

Fishing with empathy: knowing fish and catching them on the Kemi River in Finnish Lapland

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ABSTRACT. This paper develops an argument on the empathetic relationship between hunter and prey, as applied to the relations between small-scale fishers and fish. Drawing on ethnographic material from the Kemi River, and recent work on fishing, it suggests that although fishers often do not see the fish, they know their whereabouts and movements through an empathetic engagement with the fish. People on the Kemi do not see fish as merely the animal itself, but include in their empathetic relationship the behaviour and environment of the fish. An analysis of popular fishing techniques used subsequently illustrates that they represent what can be called an inversion of the fish's life story.

Introduction

For the inhabitants of the banks of the Kemi River, catching fish is tricky business. Very few people depend economically on the fishery today, but many are involved in small-scale fishing for recreation or supplementing their food stock. Most of the fish that can be caught in the catchment's rivers and lakes are also available, fresh or preserved, in local stores and supermarkets. Nevertheless, fishing is very popular, and fishing experiences are told and retold. By learning to fish and sharing fishing stories, riverbank inhabitants seem to form and perform their identities as true river dwellers (Krause 2010).

A crucial characteristic of river fishing is that most of the time, the fish remain invisible. Fishers therefore have to learn to 'see' fish in different ways. Moreover, fish move in the water much more effortlessly than humans are able to, so that river fishing mostly means persuading the fish to be caught by its own actions, rather than by chasing it. In this article, I explore how those fishing on the Kemi nevertheless manage to catch fish, and how they come to know the river and its fish in the process. Building on two sets of literature, concerning indigenous hunting practices on the one hand, and recreational angling on the other, I argue that fishers' empathy is central in their ways of knowing fish, as well as for catching them. I also suggest that fishers on the Kemi do not direct their empathy towards the fish as an individual animal, but to the fish in its environment, which is more readily perceivable than the disembodied fish (that is severed from the web of relationships in which the fish is coming into being). While this argument is based on observations of fishing practices along the Kemi, their resonance with findings on small-scale fishing in other settings, both 'indigenous' and 'western', suggests that it might have wider implications, in that the practice of fishing co-configures certain ways of knowing and interacting with fish.

The people fishing on the Kemi are both local inhabitants and visitors, but my observations and conclusions refer primarily to the former. During thirteen months

of ethnographic fieldwork along the river, inquiring into a variety of river uses and meanings, I spoke to many people about fishing, or accompanied them on fishing trips. Hardly any of the conversations I had and interviews I conducted were specifically about fishing alone; however, the topic formed a substantial part of at least ten of the interviews, most of them with men, but some also with older women, and it came up in most other interviews and in many of my fieldnotes. I also learned about fishing on the Kemi through reviewing some of the fishery regulations and the hydropower companies' compensatory fish stocking programmes.

'Seeing' invisible fish

In an early paper Hewes writes that because of the difference in medium through which fish and fisher move, 'the fisherman holds all the trumps against the fish' (Hewes 1948: 238). He explains that whereas fish are limited to water, fishers have the advantage of 'an additional dimension' namely the water surface as seen from the environment in which humans dwell. This, however, can be as much an obstacle as an advantage. As Eden and Bear observe: 'Water is a different world: unlike land and air, water is not an everyday medium in which humans live and breathe. Water moves rapidly, is often unpredictable and renders things (animals, plants, rocks, sediment) within and beneath it largely invisible to humans above it' (Eden and Bear 2010: 298).

Fish are thus largely absent from the ordinary world of terrestrial humans, unless they undertake to catch them (Bull 2011; Ota 2006). In order for this to be successful, however, the fisher needs to know something about fish behaviour, which means that knowing and catching fish stand in a direct relationship. Eden and Bear write that fisher's knowledge about fish is continually 'tested for validity (and reflexively revised) through practices of fishing because their success can be measured by the resulting catch' (Eden and Bear 2010: 304). But how do river dwellers actually catch fish? On the Kemi, as in various other settings, catching an animal that is easily

deterred and that moves and hides in the river much too cleverly for humans to track or follow, is mostly achieved by trapping rather than direct pursuit. The fish is caught by its own actions, when it gets entangled in a net, enters a cage or takes bait. These methods only work, of course, if the respective trap is set up adequately.

Therefore, fishers need to develop particular skills, which Eden and Bear (2010) call 'watercraft'. They write:

When asked to define 'watercraft' in a focus group by the facilitator, Nick said it is 'being able to read the water and try and understand what's happening below,' [...]. Both 'reading the river' and 'watercraft' evoke environmental engagement through watching the river environment and interpreting riverbank characteristics and water surface behaviour as proxies for fish presence (Eden and Bear 2010: 300).

They mention a number of techniques involved in anglers' attempts to know about fish and the catching place in spite of their near-invisibility, including wearing polarised glasses, plumbing the profile of the river bed, touching the water and rocks and using thermometers to measure water temperature. They conclude that 'reading the river is not simply reading a text, but reading a situation, through the body and all its senses, not merely the visual' (Eden and Bear 2010: 307).

