through industrial fisheries, aquaculture, bioprospecting, eco-tourism, maritime transport, deep-sea mining, oil and gas extraction, carbon markets and other industries (Bennett et al., 2021; Voyer et al., 2018). This perspective serves the interests of those seeking to stake new claims in

the ocean but utterly negates the lives and life worlds of people who live in intimate, intergenerational relationships with the sea. TD researchers must be very careful to ensure they are not implementing a kind of tokenistic participation with non-academic partners that are used to legitimise untransformed power imbalances.

#### **2.4 Scholar-Activism Within Transdisciplinary Research**

To move beyond patronising or apolitical notions of non-academic citizens as “participants” included in *our* research, we should take seriously the invitation to re-imagine “the conditions for ethical encounters ... that challenge present conditions of colonization and inequality” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 50). If TD researchers are to build ethical, reciprocal partnerships with social movements, they need to be very conscious of the critiques and risks outlined above. They must better appreciate the needed capacities for navigating these complex relational and political dynamics.

There is much to be learnt from the literature and practice of scholar-activists, who have developed principles, methods and ethics for working in solidarity with social movements. Scholar-activists seek alignment between their political values and their academic projects through working directly with marginalised groups or social movements engaged in struggles for justice and social change (Routledge & Derickson, 2015). Scholar-activists work *with and within* social movements to ensure reciprocity, to understand the situated knowledge of social movements, and to demonstrate solidarity. Solidarity is understood here as a moral relation that unites people acting based on a commitment to challenge injustice, oppression and vulnerability (Scholz, 2008). Situated solidarities (Nagar & Geiger, 2007) enable researchers to co-produce knowledges that is useful for social movements in “ways that refuse but do not ignore the violent and imperialist histories of the academy” (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 391).

Rather than following the typical first phase of “building the collaborative team and collaboratively framing the problem” (Lang et al., 2012, p.28) scholar-activists in the CJN have immersed themselves in the full intersectional complex mess of the problems faced by marginalised coastal users, trying to understand these struggles as they emerge and to understand how best we might contribute towards addressing them. In the emergence and coordination of the CJN, we have paid close attention to

navigating the politics of alliance building (Marshall et al., 2018), with an explicit bias towards the amplification of the knowledge and strategies of marginalised people to challenge structural injustices in current knowledge systems around ocean governance. We have learnt that in scholar-activist TD research, the primary 'foundational' work is not about a shared problem-framing process – it is about researchers becoming part of a social movement. Instead of only co-developing research questions at the outset, this work is concerned with creating the conditions whereby research support can be leveraged by community-based activists, social movements and others at strategic moments as local struggles evolve – for example, in compiling evidence for court cases, policy engagement or advocacy work. This resonates with Derickson and Routledge's (2015, p. 1) support for a "politics of resourcefulness" whereby community partners can make their own demands of the research project.

Scholar-activists can work towards strengthening and supporting existing relationships and processes developed by social movements and community activists. Doing so means that when the context requires it, research and other capacities that researchers hold can contribute towards responsive co-engaged action. This requires a range of activities and resources not usually associated with scholarly outputs. The CJN's roles concerning social movements of SSFs and others working for blue justice are summarised below:

- Network coordination role – convening meetings, using research funds to support gatherings of SSFs and their allies, with a co-developed agenda and outcomes.
- Advocacy role – challenging and offering alternatives to the ongoing marginalisation of SSFs and other coastal knowledge holders within ocean governance and ocean research, re-framing and recognising SSFs as ocean defenders.
- Knowledge mediation role – bridging social movements and government officials' perspectives and experiences of policy and regulations, bridging academic and activist knowledges, developing popular education materials, sourcing and making able published research that can be used by SSFs and

blue justice activists to enhance their work (for example fisheries research showing deep-sea breeding grounds of species in relation to zones of proposed offshore oil and gas production).

- Resource mobilisation role – motivating that research funds go towards supporting the activities of social movements; fundraising; orienting our funded research activities towards the needs identified by activist partners.
- Communications role – writing press releases, letters, affidavits, policy submissions, appeals and other documents upon request by, and in dialogue with, social movement partners.
- Policy engagement role – reflexive facilitation of collective strategy development and participatory preparation of submissions.
- Responsive research role – undertaking, advocating and making accessible academic research to support the above.

In this networked social movement space, we take the lead in some situations and at other times, we are led by our partners. In this dynamic, relational and responsive network, we contribute what we are best placed to contribute. Most of this work fits well with Brem-Wilson's (2014) proposed ways of practising scholar-activism across a spectrum of activities; from direct action responses (e.g. letter writing, protests); to supporting movements to understand their own practices and principles (facilitating organisational learning and reflection), bridging social movement knowledge into policymaking arenas, and carrying out research requested by movements, or sourcing reliable and useful research done by others.

We do not want to romanticise scholar-activism work as a silver bullet for addressing issues of power within TD research networks. In pursuit of solidarity, scholar-activists run the risk of perpetuating the same power imbalances that they seek to disrupt, in a sense mirroring the tendency for researcher-led agendas seen in TD research. What Vakil et al. (2016, p. 199) call "politicised trust" requires not only a mutually respectful working relationship but also an ongoing building of political solidarity. This conception of solidarity requires a strong critical reflexive praxis (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). One practice that the CJN uses to strengthen reflexivity is to open ourselves to critique

in several different forums. One forum is through sharing work in our monthly meetings to see how they are received and built on by other CJN members. Another is presenting our research and activities, not just at academic seminars but in public and activist spaces. These include national strategic workshops with SSFs and environmental justice organisations and online webinars with environmental justice scholars and activists working on related issues. Radical vulnerability within scholar-activist collaborations involves opening oneself up entirely, including to critique and backlash (both from colleagues in academia and social movements). This radical vulnerability is an important mode of enabling “epistemic and ethical responsibility in relation to politically engaged alliance work” (Chowdhury et al., 2016, p. 1800). Like all scholar-activists, we grapple extensively with clarifying and understanding our positionality and practising reflexivity in a “dynamic field where knowledge production is but one of multiple expressions of power” (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 392). Embodied, practised values such as “solidarity and responsibility, trust and hope, vulnerability and reflexivity” help scholar-activists to ethically navigate their identities and praxis (Nagar, 2014, p. 3). Opening the work in process to scrutiny by different stakeholders ensures that we are held accountable for our actions and learn from constructive critiques.

In the CJN, we draw inspiration from feminists’ ethos of care (de la Bellacasa, 2012), emphasising the embodied, practical, politically engaged work of repairing and caring for the environment and each other (Staffa et al., 2022). This is done through engaging with conflict and difference, interrogating positionalities and power relations, building upon marginalised knowledges and countering epistemic violence (Staffa et al., 2022). Equally, an ethos of care means “cultivating caring academic cultures” (Staffa et al., 2022, p. 50). The process of developing a deeper understanding of each other’s disciplinary framings and politics can be emotionally difficult. However, it can catalyse alliances between scholars from diverse disciplines who choose to stick with these challenging engagements and view them as spaces of learning and reflection for shifting practices. Over the past three years, some of our natural sciences colleagues have shown an increased willingness to actively include SSF issues in their planning and technical process. In response to requests from us and SSFs, some of these scientists have presented at SSF workshops on how their research supports fishers’

opposition to oil and gas. Others are pushing from the inside to get SSFs included in the technical tools used in Marine Spatial Planning (MSP). Incremental shifts in disciplinary practices towards more inclusive and just engagements can feel frustratingly slow for social movements and the scholar-activists linked to them, but they are part of a strategic move for justice. We, too, have learnt a lot from colleagues with diverse disciplines who are open to engaging in the politics of working with social movements. We are grateful for how they have deepened our understandings of the constraints and possibilities within government to improve ocean governance and of the strengths and weaknesses of TD research.

#### **2.4.1 How transdisciplinary scholar-activist praxis helps to address some of the challenges in transdisciplinary research**

South African TD sustainability research will need to develop multi-stakeholder networks that include social movements to meet its equitable and inclusive research production objectives. Embedding both scholar-activists and social movement representatives within TD networks enables the flexibility required of research to be responsive to urgent social and environmental justice needs on the ground. This flexibility is not easy nor possible for all researchers, but TD research networks that make space for scholar-activist researchers can get more comfortable with this kind of work. Including scholar-activists within TD projects develops the broader capacity and literacy of networks for working with social movements and vice versa. The ethical principles that guide scholar-activists closely align with those identified by feminist and Global South TD researchers. The “relational turn” within sustainability research (West et al., 2020) has brought into focus a paradigm shift towards more relational, process-oriented ways of thinking about transformations, prioritising the nurturing of relationships for bringing diverse situated knowledges into environmental governance. TD researchers working in these closely engaged, politically rigorous ways need to develop relational competencies (Holden et al., 2019) and reflexive competencies (Brundiars et al., 2021) to navigate the complex socio-political terrain of TD research. This is necessary to address the challenging tensions that TD researchers can experience in playing multiple roles (Cockburn, 2022). Lawrence et al. (2022) identified a previously unrecognised type of knowledge needed for navigating complex relationships within TD, which they have called “process knowledge”, which refers to

the knowledge needed for the integration of activities, orientations and systems of diverse actors, and for designing the structures to support continuous reflective, responsive learning. Marshall et al. (2018, p. 3) wrote about “transformative space making” as creating “openings within the cognitive, normative, social, and material arenas of knowledge systems for the coordinated exercise of pro-poor agency”. These important emerging aspects of TD praxis align closely with scholar-activist praxis and need to be developed further through critical engagement with these concepts in practice. Scholar-activists offer experience in navigating the science/society and academic/non-academic binaries. Including scholar-activists in TD research networks holds exciting possibilities to “learn democracy” (Walters, 2022) from and with social movements to build respectful, solidarity-based relationships across vastly disparate divides of race, class, gender, geography and power in South Africa. Walters (2022, p. 16) highlights that “learning democracy occurs in action where new knowledge is co-created by braiding together experiential, cognitive and contextual knowledge” and that “the means and ends of organising are equally important, as democracy is learnt through its practice”.

Yet, scholar-activists face significant dilemmas within their own work that need to be considered if they are to be included with care in TD research networks. Scholar-activists are accountable in multiple directions simultaneously – to the social movements they commit to being in solidarity with, to the universities that employ them, to their individual academic projects (with requirements in terms of publishing or graduating) and to their funders. These multiple worlds have distinct principles and values and distinct modes of evaluation and measuring impact. As scholar-activists, we frequently wrestle with our identity and role throughout this process. What we have learnt is that researchers wishing to practice co-engaged TD research with social movements need to value equally the organisational and relational practices of TD networks as they do the knowledge outputs of these networks. This means recognising that what appears as non-academic activities of scholar-activists are, in fact, critical foundations for shaping responsive, flexible, and participatory research practices. Scholar-activists who are engaged on the ground may not be able to produce publications at the rate of other researchers in the TD network, but their insights and knowledge mediation is critical to how academic and technical publications are presented and can inform strategies for environmental justice by marginalised groups

and social movements. In short, if they are part of a TD network that values their work and makes space for sharing, scholar-activists can assist in moving traditional research into meaningful impact for marginalised people. The holding of learning spaces and processes to mediate across differences and knowledge frames does not just happen automatically though. It is an additional aspect of scholar-activist work, that is important to value and make visible.

## **2.5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this paper, we argue that TD researchers for sustainability in the Global South should proactively engage with social movements that are building ground-up responses to resist environmental injustices. Indeed, we propose that TD research networks need to include environmental activists and social movement representatives if they are to meet the objectives of research that is relevant, just and progressive. In the context of ongoing and deepening violations of environmental, social and epistemic justice, ethical research must engage with and contribute to the social movements calling for change. We also recognise that building ethical and reciprocal relationships between academics and community-based activists and social movements carries a lot of risk, tension and contradiction for both academics and activists; therefore, they require TD researchers to learn and practice certain capacities, such as critical reflexivity and solidarity.

Specific lessons and unresolved tensions emerging from the CJN within the One Ocean Hub are shared as a case study of scholar-activist TD research in practice. For TD researchers interested in including social movements in their networks, we suggest, drawn from our own experiences, the following points for consideration:

- Recognise, value and support the knowledge and contributions of community-based social movements in advancing just transformations for sustainability.
- Include and value scholar-activists with existing relationships with social movements as core members of TD research teams. This entails recognising the different and distinct research contributions of scholar-activists and adapting expectations of activities and deliverables accordingly.
- Encourage and allow time and resources for co-engaged learning spaces for

the development of reflexivity, process knowledge (Lawrence et al., 2022), transformative space making (Marshall et al., 2018), learning democracy (Walters, 2022) and learning solidarity (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012).

- Early on in the network and throughout its active lifespan, make time and space for diverse actors within the TD research network to discuss and understand the opportunities and challenges of working solidarities between academic researchers and community-based activists.
- Ensure that time and energy are committed to ongoing learning spaces that openly explore oppositional stances, tensions and politics within the network as and when they arise, which they will. Through an ethos of care, work to position these spaces of tension as spaces of generative learning to identify structural and systemic blockages to shared goals.
- Allow the space and support within TD networks for researchers to take a public stand in solidarity with those on the frontlines of environmental injustices. Reciprocally, foster respectful understanding of those currently constrained to do so – while working to unpack and address those constraints.

We cannot emphasise enough the importance of dedicating time and space to critically thinking through the messy but hopeful politics of solidarity building. This enables all TD stakeholders to recognise how different relationships, roles and positions within a network are both a constraint, such as when conflicting politics can cause risk for different actors, and an opportunity to develop diverse insider/outsider strategies for change. This paper is intended as a humble invitation to the TD sustainability research community to actively engage with and contribute to social movements of marginalised people working to resist environmental injustice. We invite you into a conversation about how to be in solidarity with social movements through sharing our own experiences within a scholar-activist network and learning to be in solidarity with coastal social movements in South Africa.

## CHAPTER 3

### PAPER 2: TOWARDS COUNTER-HEGEMONIC OCEAN GOVERNANCE: SMALL-SCALE FISHER ENGAGEMENT IN MARINE DECISION MAKING IN SOUTH AFRICA

This paper is submitted and under review for a Special Issue of the *Journal of Marine Policy*. This paper is the second paper in this PhD by publication which investigates dimensions of transdisciplinary scholar-activist praxis in advancing ocean governance in a South African Coastal Justice Network. I am the sole author of this paper. The paper draws on workshop proceedings that were co-facilitated and co-authored by CJN colleagues: Dylan McGarry, Irna Senekal, Jackie Sunde, Buhle Francis and Kira Erwin. The participants in these workshops were over 100 small scale fishers – their voices and specific contributions are reflected in the workshop reports that this paper draws on.

This paper specifically offers insight into the process and importance of undertaking policy critique and developing processes that can foreground counter-hegemonic approaches to ocean governance that are meaningfully inclusive of small-scale fishers. It addresses the second question of this study: *How can scholar-activists working in blue justice support just and inclusive views of ocean governance?*

#### **Abstract**

The escalating threats facing the ocean and communities directly dependent upon the ocean underscore the urgent need for robust governance frameworks. Drawing on data from a co-constructed scholar-activist archive in the Coastal Justice Network (CJN) in South Africa, this paper examines the complex landscape of ocean governance in South Africa from the perspective of small-scale fishers (SSFs), who are disproportionately affected by extractive and ocean-grabbing activities conducted

in the name of the blue economy. The paper begins with a critique of existing governance frameworks, which are identified as being contradictory as they simultaneously promote, regulate and restrict ocean activities, most often in favour of already powerful ocean sectors. Following this, the paper offers insight into co-engaged action research processes carried out by the CJN and a network of small-scale fisher leaders. This surfaces the experiences of SSFs in engaging with formal consultation channels to participate in this governance and their struggles for more meaningful inclusion in decision making. Findings reveal systemic exclusions of SSFs' rights and perspectives from dominant governance structures and discourse. This highlights the need for a counter-hegemonic approach to ocean governance that takes fishers' voices and experiences seriously<sup>6</sup>, which they have begun to articulate as shared in the paper.

### 3.1 Introduction

In a presidential address to launch South Africa's '*Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy*' in 2014, then President Jacob Zuma announced that as part of this new initiative to "unlock the economic potential of the ocean", an overarching, integrated ocean governance framework for the sustainable growth of the ocean economy would be developed as a matter of priority (Zuma, 2014). However, a decade later, South Africa's policy frameworks and practices for ocean governance are fragmented, uncoordinated and contradictory (Le Fleur, 2022; Sowman & Sunde, 2021), as elaborated below. This affects small-scale fishers (SSFs) who have traditionally been marginalised from ocean governance the world over and in South Africa. Consequently, ocean governance researchers have identified the importance of a focus on SSFs for improved ocean governance (e.g. Campbell, 2016), with the 2014 Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) guidelines offering a vision of SSF development centred on fisher livelihoods, human rights and institutions – a focus which I also elaborate on below.

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<sup>6</sup> Paper 4 in this collection provides more insight into the importance of listening to fishers' voices as a TD scholar-activist praxis (Pereira, 2024, forthcoming).

It is now widely agreed that the ocean, human beings and other marine beings who directly depend on the ocean are under threat on many fronts. These threats are advancing rapidly through what has been called “the blue acceleration” (Jouffray et al., 2020) and “ocean grabbing” (Barbesgaard, 2017; Bavinck et al., 2017; Bennett et al., 2015; Bond, 2019). Producing contradictions in ocean governance simultaneously are 1) extractive ocean activities pursued by governments and industries in the name of economic growth (called the blue economy), 2) growing scientific evidence of the ecological crises facing the ocean, and 3) international policy commitments towards climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection. The blue economy has been critiqued as an ambiguous and divergently interpreted concept that can act as a “policy container that enables duplicitous legislation to simultaneously encourage, regulate and prohibit activities in the ocean” (Schutter et al., 2021 in Erwin et al., 2022, p. 385). This is catalysing a focus on blue justice and transformative ocean governance that includes recognition and foregrounding of environmental rights and livelihoods of SSFs through transformative ocean governance (e.g. Bennet et al., 2019; Blythe et al., 2021; Rudolph et al., 2020).

Ocean governance is a rapidly growing field of study, with researchers such as Haas et al. (2021), Rudolph et al. (2020) and others articulating the complexity and contradictions in ocean governance (see Campbell et al., 2016; Werle et al., 2019). Haas et al. (2021) point to the need for an analysis of processes that operate within and between states, civil society and communities, and the market, noting that there is a need for understanding how ocean governance evolves, not in a “business as usual” modality, but rather in a trajectory that embraces a more sustainable future orientation (Haas et al., 2021; Rudolph et al., 2021). Haas et al. (2021) see formal rules and institutions and how they operate, the legitimacy of decision-making institutions, stakeholders’ engagement and decision making, and participation and empowerment of communities as significant factors in ocean governance. In their analysis of ocean governance, Werle et al. (2019) point out that institutional responses and responsible governance which deal with “the right level of engagement” and “participatory governance rooted in shared values that embrace human rights and gender equity” (p. 540) are two of the most important factors influencing ocean governance globally. This paper particularly addresses the operation of formal institutions and how this intersects with participation and community empowerment

from the perspective of the rights of communities involved, contributing to blue justice research in ocean governance. As stated by Werle et al. (2019) in their comprehensive review of ocean governance challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

Particularly important are partnerships with, and learning from, Indigenous communities and organizations, which bring traditional knowledge, as well as proven approaches, to sustainability ... [and] ... particularly important as we work to improve future ocean governance, is to keep in mind those who are most vulnerable among coastal residents and ocean users. (p. 540)

Blythe et al. (2021, n.p.) particularly call for “understanding the processes through which ocean governance transformations can occur—and making the politics of transformative change more explicit”. They argue that recognising the politics of ocean governance will be critical for realising more equitable ocean governance, a point that this paper addresses. Specifically, the paper addresses the following questions:

- How do current ocean governance frameworks in South Africa relate to each other, and how are SSF rights and perspectives included in these frameworks?
- What are the experiences and responses of SSFs trying to participate in ocean governance through formal consultation channels, and what are their priorities and visions for ocean governance?
- What does this suggest for TD scholar-activist researchers interested in blue justice?

### **3.2 Research Context**

It is in this complex, contradictory, and at times “duplicitous” ocean governance environment that researchers and fishers in South Africa have, since 2020, been working within the One Ocean Hub ([www.oneoceanhub.org](http://www.oneoceanhub.org)) to monitor and advance participation in the many ocean governance processes that have been rolled out over this period. The One Ocean Hub is a global research network funded by the United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) to implement a five-year (2019–2024) research project in South Africa and other Global South countries, looking at fair and inclusive ocean decision making. Through this project, collaboration has been built between a group of researchers from four different research institutions in South Africa

focusing on co-developing research with SSFs to support their struggles for recognition and inclusion in ocean governance. This group of scholar-activist researchers work together under the banner of the CJN (<https://coastaljusticenetwork.co.za>) with a wider movement of coastal communities, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations working for blue justice. The CJN practices participatory action research as a form of scholar-activist TD research (Croog et al., 2016; Nagar & Geiger, 2007; Pereira & Erwin, 2023) in support of SSF communities, focusing on how to promote inclusive ocean governance. It includes capacity building and advocacy support in defending SSF rights to resources, to access marine species and spaces and to participate and be consulted in decision making about fisheries and ocean governance. It also facilitates creative and arts-based approaches to knowledge co-production with SSFs, often using Empatheatre and other TD methods<sup>7</sup> ([www.empatheatre.com](http://www.empatheatre.com); Erwin et al., 2022).

In this context, I have been supporting co-engaged action research with SSFs as a scholar-activist TD praxis (Pereira & Erwin, 2023), which I describe further in the methodology section below. As a scholar-activist TD researcher, since 2020, I have worked with fishers and researchers to establish the CJN. I have also co-facilitated workshops with fishers and other researchers and have been involved in co-constructing, documenting, organising and managing a scholar-activist archive for the CJN that I drew on in constructing this paper.

### **3.3 Methodology and Approach**

The evidence base for this paper emerged from co-produced action research in the CJN involving a diverse network of SSF leaders, captured in the co-produced scholar-activist archive mentioned above. The paper offers a case study of scholar-activist TD research at work, with emphasis on insights gained into participatory ocean governance that prioritises experience and perspectives of SSFs. Croog et al. (2018) explain that scholar-activism displays four distinct research values: “supportive

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<sup>7</sup> This TD scholar-activist praxis is the focus of Paper 3 in the five-paper collection that makes up the bulk of this PhD.

networks, active science, productive discomfort, and affective moments, — that form a vision of scholar-activism that blurs the boundaries between research, political realities, and everyday lives, and seeks to confront real world challenges” (p. 1025). They indicate that this is a TD research process; hence, I use the concept of “scholar-activist transdisciplinary research” to describe the research approach. I am particularly interested in the praxis of such research (see Pereira & Erwin, 2023); i.e. how it plays out in practice through situated political solidarity. Croog et al. (2018) argue that this type of scholarly work “can make scientific inquiry more socially relevant” (p. 1025). Routledge and Derickson (2015) argue that “situated solidarities” (drawing from Nagar & Geiger, 2007) is an objective to strive for in scholar-activist research that involves a “re-scaling of reflexivity” from individual levels to collective levels, with such research being “rooted in a sense of solidarity with and active participation in the work and political struggles of activists and marginalized groups” (Nagar & Geiger, 2007 cited in Croog et al., p. 1027). Routledge and Derickson (2015) enumerate six practices that work towards and within “situated solidarities” as “being moved, dispersing power, resourcing potential, resourcing solidarity, challenging assumptions and norms, and sustaining collaboration” (cited in Croog et al., 2018, p. 1027). Choudry (2013) explains that such “activist research” is “embedded in relations of trust ... that develop through constant effort to work together in formal and informal networks and collaborations” (p. 143). These are features of the action research undertaken in the CJN, with the co-constructed CJN scholar-activist archive offering a record of this praxis, which I draw on in this paper.

The CJN was formed through networked interactions on a WhatsApp chat group established in April 2020 during the COVID-19 period – SSF members received weekly data bundles funded by the One Ocean Hub. I took on a coordination role from the outset in setting up this WhatsApp group and in negotiating and arranging for research funds to go towards payment for data and airtime for fishers in the group. This enabled urgent communication between isolated SSFs during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This group (from here on called the “SSF leaders’ group”) has grown steadily since 2020 and now has approximately 80 SSFs from the four coastal provinces of South Africa. It also has nine scholar-activists in ongoing active and responsive dialogue with each other about the intersecting issues that SSFs have to respond to. Since late 2021, this group has managed to meet in person, in smaller focus groups, at regional workshops,

and in a series of national workshops. The interest of the CJN is co-researching the local struggles SSFs are facing and responding to these struggles together through a range of tactics – amplifying SSF concerns and voices into higher levels of decision making (Pereira & Erwin, 2023)<sup>8</sup>. One of the ways of amplifying SSF concerns is to undertake meta-review synthesis research based on the archive, which I was given ethical permission to do by the CJN members and the Rhodes University research ethics committee<sup>9</sup>.

Materials in the co-produced archive include policy documents, submissions, comments and appeals to ocean governance processes and decisions, open letters and media statements, detailed notes taken during public consultations (both online and in person), and reports from participatory workshops co-designed by SSFs and CJN researchers<sup>10</sup>. These make up a substantial record of ocean governance in practice from the perspective of SSFs. The archive offers evidence related to *process* as well as *content*. This allows for the development of an overarching perspective on the roll-out of ocean governance and the cumulative impact on SSFs, as will be elaborated below. The CJN has also co-developed methods for conceptualising and practising more just and plural ocean governance, which, I argue in this paper, in itself is a form of critical, counter-hegemonic ocean governance and important TD scholar-activist praxis in the search for blue justice.

For this paper, I have drawn on materials in this co-produced archive to surface understandings of ocean governance that address the research questions above. In particular, I focus on the overlapping, but delinked processes related to governance processes related to the South African Ocean Economy Master Plan (OEMP), MSP, and the SSF policy. I draw particularly on records of several ocean governance engagements that CJN colleagues have participated in with SSFs (see Table 3.1

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<sup>8</sup> See also Paper 4 in this collection of papers which make up the PhD thesis.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A of this thesis, which provides an overview of the ethics application and approval documents, and Paper 5 (Pereira in press) in this collection, which further elaborates the approach to ethics approval navigated in this research.

<sup>10</sup> The full scope and content of this archive are described in Chapter 1 of this thesis document (Pereira, 2024); it includes 195 objects and is available in a Google folder. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1L43vRMpKPju83TCiTMmgZKzwZikrs6pC?usp=sharing> which is accessible through the CJN web-based platform (<https://coastaljusticenetwork.co.za/>)

below). These are drawn on to produce the policy critique and evidence of counter-hegemonic ocean governance that forms the substance of this paper. The records of these are contained in the archive, which is a source of information for the analysis in this paper.

**Table 3.1: A selection of ocean governance engagements that the CJN and SSF leaders group participated in together, 2020–2023**

Date	Detail of engagement
September 2020	Letters sent to the Minister of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) about the lack of coordination between government departments responsible for conservation and fisheries management, leading to harassment and arrests of SSFs despite having fishing exemptions under COVID-19 lockdown regulations.
1 August 2020	Comments submitted to TotalEnergies EP South Africa (TEEPSA) Block 11B/12B scoping report (Oil and gas exploration application)
8 October 2020	Isimangaliso Wetland Park Draft Integrated Management Plan – online webinar
27 October 2020	Information session on marine spatial biodiversity priorities as an input for MSP – online
23 November 2020	Comments and a letter to the Minister of DFFE submitted concerning the Fisheries Rights Allocations Process (FRAP) 2020 proposed resource split
8 December 2020	Marine Protected Area (MPA) Forum meeting – online
15 March 2021	Masifundise SSF workshop, including engagement with Minister of DFFE – Cape Town

31 March 2021	Submitted comments on Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for Karpowerships in Ngqura and Saldanha
5 April 2021	Aliwal Shoal MPA stakeholder meeting – Durban
2 June 2021	OEMP meeting – online
4 June 2021	Letter sent to CEO of Isimangaliso Wetland Park in KwaZulu-Natal about inadequate consultation for Isimangaliso MPA Integrated Management Plan
10 June 2021	Amathole MPA stakeholder meeting – Hamburg
25 June 2021	Submitted comments on species-specific socio-economic impact assessments for allocation of fisheries rights
1 August 2021	Letters sent to OEMP secretariat requesting meaningful inclusion of SSF and SSF policy principles
18 August 2021	OEMP Fisheries Working Group meeting – online
28 September 2021	Amathole MPA stakeholder meeting – online
29 November 2021	Submitted comments on CGG (Viridien Company) Algoa Bay seismic survey application

29 November 2021	National MPA Forum – East London
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10 August 2022	DFFE Integrated Stakeholder Engagement Roadshow – Port Alfred
8 November 2022	DFFE and SANBI (South African National Biodiversity Institute) launch of national coastal and marine spatial biodiversity plan – online
17 November 2022	National MPA Forum – Saldanha
21 January 2023	TEEPSA 11b/12b (application for oil and gas exploration) public consultation meeting – St Francis
9 April 2023	Submitted comments on MSP draft marine sector plans
19 April 2023	OEMP update meeting – online
1 October 2023	TEEPSA 11b/12b public consultation meeting – Coldstream

In addition, the paper draws on workshop reports from five CJN-SSF workshops that took place between 2021 and 2023 (see Table 3.2 below). The reports of these workshops in the archive form the second main source of information for the analysis in this paper.

**Table 3.2: CJN-SSF workshops held between 2021–2023**

Workshop dates	Purpose and main focus of the workshops	Workshop details
10–12 November 2021	<p>Eastern Cape SSF workshop, Fish River Hotel</p> <p>The objectives of this workshop were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SSF cooperatives from along the southern Eastern Cape coast, along with support organisations, getting to know each other better, exchanging advice and support, and building solidarity.</li> <li>2. Reflections and future strategies from the first SSF squid season in 2021.</li> <li>3. Developing a shared understanding and vision for SSF engagement in ocean governance (including the OEMP, Marine Protected Area (MPA) stakeholder forums, MSP).</li> </ol>	<p>Duration of workshop: 3 days</p> <p>No. of participants: 38</p> <p>Workshop report: 11 pages</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Engaging directly with government officials regarding urgent action items going forward.</li> </ol>	<p><a href="#">Link</a> to workshop report<sup>11</sup></p>
2–4 June 2022	Eastern Cape SSF Workshop, Port Alfred	Duration of workshop: 3 days
	The objectives of this workshop were:	

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<sup>11</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Lx6NI2B86fbZJDgU2HBctCW71B\\_P7zeJ/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Lx6NI2B86fbZJDgU2HBctCW71B_P7zeJ/edit)

	To bring SSF leaders (from approximately 26 different co-ops and communities along the Eastern Cape coast) together with support	No. of participants: 58
	<p>organisations to share stories, advice and solidarity, to build stronger networks.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sharing lessons and advice related to SSF cooperatives' understanding and negotiating contracts with commercial partners.</li> <li>2. Learning about and developing strong and fair organisational practices and processes for SSF cooperatives.</li> <li>3. Thinking together about strategic responses to various policy developments that impact SSFs.</li> <li>4. Follow up with government officials about progress on action items from the November 2021 workshop.</li> </ol>	<p>Workshop report: 8 pages</p> <p><a href="#">Link</a> to workshop report<sup>12</sup></p>
5–7 July 2022	<p>National SSF and Partners Oil and Gas Strategy workshop, Port Alfred</p> <p>This was the second in a series of three national SSF oil and gas workshops held in 2022. Different organisations took on organisational responsibility for each workshop. SDCEA organised the first one in Durban in February 2022; CJN organised this workshop in Port Alfred in July 2022; Green Connection organised the third workshop in Saldanha in September 2022.</p>	<p>Duration of workshop: 3 days</p> <p>No. of participants: 80</p>
	The objectives of this workshop were:	Workshop report: 8 pages.

<sup>12</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pEsAYgkztuqPoJE00O2ud1DpQb-JWWeu/view>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To convene a large representative group of SSF leaders from the entire country, along with a range of trusted civil society and legal organisations, to take stock of the state of offshore oil and gas prospecting.</li> <li>2. To deepen relationships and networks through song, storytelling, rituals, in-depth discussion, legal learnings, scientific understanding, friendship building and deepened appreciation of our different contributions and perspectives.</li> <li>3. To develop shared strategies for responding to oil and gas applications, consultation processes and ongoing legal proceedings.</li> </ol>	<a href="#">Link</a> to workshop report <sup>13</sup>
15–18  2023	August	Eastern Cape SSF Workshop, Port Alfred	Duration of workshop: 3 days

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<sup>13</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N\\_cl9M0CT2SuxbdBrWVa85xdIkRApVxA/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N_cl9M0CT2SuxbdBrWVa85xdIkRApVxA/view)

	<p>In 2023, the CJN researchers in Cape Town and Durban also organised regional workshops in March and April respectively. The workshop agendas for these three regional workshops were closely aligned and were intended to support the development of the SSF sector requests related to MSP and other ocean governance processes.</p> <p>The CJN-Eastern Cape SSF workshop aimed to:</p> <p>Strengthen relationships, solidarity and learning between Eastern Cape fishers, and organisations working to support fishers, in this third annual EC SSF workshop.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a space together where fishers could speak out and be heard about the many different issues and struggles they are facing.</li> <li>2. This workshop was particularly focused on discussions related to MSP, and other related governance processes. We were guided by the question: "What do Eastern Cape small-scale fishers want to see included in Marine Spatial Planning?"</li> </ol>	<p>No. of participants: 60</p> <p>Workshop report: 38 pages.</p> <p><a href="#">Link</a> to workshop report<sup>14</sup></p>
<p>24–27 October 2023</p>	<p>National CJN-SSF workshop, Gqeberha</p> <p>This workshop aimed to support SSF leaders in engaging on issues pertaining to the OEMP and MSP and defending their rights as a sector in these processes. This workshop built on the three regional</p>	<p>Duration of workshop: 3 days</p> <p>No. of participants: 55</p>

<sup>14</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1c6r7jPdfO6Mn3dJJ46KsII\\_AF-hi69KO/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1c6r7jPdfO6Mn3dJJ46KsII_AF-hi69KO/view)

	<p>workshops that were held earlier in 2023, described above. This workshop was intended as a space to enable leaders to articulate a national position and speak with one voice on relevant aspects of these policy processes.</p> <p>This workshop was guided by the theme: “Anchoring small-scale fishers’ rights: Our oceans, our commons, for a just future”.</p>	<p>Workshop report: 22 pages</p>
		<p><a href="#">Link</a> to workshop report<sup>15</sup></p>

The workshops were designed and facilitated as reflective, co-engaged activist co-learning spaces, drawing on action research, popular education and arts-based participatory methods. Overall, the approaches reflect the six practices that work towards and within situated solidarities, as mentioned above, namely 1.) being moved; 2) dispersing power; 3) resourcing potential; 4) resourcing solidarity; 5) challenging assumptions and norms, and 6) sustaining collaboration (Routledge & Derickson, 2015). These workshop considerations and practices included:

- **Taking care and taking time:** Prioritising time and care for the detailed organising and logistics of the workshop, ensuring people travel safely and comfortably, and navigating complex university finance systems to ensure that the practical and financial arrangements for people to travel and be away from home are treated with respect and discretion. Ensuring that there is enough time and space in the workshop programme to be able to discuss a range of issues in depth. Making time for thorough translation into the different languages spoken by participants [*#3, #4 resourcing potential and solidarity; #6*

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<sup>15</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t1prPHSYIEoO1RAARgomRWJvd6mXr9ik/view>

*sustaining collaboration]*

- **Creating spaces of agency and building a collective small-scale fisher identity:** to intentionally take back power in terms of ocean governance rather than being pushed and pulled from one un-participatory consultation meeting to another and being forced to respond to already pre-determined policy agendas. To consider carefully what SSF priorities are for ocean decision making, and how to go about building inclusive and representative SSF structures to take these priorities forward [*#5challenging assumptions and norms; #1being moved; #4 resourcing solidarity; #2dispersing power*]



**Figure 3.1: Small scale fishers from Tsitsikamma MPA speak to a DFFE official on Zoom. Since it is very difficult to many fishers to connect to virtual meetings from their homes, sometimes SSF arranged to have meetings with officials while at a CJN workshop**

- **Remembering and honouring:** Respectful honouring of SSF friends and comrades who have passed away before their rights could be fully realised – this was done in the opening circle as well as through photo galleries of printed photos. This was part of a pre-workshop activity to share special photographs that celebrate and honour SSFs, living and deceased. These were printed and hung as a vibrant exhibition in the workshop space (see Figure 3.2). This travelling, growing gallery of images was also a recognition of the long years of struggle that SSFs have been engaged in, and of the many who have contributed to the movement who are no longer alive as well as a celebration of the many kinds of work and care that SSFs are involved in within their

communities. [#1 being moved; #4 resourcing solidarity; #6 sustaining collaboration]



**Figure 3.2: Fishers' Exhibition, a growing gallery of images that fishers shared over the SSF Leaders WhatsApp group, celebrating and honouring small-scale fishers. This exhibition travelled from workshop to workshop, growing over time as more photographs were shared**

- **Process design and facilitation that is open to wide and plural articulations of the ocean commons and SSF struggles** – Flexible and expansive workshop design and facilitation, guided by open and generative questions, and taking great care not to minimise or externalise diverse pressing issues that are raised by participants, even if they are not able to be addressed directly in the workshop. This is in contrast to most public participation meetings where the agenda is narrowly adhered to and participants are quickly shut down if they raise a question or a point that is deemed outside of the scope of the meeting [#2 dispersing power, #5challenging assumptions and norms]
- **‘Call and response’ imagery** – The interdisciplinary CJN has scholar activists with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, capacities and talents. These include environmental scientists, social scientists, fisheries specialists, artists and theatre makers. Amongst the group are several ‘artists’, whose creative practice deeply enhances the pedagogical and activist possibilities of the CJN. One innovative way that creative practice was employed in the CJN-SSF workshops was through the iterative graphic harvesting led by Dr. Dylan

McGarry. The images that were co-produced using this method were able to travel from one workshop to the next, and to be incorporated into the workshop space as a kind of living and growing exhibition of SSF perspectives. These images generated dynamic and reflective conversations and provided a shared visual ‘vocabulary’ for the issues being discussed in the workshops. Several of these images, which reflect fishers’ perspectives through symbol, metaphor and imagination, are shared in this paper. [#4 *resourcing solidarity*; #6 *sustaining collaboration*]

- **Putting SSFs on the Map** - Recognising that the dominant language of marine planning is through maps but also recognising the inadequacy of spatial coordinates to reflect the full, complex, multi-dimensional nature of SSF relationships to the ocean, the workshops all employed variations of participatory, counter-hegemonic mapping (Sunde & McGarry, forthcoming). Counter-hegemonic mapping resists the dominant power structures that are reinforced through state or corporate-controlled representations of space and uses a diverse range of participatory, creative and community-centred methods to surface place-based knowledge. CJNI researchers working with SSFs in St Helena have piloted advanced participatory mapping methods for ‘bottom-up MSP’ (Sowman & Sunde, forthcoming) [#4 *resourcing solidarity*; #2 *dispersing power*, #5 *challenging assumptions and norms*]



Figure 3.3: Participatory mapping of SSF areas and priorities at CJNI-SSF workshops

The overall goal of these workshops was for SSFs, with their social movement partners, to have the time, space and support to engage deeply, critically and meaningfully with ocean governance as it is now, to strategise about how to have their voices heard within this paradigm of ocean governance, and to imagine other ways it could be.

### **3.4 Analysis and Findings**

Analysis of the policy intentions and associated engagement processes (Table 3.1) and workshop records (Table 3.2) from the scholar-activist archive involved qualitative review and coding of the archive materials, focusing on both content and process. I identified key themes relevant to the research questions under the following three headings, which reflect the current governance situation, the consultation processes being implemented (or not), fishers' experience thereof and their vision for ocean governance.

- *“A slew of disconnected policies”*: Current patterns of ocean governance and SSFs experiences thereof
- *“Voices disappearing into the clouds”*: Consultation processes and SSFs experiences thereof
- *“Taking a step to the side”*: Fishers' articulating a counter-hegemonic form of ocean governance

#### **3.4.1 “A slew of disconnected policies”: Current paradigms of ocean governance and small-scale fishers' experiences thereof**

There are several concurrent, high-level ocean governance processes underway in South Africa directly relevant to and impactful on SSFs. These different planning and policy processes – the Ocean Economy Master Plan (OEMP), the Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) process, and the implementation of the SSF policy – all fall under the mandate and the authority of the DFFE ([www.dffe.gov](http://www.dffe.gov)). Given these overlapping mandates and their basis in a single department, they could be expected to be guided by an overarching, integrative framework, or at the very least not contradict each other. However, the experience of the CJN and SSF leaders' network in tracking and

participating in these processes has made clear the extreme lack of coordination and coherence and the many glaring disconnects and contradictions between them. These are described below and summarised in Figure 3.4.

#### **3.4.1.1 Small-scale fisheries policy**

The SSF policy development process, as well as its implementation failures, have been written about in detail elsewhere (Isaacs *et al.*, 2022; Sowman & Sunde, 2021; Sunde & Erwin 2021). Small-scale fishers and their civil society partners drove the development of the SSF policy, initially through the courts and then through a national task team. The final policy was gazetted in 2012 (DAFF, 2012), the Marine Living Resources Act was amended in 2014 (DAFF, 2014) to recognize small-scale fishing, and the Regulations on small-scale fishing were published in 2016 (DAFF, 2016). The SSF policy recognises the important contributions of SSF to food security and the economy and is guided by principles of a human-rights approach, a co-management approach, and an ecosystem-based approach. The policy stipulates that co-management structures are to be established at local, regional and national levels and that there should be shared responsibility for fisheries management between the state and SSF. It also allows for small-scale fishing areas to be established and says that the Minister of DFFE may declare that other activities that have a negative impact on SSF activities be prohibited in these areas (DAFF, 2014, section 19; DAFF, 2016). The policy recognises the need for transformation of the fisheries sector as a whole.

In practice, while 271 small-scale fisher cooperatives have been formed and recognized nationally since 2019, many genuine fishers have been left out. The top-down allocation of individual fishers into these SSF co-operatives, with onerous administrative burdens and inadequate resource allocation, has left rights-holding SSF with massive constraints on their livelihoods (Sunde and Erwin, 2020; Nangle, 2023). Those who have been left out of the co-operatives are forced to carry out their livelihoods beyond the bounds of the law or to use recreational permits, which do not allow them to sell their catch. There is no co-management and no establishment of SSF priority areas to date. There has been extremely limited re-distribution of species from the commercial sector to the small-scale sector, despite promises and commitments to do so, and SSF have to struggle against accusations from players in the commercial sector of being permit holders on paper only (Human, 2024).

### **3.4.1.2 Operation Phakisa, Marine Protected Areas and the Ocean Economy**

- Master Plan

In 2020, the same year that many small-scale fishers in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal provinces received their rights under the SSF policy, the ‘Ocean Economy Master Plan’ process was launched – in fact, in the Eastern Cape, the OEMP was launched at an event where thousands of SSF were given their fishing rights (Creecy, 2020). Yet, the OEMP completely failed to integrate the rights and principles that are enshrined in the SSF Policy. The OEMP is a planning process that takes forward ‘Operation Phakisa: Blue Economy’, which was launched in 2014. Phakisa (which means “hurry up” in Sesotho) was an approach to planning that adapted Malaysia’s “Big Fast Results” methodology and promoted intensive ‘labs’ to stimulate planning and roll-out of economic development and to identify and remove obstacles to implementation. In practice, in the case of the Operation Phakisa Oceans Economy programme, this meant the cutting of policy red tape and the fast-tracking of environmental authorisations for new developments in the ocean space (Bond, 2019; Masie and Bond, 2018). Operation Phakisa planning processes have been described by Masie and Bond (2018: 324) as ‘helter-skelter, non-consultative, elite, navel-gazing’. The stated aims of the OEMP are to “advance stabilization, revival and growth of the sub-sectors within the Ocean Economy, to ensure increased contribution to job creation, GDP, economic recovery and potential growth” (DFFE, 2020). The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment established the Oceans Economy Secretariat to lead the Oceans Economy and first introduced the idea of the ‘Ocean Economy Master Plan’ in 2019. In June 2021, a consultation process for taking forward the OEMP was started via online meetings and through sub-sector working groups. Small-scale fishers lobbied repeatedly to be meaningfully included in the OEMP process. Most OEMP meetings took place online, justified by the ongoing COVID-19 situation at the time, conducted only in English, and with no support to enable SSF representatives to access them. Only a small number of SSF were able to join the online meetings, with practical and mobile data support from CJN researchers and other civil society partners. Small-scale fishers and their partners raised concerns about the lack of recognition of the significant economic and food security contributions that small-scale fishers already make to the ocean economy. The Fisheries sub-sector

plan within the OEMP failed to include up-to-date and accurate SSF information and is dominated by commercial fishing interests. They also raised concerns about the perceived favouring and promotion of powerful sectors such as offshore oil and gas, while SSF remain marginalized. There has been a huge acceleration since the Operation Phakisa: Ocean Economy programme was launched in applications for authorization for offshore oil and gas prospecting, coastal and seabed mining, Karpowerships and other extractive projects in the ocean (Sowman *et al.*, 2023; Sunde, 2022). Small-scale fishers have participated actively in large numbers of EIA consultation processes, and have submitted comments, appeals, and even successfully taken several oil and gas prospecting approvals to court (Sustaining the Wild Coast NPC and Others v Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and Others (3491/2021); Adams and Others v Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and Others (1306/22)), but applications and approvals are taking place faster than small-scale fishers and their partners are able to respond. SSF and CJN also raised concerns about the OEMP moving ahead while Marine Spatial Planning lags behind, and that these processes are 'delinked' from the perspective of planners (Tanci, 2021) when they should be integrally linked, since MSP is supposed to ensure the fair and sustainable balancing of claims for ocean space (White *et al.*, 2012). SSF and their partners in CJN and other civil society organisations sent in multiple comments submissions, letters to the Minister and the chair of the OEMP secretariat, calling for meaningful integration of the principles in the SSF policy, and for a moratorium on approval of oil and gas and mining developments until a robust and inclusive MSP process has taken place. In the draft version of the OEMP that was submitted to the Minister in March 2022, none of these concerns were acknowledged or addressed (DFFE, 2022).

Under Operation Phakisa, the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network in South Africa's EEZ was significantly expanded, bringing the total number of MPAs in South African waters to 41 and the percentage coverage under MPAs from <0.5% to 5.4% (Sink *et al.*, 2019). South Africa is pursuing the '30% protected area coverage by 2030' goal (DFFE, 2023). Under Operation Phakisa, the new MPA network was framed as 'a strategic initiative to support sustainable development of economic opportunities in South Africa's ocean space' (Kirkman *et al.*, 2021; Sink, 2016). The new and expanded Operation Phakisa MPAs were gazetted in 2019, the same year that SSF cooperatives

started to receive their rights under the SSF policy. However, there was no coordination between these processes, so the species and fishing grounds that are important to SSF (and have been committed to them) were not included in the 'optimisation algorithms' (Sink *et al.*, 2016) that were used to identify new MPA spatial zonations. MPAs are enclosures of ocean space that disproportionately impact community-based marine resource users (SSF and others) (Sowman and Sunde, 2018; Bavinck *et al.*, 2017). Small-scale fishers living in or adjacent to MPAs, or whose traditional fishing grounds fall into MPAs, are criminalized for pursuing their livelihoods, facing risks of fines, confiscation of their catch and equipment, being arrested or even being injured or killed by armed conservation authorities (Masifundise, 2023a; Ledwaba, 2022; Sowman and Sunde, 2018). There has not been any restitution for past injustices carried out on coastal communities in the name of marine conservation. There has been inadequate communication and coordination between MPA management and fisheries management directorates (Kirkman *et al.*, 2023). In practice, this means that the conservation officials and rangers 'on the ground' in MPAs are not aware of the rights of SSF that have been recognized through the amendments to the Marine Living Resources Act, and that have been confirmed through several important court cases (for example the Gongqose case (Gongqose & others v State & others, 2018) and the Coastal Links Langebaan case (Coastal Links Langebaan and others v Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and others; 2016)). This means that fishers who believe that they are within their rights to fish in MPAs continue to be chased away, arrested and even shot at (Masifundise, 2023a; Ledwaba 2022). There are several current cases of extremely serious human rights violations carried out by conservation officials in MPAs, for which SSF and community leaders are calling for thorough investigations and accountability (Masifundise, 2021; Masifundise, 2023b).

There are no functioning co-management arrangements in any MPAs in South Africa to date (Kirkman *et al.*, 2023). The development of draft management plans, integrated management plans and estuary management plans at MPAs around the coastline between 2020 and 2024 have not included small scale fishers in their consultation processes, even though they are now rights holders. Even when SSF lobby to be included and are given a (limited) chance to comment on these draft management plans, the spatial zonations of MPAs are already gazetted before the management

plans are developed, therefore there is very little scope for fishers' knowledge and priority fishing areas to be considered with regards to MPA zonation. In these ways, top-down marine conservation contributes significantly to the marginalization and violation of the rights of SSF and is experienced as a further driver of ocean grabbing (Bavinck *et al.*, 2017).

### **3.4.1.3 Marine spatial planning**

In parallel to these processes above, the Marine Spatial Planning process has been gathering momentum. The MSP Bill was published in 2016, the MSP Act was promulgated in 2018, and the National Data and Information Report for Marine Spatial Planning was released in April 2022. In March 2023, 'Marine Sector Plans' for 10 sectors were gazette (see Figure 1). Marine Sector Plans are intended to specify the 'overall development objectives and priorities, spatial claims and interests, and proposed zones and spatial regulations' for each marine sector (DFFE, 2023b). The published draft Marine Sector Plans are 'critical inputs for the next step of developing integrated cross-sectoral Marine Area Plans' (*ibid*). However, small-scale fishers have been excluded from meaningful engagement in MSP consultations and sector plan development. There was no consultation or support from DFFE towards the development of an SSF sector plan – the 'Wild Fisheries' sector plan that focuses on commercial species is said to cover SSF requirements, despite very distinct priorities, rights and prior commitments laid out in the SSF policy. Other sectors are far advanced in the development of their sector plans and spatial tasks. For example, the National Coastal and Marine Spatial Biodiversity Plan (NCMSBP) was launched in November 2022 (SANBI, 2022). Sectors such as biodiversity and commercial fisheries have had resources, research, capacity and support to develop their sector plans; there has been no such support for small-scale fisheries as a sector. There is no 'spatial layer' for SSF in any of the MSP maps that have been developed; therefore, the prioritizing of spatial areas for SSF, as committed to in the SSF policy and regulations, has been completely left out of MSP. The decision support tools that MSP relies upon – software that scores different claims for their relative importance and then generates spatial plans while trying to balance economy, ecosystems and society with minimal conflict – are treated as if they are neutral and apolitical tools (Flannery *et al.*, 2019). However, the lack of sensitivity of these tools to issues of power and

justice means that the algorithms inevitably favour those who already hold power and disadvantage those who are marginalized (Smith and Brennan, 2012). In the meantime, blue acceleration (Jouffray et al., 2020) facilitated by Operation Phakisa is continuing apace, while the inequitable, top-down MSP process slowly unfolds.

In addition to all of the incoherence, lack of coordination and disconnection between these different ocean governance frameworks and planning processes, significant procedural injustices are preventing inclusive and participatory decision making. While a complete absence of public participation in ocean decision making was a stark reality in the past, the current challenge is not that there is a lack of formal consultation. On the contrary, in terms of ‘tick – box’ and tokenistic participation, there has been a proliferation of online meetings, EIA consultant “open houses”, open public comment periods and appeal periods, related to: EIA and environmental authorisation processes for new developments including oil and gas prospecting, coastal and deep sea mining, Karpowerships, etc.; MPA gazetting and management plans; OEMP working group meetings; MSP information sessions; fisheries rights allocations processes; and more. For a small-scale fisher wanting to participate in ocean governance to try to ensure that their rights and interests are being protected, it would be a more than full-time job to keep up with all of the consultation meetings and comment writing. The problem is not with the quantity of public participation opportunities in ocean governance but with their quality.

