

THE WISE SALMON THAT RETURNED HOME

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Introduction: Salmon in Two Northern Rivers

In this chapter, I will analyze interview data that I collected among salmon fishermen living along two rivers in Northern Finland, the Iijoki and the Kemijoki. The fishing stories of the interviewees go back to the 1920s and end with the damming of both rivers. I analyze the variety of features associated with salmon, and investigate how or why the interviewees justified these associations. By observing how the fish were represented and described in the interviews, this chapter seeks to understand the essence of salmon agency and the human–salmon relationship.

Local cultures in Northern Finland, like elsewhere in the Circumpolar North, have a long history of relying on migratory fish for their sustenance. Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) have played a major role in the history and development of societies and cultures in northern Europe. Atlantic salmon typically hatch in the gravel of a freshwater riverbed, then spend several years in the river. They then migrate to the ocean where they stay several (1–5) years, after which they return to the river habitat to spawn.

The annual salmon migration to freshwater rivers has strongly shaped the northern riverside cultures. Fishing migratory fish was an important source of livelihood and one of the main things that historically drew permanent settlements to the northern riversides. Besides their nutritional value, there were many other important characteristics of migratory fish, including aesthetic, symbolic, social, and economic values. Migratory fish and their annual rhythm belonged to the rivers' landscapes, defining the annual rhythm of riverside

villages that adapted to the salmon migration.¹ Specific professions and skills were developed and buildings were constructed to serve salmon fishing. Salmon shaped people's ways of life and their thinking.²

The Kemijoki was one of the most important salmon rivers in Europe,³ while the Iijoki was one of most important salmon rivers in Finland.⁴ Salmon started the climb to their breeding areas annually in June, but fishing continued until autumn with the migratory whitefish. The fish were prepared for food, sold, or stored for later use. Salting or freezing the catch made it available year-round.⁵

Local residents along the two rivers obtained their livelihoods from different sources, including crofting, reindeer farming, forestry, hunting, and berry picking. Along the northern rivers, fishing was a central source of food and income. The nutritional value of salmon was significant to the locals, particularly along the lower parts of the rivers. Moving toward the upper reaches of the rivers, the amount of migratory fish decreased. At the mid-course of the rivers, salmon were still described as "half a livelihood," and hard-working fishermen in the upper parts of the river were able to bring home a nice addition to their dinner tables. Salmon had economic benefits as well, as migratory fish were often the sole source of spending money.

Salmon fishing required wide knowledge of the fish and the river, significant fishing skills, organization skills, and cooperation with other fishermen. Building weirs,

1. Autti, *Valtavirta muutoksessa*; Autti and Karjalainen, "The Point of no Return." 45–57.

2. Vilkuna, *Lohi*.

3. Ibid.

4. Hoffman, *Pohjolan Voima 1943–1993*.

5. Vilkuna, *Lohi*.

seines, and traps also required special knowledge and skills. The amount and behavior of the salmon, as well as the features of the river at the fishing ground, dictated the fishing style that was used. Different methods were used in rapids and in quiet waters. The current, depth of water, and river bed conditions at the fishing ground determined which type of trap was used.⁶

Fishing traditions were important builders of local and collective identity, as well as a significant part of the fishermen's personal identities, i.e., who I am and where I belong. Local people had grown up within a salmon fishing culture, and the traditions passed on from one generation to the next impacted their sense of belonging. Migratory fish were an important part of the family histories of many interviewees. There is a strong social aspect of salmon fishing, and seine fishing in particular was connected with the communal and social facets. The chain of generations shaped these identities; fishing was taught to small children, and they in turn passed on the tradition to their children. Fishing was seen as a bloodline, and continuing salmon fishing was often considered a matter of honor.⁷

Migratory fish also had an aesthetic value. A wanderer on the riverbank could appreciate the beauty and diversity of the river environment, and a salmon jumping in the rapids was a magnificent sight. Fishing was exciting; the thrill of salmon fishing was even greater because of their large size. If one did not have a fishing permit, the thrill rose not only from competition with the fish, but also with the fishing supervisors. Fish poaching was common, and the authorities often turned a blind eye to it. Torch fishing, in