Agreeing with them, I suggest that in small-scale fishing, 'seeing' is not so much 'looking at objects' as correctly interpreting environmental dynamics, such as vegetation or ripples on the water. For instance, more than once we heard the splash of a fish on the water surface, rather than seeing it, and turning our heads we could only derive from the water turbulence where the fish had been. I was then directed by my fishing companion to cast my line a little bit upstream from the turbulence, hoping that the fish would bite. This suggestion contains simultaneously a whole series of assumptions about the fish's behaviour, including that it would be travelling upstream and that it would be likely to bite into something travelling towards it with the current. Another instance of 'seeing' fish without catching a direct glimpse of them is a particular kind of reed that grows along many of the shallower river banks. My companions repeatedly recommended fishing just in front of such reeds, as pike (*Esox lucius*) favour this environment as a hunting ground and may easily mistake the bait for prey or an intruder. Here, the fishers seemed to imagine what it would be like for pike: where it would hide, what it would look out for and into what direction, to what it would respond, and how it would react.

Fishers on the Kemi thus come to know their prey from glimpses of fins and movements on the water surface or by inferring their situation from river bed characteristics, temperature or vegetation. Therefore I would argue that the fish that the fisher looks out for is not the specimen bounded by scales and fins, as on a fish-monger's counter or in a natural history book. Rather, the fisher interacts with the total phenomenon of the fish-in-

its-environment, which includes, alongside the natural-history-book specimen, the ripples in the water, flashes of colour, sounds and rocks in the river bed. A skilled fisher thus can 'see' a fish even if the 'natural-history-book-fish' remains invisible. In a similar vein, Bear and Eden observe in their study of anglers in northeast England that 'recreational fishing is an interactive process of breaking through the apparently impenetrable boundary of water. For the anglers [...], their understandings of the water environment are almost as significant as their understandings of the fish' (Bear and Eden 2011: 346). This claim also holds, and can even be expanded for Kemi fishers who, in the process of coming to know and to catch fish attend to fish-in-the-water and do not distinguish the natural-history-book fish and their particular 'water environment'.

For instance, one eager angler pointed out to me that on watercourses that are new to him, he never quite knows where and how to get fish. Where he usually fishes, he claims to understand well the requirements and preferences of the fish, as they are seen as part of the waters from which they are caught: swiftly flowing, cold spring and autumn waters for trout (*Salmo trutta*); dark winter days and quieter water for burbot (*Lota lota*); perch (*Perca fluviatilis*) in the reservoir above the dam; and so forth. But new watercourses, with unknown currents, river beds, vegetation and fish, require exploration and many trials, before he can be satisfied with his fishing. Another instance of river dwellers' seeing fish as the total phenomenon of fish-in-its-environment is the common assumption that fish embody the characteristics of the waters from which they are taken. Grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*), for example, is valued as a quintessential river fish, and often seen as a symbol for the 'freedom' of the last undammed rapids on the river (Krause 2013a). Pike, especially when caught in the summer, is frequently called 'swamp dog' as it may have spent much time in murky waters. In spite of this derogatory label, however, I have come across many river dwellers who do appreciate pike when caught in their home river stretch, a cherished catch incorporating a cherished place. Even though the fish that fishers like to take home at the end of the day is the specimen bounded by scales and fins, the fish to which they tune their attention while on the river is much more than that and includes its presumed habitat and behaviour.

The Kemi River and its fishers

The Kemi, straddled by the Arctic Circle, is the largest river in the Finnish province of Lapland (Fig. 1), and has long provided principal routes of travel, transport and settlement (Linkola 1967). It was noted for salmon (*Salmo salar*) fishing (Vilkuna 1975), but this disappeared with the construction of hydropower dams in the mid twentieth century (Seppälä 1976). Presently, a major project coordinated by a regional development and planning agency is working towards re-introducing salmon to the