From the perspective of SSFs, the disconnect between the commitment to recognition and transformation in the progressive SSF policy on the one hand and their glaring invisibility within and exclusion from the OEMP and MSP on the other hand is deeply undermining. However, it is not only concerning other ocean governance mechanisms that SSFs have been let down; the regulations and implementation of the SSF policy itself have “deviated from the fundamental principles” of the policy (Sowman & Sunde, 2021, p. 7). Figure 3.4 summarises the status quo related to the policy intentions and implementation status, illuminating the main disconnects identified in Table 3.4. In short, the SSF policy recognises the need for transformation of the fisheries sector as a whole; however, top-down ocean governance and marine conservation approaches contribute significantly to the marginalisation and violation of the rights of SSFs and are experienced as drivers of ocean grabbing (Bavinck et al., 2017). Fuelling the

contradictions is the reality that blue economy acceleration (Jouffray et al., 2020) facilitated by Operation Phakisa continues apace while the inequitable, top-down MSP process slowly unfolds.

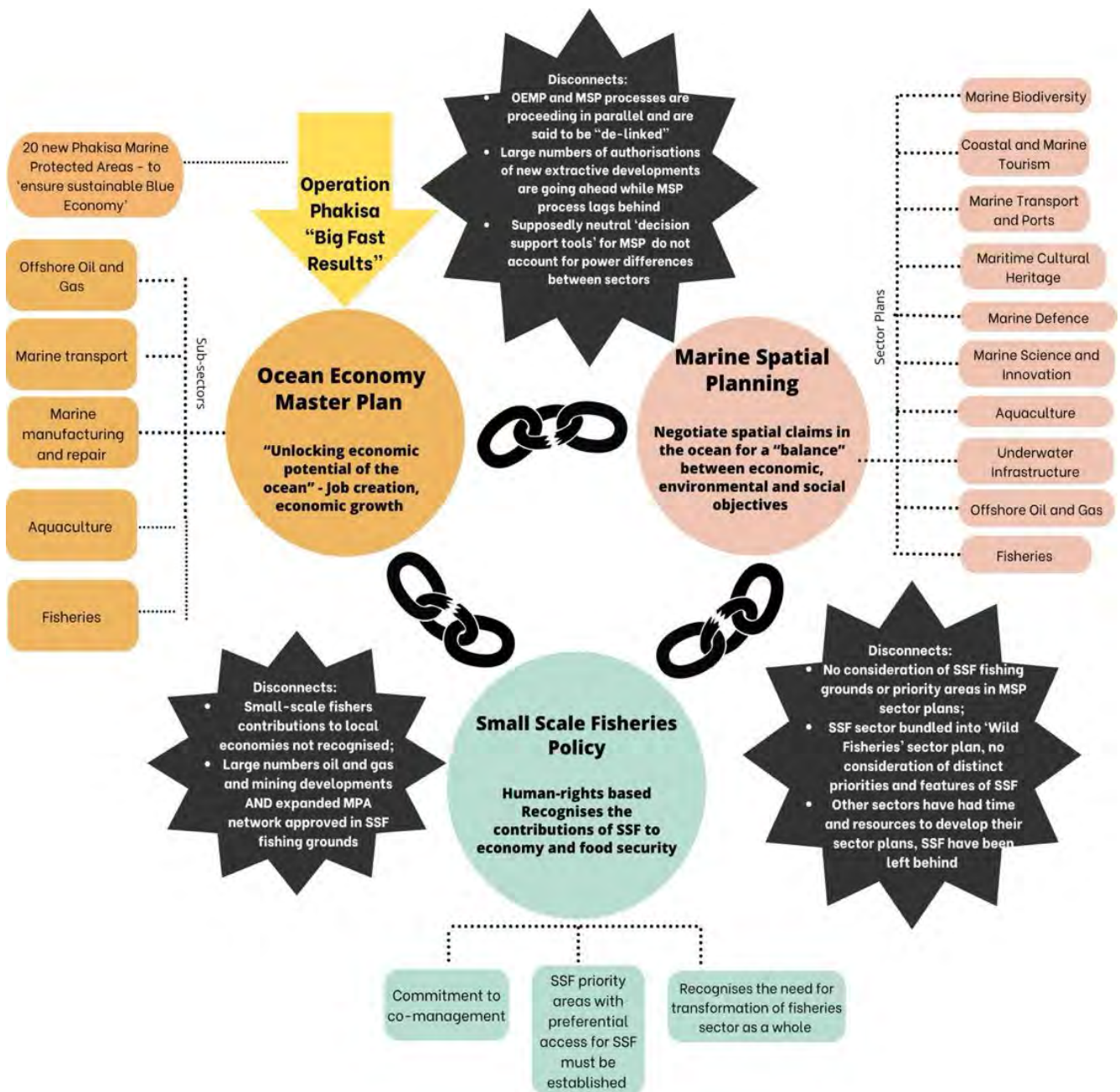


Figure 3.4: Disconnects in South African ocean governance from the perspective of SSFs

Source: Figure by the author.

The CJN and SSFs have raised concerns about the OEMP moving ahead while the MSP lags behind. They note that these processes are delinked from the perspective of planners (Tanci, 2021) when they should be integrally linked since the MSP is supposed to ensure a fair and sustainable balance of claims for ocean space (White et al., 2012). The SSFs and their partners in CJN and other civil society organisations have also sent in multiple comment submissions and letters to the Minister and the chair of the OEMP secretariat – calling for meaningful integration of the principles in the SSF policy and a moratorium on approval of oil and gas and mining developments until a robust and inclusive MSP process has taken place. In the draft version of the OEMP submitted to the minister in March 2022, none of these concerns were acknowledged or addressed (DFFE, 2022). This reveals problems with procedural justice as found in the quality of the consultative processes, discussed next.

While a complete absence of public participation in ocean decision making was a stark reality in the past, the current challenge is not a lack of formal consultation. On the contrary, in terms of ‘tick-box’ and tokenistic participation, there has been a proliferation of online meetings, consultant “open houses”, open public comment periods and appeal periods, related to:

- EIA and environmental authorisation processes for new developments, including oil and gas prospecting, coastal and deep-sea mining, Karpowerships, etc.
- MPA gazetting and management plans
- OEMP working group meetings
- MSP information sessions
- Fishery rights allocation processes and more.

For an SSF wanting to participate in ocean governance to ensure that their rights and interests are protected, it would be more than a full-time job to keep up with the slew of policies, their internal contradictions and all of the consultation meetings and comment writing. The problem is not with the quantity of public participation opportunities in ocean governance but with their quality.

### **3.4.2 “Voices disappearing into the clouds”: Consultation processes and small-scale fishers’ experiences thereof**

There is a deep commitment to the principles of meaningful public participation in South Africa’s Constitution (South Africa, 1996) and environmental governance policy frameworks, as well as in international laws to which the country is a signatory. The National Environmental Management Act (South Africa, 1998) states:

The participation of all interested and affected parties (I&APs) in environmental governance must be promoted and all people must have the opportunity to develop the understanding, skills and capacity necessary for achieving equitable and effective participation, and participation by vulnerable and disadvantaged persons must be ensured. (Section 2 (4)(f)).

These requirements for adequate and meaningful consultation have been confirmed and clarified through a range of legal cases. There is growing recognition within scholarship on environmental governance and sustainability transformations that the participation of resource users in all aspects of governance is critical for these systems to be effective and legitimate (Berkes, 2015; Sowman & Sunde, 2021). The value of including diverse knowledge systems and meaningful participation in planning and governance processes, and making it more locally adaptive (Reed, 2008) is recognised; it contributes to trust building, increasing the likelihood of acceptance of the final plan and its implementation (Innes & Booher, 2004). Knowledge co-production across different ways of knowing can facilitate social learning, challenge dominant paradigms that are otherwise taken for granted, and surface innovative alternatives for more effective and just governance (Armitage et al., 2017; Berkes, 2017). Bearing these understandings and principles in mind, how do SSFs experience public participation towards ocean governance in practice?

Inadequate and poor-quality *consultation* practices were consistently experienced across all the policy and governance processes summarised in Table 3.4 and Figure 3.4. In 2020 and 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak, many public meetings and consultations took place online. While COVID-19 was used as an excuse for delays in the implementation of the SSF policy (Sowman et al., 2021), other ocean governance processes moved swiftly ahead. Approvals for the extractive ocean and coastal developments and advancement of MSP and conservation planning

continued via a huge number of online consultations and meetings that SSFs were almost entirely excluded from. The obstacles to online participation for SSFs and other coastal community members are enormous. The vast majority of SSFs do not own laptops or have WiFi in their homes. Therefore, they have to join these meetings via their phones, relying on intermittent cellphone signals in remote coastal towns and villages – they have to pay for these data-heavy online meetings themselves. If draft reports are being discussed in these meetings, they are only available online, often as large files that need to be downloaded, costing data and money. The online meeting apps favoured by consultants and government officials are far more difficult to navigate on a cellphone than on a computer – it is often difficult to read or type on the meeting chat and to see the slides being shared. The presenters invariably speak in English, with no translation. During one of these online meetings, a fisher wrote on the SSF leaders' WhatsApp group: *"In these online meetings, it is like our voices disappear into the clouds"*. A researcher reflected: *"The ocean is on mute in these conversations"*. Another fisher became angry during one of these online meetings and recorded a voice note saying: *"There is no way for me to say what I need to say, it's just talk, talk, talk and no one can hear my voice! This is not participation!"*.

In-person consultation meetings are not much better. The SSFs are not informed or invited to many ocean governance consultations – as rights holders, they should be prioritised. If community members are informed at all, the consultant often assumes that the chief or traditional leader will represent all the interests of their constituents. The issue of language and translation is not handled sensitively. English is the default language of presentation, and if someone asks whether there will be a translation, the facilitator will often ask: *"Who needs translation?"* This puts people on the spot, often requiring them to reveal information about their education or literacy background (I. Senekal, personal communication, 21 January 2023). It is usually the most marginalised who most need translation into a language other than English, and often, they will keep quiet when the question is asked. If translation is provided, only a summary of the full English presentation is offered. The physical setup and mode of these meetings are extremely non-participatory. Rows of chairs face a front desk where the consultants or government officials sit; a projected image of highly technical PowerPoint presentations is the focal point of the meeting. Usually, these meetings take place under extreme time pressures – officials or consultants need to be at

another meeting by a certain time, and inevitably, the time for questions or discussion is cut short.

An additional challenge to meaningful participation is the volume of concurrent ocean governance processes that require SSFs' attention and input at any given time. For a snapshot example, from November to December 2022, the sheer number of concurrently running ocean-related public consultation processes affecting SSFs on the West Coast was overwhelming. These simultaneous processes are related to three separate oil and gas prospecting applications, a proposed Karpowership, two coastal mining applications, OEMP comments being due, two separate MPA management plans and two PASA/DMRE meetings with Indigenous leaders about the benefits of oil and gas. All of this took place during the snoek season when most West Coast fishers are at sea and over the December festive season when many people travel or take time off from work. The impossibility of meaningful participation in these circumstances is difficult to accept, particularly when one considers that it is the same consultants for many of these applications and the same government department approving this schedule. The embodied SSF experiences of being crushed by the cumulative weight of ocean governance processes and activities are expressed in Figure 3.5.



**Figure 3.5: OEMPF!**

Source: By Dylan McGarry, in dialogue with SSFs at CJN-SSF workshop, Port Alfred, August 2023

In some cases, the consistent and determined advocacy for the specific inclusion of SSFs has had an impact. The DFFE carried out a stakeholder engagement roadshow in August 2022, where the OEMP, MSP and MPA were all on the agenda. However, these roadshow events were rushed, presentation-heavy and did not allow any time or opportunity for community members to have their concerns heard (Githahu, 2022). Since three successful court cases were brought by SSFs and coastal communities to interdict seismic surveys, based in part on inadequate consultation (du Toit et al., 2024), consultants for oil and gas companies have adjusted their tactics and now go to great lengths to “cover their bases” in terms of evidence of consultation with fishers and coastal communities. However, the actual concerns of these communities are glossed over and dismissed in the EIAs, and many authorisations have gone ahead despite widespread resistance.

Fishers and their partners have developed strategies such as attending consultation meetings but refusing to sign the register or attending and then staging ‘walk-outs’. These strategies aim to resist and disrupt how signatures on an attendance register are used as evidence of “consultation” when, in reality, their views have not been taken on board.

What is clear when considering these various processes, such as the MSP, OEMP, MPA management and EIA consultations that are promoted as participatory, democratic spaces, is that these are largely “post-political” planning processes (Flannery et al., 2018). Post-political planning does not allow any space for debate about the ultimate starting points or purposes of planning (Flannery et al., 2018). It does not address issues of power and inequality (Tafon, 2017); it relies on technical-managerial planning tools to try to produce ‘win-win’ solutions to complex socio-environmental challenges (Mouffe, 1999); and it perpetuates neoliberal agendas which favour powerful stakeholders (McCarthy, 2005). This illusion of democratic legitimacy allows “existing power holders to retain authority to govern as they wish and reduces less powerful stakeholders to the role of rubberstamping all-but-implemented policy proposals” (Flannery et al., 2018, p. 32; Swyngedouw, 2005). These facades of consultation for environmental governance require people to participate in their own oppression. Through the CJN, SSFs and their research partners have gathered in-depth evidence of the undemocratic post-political nature of ocean governance in South

Africa and have started to create alternative spaces to explore counter-hegemonic governance, which is discussed next.

### **3.4.3 “Taking a step to the side”: Fishers’ articulating a counter-hegemonic form of ocean governance**

Through participating widely in different ocean governance processes, the SSF leaders’ group and CJN have learnt much about the substance and processes of ocean governance. It has been possible to track and gain a “bigger picture” of the connections and disconnections between different aspects of ocean governance as summarised above and generate a significant paper trail of attempts to participate in ocean governance. This paper trail – made up of comments on proposed developments, letters to government officials and consultants, and minutes of meetings (see Table 3.1) – helps to inform a “bottom-up” analysis of ocean governance but can also prove useful as evidence of SSFs putting their concerns on the record, in the event of future legal challenges.

The CJN and SSF leaders’ group developed co-engaged methods of policy analysis and responses. These co-engaged policy responses are developed through several steps, usually over the WhatsApp chat group communications:

1. Alerting the network to a new ocean policy or proposed projects that are open for comment.
2. Summarising, contextualising and making the link to what is in the SSF policy - through a combination of summary infographics, voice notes and translations between languages spoken by participants on the group (see Figure 3.6 below).
3. Surfacing concerns, questions, critiques and contradictions – again, using text and translated voice notes.
4. Strategising about engagement approaches (who should attend public meetings and how? What are the key messages to communicate? Should we try to write something for the media? Should we write a letter to the minister? Should we ask lawyers to write a letter? Should we link up with wider social movements for a public demonstration/protest?).

5. Identifying obstacles to participation – and trying to remove those obstacles (through alerting the organisers to issues, or sourcing funding for people’s travel or data, for example).
6. Submitting comments (researchers often do the writing based on what fishers have raised; this is then checked and edited by fishers before signing).
7. Following up on commitments made in the consultations, keeping a paper trail and tracking the divergences and convergences between different policy processes.



**Figure 3.6: Example of translated summaries of policy documents**

Source: iSimangaliso Wetland Park Integrated Management Plan 2022–2031, summarised and translated by CJN researchers in October 2020

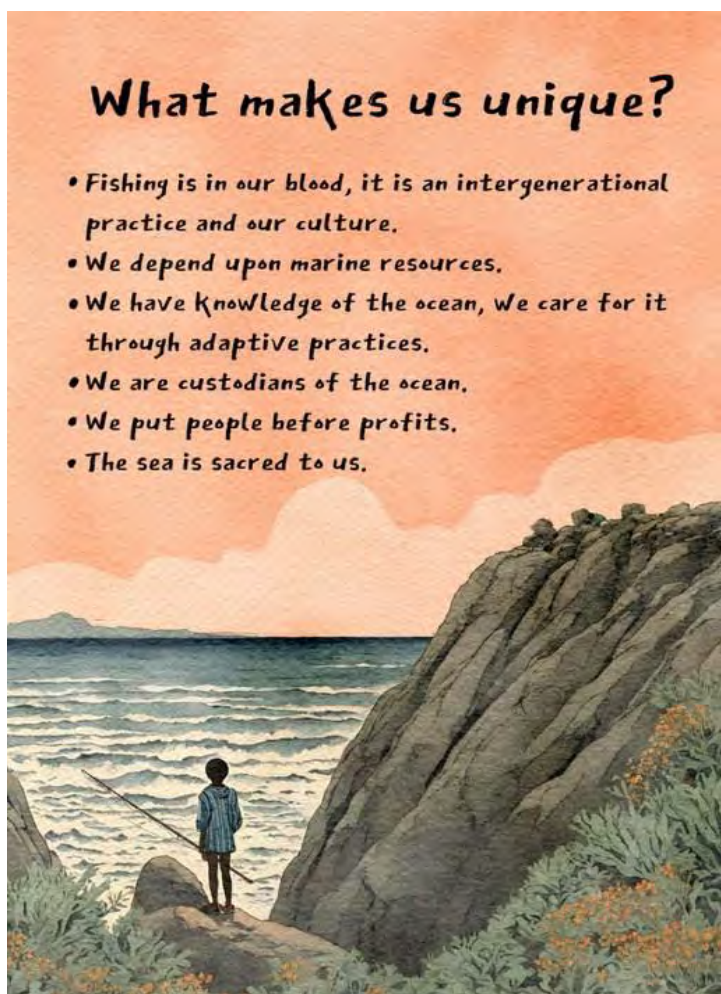
It can become extremely draining and demotivating to constantly respond to the onslaught of consultations, struggling to participate meaningfully in processes that are not actually designed to facilitate empowered engagement. Therefore, it is important to sometimes “take a step to the side, to create an alternative conversation” (Erwin et al., 2022, p. 384). To this end, CJN researchers organised a series of workshops with SSFs and other support organisations (see Table 3.2) to enable the space for expansive deliberations on SSF priorities and visions for ocean governance. The outcomes of these workshops point towards the articulation of a counter-hegemonic form of ocean governance by SSFs, the main contours of which are captured below.

### 3.4.3.1 Clarifying issues, identity and rights

An important process of clarifying a counter-hegemonic form of ocean governance was confirmation of the issues faced by SSFs, their identity and their rights. These are captured in three of the call-and-response images co-constructed with SSFs in the workshops (see Figures 3.7, 3.8, and 3.9 below). The “basket of challenges” (Figure 3.7) offers a comprehensive picture of the many intersecting issues that SSFs face and have to respond to. It was important to acknowledge the range and depth of these challenges and not minimise them; these are so often brushed aside or dismissed in formal governance spaces as being “someone else’s mandate” or “not on today’s agenda”.



Figure 3.7: Basket of SSF challenges – co-developed through a participatory exercise at the National SSF workshop in October 2023, full workshop report available [here](#)



**Figure 3.8. What makes SSF unique?** Text co-developed by SSF participants through a participatory exercise at SSF National workshop in October 2023. Illustrated by Dylan McGarry. Available in full workshop report, [here](#)

Equally important was to identify the strengths, identity, uniqueness and vision of SSFs in which they confirmed their unique and important role in the economy and as ocean custodians (Figure 3.8). Clarifying fishers' rights was also an important outcome of the workshops. Here, they asserted that they were "rights holders" per the SSF policy intention, not just stakeholders. As explored above, this was clearly not considered in the mainstream ocean governance process or consultative procedures associated with it. Clarifying and articulating these rights was important for their growing awareness and confidence to assert these rights in ocean governance processes.

The intersecting rights captured in the call and response image and verbatim text in Figure 3.9 indicate a range of intersecting rights: fishing rights, human rights, customary rights and environmental rights.

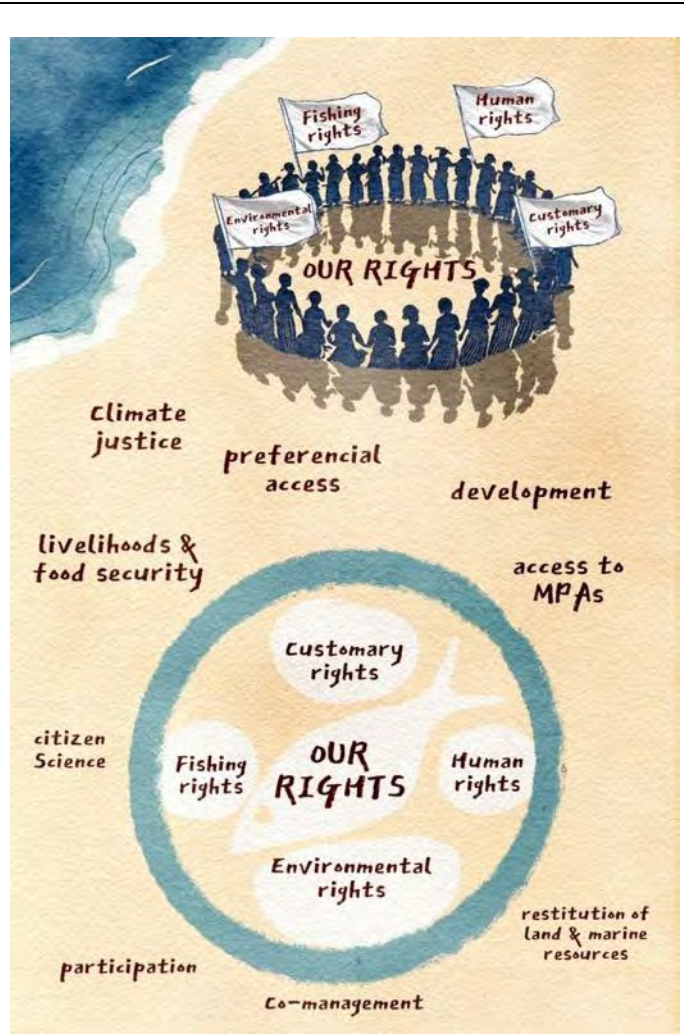


Figure 3.9: Call and response image and verbatim text articulating SSF rights. Co-developed by SSF participants in a participatory exercise led by Irna Senekal, and illustrated by Dylan McGarry, at SSF national workshop in October 2023. Full workshop report available [here](#)

*We are rights holders, not just stakeholders.*

*We have rights to a clean and healthy environment, and to practice our culture.*

*We have a right to work (to pursue our livelihoods), and to food security.*

*We have rights to specific areas where we may fish but the Minister needs to declare them.*

*We want no commercial fishing in traditional SSF zones.*

*We have rights to be consulted. There must be no decisions for us without us.*

*We have a right to co-management and it must be fast-tracked.*

*We are citizen scientists and should contribute to management and decision making.*

*We demand restitution of our rights to land and marine resources.*

*We need development that is good for fishers and the environment.*

*The diverse traditional beliefs and values of fishers must be accommodated.*

	<p><i>We want preferential access to marine resources.</i></p> <p><i>MPAs must be accessible to SSFs and we must be part of MPA expansion processes.</i></p> <p><i>We need flexibility in terms of fishing areas especially because of climate change.</i></p> <p><i>We want our customary rights, we want our fishing rights, we want our human rights!</i></p> <p><i>All ocean decision-making processes need to respect all of our rights.</i></p>
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### **3.4.3.2 Fishers' priorities for ocean policy and practice**

The archive and workshop records contain many different SSF priorities in the context of ocean governance, as touched on in Table 3.4, and in the challenges, identity and rights perspectives above. The many ideas that were put forward as SSF priorities for ocean governance were synthesised, and the following three main themes were identified in the October 2023 workshop:

- **Recognition:** We want to be recognised and respected as fishers within our communities and by the government. We want to be recognised as customary and Indigenous knowledge holders and custodians of the ocean. This would translate into the possibility of transferring our rights to our children.
- **Representation:** We want an organised collective to represent us at provincial and national levels, and we want to be considered in municipal planning. This must emerge from self-governed cooperatives. We also want a fisher advisory to DFFE scientists, which recognises our Indigenous knowledge as legitimate.

- **Co-management:** We want the ocean to be managed for life and not profit and we want to be actively involved to ensure a responsive relationship between policy and regulation and implementation that honours the intentions expressed by coastal users. We want co-management that involves us in the management of MPAs and considers our exclusive fishing grounds as integrated with marine protection. If we are involved in management, it would mean that our fishing rights align with the species we catch and the seasons we fish.

This effectively offers an agenda for counter-hegemonic ocean governance that can better include SSFs' voices and contributions to South Africa's ocean governance. Given the current challenges outlined and discussed above, these expressions of SSF identity and values will most likely not be legible to or valued by policymakers in this form. Nevertheless, this holistic, justice-oriented and "ocean commons" perspective of SSFs offers fundamentally different framings for SSF relationships with the ocean, from the one-way extraction of economic value to the management paradigms to sustain this extraction. They provide an alternative to the "post-politics" governance paradigm that appears to be the norm for ocean governance in South Africa. They might also offer another source of confidence and clarity, in their own words and on their own terms, from which SSFs can continue to claim space and visibility within ocean governance.

### **3.5 Conclusions and Reflections on the Role of Scholar-Activist**

#### **Transdisciplinary Research**

In the process of surfacing and engaging with ocean governance policy contradictions from the co-developed scholar-activist archive, there is an important role for scholar-activist TD research and CJNI research partners in support of "situated solidarities" to amplify SSF voices for more just, plural and legitimate ocean governance. One of these tasks, according to the experiences of the CJNI and SSF leaders' group, is to continuously and steadfastly support SSFs in their critical and cooperative participation in governance processes. The paper shows that this can be a rich site of social learning about the conflicts and contradictions arising due to incoherent ocean governance, the obstacles to participation, and strategic intervention points for SSFs and social movements to challenge injustices within ocean governance (Blythe et al., 2023; Le Fleur et al., 2023). Researchers can play a role by supporting greater

inclusion in these formal participation spaces and even facilitating wider inclusion by supporting SSFs and other knowledge holders to access these meetings (Sowman et al., 2023). The co-development of policy analysis, expressed via comments, appeals, letters and press statements and synthesised as in this paper, can assist SSFs in overcoming practical constraints and fragmentation; it can contribute to SSF voices being included in ocean governance. The design and facilitation of alternative spaces for SSFs to learn, deliberate and develop shared positions on their priorities for ocean governance, is one of the most helpful roles researchers can play (Ertör, 2021; Marshall et al., 2018). Designing and facilitating workshops and other deliberative spaces – with a lot of care and intention regarding the process as outlined in Table 3.3 above and with a commitment to creating an enabling space for SSFs to construct their own autonomous and sovereign political agency – is a critical contribution to articulating a possible counter-hegemonic approach to ocean governance. As shown above, this involved undertaking an SSF-centred analysis of ocean governance frameworks and decision-making practices from the perspective of SSFs, identified as a gap in ocean governance and blue justice literatures. Key to this was surfacing disconnections, contradictions and ways in which the progressive, human rights-based principles of the SSF policy are being excluded from powerful ocean governance and planning frameworks.

The paper has shown that despite numerous commitments to inclusive and participatory ocean governance in South African and international law, and a sustained effort by SSF movements over many years to be recognised and included, in reality this is not happening. The SSFs see economic justice, a healthy, protected ocean and their rights to carry out their ocean livelihoods as intimately interconnected; yet, between the state's pursuit of economic growth on the one hand and fortress conservation on the other, the rights and livelihoods of fisherfolk are drowned out. The SSFs and researchers in this study have experienced first-hand how ocean governance decision making and implementation are carried out through top-down, post-political processes that favour the existing elites in the ocean economy and are exceedingly difficult for SSFs to access and influence through formal participation channels. As a result, SSFs are seeking alternative spaces to develop their own shared understandings and positions on how the ocean should be governed by drawing on their knowledge, their rights and their relationships with the ocean

commons. Researchers can support these counter-hegemonic ocean governance explorations by designing and facilitating generative networks and processes that can listen to SSFs' voices. By embracing alternative epistemologies grounded in interconnectedness and custodianship, informed by the knowledges, rights and practices of SSFs, there is potential to navigate towards a more equitable, just and whole ocean governance paradigm.

## CHAPTER 4

### PAPER 5: LALELA ULWANDLE: AN EXPERIMENT IN PLURAL GOVERNANCE DISCUSSIONS

This paper is published as a chapter in *The Palgrave handbook of blue heritage*, edited by Rosabelle Boswell, David O’Kane and Jeremy Hills, and published in 2022. The published version of this chapter is attached as Appendix C. For this paper, Kira Erwin is the first author, I am the second author, and Dylan McGarry and Neil Coppen are the third and fourth authors, respectively. I was part of the research, script development and facilitation team for *Lalela uLwandle*, and I contributed to the research design, data collection, data analysis and writing for this paper. In particular, I led the sections of the paper that speak about the contribution of *Lalela uLwandle* to the civil society response to offshore oil and drilling. This paper is the third paper in this PhD by publication, which investigates dimensions of transdisciplinary scholar-activist praxis in advancing ocean governance in a South African Coastal Justice Network.

This paper offers a scholar-activist praxis method developed in the One Ocean Hub that allows for plural perspectives in ocean governance and points to the emergence of networked solidarity amongst researchers and activists. This method was important for surfacing small-scale fishers’ knowledge and experience, transgressively challenging power relations in public and highlighting the intersectionality of scholar-activist transdisciplinary praxis. It addresses the third question of this study: *What methods in blue justice research enable plural knowledges and perspectives for co-engagement?*

#### 4.1 Introduction

Carefully crafted storytelling on how humans make meaning of their world concerning the ocean offers learnings for altering ocean governance frameworks to be both inclusive and plural. This chapter explores these learnings through a research and theatre-based project, *Lalela uLwandle* (translated from isiZulu as Listen to the Sea),

developed using the Empatheatre methodology<sup>16</sup> under the One Ocean Hub collective. Empatheatre is a research-based, theatre-making praxis in which research, data gathering, analysis and dissemination are collaboratively facilitated across different publics (Coppen, 2019). The *Lalela uLwandle* theatrical script was written and performed through an emergent and iterative process of practice and action-based research that took place during 2018 and 2019 in which co-participants, subsistence and small-scale fishers (SSFs), academics and researchers, marine scientists, traditional healers, religious followers, lifesavers, civil society partners, activists and marine educators worked to identify and deliberate on matters of concern concerning the ocean. *Lalela uLwandle* began as a response to a local conflict about a permit application for deep-sea gas prospecting by a large oil and gas company off the coast of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. This particular local struggle in which the needs of diverse community members were pitted against a large extractive corporation is one of many examples within a larger national and international move towards the blue economy (Bennett et al., 2021). As many countries turn to the seas in the hope of renewed economic growth, issues of environmental justice related to the oceans and climate change are increasing. As outlined in the next section of this chapter (Section 4.2), ocean-related policy and governance frameworks interact with competing needs and conflicting desires on how we govern the ocean. In addition, in the blind rush for the dream of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) -led growth, policy and governance frameworks may exacerbate historic and contemporary socio-economic exclusions. In South Africa, capitalist and environmental conservation endeavours can, and have, caused harm to already marginalised people. These social and environmental justice concerns set an urgent challenge for ocean governance. This challenge lies not only in ensuring inclusion but in recognising existing power relations between ocean epistemologies in which some ways of knowing, such as science and economics, dominate policy and decision-making forums. There are many strategies needed, at different levels and on different scales, to effect changes in governance policy and

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.empatheatre.com/>

practice to ensure broad public participation and inclusion. Some interventions tackle the structures and systems of entrenched power head-on, through either resistance and protest or critical engagement from within. Other interventions take a step to the side to create an alternative conversation, with different entry points and framings that open our perceptions to expanded relations between people and the environment, liberated from the language of management and policy. *Lalela uLwandle* was an example of the latter, by openly exploring what we may gain by listening closely to a plurality of ocean knowledges. If we are to spark a new imagination for what inclusive and just decision making feels like, then we need to experiment with methods that reject epistemological hierarchies and the problematic view that different knowledge systems are incommensurable. This chapter shares our learnings on how agonistic and plural understandings of the ocean provide an important point of departure for imagining a new just and inclusive ocean governance that works towards planetary wellbeing.

## **4.2 Ocean Grabbing in Policy and Practice**

The oceans are receiving a significant increase in scientific and profit-seeking attention. The latter is discussed in Bennett et al. (2015), who offer a definition of this concept and the activities that constitute this action. The ocean, a moving body of water fundamental to all life on earth, is under threat from human activities (Bähr, 2017; Franke et al., 2020; Poloczanska et al., 2018). National states and international bodies juggle competing demands within ocean governance. Extractive ocean industries, such as commercial fishing, seabed mining, externalities from land pollutants and the hunt for marine genetic resources all make promises of economic growth (Bennett et al., 2021; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016). Yet, simultaneously, there is mounting scientific evidence supporting the protection of marine resources as crucial to life on earth and growing public demands for an end to these extractive industries to mitigate a climate crisis (Bond, 2019; Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2019). Many nation states, including South Africa, are developing Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in an attempt at governance and monitoring frameworks for their

Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)<sup>17</sup> and Extended Continental Shelf areas<sup>18</sup>. To work across these demands, ambiguous concepts like the blue economy are used to “facilitate cooperation between different social worlds” (Schutter et al., 2021, p. 7). These conceptual constructs create policy containers that enable duplicitous legislation to encourage, regulate and prohibit activities in the ocean (Schutter et al., 2021, p. 3).

Amid these national processes is a growing cry from many different geographies for “a new relationship between humanity and the ocean”, one that requires “a transformative shift from a state-centric approach to a global approach that takes into account the embeddedness of the ocean and associated actors in the wider planetary system” (Rudolph et al., 2020, p. 1). Appeals to collective humanity are necessary for healthy interconnected earth systems; if they are to be transformative, they must simultaneously grapple with the stubborn power hierarchies and socio-economic fractures across and within human geographies and decision making forums. Given the strong relationship of ocean health to the climate crisis there is a sense of urgency to these national governance frameworks. This urgency too often leads to policy development along a predictable path dependency steeped in capitalist logic and existing power structures. Already in South Africa, we see the beginnings of ocean governance replicating weak participatory and inclusion processes (Sowman & Sunde, 2018) as well as entrenching scientific and economic discourses as the only legitimate knowledge systems for decision making (Boswell & Thornton, 2021). The tensions emerging from this path dependency are clearly manifest in the struggles of subsistence and small-scale fishers (SSFs). In 2007, fishers on the West Coast of South Africa took the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) to court, demanding a more inclusive and responsive policy regime for their sector.

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<sup>17</sup> The 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea enables sovereign states special rights within an EEZ, that extends 200 nautical miles out to sea from the state’s coastland, in relation to the exploration and use of marine resources.

<sup>18</sup> Extended Continental Shelf Areas are portions of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles from the coast, where states can apply to have sovereign rights to the seabed and subsoil. The extent of a nation’s Extended Continental Shelf is often undefined or contested.

The policy instrument that emerged in 2012 had laudable goals for inclusion and indicated a significant move towards legislation for “community-based” rights for small-scale and subsistence fishers (Sowman & Sunde, 2021). Yet, in implementing the policy regulations, the state reverted to predictable economic development aspirations that forced fishers to create cooperatives using a small business model (Sunde & Erwin, 2020). For various reasons, these cooperatives have not delivered on the promise of local development, both for the state and for the fishers involved: slow roll-out by the state; broken promises of boats and equipment; capture of these cooperatives for local politics and patronage; and the uneasy fit cooperatives of this kind have with the lived experiences of rural and urban subsistence fishers along the coastline (Sunde & Erwin, 2020). Not only are many fishers excluded from this regulatory regime, but the message these permitting structures send is clear. You are more valued by the state, and your chances of getting a seat at the negotiation table are significantly increased if you comply with formalising your livelihood into a dominant economic growth model (Ntona & Schröder, 2020).

Fishing for livelihoods along the South African coast is enmeshed in coastal cultural and heritage practices (Sunde, 2014a). This is not unique to South Africa (see Gallois & Duda, 2016; Nadel-Klein, 2020; Urquhart & Acott, 2013), but the country’s experiences of coloniality and apartheid have shaped these entanglements in specific ways. Many people racialised as Black<sup>19</sup> in rural and urban areas were forcibly removed from the coast to make way for industrial and leisure activities for the White elite, violently disrupting their close relationships with the sea (Sunde, 2014b). Continuing fishing as a source of pride and, in some cases, resistance against this discrimination further enmeshed fishing into cultural identities for many coastal people (Sunde & Erwin, 2020). Of course, in addition to identifying with a particular culture, religion and class, fishers are also parents and family members whose livelihoods and knowledge of the sea support social relations in diverse ways. These socio-cultural livelihoods and logic are often antithesis to obsessions about these capitalist growth

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<sup>19</sup> A term used here to include all people who were persecuted and oppressed under the racist apartheid regimes, including people who under apartheid may still identify as belonging to the constructed racial categories of Black African, Indian and Coloured.

models for small businesses.

It is not only the “capitalist-industrial visions of ocean space” (Ntona & Schröder, 2020, p. 251) in the fisheries sector that coastal people are up against. They face similar exclusions through conservation efforts. In South Africa, state-led nature conservation has a damaging legacy of exclusion to answer for. Under apartheid, MPAs “are associated with the forced removal of Black communities from their lands and their displacement from the waters they traditionally fished” (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169). Conservation policies “almost exclusively reflected Western scientific values and beliefs, with an emphasis on protecting nature from human impacts” (Cocks et al., 2012, p. 7). Well-meaning biodiversity protection policies that result in formal exclusions for Indigenous and economically marginalised groups are common tensions that arise in marine conservation across national geographies (Crandall et al., 2018). While the South African transition to democracy in 1994 expanded constitutional rights to all people and enabled recognition of these injustices<sup>20</sup> (De Wet & Du Plessis, 2010), restoration processes concerning land and resource rights for many coastal people have been “painfully slow” (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169). These past exclusions are exacerbated by contemporary neoliberal models for marine conservation that link conservation with fantasies of development (Infield, 2001). As Schutter et al. (2021, p. 2) point out, the use of international concepts like the blue and green economy

share a foundation in ecological modernisation thinking, whereby economic growth and environmental protection can go hand-in-hand through incorporation of environmental issues into markets ... [obstructing] the fundamental change required to achieve actual sustainability.

Exclusions of local coastal people from protected areas frequently go hand-in-hand with attracting wealthier, mostly White South Africans and international visitors who pay for holidays in these pristine spaces. Rather than valuing traditional and cultural

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<sup>20</sup> NEMPA (National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act) and the World Heritage Convention Act require co-management (not just consultation with communities), and sensitivity to people and their needs (physical, psychological, developmental, cultural and social) respectively.

livelihood practices as being important contributors to conservation efforts, communities who were forcibly removed are now promised (mostly low-wage) jobs through growing environmental tourism. It is important to acknowledge there are positive environmental benefits to MPAs in South Africa, particularly for the regeneration of fish stocks (Maggs et al., 2013). However, the social impacts of MPAs include the weakening of local participatory governance, loss of tenure rights and access to resources by already marginalised communities, increased food insecurity and reduced household income, and negative impacts on culture and identity (Sowman & Sunde, 2018). Too often, contemporary conservation management is experienced by Black people as a continuum of apartheid's legacy of forced removals and punitive regulations.

Kepe (2009) calls for a recognition of how contemporary conservation efforts, while not necessarily conceptualised as racist, as was the case under apartheid, serve as “unintentional acts that highlight race differences, positively or negatively” and “end up raising questions about equality, paternalism and redress in regards to race” (p. 872). In South Africa then, these blue growth narratives can actively reproduce the “colonization of nature”, where dispossession occurs not just through land-grabs but through the rejection of “indigenous knowledge, values and practices in environmental management” (Cock, 2018, p. 140). This failure by the democratic state to adequately address historic injustices related to MPAs as well as weak contemporary processes of participation and inclusion in the promulgation of new MPAs, ensures a “growing discontent” regarding spatial planning for marine protection (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169).

Given this history of violence and segregation and continued experiences of exclusion, ocean-related policy forums cannot escape grappling with how unequal power relations impact governance frameworks. We face a collective challenge as we embark on extending existing land-based spatial planning and policy regimes to the oceans. We appear to have run out of time in the face of the climate crisis at the very moment we need time for critical reflection and debate on why these national and international frameworks have failed to ensure environmental and ecological justice on land.

How can we work with this urgency and insistence on careful participatory processes for governance, alternative social structures and critical reflection? If we are to move beyond the predictable path dependencies of capitalism and siloed governance arrangements in ocean governance, then we need a new imagination for what inclusive and just decision making feels like.

One method for generating such an imagination is to tackle the dominance of only a few ways of knowing the ocean. The epistemological hegemony of both the natural sciences and economics in ocean-related policy development generates several unhelpful rhetorical devices which reproduce fractured and polarised debates. These fault lines, as Jackie Cock (2018) calls them, fragment the environmental movement into those perceived as

narrow conservation movement focused on the protection of wild places, plants and animals, and the environmental justice movement, which is organizing around concrete issues in the everyday experience of poor people, especially their exposure to toxic pollution and lack of critical resources. (p. 143)

The dominance of scientific and economic epistemologies also creates awkward paradoxes which suggest both the possibility of a win-win scenario through linking marine protection with economic development and simultaneously de-politicises the numerous trade-offs it sets up: marine conservation vs economic growth; commercial fisheries (jobs) vs SSFs (livelihoods), marine conservation vs local restitution; and international capitalist interest vs. local economies. These repetitive dichotomies in governance forums serve to sideline the growing evidence that involving “local and indigenous communities in planning and decision-making processes enhanced management effectiveness and the achievement of socio-economic and conservation goals” of MPAs (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169). Rejecting a myopic vision of saving the planet through “greener” or, in this case “, bluer” economic development that boxes us into the same polarised positions requires actively working with the relational social and ecological processes between plural ways of knowing the sea. What is required is a concerted push for “a clear recognition of the diversity of values associated with socio-natural wellbeing as this relates to the ocean” (Ntona & Schröder, 2020, p. 245). Indeed, if we are to adequately address the scale and scope of climate change, then we must open the conversation to diverse ontologies in the production of knowledge.

Beyond understandings of economic and scientific models, cultural, traditional and spiritual knowledge systems equally shape how people act on, and with, ocean life. They also powerfully influence people's responses to state regulations. Unsurprisingly, contemporary research on environmentalism indicates "that social narratives are often far more important in leading people to accept or reject climate change than the underlying scientific evidence" (Marshall et al., 2016, p. 5). Diverse epistemologies are not just useful in the abstract notion of inclusivity but as a form of action "to explore possibilities of pluralism in our responses and politics" (O'Reilly et al., 2020, p. 14). We stand with a growing number of scholars and movements calling for the acceptance of plurality in ocean governance (Bremer & Glavovic, 2013; Corrigan & Hay-Edie, 2013; Flannery et al., 2016; Vierros et al., 2020). As Ntona and Schröder (2020) caution us:

Specifically, sectorially focused, growth-oriented MSP processes risk forgetting—or, worse, wilfully ignoring—that planning can also serve as an opportunity to develop a socially negotiated, non-economic understanding of oceanic relations, which takes into account the importance of local subsistence and health (physical, mental, spiritual and cultural), as well as local reliance upon the health and resilience of the natural environment. (p. 250)

It is this "socially negotiated" alternative that this chapter explores. It does so through a local experiment in listening to plural epistemologies along the KwaZulu-Natal coastline of South Africa. The following section outlines how a local contestation concerning oil and gas prospecting led to this experiment in listening.

### **4.3 An Application to Prospect for Gas on the KwaZulu-Natal Coastline by Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi**

On 28 October 2018, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), an environmental justice organisation born from the long fight for clean air and against environmental racism in Durban, called a meeting with the Petroleum Agency of South Africa (PASA). This agency (PASA) is the independent authority and regulatory body responsible for granting licences to prospect and mine for minerals and other natural resources on land and in the oceans. It is legislatively obligated to consider public needs when granting or denying such licences. Besides the representatives from PASA, the meeting consisted of representatives from small towns and communities

living up and down the coastline of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). In addition, members of larger environmental NGOs and activist groups were also in attendance. The meeting was called to show the authorities that many people living along the KZN coastline opposed the licence application by SASOL<sup>21</sup> and ENI, an international oil and gas company, who wanted to prospect for gas. One of the authors of this chapter, Kira Erwin, was asked by SDCEA to facilitate this meeting. With people representing locations along 600km of the KZN coast in the hall that day, discussions and debates were robust and translated to and from English to isiZulu to ensure that the discussions were understood by all.

The meeting in many ways represents South Africa's living democracy, where it is not just the government that calls and runs stakeholder consultations on the ocean, but frequently civil society and communities who demand in-person engagements regarding decision making. People in the room that day came from very different class positions and identified as different racial and cultural identities; they shared different histories in relation to the coast, which shaped their statements of concern and opposition. While some people spoke of scientific concerns for ocean health, possible habitat destruction and climate change, others spoke of concerns about their livelihoods, risks to their cultural heritage and of traditional knowledge observations concerning ocean pollution.

While local coastal representatives had a platform to voice their concerns at this gathering, there is more than one way for those in power to silence voices other than denying an audience. As Arundhati Roy (2004) reminds us: "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard" (n.p.). One method in which to "unhear" people's concerns is to reduce diverse voices into an artificially constructed homogenous "community". While the PASA officials were sympathetic to some of the arguments presented, they frequently spoke about "the community" as either "for or against" development, with very little nuanced understanding or acknowledgement of the diverse perspectives, knowledge, and concerns vocalised in the room. In doing so, the authority officials entrenched a

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<sup>21</sup> A South African energy and chemical company.

false binary in which they simply had to legally adjudicate between “the community” and the international corporation seeking to mine the seabed. In South Africa, a country with very high unemployment levels and slow economic growth (National Treasury, 2021), this binary inherently favours big business’ allure of jobs and GDP growth. Here, an international capitalist ethos that courts a national growth agenda trumps the myriad of local concerns.

What was lost in this insistence to see the opposition to seabed mining as “one voice” was the complexity of diverse demands for social, economic and environmental justice. It was the plurality of knowledge and experiences in the room that was the real challenge to PASA, a challenge that was “preferably unheard”. If South Africa is to live up to its policy aim of creating an ocean economy that contributes to the implementation of the National Development Plan 2030 (Republic of South Africa, 2012) through job creation, poverty alleviation and social equity (Findlay, 2018), then we must find alternative methods for listening to plural knowledge systems of the ocean. As will be argued below, different knowledge systems, science and tradition among them, do not have to be viewed as incommensurable for the wellbeing of the oceans. One of the challenges for inclusive ocean governance in South Africa and elsewhere is not simply a perfunctory opening of stakeholder forums but an active approach to creating more just listening and dialogue methods that are comfortable with a plurality of meanings and relationships with the ocean. Methods that make us all more willing to listen to a chorus of voices, where different ways of knowing the sea may hold equal legitimacy within social negotiations on governance. The following section outlines one such local experiment in listening, *Lalela uLwandle*, designed in direct response to the above dilemma and the contestation expressed in the meeting with PASA.

#### **4.4 The Making and Performance of *Lalela uLwandle***

*Lalela uLwandle* was first and foremost a process set out to listen deeply to the stories of coastal people’s relationships, histories and concerns for the ocean. We wanted to understand the intergenerational spiritual and historical relationships coastal citizens had with the Indian Ocean. The central questions at the heart of our research were: How does the ocean sustain and nourish KZN coastal dwellers? What are the points of conflict and intersection within and between the range of memories and

mythologies, traditional folk (and fairy) tales, religious rites, idioms, scientific understandings, songs and rituals, economic frameworks, points of catharsis, recreation and superstition that the ocean invokes across the people who live along this coastline?

The narrative data that contributed to the script was created through two methods. The early stages of the research consisted of focus groups with marine educators at the local aquarium, subsistence fishers in Durban and environmental justice partners (notably SDCEA and groundWork). During this stage, we identified key texts that offered rich historical readings of people's experiences along this coastline, such as Viroschen Chetty and Neelan Govender's excellent book *The legends of the tide* (2014), which records generations of stories about the South Indian Seine Net Fisher folk and industry in Durban and the PhD of Dr Philile Mbatha exploring the forced removals of coastal KZN communities during apartheid and the impact of coastal mining on traditional healing practices (Mbatha, 2018). In addition, renowned KZN storyteller Gcina Mhlope gave us permission to use and incorporate her beautiful story *Nolwandle: Girl of the Waves* in the play.

Gcina's unique South African folk story was useful in establishing a narrative that would open and conclude the play, introducing and echoing so many aspects of our research (loss, learning, medicine, healing) magically and profoundly. These texts, along with the narrative data, strongly influenced character development in the script. The second stage of the research included interviews with four marine scientists (two social scientists and two natural scientists), two traditional healers, an environmental activist, a Zulu historian, a lifeguard, an environmental lawyer, a former national government minister and a practising Zionist.<sup>22</sup> While the methods in collecting these narratives differ, both the focus groups and individual interviews began with the opening invitation to participants to tell us "your earliest memories of the sea".

Through these explorations, the Empatheatre team worked iteratively to shape the data into a first draft of a theatrical script. In doing so we had to remind ourselves how

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<sup>22</sup> The Zionist churches in KwaZulu-Natal combine, to various degrees, traditional isiZulu cosmology with Christianity.

easily research, when scripted into a play, can feel didactic. We worked to avoid reducing characters to mere mouthpieces conveying critical information. Each character, we decided, needed to be a consummate storyteller, a narrator of their own lives and realities as well as being able to embody and speak to the many pressing questions and concerns regarding the sea that had emerged in the research. We have learnt over the course of multiple Empatheatre processes that the stories of each character need to have strong story arcs and emotional beats. Admittedly, these arcs are often not overtly evident in the research narratives, and it is the playwright's delicate responsibility to unearth and shape them while remaining connected to the original data. In the end, after much collective discussion, we settled on the development of three characters, each one emerging from different cultural backgrounds and historical contexts existing along the KZN coastline. The characters were the following:

- Niren<sup>23</sup> whose family has origins in the Indian indentured labourers brought to South Africa under colonial rule. His stories resonate with the many voices of the KZN fisherfolk and environmental activists who have fought years of environmental racism under apartheid and today.
- Nolwandle,<sup>24</sup> who plays a marine educator and shares the stories of traditional and religious beliefs of many isiZulu-speaking people as well as the history of forced removals of Black communities through the stories of her mother and grandmother.
- Faye,<sup>25</sup> a retired marine scientist living in a South Coast town whose science drives her activism and has stories of White privilege that she is confronting in her retirement.

Often Empatheatre processes rely on composite characters, where multiple voices and many strands of research are woven into a single character. Niren, Faye and

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23 Played by Rory Booth

24 Played by Mpume Mthombeni

25 Played by Alison Cassells

Nolwandle were all created using this device. This scriptwriting process works in tandem with the research process; for example, as the lead playwright Neil Copen wove these narratives together, the research teams supported this process through fact and member checking with participants as well as heading back into the field to conduct further interviews if parts of the storyline felt unresolved. The deeper we submerged ourselves in these worlds, the more the stories and the incredible and often unexpected parallels between characters revealed themselves. We soon discovered that our characters, as disparate as they may have seemed, were connected by the ocean in various profound and unexpected ways, particularly in their devotion to rituals and rites of various kinds and shared respect of the ocean<sup>26</sup>.