6. Vilkuna, *Lohi*; Autti, *Valtavirta muutoksessa*; Autti and Karjalainen, "The Point of No Return."

7. Autti, *Valtavirta muutoksessa*; Autti and Karjalainen, "The Point of No Return."

particular, is remembered by the interviewees as an exciting, phenomenal fishing experience. It is an old method of catching fish at night with a fish spear and a bright torch light. The combined aesthetics of a dark autumn night, the beauty of water and fire, and the excitement of getting caught (torch fishing was forbidden) caused many interviewees to talk about nighttime fishing as an unforgettable memory.

Production of hydroelectricity in the Kemijoki started in 1948, right after the Second World War, with the construction of the Isohaara Dam and power plant at the mouth of the river. Harnessing the Kemijoki was one of the largest hydropower construction projects in Europe. Since then, a total of 17 large hydroelectric plants and two large water reservoirs have been constructed in the Kemijoki.⁸ Harnessing the Iijoki started with the construction of the Pahkakoski Power Plant in 1959. In 1971, the last of the five power plants (at Raasakka) was completed.⁹

The damming of both rivers ended both the salmon migration and the rich fishing culture surrounding the migratory fish. When the interviewees talked about the end of salmon migration, they discussed the bitterness and discontent felt by local people. The biggest reasons for their discontent were loss of livelihood, loss of an important and enjoyable activity, and loss of the fishing culture. In a blind belief in the power of technology and its ability to solve any problems, functioning fish passages were neither planned nor built. When the power of Finland's northern rivers began to be harnessed in the 1940s, the production of electricity was generally seen as a common nationwide goal because the country was suffering from a severe energy shortage. Electricity was needed for the post-war reconstruction and war indemnity work. Those who endured losses due

8. Suopajärvi, *Vuotos – ja Ounasjokikamppailujen kentät ja merkitykset Lapissa*; Kemijoki Oy, "Voimalaitokset ja tuotanto."

9. Rusanen, *Role of the Local People*.

to the damming of rivers had neither any chance to challenge this goal nor any way to articulate their interests and express criticism of the prevailing economic and political situation. During the construction work, concern for social and environmental changes in Finland was minor; the typical mindset was that losses could be casually compensated by money. In the worst cases, people who had no experience with monetary calculations lost both their homes and their livelihoods. This was the case especially for the Lokka and Porttipahta reservoirs along the Kemijoki.¹⁰

Research Data and Methods

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2009–2010, and in particular interview data, which consists of interviews with 23 salmon fishermen living along and near the Kemijoki and Iijoki rivers in northern Finland. The interviewees were elderly people aged between 60 and 91 years; interviews were carried out 60 years after the building of the Isohaara Dam in Kemijoki and 50 years after the building of the Pahkakoski Dam in Iijoki. The interviewees talked about their experiences fishing migratory fish, the activities that fishing and the use of fish included, and the changes they experienced in the river environment.

Thirteen of the interviewees lived beside the Kemijoki, while 10 lived beside the Iijoki. Six were female and 17 were male. The interview material collected from those who lived beside the Iijoki is part of a wider social impact assessment (SIA) completed for the Migratory Fish Return to the River Ii river restoration project.¹¹ I searched for

10. Autti, *Valtavirta muutoksessa*; Järvikoski, *Vesien säännöstely ja paikallisyhteisö*; Luostarinen, *A Social Geography of Hydro-Electric Power Projects*.

11. Karjalainen et al. *Monitavoitearviointi Iijoen vaelluskalakantojen palauttamisen tukena*.

interviewees along the Kemijoki by asking the municipalities' home help service for contacts and using snowball sampling.¹² The interviews were recorded on audiotape and then transcribed verbatim, and the analysis was based on content analysis.¹³ I then analyzed the interviewees' perceptions of salmon agencies by interpreting the ways encounters with salmon were described, which features were related to salmon, and for what reason.