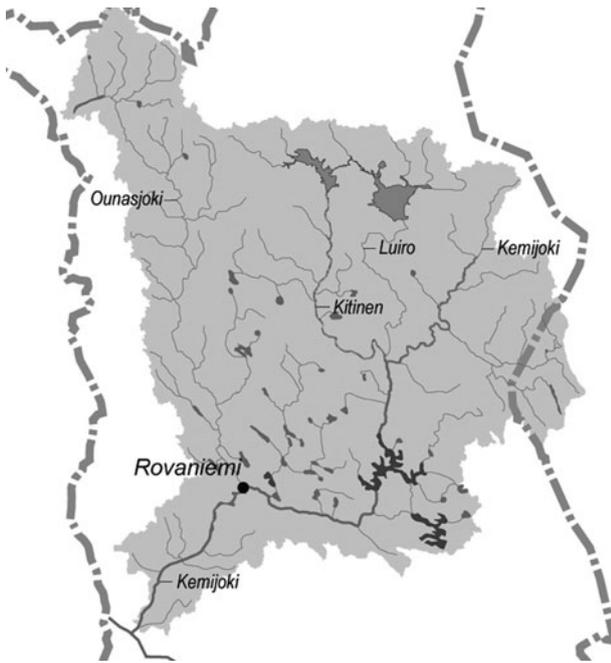


Fig. 1. Central Finnish Lapland and the catchment of the Kemi River (in Finnish *Kemijoki*) with major tributaries, lakes and hydropower reservoirs. The river drains into the Gulf of Bothnia of the Baltic Sea. Beyond the national borders are Russia (east), Norway (north) and Sweden (west). Rovaniemi (66° 30' 0" N; 25° 44' 0" E) is the provincial capital (map based on Kemijoki Oy 2009: 51).

Kemi, but progress is slow and success uncertain (Krause 2011). Since the 1980s, local hydropower companies are required to stock the river with various popular fish species as a compensation measure (Järviöskö and Kylämäki 1981). For some people, this is welcome, while others consider the stocked fish inferior and the whole scheme a mere distracting 'bread-and-circuses strategy.'

Nevertheless, living on the banks of the Kemi is, for many, near synonymous with being a more or less keen fisher. When I asked about people's experiences with the river, I most often heard fishing stories, and some people showed me their favourite fishing spots. One declared that the only fish she ever bought was cod, a sea fish, because it is needed for Finnish Christmas. All the other fish she eats, she catches in the river and lakes. Most other people I spoke to were less purist, and regularly buy fish in supermarkets, often derived from Norwegian fish farms. They happily eat the fish they catch themselves, but do not depend on it. Some emphasised that they often go fishing without actually catching anything. But that does not mean they are enjoying it less for that. First of all, time spent on the river is widely considered pleasant in general. But what is more, many assured me that catching nothing can be almost as exciting as landing a big fish, because of the element of suspense.

The present inhabitants of the Kemi are mainly Finnish-speaking with a variety of backgrounds. Until the seventeenth century, the catchment had been inhabited mostly by different Saami-speaking groups, which were later joined by so-called 'wilderness farmers' and other settlers from a number of regions in which various forms of Finnish were spoken, including Kainuu, Häme, Savo and Karelia. While this influx is frequently portrayed as a form of colonialism, other accounts rather emphasise the continuous dynamics of adaptation and innovation among both newcomers and established populations (Lähteenmäki 2006). During the twentieth century, the catchment experienced an unprecedented influx of people in the course of the expansion of forestry, hydropower construction projects, and post-war resettlement. Combined, these developments created a situation in which many inhabitants are struggling to formulate an unambiguous marker for their identities, being not 'Saami' but feeling equally distant from the Finnish-speaking 'Southerners' in Helsinki for example. A small minority of the people in the catchment today relies on the traditional livelihoods of reindeer herding, forestry and dairy farming. Hunting, fishing, berry picking, smaller forest works, keeping some reindeer and cultivating one's own potatoes remain very popular, but are negligible in terms of income compared to the usual office jobs. During the winter, tourism provides major employment and income.

Fishing practices are built on a highly hybrid tradition, integrating elements from different Saami- and Finnish-speaking groups with other technologies, like modern fly-fishing rods or even sonar fish detectors. In lakes and reservoirs, fishing with a fixed line and hook are free to anybody under the centuries-old 'everyman's right'. Using fishing rods with mobile lines, nets, fish cages, and other more sophisticated gear, as well as fishing on rapids and in rivers that are home to salmon and whitefish (*Coregonus lavaretus*), requires buying specific licences from the state, as well as seeking the permission of the owner of the local fishery. This is often a local fisheries association, in which many people are members, especially those owning land adjacent to the watercourses, which brings with it a stake in the fishery. Youngsters under eighteen years of age, and senior citizens older than sixty-five are exempt from the state licence, but are still bound to comply with the local fisheries association or other owner. People owning land on the banks of rivers and lakes nevertheless need state fishing licences.

On the Kemi, there are no professional fishermen living off fishing alone. Even the fishers on the large hydropower reservoirs are struggling to make a living. Whereas some quality fish can be caught in the river and lakes in the catchment, the prices paid by fishmongers are too low to make it viable. Under current economic conditions, fishing on the Kemi is only viable if the 'experience' is sold to tourists; selling the 'fish' itself does not pay. Perhaps there have never been people in the catchment whose livelihoods depended only on fishing. Even during the times of the famous salmon



Fig. 2. Fishing with lures on three rods from a boat driven at very slow speed; summer 2008.

runs, the families with access to the fishery were also farmers, hunted in winter, collected berries, and managed their own forests. Today, as noted above, fishing is a highly significant activity for riverbank inhabitants; not so economically, but very much in terms of identity and the good life.