After a final table reading with key civil society partners who were part of challenging the ENI application described earlier in this chapter, *Lalela uLwandle* went on a week's tour along the KwaZulu-Natal coastline and ran for one week in the city of Durban at the end of 2019. *Lalela uLwandle* was also performed in Port Elizabeth and in Makhandla at Rhodes University in 2020.

In total, the play has been performed 21 times in eight different towns and cities in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape for over 900 audience members. There have been 21 post-show discussions, and more than 600 feedback forms have been filled out and analysed. Audience members were strategically invited; they were diverse in terms of race and class and included SSFs, mining-affected communities, conservation officials, scientists, planners, tourism operators and interested members of the public. The strategic inviting of audience members is a critical aspect of the methodology, playing an important role in terms of the social learning and solidarity potential of the process. Social learning theory reveals that the more diverse an audience, the deeper the learning (Wals et al., 2009). Just as critical is how the post-show discussions are facilitated to offer the audiences a space to share and reflect after seeing the performance. In these discussions, the lead and co-facilitators are chosen from among our core team, depending upon the audience present; this is to

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<sup>26</sup> The podcast of the play *Lalela uLwandle* can be listened to online here: <https://www.empatheatre.com/listen-to-our-lalela-ulwandle-radio-play>

ensure that, for example, the discussion is carried out in the language spoken by most of the audience, with translation support from co-facilitators on the team. This co-facilitation is very useful if audience members ask questions that another researcher is best suited to address; it makes the space more democratic by inviting other Empatheatre practitioners to share their views. We were often fortunate to have civil society members in the audience who could field answers and to whom we could direct the public interested in their work. Audience members sometimes presented important counterpoints to their fellow audience members' questions or statements. In this sense, the facilitator should "hold the space" rather than too closely direct or control the discussion. At the end of the post-show discussions, audience members could also complete a feedback form on their views of the show and thoughts on ocean governance.

The post-show discussions and feedback forms supported the collaborative analysis of research findings and data with diverse publics. The audiences are involved in identifying the implications of the research in relation to their lived experiences. The post-show discussions can at times open a tribunal space for audience members to share testimonies of their experiences in response to those they have seen performed. This opens the possibilities for the development of new alliances for civic action. In the case of *Lalela uLwandle*, the KZN tour of the play in October 2019 coincided with the news that the application from SASOL and ENI for licences to undertake exploratory drilling for oil and gas off of the KZN coastline (as per the PASA meeting referenced earlier in this chapter) had been approved by the Department of Mineral Resources, and that there were 30 days to appeal this decision. From the road, while touring the play, members of our team were involved in contributing to this appeals process by drawing in the "expert testimonies" of co-researchers from a range of relevant disciplines and the testimonies of audience members from the *Lalela uLwandle* audience feedback forms. We worked closely with lawyers assisting with the appeal to gather and compile this input into a substantial letter of appeal; we shared up-to-date information related to the drilling licences and appeal process with audience members when the issue came up in post-show discussions and directed audience members who wished to take action through SDCEA's petition and other organised appeal processes. The SDCEA's appeal process is ongoing at the time of writing, with a collective civil society effort to take the government department to court over the

issue. Although not addressed in this chapter, the relationships and collective actions catalysed by the *Lalela uLwandle* process have seeded the development of a growing CJN, responding to the social and environmental justice impacts of the blue economy on a national scale.

#### **4.5 A Chorus of Voices in Public Stories**

As we experienced through the *Lalela uLwandle* process, storytelling is a powerful way to engage people in a conversation about ways of knowing the ocean and its impact on the world. Sharing research through public storytelling rather than only through publications, research reports and conferences can create a less didactic space for listening and engagement on contentious issues (Erwin, 2020b). The stories performed and those shared afterwards by audience members enabled listening that made allowance for ambiguity, complexity and plurality. This is different from presenting arguments in academic conferences or stakeholder consultations, where both the speaker and the audience are already primed to take a stand for or against a position in a critical debate (Polletta et al., 2011). As one audience member, himself a scientist, noted: “This is a very refreshing take on science and advocacy, which is amazing” (DbnP2, 15/10/2019). While critical debate was welcomed and encouraged in the post-show discussions, in our experience, it was frequently done in a manner that afforded respect to divergent views. As an audience member in Hluhluwe succinctly wrote: “Traditions are important even if you don’t believe in them, you must respect them and the sea” (HluhluweP26, 10/10/2019). In the feedback forms, it was interesting to note how appreciative the audience was to learn about multiple cultural views of the sea and to realise they shared mutual respect for the ocean, even if the meanings and practices differed. Frequently, audience members who identify as Zulu shared in their feedback that they were pleased to watch and learn about these traditional practices. In Zulu cosmology, ancestors live under the waters of the deep sea, making the ocean a sacred realm (Hofmeyr, 2020). Feedback comments, such as the ones below, captured feelings of “being recognised”:

*It inspired me because I was not expecting to see something like this but at least it shows that we do have people who are for us and our heritage. (RichardsBayP10, 12/10/2019)*

*It made me feel excited because now I know history about our ancestors, and I also*

*know a lot about the ocean. (MbazwaneP10, 11/10/2019)*

For audience members who follow ancestral beliefs, it was affirming that the play presented this knowledge system as equally important to that of the scientists or activists. When responding to how the play made them feel, one audience member wrote: “Moved, oftentimes when speaking of the ocean’s conservation it seems to only concern ocean life, but this play profoundly displays how much heritage and people’s connection/stories reside within the sea – it affects people just as much” (DurbanDP25, 19/10/2019). Acknowledging the link between heritage, respect and the ocean was a common theme in the feedback data; people wrote explicitly that “they must not put oil in the oceans because it kills the heritage that we believe in” (HluhluweP31, 10/10/19) and that “we must keep it clean so that it will be able to keep the heritage which is what helps us connect with our ancestors” (HluhluweP43, 10/10/19). Audience members who may not have practised ancestral beliefs made a similar link, for example: “I learnt that the sea is important, we must not destroy it because we are harming the lives of the people who believe in it” (HluhluweP26, 10/10/19).

The feedback data and post-show discussions confirmed that “people’s emotional ties to nature and their cultural values may offer a stronger incentive for conservation than economic arguments based on the livelihood values of nature, which are generally insufficient to motivate collective action” (Cocks et al., 2012, p. 7). Methodologies of storytelling that make visible emotional connections to nature hold value for marine science education. For example, at the end of a performance at a local aquarium with an audience of marine scientists and educators, one of the senior staff said that *Lalela uLwandle* had set them a challenge. She called on her team of scientists and educators to recognise the power of storytelling and imagine ways they could use this in their educational work at the aquarium.

Adding additional voices to the chorus woven into the script, audience members frequently showed pleasure in sharing their own or other people’s personal connections with the ocean. Talking about our relationship with nature is not a frequent experience for many people. Similarly to Cocks et al. (2012), research related to the forest in the Eastern Cape, we too found that both participants and audience members frequently “expressed their pleasure and gratitude for having been given the

opportunity to do so” (p. 4). Audience members spoke about the symbolic importance the oceans hold for them and their families, often referring to memories of parents who taught them about the sea or childhood moments of wonder that have stayed with them into adulthood. At the first performance of the tour, an audience member who grew up on an island outside of South Africa wrote down teachings from her mother. She told us:

*I was brought up with respect for the ocean. My mother would say when you enter the sea you are a guest of the fish, be a good guest. (Port ShepstoneP19, 7/10/2019)*

This, we thought, illustrated rather beautifully the theme of respect for ocean life, and in the subsequent performances, this maternal proverb was retold by the facilitators as a ritual closing to the post-show discussions. In this way, the audience members’ symbolic meanings of the oceans started to be shared across performances, and we are very grateful to the participant who shared her mother’s wisdom.

#### **4.6 The Politics of Storytelling and Working with Translation Protocols**

Acknowledging how people value social identities and move outside of them through empathetic responses and relational experiences required the research team to be cautious of their own assumptions on how the audience might read race and culture. It is important that the script storylines reflect the research data, but they should not work to confine the audience’s readings into expected cultural stereotypes or confirm discriminatory ideologies. In crafting the research narratives into composite characters for the play, it was critical to think through the politics involved in working across different epistemologies in South Africa. Historically and presently, South Africa is deeply divided by racial injustices and economic inequalities. As outlined earlier, conservation experiences and governance relationships regarding environmental resources are profoundly shaped by the social constructs of race and class and the material experiences they engineer at a quotidian scale. Rather than skirt over these inequalities and injustices, *Lalela uLwandle* performed these stories of power and injustice.

The script explored intergenerational histories, illustrating how dominant ideologies and capitalist logic work to reproduce these fractures. It is important to acknowledge the harm caused by racism and class dispossession in our societies. Yet, performances

of histories and everyday experiences so closely mediated and shaped by ideas of race and difference in our country present their own challenges. The gross essentialisation of race and other forms of difference in South Africa has engineered another obstacle to working with plural epistemologies for transformative governance. Colonisation and apartheid in South Africa have resulted in the “implicit conflation of identity and knowing”, where “the world is constructed around solidarities of knowing that feed into and fuel ethno-racial stereotypes” (Soudien, 2013, p. 151). Telling stories in which epistemologies are presented as rigidly belonging to only one “kind of people” can dangerously entrench essentialist thinking on race, ethnicity and culture. This, in turn, enables the existing mechanisms of power to repurpose new arguments for ocean wellbeing into older epistemological hierarchies – hierarchies that favour science over tradition and neoliberal economic development over culturally enmeshed livelihoods. Confining ways of knowing into the politics of identity – “who is allowed to believe what” – while simultaneously presenting a few epistemologies such as science above ideology, enables hegemonic epistemologies to deny “complicity in the politics of inclusion and exclusion” (Soudien, 2013, p. 151). The *Lalela uLwandle* script then needed to be written against essentialist ideas of race, culture and belonging and the essentialisation of ocean epistemologies.

There is a growing awareness of and attempts to include Indigenous and cultural knowledge on natural resource management in international institutional frameworks on climate change (O’Reilly et al., 2020) and ocean governance (Parsons & Taylor, 2021). Included in this is the recognition that “long-term observations of complex systems” to better understand climate change is not the exclusive domain of science (O’Reilly et al., 2020, p. 15). Integrating diverse knowledge systems into institutions shaped by hegemonic epistemologies is not an easy process. In South Africa, Indigenous knowledge is recognised on paper, and in 2019, additional laws were passed to legislate the rights of indigenous peoples. Yet, including these knowledge holders and knowledge systems in environmental decision-making and governance arrangements has proved to be a slow process (Boswell & Thornton, 2021). Ntona and Schröder (2020) state that traditional, Indigenous and local knowledge must also be incorporated into planning processes in ways that fully respect their ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Crucially, for this incorporation not to constitute appropriation, information cannot simply be ‘extracted’ from Indigenous, traditional and

local knowledge systems and ‘transplanted’ into decision making. Rather, knowledge holders themselves must be integrated into the planning process, and their worldviews recognised and meaningfully engaged with. (p. 254)

Agreeing with the above as a critical starting point, we argue that through the learnings from *Lalela uLwandle*, more is needed than simply inviting diverse knowledge holders to the negotiation table. If ways of knowing remain essentialised as belonging to specific “race groups”, “those who are educated” or “those who truly understand the issues at stake”, then invitations to diverse knowledge holders may serve as a checkbox exercise for participatory governance. This leaves untouched the power relations between and within these knowledge systems; therefore, epistemological hierarchies that currently influence policy development are unlikely to transform. For Schutter et al. (2021), stakeholder consultation forums “can actually serve to produce apparent consensus that keeps dissent at bay when it only allows for disagreement on specific technology and management choices, not challenging the expansion of a capitalist socio-economic order” (p. 6).

Being attentive to reproducing these dangers, it was insufficient for *Lalela uLwandle* to simply position different ways of knowing alongside each other (e.g. a character who represents only marine science views or religion and ancestral beliefs or culturally entangled livelihoods). This was essential since, in South Africa, audience members might easily read these as mapping apartheid-constructed racial categories and serve to confirm existing essentialist ideas about people.<sup>27</sup> Performing everyday stories unavoidably means working with some of these familiar frames. Across the performances, four voices were heard out of an estimated 900 audience members, who verbalised or gave written responses that indicated their desire to read the play through these stereotypes. Three of these four voices did so in a defensive response to believing themselves blamed as White people for the problems today. Far more frequently than these few defensive responses were deeper reflective feedback about race and privilege from the audience. An audience member in Richards Bay shared

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<sup>27</sup> See Boswell and Thornton (2021) on how “economistic perspectives of ocean management and stereotyping of the Khoisan in South Africa risk producing an exclusionary Blue Economy” (p. 2).

that she “felt ashamed of the injustices committed by whites in the name of ‘conservation’”, but that the play “ended on a hopeful note that there is space for us all” and that “the character’s stories are told with conviction that each character becomes a well-loved friend whose story touches your heart” (Richards BayP17, 12/10/2019). While this play did not aim to focus explicitly on issues of White privilege and conservation or race and power in conservation, it is worth noting that it provided a productive challenge to these dominant discourses. For example, a week after seeing the play, an audience member told one of the authors that the stories had stayed with her for days. It really made her think about the damage that apartheid had done to Black people in ways she had not thought of before and how important it was that White people like herself acknowledge this and find a way to work towards a more equal society (personal com. October 2019).

Theatre can move an audience member through a range of emotions. We learnt, however, that to catalyse an alternative conversation, *Lalela uLwandle* had to actively work to build translation protocols, which opened the possibilities of freeing ways of knowing from the narrow confines of essentialist identity and belonging. This was done both through the scripting and the creative theatre-making to weave harmonies and dissonance into a chorus of voices, not just between the characters but within them. Creating didactic, essentialised characters that play into expected tropes of environmental conservation within a local context will do little to shift the current power dynamics of ocean governance. Rather, characters should embody “agonistic relationships” within their own story arcs and in relation to the stories of the other characters. Agonistic relationships do not look to dismiss or reject difference “but acknowledge and recognise it as different while still looking for promising, if partial, synergies to serve as the basis for solidaristic relationships that are forged through anti-essentialist, relational, and always incomplete identities” (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 392).

*Lalela uLwandle* was both a performance on what is lost when knowledge systems are conceived as incommensurable to serve power and, importantly, what might be gained when we embody more fluid and plural epistemologies that can mould, expand, broaden and enrich our ways of knowing the ocean. The section below explores some of these weavings in the script and the audiences’ responses to them.

## 4.7 Agonistic Performances

All the characters in the play work with plural ways of knowing the ocean. Niren's university-shaped environmentalism is woven with his use of rituals to connect to his grandfather and father and their teachings about fishing. Niren's struggle is not a choice between epistemologies but making peace with choosing a different livelihood from the long family heritage of fishing. Faye, too, performs a blend of marine science and her awe and wonder of the sea, and increasingly, with age, acknowledges how dreams of her deceased husband shape her environmental activism in ways similar to how Nolwandle's grandmother worked with dreams to interpret the healing power of marine resources. But perhaps the most powerful performance against the incommensurability of knowledge is embodied in the intergenerational character of Nolwandle. Nolwandle embodies shifting intergenerational knowledge systems, spanning from her grandmother's traditional ancestral beliefs to her mother's more contemporary religion to her own work in scientific education at the local aquarium. She performs for the audience the strength of working across plural epistemologies. For Nolwandle, her grandmother's practices as a Sangoma using ocean resources as medicine has something in common with her mother's choice of spiritual belief, Zionism, which uses the "heavenly healing powers of the sea water" for baptisms (Coppen et al., 2019 [Playscript]). Throughout the play, Nolwandle uses love for the ocean to weave her family's heritage together. Respect for the ocean and its healing power is a direct continuum from her ancestors that flows through her. She tells us:

*Working at the aquarium as a storyteller and educator I am able, like Nolwandle, my mother and grandmother before me, to use the ocean to heal, but it's all of our responsibilities to work to heal her in return Every day, at the aquarium I am able to allow children a chance to peek beneath the mysterious blue blanket of the sea and teach them of the consequences of our destructive actions. (Beat. She chuckles knowingly) You know what I always tell these children. ... This heaven they all want a one-way ticket to ... it's not in the direction the missionaries promised us it was. No, it's in the opposite direction... it's down there ... it's beneath the waves. (Coppen et al., 2019 [Playscript])*

As Nolwandle shows, science and spirituality may resonate to work towards a healthy ocean for all. In response to the performance of commensurability in the play,

comments such as those below were very common:

*The way they were all concerned about the same thing, but yet they had different cultures, lives, backgrounds ... was really amazing. (HluhluweP10, 10/10/2019)*

*It made me realise that even if we have different traditions and cultures the ocean is of significant important to all us. (DbnDayP4, 19/10/2019)*

*Respect the oceans and honour other peoples' cultures. (MbazwanaP16, 11/10/2019)*

Imagining across divergent cultural and epistemic concepts of the sea reveals “the often hidden economic and political components of cultural representations and more overt patterns of signification in society’s constructions of nature” (Jackson, 1995, p. 88). This opened the possibility of stepping outside the usual polarised tensions in environmentalism. The agonistic stories scripted into *Lalela uLwandle* offered translation protocols for interpreting exactly how and why environmental and conservation management impacts negatively on the cultural, social and economic wellbeing of individuals and groups. For many conservation officers, marine scientists and members of the public being part of a performance that placed “biological conservation efforts into social and historical context” enabled an imagination for how the “articulation of community values into conservation plans ... can facilitate local acceptance and participation in management” (Crandall et al., 2018, pp. 9, 11–12). Equally, including performed histories of exclusions was a learning experience in acceptance for conservation officials on how current practices and discourses within their field act to exclude. All four authors and the actors were approached after performances by marine scientists, conservation field guides and environmental impact assessors who noted how important it was to integrate cultural and living heritage into their fields, and that the play had impacted how they imagined their disciplinary work going forward. For example, a young trainee conservation field guide in the Hluhluwe area<sup>28</sup> approached one of the authors after the post-show discussions. As part of her field guide training, she was being taught about the medicinal properties

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<sup>28</sup> An area on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal with a long history of land dispossession and conflict concerning conservation regulations in relation to the World Heritage Site of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (Hansen, 2013).

of plants in a particular protected area. This she noted was all based on the ecological knowledge of local Zulu communities who were now largely excluded from this government gazetted protected wetland forest. She shared that the irony and unfairness of this had hit her while she was watching the performance.

Post-show discussions across venues illustrated the audience's willingness to acknowledge inequalities and injustices and find connections, synergies and solidarities to imagine mobilisations across differences. Attempting to create alternative listening and learning forums for ocean governance must work with care and attentiveness to the geographies and histories of power-shaping local contexts. If done in ways that reject the essentialisation of people and knowledge systems, then alternative governance forums may rework these "artificial boundaries" that serve existing hierarchies. Acknowledging that we live in plural worlds does not preclude collective action; rather it "constitutes the bedrock of our working together in solidarity, the possibility, through the partial identification of common ground, of a 'performative unity'" (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 392). Working across scales and within the messiness of social structures and relationships required for environmental and ecological justice demands of us all that we become more literate on plurality for equitable collective action. Creative methods such as *Lalela uLwandle* that perform agonistic possibilities work at an affective level to enact new alliances and situated solidarities (Erwin, 2020b; Mouffe, 2013). *Lalela uLwandle* offered a productive form of accepting the horror of apartheid to work towards dismantling the polarisation and essentialism it has engineered. This enabled recognising how the past and present shape our unequal society concerning environmental injustices and the types of respect we need to build to live together in less fragmented and environmentally damaging ways. While affective processes are complex to evaluate – in other words, it is difficult for us to quantify who took up the invitation for an alternative imagination – we believe they are a very necessary part of unravelling the harm that humans do to each other and the environment at an ideological level. Working with affective processes that connect and build openings across epistemologies that have been historically, through colonialism, apartheid and capitalism, engineered as incommensurate reminds us that the "script for the future" is not already set (Soudien, 2013, p. 154). There is much to be said about what a critical politics of plurality, working with and beyond hurt and pain, offers for transformative ocean governance.

## 4.8 Conclusion

As the South African government moves quickly ahead with its blue economy planning, policy and governance frameworks, it remains unclear how it will address existing socio-economic inequalities and exclusions or whether it is just entrenching them. There are, we know, many others who sit across and within the governance fault lines outlined in this chapter who are equally distressed by the relationship between socio-economic inequalities and ecological injustices in South Africa (Cock, 2018). We hope this chapter contributes towards a shifting tide of imagining what more ocean governance might do for environmental and ecological justice beyond creating policy frameworks whose regulations serve the status quo. How might South Africa engage in an alternative process that works to mitigate the usual power dynamics in policy forums and governance arrangements? Flannery and McAteer (2020) write that to ensure progressive MSP, it is important to develop “a political frontier early on” in the process where “pathways for progressive socio-environmental outcomes have been established” (p. 269). The many voices of dissent and cries of exclusion from coastal people, particularly among the most marginalised, suggest that such a “political frontier” has not yet been established in the South African rush to use the ocean as an economic resource.

Creating such a frontier for ocean governance requires inclusive forums in which a chorus of voices on how and why the ocean holds social, economic, cultural, spiritual, scientific and ecological importance are heard. However, as this chapter argues, epistemology hierarchies that favour science and economics within decision-making forums produce additional obstacles to creating a political frontier that addresses the wellbeing of the ocean and the most marginalised in society. When ways of knowing are seen as incommensurable or knowledge frameworks are tied to essentialist identity constructs like race and culture, even an inclusive stakeholder forum may not automatically equate to transformative governance. Shifts in not just who is invited to negotiation tables, but the form and the substance of decision making is also required. To enable meaningful and effective participation of diverse knowledge holders it matters who is in the room, but it also matters how the chairs are placed in the room; what language is spoken, whose histories are visible, whose knowledge is listened to, whether issues of power can be discussed upfront, and whether efforts are made

towards agonistic debates through a rejection of essentialist identity and epistemologies.

Empatheatre, through the case study of *Lalela uLwandle*, offers some insights into how creative methods and public storytelling offer heuristic processes for translation between and across ways of knowing the sea. Building on the work already done in calling for plurality in ocean governance, it offers an orientation to empathy to work with plural epistemologies rather than a definitive methodology for transformative governance. It is hoped that sharing our experiences with this particular experimental project helps grow an appetite for action to explore alternative governance methods that unsettle practices and structures of neoliberal capitalism currently dominating our policy and governance regime.

Indeed, we would argue we have nothing to lose given the current inequalities within South Africa and everything to gain by undertaking processes that move out of siloed mentalities by making room for ways of knowing the ocean beyond the confines of the logic of science and capitalism. This makes pragmatic sense for protecting our oceans, given the growing evidence that “social factors, rather than physical or ecological factors, ultimately determine the success (or otherwise) of MPAs” (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169). It also, however, creates exciting possibilities for connecting and building strategic solidarity across epistemological divides to address pressing issues in climate change. The creative storytelling of *Lalela uLwandle* enabled a shared symbolic language, reference points and aesthetic experiences that offer a strong foundation from which we as researchers and community members can mount a well-informed resistance (and offer alternatives) to ocean harm<sup>29</sup>, and importantly, begin to imagine what an ocean governance that works towards planetary wellbeing looks like.

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<sup>29</sup> NOTE: This method was key for surfacing the marginalised voices and perspectives of SSFs, and associated power relations which affect them, a key focus of this study. This is discussed further in Paper 4 in this collection of papers in this PhD thesis.

## CHAPTER 5

### PAPER 4: BLUE RESISTANCE: SMALL-SCALE FISHERS RESPOND TO BLUE (IN)JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

This paper has been submitted to the *Journal of Human Rights Practice* and is under review. This paper is the fourth paper in this PhD by publication, which like the other papers in this collection, investigates dimensions of transdisciplinary scholar-activist praxis in advancing ocean governance in a South African Coastal Justice Network. I am the sole author of this paper.

This paper specifically offers insight into the significance of recognising small-scale fishers' resistance knowledge in advancing blue justice as a new area in environmental rights and ocean governance. It addresses the research question: *How is blue resistance expressed and acknowledged as a key feature of blue justice and transformative ocean governance?*

#### **Abstract**

Advancement of the blue economy agenda in South Africa and the current ocean governance paradigm, which is fragmented and contradictory, is privileging elite commercial interests over livelihood needs and ocean custodianship concerns of small-scale fishers (SSF) – compounding historical injustices associated with the marginalisation and ‘squeezing out’ of SSFs and their communities. This is a source of multi-layered injustice and violation of SSFs’ rights, raising a need to surface the dynamics and experiences of blue (in)justice from the perspectives of SSFs through scholar-activist transdisciplinary (TD) praxis. Drawing on a co-produced scholar-activist archive developed over five years in the South African Coastal Justice Network (CJN), this paper offers insight into the dimensions of blue (in)justice experienced by SSFs. It also offers insight into blue resistance as practised by SSFs, particularly but not only in response to oil and gas prospecting proposals along the coast of South Africa. The paper contributes to the emerging field of blue justice scholarship as it

offers an elaboration of the concept of blue justice from the empirical experiences of SSFs, capturing their voices and also their resistance praxis.

## 5.1 Introduction

Our land and sea are central to our livelihoods and our way of life. Over generations we have conserved them, and they have conserved us (Founding Affidavit in *Sustaining the Wild Coast NPC and Others v South African Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and Others* (3491/2021)).

On 30 May 2022, SSFs and allied ocean defenders gathered outside the Gqeberha High Court, South Africa, at the hearing of *Sustaining the Wild Coast NPC and Others v Minister of Mineral Resources and Others*. Their concern: Seismic surveys along the Eastern Cape coast to prospect for oil and gas. Their deeper concern: the obliteration of their livelihoods through what some have described as an accelerated, rapacious blue economy (Le Fleur et al., 2023; Masie & Bond, 2018) that is failing to include SSFs. This is even though the 2012 SSF policy demands their recognition as rights holders (DAFF, 2012).

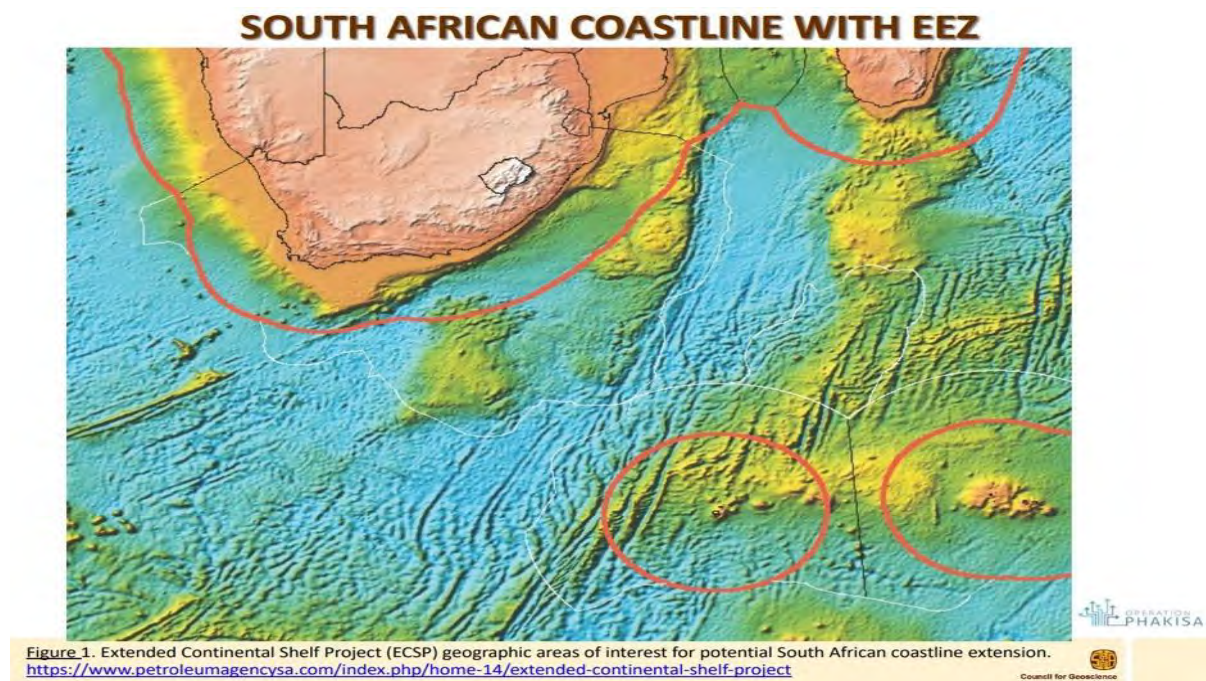
Instead, SSF rights in South Africa are being ignored, side-stepped and/or denigrated by the current ocean governance paradigm which is incoherent and contradictory, and privileges elite commercial interests over the livelihood interests of SSFs (Le Fleur et al., 2023; Nangle et al., 2023; Sowman et al., 2023; Sowman & Sunde, 2021).

For SSFs and other marginalised coastal people in South Africa, the ocean is a site of suppressed histories of exclusion (Burger, 2020; Mafumbu et al., 2022), of spiritual meaning (Menye, 2022) of cultural and place-based identity (Mbatha, 2022; Sunde, 2014a), of healing in many forms (Erwin et al., 2022), and of food security and livelihoods for coastal communities (Nwabisa, 2018; Wynberg & Hauck, 2014). In contrast to these plural and interconnected meanings, blue economy discourse, globally and specifically in South Africa, promotes the ocean primarily as a site of economic potential to be ‘unlocked’ (Ramaphosa, 2019; OECD, 2016; Zuma, 2014). In a 2014 speech to launch South Africa’s ‘Operation Phakisa: Ocean Economy’, former President Jacob Zuma declared that this initiative, which was intended to promote economic growth and boost job creation, had as its starting point “that South Africa is surrounded by a vast ocean and yet we have not fully taken advantage of the

immense potential of this untapped resource”. Putting Operation Phakisa into perspective, South Africa has an extensive coastline of 3 900km and current blue economy planning has identified an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 1.5 million km<sup>2</sup> – this is more than the country’s entire land mass of 1.2 million km<sup>2</sup> and a potential doubling of the EEZ with further continental shelf claim (Figure 5.1 below).

The South African government has granted exploration permits covering 98% of South Africa’s EEZ (Centre for Environmental Rights, 2017; Sunde, 2022). The seismic surveys that communities were resisting in the Eastern Cape are the first stage in the offshore oil and gas production process, with the seismic surveys themselves and the potential oil and gas production that they precede, having significant potential impacts on ocean life and coastal communities and their livelihoods (Andrews et al., 2021; McCauley et al., 2017; Nowacek et al., 2015; Open Letter from SA Marine Experts, 2021).

## 5.2 The Context: Layers of Injustice for Small-Scale Fishers



**Figure 5.1: Potential South African EEZ extension through the Extended Continental Shelf Project**

Source: Council of Geoscience/Operation Phakisa

Fishing and coastal communities in South Africa have been practising ocean custodianship for generations (Adams, 2022; One Ocean Hub, 2021) and struggling against threats to their relationship with the ocean throughout the colonial, apartheid and post-democratic eras (Mafumbu et al., 2022). However, the scale and scope of these threats and organised resistance to these have increased substantially in recent years because of the accelerated roll-out of the blue economy described below (Le Fleur et al., 2023, Sowman et al., 2022).

'Operation Phakisa'<sup>30</sup> was promoted by the South African government as an adaptation of Malaysia's 'big fast results' methodology (Masie & Bond, 2018; Zuma, 2014). This 'hurry up' approach to growing the ocean economy, with an initial focus on marine transport and manufacturing, offshore oil and gas, aquaculture and marine protection services (Zuma, 2014), has enabled the "cutting of policy red tape and the fast-tracking of environmental authorisations" (Sunde, 2022, p. 4). This represents what environmental justice scholars call a "quickenning of the extractivist metabolism" (Martínez-Alier, 2005; Martínez-Alier, 2023; Masie & Bond, 2018), which comes about through a "sharp increase in the use of energy, materials [waste generation] ... in regards to marine spaces and resources" (Jouffray et al., 2020 in Ertör, 2023, p. 7). Ocean grabbing (Barbesgaard, 2017), which are the "actions, policies or initiatives that deprive SSFs of resources, dispossess vulnerable populations of coastal lands, and/or undermine historical access to areas of the sea" (Bennett et al., 2015, p. 61), is accelerated through the blue economy.

In South Africa's blue economy process, appropriation and enclosure of the ocean commons are happening not just through the expansion of economic activities but also the expansion of MPAs intended to promote sustainability within the blue economy. This inclusion of marine protection services in Operation Phakisa's<sup>31</sup> scope is in line with the global rhetoric of the blue economy as achieving economic growth via sustainable development, with aspirations of a "triple win" for the economy, the environment and communities (OECD, 2016; Voyer et al., 2018). Tools like Marine Protected Areas

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<sup>31</sup> Phakisa means "hurry up" in Sesotho

(MPAs) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) are relied upon, within this framing, to counterbalance or mitigate the environmental harms of accelerated extractive developments (Jouffray et al., 2020; Voyer et al., 2018) and to achieve balance and “trade-offs” between competing ocean uses through spatial planning. However, the further enclosure of the ocean commons into fortress conservation areas via MPAs, from the 1960s onwards and with increased impetus under the banner of the blue economy, has compounded the marginalisation and “squeezing out” of SSFs and their communities (Le Fleur et al., 2023; see also Pereira, in press<sup>32</sup>) and has been a source of injustice and violation of SSFs’ rights (Isaacs et al., 2022; Sowman & Sunde, 2018; Sowman et al., 2011). At their most extreme, these lead to loss of life among SSFs (Ledwaba, 2022; McVeigh, 2022).

Small-scale fishers (SSFs) and other local coastal communities are disproportionately bearing the cost of MPAs as they are locked out of traditional fishing grounds, restricting their livelihood options and customary relationships with the coast and ocean (Sowman & Sunde, 2018; Wares, 2022). At the same time, permits for oil, gas and mining concessions are being awarded at a rapid pace, just beyond the boundaries of these MPAs (Sunde, 2022). Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is slowly proceeding, delinked from ocean economy planning and without any meaningful participation of SSFs or any critical political commitment to address power imbalances between different marine sectors (Le Fleur et al., 2022; Pereira, forthcoming<sup>33</sup>).

In another parallel (and delinked) policy process, while the blue economy agenda has been developed first via Operation Phakisa and then, since 2019, via the Ocean Economy Master Plan (OEMP) process, SSFs and their civil society partners have been immersed in struggles related to the extremely flawed implementation of South Africa’s 2012 SSF policy, as captured in more detail by Sowman and Sunde (2021), Nangle et al. (2023) and Pereira (forthcoming<sup>34</sup>). The SSF policy is a progressive, inclusive, human rights-based policy, that SSFs and their allies were integrally involved in developing (Isaacs, 2016; Sowman et al., 2014); however, its regulation and

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<sup>32</sup> See Paper 2 of this PhD by publication.

<sup>33</sup> See Paper 2 in this PhD by publication

<sup>34</sup> See Paper 2 of this PhD by publication.

implementation have been 'one-size-fits-all', rigid, top-down, un-participatory and divisive (Sowman & Sunde, 2021, see Pereira, forthcoming<sup>35</sup>).

Therefore, these contradictory approaches to fisheries' governance create layers of injustices that SSF ocean defenders have to respond to. Statements reflecting their resistance to the layers of injustice briefly outlined above are found on the protest banners of SSFs outside court cases and at protests since 2020, where communities of customary and fishing rights (see Figure 5.2 below). have been taking oil and gas companies and the government to court over their loss.



Figure 5.2: Forms of blue (in)justice reflected on fishers' protest banners

<sup>35</sup> See Paper 2 of this PhD by publication.

## **5.3 Blue Justice and Blue Injustice**

### **5.3.1 An old and new frontier needing empirical elaboration**

Blue (in)justice is both an old and a new frontier for SSFs, scholar-activist researchers and ocean defenders working to advance equitable forms of ocean governance. The coercive appropriation of ocean spaces and the dispossession of coastal communities from access to coastal and ocean territories and resources have been “weapons of domination” (Blythe et al., 2023; Campling & Colas, 2017) along the South African coastline since the earliest days of colonialism, through apartheid, and currently.

The quotes above and the struggles involved in court cases taking oil and gas companies to court to halt the exploitation of ocean resources and coastal people’s livelihoods reflect heartfelt expressions of resistance to the latest force of dispossession for coastal communities, the extractive blue economy referred to above (Bond, 2019; Morrissey, 2021). These forms of resistance emanate from contemporary South African social movements of SSF communities and their allies, reflecting wider patterns of SSFs, coastal communities and their allies leading the defence of the ocean commons against the threats posed by blue growth (Bennett et al., 2021).

There is a growing recognition of blue injustice as a distinct category of environmental injustice (Bennett et al., 2023; Blythe et al., 2023; Jentoft et al., 2022) and as a direct consequence of the accelerated pursuit of the blue economy that is compounding existing systemic injustices faced by oceanic communities and environments (Bennet et al., 2020; Ertör, 2023; Isaacs, 2019). Linked to this is a recognition of increased socio-environmental conflict in response to these blue injustices, also framed as ‘blue resistance’, and of a growing movement of ocean defenders leading this blue resistance.

While the experiences and practices of blue injustice and resistance are not new, the concepts and theory are still quite new, emergent and expanding. Therefore, there have been calls from scholars working in this area to “enrich the concept of Blue Justice empirically, based on how people experience and conceptualise injustice” (Jentoft & Chuenpagdee, 2022, p. 1268) and to elucidate the concept of blue justice

through examples from practice (Engen et al., 2021 cited in Blythe et al., 2023). Small-scale fishers (SSFs) themselves have also called on researchers to support their struggles against injustices and marginalisation and to recognise and amplify their work and knowledge as ocean defenders (CJN, 2020; CJN 2024; Isaacs, 2019). This paper is a response to these calls. It offers perspectives and expressions of blue justice and resistance by South African SSFs and their allies, as articulated in a range of public and activist interventions. The paper also offers an account of the accomplishments of ocean-defending SSFs and their social partners concerning stalling seismic survey explorations for offshore oil and gas, offering reflexive perspectives on the role that scholar-activist transdisciplinary researchers such as myself (cf. Pereira & Erwin, 2023) can play in support of ocean defenders and blue justice.

### **5.3.2 The concept of blue justice as deliberated in the literature**

The term ‘blue justice’ was first used by Professor Moeniba Isaacs in 2018 (Isaacs, 2019; Blythe et al., 2023), to refer specifically to the struggles of SSF to have their rights included in the blue economy, proposing that blue justice requires

... creating an enabling environment for small-scale fishers to engage meaningfully, and to challenge their exclusion and marginalisation... [It is] also a call for research to form a collaboration with social movements, NGOs and practitioners to challenge these spaces and narratives. (Isaacs, 2019, pp. 2–3)

This framing of blue justice positioned in opposition or contrast to the blue economy highlights the ways that blue economy implementation often leads to or exacerbates injustices, as introduced above (Bennett et al., 2021; Ertör, 2023). This initial definition emphasised the injustice of SSF exclusion from the blue economy (Jentoft et al., 2022). Blythe et al. (2023) offer an expanded definition for blue justice and blue injustice, with blue justice involving, “the recognition, meaningful involvement and fair treatment of all coastal people with respect to how ocean and coastal resources are accessed, used, managed and enjoyed” (p. 3), and blue injustice involving “the inequitable exposure of oppressed or marginalised people to coastal and marine harms, as well as their cultural and political exclusion from decision-making” (p. 3). These definitions build on definitional framings of previous blue justice literatures,

particularly Isaacs (2019), Ertör (2021), Bennett et al. (2021) and Jentoft et al. (2022).

This corollary of linking the blue injustice definition to the definition of blue justice draws on critical environmental justice scholars who recognise the disproportionate experience of environmental harms according to intersectional marginalising identities such as race, gender, class and rurality (Agyeman et al., 2016; Ertör, 2023; Pellow, 2016; Schlosberg, 2007). Like Blythe et al. (2023), Ertör (2021) works with a conceptual framing of blue justice that comes out of environmental justice scholarship that considers three interrelated elements of justice: recognition, procedure and distribution<sup>36</sup>.

- **Recognitional justice** refers to acknowledging and respecting different rights, cultural identities, knowledge systems and human dignity. Recognitional justice is related to epistemic justice (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Fricker, 2007; 2013; Visvanathan, 2006), which means being able to access and express knowledge(s) and includes testimonial and hermeneutic justice<sup>37</sup> (being heard from where one speaks and being given an equal chance to express your knowledge) (Fricker, 2007; 2013).
- **Procedural justice** refers to people having opportunities to meaningfully participate in and influence decision making. It involves upholding procedural regulations (e.g. regulations for consultation) but also establishing and respecting meaningful democratic processes (Gellers & Jefford, 2018; Pereira,

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<sup>36</sup> These in turn draw on the feminist critical theorist and philosopher Nancy Fraser's work (2005; 2008) on social justice in which she argues that recognition, representation and redistribution present analytically distinct but empirically interrelated reasons for struggle in capitalist, post-Fordist societies, namely struggles for socio-economic (re)distribution, struggles for cultural recognition, and political struggles for procedural inclusion.

<sup>37</sup> Fricker (2007, p. 1), explains that epistemic injustice is a "distinctively epistemic kind of injustice," in which someone is wronged "specifically in their capacity as a knower". Fricker argues that there are two distinct forms of epistemic injustice, namely testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. "Testimonial injustice happens when a speaker receives a deficit of credibility owing to the operation of prejudice in the hearer's judgement", while hermeneutic justice occurs when a marginalised group does not have access to equal participation in the generation of social meanings (e.g. as in the case when consultations are hosted in English and on Zoom, effectively excluding the SSF chances of co-generating social meanings) (Fricker, 2013, p. 1319).

forthcoming<sup>38</sup>).

- ***Distributive justice*** is the principle that no group of people should bear disproportionate environmental harm and that there should be equitable sharing of the benefits of environmental resources and governance (Franks & Schreckenberg, 2016; Zafra-Calvo et al., 2017 cited in Blythe et al., 2023).

Bennet et al. (2021) argue that giving attention to these dimensions of justice is important for transforming the blue economy, and as I argue below, they are also important for transforming ocean governance. Within this framework of environmental justice, Ertör (2021) discusses three dimensions of blue justice: the material and biophysical dimensions, the spatial dimensions, and the autonomy and political agency of fisherfolks.

Further emerging definitions that are useful for a focus on South African blue justice experiences are that of blue resistance: “processes of collective action that are sustained across space and time, that reflect grievances around perceived injustice, and that constitute a pursuit of alternative agendas by coastal people” (Bebbington et al., 2008 in Blythe et al., 2023, p. 7) and of ocean defenders: “individuals and groups who defend and protect the marine and coastal environment and the human rights of coastal populations against existential threats” (Bennett et al., 2022, p. 3).

This paper agrees with the shift in emerging and expanding definitions of blue justice that consider marginalised coastal communities beyond SSFs; however, I will focus particularly on the blue resistances mounted by South African SSF as a way of enriching understandings of blue justice empirically through actively advancing recognitional and procedural forms of justice in search of distributive justice. This is a reflexive and intentional centring of SSFs as ocean defenders while acknowledging the other grassroots community-based groupings who are active ocean defenders and that SSFs do not act on their own but are often supported in their blue resistances by

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<sup>38</sup> See Paper 2 in this collection of papers for the PhD thesis.

civil society and researcher networks as was the case in the CJN. Nevertheless, the choice to centre the voices and agency of ocean-defending SSFs is to counteract the many ways in which SSFs are maligned within ocean governance and marine conservation (see Pereira, forthcoming<sup>39</sup>).

#### **5.4 Research Questions, Methods and Ethics**

In the context of the current contours of blue (in)justice as outlined above and in seeking to enrich the concept of blue justice empirically, as called for by Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2022), and to amplify the voices, work and knowledge of ocean defenders as called for by SSFs in the CJN, I consider the following questions in this paper:

- How is blue (in)justice and blue resistance experienced and expressed by SSFs in South Africa?
- What kinds of knowledge are co-produced and used by ocean defender movements in their blue resistance efforts?
- How are these plural knowledges drawn on in resistance to oil and gas exploration?
- How can scholar-activist TD researchers contribute towards SSFs' struggles for blue justice in South Africa?

The empirical grounding for this paper stems from collaborative action research conducted by the interdisciplinary CJN, led by scholar-activists (including myself) in partnership with a diverse group of SSF leaders. These collaborations were initially facilitated through a WhatsApp chat group established in April 2020 by CJN researchers to facilitate urgent communication between SSFs and engaged researchers during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Over time, this group, known as the

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<sup>39</sup> See Paper 2 in this PhD by publication.

"SSF Leaders<sup>40</sup>", has expanded to include approximately 80 SSFs from South Africa's four coastal provinces, along with eight scholar-activists engaging in ongoing dialogue about the multifaceted challenges SSFs face. Since late 2021, the group has also convened in person through smaller focus groups, regional workshops and national gatherings.

Following the principles of "activist scholarship", as outlined by Choudry (2013; 2020; Apple, 2016; Cox, 2015; Routledge & Derickson, 2015), the CJNI prioritises relation-centred, grounded approaches to advancing situated solidarity and knowledge co-construction (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012; Nagar & Geiger, 2017; Mitlin et al., 2020; Stetsenko, 2018; Temper & del Bene, 2016). This entails fostering ethical, responsive, and reflexive relationships with SSF organisations, jointly investigating local struggles and collectively developing engaged methods (Erwin et al., 2023)<sup>41</sup>, and strategising responses (see also Pereira & Erwin, 2023<sup>42</sup>; Pereira, forthcoming<sup>43</sup>).

When reflecting on blue resistance in advancing blue justice empirically, I follow a scholar-activist TD approach (Marshall, 2018; Temper et al., 2019), and draw on the extensive co-produced scholar-activist archive of coastal justice materials by CJNI researchers and SSF leaders<sup>44</sup>. These materials encompass policy documents, submissions, comments, appeals to ocean governance processes, open letters, media statements and detailed records from participatory workshops. These constitute co-produced knowledge for environmental justice (Temper & del Bene, 2016), and form a comprehensive record of the blue resistance practices of SSFs and their networks developed over four years of governance participation, critique and resistance concerning the blue justice concerns outlined above. In this paper, I draw on several sources in the scholar-activist archive, shown in Table 5.1 below.

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<sup>40</sup> This research and the CJNI and SSF leaders' group, formed part of ongoing action research in the One Ocean Hub, South Africa between 2019–2024 ([www.oneoceanhub.org](http://www.oneoceanhub.org)). An aspect of this component of the research is included in the Impact Study in Appendix D of this thesis document.

<sup>41</sup> See Paper 3 in this PhD by publication.

<sup>42</sup> See Paper 1 in this PhD by publication.

<sup>43</sup> See Paper 2 in this PhD by publication.

<sup>44</sup> A full record of this archive is available at this link:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1L43vRMpKPju83TCiTMmgZKzwZikrs6pC?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1L43vRMpKPju83TCiTMmgZKzwZikrs6pC?usp=drive_link) It is described in more detail in Chapter One of this PhD (Pereira in press).

**Table 5.1: Sources of information drawn from the CJNI scholar-activist archive in this study**

Sources relevant to general blue resistance (Vignettes 1, 2, 3 and 4)	Sources specific to the court cases (Vignette 5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Letters from fishers, researchers and lawyers to government officials to put concerns on the record.</li> <li>- Workshop reports from CJNI-SSF workshops, that include SSF articulations of their own visions for blue justice.</li> <li>- Summaries, translations and analysis of policies/decisions/new extractive developments.</li> <li>- Advice and strategies for participating meaningfully in public participation processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affidavits, judgements and summaries of court cases that have been brought between SSF, the state and/or private companies.</li> <li>- Summaries, translations and analysis of policies/decisions/new extractive developments.</li> <li>- Research papers and reports from the sciences and social sciences that are useful for SSF in defending their rights.</li> <li>- Workshop reports from CJNI-SSF workshops, that include SSF articulations of their own visions for blue justice.</li> <li>- Media reports on the court cases.</li> </ul>

I analyse activist interventions captured in the CJNI scholar-activist archive using an inductive qualitative approach and the theoretical proposals for environmental justice involving procedural, distributive and recognition-related forms of justice to surface the resistance experiences and voices of SSFs. This is done using five selected vignettes<sup>45</sup> (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020), offering representative examples of the work of the SSFs and CJNI in advancing blue resistance for blue justice. These archival documents are shared here with permission of the individuals or organisations named in the vignettes. The vignettes and meta-reflective engagement with the archive make

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<sup>45</sup> Vignettes, as used in this study offer grounded insight into blue (in)justice and blue resistance praxis as found in the CJNI co-produced scholar-activist archive. They are used to highlight dimensions of injustice and blue resistance. They follow this description by Skilling and Stylianides (2020, p. 542) who state that “*vignettes* to be written, visual, or oral stimuli, aligned with relevant research paradigms and methodologies, reflecting realistic and identifiable settings”. They go on to say that vignettes can be used to elicit responses from other research participants in qualitative research, but they have not been used in this way in this paper.

visible both the forms of injustices experienced by SSFs and the agency of SSFs in mobilising blue resistance to bring about blue justice changes.

The analysis offered in this paper is a form of meta-reflective engagement with the scholar-activist archive<sup>46</sup> and offers a case of blue resistance from the perspective of SSFs in South Africa that can enrich the concept of blue justice empirically. I have ethics permission from the Rhodes University ethics committee and from the CJN members and SSFs involved to undertake this type of meta-reflective engagement with the CJN co-produced scholar-activist archive<sup>47</sup>. The meta-analysis developed in this paper has been shared with the fishers and activists whose work is reflected here in the form of graphics accompanied by discursive voice notes in the 'SSF Leaders One Ocean Hub' WhatsApp group.

## **5.5 Analysis and Findings: Blue (in)Justice and Blue Resistance**

In sharing the main findings of this analysis concerning the elaboration of the blue justice concept as deliberated in the literature, I surface insights into the intersecting nature of (in)justices as experienced by SSFs as found in the scholar-activist archive and offer a layered view of these intersecting injustices in Figure 5.1. From here, I articulate a key feature of the empirical elaboration of blue justice as reflected through the blue resistance of SSFs in the South African CJN.

### **5.5.1 South African small-scale fisher frame intersecting blue injustices**

As indicated in the introductory section above, for a long time before the concept of 'blue justice' was defined, fishing communities in South Africa (and globally) have mobilised to protect their ways of life and their access to the coast and oceans. In post-democratic South Africa, this has often been framed in terms of the protection of SSF rights. This is because fisherfolk were structurally oppressed under apartheid and were promised progressive and cross-cutting human rights through the constitution

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<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 1 of this PhD by publication, for further elaboration on the method of working with this scholar-activist archive in this study.

<sup>47</sup> Paper 5 in this PhD by publication reflects more in depth on ethics in scholar-activist TD research. Ethics approval documentation is in Appendix A of this PhD by publication.

(South Africa, 1996), specific rights to resources, ocean space and co-management through the 2012 SSF policy (DAFF, 2012). These rights and more (customary rights, rights of indigenous people, rights to inclusion in environmental decision making, etc.) were included in a range of other national and international laws and agreements (see the NEMA (RSA, 2008); Marine Living Resources Amendment Act (DAFF, 2014); UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nations, 2007); Convention on Biological Diversity (2024); Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations Voluntary Guidelines on Small-Scale Fisheries (FAO, 2015).

Blythe et al. (2023) argue that blue justice movements are broader than SSFs. This is shown clearly in the CJNI scholar-activist archive entries, where SSFs in South Africa engage in blue resistance across different kinds of injustice (not just fisheries governance injustices). There are strong overlaps in identity – many SSFs embrace Indigenous identity; many SSFs are leaders in their coastal communities beyond just fishers, and women SSFs play a huge role in the care and solidarity work in their communities. There are many non-fishers in coastal communities who support and are part of these blue resistance movements; however, I would argue that SSF forms the heart of the grassroots blue resistance movement. This is complicated by the way that the SSF policy has caused division in communities through top-down imposition of cooperatives (see Sowman & Sunde, 2021), but this is also an injustice that SSF take up as part of their struggle – the fact that so many genuine fishers have been left out, and the injustice of this (CJNI, 2023).