At this stage of the analysis, I avoided a tight framing of the concept of agency and instead looked for aspects of agency emerging from the interview material. However, some framing of the concept was needed to better guide the analysis. Agency is tied to subjectivity, even though the concept describes more than just an attribute of an individual. Related to subjectivity, agency is also inseparable from the surrounding social world. The concept of agency should be defined in relation to the production of subjectivity (as well as the definition of subject position) taking place in social processes. Thus, when defining agencies, power relations should also be considered, as they are present in all social relations.¹⁴

Offsets for Encounters with Salmon

Salmon were the biggest, strongest, and economically most significant fish, even though whitefish were even more plentiful in some locations. Other fish species, including

12. E.g., Noy, "Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research." 327–344.

13. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*.

14. Hughes, *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory and Research*; Ronkainen, "Haavoittunut kansakunta ja väkivallan toimijuus," 531–550; Virkki, *Vihan voima*.

whitefish, perch, pike, and grayling, were less valued. According to fishermen along the Iijoki, if you caught a whitefish, for example, people said the fish was bringing greetings from the salmon. Based on these greetings, the fishermen knew that salmon were coming soon and thus continued fishing.

The interviews revealed three different standpoints regarding the human–salmon relationship: salmon as a superior, godlike entity, salmon as a commodity, and salmon and humans as equals. These perceptions are overlapping and interconnected with each other. Each one emphasizes particular aspects of the meaning of salmon and its role in the community (Table 1).¹⁵

Table 1. Standpoints for salmon agency

Perception of salmon	Subject positions	Emphasized meaning of salmon
A godlike entity	Man as a part of the equilibrium of nature	Symbolic: metaphors Spiritual: animism Aesthetic: the diversity and beauty of nature
A commodity	Man above nature	Economic: nutrition, livelihood Social and aesthetic: recreation
An equal	Man and salmon as equal actors	Social: salmon as a companion Symbolic: salmon reflecting one's own life

Salmon in Traditional Beliefs

Before the ideology of man ruling nature became concrete in these river areas—in this case, the construction of the first hydropower dams—the relationship between nature and people was different. Nature was considered stronger than human beings; local culture was

15. Autti, *Valtavirta muutoksessa*; Autti and Karjalainen, “The Point of No Return.”

dependent on natural conditions, especially with regard to the rivers. Nature was seen as a provider of life, and it was also given a spiritual and divine provenance. Man did not place himself above nature, but considered himself a part of the equilibrium of nature. In Finnish fiction, rivers are often described as streams of life and used as metaphors for life. The appreciation for rivers included spiritual and religious features.¹⁶ Fish were seen as mysterious, supernatural, strong actors.

The gap between the primary elements of water, earth, and air and the unfamiliarity of water contributed to these philosophic beliefs. Water as the natural habitat of fish automatically segregates salmon from our own element. The underwater world is another dimension that is not reachable and remains essentially unknown to us. It was thus difficult to fully understand the attributes, environment, and behavior of fish. Due to the lack of a shared element and other known features of the fish, salmon were considered a mysterious creature, sometimes believed to possess supernatural powers. There is a connection between salmon and traditional beliefs and spirituality, as well as animism, as defined by Tim Ingold. For Ingold, animism requires more than just a simple sprinkling of agency. Things are in life, rather than life being in things.¹⁷ Salmon, too, were believed to possess more than the given attributes of agency. Deidre Cullon studied the ceremonial uses of salmon along the Pacific Northwest Coast. She argued that an animistic belief endowed salmon with human qualities and agency. Proper care and respect ensured that these supernatural beings would remain benevolent and generous.¹⁸

16. E.g., Pietarinen, "Ihminen ja luonto," 98–108; Vilkkä, *Ympäristöetiikka*.

17. Ingold, *What is an Animal?*

18. Cullon, "A View from the Watchman's Pole," 9–37.

Along the Kemijoki, the salmon fishermen were careful not to mention the name of the salmon while fishing. They believed that the fish could hear them speaking, and when recognizing its own name, the salmon would hide. Thus, many alias names, which were often borrowed from other languages, were used for salmon. When an alias name became common, it had to be changed again.¹⁹ Besides the possession of agency, the variety of different names for salmon also speaks to its importance in the culture of riverside communities. Wooden or stone sacrificial landmarks for fishermen's luck are signs of spirituality and animism and they can still be found around fishing grounds in northern Finland.