Fishing on the Kemi

On the Kemi, fish are caught either on a hook or in a net. Both can be considered traps as none of them actively catches fish, but their success hinges on the fish itself taking the bait or entering the net, or at least not escaping from it in time. The basic principle of lure fishing (Figs. 2, 3) is that the fish, moving about freely in the water, has to be persuaded in some way to bite into a hook. Such persuasion is accomplished by a combination of two factors: the taste, visual and olfactory characteristics of the bait, and the positioning and movement of the bait within the water. The bait can be an organism that the fish is likely to feed on, or an emulation thereof; alternatively, objects that are likely to catch the fish's attention can be used as bait. One river dweller believes that the right choice of bait is above all a question of colour. He explained that in summer, bright colours on all sorts of bait yield the best results. In autumn, however, fish are attracted to darker, 'bronze-coloured' bait. If the bait resembles a little fish in any way, especially its 'back' should be bronze-coloured, whereas its 'belly' should be red, albeit much less bright than in summer.

Also the movement of bait is crucial and should either resemble the movement of an animal the target fish is likely to feed on, or in another way inspire the fish to touch it, for example if it considers it an intruder in its territory. Success with baits presupposes, however, that the fish is hungry, active or sufficiently aggressive to go for the bait, which is not always the case. An angler can do everything right and still end up without a catch. Furthermore, once the fish gets stuck on the hook, it must yet be hauled out of the water, which can require a lot of skill by the fisher, and also a degree of luck. Many



Fig. 3. Ice fishing competition; early spring 2008. The ice fishing competition from which this picture originates is not the same as described in the text. The pictures I took at this event did not turn out well, as it was too dark.

fish put up a considerable fight when hooked, and they do not always remain on the hook until they are exhausted enough to be landed.

The second general type of fishing technique is based on trapping the fish in some kind of structure, usually a net or a cage (Figs. 4, 5). This technique either takes advantage of a particular movement of the catching gear, or of a particular movement of the fish. Most nets and traps are designed and employed so that fish are unable to perceive their overall pattern, and thus often swim readily into capture. There are two alternative principles for net fishing: stable traps and gillnets, on the one hand, take advantage of observed and regular movements of the fish. Mobile nets, on the other hand, also require knowledge of the fish's whereabouts and behaviour, but catch them through particular movements of the net, rather than relying only on the fish's movements. Historically, dip nets provided a further popular means for catching migratory fish on Kemi rapids (Vilkuna 1975: 318–329); but not at present. While mobile nets, used in the right place at the right time, can yield rich catches, fishing with stable gear bears the advantage for river dwellers that their nets or traps, once set up properly, do the fishing for them.

Nevertheless, the 'passivity' of fishing techniques on the Kemi must not be overstated *vis-à-vis* allegedly more 'active' forms of fishing or catching other animals. Indeed, as the preceding description of fishing techniques has made clear, even the use of hooks and traps that require fish to be caught by their own actions need very skilful positioning, movement and management, that is, very active practice on the part of the fisher. Conversely, the anthropological literature on hunting shows that also the 'active' pursuit of game is most often not about directly chasing visible animals, but about inferring from their traces and knowledge about their behaviour, where



Fig. 4. A fisher hauling in his nets; late spring 2008.



Fig. 5. A fisher proudly presenting his home-made pike trap; autumn 2007.

to find them and how to approach them (for example Ingold 2000: ch.2; Willerslev 2004; Nadasdy 2007). This process may take hours, with the animal in sight only for the last few seconds.

Of course, fishing practices and knowledge differ among the people on the Kemi. Some find that 'real'

fishing is done with nets, while others prefer fishing with hook and line, from a boat. Some have acquired detailed knowledge of particular fishing spots, but others enjoy fishing in various and changing places. Those who live directly on the river bank have different kinds of access to fishing than do those who live further inland and do not own land, and hence fishing rights, on the river. Furthermore, the appreciation of different fish species differs among riverbank inhabitants: especially along the main river course, trout and grayling are valued most highly, whereas people living on lakes and smaller tributaries also appreciate pike and perch catches. What generally unites most of the people in the catchment, however, is a keen interest in fishing, sharing fishing stories, and eating self-caught fish.

It must be emphasised that learning how to fish is not reducible to the interactions of fisher and fish, but is also mediated through imitating more experienced fishers and sharing experiences and techniques. Children on the Kemi, for instance, are often given fishing rods, so that they can imitate the adults' fishing activities, or get practical instructions about where and how to cast the line, attach the bait, or haul in a fish. Although river dwellers are cautious not to reveal their favourite fishing grounds to strangers, they are keen narrators of fishing stories, which often describe in great detail how a particular catch was accomplished, which lure was used, and how the weather and river conditions were. In sum, Kemi fishers learn about fish by scanning waves and vegetation, checking lines and nets, and listening to or watching one another.