The intersectional nature of blue (in)justice as typically experienced by SSFs is shown in Vignette 1 which shares the verbatim testimony<sup>48</sup> of an SSF, speaking about the blue injustices he experiences and his observations of human rights violations.

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<sup>48</sup> This interview first appeared on the Beach Co-op blog in an article that I wrote, which forms part of the scholar-activist archive. (<https://www.thebeachcoop.org/2022/03/18/human-rights-and-coastal-justice/>)

**Vignette 1: Verbatim testimony shared by Fikile Jonas, a fisherman from Hamburg, Eastern Cape, South Africa**

*...Human rights of coastal communities have been violated in a number of ways. For a start, if you want to fish to eat or to feed your family, you have to go to the post office, queue, pay for a license. Then you still have to buy bait and other things. This makes it unaffordable and unrealistic for people. So people continue to fish without permits. This means that compliance officers can arrest you, they can confiscate your equipment (which people cannot afford to replace), they can fine you and if you don't pay the fine you can have a warrant of arrest against you. I have two warrants of arrest against me right now.*

*The other violation is the lack of consultation with fishers and coastal communities about what is happening in their areas. Look at what happened with the seismic surveys (for offshore oil and gas exploration) – the communities were not consulted. Marine protected areas have been established around many areas of our Eastern Cape coast. This was done without proper consultation. They did not tell the people what these MPAs would really mean for them, or ask the people about the ways we know how to protect the ocean. As far as I am concerned that is a violation of our rights. In places like Dwesa-Cwebe, there are fishers that have been shot and killed. In Northern KwaZulu-Natal there are two young fishermen who are breadwinners who have been shot and killed because they are called poachers, fishing in their own traditional waters. If that's not human rights violation I don't know what is. Then there are these ladies who are looking for shellfish. It is such a painful thing to see a young man in his twenties (a fisheries compliance officer) chasing an old woman struggling to feed her family – women in their 50s running away from these youngsters in uniforms, under threat of arrest for trying to feed their families. There's plenty more but I'm a bit angry right now so I'll have to take a break...*

Through an iterative process of “co-defining matters of concern” (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2016; Mudokwani & Mukute, 2019) with SSFs via interviews, workshops and ongoing dialogue over the SSF leaders WhatsApp group captured in the scholar-activist archive, the following issues have been identified as pressing threats to blue justice in South Africa:

- Lack of meaningful participation of SSFs and other marginalised coastal knowledge holders in ocean governance, in the overlapping policy domains of blue economy implementation, EIAs for new extractive ocean projects, MSP, fisheries governance, and MPA expansion.

- Human rights violations in MPAs, including criminalisation of livelihoods (i.e. the characterisation and policing of small-scale fishers as if they are illegal poachers, resulting in arrests or even shootings) , blocking of access to the sea, and lack of co-management of these protected areas.
- Huge acceleration in applications and approvals for offshore oil and gas exploration and production, and for coastal and deep-sea mining.
- The SSF policy implementation failures – especially the fact that many genuine fishers have been left out of the SSF cooperatives; delays in issuing of permits; lack of co-management of fisheries governance; lack of redistribution of marine species from commercial fishing sector to small-scale sector; and legal challenges against SSFs’ rights by industrial fishing associations, for example in the squid industry (Human, 2024).

Figure 5.3 presents these various injustices according to an adaptation of the environmental justice framework developed by Schlosberg (2007; 2013) and proposed as a framing for blue justice by Blythe et al. (2023) and Ertör (2021).

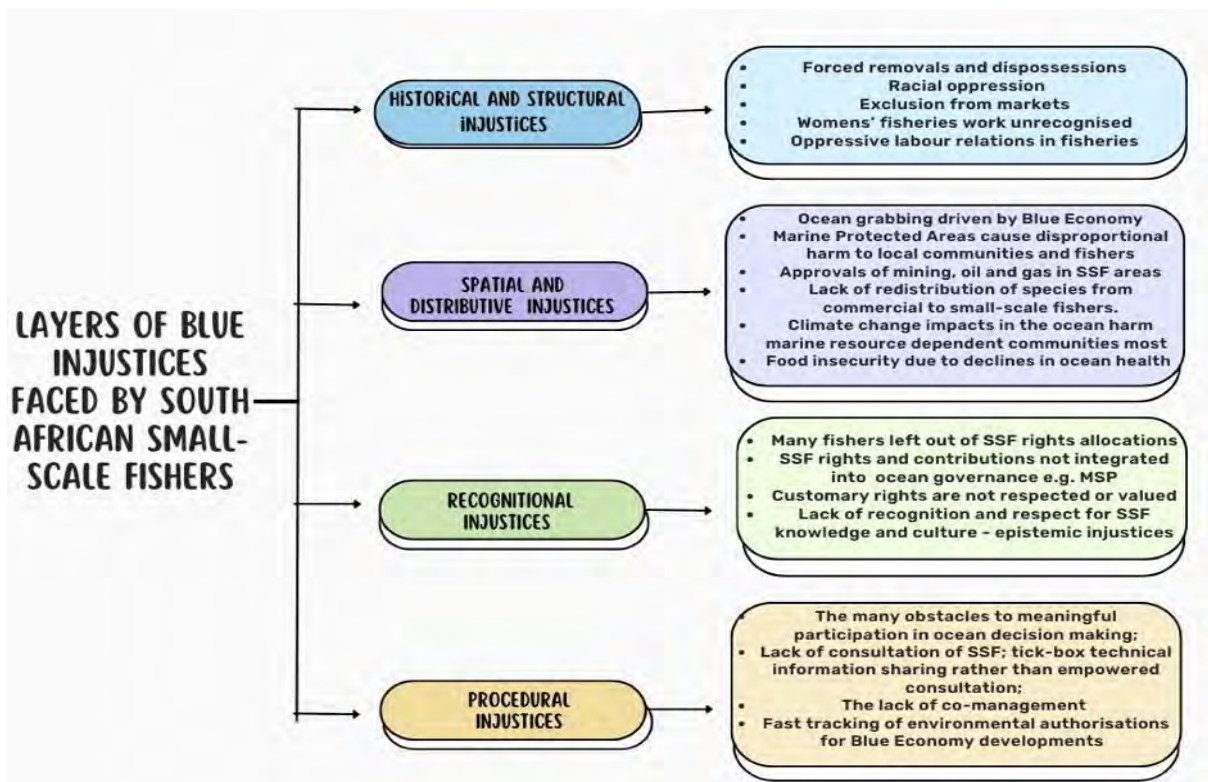


Figure 5.3: Layers of blue injustice

In the next section, I elaborate on how these layers of blue injustice also produce blue resistance.

### **5.5.2 Blue resistance: Activist knowledge co-production for blue justice**

Small-scale fishers (SSFs) are by no means passive victims in this context – they have asserted powerful agency and sustained resistance to these blue injustices, drawing on diverse alliances, strategies and knowledge systems to do so. Blue justice movements are led by coastal communities; however, academics can support their struggles for blue justice by co-producing research about the causes of injustice in coastal communities and methods for resisting these (Blythe et al., 2023).

The co-produced knowledge in the CJN scholar-activist archive tells a story of committed, creative and hopeful resistance to injustice – critical hope in action (Bozalek et al., 2013). The material in the coastal justice archive, particularly the letters, submitted comments, affidavits and workshop reports, are examples of applied knowledge co-production through grounded participatory methods that CJN researchers and SSF leaders have developed, refined and adapted together. Using a combination of visual summaries, text notes, voice notes and polls, methods for participatory co-writing of policy comments, EIA comments, letters to officials and press statements were developed *in situ* as issues unfolded using WhatsApp groups, meetings and other communications strategies. The co-production of knowledge concerning comment submissions, court cases and other modes of resistance contribute towards direct actions to stop harmful projects and practices and become spaces of rich learning and relationship building (Sowman et al., 2023). These reflect blue resistance to various procedural, recognitional, epistemic and distributive injustices. A selection of vignettes (Vignettes 2–4) from the scholar-activist archive shows the dynamism, scope and substance of blue resistance in the SSF communities.

**Vignette 2: A composite view of blue resistance, typically representing the scope of blue resistance of SSFs in the CJN scholar-activist archive**



1. Anna Tities and friend, SSFs from Klipfontein, holding a poster that reads “Our Ocean is Not for Sale” at a protest against oil and gas exploration, in 2023.
2. Jerry Mngomezulu, chairperson of the Kosi Bay Affected Communities, holding a poster that reads “We are custodians of Kosi Bay, respect our customary rights” at a CJN-SSF workshop, 2023.
3. A ‘screen grab’ from the chat function in a webinar presentation of the biodiversity sector plans for MPA. Christian Adams, a fisherman from Steenberg’s Cove, introduces himself as “Christian Adams (PhD in Fishing), University of the Ocean”.
4. A woman holds a sign saying “We know the kind of development we need, please consult us” outside the Gqeberha High Court, for the Wild Coast Communities vs Shell Seismic Survey case in 2022
5. Simon Sokomane, an SSF from Tsitsikamma, addresses a high-level official about the injustices that fisherfolk have experienced at the Tsitsikamma MPA. This took place during a CJN-SSF workshop in 2022, where SSFs were supported to directly speak to officials via online meetings that they are usually excluded from.
6. Thembakazi Paliso and William Xolo, SSFs from Hamburg and Humansdorp, holding a sign that reads “Co-management Now!” at a CJN-SSF workshop, 2023.
7. David Gongqose and Kuzile Juza, SSFs from Hobeni, Dwesa-Cwebe, holding a poster that reads “The DMRE (Department of Mineral Resources and Energy) says that oil and gas exploration will bring jobs. Jobs for who? Fishing is the job we want!” outside the Gqeberha High Court, for the Wild Coast Communities vs Shell Seismic Survey case in 2022.
8. Melisa Pullen, an SSF from Klipfontein, presents a map that shows the spawning and migratory grounds of the species they catch and sites of cultural importance to local communities, and how these spaces are threatened by oil and gas and other blue economy activities.
9. Loyiso Dunga from the One Ocean Hub facilitates a participatory mapping exercise with SSFs to map their fishing grounds, sites of cultural significance, and other features that SSFs want to see included in MSP at a CJN-SSF workshop in 2022.

Collectively, the images and explanations shown in Vignette 2 show the SSFs engaging in resistance against recognitional and epistemic injustices, procedural injustices and spatial and distributive injustices. These resistances recur through other resistance practices shown in Vignettes 3<sup>49</sup> and 4<sup>50</sup> below.

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<sup>49</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LtzdPOUCcchLtZxW6b\\_4D8nUKU4t6FxNf/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LtzdPOUCcchLtZxW6b_4D8nUKU4t6FxNf/view?usp=sharing)

<sup>50</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s7Qj\\_xtNdZl9fR8Mfu5iAOYrgr05hjNw/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s7Qj_xtNdZl9fR8Mfu5iAOYrgr05hjNw/view?usp=sharing)

### Vignette 3: Eastern Cape SSF letter to SLR consultants re CGG's proposed seismic survey, 31 May 2023

31 May 2023

Attention: CGG Algoa Stakeholder-Engagement-Team  
By e-mail to: [cggsouthcoast@slrconsulting.com](mailto:cggsouthcoast@slrconsulting.com)

Dear CGG Algoa Stakeholder-Engagement Team

**Object: Proposed 3D Speculative Seismic Survey off the Southeast Coast, South Africa**

We are writing to you as leaders of small scale fishing cooperatives who are based along the Eastern Cape Coast and operate from coastal towns, specifically, the harbours of Gqeberha and Port St Francis, in exercising our fishing rights. Our fishing grounds stretch along the east and south cape coasts. Our basket of rights include squid but is not limited to this species.

1. It is our view, that we are directly affected parties in the proposed speculative seismic survey. Yet, we were not afforded a fair opportunity to participate in public consultations as required by the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations of the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) of 2017. Our fishing rights are important because they support the livelihoods of our families and communities in rural and urban areas.
    - a. The newspapers Die Burger (Afrikaans) and Herald (English and isiXhosa), PE Express (English) and Kouga Express (English), 2023 in which you advertised where the public meetings were to be held between 3 and 6 April are not available to us in our small communities. Site notices placed in Plettenberg Bay, Storms River Village, St Francis Bay, Jeffreys Bay and Gqeberha were also not accessible to us, as the squid fishing season had already closed. We heard of the proposed survey by word of mouth through our own networks.
    - b. The public libraries in Gqeberha, Jeffrey's Bay, St Francis Bay, and Plettenberg Bay, where you placed information are not accessible to us who are based in small coastal towns beyond Gqeberha along the remainder of the Eastern Cape Coast.
    - c. None of us heard the notices you claim were aired on 12 and 13 April on radio.
    - d. The huge volume of information that we would have been required to process to fully understand the proposal and your assessment of possible impact further impacted our participation negatively. The summaries in English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa provided do not explain how you arrived at your assessment of impact. To understand that would have required us to download and read technical information in English, which for the majority of us is not our home language. We are primarily isiXhosa and Afrikaans speakers.
    - e. Further, to attend the public meetings in Gqeberha or any of the other sites, would have involved huge travel costs for us and even if we did travel to attend these meetings, we would also have had overnight costs. Altogether, travel costs to the in-person public participation meetings was simply unaffordable.
    - f. Another option for us to directly participate was through an online meeting. Again, how this could be regarded as a reasonable option for us in remote rural communities and small coastal towns where internet access is unstable and the costs of data for long meetings unaffordable, is impossible to understand.

We are people who have had our rights trampled on under apartheid and now are again excluded from decision-making around ocean resources through this unfair public participation process.

  2. We understand that your documents say that there is no anticipated impact on squid jig fisheries or on small-scale fishery, as there is no overlap with our fishing grounds. We dispute this view. We acknowledge that our fishing grounds as small scale fishers do not correspond with the area to be surveyed. However, this simple argument that this means we are not impacted, is illogical.
    - a. As fishers we know that squid lay their eggs along the coast between Port Alfred and Plettenberg Bay. The growing squid larva move beyond our fishing areas into the Agulhas current where they grow up and return as adult fish to mate and lay their eggs. The seismic survey area lies within the Agulhas current and takes place during a time when the fish that we depend on, is growing up outside our traditional fishing grounds. Squid do not live long. If these young fish are damaged, the population suffers.
  - b. Seismic surveys negatively affect plankton, we have learnt. (<https://www.curtin.edu.au/news/media-release/new-research-reveals-impact-seismic-surveys-zooplankton/#~:text=Marine%20seismic%20surveys%20used%20in%20petroleum%20exploration%20could%20impact%20journal%20Nature%20Ecology%20and%20Evolution%20has%20found>). If the effect is so damaging to zooplankton, is it not possible that squid larva will be similarly affected?
  - c. The survey falls in the period when the sardine run starts, when geelbek migrate up the coast and when small turtle hatchlings swim along the Agulhas current from their birth places in KwaZulu Natal to where they grow up.
  - d. As fishers we know that the health of all ocean life is connected. Sardines start spawning along the south coast before migrating from there up the Eastern Cape coast. This is happening during the period of the proposed survey. (<https://theconversation.com/south-africas-massive-sardine-run-leads-fish-into-an-ecological-trap-168413>) Changes in sardine behaviour along the southern parts of the coast will also affect all of us waiting for the sardine run further along the coast.
  - e. The survey area lies next to and on top of some of the most important coral fields along our coast. We are concerned about the impact on the life of the corals which provide a home for kingklip to spawn and grow up. Research shows that the noise of seismic surveys affects the use of coral reefs by fish. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0308597X16307382>). Also, as autumn arrives with colder weather, the kingklip start their breeding and use sound to attract their mates. The CGG survey with its constant huge noise overlaps with this period between April and May. In addition, seismic surveys also affect fish eggs and larva negatively. (<https://oceanadventures.co.za/seismic-survey-effects-on-turtles-fish-invertebrates/#~:text=Reduced%20catch%20rate%20per%20unit%20effort%20has%20been%20viability%20increased%20embryonic%20mortality%20and%20decreased%20larval%20growth>).
3. We also understand that your documents say that there is a small chance of bunkering leading to oil spills. Bunkering in the calm of Algoa Bay has led to numerous oil spills. (<https://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2022-05-26-experts-warn-of-environmental-disaster-if-bunkering-spills-persist/>). We disagree with your assessment that the potential impact of unplanned events like an oil spill is low, when we know that your survey takes place in the fast flowing Agulhas current.
4. Finally, we understand the purpose of this survey is speculative. We understand this too mean that CGG will sell the data on to other parties. We note the strong likelihood that this would be multinational oil and gas companies. We are extremely concerned by the use of fossil fuels as a source of energy in South Africa and elsewhere globally because of the effects of global warming:
  - a. We together with fellow fishers along the KwaZulu Natal and Wild Coasts have recently experienced massive floods which have damaged our homes and livelihoods.
  - b. We know that the warming of the atmosphere changes ocean temperatures and currents and these changes in turn affect the behaviour of fish species on which we depend as small scale fishers for our livelihoods.We say that the risks associated with this survey are too big and the CGG speculative survey should be stopped.

In the letter shown in Vignette 3, SSF representatives set out their concerns and objections to the proposed seismic survey planned along the stretch of coastline where they live and fish – and where they have squid fishing rights, which involves fishing offshore. This counteracts the misperception that SSF fishing activities are confined to beaches and the nearshore and that they, therefore, are not affected by offshore and deep-sea activities. They emphasise their status as rights holders and that their livelihoods and the food security of their communities stand to be impacted by the proposed activity. They request meaningful consultation and point to its absence as a recognitional injustice. They refer to the historical and structural injustices they face, saying: “We are people who have had our rights trampled on under apartheid and now are again excluded from decision making...”.

They set out the procedural injustices experienced in this case. These included the public meetings that are advertised in newspapers that are not sold in the rural or urban township communities where fishers live and the draft reports that were made available in public libraries in urban centres far from where many fishers live – this meant they only heard about the seismic surveys in the CJN. The online EIA reports were in English and used large, data-heavy files (with prohibitive file downloading costs). In addition, there is the prohibitive cost of travelling to urban centres for consultation meetings. Online consultations are also inaccessible due to most fishers not owning computers and consultants using online meeting platforms not compatible with mobile phones.

Fishers also point out potential distributive injustices in the proposed seismic survey and dispute the claim in the report that the seismic survey area does not overlap with their fishing grounds. By drawing on a range of scientific reports and their own local ecological knowledge, they showed that the seismic survey area overlaps with the spawning, mating and migratory areas of several species that they as SSFs have a right to fish for. With CJN researchers, they point to emerging scientific evidence that seismic surveys can harm plankton which form the basis of the food chain. They raised concerns related to coral fields that the seismic survey overlaps with, citing scientific evidence that seismic surveys affect the use of coral reefs by fish for their spawning. They raised concerns about the potential for oil spills due to bunkering, referring to the experience of prior oil spills in the region and pointing out that the negative impacts of an oil spill would be far-reaching due to the activities taking place in the proximity of the fast-moving Agulhas Current. Finally, they raised concerns that although the seismic survey is “speculative”, it is common knowledge that the data generated by the survey would be sold to international energy companies, which contradicts climate change policy fossil fuel commitments. Overall, they argue that the potential harm of the seismic survey would be disproportionately borne by SSFs and their communities, and therefore should not go ahead.

## Vignette 4: Eastern Cape SSF letter to the OEMP Directorate, 2 April 2022; available

02 April 2022

To: M [REDACTED]  
 Chief Director: Operation Phakisa Secretariat  
 Chair: Ocean Economy Master Plan Secretariat  
 Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)

And: [REDACTED]  
 Coordinator: Fisheries Working Group  
 DFFE

And: [REDACTED]  
 ODG: Fisheries Management  
 DFFE

And: [REDACTED]  
 Director Directorate for Small-scale Fisheries  
 DFFE

This is a letter from small scale fisher co-operatives in the Eastern Cape, whose rights were recognized in 2019/2020, stating that we reject the OEMP in its current form.

There has been inadequate consultation of small scale fishers and other community based coastal groups, despite there being many pleas for better inclusion of small scale fishers in the development of the OEMP. There has been a lack of dialogue, a lack of translation of the plan or the meetings out of English into our mother tongues, and the majority of the working group meetings have been held on zoom, which we cannot access.

We know that many small scale fishers and their partners have been asking for proper inclusion all of last year, and more recently for extensions on this 31 March deadline. This is needed to allow more time for small scale fishers to have this plan explained to us, to properly plan for how the rights of small scale fishers will be protected and upheld despite this OEMP favouring the industries that keep us marginalised, and to have our concerns included. But, despite these many requests, and despite reassurances from your secretariat that you would do more about including the SSF sector, there has still been very inadequate consultation. This deadline of 31 March 2022 for the draft plan to be submitted to the Minister was only communicated to a small number of people (not even all the members of the working groups were informed), and with very little notice. Despite many legitimate requests for an extension, you are going ahead regardless.

How can the government continue to ignore and exclude our calls for meaningful consultation, even when two recent court cases within the last 6 months have been found in favour of SSF in this regard? (see the Shell salmon survey case in Makhanda High Court, and the Seacatch GenData scientific survey case in the Western Cape High Court)

Our further concerns are that there is an unbalanced focus on oil and mining, marine shipping and commercial fisheries in the OEMP, and a failure to consider how these more powerful sectors have direct negative impacts on the SSF sector. We know that DFFE is obstructed from following through with its promises for us because of pressure from the commercial fishing sector.

There is a failure to integrate existing marine legislation that relates directly to the rights of small scale fishers into the OEMP.

Let us remember that SSF is a significant sector in South Africa. It is significant for food security in marginalised communities, the sector holds significant potential for bringing together social and ecological well-being when fishing practices are relatively less harmful and small-scale fishers hold indigenous, local and traditional knowledge of how to sustain marine resources. In a country that is becoming more and more unequal and facing extreme environmental challenges, this sector should be prioritised in any ocean economy master plan.

We as fishers along the eastern coast want the OEMP as a national structure with the potential to assist our sector to work better, not necessarily catch more, but receive higher pay for what we catch, through investment in our businesses, linkages to markets, and other measures. We draw on the existing Small Scale Fishing policy which should be significantly included in the OEMP, or any future ocean economy planning.

1. Small scale fishing areas and resources must be protected. We need to access our traditional fishing grounds and access to the nearshore. This should be differentiated from commercial fishing areas and take priority over coastal private property developments. There are a lot of species that will not be with us for long if we don't do something fast because of the exploitation of these fish cuts. We need fishing grounds that are protected from the impacts of marine shipping.

2. There should be a MORATORIUM on further oil and gas exploration, and coastal and marine mining, until there have been Strategic Environmental Assessments, as part of the Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) process. No more extractive coastal and ocean activities until the MSP is in place.

3. There need to be SSF co-management structures set up at local, regional and national levels. This is in the SSF regulations, and must be implemented now. We need to be acknowledged and included in decisions about marine resource use and conservation. Climate protection is part of our culture as fisher people. We have a lot of important knowledge and capacity to add - do not sideline us from decisions about our ocean.

4. Support to improve infrastructure and services. This should include supporting infrastructure for the cold chain, skills training for work along the SSF value chain, training in business, finance and contract literacy for fishing co-ops, and upgrading facilities such as landing sites and processing facilities. This support is critical as we in the Eastern Cape are vulnerable to economic abuse and exploitation when commercial fishing companies come to us with contracts that we struggle to understand, or that we have no alternative but to accept. DFFE officials promised us in 2019 that they will tutor SSF Co-operatives for the first 3 years, but this has not yet happened.

5. Support the development of local markets so that our fish can feed local towns, broaden our markets and building local economies. We should also learn from existing successful examples about how to develop supplementary livelihoods such as eco-tourism.

6. This sector includes many women, not only in the processing of fish but also in harvesting. Women should also be a direct focus of skills development and supplementary livelihoods in the SSF sector.

7. The support originating from the points above would assist our sector in training and integrating youth to be a part of the future of SSF.

8. Provision of social protection for small-scale fishers - including insurance schemes and subsidies for small-scale fishers to get safety at sea training, buy safety equipment and survey their boats, income protection during times of pandemics, unusually extreme storms and access to healthy meals while on duty in the ocean. Other subsidies might include support for child care for women fish workers, support for youth training and support for funeral covers for the immediate family members.

We are aware that the OEMP is in its final draft form and we want it known that we reject it as it is currently. We ask that DFFE refrains from sending this to the minister: This plan does not currently represent the SSF sector fairly represented alongside other ocean sectors. Any plan for the ocean economy must follow a balanced, fair and inclusive process, that takes the climate, justice and social impacts of the dominant economic sectors such as oil and gas, mining, marine shipping and commercial fishing seriously. Any plans for the ocean economy must make sure that the SSF sector is properly addressed, and that the different policies affecting us, such as the SSF regulations and MSP, are properly considered and followed in this plan.

Signed

Sarah Baartman Fishing Co-op  
 Eastern Cape Khoisan Small Scale Fishers  
 Mngq Gesukkel Vusanyo Co-op  
 Kwaikama Fishing Primary Co-operative

The letter shown in Vignette 4 was sent by SSFs in the Eastern Cape to the OEMP directorate to request that the draft OEMP not be submitted to the minister and to state their rejection of the OEMP in this form. This came after over a year of lobbying this directorate for the meaningful inclusion of SSFs in developing the OEMP. The draft OEMP that was to be submitted to the Minister of the DFFE was only circulated to a small number of stakeholders, with a comment period of 30 days. In addition to the letter sent by the Eastern Cape SSF, fishers in the Western Cape requested an in-person meeting with the chair of the OEMP secretariat to request greater inclusion of SSFs and an extension of the comment period for this draft plan. Despite many formal requests for an extension, the draft plan was submitted anyway.

This letter shown in Vignette 4 from Eastern Cape SSFs highlighted the many experienced and potential injustices the OEMP represented that are not unlike those highlighted in Vignettes 2 to 4 above. In terms of procedural injustices, the letter sets out the “inadequate consultation” regarding this draft plan, referring to the many verbal and written requests for greater inclusion of SSFs and other community-based coastal groups. The draft plan was not translated from English into any of the first languages of SSF community groups, and most of the working group meetings had taken place online on Zoom, meaning SSFs could not access them without significant support from civil society and researcher partners. In terms of recognitional injustices, the letter points out that there has been no integration of the SSF policy into the OEMP, meaning that the rights, contributions and knowledge of SSFs are completely missing from the plan:

We need to be acknowledged and included in decisions about marine resource use and conservation. The SSF sector is significant for food security in marginalised communities. Ocean protection is part of our culture as fisher people. We have a lot of important knowledge and capacity to add – do not sideline us from decisions about our ocean.

Concerning intersectional structural injustices, the letter calls for the need for a particular focus on women SSF whose contributions to the SSF sector are often the most marginalised and overlooked and social protections for SSFs and their families. The potential entrenching of spatial and distributive injustices through the OEMP is highlighted in terms of the threats that the other sectors promoted in the OEMP – oil and gas, shipping, commercial fishing and coastal private property development – pose to SSF fishing grounds and ocean health. The closing statement of this letter calls for fairness and inclusivity in the OEMP:

This plan does not currently represent the SSF sector fairly alongside other ocean sectors. Any future plan for the ocean economy must follow a balanced, fair and inclusive process that takes the climate, justice and social impacts of the dominant economic sectors such as oil and gas, mining, marine shipping and commercial fishing seriously.

### 5.5.3 When blue resistance breaks through

In the South African context, the blue resistances such as those shared in Vignettes 2, 3 and 4 are slow, emerge from long-term efforts and build on decades of work that has gone before; they are not single events (Isaacs, 2011; Masifundise, 2015; 2017; Menon et al., 2018). It can therefore be very difficult to detect any shifts or impacts that can be confidently attributed to the activist resistance of SSFs and their movements. For the most part, the many layers of the injustices pointed out above just become more entrenched and intractable over time (Sowman et al., 2021)

However, despite being marginalised, undermined and threatened in myriad ways, SSFs continue to organise, mobilise, build solidarity and practice many everyday acts of resistance (Blythe et al., 2023; Rodríguez Aguilera, 2022) through continuing to fish, care for and feed their families and communities, building alliances and imagining more just futures. At certain key moments, there have been some clear examples of blue resistance directly impacting and stopping injustices. For SSFs in South Africa, there have been several landmark legal victories throughout their movement building. Litigation is often considered the last resort by grassroots social movements because of the high costs and risks entailed; however, in the context of historical injustices, structural inequalities, imbalanced power relations and weak democratic participation processes, litigation has often been a necessary strategy for South African activists (Sowman et al., 2023).

- The Kenneth George case (Kenneth George and Others v The Minister of Environment and Tourism and Others, 2005. EC 1/2005) was an Equality Court Case brought by fishers, CBOs and NGOs, in which the courts recognised that subsistence, artisanal and SSFs were prejudiced by the existing fisheries policy framework. They thus compelled the Minister of Environmental Affairs to make provisions for these fishers in policy and ensure that they had equitable access to marine resources. This judgement was the catalyst for the development of the human-rights-based SSF policy (2012).
- In the Coastal Links Langebaan High Court case (Coastal Links Langebaan and Others v Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Others; 2016; Western Cape High Court, Case number 11907/13), the permit conditions that

prevented traditional net fishers from accessing their fishing grounds in restricted zones in the Langebaan lagoon, were deemed unconstitutional and set aside.

- In the Gongqose case (Gongqose & Others v State & Others (1340/16 & 287/17) [2018] ZASCA 87 (01 June 2018)), the Supreme Court of Appeal found that a customary right to fish was not extinguished by fishing prohibitions in MPAs. The judgement recognised that customary law and conservation must co-exist and highlighted that fishing communities have the greatest interest in the sustainable use of marine resources, which is respected via customary rules. Therefore, this judgement finds that fishing carried out by people with customary rights in an MPA is not unlawful.

More recently, SSFs and coastal communities have made international headlines for their success in stalling seismic surveys exploring for oil and gas on the Eastern Cape coast and West Coast of South Africa. I share this as Vignette 5<sup>51</sup> (Part A, B and C) in this study.

#### **Vignette 5 Part A: SSFs' blue resistance to seismic surveys**

(See Pereira, 2023, for the full version of this case study)

As small-scale fishers and their social partners in community-based organisations, universities, and NGOs became aware of specific seismic surveys about to commence in late 2021/early 2022, with little to no public consultation regarding these surveys, they launched a broad and strategic resistance. This included large public demonstrations<sup>52</sup> on beaches and outside petrol stations around the country; communications<sup>53</sup>, story-telling<sup>54</sup>, and advocacy<sup>55</sup> aimed at raising public awareness; letters and petitions<sup>56</sup>; and ultimately legal action.

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<sup>51</sup> This case study first appeared on the Ocean Defenders website and the One Ocean Hub blog – <https://oceandefendersproject.org/case-study/no-to-seismic-surveys/>; <https://oneoceanhub.org/the-outcome-of-the-shell-seismic-survey-case/>. I am the author of both pieces.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1Lt0DQS0VY>

<sup>53</sup> <https://coastaljusticenetwork.co.za/full-press-release-blasting-along-the-west-coast-threatens-the-future-of-small-scale-fishers/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UBublpCWuk>

<sup>55</sup> <https://coastaljusticenetwork.co.za/open-letter-from-under-threat-small-scale-fishers-to-ministers-of-dmre-and-dffe/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.change.org/p/shearwater-geoservices-shearwatergeo-and-shell-stop-blasting-the-wild-coast-our-voices-can-make-a-difference-and-put-an-end-to-shell-blasting-in-the-wild-coast>

The resistance efforts in 2021/2022 were focused specifically on two permits granted by the government for conducting seismic surveys to explore oil and gas without the due prior consultation of local communities. Small-scale fishers were at the heart of both of these successful campaigns, as they strongly asserted their identity as ocean defenders whose rights – related to participation, livelihoods, and cultural and customary relationships – had been violated in the granting of these exploration permits (see Vignette 3 above). They also voiced deep concerns about the impacts of seismic blasting on plankton, fish, whales, birds and other marine life with whom fisherfolk share the ocean. Moreover, they raised concerns about the continued exploration of fossil fuels at a time when fishers are already observing the worrying impacts of climate change on ocean ecosystems.

The first case took place along the Eastern Wild Coast of South Africa. Here, SSFs learnt in November 2021 that a company called Impact Africa, in partnership with Royal Dutch Shell, was about to start a large-scale seismic survey, without any meaningful consultation of the people living along that coastline. With support from human rights lawyers, researchers and civil society partners, applicants from fishing communities along this stretch of coastline launched legal proceedings against South Africa's DMRE, Impact Africa, and Shell. These legal proceedings had the intent to get an urgent interdict and then revoke the exploration permit entirely. The founding affidavit in this case, containing the statements of Mr Sinegugu Zukulu and other community-based ocean defenders and SSFs, expresses their identities as ocean defenders and their practices of blue resistance, very clearly:

*The Wild Coast is a place of stunning natural beauty. Unlike other coastal stretches in South Africa, Indigenous people have maintained continuous possession of this land despite waves of colonial and Apartheid aggression. This is no accident. Our ancestors' blood was spilled protecting our land and sea. We now feel a sense of duty to protect our land and sea for future generations, as well as for the benefit of the planet. ...Our land and sea are central to our livelihoods and our way of life. Over generations we have conserved them, and they have conserved us...Multinational corporations now wish to blast our sea every ten seconds for five months with air gun bursts between 220 and 250 decibels – louder than a jet plane taking off – that will be heard underwater more than 100 kilometers away. They want to do this for one reason – to look for oil and gas that they can profit from while worsening the planet's climate crisis...*

[\(Founding Affidavit in Sustaining the Wild Coast NPC and Others v Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and Others \(3491/2021\)\)<sup>57</sup>](#)

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<sup>57</sup> <https://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FA-Signed.pdf>

The papers submitted by the community applicants' lawyers in this case were made up of a tapestry of knowledges. There was the evidence given by SSFs and other community members of the procedural injustices in this case and the recognitional injustices in terms of the lack of consideration for their local ecological knowledge or their sacred customary relationship with the ocean – these were presented in community affidavits and arts-based research outputs (McGarry, 2023). These were presented alongside scientific evidence and affidavits from marine and fisheries scientists showing the potential harm to marine biodiversity and ocean health and empirical evidence related to the food security contributions of SSFs and the impacts of fossil fuel extraction on climate change.

The judges, in this case, found in<sup>58</sup> favour of the community applicants; first granting an urgent interdict to stop the seismic survey from commencing until the full case was heard, and then ultimately setting aside Shell and Impact Africa's exploration permit entirely. The judges affirmed the role<sup>59</sup> of the applicants as custodians of the ocean. They recognised their cultural, customary and livelihood rights and found that their right to be consulted had been violated. This judgement has been considered groundbreaking in its recognition of the sacred nature of coastal communities' relationship with the ocean and of their defence of customary practices and spiritual relationships as legitimate ways of knowing, worthy of respect and consideration (Du Toit et al., 2024; Sunde, 2022). Two of the community members involved in the case, lead applicant Sinegugu Zukulu and Nonhle Mbuthuma, were awarded the 2024 Goldman Environmental Prize<sup>60</sup> for their work on this campaign (see Figure 5.4).

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<sup>58</sup> <https://cer.org.za/virtual-library/case-watch/challenges-to-shells-seismic-blasting-on-south-africas-wild-coast-december-2021>

<sup>59</sup> <https://oneoceanhub.org/the-outcome-of-the-shell-seismic-survey-case/>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/sinegugu-zukulu-nonhle-mbuthuma>



**Figure 5.4: Sinegugu Zukulu and Ntsindiso Nongcavu, applicants in the Shell Wild Coast case, with a poster emphasising the inter-relationship of the environment and culture, and the threats seismic surveys pose to these**

Some key excerpts worth highlighting from the High Court judgement in the Shell Wild Coast case are captured in Part B of Vignette 5 below.

***Vignette 5 Part B – Breakthroughs for blue justice in the seismic survey blue resistance work in extracts from the High Court judgement***

**CONSULTATION**

“...meaningful consultation consists not in the mere ticking of a checklist, but in engaging in a genuine, bona fide substantive two-way process aimed at achieving, as far as possible, consensus”

**COASTAL COMMUNITIES AS OCEAN CUSTODIANS, AND THE SACRED NATURE OF THIS RELATIONSHIP**

“The applicant communities contend that they bear duties and obligations relating to the sea and other common resources like our land and forests; it is incumbent on them to protect natural resources, including the ocean, for present and future generations; the ocean is the sacred site where their ancestors live and so have a duty to ensure that their ancestors are not unnecessarily disturbed and they are content. If there is a potential for disturbance, they contend, they. must be given the opportunity to follow their customary practices for dealing with the anticipated disturbance.”

The judgement cites Judge Bloem’s judgement, in Part A of the case, related to Respect for Cultural

and Spiritual Relationships with the Ocean

“I accept that the customary practices and spiritual relationship that the applicant communities have with the sea may be foreign to some and therefore difficult to comprehend. How ancestors can reside in the sea and how they can be disturbed may be asked. It is not the duty of this court to seek answers to those questions. We must accept that those practices and beliefs exist... In terms of the Constitution, those practices and beliefs must be respected and where conduct offends those practices and beliefs and impacts negatively on the environment, the court has a duty to step in and protect those who are offended and the environment.”

Part A Judgement: <https://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SWC-v-Shell-Wild-Coast-Seismic-Blasting-Interdict-28.12.2021.pdf>

Part B Judgement: <https://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAECMKHC/2022/55.html>

What this process did was show what is possible with sustained blue resistance, leading to further blue resistance action along the same lines (see Vignette 5, Part C below). At the same time as Wild Coast fishers were celebrating their first victory in securing an interdict to stop Shell’s seismic survey, news broke of another seismic survey about to begin. In early 2022, SSFs on the West Coast got the disturbing news that an Australian company called ‘Searcher Geodata’ was about to start a seismic survey along their coastline. The public interest that had been galvanized around the Wild Coast Shell case now turned its attention towards the Searcher West Coast case. Again, it was the deep intergenerational knowledge and guardianship of SSFs, particularly West Coast snoek fishers, combined with scientific evidence shared by scientists into the networked process, that guided and strengthened the collective response to this case.

Vignette 5 Part C shows an extract from the founding affidavit submitted by Mr Christian Adams and others in the case that West Coast SSFs brought against the South African government and Searcher.

***Vignette 5 Part C: West Coast SSFs take the South African government and Searcher to court***

“The fishers with whom I fish have a deep knowledge of the ocean ecosystem. I know that like me, this knowledge has been passed down over several generations of fishers. We know the sea in so many ways: we can tell what fish will be available by looking at the sky, by smelling the wind, by feeling the wind against our faces. We know this West Coast and the way that the sea and the weather interact here as if it was part of us. ... This traditional knowledge is part of our culture, it is who we are. We did not learn this knowledge at university but as a culture, the West Coast traditional fishers hold the knowledge of generations of ocean guardians...”

(Founding affidavit in *Adams and Others v Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and Others* (1306/22))<sup>61</sup>

An interdict was granted by the Western Cape High Court in March 2022<sup>62</sup>, leading Searcher Geodata to call off their proposed seismic survey and leave South African waters. In early 2023, Searcher re-applied and was granted environmental authorisation to carry out a seismic survey on the West Coast<sup>63</sup>. There is an appeal process underway<sup>64</sup> and a decision regarding these appeals is still pending; this shows that this type of blue resistance is not an event but a long-term process requiring sustained and persistent co-engagement.

The success of these ocean defenders has been met with polarising discourse from the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, who has said that environmental activists resisting oil and gas are “foreign-funded agents” blocking economic development, and intent on “apartheid and colonialism of a special type”<sup>65</sup>. The SSFs have responded to these claims through several public statements, re-asserting their agency and integrity in defending their human and environmental rights (Masifundise 2021; 2023c). Energy companies have adjusted their tactics to ensure they have greater evidence of consultation, despite continuing to ignore or undermine the voices

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<sup>61</sup> <https://thegreentimes.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/founding-affidavit-seismic-case.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> <https://cer.org.za/virtual-library/judgments/high-courts/christian-john-adams-others-v-minister-of-mineral-resources-and-energy-others-west-coast-seismic-blasting-part-a-interdict-march-2022>

<sup>63</sup> [https://www.news24.com/fin24/climate\\_future/energy/geoscience-firm-searcher-gets-the-nod-for-seismic-survey-off-the-west-coast-20230116](https://www.news24.com/fin24/climate_future/energy/geoscience-firm-searcher-gets-the-nod-for-seismic-survey-off-the-west-coast-20230116)

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/civil-society-groups-to-appeal-environmental-authorisation-of-searcher-seismic-survey-project-911a3767-bf2a-4e2a-a945-180673de45bb>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2023-05-16-mantashe-says-environmental-ngos-block-development-in-sa/>

of ocean defenders – they are still intent on overturning the courts' decisions against them. At the time of writing, Shell's appeal to overturn this judgement was dismissed (although the door was left open for the seismic surveys to resume following an improved public participation process) (Natural Justice, 2024). The struggle is far from over. However, these cases have set very important precedents for blue justice specifically and environmental justice generally.

Du Toit et al. (2023, p. 9) have stated that the precedent set by these cases is significant for climate justice more broadly, noting:

The willingness of the South African judiciary to engage so deeply with the concerns of the relevant Indigenous communities, and to elevate the rights of vulnerable people and the environment over corporate interests, suggests that, going forward, carbon majors might no longer have unchecked licence to plunder natural resources, especially where this threatens the cultural beliefs, practices and identities as well as the survival of Indigenous communities.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This paper intended to provide an expanded view of blue justice based on the grounded experience of SSFs. This was in response to a call for the same in the literature on blue justice and calls from SSFs to affirm their SSF blue resistance knowledge as legitimate in ocean governance praxis. The paper illustrates how such knowledge was deployed in knowledge co-production processes that address blue (in)justice in ocean governance. The paper shows that South Africa's blue economy agenda and how it is accelerating the "marine social metabolism" (Ertör, 2023, p. 1157; Longo & Clark, 2016) in deeply unjust ways, is meeting with more and more resistance from communities, fishers, researchers, CBOs, NGOs and others, in a growing blue justice movement. Small-scale fishers (SSFs) are uniquely placed within this movement, as rights holders under the current ocean governance framework (contested rights holders, marginalised and incomplete rights holders, but rights holders nevertheless) and as people whose livelihoods, identities and futures are intimately and inextricably connected to the ocean. The paper shows that SSFs are facing layered or multi-dimensional dynamics of injustices related to historical and structural injustices, recognition injustices, procedural injustices and spatial and distributive injustices. The paper also shows that SSFs have agency and the will to

resist these injustices, and do so, but with the support of wider networks of partners such as those involved in the CJN. The paper shows that SSFs, while being central actors, cannot resist the growing tide of blue injustice on their own and that researchers and other partners can support their efforts through forms of scholar-activist TD praxis – such as supporting litigation and through evidence co-produced, collated, shared and reviewed from the co-produced scholar-activist archive that documents their journeys, struggles and victories in their fight for blue justice. Overall, the paper offers an empirical view of blue resistance as a key feature of blue justice efforts that amplify the voices and practices of SSFs. This is done reflexively in and through a scholar-activist TD research approach that values situated solidarity praxis in transforming ocean governance. This paper was developed in response to calls for advancing transformative ocean governance, both from the scientific field working on blue justice concepts and their advancement and from the fishers themselves involved in the South African CJN. As indicated in the paper, the praxis and articulation of blue (in)justice and resistance to it, can lead to impacts in law and practice. The paper also shows that while these gains are hard-won, their longer-term outcomes are not assured as the struggle for blue justice continues.

## CHAPTER 6

### PAPER 5: TRAIL-MARKERS FOR AN EXPANDED ETHICS OF ENGAGED SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

This paper has been submitted to the *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* and is currently under review. I am the sole author of this paper.

The paper offers a reflective account of ethics practices for engaged scholar-activist sustainability research as a contribution to the research question “*What emerges as key lessons for scholar-activist transdisciplinary researchers in blue justice?*” This question is further addressed in the final concluding chapter of this thesis (Chapter 7). As the question of research ethics for this kind of research appeared to require substantive reflection, I developed it as a stand-alone paper.

#### **Abstract**

The aspirational goals of engaged sustainability science – essentially, knowledge co-production that transcends disciplinary and academic/non-academic boundaries, towards actively addressing socio-ecological challenges and injustices – require fundamental shifts in research culture and practice. As this mode of research becomes more mainstream in terms of funding and policy in higher education institutions, it remains difficult to put it meaningfully into practice. Questions of power, ethics, politics and justice are being grappled with by sustainability researchers on the ground, especially those who work in the realm of scholar-activist transdisciplinary (TD) research, as they must simultaneously respond to academic institutional norms that are at odds with these shifts towards a more engaged and relational research practice. The tension-laden, behind-the-scenes work of ethical reflexive praxis in co-engaged TD sustainability science must be articulated and shared so that other researchers and practitioners navigating these complex terrains can learn from one another.

The study draws from an extensive co-produced scholar-activist archive co-produced by a South African Coastal Justice Network (CJN) which includes reflections from researchers on their practice. The paper draws mainly on a focus group discussion that reflects on four years of engaged TD research into transforming ocean governance in the CJN. It surfaces complexities and challenges associated with ethics processes in co-engaged research. What emerged from this discussion were messy, unfinished, unresolved yet hopeful trail-markers for an expanded ethics of engaged scholar-activist sustainability research.

## **6.1 Introduction**

Engaged sustainability science has become a prominent mode of research, as part of a broader shift towards more inclusive, relational and deliberative research approaches (West et al., 2020). Engaged sustainability science includes inter-alia participatory action research, TD knowledge co-production, interventionist and scholar-activist environmental justice-oriented research (see Cockburn & Cundill, 2018; Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2016; Norström et al., 2020; Pereira & Erwin, 2023). These related and often overlapping approaches seek to engage across disciplines and beyond academia to co-produce knowledge with diverse knowledge holders – to embrace and learn from plural ways of knowing, address the power and politics of knowledge production and build multi-stakeholder collaborations to respond to socio-ecological challenges (Lang et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2022; Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2016). Researchers acknowledge that these research approaches are ethically motivated (see Caniglia et al., 2016), and it is also widely recognised that there is a need to develop normative competencies in the sustainability sciences to prepare scholars for ethical praxis in the sustainability sciences (see Lang et al., 2012).

But, while the importance and value of engaged sustainability science and the ethics-oriented nature of this practice is now widely acknowledged (see Lang et al., 2012), dominant research systems and especially ethics approval practices in higher education remain paradoxically out of step with these shifts. This paper is a reflexive review and sharing of some of the ethical dilemmas, pressures and contradictions faced by scholar-activists when carrying out engaged TD research for social and environmental justice in the One Ocean Hub's CJN in South Africa. Through this, it seeks to contribute towards articulating expanded research ethics for engaged,

scholar-activist sustainability science praxis in advancing blue justice (Erwin et al., 2022; Pereira & Erwin, 2023; Pereira, forthcoming<sup>66</sup>). Interestingly, in a recent systematic review of scholar-activist research, Bashiri (2024, p.76) identified many features of scholar-activist research including that

normative orientation is a final feature of scholar-activism, as many scholar-activists ... emphasise certain values and directionalities over others' with social justice commitment, criticality, dealing with hegemony and systems of power, reflexivity, active engagement, resistance and co-creation as being defining features of such research.

Bashiri (2024) further states that "scholar-activists argue that social movements and struggles are not confined solely to external contexts but also exist within the oppressive dynamics present within academia itself" (p. 76). Despite these features of scholar-activism being outlined, this recent systematic review did not include a focus on the processes and struggles of dealing with research ethics. In many ways, it seems that research ethics processes and practices are implicitly assumed within the general commitment to ethical concerns, such as social justice in TD scholar-activist research and sustainability science research.

## **6.2 The Need for Expanded Ethics for Engaged Sustainability Science**

The imperative for engaged knowledge co-production has been substantially argued (Bremer & Meisch, 2017; Editors: Nature, 2018; van der Hel, 2016) and questions of validity, rigour and knowledge integration in such approaches have been well considered (Lang et al. 2012; Lawrence et al., 2012). However, there has not been enough attention paid to how "researchers can navigate the normative tensions, contradictions and ambiguities of co-producing knowledge in their research practice" (Caniglia et al., 2023, p. 493), which they argue impacts the transformative intent of such research. Existing ethical protocols are ill-suited to help engaged researchers navigate these complex and contested terrains (Caniglia et al., 2023; Cockburn & Cundill, 2018). University ethics protocols remain relatively unchanged since they were introduced to mitigate harm being perpetrated upon people and animals in the

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<sup>66</sup> See Papers 1, 2, 3 and 4 in this PhD by publication.

pursuit of biomedical science (Tegama & Fox, 2023). In the positivist paradigm, human “subjects” become involved in the research process as sources of data, to have hypotheses or experiments designed by the researcher applied to them. Out of this paradigm come principles such as “do no harm”; “anonymity of research participants”; and “prior informed consent”. These are all very important principles for biomedical research and as a baseline for most other research, but on their own, they are not appropriate for open-ended, responsive, collaborative, change-oriented research (Cockburn & Cundill, 2018; Dube et al., 2013) even in the health sciences (Page, 2022). Some contemporary research ethics frameworks have expanded beyond the earlier baseline of individual protection principles of biomedical ethics to incorporate more inclusive principles, such as: respect for the dignity of research participants; reflexive considerations of the researchers’ positionality and power; and thorough consideration of the benefits and risks of research engagements for research participants. However, these principles can remain quite abstract and elusive for researchers inexperienced in relational co-engaged research; and the practical tools for enacting ethical research, such as consent forms and gatekeeper letters, can get in the way of building trusting relationships if applied unthinkingly. Page (2022) argues that there is a lack of empirical evidence on how ethical decisions are made in co-produced research.

In addition to the unsuitability of established research ethics frameworks, and a lack of evidence on how ethical decisions are made in co-produced research, ethics are often treated as an important but relatively minor consideration (Nagar, 2018), reduced to being an administrative milestone on the way to getting a research project off the ground. What remains largely un-interrogated are the actual everyday ethical choices that are made throughout the project and the inherent ethical assumptions or values that sit behind particular methodological choices. As said by Page (2022, p. 2) “To date, the ethical issues that arise during the co-production process have been dealt with on an ad hoc and in situ basis”.

This is perhaps paradoxical, as engaged research approaches are inherently value-laden and guided by transformational perspectives (Lang et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2018; Popa et al., 2015) and include a recognition that previous research approaches have at times been extractive, harmful or inaccessible to the point of being irrelevant

to most of society. These important shifts towards engaged research, now becoming a part of mainstream academic rhetoric and commitment (Editors: Nature, 2018), have long been percolating from critical, counter-hegemonic thinkers and movements.

Intersectional feminists, Indigenous and anti-colonial scholars, working-class social movements and emancipatory pedagogists (see Alexander, 2003; Ahmed, 2013; de Sousa Santos, 2014; Choudry, 2020; Davis, 2008; Freire, 1985; hooks, 1991; Thuhiwai, 1999; Vally, 2021) – thinking with and from a place of “situated solidarity” (Routledge & Derickson, 2015) and commitment to social and ecological justice – have been calling for a radical “rethinking of the consciousness and purpose of research” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 49). This reimagining should “focus on the complexities of our contemporary socio-political condition(s)” and assert that “research cannot appropriately be practiced without questions of power always being addressed” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 50). It should “not support a false separation between academic research and transformative actions in the contemporary world” (p. 49). The “relational turn” in sustainability science emphasises that transformations arise through “continually unfolding processes and relations” (West et al., 2020, p. 305) rather than through interactions between separate entities. Therefore, close and careful attention needs to be paid to the ongoing ethical values that frame the relationships and processes through which knowledge is co-produced, as much as, if not more than, the outputs being produced.