The next example reveals some aspects of the supernatural beliefs surrounding salmon, as well as the fact that men and salmon were perceived as equals. Veikko, an elderly man who used to fish for salmon along the Kemijoki, told a story about his father and grandfather. His grandfather had gone away for the night and he told his son, the narrator's father, to examine the salmon net the next morning. The son did as he was told and caught two salmon. Because he had been short of money, the son decided to sell the second salmon and not tell his father about it. When his father came home, he immediately asked about the salmon net. "There was one salmon," his son told him. "Not two?" marveled the father. "There should have been two. Last night in my dream I was fighting two men."

Salmon as a Commodity

Opposite perspectives of the human–animal relationship are obvious in the data as well. Especially downstream of both rivers, salmon were severely overfished. Some of the interviewees described the salmon culture and fishing in the same way they talked about

19. Vilkuna, *Lohi*.

haymaking or harvesting potatoes. Many animals are affected by their location within a distribution of resources that is deeply skewed toward humans. Their habitats and ecologies are subject to human interests and depredation; their lives are subordinated to the needs of humans; and the material and ecological conditions for their survival are frequently disregarded during the pursuit of human commercial advantage.²⁰ Some interviewees highlighted the nutritional and economic value of fishing, describing their methods and tools, but also spoke about the social and recreational aspects of fishing, where the river environment and the element of flowing water were highly important. In these narratives, human activity and agency were emphasized and salmon were seen as an object, a commodity without any agency of their own. In the next interview excerpt, Ilmari from the Kemijoki River talks about the annual rhythm of salmon fishing and compares the different traps:

Ilmari: When the river was still free, it was the beginning of July when the salmon began to appear. One could not immediately catch them with lures, but later in August they were caught with nets and lures, and all autumn until the river started to freeze. Some salmon stayed, which were called “winter salmon,” and they were fished already early in the spring near Juoksuniemi, our cemetery hill. Seine was a good trap, if you were able to throw it wider. My father used to fish with lures; he got many salmon, but the nets, they were not so expensive.

Reading between the lines, however, one could reveal the hidden agency of the fish as respect for a strong fish and a provider of life. The different perspectives of salmon seem to be overlapping, and the perception which dominates the others depends on the context of the telling.

20. Ingold, *What is an Animal?*; Carter and Charles, “Animals, Agency and Resistance.” 331.

Salmon as a Mirror for Human Agency

According to the third perspective, salmon were considered similar to humans. The perceived equality between humans and salmon may have partly been due to the large size of the fish. The weight of one fish could reach almost 30 kilos, although most were 10–20 kilos. Fishing such specimens required both skill and strength. A competitive spirit was present in the interview data in two different forms. The battle was perceived on the one hand as taking place between the fisherman and the catch, with the fishing event described as a battle between two equal partners. It was also a battle between man and nature, as survival was at stake. On the other hand, the competition was between the fishermen: who would get to the best fishing grounds, who would get the most salmon, and who would get the biggest fish. Catching a large salmon was a sign of skill, strength, and cunning. In a way, it strengthened the fisherman's status within his community; the prize in this competition was the appreciation of others and a significant role in many fishing stories.

Two interviewees, Alpo and Hannes, described wrestling with salmon:

Alpo: It was customary to jump over the salmon when it was caught in shallow water, because of the fear of losing the catch. This was possible because the salmon were not as strong in shallow waters. When wrestling with the fish, one could feel how strong it was. If you held it between your knees and grabbed its gills, it could still get away if its tail was free.

Hannes: Yes, if the salmon's tail was free, one could not hold it back.