An empathetic way of knowing

I will argue that fishing knowledge and practices on the Kemi, which enable fishers to entrap mostly invisible fish, can be understood as empathetic relationships. What then, does empathy mean precisely? Following Wispé, I approach empathy as 'a way of knowing', that is 'the attempt by one self-aware self to comprehend unjudgementally the positive and negative experiences of another self' (Wispé 1986: 318). It is critical for my conclusions about Kemi fishers that empathy implies this attempt to understand and feel, as if assuming the other's perspective, but without actually taking it on oneself. This is also reflected in Rogers' claim that 'being empathic [...] is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another [...] as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition' (Rogers 1975: 3). Furthermore, Rogers emphasises that empathy is a process rather than a state of being, something that must be actively practiced and can be learned by attuning one's attention. He approvingly quotes Barrett-Lennart's delineation of empathetic understanding as 'an active process of desiring to know the full, present and changing awareness of another person, of reaching out to receive his communication and meaning' (Rogers 1975: 4). Zahavi calls empathy 'a basic, irreducible, form of

intentionality that is directed towards the experience of others. It is a question of understanding other experiencing subjects' (Zahavi 2008: 517).

Empathy is thus primarily a way of coming to know another being, rather than a way of conceiving common personhood in animals and humans, or of sympathising with the animal one is empathetic towards. Authors in the anthropological literature on hunting have sometimes struggled with a presumed tension implied in the idea of empathy between hunter and prey. Brightman (1993), for instance, discusses the apparent contradictions of benefactive and adversarial models in Cree hunting. He writes that on the one hand, hunting is considered a moment in which the animal gives itself up to the hunter, while on the other hand, it is seen as a cunning ploy by the hunter or trapper, killing the animal by outwitting it. If animals, as is often claimed in hunting literature, render themselves voluntarily (for example Nadasdy 2007), does empathetic engagement become mostly a way of 'becoming-animal'? In the literature on empathy, we find that it necessarily entails neither sympathising nor identifying with the other being. Wispé, for instance, clearly distinguishes empathy from sympathy: 'The object of empathy is to 'understand' the other person. The object of sympathy is the other person's "well-being". [...] In brief, empathy is a way of "knowing"' (Wispé 1986: 318). Empathy can thus define a relation even if it is ultimately geared at killing the being with whom one is empathetic (compare Fuentes 2006).

In his formulation for differentiating empathy and sympathy, Wispé adds that while empathy is a way of knowing, 'Sympathy is a way of "relating"' (Wispé 1986: 318). In the light of recent anthropological studies on knowledge (for example Ingold and Kurttila 2000; Raffles 2002; Harris 2007; Gieser 2008), however, an opposition between 'knowing' and 'relating' is difficult to sustain. As Ingold has put it, 'knowledge is perpetually "under construction" within the field of relations established through the immersion of the actor-perceiver in a certain environmental context' (Ingold 2011: 159). As coming to know necessarily happens in a set of relationships, knowing and relating are closely linked. Wispé presumably had a particular kind of relating in mind, namely a direct concern for the other's well-being.

If empathy is the attempt to understand another being's experience, Zahavi adds that 'this does not entail that the other's experience is literally transmitted to us. Rather, it amounts to experiencing, say, the other person's emotion without being in the corresponding emotional state yourself' (Zahavi 2008: 517). Also, as writing on empathy since Rogers (1975) has emphasised, this reaching out for another being's experience is necessarily tentative, and being empathetic requires continued checking and fine-tuning, perhaps without ever reaching exactly the same stream of experience as the other being. This acknowledgement that empathetic reaching out is geared at understanding *despite* obvious, and philosophically perhaps insurmountable, differences (compare Wikan

1992) also qualifies Geertz' famous critique of empathy as alleged 'pretensions to more-than-normal capacities' (Geertz 1974: 44), when we thus 'realize that empathy rather than being some mysterious form of telepathy simply amounts to an experience of the embodied mind of the other, i.e. simply refers to our ability to access the life of the mind of others in their bodily and behavioral expressions' (Zahavi 2008: 522).

In this way, we can better understand the tension in fishing between the tendency to 'become-fish' and the necessity to remain human. Bear and Eden state that '[t]he possibility of becoming-fish, alongside the impossibility of actually thinking like a fish, is what provides a continuing challenge and pleasure for anglers' (Bear and Eden 2011: 350). In their study of angling discourses and practices, they approach anglers' empathy with fish as 'thinking like a fish', based on Deleuze and Guattari's 'notion of becoming-animal [which] emphasises the transformative nature of the encounter [...] and] is not merely about the anglers' skilful mastery over a fish but also about an affective contagion [...] involving an assemblage of fish, human and technology' (Bear and Eden 2011: 338). 'Becoming-fish,' in Bear and Eden's writing, includes 'imagining the bait from the fish's perspective' and adjusting angling rhythms to those of the fish. They find that 'anglers do not see the cold blood or scaly bodies of fish as alien or as a barrier to attempting to understand and, to an extent, empathise with them' (Bear and Eden 2011: 346, 349).