### **6.3 Making the Invisible and Implicit More Explicit**

When engaged knowledge co-production brings together different disciplinary perspectives and epistemologies from outside academia, even if there is a shared overarching goal, the different underlying ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of these different approaches may contradict each other (Page, 2022). These underlying assumptions often remain invisible and can lead to misalignment and conflict between co-researchers that are difficult to address (Lang et al., 2012; West et al., 2022). Caniglia et al. (2022) further elaborate on the normative complexities of knowledge co-production research by stating that these can be simultaneously ethical, political and epistemological and that they are “first and foremost ethical as they invite judgement about and assessment of what is right or wrong to do in a specific situation” (p. 494). Furthermore, normative complexities are

also political, as researchers' decisions are "enmeshed in complex power dynamics that may generate resistance, contestation and conflict". They are epistemological in that they may include diverse worldviews and ways of knowing, and actors may not find all forms of knowledge useful or legitimate (Caniglia et al., 2022, p. 495). This points to the importance of being careful, respectful and open-minded in research ethics processes. Adding complexity is that this confluence of normative complexity can be easily conflated and cannot be pre-determined. Kara's (2018) book *Ethics in the real world: Euro-Western and Indigenous perspectives* provides insight into culturally hegemonic dynamics of normative framings in research ethics. She argues that there is a need to be conscious of the often-normalised biases of ethics protocols generated in the Euro-Western research paradigm and that more emphasis should be given to research ethics as developed in Indigenous research. This draws attention to the fact that research ethics are not developed in isolation, but emerge from other forms of ethics, such as individual, social, professional, cultural and political ethics, and that these may not share the same historicity. For all these reasons, it is important to make the invisible more explicit in co-engaged research processes, which I try to do in this paper, in the context of the One Ocean Hub's CJN. By 'the invisible', I mean the kinds of small but significant ethical dilemmas that come up in the course of doing engaged research that we may not have thought about in our ethics applications, as well as the hidden assumptions that are taken for granted when we think about research ethics. Examples of these kinds of issues are explored below.

The One Ocean Hub<sup>67</sup> is an international TD research hub with an explicit "research for development" orientation (Pereira & Erwin, 2023). There are researchers from a wide range of disciplines using different methodological approaches but working towards the common goal of transforming ocean governance. Different researchers in this hub have different sets of well-established relationships with groups that their research is co-produced or targeted towards, including small-scale fishers (SSFs), civil society, government, conservation authorities, human rights lawyers and international policymakers. Beyond disciplinary or methodological differences, there are diverse

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<sup>67</sup> <https://oneoceanhub.org/>

practices enacted by different researchers. For example, some researchers identify as experimenters, modellers, policy analysts, facilitators and activists. The assumption or hope would be that each of these different disciplinary or methodological approaches and different sets of relationships can provide a different piece of the puzzle (West & Schill, 2022) that ultimately contribute to a fuller and deeper understanding of the whole. However, there are very different assumptions, values and ethics underpinning these different approaches which can bring contradictory pictures into focus. One example from practice (Pereira & Erwin, 2023) is a scenario in which different ethical standards and assumptions contradict each other: for researchers identifying as scholar-activists, it is ethical practice to publicly speak out on issues of injustice or human rights violations that are identified or experienced by research partners – to not do so would erode trust with their community-based or social movement partners. For researchers identifying as positivist scientists, it is not ethical to “take a side” on a politically contested issue, as this is seen to undermine their objectivity and therefore their trustworthiness as expert knowledge producers, particularly with government or industry-based partners. This can (and does) bring about tensions between engaged researchers with different underlying ethical priorities, with all sides feeling that there is a risk of compromising their own ethical standards by collaborating with the other, even if they may be working together in a TD project with broadly shared goals.

To come closer to understanding these differences, and then negotiating our way towards important bridges and boundaries between our different ways of working, we need to make visible the invisible and often hidden work of engaged ethics in practice. Page (2022, p. 2), writing on co-engaged research in health sciences, argues that “all parties engaged in co-production need to consider the ethical aspects of the co-production of research”, a process that I consider below, in the more specific context of the One Ocean Hub’s CJN in South Africa, which I have been part of, practising as a scholar-activist TD researcher working in situated solidarity with SSFs on transforming ocean governance (Pereira, forthcoming).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Papers 1, 2, 3 and 4 of this PhD by Publication, and Chapter 1.

## 6.4 Research Context and Methods

The One Ocean Hub is a global research network funded by the United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) to implement a five-year (2019–2024) research project in South Africa and other Global South countries, looking at fair and inclusive ocean decision making. Through this project, collaboration has been built between a group of researchers from four different South African research institutions focusing on co-developing research with SSFs to support their struggles for recognition and inclusion in ocean governance. This group of activist researchers work together under the banner of the CJN. The CJN practices participatory research with SSF communities. It focuses on how to promote inclusive ocean governance and provides advocacy support in defending SSF rights to marine species and spaces. It encourages SSFs to participate and be consulted in decision making about fisheries and ocean governance and facilitates creative and arts-based approaches to knowledge co-production with SSFs (see Pereira, forthcoming<sup>69</sup>). It also offers a space for reflexive and caring companionship among a group of scholar-activists grappling with the contradictions and tensions that arise from this practice and identity. The CJN has established an extensive scholar-activist archive which captures diverse records of ongoing scholar-activist participation in blue justice. It includes entries in the form of ethics and codes of practice, workshop reports, court judgements and affidavits, letters to government officials, pamphlets and summaries, policies, press statements, open letters and media articles, public comments and appeals, SSF and blue justice research, and a timeline<sup>70</sup> (see Pereira & Erwin, 2023; Erwin et al., 2022; Pereira, forthcoming). In this paper, I draw mainly on the entries on ethics and codes of practice referred to above, which include reflections from co-engaged researchers that include a document on scholar-activist values and ethics practices (see Box 1 below), and a focus group discussion transcript (see Caretta & Vacchelli, 2015; Wilkinson, 1998), as well as evidence of ethics practices. I draw on all of these in this analysis.

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<sup>69</sup> See Paper 4 in this PhD by publication.

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 1. The full scholar-activist archive is available here:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1L43vRMpKPju83TCiTmMgZKzwZikrs6pC?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1L43vRMpKPju83TCiTmMgZKzwZikrs6pC?usp=drive_link)

The focus group discussion builds and reflects on four years of engaged TD research into transforming ocean governance. The focus group was convened and facilitated by me in June 2023, to reflect on the values and ethics that have been put into practice through the co-engaged scholar-activist research approaches by six scholar-activist colleagues (including myself) from the CJN, involving collaborations with SSFs, policy actors, scientists and other actors in the One Ocean Hub and CJN. During this particular three-hour discussion, we reflected on the values, practices and ethics underpinning our work together for the previous four years. While the data reflected here is drawn from this focus group discussion, the specific, bounded focus group discussion was informed by and built on a far broader, long-term and ongoing conversation among this group of scholar-activists. A ‘conversation’ woven through four years’ worth of regular meetings, workshops, reflexive writings and presentations, collective research co-design and practice. Over this time, we have often spoken about and grappled with the ethics of our research practice.

For example, researchers from this group have contributed to the development and refinement of the One Ocean Hub Code of Practice<sup>71</sup> (2022) which sets out ethical principles and standards for all the TD research taking place under the banner of the One Ocean Hub. This code of practice sets out a commitment to “supplement the ethics approach of ‘do no harm’ with ethics of care – research will be conducted with the spirit of equality and reciprocity... and it ... acknowledges and responds to what has gone wrong in past research and development interventions” (One Ocean Hub, 2022, p. 5). We have all taken part in numerous One Ocean Hub meetings to discuss and debate the ethics and practices of engaged “research for development” with colleagues from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds (and political positions). We all had to submit formal ethics applications to our universities. We have co-developed codes of practice, research agreements and methods for accessible and responsive research with our community-based co-researchers, to try to build greater transparency, reciprocity and solidarity into our engaged research relationships<sup>72</sup>. But

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<sup>71</sup> <https://oneoceanhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/OOH-code-of-practice.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> See for example Appendix A of this PhD by Publication, which was my own ethics approval application to the Rhodes University Ethics Committee for co-engaged TD scholar-activist research undertaken in the One Ocean Hub and CJN contexts.

the most extensive and significant ethical work we have undertaken is in the reflexive conversations between ourselves, the scholar-activists convening under the banner of the CJN. These were sometimes one on one – often as a larger group of six to 10 people – supporting one another to navigate the complex ethical-political terrain we move through concerning our multiple and contested positionalities as scholar-activists. It is these conversations that this paper will focus on.

The focus or prompt for the focus group discussion in July 2023, was a list of scholar-activist values that had been drafted in some haste by two of us for a pamphlet in preparation for our participation in an international meeting (see Box 1 below). Through the writing of this pamphlet and sharing of feedback with other CJN members, a discussion emerged (over a mobile chat group) about the discomfort we felt about having to “package and sell” what we do, to get greater support, legitimacy and continued funding – there was a concern that this leads to over-simplification, over-claiming and exaggeration. I decided to use this text as the prompt for our focus group discussion, to bring this conversation back to the surface, to give it time and attention, and to stimulate our thinking about better and more authentic ways to articulate the values and ethics guiding our work. I have included many substantial sections of transcribed text that come directly from the recording of the focus group discussion. I hope that the expressive, vulnerable and thoughtful conversation tone conveys a sense of reflexive dialogue in practice, offers some insight into the empirical dynamics of co-engaged research ethics praxis and will help to make the invisible more visible. However, I have anonymised the transcription, as negotiated and agreed on by all participants – this was in the interests of the CJN’s ongoing reflexivity as a community of scholar-activist researchers working with SSFs and others seeking to contribute to blue justice in the CJN (see Pereira & Erwin, 2023; Pereira forthcoming)<sup>73</sup>.

## **6.5 Findings: Dealing With Ethical Complexity and Contradictions**

### **6.5.1 Focus group prompt**

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<sup>73</sup> This research is covered by ethics application 2023-7072-7409, approved by the Rhodes University Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

As noted above, a documented set of scholar-activist values and practices in the CJN (March 2023) gave rise to the focus group discussion held in June 2023 (see Box 1).

**Box 1: The scholar-activist values and practices of the CJN – from a pamphlet printed in March 2023 (which was distilled from ethics praxis in the CJN over four years)**

1. **Accessibility** - research can be used and understood by all who contribute, and the research products and research relationships can be leveraged at critical moments to respond to emerging justice issues
2. **Reflexivity** - critical awareness of our own practices, blind spots and power
3. **Relevance** - Research should be useful and use-able for the social justice efforts of social movements of coastal communities
4. **Transparency** - clarity of co-produced objectives, processes, outcomes, timeframes
5. **Care-fulness** - relations and ethics of care
6. **Respectfulness** - diverse forms of knowledge recognised and honoured
7. **Relationality** - research should be grounded in reciprocal relationships that have their own life beyond a particular project or funding opportunity
8. **Reciprocity** - all partners in a network can call on one another for support and responsiveness when needed
9. **Fallibility** - the possibility of failure and learning from failure
10. **Transformativity/Transgression** - how is the research transforming power relations and transgressing business as usual?

### **6.5.2 Reflections from the focus group discussion: “Values, ethics and practices of the Coastal Justice Network”**

A strong response to the reading of the scholar-activist values (see Box 1) was that while scholar-activist TD researchers are certainly values-driven, they are practising within massive contradictions and constraints that make these values partly aspirational rather than fully or neatly achievable, reflected in these extracts:

*As I was listening to you read out these values, I was thinking about how fragile these are in the current systems in which we work. I was just thinking of the reality of the values in relation to what we are able to practice...*

*These are such important values, but for some of them, I was thinking to myself, how could I actually do that, with all the other demands? It's interesting to think about the values in the context of the obstacles to those values.*

*Maybe what we can say is: what we commit to is to strive to live into these values as opposed to claiming something impossible and untrue, that we embody these completely.*

*Although we acknowledge these are impossible to achieve, I don't find these oppressive. I find them as something to try to live to, which I think is what values always are in a way. So kind of your guiding ethos, which is negotiated in different contexts. I have this image of when you are weaving a basket. If we are all jointly making this amazing basket - these values are the things that give the shape. And in doing this work together we are constantly weaving it. Sometimes having to unpick. Make a few knots here, throw out a piece of that. So it's a thing that is constantly being made, being woven.*

*These 'values' (i.e. the ones we identified in the process of making a pamphlet, Box 1) do not feel authentic to us when listed in summary like this. In reality, the values and practices we navigate with are messy, contradictory and incomplete.*

*There's something missing. They're all very neat. They're all very pretty and perfect. What's not here is the in-between, the contradictions and roughness. It doesn't capture the resistance, the pain, the hurt, the rubbing up, the daring to speak out.*

*Some of these nice 'values' words, I am so sick of them. Like 'transformative' – it's just not true, it's not actually happening. You know, because these words have been so appropriated.*

*I think CJN has been a bit braver than that. We value taking risk. And sticking our necks out a bit. I'm not sure how we capture that. But there's something about consciously creating or not shying away from discomfort, and trying to sit with it and not just brush it away or smooth it over.*

This theme of an *ethical value of 'staying with' discomfort, contradiction and tension*, and of the willingness to take risks, was a recurring theme in the discussion. This resonates with findings from other researchers that suggest that engaging productively with tensions can be a generative stimulus for learning and change – whereas ignoring or suppressing them can block and undermine attempts to bring about transformative contributions (Chambers et al., 2022; Turnhout et al., 2020; West et al., 2022). The theme of *dealing with contradictions* is elaborated further by focus group participants:

*We're sitting in a context where we're very aware of the contradictions, but we haven't solved all of those contradictions or found ways of addressing them all. But I think we hold a commitment to 'staying with' those contradictions.*

*We see all that is still wrong and unfair, in ocean governance generally and in the relationships between researchers and coastal communities specifically. We can't become numb or resigned to this. We don't just accept these unfair things as inevitable. We stay critical of them, stay uncomfortable about them. We have to carry on with the work anyway, doing what we can to shift things even though we know it's just 'a drop in the ocean'. It's part of reflexivity I suppose but it's the next level – having a hyper awareness of all the contradictions and inadequacies, without becoming paralysed.*

*We value that risk taking, and we acknowledge and we practice the value of not hiding from the discomfort and contradictions.*

*While we aim for reciprocity with the communities we also know it's full of contradictions - we say we respect [the fishers'] local knowledge but then if we were to take that to a logical conclusion we should be budgeting and insisting to pay them a seriously respectful stipend, paying for their experience and expertise at the same rate as we are paid for our experience and expertise.*

This theme about the contradictions between the values we strive for and the profound constraints to these crystallised much of the discussion on *the question of fair and ethical compensation for community-based co-researchers*. There are major tensions inherent in the question of how academic researchers, from their position of relative but constrained power, financially compensate non-academic co-researchers for their time and knowledge. The language and principles of engaged TD research emphasise the *co-production* of knowledge with *co-researchers*, and yet community-based co-

researchers are not ever compensated at the same rate as professional researchers. At times, the university's institutional requirements and processes for paying co-researchers are onerous and even degrading. There is no simple solution to this reality, and the ethical considerations related to how to approach the payment of stipends or 'honoraria' are complex, as reflected in the focus group extracts below:

*We're grappling with inequality in our society in all manifestations - capitalism, patriarchy, racism - and how this influences all of our relationships.*

*I feel we are in an industry in which we are middle management and we are exploiting the good will or the desperation of people for some change, so they agree to take part in research with us, but there would always be a point at which we wouldn't work for nothing.*

*As soon as we establish contractual relationships with people we alter in some way the nature of the relationship.*

*We recognise and reject the inequality between knowledges and the unfair way that some knowledges are rewarded and recognised over others, but then fall back to using the same mechanisms that values knowledge financially.*

*We're actually not changing the inequality of knowledges but that's the contradiction that I think we have to live with. We live within the system that we critique.*

*This woman told me she's not keen to work with researchers or NGOs any more. She feels like outsiders don't respect communities' time, because they think that because people want their rights and they care passionately about these issues, that they will just come to endless workshops. But no one ever thinks about how you got to the meeting. What you had to organise at home to be able to attend. What else you needed to do that day. How are you compensating for the income and time that you're losing for spending a day at that meeting?*

*I have been trying to employ [name redacted] who I would defer to any day - her knowledge of working in certain ways in different communities, she knows far more than any of us. I had to fight to get her employed on a one-month contract because she couldn't supply a matric certificate. She is 60 years old. The university fought me on this and eventually they forced her to go to do an affidavit at the police station. I found that a violence on her.*

*When we are able to use research funds to pay co-researchers, a myriad of other ethical questions come up. Who should be paid, how much should they be paid, how is this rate decided, what kinds of participation are compensated? How do we ensure that paying one community member does not cause conflict with other community members? If we pay a certain amount for research participation, will this complicate things for future researchers or project partners who are not able to pay that same amount? Are our relationships to be reduced to financial value, does this undermine the other kinds of value being generated through our engagements? But even though we get other kinds of value from this work, would we ever be willing to do this for free?*

*There was an example where I thought I'd give something to someone for their time given to a shared research process, some material amount, and they said no thank you, my relationship with you does not require you to do this for me because once you pay me for my time that then I can't ask you for help again without you thinking I'm expecting payment.*

*Some civil society groups resist payment for their activism. They have articulated the harm that money can do to their movements. They say 'we must not send the message to our communities that you have to wait for money from the university before you can do anything about your situation! And you mustn't think that meetings always have to take place in fancy venues.*

*Our one research project will not fix these deep inequalities and injustices. What can we do to shift things that are within our power to shift; and how do we remain positive and hopeful when we are faced constantly with the enormity of structural injustice?*

What emerges from this ethical dilemma about the payment of co-researchers is a scholar-activist ethic of *contextually sensitive respect*. This resonates with what Cockburn and Cundill (2018) articulated as “developing an ethical sense”, and what Caniglia et al. (2023) describe as a capacity to “traverse principles and situations with discernment” (p. 499). In this way, ethically engaged research is the opposite of a tick-box exercise. In addition to really understanding each context is the *practice of including co-researchers in discussions about what is fair and appropriate*. Ethically engaged researchers take on the additional work and risk of being transparent and bringing people into conversations about project budgets and financial considerations;

they have to accept the discomfort of taking responsibility for project decisions that feel unfair or disrespectful. This is the messy contradiction researchers in this context must face and tolerate. We cannot hide behind university procedures and protocols as if we have no power, but we also have to be pragmatic and practical about the limits of what it is possible to shift. This relates to what West and Schill (2022) refer to as “practical wisdom” – bringing one’s skills of “reflexivity and deliberation to bear on the practical necessity of acting in the situation at hand” (p. 9), reflected in the focus group extracts below:

*There is a kind of negotiating and shared decision making that is deeply contextual, that is at the heart of an ethical engaged research practice.*

*It is contextual and with me, the conversation about not wanting payment arose in a conversation where someone was positioning me as a comrade, not as a scholar. So maybe in addition to reading the context, is thinking about who is deciding what the value of these relationships are and how are those decisions made? We are pushed by the governmentality of our university's procedures to decide for people. We should push back.*

*The knowledge hierarchy and its valuation in the market is imposed on these relationships and that's unfair. I think we can do more than just follow procedures – but this means taking responsibility for our decisions and not being able to fall back on ‘that’s just the way things are done’.*

*I don't think there's a one-size-fits-all all ethical approach to paying people. I think it's a case-by-case kind of thing, where we have to be reflexive and ask ourselves: ‘in **this** circumstance what is required?’*

*If we are to do this engaged scholarship work, we have to really put in the time and effort to understand where people are coming from and what each situation requires; and then figure out if it is possible to meet the needs of the situation, within the constraints of the project and the university.*

*When we hit the wall in terms of being able to pay fishers an advance for their travel costs ahead of the workshop, we [the researchers] just had to pay them out of our own pockets and claim the money back from the project later, once we had the signed receipts from all the participants. If anything goes wrong, if we send someone money and they don't turn up to the workshop, or if we lose any of the documentation, we know*

*we will not get that money back. We have to take that risk - we can't expect our project partners to carry the costs.*

*One of the things we have done is to fund data and airtime [for SSFs] since 2020. This has been full of tension and contradiction and yet it has created a LOT of possibility for communication and relationships. It is a way of getting research funds to people but not in the form of stipends, but as an investment in small-scale fisher capacity to organise, mobilise and learn together. An important question for engaged researchers then might be 'How are you using resources at your disposal to remove obstacles to people connecting?'*

There are some clear experiences and reflections shared above that point to some of the obstacles to ethically engaged research that originate directly in research institutional systems and practices. The paying of stipends to community-based co-researchers or the paying of local small businesses or self-employed people, such as caterers, taxi drivers or guest houses, is greatly constrained by financial management systems in our universities and financial reporting requirements to research funders. Some university financial procedures can place almost insurmountable bureaucratic obstacles in front of people. For example, requiring that a local caterer register on the university supplier database, provide tax clearance and Black Economic Empowerment certificates, and other due diligence steps, which are required for ethical financial accountability, is an almost impossible expectation. This paradoxically results in unethical impacts when, for example, a sustainability research project caters for a workshop with fast food from a chain restaurant rather than with local food made by a self-employed caterer – simply because the local caterer is unable to register on or comply with the university's supplier database system.

The undiscerning application of ethical principles like anonymity becomes paradoxically unethical in a context of co-production of knowledge where crediting people's contributions as equal and valid knowledge holders are important. Yet even here this needs to be decided and negotiated on a case-by-case basis, as sometimes there is risk for people speaking out publicly about certain things. This has been recognised and acknowledged within the One Ocean Hub code of practice, which refers to itself as a "living document" and aims to prevent situations where "[ethics] protocols erect barriers between researchers and researched persons" and "ethics

protocols can erode agency” (One Ocean Hub, 2022, p. 5).

The tension and the sense of falling short and inevitably failing to live up to the ideals of transformative research takes a toll on scholar-activist researchers. Playing a responsive activist role on top of all the other academic roles is extremely demanding, especially when a lot of scholar-activist work remains undervalued or invisible within academic spaces, as expressed by focus group participants below:

*One thing that I found really hard in the practice and principles is reciprocity and being responsive and in service to others. I felt like I was watching things fall between my fingers, not having the capacity to hold these values true, so I had a constant sense of failure. My personal experience of watching the work just grow exponentially without feeling I had any control over it - I struggled with this. It cost me a lot to try and do those things and I tried like hell to do them but failed.*

*I have done this kind of work as a practitioner based in an NGO before, and many of the tensions are the same, but doing this work as a university-based researcher, there's a huge added pressure of feeling like we're doing multiple jobs all the time. I think the sort of extra work of justifying that your work really is research is an additional demand that has been difficult.*

Ethically engaged research also has to take into account the wellbeing of the researchers. The added pressure and strain engaged researchers experience while trying to do the ethical thing in deeply complex, and at times, paradoxically unethical contexts and juggling multiple roles and positionalities must be taken seriously.

When scholar-activists are called upon to move from responsive, engaged collaborative work into the more individual academic mode or the reporting mode required by research funders, it often feels like an ethical challenge. There is no denying that even the most ethical and collaborative research partnership is extractive because researchers use it to build their careers or to meet the demands of their professional lives. In terms of reporting to funders, when required to report on *impact*<sup>74</sup>,

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<sup>74</sup> See Appendix D of this PhD by Publication, which offers an example of how we as researchers are called on to report impact – the example is an impact case for the One Ocean Hub and the UKRI/United Kingdom Research Excellence Framework (UK REF) framework.

offer up *guidelines, recommendations, or lessons* or talk about *scalability*, as scholar-activists, we struggle to make these kinds of claims with ethical integrity when we know how contextual, relational, tenuous, small or incomplete our impact actually is, given the scale of the challenges that we are facing. For example, in Pereira (forthcoming<sup>75</sup>) I reported on ‘wins’ made by scholar-activist coalitions with SSFs to the environmental legislation, but also noted these ‘wins’ may be short-lived and hard to maintain, given the onslaught of oil and gas interests and the dominance of the blue economy designs and paradigm. Researchers in the CJN focus group reflected on these and related complexities:

*What I struggle with is the bean counting. When we have TD research meetings and people say ‘I did this and I published that’ it drives me up the wall – it’s like people see every engagement with communities as something they can add to their list of outputs. I find it really unethical when people run a workshop and the first thing they are thinking is ‘Oh there’s a paper in there, oh there’s a paper in here’. When you are focused on your own academic career and outputs, that puts people and engagements into boxes, and my work with people cannot be put into boxes.*

*I am drawn to TD research because what it promises is this much more engaged way of working with communities, and it promises or commits to these engagements as something of central and inherent value. But then when it comes to reporting and counting outputs, and we are pressured to make big claims about our impact, it starts to feel as though in the academic context the engagement is just a means to an end, and this feels unethical to me.*

*There is a generative tension, and maybe also a burdensome tension, in being part of a research team or collective where some people have worked for many years in a particular sector, and others are new to a sector, and where there are different approaches, or people trying approaches that others have tried before. Generosity and openness are values that are required to ‘keep us together’ in a loose collective, along with clear individual ethical-political boundaries that each person must hold for themselves, so that individual ethical integrity is not compromised for the sake of ‘getting along’. Working collectively and relationally takes a lot of conscious and reflexive work,*

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<sup>75</sup> See Paper 5 of this PhD by papers.

*to ensure these tensions do not cause a fragmenting of relationships. Ethical scholar-activists, who are inherently 'insider-outsiders' in their positionality, have to learn how to hold both optimism and openness to shifting power and changing dominant systems from the inside, and solidarity with the critical counter-hegemonic movements at the margins of society.*

*There is a commitment to learning with each other and also with others and I think that's really important. Sometimes when I look back I can only imagine how annoying it must have been at times that a whole lot of people came into a field that they knew quite frankly nothing about and had some crazy ideas about what they thought might be useful. And your generosity at still engaging us should be recognised - it was very powerful in making the group stay together because you know there are many people who would have just disengaged, or distanced themselves.*

*It wasn't very hard for me to keep working with you because your commitment to the fishers was so evident and consistent. There were times your stance challenged me and was uncomfortable for me, and I had to figure out when do I just stay open and receptive to other views and ways of doing things, and when do I speak out to challenge others, to stay true to my own ethics and experience?*

*I had to let you try all those things, and be open to your approaches and your optimism, but to be true to something ethically in me or in my experience of engaging I knew I had to chart a different course.*

*There is a recognition and trust among us that we have a common commitment that is sincere. It might not be expressed in the same ways, but it is sincerely held. And we trust these intentions in one another even if they are expressed differently. And built into that is generosity.*

As seen above, much of what was identified together in this discussion were tensions, discomforts and unresolved contradictions in our work. This challenging conversation reflects a messy, incomplete, yet far more honest picture of the values required to ethically navigate the practice of engaged scholar-activist TD research. Page (2022) comments that "to date, the ethical issues that arise during the co-production process have been dealt with on an ad hoc and in situ basis" (p. 2). As shown by the CJN researchers above, this is not an easy-to-navigate process for sustainability science researchers committed to co-engagement and the community partners they work with in scholar-activist coalitions.

## 6.6 Discussion: Guidelines, Principles or Trail-Markers?

Page (2022) proposes that there is a need to make the ethical aspects of co-production much more explicit both before and during the research process. From the field of health sciences, she draws in a set of principles taken from earlier medical research ethics which she describes as the four moral principles of non-maleficence, beneficence, justice and autonomy (since their development in the late 1970s). This was later expanded beyond these to be relevant in a public health context and included other principles such as health maximisation, efficiency and proportionality (meaning balancing individual freedom against the public good). These were subsequently developed through a consensus framework for ethical collaboration in healthcare, that added principles such as benefit and welfare, respect for peoples, solidarity and safety and sustainability (Page, 2022). She goes on to note, however, that “ethical challenges can arise when the application of these principles are considered from the perspectives of different stakeholders with differing priorities” and advises that the principles “can act as discussion points in the planning stage of co-production and the resolution of conflicts that may arise” (Page, 2022, p. 2). In other words, she endorses an approach of ongoing deliberation on research ethics in co-engaged research. With this as a background, I am also conscious of some important recent articulations of the particular ethical considerations and capacities that engaged sustainability research requires. These include the development of an “everyday ethical sense” (Cockburn & Cundill, 2018), which refers to the implicit, practical ways that people navigate ethical dilemmas in their daily lives. Rather than being guided solely by formal ethical frameworks, this sense emerges from lived experience, relationships and social context. It involves using ones’ discretion rather than following an ethics recipe. An example of this might be if a research participant coming to a workshop misses their bus, and has to ask you to buy them another ticket to attend the workshop. A rigid ethical protocol may guide you to disburse an equal stipend to all participants. An everyday ethical sense would lead you to consider the context – has this participant repeatedly missed the bus and asked for extra money? Is this the first time it has happened? How far from the bus stop does this participant live, and have you considered their travel time to reach public transport? Navigating these kinds of questions with discretion is to use ones’ everyday ethical sense. Other elements of an expanded consideration of ethics include a feminist ethos of care and reflexivity (Staffa

et al., 2021), examples of reflexive methods for navigating the ethical-political dimensions of knowledge production (West & Schill, 2022) and principles drawn from “virtue ethics” (Caniglia et al., 2023). There is also the need for more resonance with Indigenous ethics in research which, among others, “calls for the non-Indigenous scholar to adjourn disbelief and, in the pause, consider alternative possibilities” (Kovach, 2009, p. 29) and Indigenous research ethics principles such as “relational accountability, communality of knowledge, reciprocity and benefit sharing” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 22; Wilson & Wilson, 2013; Kara, 2018), which are some of the main issues discussed by researchers in the focus group.

While many of the latter expansions of earlier medical ethics framed formal ethics principles and the advice from activist, feminist and Indigenous scholars resonate with the issues highlighted above, I hesitate to now offer yet another list of guidelines, principles or recommendations, given all that has been discussed above about the inevitable shortcomings of such lists. Perhaps it is more helpful to think about some suggested markers, like rough cairns, along the unfinished, often indiscernible, path(s) of ethically engaged research, which I offer in Box 2 below.

**Box 2: Some cairns\* along the path to an expanded ethics for engaged scholar-activist research**

*\*A cairn is a rough pile of rocks, used to mark a trail or to indicate which direction to turn*

**ETHICS OF 'FINDING A WAY' THROUGH RIGID INSTITUTIONS**

Also known as “activist administrative practices” – respectfully challenging and raising awareness of colleagues in university administration and funder organisations about the mismatch between their systems and the needs of community-based research partners. In reality, what this often means is that individual researchers take on financial and other risks.

**ETHICS OF BEING CONTEXTUALLY RESPECTFUL AND CARE-FUL**

Taking responsibility for responding sensitively to each unique situation as it arises, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach to ethics; ‘caring’ through practical action and active political engagement (de la Bellacasa, 2017).

**ETHICS OF HOLDING CONTRADICTIONS, EMBRACING DISCOMFORT, AND STAYING WITH GENERATIVE TENSION**

Resonant with West et al.’s (2020, p. 305) framework of relational research as being “receptive to complexity and ambiguity”, this aspect of expanded ethics recognises the capacity to see and accept contradictions and not become numb to them or paralysed by them. As a departure from the ethical principle of ‘do no harm’, the importance of critical, honest and generative tension is recognised. It entails staying reflexive and accountable to make sure that “productive” tension between colleagues or groups does not tip over into destructive fragmentation.

**ETHICS OF BALANCING COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL INTEGRITY**

When tensions arise in multi-actor networks where different approaches and strategies to bring about change conflict with one another, a capacity for balancing “openness to others” with “being true to oneself” is important to nurture – reflexive practices of making these tensions visible, and trusted companions with whom to “offload and debrief”, are necessary.

**ETHICS OF VALUING RELATIONSHIPS OVER DELIVERABLES**

The turn towards relationality as a transformative feature of engaged sustainability science (West et al., 2020) entails the valuing of relationships and processes over deliverables and outputs. It takes courage to stand by this principle, as it goes against funder and academic incentives; however, there is important work to be done in expanding approaches to evaluation to include the recognition of “relationships and networks” as a measure of impact. The invisible work of nurturing and growing strong relationships of trust and solidarity among diverse groups of people is sometimes the most important work in engaged research.

**ETHICS OF CARE, COMRADESHIP AND COMPANIONSHIP**

A crucial part of transforming research cultures is by establishing spaces of trust, vulnerability, care and companionship among researchers. This is essential for the wellbeing of individual researchers and is a rejection of competitive, individualised career-focused research cultures of the past.

Some examples of how these ethical trail-markers (in Box 2) have been put into practice include:

- By directing research funds into weekly mobile data packages for a large group of SSFs to strengthen solidarity, knowledge sharing and collective action of fishers and researchers, via mobile chat groups.
- Through the co-engaged development of a “research solidarity agreement”<sup>76</sup> to replace the standard research consent form. This agreement is very specific about what all the parties in the research engagement (e.g. workshop, focus group discussion, interview) expect and commit to (for example the researcher commits to sharing a draft of any material that is to be published based on this workshop with you before it is published; the community representative commits to share the outcomes of this workshop with others in their community organisation). There are always two copies made of this agreement – one for the facilitator/co-researcher and one for the participant/co-researcher.
- By giving close attention to practices and pedagogies for co-engaged research – for example through mixed media feedback from research engagements – accompanying a traditional workshop report with voice notes in multiple languages, infographics, illustrations and discussion prompts – and through finding various ways to re-direct research funds directly towards supporting the actions and agendas identified by community-based research partners.
- Through explaining and justifying to an ethics committee concerned about the risks being incurred through our research, the need for an expanded understanding of risk in the context of scholar-activist work with human rights defenders.

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<sup>76</sup> See Appendix A of this PhD by publication which outlines this and other ethics tools developed for this co-engaged study.

## 6.7 Conclusion

Engaged knowledge co-production for addressing socio-ecological crises is now a well-funded and widely supported mode of research, embraced by research and development funders and policymakers seeking to invest in research with “real world” impact (see for example Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) projects including One Ocean Hub<sup>77</sup> and International Science Council [ISC], 2024<sup>78</sup>). Despite the widespread acknowledgement within academia that the challenges of our times require TD engagement, and despite the important progress being made in sustainability and other sciences towards understanding the relational, political and transgressive implications of this kind of research, it remains difficult to conduct such scholarship amid the continuity of mono-disciplinary positivist thinking and practice in higher education (Lotz-Sisitka, et al., 2015).

Many researchers navigating the contested ethical-political terrain of engaged sustainability science without a lot of prior experience or guidance, are learning and developing appropriate methods for engaged research in practice by *doing* it – even as they encounter obstacles in entrenched institutional systems and cultures along the way – as is the case with CJN researchers outlined above. As stated by Page (2022), there is a need for an empirical understanding of co-engaged research ethics practices. Overall, it is important that learnings and reflections such as those shared from the CJN, however messy and unfinished, are shared more widely so that researchers involved in co-engaged sustainability praxis and the advancing of blue justice can build a clearer collective picture of what ethically engaged research actually looks like. This paper is one humble contribution to this rich, complex, emergent field, particularly linking to those works that foreground ethics as relational, ethical-political dimensions within TD sustainability science that require feminist ethics of care, reciprocity, benefit sharing, social and environmental justice and the communality of knowledge.

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/global-challenges-research-fund/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://council.science/our-work/science-missions/>

## CHAPTER 7

### SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1 Research for/as Blue Justice

When looking across the five papers presented in this study, within the contextual and theoretical framings provided in Chapter 1, a detailed and nuanced picture of scholar-activist praxis for blue justice emerges. In this closing chapter, I will draw out some key lessons and insights towards answering the main research question for this study: *How can scholar-activist transdisciplinary research praxis contribute to advancing blue justice in transformative ocean governance in South Africa?* This study has put forward an analysis of scholar-activist praxis and of blue justice made visible and advanced through this praxis. Therefore, I hope that this study offers some guidance – practical and conceptual – for marine researchers wanting to extend their transdisciplinary (TD) work into political solidarity with social movements of oppressed people struggling for blue justice. This closing discussion will lift a synthesis of findings from across the co-produced archive as curated within this thesis.

At a Coastal Justice Network (CJN) reflexive planning meeting in April 2021, I facilitated a discussion on articulating a vision for the CJN – at this stage we were still a very loose and undefined group of researchers with a broad set of shared values and orientations towards scholar-activism. The vision that was co-developed through this discussion was as follows: *“The Coastal Justice Network is about honouring relationships and making space for a chorus of voices in ocean decision making. It wants to contribute towards redressing the past and imagining a better future, for ocean governance and ocean research.”*

Following Weber et al.’s (2023) conceptualisation of co-produced knowledge for environmental justice, the scholar-activist space of the CJN also holds a vision to “explicitly help work towards a desired future that is more environmentally just, helping to support alternative-building while aiming to act as an alternative in and of itself” (p. 41). This vision of research for/as blue justice is extended through the methodology of

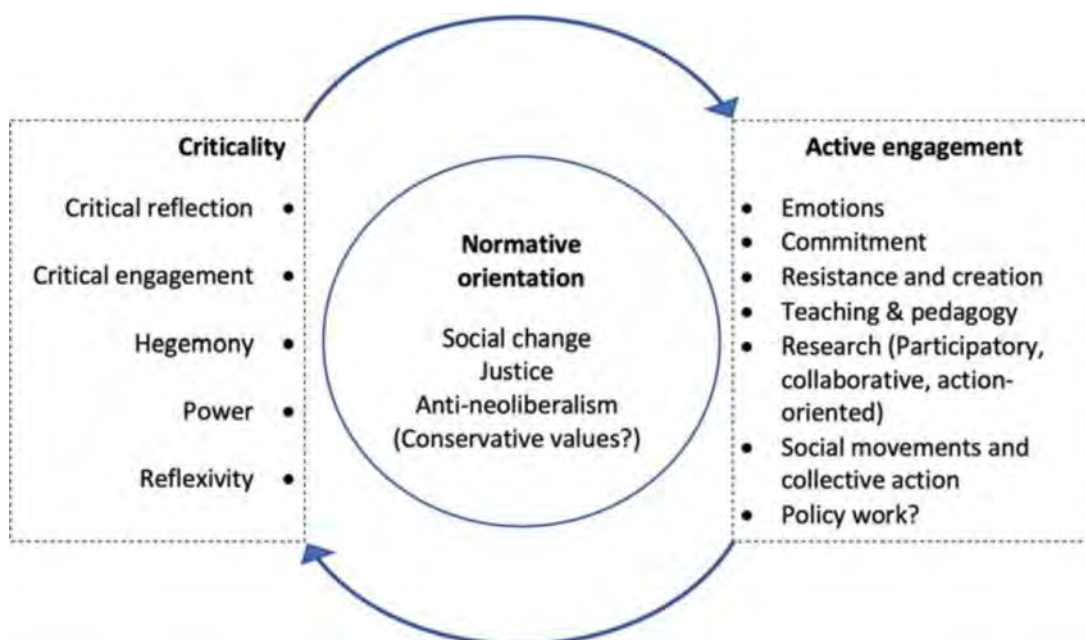
the co-constructed activist archive. As explained in Chapter 1, this archive serves a primary purpose as an archive to support and enhance learning and movement building for blue justice and a secondary purpose as the data record for this individual thesis.

This vision goes beyond a TD commitment to knowledge co-production for the sake of an improved or more legitimate basis for environmental governance. The CJA vision articulated above contains a yearning for radical change while simultaneously being humble in its reach and scope. It centres relationships and voice, seeks justice and redress in both ocean governance and research practice and aims to contribute to imagining more just futures.

This orientation to research within a TD hub for transformed ocean governance is a response to the layers of environmental injustices that small-scale fishers (SSFs) and other coastal knowledge holders are subjected to through the implementation of a blue economy (Blythe et al. 2023; le Fleur et al., 2023; Sowman et al., 2023; Chapter 5 in this thesis) – such as the entrenched racial, spatial, economic and other injustices inflicted through colonialism and apartheid. But it is also a response to the particular cognitive and epistemic injustices that SSFs and other coastal communities have been subjected to through scientific research practices of the past. Small-scale fishers (SSFs) have their livelihoods and customary fishing practices comprehensively regulated via scientific fisheries and biodiversity assessments that exclude their knowledges and rights (Auld & Feris, 2022; Isaacs et al., 2023). Offering just one example of this challenge, Jerry Mngomezulu, the chairperson of the Kosi Bay Displaced Communities Organisation, shared his reflections on the role that research has played in dispossessing him and his community of their land due to its enclosure within the iSimangaliso Wetland Park: “You could fill a whole hall with the number of theses and reports that were written about the ecosystems and species of Kosi Bay. Those research papers were later used to build the fences that keep me and my community out” (Jerry Mngomezulu, personal communication, 22 November 2022). With this history of exclusion, research for just ocean governance must take very seriously the call for a “rethinking of the consciousness and purpose of research” (Canella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 49), and to assert that “research cannot appropriately be practiced without questions of power always being addressed” (p. 50). In this

context, developing ethical, solidarity-based research relationships that aim to enhance the liberatory justice agendas of oppressed ocean communities are commitments to redress the harms of past extractive and anti-social research.

Bashiri (2024), through an extensive systematic review of scholar-activist research, has developed a useful conceptual framework for scholar-activism, based on the accounts of self-identified scholar-activists writing about their praxis. In his conceptual framework, he identifies three core components of scholar-activism, namely **criticality**, **normative orientation** and **active engagement** (Figure 7.1).



**Figure 7.1: Conceptual framework for scholar-activism**

Source: developed by Bashiri (2024, pg. 87)

Within this framework, **criticality** encompasses critical thinking and reflexivity. Bashiri (2024) identified that scholar-activists foreground a critical examination of, and resistance towards, hegemony within academia and society. They recognise the hidden, taken-for-granted power dynamics that saturate the networks of relationships in which we are all enmeshed. Scholar-activists are often involved in efforts to destabilise power imbalances and support the reclaiming of power through centring and amplifying marginalised voices (Maxey, 1999). The **normative orientation** of scholar-activists is most often explicitly for social change, justice and anti-

neoliberalism. Scholar-activists identify their **active engagement** in terms of engaging with emotions (as opposed to the ideals of objective, supposedly neutral positivist science); engaging with collective action and social movements; and engaging through participatory, collaborative and action-oriented research (Bashiri, 2024). This framework resonates closely with my own scholar-activist identity and praxis and that of the CJN as surfaced in this thesis.

## **7.2 Resistance as a Productive Source of Transformative Ocean Governance**

For this synthesis, I reread the CJN's archive through the conceptual framework for social transformation articulated by environmental justice scholars in the ACKnowl-EJ network (Rodríguez et al., 2023). This helped me to think about the important contributions of *resistance* enacted by marginalised coastal communities. The ACKnowl-EJ network proposes three considerations for just transformations for sustainability, as follows:

- Social transformation towards more sustainable futures often occurs as a result of conflict. Oppositional consciousness and resistance to hegemonic structures are a key element in the creation of alternative ways of being and doing.
- A perspective of conflict as productive, rather than something to be avoided, suggests the usefulness of a 'conflict transformation' approach that can address the root issues of ecological conflicts as a path towards transformations to sustainability.
- Radical alternatives are a form of resistance that advances a vision of what sustainable transformative processes could look like. (Rodríguez et al., 2023, pp. 7–8)

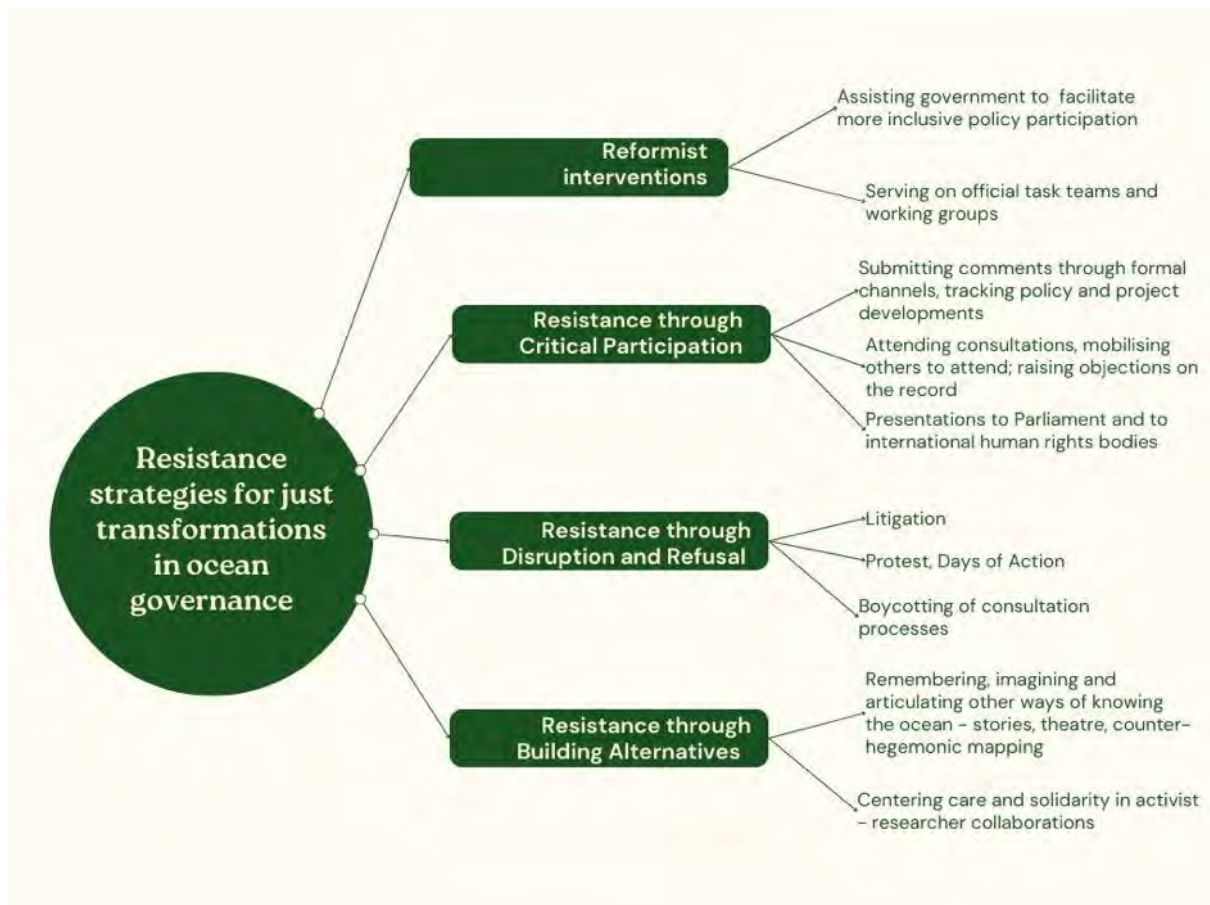
The many, intersectional and layered injustices that coastal communities, particularly SSFs face, are described in detail, particularly in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. These injustices are rendered invisible and unacknowledged in most formal ocean governance processes – a further source of injustice in itself – and this is the first stumbling block for a transformative ocean governance agenda. However, SSFs and their allies in grassroots environmental justice movements are not the passive victims of these injustices as the coastal justice archive and the papers in this thesis clearly show. Their

resistances are holding back the tide of blue (in)justice.

The distinction between “affirmative” and “transformative” approaches to change as articulated by Rodríguez et al. (2023; see Chapter 1) also resonates with the analysis of the coastal justice archive in this thesis. Whereas affirmative approaches – also called “reformist reforms” (Amini, 2017, p. 51) – try to bring about progressive changes within existing systems or institutions, transformative approaches aim to bring about radical changes at the root through the fundamental restructuring of social and institutional arrangements. The coastal justice archive reflects a wide spectrum of strategies for change – see Figure 7.2 below. As Chapter 3 explores, SSFs have consistently attempted to participate in the available formal participation channels for ocean governance. Scholar-activists have played a “reformist” role at times by offering guidance and support to government officials on how to improve their participatory processes. Small-scale fishers (SSFs) and their partners in civil society dedicated themselves to a significant **reformist intervention** by serving on the task team that developed the SSF policy (DAFF, 2012), and more recently on working groups for the Operations Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) process. Through **critical participation** by closely tracking and immersing ourselves in consultation processes related to the blue economy, alongside and in support of SSFs, we have learnt a huge amount about the fragmentation, dysfunction and contradiction inherent in ocean governance at present – an analysis shared in Chapter 3.

In addition to participating ‘inside’ these processes, there is an important ‘outside’ response. The **disruption and refusal** of unjust processes and unjust hegemonic power have been enacted through protest, boycotting and litigation – this is explored in detail in Chapter 5. Resistance to injustice through building alternatives is also a significant feature of the strategies reflected in the coastal justice archive. The development and practice of **alternative methods** for plural ocean governance discussions are explored in depth in Chapter 4 in the discussion of *Lalela uLwandle*. Co-designed methods and spaces for imagining and visioning alternative paradigms for ocean governance, which centre SSF knowledge and ocean relationships, are a critically hopeful form of resistance (Bozalek et al., 2013). The normative values of care and solidarity in scholar-activist TD research relationships (Aguilar et al., 2023; Bashiri, 2024; Staffa et al., 2022) are also a form of resistance against the individualism and

neoliberalism of mainstream academia. This has been critiqued by researchers who struggle to bridge the gap between individualised academic structures and the social and engaged approaches typical of scholar-activism (Chatterton et al., 2010; Clarke, 2021; Richter et al., 2021; Vally, 2021).



**Figure 7.2: Resistance strategies for just transformations in ocean governance**

I echo Rodríguez et al.'s (2023) emphasis on **resistance and conflict** as an important step towards sustainability transformations because this is an important departure from mainstream approaches towards environmental governance. The management tools that are prominent in contemporary ocean governance, such as a Marine Spatial Plan, aim for conflict avoidance and win-win solutions – sought through technical, apparently apolitical methods (Flannery et al., 2019; Tafon, 2017) that ultimately leave existing power hierarchies intact. There is a strong body of TD research aimed at transforming ocean governance (Franke et al., 2023; Lombard et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2020). While this research may lead to important and necessary improvements,

it does not show substantive engagement with the social movements pushing from the margins for just transformations in ocean governance.

Resistance as a catalyst for transformations can also be understood through Mouffe's (1999) concept of agonistic pluralism. Agonistic pluralism entails an embracing of disagreement and an incorporating of so-called radical perspectives into discourse – then allowing space to 'agonise' and disagree, pluralistically. The activism of SSFs and their partners in emerging movements for blue justice takes the form of agonistic pluralism. The demands of blue justice movements are anchored in an aspirational interpretation of the Constitution. They are not anarchic or seeking to reject or overthrow the present regime, but rather trying to figure out in the learning and practising of democracy, how to give meaning to the democratic framework which all ocean governance emerges from (Sutoris, 2022). Agonistic pluralism

... asserts that the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilise those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs. Far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence. (Mouffe, 1999, pp. 754–755)

This is relevant in terms of the assumptions inherent in environmental governance and the participatory and TD research approaches that focus on promoting solutions-oriented research for improved governance. This perspective seeks consensus and the ironing out of tensions towards rational decision making and can also view agonistic disagreement as threatening and destabilising. But, as Mouffe (1999) argues, space for conflict and tension is at the very heart of plural democracy. Scholar-activist TD research praxis that aims to contribute to the struggles of SSFs and their movements for blue justice needs to understand and position their work within an agonistic pluralism that can embrace resistance and tension – as surfaced and discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is a form of critical theory, which expanded from earlier forms of critical theory focusing on structural critique, and later forms of critical theory in the Habermasian tradition to democratic engagement that focused on consensus-seeking (Chambers, 2004). Instead, Mouffe and critical theorists in the "third generation" of critical theory (Chambers, 2004) recognise that power relations and

inequalities may always be present in social interactions; it is more productive to pursue democratic approaches that acknowledge and struggle with these power relations and acknowledge plurality, rather than ignore or smooth them over. Bashiri (2024) in his systematic review comments that scholar-activists tend to favour working with critical theoretical approaches. I have found the perspectives of Mouffe (1999) align with the environmental justice approaches of Rodríguez et al. (2023) – useful for more carefully characterising the type of critical theoretical engagement work that this thesis represents – although as mentioned in Chapter 1, I adopted a “low theory” approach to working with SSFs in solidarity through the scholar-activist work of the CJN.