The interviewees saw similarity between the salmon lifecycle and their own behavior, appreciations, and intentions. It was well known among the fishermen that salmon migrated in shoals of fish, and this was considered a sign of their social character. Salmon, like people, were sociable creatures that appreciated the company of others. They belonged to a collective of salmon and were members of a family. Sometimes the fish also seemed to search for contact with the fishermen, as illustrated in Niilo's interview.

Niilo: We were going to the Hepokangas fishing ground when a female salmon made an appearance. It was so cunning, one had to think it was looking for company, and as it heard some clatter, it showed itself swimming right near the surface of the water. It did not leap; it just showed its dorsal fin. Aato said, “You just wait for us, we will be here with the torches tonight.” So we went, and the stupid salmon came swimming along to see what we were up to, and Aato caught it right away.

Many interviewees perceived salmon to be cunning, often even playing with the fishermen and teasing them. One day, after hours of fishing with no success, Pekka decided to give up. He rowed his boat to the shore, walked to his cottage located on the river bank, and slammed the door behind him. Immediately after this, a big salmon leapt right next to Pekka’s rowing boat. The same thing happened three days in a row. Pekka saw this as a sign of malicious pleasure on the part of the salmon, but also as an invitation to play a bit more.

Some thought that salmon, similar to people, used to search for cool places during hot weather. When the weather was hot, the fishermen searched for salmon in cooler deep waters. When salmon were caught, the fishermen often saw signs of astonishment in the fish. Still, even if they had a small chance to escape, the salmon did not always seize the opportunity. This, as interpreted by the interviewees, was due to their amazement—the fish were so confused and surprised that they momentarily had no idea where to go.

Laziness was another characteristic of salmon that interviewees mentioned. This was based on the observation that salmon were often seen at rest in still waters, especially after breeding. These “lazy” salmon were rather easy to catch with a fishing net or gig. In the local culture, hard work and diligence were greatly appreciated, especially among the older generation. The interviewees mentioned hard work as an important value and a source of contentment in their lives; they started working very early, and hard work had been constant ever since. Their traditional social system leaned much on Lutheran philosophies, which emphasized the value of a strong work ethic. Diligence increased one’s social appreciation, belonging, and agency within the community, while laziness and an idle attitude toward work

were not approved. From this viewpoint, the resting salmon were not appreciated as much as the ones that leapt for their breeding areas.

The fact that salmon return annually to their birth river to breed was well known among the people along the rivers. It was considered a deeply human characteristic; fish were perceived to express appreciation for their birthplace. The river was considered the “right” place to be—fish came “home.”

Ari: Salmon are born here and that is significant. If they are born on a fish farm, it is not the same thing. It is not their home. I myself know that my home is along the Iijoki [laughs], and so do the salmon. If they have a chance to return, say to some rock in Livojoki [tributary of Iijoki], they will go on to their trip to the sea and then come back. They have the tendency to do so. And they return to exactly the same place where they were once born. We think we know much, but salmon are wiser. We do not have the kind of direction system that salmon have. Even if we had a GPS, salmon return to precisely the same place without a GPS, and their trips are thousands of kilometers away.

According to Carter and Charles,²¹ the natal circumstances of all human beings place them within historically specific and determinate social relations and arrangements. In the interviewees’ minds, the fact that salmon wanted to raise their offspring in the same place they were born was connected to people’s own place attachments and appreciation for their family roots.

Evidence of social hierarchies and dominance were also expressed. Some elderly men saw a difference between female and male salmon.

Niilo: The male salmon could not be caught. Were they blessed or what, damn! Or maybe they were so much wiser that they did not get caught, never. It was always just females. And I have never seen a female salmon bigger than 14 kilos. Even that is out of the ordinary. Females are usually 7 or 8 kilos, more or less than 10 kilos. But we could not catch male salmon, except by torch fishing, and sometimes with seine.