Willerslev (2004), describing hunting practices and narratives among northeastern Siberian Yukaghirs, is confronted by a tension in empathetic relations, which revolves around the apparent contradiction between assuming the perspective of the other being, and keeping a critical distance from the other's emotional state. Hunters explain that they need to be able to assume the appearance and viewpoint of their prey in order to make them empathise with the hunter who can subsequently kill the seduced animal. But this empathising should be carefully balanced. If hunters immerse themselves too far into the reality of the animal, they will not succeed in hunting, but lose their human selves. Therefore, Yukaghirs must cautiously manage their empathetic relations with prey. A skilful hunter must be 'not animal', but equally 'not *not-animal*'. 'In other words, the success of the hunter rests in his ability to keep up a "double perspective"' (Willerslev 2004: 639). It must be pointed out, however, that my use of 'empathy' relating to fishing on the Kemi differs somewhat from Willerslev's use of the concept. For Kemi River fishers, it is not a matter of inducing in the fish empathy for the fisher, seducing the animal to give itself up. Rather, empathy functions as a way of coming to know the fish and their behaviour.

This understanding of empathy comes closer to some of the dynamics that Scott (1989, 1996), for instance, describes in Cree goose hunting. These '[h]unters arrange landscapes that will be attractive and non-threatening to geese, [including d]ecoys and goose calls [that] are iconic

approximations by hunters of the semiotic landscape of geese' (Scott 1989: 199). Geese are seen as beings with the capacity to judge, learn and communicate, beings that can 'make up their minds,' and that can feel 'welcome' if appropriate calls are imitated by hunters at what are conceived as 'gentle intervals'. The Cree of Scott's account often explain hunting success or failure from the perspective of the geese, such as the comments on some geese avoiding an otherwise popular spot: 'Probably that goose told the other ones over there: "If I don't come back, it's okay to come on over" [, or] "They see where the flock ahead of them went over, and they see nothing happens to them, so they think, "Might as well go over there!"'" (Scott 1989: 202). Although Scott's argument is not explicitly concerned with empathy, it is clear that Cree goose hunters, too, relate to their prey animals empathically in order to get to know and to shoot them.

Let us return to empathy in fishing on the Kemi. One of the fishing competitions in which I participated took place one cold and dark February evening on a former river branch that now functioned as a spillway for a hydropower station. As the spillways are not used in winter, when river discharge is low, a rather quiet pool forms at the lower end of the river branch, covered in a thick ice crust (Fig. 3). This spot and time were deemed apposite for fishing burbot. The organisers of the competition knew that burbot 'enjoy' the quiet waters of this pool, and that they feed in the dark. We spread out across what appeared to be an undifferentiated area of snow reaching from the trees on the one river bank to those on the other. But a majority of fishers went close to the far side of the open area. Asking about this it was explained that this was a place where burbot would likely be feeding now: because the water level in the river had dropped with decreasing winter discharges, the ice on the very edge of the river was likely to be too close to the river bed for fish to feel comfortable there. On the other hand, much further out from the bank, there might be some current from the confluence with the main river channel, which would affect fishing lines and bait. Somewhere in between we would be likely to catch some burbot. After my companion had drilled a hole through the ice and began to prepare his line, he pointed in a vague direction, instructing me to go there, think where the fish may want to go, and drill my own hole sufficiently far from his so that the activity in one would not interfere with the other.

My companion had fixed two hooks on our lines, about 25 cm apart. The lower one was supposed to hover right above the river bed and attract low feeding burbot, the other one slightly above to attract those searching for food in open water. We attached pieces of small whitefish to the hooks. About 20 cm above the second hook, we also attached bright visual markers – strips from a cut-up white plastic bag, and an old CD. He explained that the fish, looking for food in the dark under the ice, needed to be attracted towards our bait in order to find it; the

plastic strips, moving in the water with the jiggling of the line, were supposed to create an intriguing sight for the burbot; the CD was to reflect some of the little light that was around, with similar effect. When the competition ended, I had not caught a single burbot. Also most of the others had not caught anything in the course of two hours of sitting crouched over the ice hole in the freezing wind, struggling to keep the hole clear of newly forming ice and trying to find out 'what the fish wants'. Nevertheless, we had clearly been empathetically relating with this invisible and elusive fish, trying to attract it and not deter it, attempting various visual and olfactory means. We had also been engaging this empathy with fish that was not bounded by individual bodies, but included its riverine habitat.

Empathy as resonance

But how can humans empathise with beings as different from them as fish? Developing a language for conceptualising mutual understanding across religious and cultural otherness, Wikan has written of an empathetic 'feeling-thinking engagement' (Wikan 1992: 476) that she calls 'resonance'. Given the differences that may exist among differently situated people across the globe, 'resonance' points towards the possibility of dialogue and exchange. Wikan suggests that the concept of 'culture,' conversely, 'extols the exotic and strange. [...] Where culture separates, resonance bridges – from a lived realization that this is the only practicable way' (Wikan 1992: 476). Wikan wrote about relations between humans of different backgrounds, segregated by a concept of culture. What, then, about the concept of species? Can there also be resonance between humans and fish, that is, between beings of different species? Milton (2005) has argued for approaching social-ecological relations in terms of emotion, and Candea (2010) has analysed the relations between humans and meerkats in terms of emotional engagement. Taking a related but slightly different approach, as I have argued above, empathetic resonance can be the key to approaching the question of how river dwellers come to know and to catch fish. Empathy, as has become clear in the previous sections, is indeed a feeling-thinking reaching out towards the fish, attempting to come to know it through evoking images and emotions in the fisher. Although it is thus an emotional as much as a cognitive process, empathising must neither be confused with sympathising, nor with identifying. Rather, empathy is about knowing through imagining another being's perspective. My account does not address possible empathetic perceptions on the part of the fish, but neither does it rule out their possibility.