This PhD has been a process of re-searching (looking again, and again, at...) my context and my practice, through the lenses of political ecology, environmental justice, social movement learning theory and scholar-activist approaches to transdisciplinarity; and then looking back at these theories through the lenses of my context and practice. In finding the language and frameworks in Rodríguez *et al*'s work on the productive role of resistance in just transformations, I felt greater confidence in my own practice of embracing and holding space for the contestation and resistance that activists bring to sustainability research. In looking again at theories of Blue Justice and transdisciplinary research, through the lenses of the co-produced activist archive, I see how it expands and deepens those theories. In this reciprocal, reflexive dance between theory and practice, I have grown to recognize, name and expand the theories that already live in me, as I alluded to in Chapter 1.

### **7.3 Characterising the Role of Coastal Justice Network Scholar- Activists in Relation to Blue Justice**

Throughout the chapters in this thesis, I have sought to surface the particular roles that we as scholar-activists in the CJN have played in support of the struggles of SSFs for blue justice. Writing these papers at different times, and with different areas of focus, has meant that different aspects of scholar-activist TD praxis have been emphasised in each of these pieces.

In Chapter 2, writing about how we as scholar-activists are part of the social movements struggling for blue justice, we highlighted some of the roles we play from

inside these movements, that may not be recognised or valued within existing academic systems. In addition to specific roles like “letter writing” and “resource mobilisation”, this chapter highlights the reflexive and challenging role that scholar-activists play in navigating the tricky politics of being accountable in multiple directions simultaneously. This paper also identified an important principle of scholar-activist TD praxis, which is to facilitate the kinds of enabling conditions that allow for different types of support and knowledge co-production to be leveraged by local activists when most needed – supporting a politics of resourcefulness (Derickson & Routledge, 2015) through which community partners can make demands of the research collaboration.

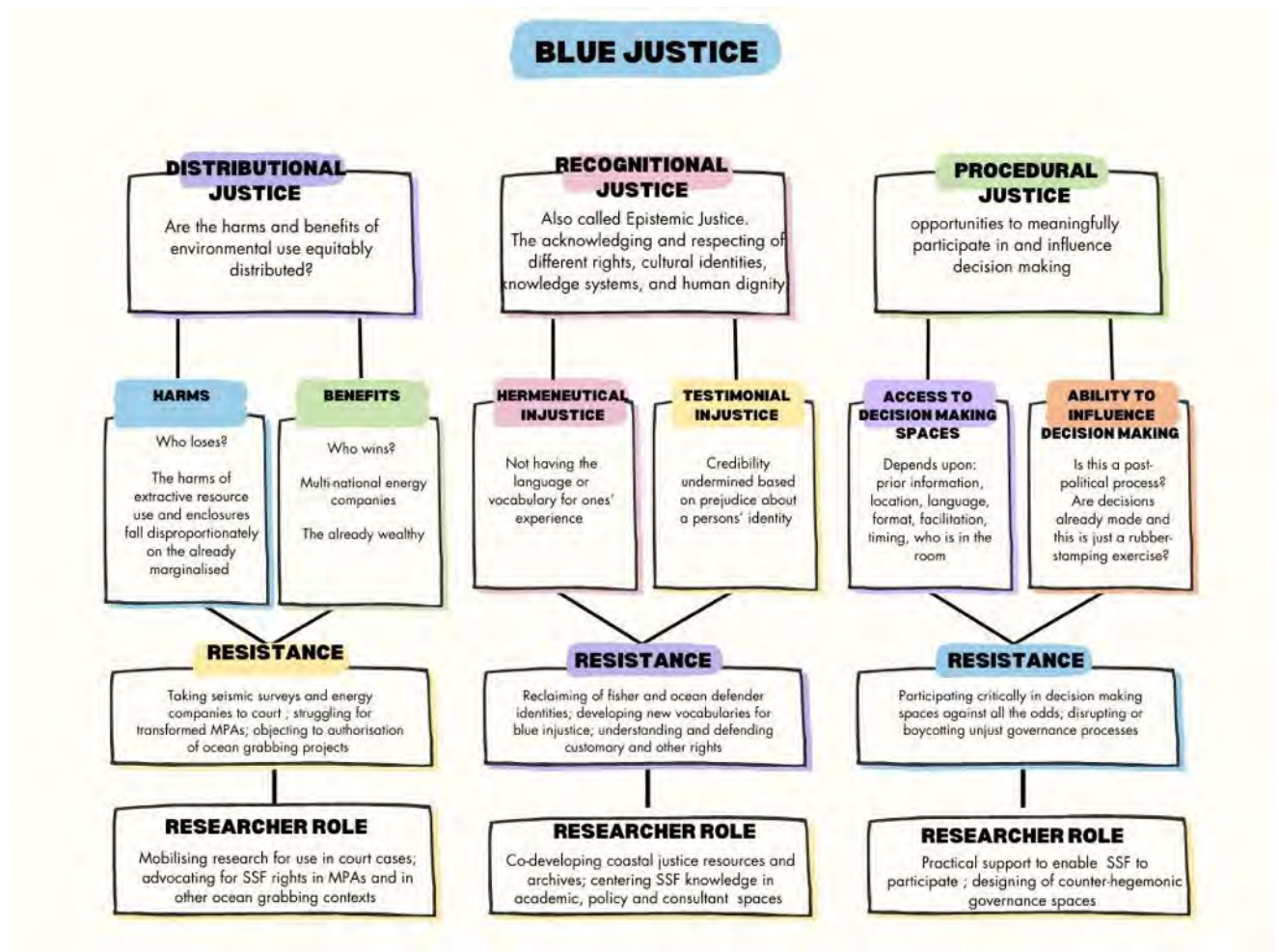
Chapter 3 highlighted the roles that TD scholar-activists can play in amplifying SSF voice in ocean governance participation and analysis, and in facilitating generative spaces for co-creating counter-hegemonic alternatives. This chapter details practising situated solidarities in particular sites of struggle (in this case, sites refer to particular policy processes and specific geographies). The networked approach of the SSF leaders and CJNI groups, allowed for focused workshops honing in on local struggles across a wide geographical spread – these were then amplified into broader activism, in dialogue with fishers from other regions and environmental justice organisations on a national scale.

Chapter 4 dived deeper into a particular methodological innovation, the Empatheatre approach to research-as-theatre-making, to explore what agonistic, plural ocean governance discussions – a chorus of voices – could really look like with *Lalela uLwandle*. It expanded on the role of TD scholar-activists in bridging the knowledge co-created through *Lalela uLwandle* into civil society resistance against offshore oil and gas explorations. This process contributed to opening the space for such approaches in the One Ocean Hub and catalysed early on in the CJNI’s work.

Chapter 5 explored blue injustice, as expressed and resisted by SSFs, and how knowledge co-production with scholar-activists supports these struggles. The writing of these three papers, which are ‘deep dives’ into the co-constructed coastal justice archive, are intended as scholar-activist contributions to the SSF blue justice movements described in these papers. Centring and valorising SSF knowledge and contributions towards just ocean governance transformations within peer-reviewed academic journals can hopefully play a small role in countering the glaring absence of

SSF knowledge and perspectives in most ocean governance literature.

Many scholar-activist contributions to blue justice discussed in this thesis are a kind of "praxis epistemology" (Amini 2017) – brought about through the co-design of activities and resources that are needed in a particular moment and place of struggle. This echoes Vally's (2021) description of scholar-activist "praxis epistemology" which "have allowed some communities the tools to inform, direct, own and use research to claim a space in the formal policy arena and to demand accountability from state actors" (p. 60). Chapter 5 showed that such a process does reveal different types of injustice; the data revealed that SSFs were dealing with a complex combination of historical injustices and contemporary challenges around distributional injustices, recognitional injustice (which included epistemic and hermeneutic injustices) and procedural injustice. These injustices led SSFs and partners to turn to the legal justice system through various court cases. Here I showed how this relates to TD scholar-activist roles. Figure 7.3 below is a conceptual diagram linking the different types of blue injustice to the modes of resistance to these and the particular roles that TD scholar-activists can play concerning these resistances.



**Figure 7.3: Dimensions of blue justice, resistance, and examples of researcher roles in support of resistance efforts**

Drawing on evidence in the CJN scholar-activist archive and synthesising the different papers in this thesis, Figure 7.3 points out that in responding to different forms of injustice and resistance, researchers can respond to the following:

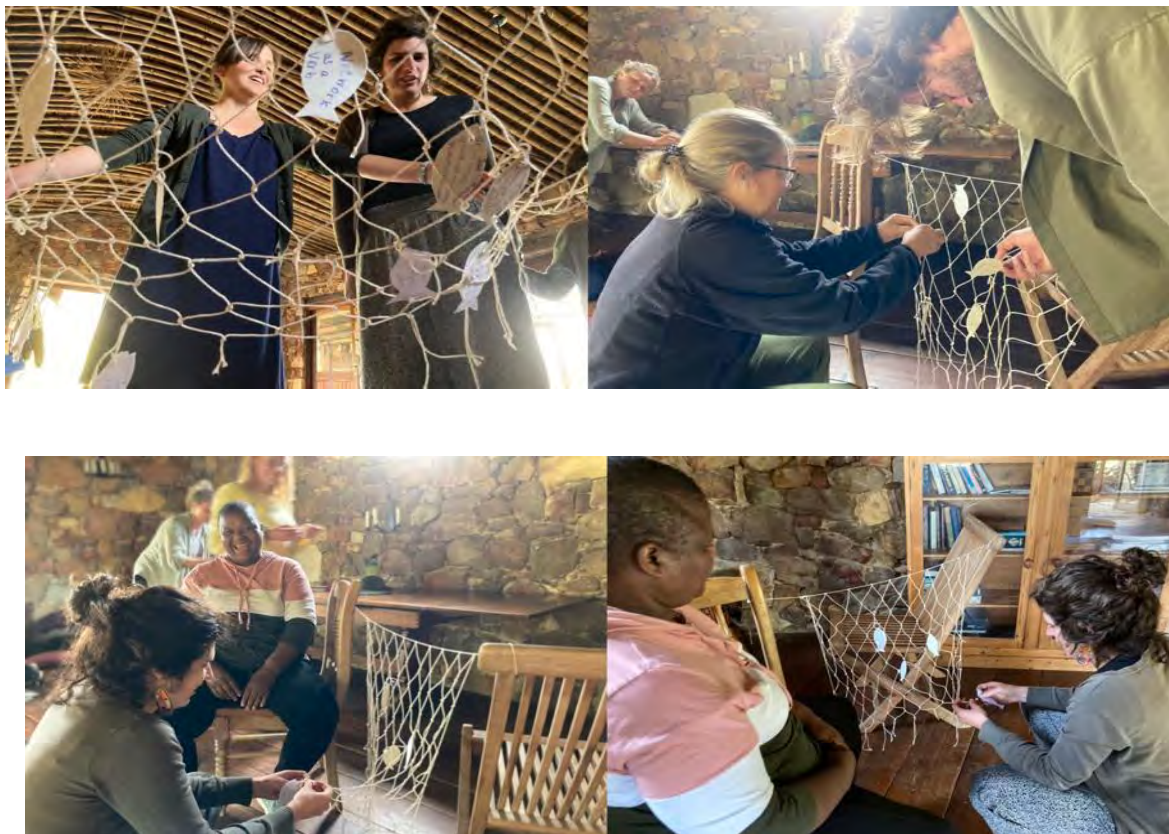
- **Distributional injustices** through mobilising research for use in court cases, advocating for SSF rights in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and other ocean-grabbing contexts.
- **Recognitional injustices** through co-developing coastal justice resources and archives, centring SSF knowledge in academic, policy and consultant spaces, providing translations and accessible versions of policy materials etc.

- **Procedural injustices** through providing practical support for SSFs to participate meaningfully in ocean governance processes, designing counter- hegemonic methods that allow for pluralism and meaningful participation so that SSF voices are not absent or excluded from such processes.

In addition to all the distinct roles identified in the papers in this thesis, and summarised above, there are two additional overarching dimensions of scholar-activist praxis for blue justice that I would like to lift out.

The first is '**net-work**': this refers to the "transformative space making" (Marshall et al., 2018) that is spoken about in Chapter 2, through which fishers can make their own demands of the research project and through which it is possible to imagine and experience alternative paradigms for ocean governance. Net-work refers to the actual labour, thought, care, love and rigour that goes into "holding space" with generative possibility – it can tolerate conflict and can span diverse strategies and agendas without fragmenting. Paulo Freire consistently asked how we who enter oppressed communities can labour in ways that respect the wisdom, cultures and histories of the oppressed; how can we support the creation of conditions for greater democratic life within oppressed communities? (Darder & Yiamouyiannis, 2009). In the CJN, there was an explicit intention towards opening a space of possibility for knowledge co-production and co-activism to be called for or leveraged when needed. We have seen this in action in our networks – where partners (fishers or other environmental justice activists) who know who the CJN is and know the kinds of work we can do call on us to do particular tasks. Records in the CJN scholar-activist archive show that for example, I may be asked to write something that is deemed strategically important for the wider network, or to convene a meeting of specific stakeholders at a specific time. For example, a fisher may ask: "Please make sure [specific government official] is at our workshop next month" or "Hello everyone. My opinion is that we should write to the parliamentary portfolio committee to raise the issue of our exclusion from the OEMP meetings. Who is in agreement? Who is available to help write that letter?" or "Does anyone have a copy of the SSF policy you can share on WhatsApp? I need it for my meeting today".

The term 'Net-work' came to be shorthand among CJNI researchers for this practice of generative space holding. It is a challenging role to play because it takes a lot of time and care to tend to large relational networks. It is quite a vulnerable position to be in, because as the researcher one is not "in the driving seat" in terms of what the members of the network will decide to focus on or prioritise; it becomes difficult to justify or report on impact if one is dedicated to 'net-work', and more tangible actions are being undertaken by others within the relational space one is holding. Nevertheless, 'net-work' enabled so much of the impactful knowledge co-production for blue justice reflected in this study<sup>79</sup>. The intangible but valuable possibilities that net-work enables is an important finding within this study.



**Figure 7.4: CJNI members Anna James, Taryn Pereira, Jackie Sunde, Dylan McGarry and Buhle Francis enacting net-work, CJNI retreat, October 2021. Through the embodied act of weaving a net, and then 'catching' our little fish, on which we all wrote our values and visions, we participated in a physical activity that gave substance to the invisible weaving and catching that happens in relational net-work**

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<sup>79</sup> See also Appendix D, which is an 'impact statement' released by the One Ocean Hub which is being used in the final reporting on this multi-million-pound research programme. It captures some of the impact of this process.

The second is **reflexive companionship**. When Dr Alice Nah gave a keynote address at the Association of Human Rights Institutes conference in Bilbao in September 2023, entitled “How can academia contribute to and support the work of human rights defenders?”, I felt that she was speaking directly to me. Her talk highlighted and affirmed many aspects of scholar-activism that I have struggled to articulate. Her closing slides had the following bullet points:

“We need community

- Find like-minded mentors and companions on your journey
- Mentor others, and be a good companion
- Find inspiration from others, and inspire others.
  - Keep companions and texts near you that encourage you (Sara Ahmed, 2017)” (Nah, 2023).

Within the CJN, I have found like-minded mentors and companions for my scholar-activist journey; they inspire and encourage me and serve as a reliable and honest space of critical individual and collective reflexivity. The following excerpt from my reflexive journal expresses some of the qualities of this valuable collegial, comradely companionship:

*There is a daily barrage of issues to respond to, and for a while we were responding to each and every new mining authorisation, oil and gas prospecting application, fisheries resource allocation decision, online MSP meeting, MPA management plan, human rights violations – we attended webinars and facilitated the writing and submitting of comments and summarised policy developments and wrote press releases almost every day. It was an intense and overwhelming immersive education in ocean governance, and in blue injustice; a grounded ethnographic study; it gave a unique, wide ranging, perspective on a fragmented and incoherent ocean governance as it hit reality. We co-developed contextual, historical and situated understandings and critiques of these processes as we participated in them, often engaged in a stream of ‘side chats’ (on the SSF leaders’ WhatsApp group, or on the dedicated scholar-activist ‘CJN Care’ group) as we sat in these online consultations – sharing definitions for some of the jargon being used, pointing out the contradictions, drafting comments for each other to check before we posted it in the webinar chat box. We checked with each other on strategy – who*

*should we address the letter to? Which partner organisations should we invite to a meeting to discuss this latest issue? Who should be the lead contact person for this issue? And in between it all we shared inspiring poems or papers, or blogs about the difference between fatigue and depletion. We encouraged each other, we thanked each other, we checked on each other's dogs and kids and progress with moving house. We let each other know when we were sick (Covid, stomach bugs, migraines). We laughed about the absurdity of some of the things we were experiencing in these consultation meetings. We shared observations of how it felt to be in these meetings or to read the consultants' Environmental Impact Assessment reports. How intimidated we were often made to feel in these consultation meetings. How we were made to feel that we should 'stay in our lane' because we did not really know what we were talking about.*

This companionship has enhanced my reflexive scholar-activist analysis and praxis – it kept me buoyed up, encouraged and cared for even during painful, frustrating and exhausting times.

#### **7.4 What Can be Learnt from the Tensions, Contradictions and Shortcomings in this Study?**

Some of the tensions, contradictions and ethical quandaries arising from TD scholar-activist praxis are discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6. There were particular challenges that were the result of the positioning of the CJN as an explicitly scholar-activist grouping within a wider TD research hub. Many possibilities and openings were enabled through this positionality, but there were constraints and tensions too.

I was aware and concerned about the perception that the CJN was an 'in-group' or clique within the broader One Ocean Hub. In the primary networked scholar-activist and SSF space of the CJN, we maintained important boundaries, keeping the group limited to the fishers and researchers who had agreed to the ethico-political commitments guiding this network, as set out in the Code of Practice<sup>80</sup>. This primary network needed to be quite protected, have boundaries, be accountable, reliable and 'comradely' – guided by an ethos of care and solidarity, rather than an ethos of

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<sup>80</sup> SSF leaders' group and CJN Code of Practice available here: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1koJqaSVGc7n599gbvLZllge7ewHIG8oV/edit?usp=drive\\_link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1koJqaSVGc7n599gbvLZllge7ewHIG8oV/edit?usp=drive_link)

academic 'neutrality' or generalised information sharing. This primary network interacted with wider secondary networks, of government officials, scientists, conservation agencies and other civil society organisations. It was our experience that if the primary network was completely open and un-boundaried, existing power hierarchies were stubborn to shift; the deliberately unheard remained unheard (Roy, 2004); a politics of 'diplomacy' that tried to reduce or tiptoe around tension prevailed. As such, critical and counter-hegemonic voices are not easily tolerated. To counter the perception of the CJN as a 'clique', I tried to open as many spaces as possible to share what the CJN was and to make explicit the political and ethical heart of its work. We invited early career researchers who were interested in scholar-activism into the CJN reflective meetings, and some stayed and became regular and active co-conspirers.

In our work as scholar-activists within a TD research hub, we were often advised by other TD colleagues to take a more 'balanced' and less 'angry' approach. To give government officials/EIA consultants/others with power in ocean governance the benefit of the doubt. The long memory of some scholar-activists who have been working with SSFs and engaging with scientists and policymakers about more inclusive ocean governance for decades would remind us that these same issues have been raised for many years and that there is no possible justification for excluding SSFs. Therefore, to be a scholar-activist is to unapologetically 'take a side' and be less concerned with 'balance' in an unbalanced system, than with 'justice', and it requires an embracing of the more complex agonistic forms of critical engagement (Mouffe, 1999) as discussed above.

Green acknowledges in her critique of TD ocean governance research in Cape Town that 'calling in' and 'calling out' are both transformational tools (Green, 2022). Critiques of science and science practices may be implied or directly made while articulating injustices in present knowledge hierarchies. This can certainly be experienced by scientists as offensive critique and scholar-activists can come across as self-righteous and claiming to be taking the 'moral high ground'. This is not the intention. It is important to be able to name and critique dominant science and more generally research praxis in the project of building expansive and progressive alternatives to the status quo. It is also important to reflexively review and understand one's own stance,

as I have tried to do throughout this thesis, by making my own positionality, commitments and approaches to research clearer (to myself and others). It is easy to see how self-identified scholar-activists might tip over into performative ally-ship, self-righteousness or a gatekeeper role concerning activist partners. Again, this requires constant reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

Richard Pithouse (2014) has argued that poor people's movements in South Africa need to make a radical break with the left academy, the state and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), to develop their own understandings and needs and not be used by these more powerful agents for external purposes. Cox (2015), Matthews (2017) and others have also argued that social movements should disentangle themselves from NGOs and academics. There are important warnings in these critiques. However, there cannot be an all-or-nothing approach to this; many social movements still seek collaboration with researchers who they consider allies, and who have proven themselves to be trustworthy and reliable sources of support, as shown in Figure 7.4 above there are important roles that scholars can play in such relations. But these relationships must be negotiated on equitable and reciprocal terms. For scholar-activists trusted in this way, there has to be a continuous conscious guarding against the pressures from academic culture to place individual academic and funding requirements over the needs and agendas of the social movements they are part of. As indicated in this work, this has been a constant tension that I and members of the CJN have grappled with, with our only capability to deal with this being humility, transparency and situated solidarity. This, as shown in Chapter 6, requires taking up the challenge of framing ethics in research to be more congruent with the normative intentions of scholar-activism, where I noted that one strategy is to make the implicit more explicit.

As a final reflection on shortcomings in this study; the study would have benefitted from a wider reading of theory, particularly of eco-feminism, critical African feminism and post-humanism in considerations of solidarity. I have not immersed myself in these discourses enough to confidently apply them to my own work. I recognise the relative under-development of theoretical concepts within this study and my scholarship, but as indicated in Chapter 1, I chose also to use a "low theory" (Wark, 2021) approach to this study as I felt it was congruent with the study's focus. I acknowledge this as a

tension within my own scholar-activist identity – I am drawn always into the receptive, responsive, relational work that is called for daily, and find it difficult and frustrating to withdraw from this to read and write deeply and rigorously within what often seems to be a highly abstracted theoretical terrain. However, I have found key theoretical ideas useful to enhance the reflexivity of my work; I have surfaced these from the work, rather than applying theory to my work (e.g. as is the case with the use of Mouffe’s work above). I see my role most naturally as being immersed in the collective part of an ecosystem of scholars and activists, where my particular role and contribution is in the holding of care-ful space for the flowing movement of useful knowledge to take place. However, this means that I sometimes lack confidence when called on to perform on the ‘scholar’ side of the scholar-activist hyphenated identity.

## **7.5 Reflections on the Teaching and Learning of Scholar-Activist Transdisciplinary Praxis**

A recent publication on competencies for ocean sustainability (Penca et al., 2024) has identified what they see as the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to enable the shifts towards a just, equitable and sustainable ocean future. The types of knowledge they highlight are: knowledge of biophysical and socio-ecological sustainability science; human-ocean-ocean interactions and behaviours; knowledge of marine technologies and engineering; and knowledge of planning. The skills highlighted are systems thinking; research design; communication and engagement; facilitation and coordination; management and leadership; and attitudes are summarised as ‘embodying sustainability’ and ‘leading the change’. While most of these categories are open enough to be interpreted widely, what is clear is that there is no consideration or acknowledgement of the knowledge and competencies for just ocean transformations that emerge from social movements of the marginalised. Situated and grounded knowledges of the socio-cultural-ecological-political-economic entanglements of sea, land and people; skills of organising and mobilising to resist hegemonic structures; attitudes of custodianship and sacred relationship with the ocean commons. For TD researchers who want to orient their work to contribute to these grassroots activist movements for social and environmental justice, the kinds of competencies needed may partially be covered under Penca et al.’s (2024) focus on engagement, facilitation and coordination – but there are deepened understandings

needed of scholar-activist solidarity competencies that enable professional researchers to join movements and contribute to resistance strategies that originate in the margins. These competencies might include radical reflexivity; epistemic humility; solidarity ethics; counter-hegemonic methods; transgressive co-learning, and transformative space making (Marshall et al., 2018). This question of competencies for just ocean governance requires further elaboration.

Another area that needs to be further developed in future work is indicators of impact for scholar-activist TD work. The work of scholar-activists and grassroots activists is not visible or valued in the university and similarly difficult to make legible to research funders, even when they are explicitly funding research for change. Theories of change for TD research initiatives need to be expanded to include scholar-activist and social movement praxis and need to become sensitive to seemingly subtle and nuanced changes that may result from scholar-activist research collaborations, as well as the large headline-grabbing changes like court case victories. The less tangible impacts – networks of diverse knowledge holders, securely connected through trust and solidarity that can keep space open for conflict transformation and agonistic pluralism – indicators that need to be explored and articulated in TD theories of change.

## **7.6 Future Directions and Closing**

The co-engaged research and shared actions I, together with my CJN colleagues and the SSF leaders have been involved in over the past four years have started to demonstrate the power of joint strategy development, decision making and plural knowledge weaving – for example, we saw these elements at work in the mobilisation to resist oil and gas extraction. The CJN archive and my study show that mainstream ocean governance platforms do not yet know how to accommodate the complex, intersectional, relational nature of fishers' knowledges and relationships with the ocean, and they are yet to realise their own policy intentions as articulated in the 2012 SSF policy and elsewhere. The CJN archive's content, and the mobilisation thereof into and through court cases against seismic surveys (and all the mobilising and co-learning around these court cases) are an example of SSF's ecologies of knowledge (De Sousa Santos, 2007) being heard, showing a different way for valuing and

governing the ocean. However, as indicated across this study, doing this work is not 'short-term work', it needs sustained co-engagement across multiple spaces and years, it involves trust building and open processes of flexible work in situated solidarity with SSF matters of concern, the net-work mentioned above.

This study has shown an urgent need to create spaces for rethinking and reimagining principles and practices for ocean research and governance that are inclusive of SSFs, and recognise the importance and value of blue resistance and associated TD scholar-activist praxis. The study has also shown that it is important to model what should be happening in ocean governance and to make very concrete suggestions about how decision making within governance needs to change. It is my hope that this study offers some concrete guidance in this direction. Core to this, as shown throughout the study, is the need to focus on developing truly democratic structures that acknowledge 'agonistic pluralism' and that support SSFs to develop provincial and national structures. There is a need to expand the CJN and the relationships it has enabled to continue to bring together SSFs, civil society and researchers in a deliberate way over the longer term, as the challenges will remain large for inclusive ocean governance into the future, as has also been shown throughout this study.

And finally, this study has tried to surface and model the praxis of a TD scholar-activist working in net-work and comradeship with others concerned with blue justice – those who have the will to support the task of dealing with historical injustices that still characterise South African ocean governance relations and the myriad procedural, recognitional and distributive injustices being experienced by SSFs daily. As argued above and throughout the thesis, this requires shifts in thinking about research practice itself, and the competencies that may be needed for TD researchers in the academy if they are to meaningfully engage with the injustices that permeate the environmental sector and society more widely.

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**Legal cases:**

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Western Cape High Court. Case number 1306/22.

Coastal Links Langebaan and Others v Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Others; 2016; Western Cape High Court, Case number 11907/13.

Gongqose & Others v State & Others; 2018; South African Supreme Court of Appeal; Case numbers 1340/16 & 287/17.

Kenneth George and Others v The Minister of Environment and Tourism and Others; 2005. Equality Court; Case number 1/2005.

Sustaining the Wild Coast NPC and Others v Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and Others; 2022; Eastern Cape High Court, Case number 3491/2021.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Ethics Documents

### CLICK HERE TO START

**This is an application for Research Ethics Approval to conduct research in the Education Faculty.**

Its aim is to prevent deliberate or carelessly unethical research, which would put researchers, participants or the university at risk. This form, therefore, emphasizes risk (reduction & mitigation). *Please provide a more holistic overview of ethical research practices in the research proposal itself.*

Do read the question HELP bubbles ( on the right-hand side of each panel) which assist with interpreting questions. Applications without enough pertinent information have to be returned, wasting valuable time. For further guidance, see the Education Faculty Ethics Guidelines and Requirements, available on the [Research Ethics website](#).

Use this form for **Education Staff Low-Risk Research** and **Education Student Low-Risk Research**.

NOTE CHANGE: The Principal Investigator is the student researcher or the lead staff researcher. **This is the person in whose name the formal Ethics Clearance Certificate will be issued.** Therefore, provide the name, spelling and correct punctuation required on the Clearance Certificate (e.g. start a name with a capital letter).

For **Moderate and High-Risk Research** applications, please use the Human Ethics form for submission to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) which is accredited to deal with such applications. To select another form, return to the Home screen, select Create Project and select the relevant form.

Research Ethics Renewal requests follow a different process, details for this can also be found on the [Research Ethics website](#).

### NAVIGATING THE FORM

Please use the Actions in the left-hand panel to navigate the form.

Alternatively, if your screen is small, click on the three small horizontal bars on the top left-hand of the black horizontal bar.

Use the **NEXT**, **PREVIOUS** and **NAVIGATE** arrows to move between pages of the form.

The screen **help bubble** ( ) on the right-hand side of each panel provides information about the questions within the page you are on.

Using this resource can reduce resubmissions.

Once the application is signed by a supervisor or staff member, it will automatically be submitted.

Once submitted, you will receive an email confirming the submission of your application.

**TO CONTINUE**, click on the **NEXT** arrow.

### Identification

#### Title of proposed research

Learning eco-feminist scholar-activist transdisciplinary praxis with ocean social movements

#### Applicant

Title

Ms.

First Name

Taryn

Surname

Pereira-Kaplan

Applicant Contactable Email

t.pereirakaplan@ru.ac.za

Applicant Contactable Phone Number

0822936380

Is the Applicant the same person as the Researcher?

Yes

No

**Supervisor Details (Where Applicable)**

Title

Distinguished Professor

First Name

Hella

Surname

Lotz-Sisitka

Contactable Phone Number

083 270 4438

Contactable Email

H.Lotz-Sisitka@ru.ac.za

Student Number

n/a

**Do you have a co-supervisor?**

Yes

No

**Co-supervisor details (where applicable)**

Title

Dr.

First Name

Kira

Surname

Erwin

Contactable Phone Number

074 259 2672

Contactable Email

KiraE@dut.ac.za

Student Number

n/a

Do you have a second co-supervisor?

Yes

No

*TO CONTINUE, click on the NEXT arrow.*

## Application Type

Application type

PhD study

Please upload the research proposal and instruments as ONE document.

Documents

Type	Document Name	File Name	Version Date	Version	Size
Proposal	Motivation for an upgrade from Masters to PhD_Taryn Pereira	Motivation for an upgrade from Masters to PhD_Taryn Pereira.pdf			1.3 MB

Department or Unit

Education Department

Is the study part of a larger project?

Yes

No

Provide details of the lead researcher and the title of the larger project:

One Ocean Hub - Dr. Dylan McGarry: "Coastal justice net-work and learning in the time of Covid -19: Transdisciplinary responses to Ocean Governance and Blue Economy concerns in South Africa" APPLICATION CODE: 1497  
We first got ethical clearance for this project in 2020, and have renewed it each year. We are currently in the process of renewing it for 2023.  
Furthermore, this current application is for ethical clearance for an upgrade from a Masters to a PhD study. I received ethical clearance for this Masters study in 2020 - "Towards a pedagogy for critically reflexive, decolonial solidarity within a trans-disciplinary ocean governance research project" APPLICATION CODE: 1077.

Does the larger project have ethical clearance?

- Yes  
 No

Please upload other ethical clearance certificate/s

Documents						
Type	Document Name	File Name	Version	Date	Version	Size
Other	Buhle Francis Dylan McGarry Ethics Approval (3)	Buhle Francis Dylan McGarry Ethics Approval (3).pdf				166.5 KB

Which other researchers should be covered under this clearance?

None

**TO CONTINUE, click on the NEXT arrow.**

## Context

**Field of Study** (e.g. Inclusive Education)

Environmental Education, Transdisciplinary learning

**Intended estimated start date** and completion date of the research

This application is for ethical clearance for my PhD, which is an upgrade from my Masters project, for which I received ethical clearance in 2020 (Code 1077). Therefore I have already started the research process relevant to this project, under the ethical clearance granted in that application, in April 2020. The research covered in this current application is estimated to take place from February 2023 to March 2024.

**Summary of proposed research (Abstract summarising the research objectives, setting, methods and research participants. In 200 words or less)**

The objective of the proposed PhD is to answer the following main research question: What are the key features of eco-feminist solidarity praxis, in collaborations between transdisciplinary scholar-activist researchers and community-based ocean justice activists working towards transforming ocean governance? I will explore the role that eco-feminist solidarity praxis can play in shaping impactful relationships that are politically engaged, critically reflexive, decolonial and truly ethical, between transdisciplinary researchers and community based ocean activists. This research will take place within the context of the One Ocean Hub, a global transdisciplinary (TD) ocean governance research hub. I have been part of a group of scholar activists within the One Ocean Hub who have formed a network of researchers, small scale fisherfolk and civil society organisations – the Coastal Justice Network (CJN) – working together to address injustices in South African ocean spaces. I will conduct a retrospective meta-analysis of a co-produced activist archive developed through the work of the CJN. I will carry out interviews with the ocean activists (small scale fisherfolk and others) and researchers who have been most involved in the CJN, as well as other TD researcher colleagues from the One Ocean Hub, to reflect on the features and impact of our work together.

**What are the potential benefits of the research?**

For scholar-activist TD researchers participating in the project:  
Enhanced competencies in critical self and group reflexivity and eco-feminist solidarity practices for transdisciplinary research; the opportunity to learn with, demonstrate solidarity and develop strong and accountable relationships with activist partners, and to co-produce research outputs that are directly relevant and useful to small scale fisherfolk and other ocean justice activists, and therefore get taken up into activist led processes to bring about changes in ocean governance.

For ocean activists participating in the project: the opportunity to develop accountable working relationships with academic partners who are critically reflexive about the harms caused by extractive or so-called 'neutral' research practices, and committed to fair and equitable partnership; to be well networked within a wider collective of ocean justice activists and researchers, so that support and solidarity can be leveraged when the need arises; co-production of, and access to, a coastal justice archive of materials, resources and mediated research that is directly relevant and useful for their activist strategies and struggles.

For broader TD research and education:  
The teaching and learning of transdisciplinary research praxis is an emergent field, and this study offers insights into the relational and reflexive competencies that engaged TD researchers require to enable ethical research partnerships with community based activists and social movements. Eco-feminist solidarity practices in TDR enhances the competencies of TD researchers to have a critically reflexive awareness of the intersectional oppressions faced by small scale fisherfolk and other ocean justice activists; to carefully facilitate reciprocal and solidarity based relationships between academics and activists, which improves the equality and effectiveness of research partnerships; address power imbalances in research relationships and advance greater justice - social justice, gender justice, environmental justice, and epistemic justice.

For ocean governance:  
Integrating and mobilising the different knowledges, resources and strategies of social movements and academic researchers, in solidarity with each other and in solidarity with the ocean, can contribute to powerful advocacy, resistance to unjust and unsustainable use of the ocean, and to demonstrating alternatives for a more socially and environmentally just relationship with the ocean.

**How will the benefits be shared?**

The benefits described above have already been shared, in an ongoing way, via a range of engaged platforms and processes. The Coastal Justice Network coordinates a range of active whatsapp groups that include small scale fisher leaders and other community based activists, as well as other civil society partners, lawyers and scholar activists, where pressing issues and strategies for responding collectively are discussed, and where resources such as relevant research, learning materials, infographics, videos and voice notes are shared to enhance learning and agency of community based ocean activists seeking to participate powerfully in ocean governance. We also have a website, where blogs, updates and news is regularly shared. We have facilitated a number of workshops with small scale fishers and other ocean activists, where solidarity knowledge and actions are co-developed.

The full co-produced activist archive, which consists of translated and mediated knowledge products, will be curated and made available online, using low data or data free technologies, as well as in printed form to be disseminated at regional and national CJN workshops to be held in 2023.

I have made (and will continue to make) regular presentations of this research at academic conferences, civil society meetings, and international and national policy development meetings, as well as advocating for and supporting community based ocean activists to be included and make their own presentations in these kinds of forums.

For my PhD, I will be writing four papers intended for peer-review publication, in order to share the findings of my research with relevant academic audiences, particularly with other transdisciplinary and scholar-activist researchers, as well as with other ocean governance and policy researchers in South Africa and internationally.

I have been asked by the One Ocean Hub director to facilitate a learning session with the funders of the One Ocean Hub (UKRI-GCRF) about principles for solidarity in transdisciplinary research – therefore I hope that the benefits of this research reach a wider global audience of TD research practitioners.

TO CONTINUE, click on the NEXT arrow.

## Ethical practices and risks

Does the proposed research involve any human participants?

- Yes  
 No

Choose the **risk level** of the proposed research from the given categories and definitions in the Help bubble.

LOW Risk

Describe any significant ethical issues or risks associated with the research **location**, why they could not be avoided, and how they will be managed.

The risks for activists:

Community based environmental justice activists already face a high degree of risk in their work – they risk intimidation and even violent retaliation for their work as environmental and human rights defenders, from those who stand to gain financially or politically from large scale extractive developments. There is a chance that their work may gain more exposure through their collaboration with a wider group of activists and researchers, and that this increases the risks and threats that they face.

There is a risk that the participants feel that their time is wasted; that their knowledge is used without proper acknowledgement; that they are diverted from their core work. There is a risk of raising expectations of what academic researchers can offer community based partners, and those expectations not being met. In reality, which could place strain on relationships between activists and academics. There is a risk that they encounter an unsafe or inconvenient situation when travelling to or from the meeting venue. There is a risk that they may be criticised or lose legitimacy in their social movements for partnering with university researchers affiliated to a UK government funded development grant – this may be politically unacceptable to some in their social movements.

Mitigation of risks to activists:

All research and advice related to mitigation of risks to environmental human rights defenders emphasises the importance of greater visibility and awareness of the work that they do, and the risks that they face. Activists who have networks outside of their immediate communities are able to leverage crucial legal support, media attention and public awareness, all of which decreases the chances of harassment or violence against them. As the Coastal Justice Network we have strong partnerships with organisations such as Natural Justice, the Legal Resources Centre and the Environmental Justice Fund, all of which have dedicated mechanisms and funds for support activists who face these kinds of risks. We are also connected to international human rights lawyers through the One Ocean Hub who are able to advise and secure international support for activists at risk. In these ways, we hope that our relationships with activists helps to reduce the risks they face. Another way to mitigate risk and demonstrate solidarity is for us as researchers to put our names to press statements and legal affidavits that stand up for the rights of ocean activists, so that it is clear that they are not isolated, and that there is wider public awareness of and support for their work. Carefully discussed and negotiated decisions about when activists will choose to remain anonymous, and when they wish to put their name to co-developed work, will be carried out on a case by case basis.

A lot of care has been taken to discuss the research context, goals, process and scope with all participants - and to be open to adjusting aspects of my research plan based on advice and feedback from participants. There are protocols and codes of conduct promoted by many social movements, with regards to participating in research (such as the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings:

<http://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/>) - I will adhere to these, and other protocols co-developed within the Coastal Justice Network. With regards to the risk of raising expectations that cannot be met – there has been ongoing dialogue over the life of the Coastal Justice Network, about what we as researchers can realistically do, what we are well positioned to contribute to, and what we cannot do from our positions. This back and forth dialogue which has taken place over the Whatsapp groups, in one on one or small group discussions, and in workshops, has deepened all of our shared understanding about the scope and limitations of academic contributions to the work of grassroots social movements.

If there are political concerns from activists about being associated with a project funded by a conservative UK government, I will need to ensure that it is clear that the Coastal Justice Network is a separate entity, politically independent from the OOH. Self-reflexive and group-reflexive methods will aim to make visible 'blind spots' related to the relational dimensions of the research partnerships, such as the impacts of race, gender, power and privilege within these relationships.

With regards to the practical arrangements for the research encounters, my colleagues and I will organise transport for participants to meeting venues, ensure that participants receive money for public transport in advance so that they do not carry any financial risks, ensure that meeting venues are as convenient and close to research participants as possible, that they are safe and comfortable, and that there is adequate catering and accommodation provided.

The risks for academics:

In partnering in solidarity with community based activists, researchers face the risk of becoming targeted by those in power who are threatened by the work of the social movements. We have seen how politicians, most notably the Minister for Mineral Resources and Energy, has made accusations about 'foreign funded academics' standing in the way of economic development. This is concerning discourse, which needs to be taken seriously, although to date it has remained a generalised theme of some political speeches, without any real world consequences. There is a risk that the industries that are carrying out unscrupulous or damaging practices are threatened by scholar-activists who critique them.

There is a risk that academic researchers feel that they are put in an uncomfortable position where their practices are critiqued by activists; or that they are concerned about jeopardising their research reputation by becoming too politically aligned with social movements, that their alignment with activists threatens their work with other partners such as those in industry or government.

Mitigation of risks to academics:

The risks to academics are a lot lower than those faced by community based activists. My colleagues and I are protected to an extent by the fact that we do not live in the communities where these issues are most contested; we have the privileges of protection that comes with greater socio-economic security, and visibility within our institutions. The best way to mitigate the kinds of risks that come with exposing and resisting corrupt or otherwise unjust practices is to ensure that our university seniors (Director, Dean) are aware of our work and of any specific threatening incidents that we face, and that they are able to support us in responding. We also follow very rigorous processes of communicating our fieldwork plans to our colleagues, and ensure that we do not travel alone or at night to fieldwork or community meetings. Constant communication within our team and regular updates of our senior managers to assess risk levels and appropriate actions will be carried out.

A lot of care will be taken to discuss the research context, goals, process and scope with all participants - and to be open to adjusting aspects of my research plan based on advice and feedback from participants. My role as a reflexive interviewer and reflexive facilitator (with co-facilitators) will be crucial in ensuring that the academic research participants are supported to become critically reflexive of their own practice and the expectations or critiques of activists. I need to ensure that participants are able to make an informed choice about whether they want to remain anonymous, or to have their contributions attributed to them by name, in the research outputs that are produced - individuals will have the opportunity to indicate privately on the written consent form what they would prefer in terms of anonymity.

We will be exploring the many forms and practices that make up academic - activist research partnerships, and encouraging the academic researchers to identify the form and practices that are most appropriate for their work context - meaning that they have agency to determine the boundaries of their engagement.

Risk to One Ocean Hub: The OOH represents a wide range of researchers and research institutions, and only a small sub-set of these are interested and willing to be part of a solidarity based network with social movement activists; others will not be interested or able to do so, as they may have research partnerships with, for example, particular industry or government partners that the social movements are in direct opposition to.

Mitigation of risks to OOH: We need to be careful and strategic with how we use the name and identity of the OOH, to ensure that we do not place the work of other colleagues in the broader Hub at risk. This might mean that, for example, the Coastal Justice Network is explicitly understood by all to be an independent and separate entity to the OOH. These considerations will be worked with in an ongoing way, in consultation with the research participants, the Executive Team of the OOH, and other OOH stakeholders.

Which of the research **participants**, groups or individuals, may be vulnerable in the context of the study?

Describe the source, likelihood and level of risk to vulnerable participants, and how this risk will be avoided or reduced.

We work with women and men who are leaders within the social movement for small scale fishers in South Africa, as well as other organised community groups representing mining affected communities, and communities displaced by marine protected areas. The goal of these fisher and coastal justice activists is directly to reduce the vulnerability of small scale fisher folk and other marginalised coastal people. The kinds of vulnerability include: precarious livelihoods due to restricted access to the ocean and fisheries resources, leading to poverty and all related social ills; violent policing of livelihood activities within protected areas, where local people have been dispossessed of their customary access to land and ocean; the risk of unsafe working conditions in the course of pursuing their livelihoods, particularly when their fishing and harvesting practices are criminalised or when they are forced to work for exploitatively low wages; the risk of contaminated and polluted land, water and air due to mining or oil and gas extraction; the risk of threats from powerful actors whose harmful actions are exposed and challenged through the work of activists. Small scale fisher and coastal communities have been directly harmed by the products of scientific research; fisheries management research that does not take community livelihoods and local ecological knowledge into account, conservation research that is used to identify and expand protected areas that displace local people, and geological research that identifies where mineral or gas deposits are located - these are all examples of scientific research that has been used to further marginalise and threaten coastal communities. It is these very risks that motivate us to be in solidarity with ocean activists, as scholar-activists, and to seek ways in which our research and wider academic research can be directly used by activists to advance their struggles for reduced vulnerability and for justice.

If high risk cannot be avoided, explain why less vulnerable participants could not be used:

Since the entire project is about understanding and enhancing the relational solidarity aspects of TD research with academics and activists, the study would be meaningless without working in close engaged partnership with participants from both academia and social movements. The expansive, generative, interventionist nature of my research mean that the slightly risky aspects of the research, are a critical and inevitable part of the research; I believe that by working carefully and reflexively with these risks, they will become generative sources for positive change.

Is **permission** to conduct the research required from a ('gatekeeper') organisation? (e.g. participants' employer, Education Department or University Registrar)

- No
- Yes, but a waiver is requested
- Yes

List the organisation/s from where permission is required (click "Add Another" to enter each organisation).

University of Strathclyde - One Ocean Hub Director

For research being conducted in the Eastern Cape Department of Education, the application can be found at [https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/ethics/documents/educationfacultyrec/Application\\_Form\\_to\\_conduct\\_Research\\_in\\_the\\_ECDoE.docx](https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/ethics/documents/educationfacultyrec/Application_Form_to_conduct_Research_in_the_ECDoE.docx)

Indicate how permission will be requested from each organisation listed.

I received a gatekeeper permission letter from Prof Elisa Morgera from University of Strathclyde, who is the Director of the One Ocean Hub, for my Masters ethics application - see upload below. I will share my revised and upgraded PhD proposal with her, and ask her for an updated gatekeeper letter related to this research, which she is already aware of and supportive of.

Please upload examples of permission letter/s.

Documents						
Type	Document Name	File Name	Version Date	Version	Size	
Consent/Assent form or Information sheet	Taryn OOH gatekeeper letter (1)	Taryn OOH gatekeeper letter (1).pdf			495.1 KB	
Consent/Assent form or Information sheet	Template Gatekeeper Letter_Taryn Pereira Kaplan 2023	Template Gatekeeper Letter_Taryn Pereira Kaplan 2023.docx			100.1 KB	

If organisational permission is required, the permission letter once received from the relevant 'gatekeeper' should be emailed to the Research Ethics Administrator. Only once it is received and acknowledged, can Ethical Approval be provided and the research may proceed.

How will research participants be approached? How will **consent** and where relevant **assent** be obtained and recorded? (once organizational permission has been granted, or if permission is unnecessary, or waived)

There are some aspects of standard procedural ethics protocols that can introduce an element of distrust into the research – and inadvertently undermine the quality of relationships that we are seeking to build . Being asked to sign a consent form prior to participating in a discussion, introduces suspicion, unease and resistance, in a context where signing forms most often means one is 'signing something away'. This is counter-productive when one's aim is to build trust, demonstrate commitment to fair and equitable partnerships, and assure participants that their knowledge is to be respected and acknowledged. This is one of the concerns at the very heart of this research project – how professional researchers can develop greater 'solidarity with', to counter balance the historical and persistent 'power over (or disconnection from)' community based research partners. Therefore, in negotiating the terms of the research engagement, it is more appropriate with civil society and community based partners to work with a co-developed 'agreement of purpose and process' rather than just 'informed consent', with a written consent form as a record of what has been negotiated. This research project aims to contribute to a wider conversation happening within our field, about best practice approaches to research ethics for transdisciplinary, co-engaged, emergent research.

My approach to carefully discussed verbal agreement on purpose and process as the primary mode for granting of consent, with written forms that are only introduced to participants once verbal consent has been negotiated, addresses these concerns with regards to the risks of alienating procedural ethics practices.

I need to ensure that participants are able to make an informed choice about whether they want to remain anonymous, or to have their contributions attributed to them by name, in the research outputs that are produced - this will be included in the verbal discussion, but individuals will have the opportunity to indicate privately on the written consent form what they would prefer in terms of anonymity.

The co-produced activist archive consists of a wide range of materials that make up my 'data'. These include interviews, transcripts of meetings and workshops, whatsapp discussions, co-produced pamphlets, press releases and more. For interviews, focus group discussions and workshops – methods that clearly generate 'research data' - I follow a process of:

Sharing information letters (attached below) prior to the interview / focus group discussion / workshop. I verbally talk through an overview and context for the discussion (based on what is written in the information letter). I explain how I will use the data generated in the discussion, and ask what other purposes the participants might be able to use the data themselves. We have a discussion about what is meant by consent to participate, consent to audio record, consent to photograph, and anonymity. I will ask for verbal permission for the discussion to be audio recorded, explaining the rationale for recording for research purposes, and giving participants the option to indicate to me during the discussion if there is anything they would like to say off the record, or have deleted from the record. I will discuss with participants whether they would like their contributions to the discussion to remain anonymous or to be attributed to them by name - this acknowledges the participants as my co-researchers, rather than as research subjects. The reason I will ask for verbal consent first, rather than only written consent is that, in my experience, asking community based activists to sign a consent form at the outset of a meeting is met with suspicion and resistance, and sets participants on edge rather than making them feel welcomed and respected. It is also inconsiderate of people who may struggle to read and understand the meaning of the written consent form. After this opening discussion, I will share the written form with participants and explain that this is just a written record of what we have just discussed and agreed. The written form also gives people an opportunity to indicate privately whether they would prefer to remain anonymous or not.

In instances where I refer to knowledge sources within the co-produced activist archive that were generated through our activist work and not directly intended at the time to be data collection for my research, such as affidavits from course cases, or press releases about a particular coastal justice issue, I will seek retrospective consent from those who were involved in producing that particular knowledge artifact. This involves both a verbal discussion and a signed consent – adapted from the forms attached below to refer to products of past collaborations that have been included in the data archive.

In the case of interviewing researcher colleagues from the One Ocean Hub, I will send personal emails to each of the people I wish to interview, outlining my research and asking whether they are willing to be interviewed by me for my research, and will include the information letter in this email. Consent to be interviewed will therefore be granted in email form when they respond. At the beginning of each interview, I will verbally repeat what was shared in the information letter, and ask for both verbal and written consent (through signing of the consent form) to record and transcribe the interview, as well as to indicate whether they would like to remain anonymous in research outputs, letting participants know that they can indicate to me through the course of the interview or afterwards if they would like anything to be off the record or deleted from the record.

Please upload the letters or other means whereby **consent** and where relevant **assent** will be sought and recorded.

Documents

Type	Document Name	File Name	Version Date	Version	Size
Consent/Assent form or Information sheet	Information letter for research participants	Information letter for research participants.docx			101.6 KB
Consent/Assent form or Information sheet	Research consent form (1)	Research consent form (1).docx			106.0 KB

**Researcher Positionality and Conflict of Interest: Please declare any conflict of interest and provide a consideration of how your particular position in the study, may influence it.**

My positionality will be a core consideration in the research, since I am in large part researching my own praxis, and the principles of solidarity that I and my colleagues and comrades within the Coastal Justice Network have learned together. My identity and my positionality, and the impact this has on my ability to practice an eco-feminist, scholar activist solidarity with community based activists, is deeply relevant to this research. I am a white cisgendered English speaking South African woman. I am securely employed as a university-based researcher, which bestows a legitimacy and access to social capital within research and governance spaces. I benefit from inherited wealth and privilege enabled by colonial - apartheid - capitalist entrenched systemic racism. Through this privilege, I am highly visible to those who hold power in our society, meaning I can access many resources and opportunities, my voice is listened to, and my knowledge is recognised.