Female salmon were considered stupid and were not appreciated as much as males, especially large, awe-inspiring male salmon. Males were considered more cunning, wiser,

21. Carter and Charles, “Animals, Agency and Resistance,” 331.

and much more difficult to catch. Male salmon were more active than females, and when breeding, males were thought to actively look for and choose the breeding place. Niilo used an interesting word, “*vihteenuinti*,” or “entertainment swim,” for salmon’s breeding time. He explained that during the entertainment swim, it is usually the male salmon that swims around and looks for a partner, searching through all the breeding areas. Male salmon were also considered smart enough to avoid capture. They teased the fishermen by showing their tail or dorsal fins on the water surface. If such a cunning male salmon happened to be caught in seine fishing net, it understood to keep quiet until the last moment.

Many interviewees talked about having emotional bonds with the fish and expressing caring and empathy for them. This tells about an equal approach. The fact that dam construction ended the salmon migration was painful for many interviewees; they grieved for the fish. For example, Eeva, who had seen the salmon’s attempts to overcome the dams, said that during her long life she could never forget or forgive the painful memories of salmon suffering. She witnessed how strong the salmon’s intentions were when they seriously injured themselves by leaping against the dams.

Eeva: And that summer Isohaara [the dam] was closed and listen to me, the injured salmon tried to leap in between the logjam and timber . . . [her voice fades] it was just horrible. They could not pass. I have seen such a sad thing there and it has stayed in my heart as a bad memory: that they can do that, just close the best river in Finland.

Along the Iijoki, a similar story is told by Alpo. He witnessed the final construction work at Pahkakoski Dam, and after the hatchway of the dam was closed, a shoal of salmon started leaping against the dam constructions. Alpo was impressed by and convinced of the persistence of the fish, which he considered another sign of salmon agency.

Alpo: They leapt there; you know a salmon never gives up. They try and try, they leapt against the stream, and the stream hit them back against the breakwater made of concrete. Masses of salmon got injured because of these breakwaters. You could see them, the ones that were physically injured.

After seeing the drive that forced salmon to leap against the dams, the fish were caught at Pahkakoski Dam and transferred past the hydropower plant. The fish, however, seemed to have lost the instinct to continue swimming toward their breeding habitats. People assumed the fish suffered from stress and placed the salmon in special stress pools for 24 hours, which was believed to calm them down. Next, the salmon were taken back to the river, past the dam. However, these attempts did not work and they could not save the salmon stock; this procedure was gradually renounced.

Interviewees also worry about the changed circumstances in fish habitats.

Eeva: And there at Jyrhämä the shores and riverbanks were modified because of the Vanttaus Dam, because the dam raises the water level. I think it is wrong; they do not like the fact that the shores were modified with big rocks and stones. This is my own...

Ilmari [interrupting]: I think it is good that the hydropower plant has been built, it has improved the economy. The shores should not disturb anyone—at least they do not disturb me.

Eeva: No, but I mean the fish, because the fish cannot get to natural shore anymore, just to the rocks. Here at Jyrhämä, I mean. But I might be wrong.

Eeva and Ilmari shed light on questions like “Who has the right to talk?” and “Who has the right to the river?” In Eeva’s comments, the destinies of fish and riverside people seem similar. Facing prevailing economic and political pressure, both entities must quietly accept their fate. People are discontented with the environmental change in the river landscape, but they do not dare to speak up and express these feelings. The dominant narrative of the change in the river is based on legal, technical, and economic language; against the good of society, pleading for one’s own experiences is difficult and useless. Eeva knows that her opinions are too modest and have no room in the discourse on hydropower, energy production, or the state economy. Thus, she appeals for the wellbeing of the fish; the fish do not like the fact that the shores have been altered. She places fish first and talks about the losses fish have experienced rather than her own losses. Ilmari refers only to economic rationalities, considering Eeva’s comments incorrect and foolish.

During the last decade, several migrant fish restoration projects have taken place on these rivers. The interviewees are still concerned about the wellbeing of salmon. They know about these river restoration projects through the media and follow the projects with interest. One restoration activity involves catching salmon from the river mouth and transporting them to the upper parts of the river, past the hydropower plants. The interviewees worry about how the salmon are coping with these stressful situations. They discuss how salmon should be looked after, and hope that the turbines of hydropower plants will not hurt fish on their way back to the sea.