Quite often, finding out what sort of fish is present and ready to be caught only emerges in the process of fishing itself. But even trying out a fishing place, for instance in angling, must be done empathetically with the fish-in-the-water. I have been taught that casting a lure must always aim beyond the position where the fish is thought

to be situated, in order to be able to pull the lure past the fish in an attractive way. Should the cast lure splash into the water right above the fish, it will do little but scare off the fish. In fact, not chasing fish away can be as important as luring them to a particular position. If only they are approached in an appropriate way, fish can often be caught rather easily, but if the needs of a fish are not met, it is impossible to catch. Similarly, a gillnet has to be placed in a position through which fish are actually going to move, which requires some understanding of, and empathy with, the behaviour of the targeted fish. One family living on a lake on the river's headwaters, for instance, explained to me where they place their net for their weekly catches in spring and summer respectively. In summer, it needs to be close to a particular deep hole in the lake bottom, where the fish seek shelter in the cool water; in spring, however, the net must be set close to the shore to catch the fish moving along the bank on their way to spawn. To both sentiments, that of seeking shelter from the summer heat, as well as that of the busy activity after snowmelt in spring, river dwellers can readily relate with their own experience.

Fishing requires empathy not only for setting up a net or fishing with a lure, but also for longer-term activities. One fisher, for example, recalls that when he spent time on the summertime river as a child, he and his friends would of course swim and play just like children do the world over. At the same time, however, they would also be keeping their eyes open for potential burbot and grayling winter fishing grounds. While playing in the water, they acquired a detailed knowledge about the position of sand and gravel patches on the river bed, as they would be in different spots in different years. They often built shallow rock weirs that were to channel the movement of fish into certain places, where later in the year fish traps could be set, or ice-holes drilled. From what their parents had told them, as well as from previous years' successes and failures, they knew that these weirs had to be on sandy ground and in places with weak current, if they were to help catch burbot; those for grayling had to be placed on gravel. The children imagined the river bed empathically as part of a fish-in-the-water, trying to understand their experiences and respective behaviour, and manipulating this aspect of the fish. They took into account the preferences of different fish species that they had deduced from fishing experience. While they were doing this, and equally during ice-fishing or setting the traps, they would hardly ever directly see any of the fish. But by empathetically engaging with them, they were able to predict and influence their behaviour in order to catch them at a later point.

What is gained, then, by describing the relations between fish and people on the Kemi as empathetic? In the anthropological literature on indigenous hunting, human-prey relationships are usually treated in terms of reciprocal communication and exchange between persons not limited to humans, reflecting indigenous discourses and practices (for example Scott 1989, 1996; Bright-

man 1993; Nadasy 2007). This approach has critically enhanced the understanding of indigenous cosmologies and explanations of hunting success or failure. The perspective of empathy, while not directly contributing to this approach on its own terms, opens a more in-depth perspective on the ways fishers get to know fish by learning to think-feel like a fish, paraphrasing Wikan (1992) with Bear and Eden (2011). Appreciating the acts of empathy in the attempts of humans to find and lure invisible fish means enquiring how exactly fishers go about in relating across multiple discontinuities of bodies, species and media. Whereas the perspective of reciprocal exchange addresses questions of indigenous understandings of hunting, the perspective of empathy provides insights into how people may come to know the animals they are after. As my reading, for instance, of Scott's (1989) account suggests, this is not to say that there may be no link between reciprocity and empathy. I am arguing, rather, that both concepts emphasise different aspects of hunter-prey relationships, and an understanding of reciprocity is not a precondition for empathy. Coming to know fish in a feeling-thinking way might, as Ross (1992: ch. 6) suggests, facilitate the development of the ethics and conduct characteristic of indigenous hunters, but empathy and cosmology do not necessarily go together.