I endeavour to be in solidarity with small scale fisherfolk and other community based ocean activists, who are for the most part Black, economically vulnerable, politically marginalised and dispossessed of access to their customary territories on land and water, and whose specialised knowledge about the ocean has been ignored, undermined or stolen from them, including by academic researchers.

I have to engage with the aspects of my identity – particularly my whiteness, my class privilege and my academic affiliation – that impact my relationships with my activist research partners, in a highly critically reflexive way, in relation to my exploration of what an eco-feminist solidarity praxis looks like.

Crucially, the pursuit of solidarity, and the enactment of scholar activist practices, runs the risk of perpetuating the same power imbalances that they seek to disrupt – thus the need for reflexive, critical, decolonised approaches to solidarity (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). This conception of solidarity requires a strong critical reflexive praxis. Through actively and critically reflecting on ourselves, our place, our influence and our own processes of learning in the world, we are more able to act in 'creative, constructive ways that challenge oppressive power relations rather than reinforce them' (Maxey, 1999: 201). Scholar activists grapple extensively with clarifying and understanding their positionality and practising reflexivity: "Scholar-activists must reflexively negotiate their multiple, relational positionalities, as authoritative knowers in some settings, as invited or uninvited guests in others, as recognized collaborators, as outsiders, etc. in a dynamic field where knowledge production is but one of multiple expressions of power" (Routledge and Driscoll Derickson, 2015: 392).

It is also important to note that, in working with organised social movements, there is far greater scrutiny and accountability required of researchers than, say, in working with more dispersed, isolated or apolitical groupings of community based partners. The small scale fisherfolk and other ocean activists we work with have a very well articulated critique of extractive researchers, and of their own identity and rights as ocean custodians and knowledge holders. Therefore it is not only through my own reflexive praxis that my positionality is interrogated – it is being actively interrogated and challenged by activist partners throughout our work together.

## Information Management and Dissemination

How will data and the private details of individuals or organisations (not already in the public domain) be stored?

How will data and private details be protected from unauthorized distribution and use?

How will it be available for verification if needed?

My research results will be disseminated via my dissertation; via four peer reviewed publications; via a range of conference and workshop presentations; and via co-produced activist outputs, including a handbook on Eco-feminist Principles and Practices for Solidarity in Research. Participants may well want to have their opinions and perspectives acknowledged and accredited to them, as co-researchers rather than research subjects; however, some may wish to remain anonymous in the research outputs produced, such as journal articles, workshop reports, the theses and the handbook, if they feel that they have expressed something which might place them at some risk if publicly attributed to them. As mentioned under 'consent', I will be verbally discussing and negotiating consent for participation, for audio recording, for photographing, and regarding anonymity, and when this verbal discussion has taken place I will ask participants to indicate on a written consent form what has been agreed. I will explain that if someone would like to say something off the record, or to change their mind about anonymity, or have something deleted from the record, they are able to indicate that to me, either during the discussion or privately post - discussion

All data will be saved in a password protected folder on iCloud; in a password protected google drive folder, as well as a folder of hard copies of the data in a locked drawer on RU campus in the office of my supervisor, Prof. Heila Lotz-Sisitka.

**TO CONTINUE, click on the NEXT arrow.**

## Declaration

In the case of student research, the **Supervisor MUST sign the declaration** to indicate that they approve of the submission.  
If you are a student, click REQUEST and insert your Supervisor's Rhodes email address.  
Students may not sign the declaration themselves, this button is used when the supervisor is filling out the form on behalf of the student.

I, as the lead researcher or research supervisor, hereby undertake to ensure that all changes to the proposed research required by and agreed with the Education Faculty Ethics Chair will be made prior to the commencement of the research. I also undertake to notify the Chair of any amendments to the proposed study that may change the risk level.

**Signed:** This form was signed by Prof Heila Lotz-Sisitka (H.Lotz-Sisitka@ru.ac.za) on 02/02/2023 20:23

**IMPORTANT:**

Once the application has been signed the form will automatically be submitted.  
You will receive a confirmation email that the application has been submitted.  
To check the status of your application, return to the HOME screen (tab in top black horizontal bar).



Rhodes University, Education Faculty  
Research Ethics Committee  
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa  
Tel: +27 (0) 46 603 8393  
Fax: +27 (0) 46 603 8028  
email: [e.rosenberg@ru.ac.za](mailto:e.rosenberg@ru.ac.za)

<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>

17 February 2023

taryn.pereira-kaplan

Education Department

[g01p1016@campus.ru.ac.za](mailto:g01p1016@campus.ru.ac.za)

Dear Taryn Pereira-Kaplan

Your application Learning eco-feminist scholar-activist transdisciplinary praxis with ocean social movements, 2023-7072-7409 has been reviewed by the Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee [EF-REC].

Ethics approval has been granted pending the required Permission Letters being obtained from the organisation(s) listed in your application.

**University of Strathclyde - One Ocean Hub Director**

Your application can be downloaded as a PDF version and forwarded with your permission letter request. Please refer to the Applicant User Guide for how to do so.

Please forward the required permission letter/s, once received, to the EF-REC Chair ([E.Rosenberg@ru.ac.za](mailto:E.Rosenberg@ru.ac.za)) and to the Education Research Ethics Coordinator ([ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)) in order for your approval to be finalised.

Sincerely

**Professor Eureka Rosenberg**

**Chair: Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee**

## **Coastal Justice Network Solidarity Building with Small-Scale Fishers**

### **Focus Group Discussion / Interview / Workshop**

#### **Consent form**

NOTE FOR FACILITATORS: This form must be given to participants in hard copy, and will be discussed verbally in the home language of participants. If there is any aspect of the form that is unclear, as much time as is needed will be taken to explain this. This negotiated consent process will not be rushed – we will allocate at least 15 minutes at the start of each workshop for this negotiation of acceptable consent. If there is an aspect of the form that is not accepted, or is identified as missing, by the group or any individual, we will adjust the form and make written, signed changes to respond to the concerns of participants.

#### **ABOUT THIS CONSENT FORM**

Thank you for participating in this research, where we aim to develop together a shared understanding of small-scale fisheries cooperatives, including their history, their current context, their challenges and their developmental visions.

As discussed prior to this discussion / interview / workshop, the things we talk about today may be used in research reports, research presentations, policy submissions, and learning

handbooks for small-scale fishers. We commit to share with you copies of any of these reports or links to websites where your contributions appear.

We might be discussing some sensitive matters today, related to the business partnerships and finances of co-operatives. It is very important that we all respect the privacy of other fishers and co-operatives present. If this kind of information is shared during the workshop as part of a question that is asked or an example that is given, we will ensure that this kind of sensitive information is kept anonymous and private. We ask all participants to respect one another's privacy, and not to record the discussion or workshop on your phone.

**Name:**

**Date:**

*Informed consent to participate*

This research project has been explained to me, I understand what we are going to be discussing today and why, and I consent to participating:

Yes

No

Comments:

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*Informed consent to be photographed:*

The reason for taking photographs, and the ways these photographs might be used, including in publications and public presentations, has been explained to me, and I give my consent to be photographed

Yes:

No:

Comments:

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If you would not like your photograph to be taken or shared, that is completely fine – we will indicate to the photographer to avoid taking your picture, and if you appear in any group shots, we will not use those photographs in any public forum.

Anonymity:

The option to remain anonymous in any reports or publications generated by this research has been explained to me, and I choose to remain anonymous:

Yes:

No:

Comments:

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If you change your mind about remaining anonymous following our discussions today, you are encouraged to talk to the lead researcher or facilitator about your choice, and she will ask you to fill in a new form indicating your preference.

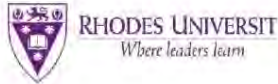
Any other comments or additions:

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics

Ethics Coordinator: [ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)

t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707

Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139



Senior Researcher  
SARChI Chair: Global Change and Social Learning Systems  
& One Ocean Hub  
**Environmental Learning Research Centre**  
Department of Education  
Lucas Avenue, Rhodes University  
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, South Africa, 6140  
Tel: 046-603 7276 / 8390

**Participant information letter: *Coastal justice net-work and learning in the time of COVID-19: Transdisciplinary responses to Ocean Governance and Blue economy concerns in South Africa***

Dear Participant

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. The One Ocean Hub project, *Coastal justice net-work and learning in the time of COVID-19: Transdisciplinary responses to Ocean Governance and Blue economy concerns in South Africa*, aims to engage knowledge co-production through participatory interactive social learning methods towards solidarity and transformation in blue economy impacts on coastal communities in South Africa. This project takes place over the period July 2020 - July 2021.

We speak to you as a knowledge holder when it comes to issues of the blue economy and ocean governance in South Africa. What you share with us will go towards building a fuller and context rich understanding of coastal users along the South African coastline.

If you choose to participate it is hoped (although never guaranteed) that your, and other, voices will contribute towards policy making in this area. Although we cannot guarantee policy changes, we can assure you that by choosing to participate in the project your voice offers a valuable contribution to producing new kinds of knowledge about the oceans. We are very interested in hearing about your experiences of living and working with the ocean and the changes you have seen in the ocean over time, and what this means for you.

If you choose to give your consent to participate in the research, the information that you provide will be used anonymously in one or more of the following ways:

- Academic publications and presentations
- Be used to write a script for a community radio drama that will be played to various audiences in online forums
- To inform a strategic report that will be accessible to the researchers involved in the broader One Ocean Hub project, as well as accessible to the public on the project website

With your additional permission, indicated in a tick box below, this interview/focus group participation will be included in a documentary podcast or radio drama. As these artefacts are made we will consult with you on the final result before the podcast is published ensuring that anything shared is shared with your approval. If this is the case we will negotiate authorship and work together with you to think about the risks involved with that.

Commented [1]: Is this paragraph ok in terms of thinking about podcast ethics.

Participation in this research project is voluntary and you may decline to participate, or withdraw from the research at any time, without any negative consequences. During the research encounters you are free to share as much, or as little, as you feel comfortable. The information that you provide will be stored safely and treated confidentially. There are no foreseen adverse risks associated with participating in this study and you will not incur any financial costs as a result of your participation. No financial reimbursements for time will be provided.

You are always free to contact us should you have further questions.

Yours sincerely Dylan McGarry and Taryn Pereira

Complaints can be reported to the One Ocean Hub Projects co-ordinator: Email: [oneocean-hub@strath.ac.uk](mailto:oneocean-hub@strath.ac.uk)

Or the Environmental Learning Research Centre Tel: +27 (0)46 603 8389

## CONSENT FORM

### Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number:
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- Should I wish to, understand that my contribution might be included in a podcast or radio drama. In this case I will be updated as the podcast is produced as to how my voice is included. At each stage I will be consulted about inclusion in the podcast narrative.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Please indicate:

I choose to be anonymous in this study \_\_\_\_\_

I choose to have my name associated with my interview data \_\_\_\_\_

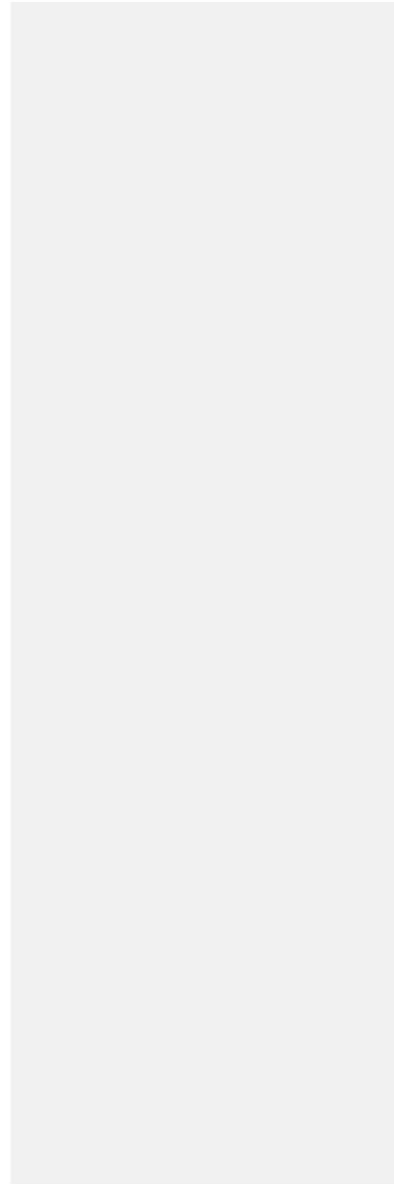
**Full Name of Participant Date Time Signature / Right Thumbprint**

I, (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

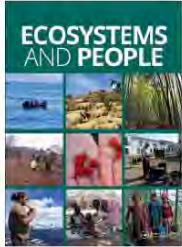
**Full Name of Researcher Date Signature**

**Full Name of Witness (If applicable) Date Signature**

**Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) Date Signature**



# Appendix B: Paper 1: Surfacing Solidarity Praxis in Transdisciplinary Research for Blue Justice



Ecosystems and People



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## Surfacing solidarity praxis in transdisciplinary research for blue justice

Taryn Pereira  and Kira Erwin<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Environmental Learning Research Centre, Rhodes University, Makhandla, South Africa; <sup>b</sup>Urban Futures Centre, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa

### ABSTRACT

In this article, we centre the knowledge and contributions of environmental justice social movements towards transformations for sustainability in Transdisciplinary Research. Scholar activists within research teams can help bridge networks of scholars with social movement networks to build strongly engaged and relational transdisciplinary research. We draw on reflections and learnings from the Coastal Justice Network, a scholar activist network working in solidarity with small-scale fishers and other blue justice movements in South Africa. We discuss some of the alignments, possibilities, and tensions inherent in this mode of TD research. Lastly, we suggest approaches for bridging the academic-activist divide within TD ocean research, including the inclusion of scholar activists who have established relationships with social movements in TD teams; ensuring adequate time and learning spaces for developing relational capacities such as reflexivity and solidarity; and embracing and learning from the messy politics of alliance building.

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### Introduction

Transdisciplinary (TD) research is one of the ways that academia has responded to the global poly-crises we face (Hirsch-Hadorn et al. 2006; Lang et al. 2012). The growing urgency of the global environmental crisis has compelled sustainability researchers in particular to address the 'science – society' gap in socially engaged, transformative and reflexive ways (Jahn et al. 2012; Lang et al. 2012; Lawrence et al. 2022). TD research with a focus on sustainability advocates for the co-production of knowledge through participatory, inclusive partnerships with diverse stakeholders grappling with environmental concerns. TD research is a well-established (albeit still subject to a divergent range of interpretations and applications), and a well-funded mode of research that is viewed by some as *the* model for sustainability science (Hirsch-Hadorn et al. 2006; Görg et al. 2014; in Healy 2019).

One of the core practices of this kind of research is to establish multi-stakeholder networks (Hirsch-Hadorn et al. 2006; Lang et al. 2012; Lawrence et al. 2022). To sufficiently respond to intractable socio-ecological challenges and to encourage knowledge co-production, these networks include government officials, policy makers, NGOs and community-based organisations. There has been increasing recognition of the need to give careful attention to the relational aspects of these research partnerships (West et al. 2020). There remains, however, a relative lack of attention within TD theory and practice to critical and

ethical engagements between TD researchers and social movements of marginalised people working in counter-hegemonic ways towards environmental justice (Temper et al. 2018).

In this article, we explore how a scholar-activist orientation might contribute to bringing sustainability TD research closer to grassroots social movements. We do this through discussing how the Coastal Justice Network emerged from a large TD research project, the GCRF One Ocean Hub, that works towards inclusive and just ocean governance. The Coastal Justice Network is convened by scholar-activists, including both authors, within an existing TD research network. The One Ocean Hub is an international transdisciplinary research programme across five countries with a vision of 'fair and inclusive decision-making for a healthy ocean whereby people and planet flourish'. This TD project has as its mission to 'bring together coastal people, researchers and decision-makers to value and learn from different knowledge(s) and voices' to 'collaboratively influence decisions and practices shaping the future of the ocean for justice and sustainability' (One Ocean Hub 2022). Undertaking research of this kind must recognise South Africa's violently racist history, established through colonialism and apartheid, that dispossessed Black people of coastal territories, livelihoods and relationships with coastal and ocean resources. Forced removals from coastal areas made way for White elites and private developments, but also occurred in the name of conservation of biodiversity (Peer et al. 2022). Under democracy there

**CONTACT** Taryn Pereira  [t.pereirakaplan@ru.ac.za](mailto:t.pereirakaplan@ru.ac.za)

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are ongoing manifestations and impacts of displacement and exclusion of coastal people from coastal spaces (Mafumbu et al. 2022). Ranging from the inadequate consultation and involvement of coastal users in decision-making, to the exploitation and marginalisation of small-scale fishers, to the criminalisation of customary livelihoods in Marine Protected Areas, these injustices continue to reproduce historic exclusions (Sowman and Sunde 2018). Ocean policy and governance in South Africa is deeply fragmented (Taljaard et al. 2019), resulting in contradictory and ineffective implementation of even the most progressive policies (Sowman and Sunde 2021), and enabling 'Blue Economy' frameworks to be rolled out in undemocratic and socio-ecologically unjust ways (Bond 2019). In response to all of this, social movements of small-scale fishers and other community groupings along the South African coastline have coalesced to mobilise for 'Blue Justice' (Isaacs 2019; Bennett et al. 2021). We argue that TD research that aims to work towards ocean justice and sustainability needs to engage with and be responsive to these social movements.

We begin the article by giving an overview of how and why the Coastal Justice Network emerged from the One Ocean Hub. We then offer a discussion on some of the opportunities for both TD researchers and social movements for creating networks and relationships that hold mutual benefits. This can expand the possibilities for strategically working together towards shared goals. We also discuss the challenges in this work that arise for different stakeholders around solidarity practices between academic researchers and social movements, as well as the politics of engagement that emerge with government and other stakeholders. Lastly, drawing from our own experiences convening and contributing to the Coastal Justice Network, we offer some suggestions for embedding scholar activists within TD research networks, as bridge builders (rather than gatekeepers) between academic and activist knowledge holders. We explore how, despite challenges in how TD practitioners encounter and negotiate the power dynamics and politics within their networks, these tensions can have productive learnings for TD researchers and environmental justice activists wishing to work together. We hope that this article contributes to reflections for how scholar-activism might bring sustainability TD research for inclusive ocean governance closer to social movements working for blue justice, in ethical, politically rigorous and productive ways.

### The coastal justice network

'Ideal-typical' TD research processes as described by Lang et al. aim to ensure "collaborative problem framing and building a collaborative research team" (Lang et al. 2012). The international group of researchers who designed the One Ocean Hub

programme were successful in motivating to the funders the necessity of a 'work package zero' - a process-focussed package of activities that preceded the development of detailed research and co-design plans. This work package was intended as a space for establishing relationships and networks and to building a shared code of practice. This resonates with what Horcea-Milcu et al. call Phase 0 of TD research that is dedicated to 'setting up a TD process' before moving into the co-developing research agendas and plans with partners (Horcea-Milcu et al. 2022, p. 195). This 'work package zero' proved to be very important initial stage in terms of allowing the time and space for TD researchers to form relationships with one another. It also allowed space and time to bring pre-existing networks of collaborators into conversation about what they would like to work on together under the broad project vision of transformations in ocean governance.

Within the One Ocean Hub were a few researchers with established relationships with environmental justice organisations, and others with long-standing relationships with small-scale fishers (SSF) and their organisations, and some with networks spanning these groupings. These networks have been actively involved in defending the human rights of small-scale fishers, including; advocating for and contributing to a transformative small-scale fisheries policy (Sowman et al. 2014), raising awareness of and providing support against historical and contemporary exclusions from Marine Protected areas that overlap with traditional fishing grounds (Wicomb 2015; Sowman and Sunde 2018) SSF's inclusion in fisheries governance (Kolding et al. 2014), and, more recently, supporting SSF's resistance to seismic explorations for deep sea oil and gas which pose risks to their fishing grounds (Sunde 2022). Over the first year and a half of the One Ocean Hub, a group of around 10 One Ocean Hub scholar activist researchers (including both authors), from four different universities spread across the country, started to meet regularly online. In these meetings, which were initially focussed on articulating a critique of the Blue Economy, we discussed the pressing issues that were being identified by our social movement partners, and what we were able to contribute to these struggles from our positions as researchers within this TD network.

In March 2020, everything came to a standstill with the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and resultant lockdowns. It was quickly brought to our attention that there were human rights violations being experienced by small-scale fishers under the strongly enforced South African lockdown regulations. Remote coastal fishing communities were struggling to access food, drinking water and other basic services; and many fishers were being harassed or even arrested by law enforcement officials for

carrying out the work that produced their livelihoods (Sunde and Erwin 2020; Sowman et al. 2021). The impacts of COVID-19 and lockdown regulations were exacerbating the existing marginalisation and vulnerability of small-scale fishers within ocean governance in the country. Some SSF leaders were reaching out to researchers in our group asking for support in terms of updated information about the lockdown regulations, and in advocating for their right to fish as an 'essential service'. We decided as a matter of urgency to motivate to our funder that some of our research budget be re-allocated towards airtime and mobile data for small-scale fisher leaders around the coastline, so that they could be in contact with one another and with a wider network for sharing information, advice, and support in responding to the pandemic. Through advice and discussion with small-scale fisher organisations and researchers with existing relationships, nominations were made of small-scale fisher (SSF) representatives who were well positioned and mandated to share any information they received widely within their communities. We set up a 'whatsapp' group and added all the SSF leaders who had been nominated, as well as researchers and civil society partners committed to working in solidarity with SSF. 'whatsapp' is a mobile app widely used by social movements in South Africa, and is a low data, accessible platform for text-based communication. This 'whatsapp' group was an emergency solidarity intervention – we did not yet have a clear long-term vision for it, and it was not part of our planned research activities. Three years later, this group continues to form a core communication and strategy platform for the fishers and scholar-activists on the group.

The initial group of scholar-activist researchers now met more regularly (every week for the first few months, shifting to once a month, which continues to the present) to have reflexive and strategic discussions about our roles, responsibilities and response-abilities (Haraway 2016; Bozalek 2020) in relation to the 'whatsapp' group, and the issues raised on this group by the SSF leaders. Over 2021 and 2022 we became increasingly networked within an emerging social movement around environmental justice and the oceans and coasts. Through practicing solidarity with SSFs and civil society, we were publicly vocal about injustices that arose along the coast. In this learning through doing process, we experienced the challenges and opportunities that scholar activism and its relationships with social movements hold for TD research projects, and vice versa. Partly, in response to these challenges we came to call ourselves the 'Coastal Justice Network'. The Coastal Justice Network enabled a core group of researchers, rooted within wider networks, to facilitate collective responses to advance blue justice around the South

African coastline. The following sections outline some of the alignments and tensions between TD research projects and social movements, and how scholar activists can assist in navigating these.

### Transdisciplinary research and social movements

Transdisciplinary research, discussed in this paper through the lens of the 'social engagement' school of transdisciplinarity (Lawrence et al. 2022), which seeks the involvement of different academic disciplines as well as knowledge holders outside of academia in co-developing transformative solutions to real-world problems, is inherently political. It is engaged in political work in the broadest sense – through having to do with activities of co-operation, negotiation, meaning-making and conflict within and between groups of people (Leftwich 2004). TD research is also explicitly political in that it seeks to make research more responsive, inclusive, influential, and 'useful' in societal decision-making. In its orientation towards addressing societal challenges and contributing to 'transformations for sustainability', TD research is guided by 'specific normative socio-political goals' (Lawrence et al. 2022) towards the realisation of 'the common good', where the common good is generally understood to include political justice (Lawrence et al. 2022). Marshall et al. (2018, p. 2) articulates 'the processes of knowledge co-production in TDR as being influenced by and exerting influence over the wider politics of the knowledge – action interface'.

Although transdisciplinarity emerged from concerns about the 'silo-ing' of scientific disciplines and aims to address power imbalances in knowledge production, dominant TDR discourse can appear blind to its own centering of scientific paradigms even as it aims for more egalitarian knowledge co-production. This contradiction is present in the language of TDR – the term 'transdisciplinary', and the transcendence it implies (Cockburn 2022) of the boundaries between different disciplines, as well as of the boundaries between academic knowledge systems and all other knowledge systems, remains a very academic term. Knowledge holders outside of academia do not think of their knowledge as belonging to or emerging from a discipline. Furthermore, transdisciplinary literature often speaks about 'academic and societal actors' as if academia is outside of society; but this conception of academics as distinct from the rest of society is also problematic in its myopic centering and differentiating of academics. Within 'strong' transdisciplinarity (Max-Neef 2005; Ross and Mitchell 2018) there should not be this false binary of academic and societal knowledge, but rather a conception of social networks of knowledge and

action, in which academic knowledge and contributions are one strand interwoven with many others.

TD research is an activity system that is itself 'permeated with political dynamics' as 'differently empowered actors with competing aims and interests, negotiate to ensure their objectives are met' (Healy 2019). The larger politics of knowledge–action interface is frequently acknowledged in TD research; however, the ways in which different knowledge holders encounter and negotiate the power dynamics and politics within their TD networks is an under-developed aspect of TD research (Cundill et al. 2015; Wolff et al. 2019). While the political nature of transformations to sustainability is acknowledged by some (Jørgensen 2012; Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015; Temper et al. 2018; Stirling 2019), most literature on TD for transformations to sustainability remains focused on discussions on the robustness, validity and integration of co-produced knowledge with minimal analysis on the politicized nature of working across disciplinary and academic-activist boundaries. There is also little literature within TD scholarly work on what it means to take a political stance when TD research projects come up against government or private business agendas that reproduce inequality and injustices.

The Coastal Justice Network emerged as a negotiation and navigation through some of the political tensions between disciplines and individual researchers within the TD network. Different researchers within the One Ocean Hub in South Africa have different relationships with government departments. Diverse networks and skills bases are a strength of TD research networks. However, it can also create tensions within these networks when some researchers wish to take more assertive political stances in their work. One of the reasons that the CJN came to be, was to create some distance from the broader One Ocean Hub community of researchers. Several justice issues had emerged early on in the One Ocean Hub, specifically around extractive oil and gas and its impact on fishers, and around the killing of fishers in marine protected spaces by conservation officers as supposedly 'anti-poaching' measures. We learnt that not all our colleagues were comfortable when we took a public stand against human rights abuses and against oil and gas applications in the oceans. A few colleagues felt that even if they agreed in sentiment, particularly against extractive mining, that adding their names to One Ocean Hub letters to Ministers or the press could compromise their existing relationships with government officials. Being seen as oppositional to government holds professional risk for many of the marine scientists who rely on types of government funding and networks to do their work. Creating a separate grouping within the TD network called the Coastal Justice Network

enabled scholar activists to freely vocalise injustices and work in solidarity with our civil society and social movement partners. This allowed us to stand by our own political principals that sit at the core of our research projects, and importantly built trust and solidarity with our key partners. For example, when fishers in isiMangaliso were killed by conservation officers it was the Coastal Justice Network, not the One Ocean Hub, who wrote publicly about this oppressive violence impacting fishers. Increasingly we started to write/speak as the Coastal Justice Network, although always acknowledging being a part of the One Ocean Hub.

In larger One Ocean Hub meetings we reported back on the Coastal Justice Network activities and why these held relevance for the broader objectives of the TD research. Making spaces for discussion and dialogue within the One Ocean Hub enabled TD researchers throughout the network to collectively strategize on how those wishing to support socio-environmental justice activities could do so without compromising their relationships with government officials who were key partners on other projects. This is not to suggest that navigating these different positionalities and political strategies are without tensions. Certainly, there have been some frustrations and conflicts around different methods of engaging with stakeholders outside academia, around the role of science in taking a normative political stance, and around different interpretations of the role of transdisciplinary research.

Many transdisciplinary sustainability researchers remain uncomfortable, in inhabiting a political identity – the 'explicit attention to normative goals is unfamiliar territory for many researchers' (Lawrence et al. 2022, p. 51). Particularly for those with disciplinary training in the natural sciences, concerns about 'remaining neutral' and not 'taking a political stand' can be very challenging to shift (Latour 2004; Isopp 2014). This may partially explain why, even amongst TD sustainability researchers committed to values of participatory, inclusive, co-engaged research with diverse stakeholders responding to environmental concerns, there is hesitancy in acknowledging the importance of social movements (Temper et al. 2018); and a lingering discomfort about being associated with political action.

The radical, systemic shifts in values, structures and governance that is needed for sustainable and just socio-ecological systems do require high-quality TD research. Equally however, these systemic shifts require politically engaged, transgressive, at times unruly and disruptive approaches to the stubborn reproductions of inequality and exploitation inherent within current economic and social structures. It is frequently social movements who lead these kinds of politically engaged processes at global and local scales (Lotz-Sisitka et al.

2015; Martinez-Alier et al. 2016; Scoones 2016; Temper et al. 2018; Stirling 2019). Social movements, as distinct from broader civil society, are ‘a sustained mobilization of “challengers” (individuals and organizations) that are located in the subordinate positions of a social field that seek fundamental changes in the social field, and that encounter resistance to those changes from the “incumbents” located in the dominant positions of the field’ (Hess 2022, p. 58). In the Global South, and indeed for ‘subaltern’ (Gramsci 1957) communities throughout the world, social movements are crucial spaces of political organising, knowledge production and strategy for bringing about emancipatory transformations and alternatives.

Globally, fisher people and their communities have organised and mobilised to respond to the range of ‘blue injustices’ (Chuenpagdee and Jentoft 2019; Bennett et al. 2021; Ertör 2023). In South Africa, fisher people, their communities and wider alliances of civil society organisations and researchers, have also engaged in organised resistance to diverse justice issues in relation to ocean decision-making. These emerging social movements are particularly concerned about: rampant expansion of mining and oil and gas extraction along the South African coast and ocean; realisation and protection of the human, customary and environmental rights of small-scale fishers and their communities; and meaningful inclusion of coastal communities – particularly of women, whose contributions to coastal livelihoods are profoundly marginalised – in ocean governance and co-management. Grassroots social movements such as the one emerging in South Africa around environmental justice and the oceans are at the forefront of both experiencing environmental injustice and responding to it (Chesters 2012). Social movements have enormous, often unrecognised, learning and knowledge to contribute towards knowledge generation for sustainable practices (Choudry 2015). They hold ‘subjective knowledge’ based on their particular positions, identities and experiences (Brem-Wilson 2014); they are the eyes, ears and bodies on the frontline of socio-ecological injustices. They also collectively hold direct knowledge about broader social, ecological and political dysfunctions that reveal otherwise hidden social relations that hold ‘wicked’ socio-ecological problems intractably in place (Choudry 2020). The ‘systemic, multi-dimensional and intersectional’ approaches of environmental justice movements mean that they are particularly well positioned to contribute to just transformations for sustainability (Temper et al. 2018, p. 747).

TD research that positions itself as contributing to socio-ecological transformations therefore needs to prioritise inclusion and collaboration with social movements. Yet there are limited examples of how TD research connects with social movements to co-

generate knowledge and impact decision-making. In addition to the historic discomfort of some scientific disciplines with taking a political stand to protect ideologies of scientific objectivity, some TD scholars have concerns about the ‘radical’ or ‘destructive’ nature of activists within social movements, and about the legitimacy and depth of representivity within social movements. As outlined earlier for some TD research scholars being seen as aligned to social movements creates immediate risks of damaging hard-won relationships with authorities towards whom social movements may take an oppositional stance.

This wariness to partner goes both ways – many activists within social movements are sceptical and guarded about partnering with academics and researchers. Based on past (and often present) dynamics of power and privilege, partnerships with researchers have been experienced as extractive and exploitative of social movements (Maxey 1999; Gutierrez and Lipman 2016; Vakil et al. 2016). Activists resent being viewed by academic researchers as objects of knowledge, rather than knowledge producers in their own right (Juris 2008). There is also a sense of being exploited for academic gain (Edelman 2009) where the research benefits academics career paths more than social movement objectives. Many activists are researchers in their own right, with their own theories and concepts (Choudry 2015; Martinez-Alier et al. 2016; Burt 2019), but their knowledge is often undermined by academics as being insufficiently rigorous. At other times, their knowledge alerts academics to important new areas of research but becomes co-opted and repackaged to align with academic conventions, without adequate acknowledgement or benefit sharing of the outcomes of the study (Cordner et al. 2012; Dawson and Sinwell 2012; Gillan and Pickerill 2012). This can leave strategic research needs identified by social movements as ‘unfunded, incomplete, or generally ignored’ (Frickel et al. 2010, pp. 444–445).

Despite the commitment in TD theory to equitable, deeply co-engaged knowledge production with diverse partners, in practice, approaches to co-engaged research (especially with marginalised groups) often proceed with the acceptance that inevitably the researcher is leading the process. Here, researchers try and be as ‘participatory’ as possible within the paradigm of researcher-led enquiries. Several reviews have highlighted that TD research in practice faces challenges in mitigating against power imbalances, and in implementing strong empowered engagement with non-academic partners (Lang et al. 2012; Wolff et al. 2019; Lawrence et al. 2022). Of serious concern to scholar activists is the risk that some TD research projects may co-opt the ‘appearance’ of social movement participation, without

taking up the knowledge or struggles of these movements in meaningful ways. For example, Healy (2019, p. 521), writes about how social movements are used for conferring legitimacy on governmentality in a neoliberal policy environment, 'enabling the [European] research policy community to lend "visible" support to projects with radical policy objectives ... whilst leaving dominant, neo-liberal policy trajectories of ecological modernisation intact'.

How TD research projects navigate this tricky politics is particularly important to pay attention to in the context of efforts to transform ocean governance. Like elsewhere in the world, in South Africa, marine decision-making remains extremely unbalanced in terms of its reliance upon marine and fisheries science – disciplines that are dominated by normative scientific frameworks, and resistant to integrating knowledge and paradigms from the social sciences (Green 2022; Harden-Davies et al. 2022), and even less so the local ecological knowledge of coastal communities. There is a particular danger in ocean governance of 'de-peopling and de-politicization' (Bennett et al. 2021, p. 5), as if the ocean is an empty territory. The treatment of the ocean as an under-used frontier, usually under the banner of the Blue Economy, leads to claims for marine resources by powerful actors, through industrial fisheries, aquaculture, bio-prospecting, eco-tourism, maritime transport, deep sea mining, oil and gas extraction, carbon markets and other industries (Voyer et al. 2018; Bennett et al. 2021). This is a perspective which serves the interests of those seeking to stake new claims in the ocean, but which utterly negates the lives and life worlds of people who live in intimate, intergenerational relationship with the sea. TD researchers must be very careful to ensure they are not implementing a kind of tokenistic participation with non-academic partners that are used to legitimise untransformed power imbalances.

### Scholar activism within TD research

To move beyond patronising or apolitical notions of non-academic citizens as 'participants' who we include in *our* research, we should take seriously the invitation to re-imagine 'the conditions for ethical encounters ... that challenge present conditions of colonization and inequality' (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012, p. 50). If TD researchers are to build ethical, reciprocal partnerships with social movements, they need to be very conscious of the critiques and risks outlined above, and better appreciate the capacities that are needed for navigating these complex relational and political dynamics.

There is much to be learned from the literature and practice of scholar-activists, who have developed principles, methods and ethics for working in

solidarity with social movements. Scholar activists seek alignment between their political values and their academic projects, through working directly with marginalised groups or social movements engaged in struggles for justice and social change (Routledge and Derickson 2015). Scholar activists work *with and within* social movements, to ensure reciprocity, to understand the situated knowledge of social movements, and to demonstrate solidarity. Solidarity is understood here as a moral relation that unites people acting on the basis of a commitment to challenge injustice, oppression and vulnerability (Scholz 2008). Situated solidarities (Nagar and Geiger 2007) enable researchers to co-produce knowledges that are useful for social movements in 'ways that refuse but do not ignore the violent and imperialist histories of the academy' (Routledge and Derickson 2015, p. 391).

Rather than following the typical first phase of 'building the collaborative team and collaboratively framing the problem' (Lang et al. 2012) scholar-activists in the Coastal Justice Network have immersed themselves in the full intersectional complex mess of the problems faced by marginalised coastal users, trying to understand these struggles as they emerge, and to understand how best we might contribute towards addressing them. In the emergence and coordination of the Coastal Justice Network, we have paid close attention to navigating the politics of alliance building (Marshall et al. 2018), with an explicit bias towards the amplification of the knowledge and strategies of marginalised people to challenge structural injustices in current knowledge systems around ocean governance. We have learnt that in scholar activist TD research, the primary 'foundational' work is not about a shared problem framing process; it is about researchers becoming part of a social movement. Instead of only co-developing research questions at the outset, this work is concerned with creating the conditions whereby research support can be leveraged by community-based activists, social movements and others, at strategic moments as local struggle evolve – for example in compiling evidence for court cases, policy engagement or advocacy work. This resonates with Croog et al. (2018)'s support for a 'politics of resourcefulness' whereby community partners can make their own demands of the research project.

Scholar activists can work towards strengthening and supporting existing relationships and processes that have been developed by social movements and community activists. Doing so means that, when the context requires, research and other capacities that researchers hold, can contribute towards responsive co-engaged action. This requires a range of activities and resources not usually associated with scholarly outputs. The Coastal Justice Network roles in

relation to social movements of small-scale fishers and others working for Blue Justice are summarised in Box 1:

**Box 1.** Roles played by scholar-activists in Coastal Justice Network.

- **Network coordination role** – convening meetings, using research funds to support gatherings of small-scale fishers and their allies, with a co-developed agenda and outcomes
- **Advocacy role** – challenging and offering alternatives to the ongoing marginalization of small-scale fishers and other coastal knowledge holders within ocean governance and ocean research, re-framing and recognising small-scale fishers as ocean defenders
- **Knowledge mediation role** – bridging social movements and government officials' perspectives and experiences of policy and regulations, bridging academic and activist knowledges, developing popular education materials, sourcing and making available published research that can be used by small-scale fishers and blue justice activists to enhance their work (for example fisheries research showing deep sea breeding grounds of species in relation to zones of proposed offshore oil and gas production)
- **Resource mobilization role** – motivating for research funds to go towards supporting the activities of social movements; fund raising; orienting our funded research activities towards the needs identified by activist partners
- **Communications role** – writing press releases, letters, affidavits, policy submissions, appeals and other documents upon request by, and in dialogue with, social movement partners
- **Policy Engagement role** – reflexive facilitation of collective strategy development and participatory preparation of submissions
- **Responsive Research role** – undertaking, advocating for and making accessible academic research to support the above.

In this networked social movement space, we take the lead in some situations, and at other times we are led by our partners. In this dynamic, relational and responsive network we contribute what we are best placed to contribute. Most of this work fits well with Brem-Wilson's (2014) proposed ways of practising scholar activism across a spectrum of activities; from direct action responses (e.g. letter writing, protests); supporting movements to understand their own practices and principles (facilitating organisational learning and reflection), bridging social movement knowledge into policy making arenas; and carrying out research requested by movements, or sourcing reliable and useful research done by others.

We do not want to romanticise scholar-activism work as a silver bullet for addressing issues of power within TD research networks. In pursuit of solidarity, scholar-activists run the risk of perpetuating the same power imbalances that they seek to disrupt, in a sense mirroring the tendency for researcher led agendas seen in TD research. What Vakil et al. (2016) call 'politicised trust' requires not only a mutually respectful working relationship but also an ongoing building of political solidarity. This conception of solidarity requires a strong critical reflexive praxis (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012). One practice that the Coastal Justice Network uses to assist us in critical reflection is to open ourselves to critique in several

different forums. Firstly, through sharing work in our own monthly meetings to see how they are received and built on by other CJN members. Secondly, we present our research and activities not just at academic seminars, but both in public and in activist spaces, including national strategic workshops with SSFs and environmental justice organisations, and in online webinars with environmental justice scholars and activists working in related issues. Radical vulnerability within scholar-activist collaborations involves opening oneself up entirely, including to critique and backlash (both from colleagues in academia and in social movements). This radical vulnerability is an important mode of enabling 'epistemic and ethical responsibility in relation to politically engaged alliance work' (Chowdhury et al. 2016). Like all scholar-activists we grapple extensively with clarifying and understanding our positionality and practising reflexivity in a 'dynamic field where knowledge production is but one of multiple expressions of power' (Routledge and Derickson 2015, p. 392). Embodied, practiced values such as 'solidarity and responsibility, trust and hope, vulnerability and reflexivity' help scholar-activists to ethically navigate their identities and praxis (Nagar 2014). Opening the work in process to scrutiny by different stakeholders ensures that we are held accountable for our actions and learn from constructive critiques.

In the CJN, we draw inspiration from feminists' ethos of care' (De la Bellacasa 2012) emphasising the embodied, practical, politically engaged work of repairing and caring for the environment and each other (Staffa et al. 2022). This is done through engaging with conflict and difference, interrogating positionalities and power relations, building upon marginalised knowledges; and countering epistemic violence (Staffa et al. 2022). Equally, an ethos of care means 'cultivating caring academic cultures' (Staffa et al. 2022). The process of developing a deeper understanding of each other's disciplinary framings and politics can be emotionally difficult. However, it can catalyse alliances between scholars from diverse disciplines who choose to stick with these challenging engagements and view them as spaces of learning and reflection for shifting practices. Over the last 3 years, some of our natural sciences colleagues have shown an increased willingness to actively include small-scale fisher issues into their planning and technical process. Some of these scientists, in responses to requests from us and from SSFs, have presented at Small-Scale Fishes workshop on how their research supports fishers' opposition to oil and gas. Others are pushing from the inside to get SSFs included in the technical tools used in Marine Spatial Planning. Incremental shifts in disciplinary practices towards more inclusive and just engagements can feel frustratingly slow for social movements and the scholar-

activists linked to them, but they are part of a strategic move for justice. We too have learnt a lot with colleagues from diverse disciplines who are open to engaging in the politics of working with social movements. We are grateful for how they have deepened our understandings of the constraints and possibilities from within government to improved ocean governance, and of the strengths and weaknesses of TD research.

### How TD scholar-activist praxis helps to address some of the challenges in TD

TD sustainability research in South Africa will need to develop multi-stakeholder networks that include social movements to meet its objectives of equitable and inclusive research production. Embedding both scholar-activists and social movement representatives within TD networks enables the flexibility required of research to be responsive to urgent social and environmental justice needs on the ground. This flexibility is not easy nor possible for all researchers, but TD research networks that make space for scholar-activist researchers can get more comfortable with this kind of work. Including scholar activists within TD projects develops the broader capacity and literacy of networks for working with social movements, and vice versa. Ethical principles that guide scholar activists closely align with those identified by feminist and Global South TD researchers. The 'relational turn' within sustainability research (West et al. 2020) has brought into focus a paradigm shift towards more relational, process-oriented ways of thinking about transformations, that prioritise the nurturing of relationships for bringing diverse situated knowledges into environmental governance. TD researchers working in these closely engaged, politically rigorous ways need to develop relational competencies (Holden et al. 2019), and reflexive competencies (Brundiens et al. 2021) to navigate the complex socio-political terrain of TD research. This is necessary to address the challenging tensions that TD researchers can experience in playing multiple roles (Cockburn 2022). Lawrence et al. (2022) identify a previously unrecognised type of knowledge needed for navigating complex relationships within TD, which they have called 'process knowledge', which refers to the knowledge needed for integration of activities, orientations and systems of diverse actors, and for designing the structures to support continuous reflective, responsive learning. Marshall et al. (2018) write about 'transformative space making' as creating 'openings within the cognitive, normative, social, and material arenas of knowledge systems for the coordinated exercise of propoor agency'. These important emerging aspects of TD praxis align closely with scholar activist praxis and need to be developed

further through critical engagement with these concepts in practice. Scholar activists offer experience in navigating across the science/society and academic/non-academic binaries. Including scholar activists in TD research networks holds exciting possibilities to 'learn democracy' (Walters 2022) from and with social movements to build respectful, solidarity-based relationships across vastly disparate divides of race, class, gender, geography and power in South Africa. Walters (2022, p. 16) highlights that '... learning democracy occurs in action where new knowledge is co-created by braiding together experiential, cognitive and contextual knowledge'; and that 'the means and ends of organising are equally important, as democracy is learnt through its practice'.

Yet scholar activists face significant dilemmas within their own work that need to be considered if they are to be included with care in TD research networks. Scholar activists are accountable in multiple directions simultaneously – to the social movements they commit to being in solidarity with, to the universities that employ them, to their individual academic projects (with requirements in terms of publishing or graduating), and to their funders. These multiple worlds have distinct principles and values, and distinct modes of evaluation and measuring impact. As scholar-activists, we frequently wrestle with our identity and role throughout this process. What we have learnt is that researchers wishing to practice co-engaged TD research with social movements, need to value equally the organising and relational practices of TD networks as they do the knowledge outputs of these networks. This means recognising that what appears as non-academic activities of scholar-activists are in fact critical foundations to shaping responsive, flexible, and participatory research practices. Scholar-activists who are engaged on the ground may not be able to produce publications at the rate of other researchers in the TD network, but their insights and knowledge mediation is critical to how academic and technical publications are presented and can inform strategies for environmental justice by marginalised groups and social movements. In short, if they are part of a TD network that values their work and makes space for sharing, scholar activists can assist in moving traditional research into meaningful impact for marginalised people. The holding of learning spaces and processes to mediate across differences and knowledge frames does not just happen automatically though. It is an additional aspect of scholar activist work, that is important to value and make visible.

### Conclusion and recommendations

In this paper, we argue that TD researchers for sustainability in the Global South should proactively

engage with social movements that are building ground-up responses to resist environmental injustices. Indeed, we propose that TD research networks need to include environmental activists and social movement representatives if they are to meet the objectives of research that is relevant, just and progressive. In the context of ongoing and deepening violations of environmental, social and epistemic justice, ethical research must engage with and contribute to the social movements calling for change. We also recognise that building ethical and reciprocal relationships between academics and community-based activists and social movements carries a lot of risk, tension, and contradiction, for both academics and activists, and therefore requires TD researchers to learn and practice certain capacities, such as critical reflexivity and solidarity.

Specific lessons and unresolved tensions that have emerged from the Coastal Justice Network within the One Ocean Hub are shared, as a case study of scholar activist TD research in practice. For TD researchers interested in including social movements in their networks, we suggest, drawn from our own experiences, the following points for consideration in Box 2 below:

#### Box 2 Recommendations for TD scholars

- Recognise, value and support the knowledge and contributions of community-based social movements in advancing just transformations for sustainability;
- Include, and value, scholar-activists with existing relationships with social movements as core members of TD research teams. This entails recognising the different and distinct research contributions of scholar-activists and adapting expectations of activities and deliverables accordingly;
- Encourage and allow time and resources for co-engaged learning spaces for the development of reflexivity, process knowledge (Lawrence et al. 2022), transformative space making (Marshall et al. 2018), learning democracy (Walters 2022) and learning solidarity (Gatzambide-Fernández 2012);
- Early on in the network, and throughout its' active life-span, make time and space for diverse actors within the TD research network to discuss and understand the opportunities and challenges of working solidarities between academic researchers and community-based activists;
- Ensure that time and energy is committed to ongoing learning spaces that openly explore oppositional stances, tensions and politics within the network as and when they arise, which they will. Through an ethos of care, work to position these spaces of tension as spaces of generative learning, to identify structural and systemic blockages to shared goals;
- Allow the space and support within TD networks for researchers to take a public stand in solidarity with those on the frontlines of environmental injustices. Reciprocally, foster respectful understanding of those who are currently constrained to do so - while working to unpack and address those constraints.

We cannot emphasise enough the importance of dedicating time and space to critically thinking through the messy but hopeful politics of solidarity building. This enables all TD stakeholders to recognise how different relationships, roles and positions within a network are both a constraint, such as when conflicting politics can cause risk for different

actors, and an opportunity to develop diverse insider/outsider strategies for change.

This paper is intended as a humble invitation to the TD sustainability research community, to actively engage with and contribute to social movements of marginalised people working to resist environmental injustice. We invite you into a conversation about how to be in solidarity with social movements, through sharing our own experiences within a scholar-activist network learning to be in solidarity with coastal social movements in South Africa.

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#### ORCID

Taryn Pereira  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6349-5002>

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# The Palgrave Handbook of Blue Heritage

*Edited by* Rosabelle Boswell  
David O’Kane · Jeremy Hills

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Rosabelle Boswell · David O'Kane ·  
Jeremy Hills  
Editors

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*Editors*

Rosabelle Boswell  
Nelson Mandela University  
Port Elizabeth, South Africa

David O'Kane  
Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology  
Halle, Germany

Jeremy Hills  
University of the South Pacific  
Suva, Fiji

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The work of researchers presented in this book also reveals the increasingly transdisciplinary field of ocean management and the intellectual flexibility required to understand diverse disciplinary frameworks and epistemologies in the ocean sciences. We are therefore very grateful to the authors in this book. Many are working in extraordinarily difficult and fluid circumstances but still managed to submit their chapters to this edited book. The added challenge of Covid-19 made their task even more challenging and because of Covid-19, some researchers did not manage to offer a chapter. In the ‘field’, researchers were also required to engage with communities embedded in highly unequal societies, where primary concerns were for subsistence and health care needs. For doing the difficult work of engaging research participants in local communities, sharing challenging stories, collating data and analysing it and working as part of a team, we thank the authors, the editors,

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## ***Lalela uLwandle: An Experiment in Plural Governance Discussions***

Kira Erwin, Taryn Pereira, Dylan McGarry, and Neil Coppen

### **Introduction**

Carefully crafted storytelling on how humans make meanings of their worlds in relation to the ocean offers learnings for altering ocean governance frameworks towards both inclusivity and plurality. This chapter explores these learnings through a research and theatre-based project, *Lalela uLwandle*

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K. Erwin  
Durban University of Technology, Kwazulu Natal, Durban, South Africa  
e-mail: [KiraE@dut.ac.za](mailto:KiraE@dut.ac.za)

T. Pereira · D. McGarry (✉)  
Rhodes University, Makanda, South Africa  
e-mail: [d.mcgarry@ru.ac.za](mailto:d.mcgarry@ru.ac.za)

T. Pereira  
e-mail: [t.pereira@ru.ac.za](mailto:t.pereira@ru.ac.za)

N. Coppen  
Durban, South Africa

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(translated from isiZulu as Listen to the Sea), developed using the Empatheatre methodology<sup>1</sup> under the One Ocean Hub collective. Empatheatre is a research-based, theatre-making praxis in which research, data gathering, analysis and dissemination is collaboratively facilitated across different publics (Coppen, 2019). The *Lalela uLwandle* theatrical script was written and performed through an emergent and iterative process of practice and action-based research that took place over 2018 and 2019 in which co-participants, subsistence and small scale fishers, academics and researchers, marine scientists, traditional healers, religious followers, lifesavers, civil society partners, activists, and marine educators worked to identify and deliberate on matters of concern in relation to the ocean. *Lalela uLwandle* began as a response to a local conflict around a permit application for deep sea gas prospecting by a large oil and gas company off the coast of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. This particular local struggle in which the needs of diverse community members were pitted against a large extractive corporation, is one of many examples within a larger national and international move towards the Blue Economy (Bennett et al., 2021). As many countries turn to the seas in the hope of renewed economic growth, issues of environmental justice related to the oceans and climate change are increasing. As outlined in the first section of this chapter, ocean-related policy and governance frameworks interact with competing needs and conflicting desires on how we govern the ocean. In addition, in the blind rush for the dream of GDP growth, policy and governance frameworks may exacerbate historic and contemporary socio-economic exclusions. In South Africa capitalist and environmental conservation endeavours can, and have, caused harm for already marginalised people. These social and environmental justice concerns set an urgent challenge for ocean governance. This challenge lies not only in ensuring inclusion, but in recognising existing power relations between ocean epistemologies in which some ways of knowing, such as science and economics, dominate policy and decision-making forums.