Aino: But now they worry about the salmon that they planted in Ounasjoki [a tributary of the Kemijoki].

Outi: Yes, they transported salmon there.

Aino: Yes, now they talk about how a salmon has escaped and if they have found it or ask if someone caught it [laughs]. I have read in the newspaper, and heard discussions on the radio too, about how many smolts there will be next year. I have laughed many times with my son and wondered who will observe the salmon day and night on the riverbanks.

Conclusions: Intertwining Agencies

The northern sources of livelihood and the factors that people living in these challenging circumstances depend on, such as salmon, shape the local cultures in many ways. The economic significance of salmon fishing also creates and reconstructs meanings in other sectors of life, including the social and spiritual sectors. Many interviewees saw salmon as a strong actor. Symbolism, as well as humanizing and caring for the fish, was common in my data. According to Zelko, attitudes toward specific species are largely shaped by our innate anthropomorphism.²² That is, when we think about animals, we are also thinking about

22. Zelko, "From Blubber and Baleen to Buddha of the Deep," 91–108.

ourselves. Additionally, some interviewees talked about the agency of the river. The river was also considered an entity with thoughts, actions, and objectives. This came up when the interviewees described the change from a free-floating river to a heavily regulated one. A free river's desire is to reach the sea, flowing freely toward its destination, and building a dam is a death blow. This metaphor also fits the salmon, who share the same sad destiny. Salmon fishing involved an interaction between three partners: the fisherman, the salmon, and the river (animal–human–environment interaction). Some interviewees added traps as a fourth component. This became especially common in narratives about fly fishing.

The role of the fish in local riverside cultures was much more than just economic. The interviewees have grown up in a fishing culture filled with stories of salmon; they observed and learned about salmon behavior while fishing, and interpreted and compared the stories and observations with their own life.

Kalevi: Indeed, my father was a fisherman, and he took me along to the river from a very early age. Since I started fishing as a little boy, fishing for all kinds of fish in the river, of course it went all the way to my blood; you couldn't help it.

Narratives about the qualities of the fish, as well as the descriptions of fishing activities, showed that salmon were believed to have agency. My data include a variety of salmon agencies with different intensities. At a minimum, salmon were perceived as a commodity, and the human–animal relationship resembled an actor–object relationship. The agency of fish in this composition was narrow. However, some interviewees gave salmon a much wider agency as a companion, human-like creature mirroring the lives of riverside people. Salmon characterizations and comparisons were drawn from the interviewees' own familiar everyday environment, and in these narratives human and salmon agencies were

intertwined. Moreover, according to traditional beliefs and spirituality, salmon were seen as a godlike creature possessing supernatural powers.

The actions of the fish were regarded as evidence that salmon possess agency. The fish were seen as having the ability to take action and as possessing thoughts, emotions, and intentions. Things that were known about the fish were reflected in human life and interpreted and explained by comparing them with one's own experiences and intentions. Salmon were enmeshed within social and cultural relationships. In this way, local people along the riversides brought salmon into a social world that was familiar to them. Salmon agency was relational. As Carter and Charles wrote, in this sense, non-human animals are agents in relation to human-dominated structures.²³

The river and its damming put people and salmon in the same restricted position, as both depended on a free river. People were aware of what they shared in common with the salmon. When the electrification of the rivers began, local residents saw the sad fate of salmon and were reminded of their own situation. Reflecting one's own experiences was now reciprocal.

Defining agency is a social process. As linguistic creatures, people define the agencies of salmon as well as the extent and dimensions of such agencies. All of these agencies are produced in interaction, which in turn is always contextual, time-, action-, and place-specific. Agency is negotiable, and it is strongly related to power relations. When defining salmon agencies, subjects, wider subject positions, and power relations are produced and reproduced at the same time. As interviewees talked about salmon, they defined not only salmon agencies, but also positioned themselves and described the surrounding community.

23. Carter and Charles, "Animals, Agency and Resistance." 331.

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