An inversion of the fish's life story

Small-scale fishing is thus a matter of learning, through empathy, about the fish's behaviour, and using this knowledge to devise ways to catch the fish. Typically, the latter is an inversion of the former. Gell has suggested that an effective trap 'is both a model of its creator, the hunter, and a model of its victim, the prey animal. But more than this, the trap embodies a scenario, which is the dramatic nexus that binds these two protagonists together.' In order to set such a trap, people create 'lethal parodies of the animal's *Umwelt*' that 'may actually reflect the outward form of the victim [...] or] represent parameters of the animal's natural behaviour, which are subverted to entrap it' (Gell 1996: 27). Applying this to the preceding discussion, the secret of fishing seems to lie in the knowledge of fish habitat and behaviour, and the ability to create traps that work as inverted fish-in-its-environment, representing a microcosm of fish behaviour, currents, river bed, vegetation, etc. Empathising with the fish in order to understand their behaviour and preferences creates a knowledge that can be turned on its head, to devise a catching technique that embodies the life story of the fish, but leads to its entrapment. I shall expand on this below. At this point it is worth pointing out, however, that this knowledge must not be understood as primarily a static set of instructions for action. As has become evident throughout the previous descriptions of fishing practices, it is rather emergent through continual attention to the ever changing fish-in-the-water, for instance in

relation to the stark seasonal and other rhythms on the Kemi (Krause 2013b).

In fact, assembling the fishing gear can be seen as an extension of the same process of learning about fish-in-the-water, in which the fisher empathetically engages with the fish. Just as a glove has to fit the human hand in a way that does justice to its anatomy without restricting its movements, successful traps and lures are an inverse image of the fish's actions and habitat, the fish's story 'in reverse'. During those times of the year when fish travel upstream, for instance, the entrance of a fish trap must always face downstream; when fish travel downstream, it must face the other way. Nets are best placed across known migration routes, as the inverse story of their movement. Moreover, river dwellers often place a spruce bough into fish traps to take advantage of some fish's propensity to hide under protecting objects. Looking for shelter, they swim into their own capture. Similarly, the shape of the barbed fishhook on the line encompasses the scenario of a fish getting stuck and struggling away from it, by which it will only tighten the hook's grip. And the very choice of bait often turns the fish's moving towards sustaining its life into its moving towards its end. That fishing on the Kemi entails indeed a story was driven home to me most vividly when a seventy year old man on Lake Kemi showed me one of the fish traps he had built, and explained how he employed them (Fig. 5). The traps were set in the lake in late spring, when pike swim along the flooded shores looking for appropriate spawning grounds. There, they will encounter a barrier in the form of a net, set perpendicular to the shore, along which they will swim for up to 15 m, still searching for a place to spawn. The net, however, leads them into deeper waters and into the trap, which is a tube-shaped fyke made from large rings wrapped in a net, and is equipped with two funnels that are easy for the pike to pass entering the trap, but very difficult to pass the other way. This fisher makes and sets his fish traps in a conscious attempt to take advantage of and interfere with the specific life story of pike.

How does this relate to the question of empathy and contribute to understanding how Kemi fishers come to know and catch fish? The main analytical benefit of approaching fishing and traps as inverse life stories is that it emphasises the processual and dynamic nature of human-animal relations. The focus shifts from inert material culture and its pre-defined application, to an attention towards processes of growth and development of both the fishers and the fish. Small-scale fishing can be investigated more directly as a negotiation and manipulation of the 'life stories' of fish, and fishers' coming to know fish can more clearly be appreciated as involving the entire fish in its environment, rather than an attention to individual, bounded animals. This might even be taken further by suggesting that assembling fishing gear amounts to participating in the fish's life story, in that it implies an attempt to think-feel with the fish, a feeling that is perceived in the fisher's own body.

Conclusion

In the circumpolar north, where small-scale fishing is established for livelihood and leisure, a better understanding of how people come to know fish and catch them is vital to expand existing knowledge about human-environment interaction in fragile ecosystems. In this article I have argued for understanding the process of the fishers' getting to know fish as one of empathetic engagement, revolving around a relationship with the total fish-in-the-water, rather than with an individualised natural-history-book fish, devoid of its environment, behaviour patterns, and other attributes. Whereas the latter kind of fish remains invisible most of the time, fishers learn to see and engage with the former in the river. Furthermore, I have suggested conceptualising the hooks, cages and nets used in catching fish as inverse life-stories of this fish-in-the-water, based on its total appearance, but strategically manipulating it into a deadly trap.

Focusing on fish in the river, I hope to contribute to discussion about the relations between humans and their non-human environments, in particular extending the argument about empathy in human-animal encounters from hunting mammals to catching fish. With this I have also tried to address how a focus on empathy complements existing approaches based on the concept of reciprocity between hunter and prey. I have argued that approaching Kemi fishers' getting to know fish as empathetic relations can shed light on the apparent difficulty of conceptualising the fishers' inevitably partial, but nevertheless productive understanding of another species. Thereby, I hope to have developed recent work on fishing by Eden and Bear, which in spite of analysing very similar dynamics among English anglers, does not spell out their implications in terms of empathy. They also say little about how knowing fish is translated into catching them, which I have addressed through reference to Gell's proposition concerning traps. Altogether, and in support of many other detailed studies on interactions between humans and fish, I have tried to develop an approach towards understanding how we live in a world not made up of insurmountable disparities between different 'cultures' and 'species', but emerging from interactions and resonances.

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