There are many strategies needed, at different scales, to effect changes in governance policy and practice to ensure broad public participation and inclusion. Some interventions tackle the structures and systems of entrenched power head on, through either resistance and protest or critical engagement from within. Other interventions take a step to the side, to create an alternative conversation, with different entry points and framings, that opens up our perception to an expanded set of relations between people and the environment, liberated from the language of management and policy. *Lalela Ulwandle* was an example of the latter, by openly exploring what we may gain by listening closely to a plurality of ocean knowledges. If we are to spark a new

imagination for what inclusive and just decision-making feels like then we need to experiment with methods that reject epistemological hierarchies and the problematic view that different knowledge systems are incommensurable. This chapter shares our learnings on how agonistic and plural understandings of the ocean provide an important point of departure for imagining anew just and inclusive ocean governance that works towards planetary well-being.

## **Ocean Grabbing in Policy and Practice**

The oceans are receiving a significant increase in scientific and profit-seeking attention. The latter is discussed in Bennett et al. (2015). For a definition of this concept and the activities that constitute this action. The ocean, a moving body of water, fundamental to all life on earth, is under threat from human activities (Bähr, 2017; Franke et al., 2020; Poloczanska et al., 2018). National states and international bodies juggle competing demands within ocean governance. Extractive ocean industries such as commercial fishing, seabed mining, externalities from land-pollutants, and the hunt for marine genetic resources all make promises of economic growth (Bennett et al., 2021; OECD, 2016). Yet, simultaneously there is mounting scientific evidence advocating for the protection of marine resources as crucial to life on earth, and growing public demands for an end to these extractive industries to mitigate against a climate crisis (Bond, 2019; Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2019). Many nation states, including South Africa, are developing Marine Spatial Plans (MSPs) in an attempt at governance and monitoring frameworks for their Exclusive Economic Zones<sup>2</sup> and Extended Continental Shelf areas.<sup>3</sup> To work across these demands ambiguous concepts like the Blue Economy are used to “facilitate cooperation between different social worlds” (Schutter et al., 2021, p. 7). These conceptual constructs create policy containers that enable duplicitous legislation to encourage, regulate and prohibit activities in the ocean (ibid., 2021, p. 3).

Amidst these national processes is a growing cry from many different geographies for “a new relationship between humanity and the ocean”, one that requires a “a transformative shift from a state-centric approach to a global approach that takes into account the embeddedness of the ocean and associated actors in the wider planetary system” (Rudolph et al., 2020, p. 1). Appeals to collective humanity are necessary for healthy interconnected earth systems, but if they are to be transformative, they must simultaneously grapple with the stubborn power hierarchies and socio-economic fractures across, and within, human geographies and decision-making forums. Given

the strong relationship of ocean health to the climate crisis there is a sense of urgency to these national governance frameworks. This urgency too often leads to policy development along a predictable path dependency steeped in capitalist logics and existing power structures. Already in South Africa we see the beginnings of ocean governance replicating weak participatory and inclusion processes (Sowman & Sunde, 2018), as well as entrenching scientific and economic discourses as the only legitimate knowledge systems for decision-making (Boswell & Thornton, 2021). The tensions emerging from this path dependency are clearly manifest in the struggles around subsistence and small-scale fishers. In 2007 fishers on the West Coast of South Africa took the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries to court demanding a more inclusive and responsive policy regime for their sector. The policy instrument that emerged in 2012 had laudable goals for inclusion and indicated a significant move towards legislation for 'community-based' rights for small-scale and subsistence fishers (Sowman & Sunde, 2021). Yet in implementing the policy regulations the state reverted back to predictable economic development aspirations that forced fishers to create co-operatives using a small business model (Sunde & Erwin, 2020). For various reasons these co-operatives have not delivered on the promise of local development, both for the state and for the fishers involved. Slow roll out by the state, broken promises of boats and equipment, capture of these co-operatives for local politics and patronage, and the uneasy fit co-operatives of this kind have with the lived experiences of rural and urban subsistence fishers along the coastline (ibid.). Not only are many fishers excluded from this regulatory regime, but the message these permitting structures send is clear. You are more valued by the state, and your chances of getting a seat at the negotiation table are significantly increased, if you comply with formalising your livelihood into a dominant economic growth model (Ntona & Schröder, 2020).

Fishing for livelihoods along the South African coast is enmeshed in coastal cultural and heritage practices (Sunde, 2014). This is not unique to South Africa (see Gallois & Duda, 2016; Nadel-Klein, 2020; Urquhart & Acott, 2013) but the country's experiences of coloniality and apartheid have shaped these entanglements in specific ways. Many people racialised as black<sup>4</sup> in rural and urban areas were forcibly removed from the coast to make way for industrial and leisure activities for the white elite, violently disrupting their close relationships with the sea (Sunde, 2014). Continuing fishing as a source of pride, and in some cases resistance against this discrimination, further enmeshed fishing into cultural identities for many coastal people (Sunde & Erwin, 2020). Of course, in addition to identifying with a particular culture, religion and class, fishers are also parents and family members whose livelihood and knowledge of the sea support social relations in diverse ways. These

socio-cultural livelihoods and logics are often antithesis to obsessions about capitalist growth models for small businesses.

It is not only the “capitalist-industrial visions of ocean space” (Ntona & Schröder, 2020) in the fisheries sector that coastal people are up against. They face similar exclusions through conservation efforts. In South Africa, state-led nature conservation has a damaging legacy of exclusion to answer for. Under apartheid, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) “are associated with the forced removal of black communities from their lands and their displacement from the waters they traditionally fished” (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169). Conservation policies “almost exclusively reflected Western scientific values and beliefs, with an emphasis on protecting nature from human impacts” (Cocks et al., 2012). Well-meaning biodiversity protection policies that result in formal exclusions for indigenous and economically marginalised groups are common tensions that arise in marine conservation across national geographies (Crandall et al., 2018). Whilst the South African transition to democracy in 1994 expanded constitutional rights to all people and enabled recognition of these injustices<sup>5</sup> (De Wet & Du Plessis, 2010), restoration processes around land and resource rights for many coastal people have been painfully slow (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169).

These past exclusions are exacerbated by contemporary neoliberal models for marine conservation that link conservation with fantasies of development (Infield, 2001, p. 800). As Schutter et al. (2021, p. 2) point out the use of international concepts like the blue and green economy,

share a foundation in ecological modernisation thinking, whereby economic growth and environmental protection can go hand-in-hand through incorporation of environmental issues into markets....[obstructing] the fundamental change required to achieve actual sustainability. (Schutter et al., 2021, p. 2)

Exclusions of local coastal people from protected areas frequently come hand-in-hand with attracting wealthier, mostly people racialised as white South Africans, and international visitors who pay for holidays in these pristine spaces. Rather than valuing traditional and cultural livelihood practices as being an important contributor to conservation efforts, communities who were forcibly removed are now promised (mostly low wage) jobs through growing environmental tourism. It is important to acknowledge there are positive environmental benefits to MPAs in South Africa particularly for the regeneration of fish stocks (Maggs et al., 2013). However, the social impacts of MPAs include weakening of local participatory governance, the loss of tenure rights and access to resources by already marginalised communities, increased food insecurity and reduced household income, as well as negative

impacts on culture and identity (Sowman & Sunde, 2018). Too often then contemporary conservation management is experienced by black people as a continuum of apartheid's legacy of forced removals and punitive regulations. Thembela Kepe calls for a recognition of how contemporary conservation efforts, whilst not necessarily conceptualised as racist, as was the case under apartheid, serve as "unintentional acts that highlight race differences, positively or negatively" and "end up raising questions about equality, paternalism and redress in regards to race" (2009, p. 872). In South Africa then these Blue Growth narratives can actively reproduce the "colonization of nature", where dispossession occurs not just through land-grabs but through the rejection of "indigenous knowledge, values and practices in environmental management" (Cock, 2018, p. 140). This failure by the democratic state to adequately address historic injustices related to MPAs, as well as weak contemporary process of participation and inclusion in the promulgation of new MPAs ensures a "growing discontent" around spatial planning for marine protection (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169).

Given this history of violence and segregation, and continued experiences of exclusion, ocean-related policy forums cannot escape grappling with how unequal power relations impact governance frameworks. As we embark on the exercise of extending existing land-based spatial planning and policy regimes to the oceans, we face a collective challenge. At the very moment in which we need time for critical reflection and debate around why these national and international frameworks have failed to ensure environmental and ecological justice on land, we appear in the face of the climate crisis to have run out of it. How may we work with this urgency *and* insistence on careful participatory processes for governance, alternative social structures and critical reflection? If we are to move beyond the predictable path dependencies of capitalism and siloed governance arrangements in ocean governance, then we need a new imagination for what inclusive and just decision-making feels like.

One method for generating such an imagination is to tackle the dominance of only a few ways of knowing the ocean. The epistemological hegemony of both the natural sciences and economics in ocean-related policy development generates a number of unhelpful rhetorical devices which reproduce fractured and polarised debates. These fault lines, as Jackie Cock calls them, fragment the environmental movement into those perceived as "narrow conservation movement focused on the protection of wild places, plants and animals, and the environmental justice movement, which is organizing around concrete issues in the everyday experience of poor people, especially their exposure to toxic pollution and lack of critical resources" (2018, p. 143). The dominance of scientific and economic epistemologies

also creates awkward paradoxes which suggests both the possibility of a win-win scenario through linking marine protection with economic development, and simultaneously de-politicises the numerous trade-offs it sets up; marine conservation vs economic growth; commercial fisheries (jobs) vs small-scale fishers (livelihoods), marine conservation vs local restitution, and international capitalist interest vs. local economies. These repetitive dichotomies in governance forums serve to side-line the growing evidence that involving “local and indigenous communities in planning and decision-making processes enhanced management effectiveness and the achievement of socio-economic and conservation goals” of MPAs (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169). Rejecting a myopic vision of saving the planet through “greener”, or in this case “bluer” economic development that boxes us into the same polarised positions, requires actively working with the relational social and ecological processes between plural ways of knowing the sea. What is required is a concerted push for “a clear recognition of the diversity of values associated with socio-natural well-being as this relates to the ocean” (Ntona & Schröder, 2020). Indeed, if we are to adequately address the scale and scope of climate change then we must open the conversation to diverse ontologies in the production of knowledge.

Beyond understandings of economic and scientific models, cultural, traditional and spiritual knowledge systems equally shape how people act on, and with, ocean life. They also powerfully influence people’s responses to state regulations. It is unsurprising that contemporary research on environmentalism indicates “that social narratives are often far more important in leading people to accept or reject climate change than the underlying scientific evidence” (Marshall et al., 2016, p. 5). Diverse epistemologies are not just useful in the abstract notion of inclusivity, but as a form of action “to explore possibilities of pluralism in our responses and politics” (O’Reilly et al., 2020, p. 14). We stand with a growing number of scholars and movements calling for the acceptance of plurality in ocean governance (Bremer & Glavovic, 2013; Corrigan & Hay-Edie, 2013; Flannery et al., 2016; Vierros et al., 2020). As Ntona and Schröder’s (2020) caution us,

specifically, sectorially focused, growth-oriented MSP processes risk forgetting—or, worse, wilfully ignoring—that planning can also serve as an opportunity to develop a socially negotiated, non-economic understanding of oceanic relations, which takes into account the importance of local subsistence and health (physical, mental, spiritual and cultural), as well as local reliance upon the health and resilience of the natural environment.

It is this “socially negotiated” alternative that this chapter explores. It does so through a very local experiment in listening to plural epistemologies along the KwaZulu-Natal coastline of South Africa. The following section outlines how a local contestation around oil and gas prospecting led to this experiment in listening.

### **An Application to Prospect for Gas of the KwaZulu-Natal Coastline by ENI**

On the 28 October 2018 the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), an environmental justice organisation born from the long fight for clean air and against environmental racism in Durban, called a meeting with the Petroleum Agency of South Africa (PASA). PASA is the independent authority and regulatory body responsible for granting licences to prospect and mine for minerals and other natural resources on land and in the oceans. PASA is legislatively obligated to consider public needs when granting or denying such licences. Besides the representatives from PASA, the meeting consisted of representatives from small towns and communities living up and down the coastline of KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, members of larger environmental NGOs and activist groups were also in attendance. The meeting was called to make it known to the authorities that many people living along the KZN coastline were opposed to the licence application by SASOL<sup>6</sup> and ENI, an international oil & gas company, who wanted to prospect for gas. One of the authors of this chapter, Kira Erwin, was asked by SDCEA to facilitate this meeting. With people representing locations across 600kms of the KZN coast in the hall that day discussions and debates were robust, and translated to and from English to isiZulu to ensure that the discussions were understood by all.

The meeting in many ways represents South Africa’s living democracy, where it is not just the government who calls and runs stakeholder consultations on the ocean, but frequently civil society and communities who demand in-person engagements around decision making. People in the room that day came from very different class positions, as well as identified with different racial and cultural identities, and shared different histories in relation to the coast, which shaped their statements of concern and opposition. Whilst some people spoke of scientific concerns for ocean health, possible habitat destruction, and climate change, others spoke of concerns around their livelihoods, risks to their cultural heritage and of traditional knowledge observations around ocean pollution.

Whilst local coastal representatives had a platform to voice their concerns at this gathering there are more than one way for those in power to silence voices other than denying an audience. As Arundhati Roy reminds us “there’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” (2004). One method in which to “unhear” people’s concerns is to reduce diverse voices into an artificially constructed homogenous “community”. Whilst the PASA officials were sympathetic to some arguments presented, they frequently spoke about “the community” as either “for or against” development, with very little nuanced understanding or acknowledgement of the diverse perspectives, knowledge and concerns vocalised in the room. In doing so the authority officials entrenched a false binary in which they simply had to legally adjudicate between “the community” and the international corporation seeking to mine the seabed. In South Africa, a country with very high unemployment levels and slow economic growth (South African Budget Review, 2021), this binary inherently favours big business’ allure of jobs and GDP growth. Here an international capitalist ethos that courts a national growth agenda trumps a myriad of local concerns. What was lost in this insistence to see opposition to sea-bed mining as “one voice”, was the complexity of diverse demands for social, economic and environmental justice. It was the plurality of knowledge and experiences in the room that was the real challenge to PASA, a challenge that was “preferably unheard”.

If South Africa is to live up to its policy aim of creating an Ocean Economy that contributes to the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP 2030) through job creation, poverty alleviation and social equity (Findlay, 2018), then we must find alternative methods for listening to plural knowledge systems of the ocean. As will be argued below, different knowledge systems, science and tradition amongst them, do not have to be viewed as incommensurable for the well-being of the oceans. One of the challenges for inclusive ocean governance in South Africa and elsewhere, is not simply a perfunctory opening up of stakeholder forums, but an active approach to creating more just listening and dialogue methods that are comfortable with a plurality of meanings and relationships with the ocean. Methods that make us all more willing to listen to a chorus of voices, where different ways of knowing the sea may hold equal legitimacy within social negotiations on governance. The following section outlines one such local experiment in listening, *Lalela uLwandle*, that was designed in direct response to the above dilemma and the contestation expressed in the meeting with PASA.

## The Making and Performance of *Lalela uLwandle*

*Lalela uLwandle* was first and foremost a process set out to listen deeply to the stories of coastal people's relationships, histories and concerns for the ocean. We wanted to understand the intergenerational spiritual and historical relationships coastal citizens had with the Indian Ocean. The central questions at the heart of our research was: How does the ocean sustain and nourish KZN coastal dwellers? What are the points of conflict and intersection within and between the range of memories and mythologies, traditional folk (and fairy-tales), religious rites, idioms, scientific understandings, songs and rituals, economic frameworks, points of catharsis, recreation and superstition that the ocean invokes across the people who live along this coastline?

Narrative data that contributed to the script was created through two methods. The early stages of the research consisted of focus groups with marine educators at the local aquarium, subsistence fishers in Durban, and environmental justice partners (notably SDCEA and groundWork). During this stage we identified key texts that offered rich historic readings of people's experiences along this coast line, such as Viroshen Chetty and Neelan Govender's excellent book *The Legends of the Tide*, which records generations of stories around the South Indian Seine Net Fisher folk and industry in Durban, and the PH.D. of Dr. Philile Mbatha exploring the forced removals of coastal KZN communities during apartheid and the impact of coastal mining on traditional healing practices (Mbatha, 2018). In addition, renowned KZN storyteller Gcina Mhlope gave us permission to use and incorporate her beautiful story *Nolwandle: Girl of the Waves* in the play. Gcina's unique South African folk story was useful in establishing a narrative that would open and conclude the play, introducing and echoing so many aspects of our research (loss, learning, medicine, healing) in a magical and profound way. These texts, along with the narrative data, strongly influenced character development in the script. The second stage of the research included interviews with 4 marine scientists (2 social scientists and 2 natural scientists), 2 traditional healers, an environmental activist, a Zulu historian, a lifeguard, an environmental lawyer, a former National government Minister, and a practising Zionist.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the methods in collecting these narratives differ, both the focus groups and individual interviews began with the opening invitation to participants to tell us "your earliest memories of the sea?"

Through these explorations the Empatheatre team worked iteratively to shape the data into a first draft of a theatrical script. In doing so we had to remind ourselves how easily research, when scripted into a play, can feel didactic. We worked to avoid reducing characters to mere mouth pieces

conveying critical information. Each character, we decided, needed to be a consummate storyteller, a narrator of their own lives and realities, as well as being able to embody and speak to the many pressing questions and concerns around the sea that had emerged in the research. We have learned over the course of multiple *Empatheatre* processes that the stories of each character needs to have strong story arcs and emotional beats. Admittedly these arcs are often not overtly evident in the research narratives and it's the playwright's delicate responsibility to unearth and shape this whilst remaining connected to the original data. In the end, after much collective discussion, we settled on the development of three characters, each one emerging from different cultural backgrounds and historical contexts existing along the KZN coastline. The characters were: Niren<sup>8</sup> whose family has origins in the Indian indentured labourers brought to South Africa under colonial rule. His stories resonate with the many voices of the KZN fisher-folk as well as environmental activists who have fought years of environmental racism under apartheid and still today; Nolwandle,<sup>9</sup> who plays a marine educator and shares the stories of traditional and religious beliefs of many isiZulu speaking people, as well as the history of forced removals of black communities through the stories of her mother and grandmother; and lastly Faye,<sup>10</sup> a retired marine scientist living in a South Coast town whose science drives her activism and has stories of white privilege that she is confronting in her retirement.

Often *Empatheatre* processes rely on the use of composite characters, where multiple voices and many strands of research are woven into a single character. Niren, Faye and Nolwandle were all created using this device. This script writing process works in tandem with the research process, for example as the lead playwright Neil Coppen wove these narratives together, the research teams supported this process through fact and member checking with participants, as well as heading back into the field to conduct further interviews if parts of the storyline felt unresolved. The deeper we submerged ourselves in these worlds, the more the story and the incredible and often unexpected parallels between characters revealed itself. We soon discovered that our characters, as disparate as they may have seemed, were connected by the ocean in various profound and unexpected ways, particularly in their devotion to rituals, rites of various kinds and shared respect of the ocean.<sup>11</sup> After a final table reading with key civil society partners who were part of challenging the ENI application described earlier in this chapter, *Lalela uLwandle* went on a week's tour along the KwaZulu-Natal Coast line and ran for 1 week in the city of Durban at the end of 2019. *Lalela uLwandle* was also in 2020 performed in Port Elizabeth and in Makhanda at Rhodes University.

In total, the play has been performed 21 times, in 8 different towns and cities in KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape, for over 900 audience members. There have been 21 post show discussions and more than 600 feedback forms have been filled out and analysed. Audience members were strategically invited; they were diverse in terms of race and class, and included small scale fishers, mining affected communities, conservation officials, scientists, planners, tourism operators and interested members of the public. The strategic inviting of audience members is a critical aspect of the methodology, playing an important role in terms of the social learning and solidarity potential of the process. Social learning theory reveals that the more diverse an audience the deeper the learning (Wals et al., 2009). Just as critical is the way in which the “post-show discussion” is facilitated to offer the audience a space to share and reflect after seeing the performance. In these discussions, the lead and co-facilitators are chosen from amongst our core team, depending upon the audience present—to ensure that, for example, the discussion is carried out in the language spoken by the majority of the audience, with translation support from co-facilitators on the team. This co-facilitation is very useful if audience members ask questions that another researcher is best suited to address, and makes the space more democratic by inviting other Empatheatre practitioners to share their views. We were often fortunate to have civil society members in the audience who could field answers and to whom we were able to direct the public interested in their work. Audience members themselves can also sometimes present important counter points to their fellow audience members. In this sense the facilitator should “hold the space” rather than too closely direct or control the discussion. At the end of this post-show discussion audiences members could also complete a feedback form on their views of the show and thoughts for ocean governance.

The post-show discussions and feedback forms support collaborative analysis of research findings and data with diverse publics. The audience are involved in identifying implications of the research in relation to their lived experience. The post show discussion can at times open up a tribunal space for audience members to share testimonies of their own experiences in response to those they have seen performed. This opens up the possibilities for the development of new alliances for civic action. In the case of *Lalela Ulwandle*, the KZN tour of the play in October 2019 coincided precisely with the news that the application from SASOL and ENI for licences to undertake exploratory drilling for oil and gas off of the KZN coastline (as per the PASA meeting referenced earlier in this chapter) had been approved by the Department of Mineral Resources, and that there were 30 days to appeal this decision. From the road, whilst touring the play, members of our

team were involved in contributing to this appeals process, by drawing in the “expert testimonies” of co-researchers from a range of relevant disciplines; as well as the testimonies of audience members from the *Lalela Ulwandle* audience feedback forms. We worked closely with lawyers assisting with the appeal to gather and compile this input into a substantial letter of appeal; we shared up to date information related to the drilling licences and appeal process with audience members when the issue came up in post-show discussions; and were able to direct audience members who wished to take action towards SDCEA’s petition and other organised appeal processes. This appeal process is ongoing at the time of writing, with a collective civil society effort to take the government department to court over the issue. Although not addressed in this chapter the relationships and collective actions catalysed by the *Lalela Ulwandle* process have seeded the development of a growing Coastal Justice Network, responding to the social and environmental justice impacts of the Blue Economy at a national scale.

## **A Chorus of Voices in Public Story**

As we experienced through the *Lalela uLwandle* process storytelling is a powerful way to engage people in a conversation about ways of knowing the ocean and their impact on the world. Sharing research through public storytelling rather than only through publications, research reports and conferences can create a less didactic space for listening and engagement on contentious issues (Erwin, 2020). The stories performed, as well as those shared afterwards by audience members, enabled listening that made allowance for ambiguity, complexity and plurality. This is different from presenting arguments in academic conferences or stakeholder consultations where both the speaker and the audience are already primed to take a stand for or against a position in a critical debate (Polletta et al., 2011, p. 112). As one audience member, himself a scientist, noted “This is a very refreshing take on science and advocacy which is amazing” (DbnP2, 15/10/2019). Whilst critical debate was welcomed and encouraged in the post-show discussion, in our experience it was frequently done in a manner that afforded respect to divergent views. As an audience member in Hluhluwe succinctly wrote “traditions are important even if you don’t believe in them you must respect them and the sea” (HluhluweP26, 10/10/2019). In the feedback forms it was interesting to note how appreciative the audience were to be learning about multiple cultural views of the sea, and to realise they shared mutual respect for the ocean, even if the meanings and practices differed. Frequently

audience members who identify as Zulu shared in their feedback that they were pleased to watch and learn about these traditional practices. In Zulu cosmology ancestors live under the waters of the deep sea, making the ocean a sacred realm (Hofmeyr, 2020). Feedback comments, such as the ones below, captured feelings of “being recognized”:

*It inspired me because I was not expecting to see something like this but at least it shows that we do have people who are for us and our heritage.* (RichardsBayP10, 12/10/2019)

*It made me feel excited because now I know history about our ancestors and I also know a lot about the ocean.* (MbazwaneP10, 11/10/2019)

For audience members who follow ancestral beliefs it was affirming that the play presented this knowledge system as equally important to that of the scientist’s, or activists’. When responding to how the play made them feel one audience member wrote “moved, often times when speaking of the ocean’s conservation it seems to only concern ocean life, but this play profoundly displays how much heritage and people’s connection/stories reside within the sea—it affects people just as much” (DurbanDP25, 19/10/2019). Acknowledging the link between heritage, respect and the ocean was a common theme in the feedback data, people wrote explicitly that “they must not put oil in the oceans because it kills the heritage that we believe in” (HluhluweP31, 10/10/19), and that “we must keep it clean so that it will be able to keep the heritage which is what helps us connect with our ancestors” (HluhluweP43, 10/10/19). Audience members who may not have practised ancestral beliefs made a similar link, for example, “I learnt that the sea is important, we must not destroy it because we are harming the lives of the people who believe in it” (HluhluweP26, 10/10/19).

The feedback data and post-show discussions confirmed that “people’s emotional ties to nature and their cultural values may offer a stronger incentive for conservation than economic arguments based on the livelihood values of nature, which are generally insufficient to motivate collective action” (Cocks et al., 2012, p. 7). Methodologies of storytelling that make visible emotional connections to nature hold value for marine science education. For example, at the end of a performance with an audience of marine scientists and educators at the local aquarium one of the senior staff said that *Lalela uLwandle* had set them a challenge. She called on her team of scientists and educators to recognise the power of storytelling and imagine ways they could use this in their educational work at the aquarium.

Adding additional voices to the chorus woven into the script, audience members frequently showed pleasure in sharing their own or other peoples' personal connections with the ocean. Talking about our relationship with nature is not a frequent experience for many people. Similarly to Cocks et al. research related to the forest in the Eastern Cape, we too found that both participants and audience members frequently "expressed their pleasure and gratitude for having been given the opportunity to do so" (2012, p. 4). Audience members spoke about the symbolic importance the oceans hold for them and their families, often referring to memories of parents who taught them about the sea, or childhood moments of wonder that have stayed with them into adulthood. At the first performance of the tour an audience member who grew up on an island outside of South Africa wrote down teaching from her mother. She told us,

I was brought up with respect for the ocean. My mother would say when you enter the sea you are a guest of the fish, be a good guest. (Port ShepstoneP19, 7/10/2019)

This we thought illustrated rather beautifully the theme of respect for ocean life, and in the subsequent performances this maternal proverb was retold by the facilitators as a ritual closing to the post-show discussions. In this way the audience members' symbolic meanings of the oceans started to be shared across performances, and we are very grateful to the participant who shared her mother's wisdom.

## **The Politics of Storytelling and Working with Translation Protocols**

Acknowledging how people value social identities as well as move outside of them through empathetic responses and relational experiences required the research team to be cautious of their own assumptions on how race and culture might be read by the audience. It is important that the storylines in the script reflect research data, but they should not work to confine the audience's readings into expected cultural stereotypes or confirm discriminatory ideologies. In crafting the research narratives into composite characters for the play, it was critical to think through the politics involved in working across different epistemologies in South Africa. Historically and presently, South Africa is deeply divided by racial injustices and economic inequalities. As outlined earlier, experiences of conservation, and relationships of governance around environmental resources, are profoundly shaped by the social

constructs of race and class, and the material experiences they engineer at a quotidian scale. Rather than skirt over these inequalities and injustices *Lalela uLwandle* performed these stories of power and injustice. The script explored intergenerational histories illustrating how dominant ideologies and capitalist logics work to reproduce these fractures. It is important to acknowledge the harm caused by racism and class dispossession in our societies. Yet performances of histories and everyday experiences which are so closely mediated and shaped by ideas of race and difference in our country present its own challenge. The gross essentialization of race and other forms of difference in South Africa has engineered another obstacle to working with plural epistemologies for transformative governance. Colonisation and apartheid in South Africa have resulted in the “implicit conflation of identity and knowing”, where “the world is constructed around solidarities of knowing that feed into and fuel ethno-racial stereotypes” (Soudien, 2013, p. 151). Telling stories in which epistemologies are presented as rigidly belonging to only one “kind of people” can dangerously entrench essentialist thinking on race, ethnicity and culture. This in turn enables the existing mechanisms of power to repurpose new arguments for ocean well-being into older epistemological hierarchies. Hierarchies that favour science over tradition, and neoliberal economic development over culturally enmeshed livelihoods. Confining ways of knowing into the politics of identity, “who is allowed to believe what”, whilst simultaneously presenting a few epistemologies such as science as above ideology, enables hegemonic epistemologies to deny “complicity in the politics of inclusion and exclusion” (Soudien, 2013, p. 151). The *Lalela uLwandle* script then needed to write against essentialist ideas of race, culture and belonging, and against the essentialisation of ocean epistemologies.

There is a growing awareness of and attempts to include indigenous and cultural knowledge on natural resource management into international institutional frameworks on climate change (O’Reilly et al., 2020, p. 17) and ocean governance (Parsons & Taylor, 2021). Included in this is recognition that “long term observations of complex systems” to better understand climate change is not the exclusive domain of science (O’Reilly et al., 2020). Integrating diverse knowledge systems into institutions shaped by hegemonic epistemologies is not an easy process. In South Africa indigenous knowledge is recognised on paper, and in 2019 additional laws were passed to legislate the rights of indigenous peoples. Yet including these knowledge-holders and knowledge systems into environmental decision-making and governance arrangements has proved to be a slow process (Boswell & Thornton, 2021). Ntona and Schröder state that traditional, indigenous and local knowledge,

must also be incorporated into planning processes in ways that fully respect their ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Crucially, for this incorporation not to constitute appropriation, information cannot simply be 'extracted' from indigenous, traditional and local knowledge systems and 'transplanted' into decision making. Rather, knowledge-holders themselves must be integrated into the planning process, and their worldviews recognised and meaningfully engaged with. (2020)

Agreeing with the above as a critical starting point we argue, through the learnings from *Lalela uLwandle*, that more is needed than simply inviting diverse knowledge-holders to the negotiation table. If ways of knowing remain essentialized as belonging to specific "race groups" or "those who are educated", or "those who truly understand the issues at stake" then invitations to diverse knowledge-holders may serve as a checkbox exercise for participatory governance. This leaves untouched the power relations between and within these knowledge systems, and therefore epistemological hierarchies that currently influence policy development are unlikely to transform. For Schutter et al. stakeholder consultation forums "can actually serve to produce apparent consensus that keeps dissent at bay when it only allows for disagreement on specific technology and management choices, not challenging the expansion of a capitalist socio-economic order" (2021, p. 6).

Attentive to reproducing these dangers it was insufficient for *Lalela uLwandle* to simply position different ways of knowing alongside each other (e.g. a character who represents only marine science views, or religion and ancestral beliefs, or culturally entangled livelihoods). Especially since in South Africa audience members might easily read these as mapping onto apartheid constructed racial categories and serve to confirm existing essentialized ideas about people.<sup>12</sup> Performing everyday stories unavoidably means working with some of these familiar frames. Across the performances we have heard 4 voices out of an estimated 900 audience members who verbalised or gave written responses that indicated their desire to read the play through these stereotypes. Three of these four voices did so in a defensive response to believing themselves blamed as white people for the problems today. Far more frequently than these few defensive responses were deeper reflective feedback around race and privilege from the audience. An audience member in Richards Bay shared that she "felt ashamed of the injustices committed by whites in the name of 'conservation'", but that the play "ended on a hopeful notes that there is space for us all" and that "the character's stories are told with conviction that each character becomes a well-loved friend whose story touches your heart" (Richards Bay, 17 12/10/2019). Whilst this play did not aim to focus explicitly on issues of white privilege and conservation, or race

and power in conservation, it is worth noting that it provided a productive challenge to these dominant discourses. For example, an audience member a week after seeing the play told one of the authors that the stories had stayed with her for days, and that it really made her think about the damage that apartheid had done to black people in ways she had not thought of before, and how important it was that white people like herself acknowledge this and find a way to work towards a more equal society (personal com. October 2019).

Theatre can move an audience member through a range of emotions. We learnt, however, that to catalyse an alternative conversation *Lalela uLwandle* had to actively work to build translation protocols which opened up the possibilities of freeing ways of knowing from the narrow confines of essentialised identity and belonging. This was done both through the scripting and through creative theatre making in order to weave harmonies and dissonance into a chorus of voices not just between the characters, but within them. Creating didactic essentialised characters that play into expected tropes of environmental conservation within a local context will do little to shift the current power dynamics of ocean governance. Rather characters should embody “agonistic relationships” within their own story arcs and in relation to the stories of the other characters. Agonistic relationships do not look to dismiss or reject difference “but acknowledge and recognise it *as* different whilst still looking for promising, if partial, synergies to serve as the basis for solidaristic relationships that are forged through antiessentialist, relational, and always incomplete identities” (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 392). *Lalela uLwandle* was both a performance on what is lost when knowledge systems are conceived as incommensurable to serve power, and importantly what might be gained when we embody more fluid and plural epistemologies that can mould, expand, broaden and enrich our ways of knowing the ocean. The section below explores some of these weavings in the script and the audiences’ responses to these.

## Agonistic Performances

All the characters in the play work with plural ways of knowing the ocean. Niren’s university shaped environmentalism is woven together with his use of ritual to connect to his grandfather and father and their teachings around fishing. Niren’s struggle is not a choice between epistemologies but making peace with choosing a different livelihood from the long heritage of fishing in his family. Faye too performs a blend of marine science and

her awe and wonder of the sea, and increasingly with age acknowledges how dreams of her deceased husband shape her environmental activism, in ways similar to how Nolwandle's grandmother worked with dreams to interpret the healing power of marine resources. But perhaps the most powerful performance against the incommensurability of knowledge is embodied in the intergenerational character of Nolwandle. Nolwandle embodies shifting intergenerational knowledge systems that span from her grandmother's traditional ancestral belief to her mother's more contemporary religion, to her own work in scientific education at the local Aquarium. She performs for the audience the strength in working across plural epistemologies. For Nolwandle her grandmother's practices as a *Sangoma* using ocean resources as medicine has something in common with her mother's choice of spiritual belief, Zionism, that uses the "heavenly healing powers of the sea water" for baptisms (Coppen et al., 2019). Throughout the play Nolwandle uses love for the ocean to weave together her family's heritage. Respect for the ocean and its healing power is a direct continuum from her ancestors that continues to flow through her. She tells us,

Working at the aquarium as a story-teller and educator I am able, like Nolwandle, my mother and grandmother before me, to use the ocean to heal, but it's all of our responsibilities to work to heal her in return.....Every day, at the aquarium I am able to allow children a chance to peek beneath the mysterious blue blanket of the sea and teach them of the consequences of our destructive actions. (*Beat. She chuckles knowingly*) You know what I always tell these children... This heaven they all want a one-way ticket to... it's not in the direction the missionaries promised us it was. No it's in the opposite direction.... it's down there...it's beneath the waves. (Coppen et al., 2019)

As Nolwandle shows, science and spirituality may resonate in order to work towards a healthy ocean for all. In response to the performance of commensurability in the play comments such as those below were very common:

The way they were all concerned about the same thing, but yet they had different cultures, lives, backgrounds...was really amazing. (HluhluweP10, 10/10/2019)

It made me realize that even if we have different traditions and cultures the ocean is of significant important to all us. (DbnDayP4, 19/10/2019)

Respect the oceans and honour other peoples' cultures. (MbazwanaP16, 11/10/2019)

Imagining across divergent cultural and epistemic concepts of the sea reveals “the often hidden economic and political components of cultural representations and more overt patterns of signification in society’s constructions of nature” (Jackson, 1995, p. 88). This opened up the possibilities of stepping outside the usual polarised tensions in environmentalism. The agonistic stories scripted into *Lalela uLwandle* offered translation protocols for interpreting exactly how and why environmental and conservation management impacts negatively on the cultural, social and economic well-being of individuals and groups. For many conservation officers, marine scientists and members of the public being a part of a performance that placed “biological conservation efforts into social and historical context” enabled an imagination for how the “articulation of community values into conservation plans...can facilitate local acceptance and participation in management” (Crandall et al., 2018, pp. 9, 11–12). Equally including performed histories of exclusions was a learning experience in acceptance for conservation officials on how current practices and discourses within their field act to exclude. All four authors, as well as the actors, were approached after performances by marine scientists, conservation field guides and environmental impact assessors respectively on how important it was to integrate cultural and living heritage into their fields, and that the play had impacted on how they imagined their disciplinary work going forward. For example, a young trainee conservation field guide in the Hluhluwe area<sup>13</sup> approached one of the authors after the post-show discussions. As part of her field-guide training she was being taught about the medicinal properties of plants in a particular protected area. This she noted was all based on the ecological knowledge of local Zulu communities who were now largely excluded from this government gazetted protected wetland forest. She shared that the irony and unfairness of this had hit her whilst she was watching the performance.

Post-show discussions across venues illustrated the audience’s willingness to acknowledge inequalities and injustices, and find connections, synergies and solidarities to imagine mobilizations across differences. Attempting to create alternative listening and learning forums for ocean governance must work with care and attentiveness to the geographies and histories of power shaping local contexts. If done in ways that reject the essentialization of people and knowledge systems then alternative governance forums may rework these “artificial boundaries” that serve existing hierarchies. Acknowledging that we live in plural worlds does not preclude collective action, rather it “constitutes the bedrock of our working together in solidarity, the possibility, through the partial identification of common ground, of a ‘performative unity’” (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 392). Working across scales and

within the messiness of social structures and relationships required for environmental and ecological justice, demands of us all that we become more literate on plurality for equitable collective action. Creative methods such as *Lalela uLwandle* that perform agonistic possibilities work at an affective level to enact new alliances and situated solidarities (Erwin, 2020; Mouffe, 2013, pp. 96–97). *Lalela uLwandle* offered a productive form of accepting the horror of apartheid in order to work towards dismantling the polarisation and essentialism it has engineered. This enabled recognising how the past and present shape our unequal society in relation to environmental injustices, and the types of respect we need to build to live together in less fragmented and environmentally damaging ways. Whilst affective processes are complex to evaluate, in other words it is difficult for us to quantify who took up the invitation for an alternative imagination, we believe they are a very necessary part of unravelling the harm that humans do to each other and the environment at an ideological level. Working with affective processes that connect and build openings across epistemologies that have been historically, through colonialism, apartheid and capitalism, engineered as incommensurate reminds us that the “script for the future” is not already set (Soudien, 2013, p. 154). There is much to be said on what a critical politics of plurality, working with and beyond hurt and pain, offers for transformative ocean governance.

## Conclusion

As the South African government moves quickly ahead with its Blue Economy planning, policy and governance frameworks it remains unclear how it is addressing existing socio-economic inequalities and exclusions, or whether it is just entrenching them. There are, we know, many others who sit across and within the governance fault lines outlined in this chapter who are equally distressed by the relationship between socio-economic inequalities and ecological injustices in South Africa (Cock, 2018, p. 143). We hope this article contributes towards a shifting tide of imagining what more ocean governance might do for environmental and ecological justice, beyond creating policy frameworks whose regulations serve the status quo. How might South Africa engage in an alternative process that works to mitigate against the usual power dynamics in policy forums and governance arrangements? Flannery and McAteer write that in order to ensure progressive Marine Spatial Planning it is important to develop “a political frontier early on” in the process where “pathways for progressive socio-environmental

outcomes have been established” (2020). The many voices of dissent and cries of exclusion from coastal people, particularly amongst the most marginalised, suggest that such a “political frontier” has not yet been established in the South African rush for the oceans.

Creating such a frontier for ocean governance requires inclusive forums in which a chorus of voices on how and why the ocean holds social, economic, cultural, spiritual, scientific and ecological importance are heard. However, as this chapter argues, epistemology hierarchies that favour science and economics within decision-making forums produce additional obstacles to creating a political frontier that addresses the wellbeing of the ocean and the most marginalised in society. When ways of knowing are seen as incommensurable, or knowledge frameworks are tied to essentialised identity constructs like race and culture, even an inclusive stakeholder forum may not automatically equate to transformative governance. Shifts in not just who is invited to negotiation tables but the form and the substance of decision making is also required. To enable meaningful and effective participation of diverse knowledge holders it matters who is in the room, but it also matters how the chairs are placed in the room; what language is spoken; whose histories are visible; whose knowledge is listened to, whether issues of power are able to be discussed up front, and whether efforts are made towards agonistic debates through a rejection of essentializing identity and epistemologies.

Empatheatre, through the case study of *Lalela Ulwandle*, offers some insights into how creative methods and public storytelling offer heuristic process for translation between and across ways of knowing the sea. Building on the work already done in calling for plurality in ocean governance, it offers an orientation to empathy to work with plural epistemologies rather than a definitive methodology for transformative governance. It is hoped that sharing our experiences with this particular experimental project helps grow an appetite for action to explore alternative governance methods that unsettles practices and structures of neoliberal capitalism currently dominating our policy and governance regime.

Indeed we would argue we have nothing to lose given the current inequalities within South Africa, and everything to gain by undertaking processes that move out of siloed mentalities by making room for ways of knowing the ocean beyond the confines of the logic of science and capitalism. This makes pragmatic sense for protecting our oceans given the growing evidence that “social factors, rather than physical or ecological factors, ultimately determine the success (or otherwise) of MPAs” (Sowman & Sunde, 2018, p. 169). It also however creates exciting possibilities for connecting and building strategic solidarity across epistemological divides to address pressing issues in

climate change. The creative storytelling of *Lalela uLwandle* enabled a shared symbolic language, reference points and aesthetic experiences that offered a strong foundation from which we as researchers and community members can mount a well-informed resistance (and offer alternatives) to ocean harm, and importantly begin to imagine what an ocean governance that works towards planetary well-being looks like.

## Notes

1. <https://www.empatheatre.com/>.
2. The 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea enables sovereign states special rights within an Exclusive Economic Zone, that extends 200 nautical miles out to sea from the state's coastland, in relations to the exploration and use of marine resources.
3. Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) Area are portions of the continental shelf beyond the 200 nautical miles from the coast, where states can apply to have sovereign rights to the seabed and subsoil. The extent of a nation's ECS is often undefined or contested.
4. A term used here to include all people who were persecuted and oppressed under the racist apartheid regimes, including people who, under apartheid may still identify as belonging to the constructed racial categories of Black African, Indian and Coloured.
5. NEMPA (National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act) and the WHCA (World Heritage Convention Act) require 'co-management' (not just consultation with communities), and 'sensitivity to people and their needs' (Physical, psychological, developmental, cultural and social)' respectively.
6. A South African energy and chemical company.
7. The Zionist Churches in Kwa-Zulu Natal combine, to various degrees, traditional isiZulu cosmology with Christianity.
8. Played by Rory Booth.
9. Played by Mpume Mthombeni.
10. Played by Alison Cassells.
11. The podcast of the play *Lalela uLwandle* can be listened to online here: <https://www.empatheatre.com/listen-to-our-lalela-ulwandle-radio-play>.
12. See Boswell and Thornton on how "economistic perspectives of ocean management and stereotyping of the Khoisan in South Africa risk producing an exclusionary Blue Economy" (2021, p. 2).
13. An area on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal with a long history of land dispossession and conflict surrounding conservation regulations in relation to the World Heritage Site of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (Hansen, 2013).

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## Appendix D: Impact Story



# IMPACT STORY

RESEARCH AND ACTION  
ACROSS SCALES: Expanding  
Support for Small-Scale Fishers  
as "Ocean Defenders"





Supporters of the community applicants in the Shell Wild Coast case celebrate outside the Makhanda high court. Photo: Toto Tsarneba, Grocotts Mail.

**H**uman rights defenders (EHRDs) draw attention to the links between unsustainable environmental decisions and negative impacts on human rights. The Hub recognises the key role of EHRDs in ocean governance and seeks to provide support at multiple levels to strengthen their protection and acknowledge their value.

The UN defines environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) as “individuals and groups who, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment.” EHRDs draw attention to the links between unsustainable environmental decisions and negative impacts on human rights.

Though entitled to the rights and protections set out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, EHRDs are increasingly the object of (often lethal) attacks by governments and private actors as well as harassment, denigration, and side-lining.

The Hub recognises the key role of EHRDs in ocean governance and seeks to provide support at multiple levels

to strengthen their protection and acknowledge their value. We do this through:

- working directly with ocean defenders to support them;
- raising awareness of the human rights of ocean defenders; and
- strengthening international support for ocean defenders.

**Direct support for ocean defenders**

Our Hub South African team have invested in working with communities to better understand their needs. Over time, researchers in the Coastal Justice Network (CJN) have **built partnerships with small-scale fishers (SSF) and coastal Indigenous communities**. Through these partnerships, researchers, SSF leaders, and environmental justice organisations have been able to respond collaboratively to a range of injustices perpetrated on coastal communities and environments, including:

- social harms – the criminalisation of livelihoods and associated killing of fishers in Marine Protected Areas
- environmental harms – expansion of coastal mining and offshore oil and gas operations
- economic harms – the blocking of SSF rights by industrial fishing associations



From left to right: Jerry Mngomezulu, ocean defender from Kosi Bay, Delene Spandiel, small scale fisher from Gqeberha, South Africa & Nathan Sewell, small scale fisher from Durban, South Africa, South Africa  
Photo credit: Taryn Pereira

The CJN seeks to facilitate stronger partnerships between different leadership structures at the local level, with the goal of enhancing the agency of small-scale fishers, as well as strengthening the networks of organisations that small-scale fishers can draw upon to support them, in defending their rights. The Coastal Justice Network is working to secure ongoing funding so that they can dependably provide ongoing research, legal and financial support for SSFs and their communities.

**Coastal Justice Network is working to secure ongoing funding so that they can dependably provide ongoing research, legal and financial support for SSFs and their communities**

Through actions such as the Empatheatre plays, CJN members are working more broadly to facilitate transformative public dialogues about social injustices and rights violations in the coastal and ocean space.

**Raising awareness of the human rights of ocean defenders**

Another form of support for ocean defenders is raising awareness of the work they do and the challenges and threats they face. We are working to make legal professionals more aware of the need to recognise and protect the human rights of ocean defenders. We are also helping ocean defenders understand their own human rights and are facilitating EHRD communities to share their experiences and build alliances with each other.

Hub researchers provided input to the 2021 and 2022 **Winter/Summer School on Human Rights and the Environment**, organised by the UN

Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Network for Human Rights and the Environment (GNHRE). We worked with the School organisers to conceptualise the focus for the 2022 School: Water – from oceans to taps. Its aim was to help environmental and human rights scholars, practitioners, and activists think about the water

system in relation to their existing work. Hub researchers affiliated with the

CJN and Empatheatre in South Africa organised panels at the Schools, including on stories of ocean defenders in South Africa and the relevance of art as a tool of resistance.

**I found myself thinking at many points that I need to redirect my entire area of focus and just work on oceans. It was inspiring.**



Dr Dina Lupin  
Director of the Global Network for Human Rights and the Environment



"Umkhosi Wenala" has provided an innovative participatory decision-making space where rural youth can have a voice in the creation and management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that exclude cultural, spiritual and other local perspectives, concerns and questions. Photo: Neil Coppen

The panels shared Hub research and also included representatives of SSF collectives, who reflected on their involvement in resisting and seeking alternatives to ocean oil and gas exploration, coastal mining, enclosure of the ocean commons, and un-democratic ocean governance. Dr **Dina Lupin**, GNHRE Deputy Director, commented: "I found myself thinking at many points that I need to redirect my entire area of focus and just work on oceans. It was inspiring."

Members of the Hub South African team have continued to work with GNHRE and UNEP, co-organising a March 2023 **workshop "on defenders for defenders"** to share lessons learnt across regions and thematic areas from freshwater to ocean to land. **Taryn Pereira** (Rhodes University, South Africa) from CJN organised a panel of South African ocean defenders, entitled "Stories from small-scale fisher ocean defenders in South Africa." They shared their experiences and analysis of the South African government's approach to growing its blue economy, detailing the damage done as well as communities' solidarity strategies.

The workshop provided a point of connection between EHRDs who, despite being in different countries, identified similar strategies of governments, such as militarising Indigenous spaces and using participation mechanisms to create an appearance of inclusion while actually silencing communities. Arts were highlighted as an effective resistance

**The Hub has continued to work with GNHRE and UNEP, organising a workshop "on defenders for defenders" to share lessons learnt across regions and thematic areas.**

tool, able to create bonds among communities and raise awareness of specific struggles.

We have also supported the development of a global project led by IUCN to **document threats to and good practices on ocean defenders**; Taryn Pereira from CJN is contributing a case study to this initiative. And the ongoing **Empatheatre productions Lalela uLwandle** and

**Umkhosi Wenala** can be seen as human rights practices in themselves – practices that support the understanding and protection of human rights by duty bearers, as well as practices that protect EHRDs and contribute to the legal empowerment of human rights-holders.

### IMPACT!

**The workshop provided a point of connection between EHRDs who, despite being in different countries, identified similar strategies of governments, such as militarising Indigenous spaces and using participation mechanisms to create an appearance of inclusion while actually silencing communities.**

### Expanding international support for ocean defenders

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has been working to support environmental defenders by denouncing attacks on them, advocating with state and non-state actors for



The Hub is working to make legal professionals more aware of the need to recognise and protect the human rights of ocean defenders. Photo: Small-scale fishermen in Ghana by Nessim Stevenson.

better protection of their human rights, and requesting accountability when attacks occur. Yet, there has been a blind spot in UN initiatives on EHRDs: they have been overwhelmingly focused on land, ignoring those defending the ocean.

## IMPACT!

Hub research and methods to work with ocean defenders were considered relevant by the UN Environment Programme to inform the implementation of the 2023 UN Guidance on the Protection of Environmental Human Rights Defenders.

We are working to ensure that EHRDs are understood to include the SSFs, Indigenous peoples, and local communities negatively affected by blue economy initiatives. To this end, Hub researchers took part in consultations organised by UNEP and the Universal Rights Group, with the support of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021.

At the global consultation, Hub Hub Deputy Director **Philile Mbatha** (University of Strathclyde, UK) and early-career researcher **Aphiwe Moshani** (University of Cape Town, South Africa) shared their relevant research on SSF communities. They provided an overview of the expansion of blue economy interventions on the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) coast. They pointed to the long history of criminalisation of traditional SSFs in this area, starting in the 1950s when conservation interventions escalated in northern KZN. Today, SSF communities are still facing forced removals, dispossession, insecure rights, and loss of traditional livelihoods. Hub research and methods to work with ocean defenders were considered relevant by the UN Environment Programme to inform the implementation of the 2023 UN Guidance on

the Protection of Environmental Human Rights Defenders. Addressed to UN Resident Coordinators, this Guidance will help allocate financial and other resources at the national level.

At the regional African consultation on “existing good practices to support EHRDs and their communities,” Hub researchers involved in the CJN and Empatheatre presented on their work in partnership with SSF communities. They discussed the threats to and challenges faced by EHRDs with whom they partner and how the Network has sought to provide support. The South African team’s findings and approaches to enhancing participation and inclusion of SSF will be included in the good practices documented by UNEP. By shining light on the key work of ocean defenders, the Hub is both strengthening EHRD as a framework and expanding it to include the ocean.

### Publications:

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4. Pereira, T., & Erwin, K. (2023). Surfacing solidarity praxis in transdisciplinary research for blue justice. *Ecosystems and People*, 19(1), 2260502.
5. K Erwin, T Pereira, D McGarry, and N Coppen. Lalela Ulwandle: An experiment in plural governance discussions, in Rose Bosewell et al. (ed), *The Palgrave Handbook of Blue Heritage* (Palgrave, 2022), 383-409.

