

Advancing Gender Research to Support Gender Justice in Fisheries and Aquaculture

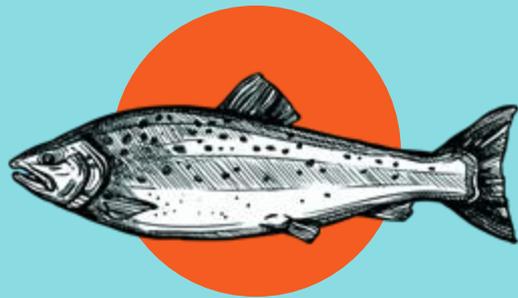
Keynote Address

Holly M. Hapke, PhD
University of California, Irvine, USA

**9TH GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON
GENDER IN AQUACULTURE & FISHERIES**

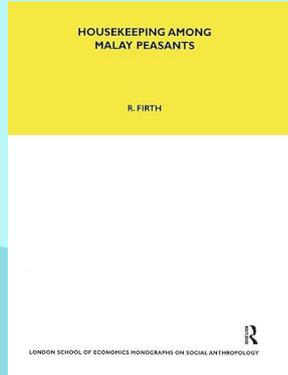
October 1-3, 2025





Introduction

Early Studies on Women, Gender and Fisheries

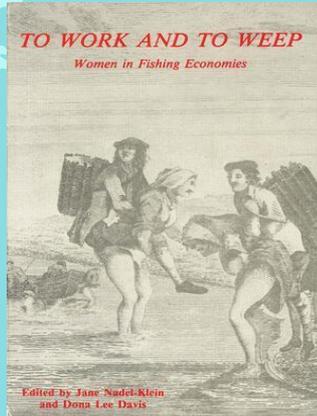


1943

Siri Gerrard – Norwegian Fisheries
(1975, 1983, 1995)

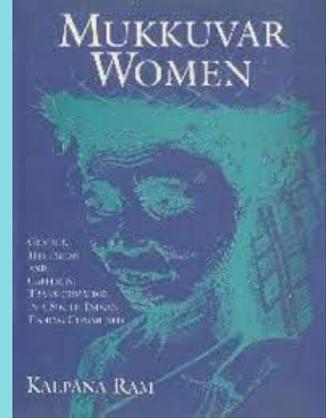
"She Was Skipper of the Shore-Crew"
Notes on the History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Newfoundland
Marilyn Porter

1985

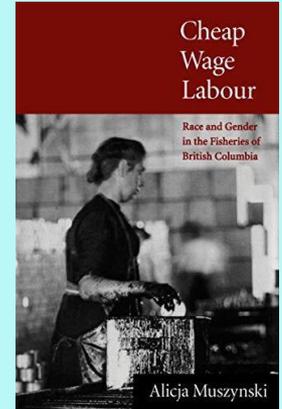


1988

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT
1992
Nalini Nayak



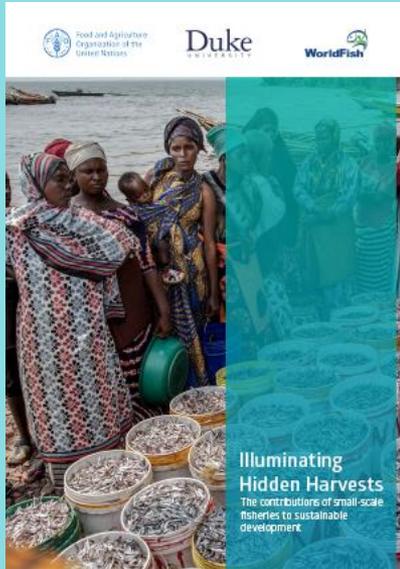
1991



1996

Recent Work

Special Issues of *Maritime Studies*



Maritime Studies (2018) 17:117–124
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-018-0113-9>

EDITORIAL



(En)Gendering Change in Small-Scale Fisheries and Fishing Communities in a Globalized World

Katia Frangoudes¹ · Siri Gerrard²

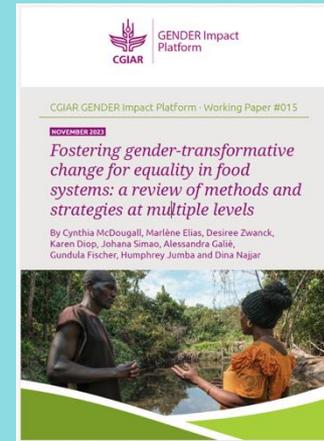
Maritime Studies (2019) 18:241–248
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-019-00159-w>

EDITORIAL

Situated transformations of women and gender relations in small-scale fisheries and communities in a globalized world

Katia Frangoudes¹ · Siri Gerrard² · Danika Kleiber³

Special Issues of GAF Conference Proceedings in *Asian Fisheries Science; Gender, Technology & Development; Development; Fishery Technology*



Research on Women & Gender Demonstrates:

- Women play an integral role in all aspects of fisheries and aquaculture - ~45% of those engaged in subsistence fisheries (Harper et al. 2023) - and thus contribute significantly to household livelihoods that rely on these food systems.
- These roles vary in different contexts, but women are especially prominent in post-harvest and product transformation activities, such as processing and trade, which are critical for generating value.



And Yet...



- Post-harvest activities continue to receive less attention in research and development policy than fish production (harvesting).
- Women's involvement in the sector remains **invisible** and **undervalued**.
- Women remain generally **excluded** from national development policies and programs and fisheries governance institutions.
- Gender scholarship itself has existed at the margins of fisheries science
 - A disproportionate attention to production/harvesting with relative neglect of postharvest;
 - gender bias among fisheries scientists that overlooks or minimizes women's roles in fish economies.
- This neglect of post-harvesting activities and the exclusion of women from research, technological innovation, and policy have created **differential impacts** of economic change on men and women – often to **women's detriment**.

We also know:



- Fishery and aquaculture food systems are deeply embedded in and governed by social-cultural systems and social relations characterized by gender inequality.
- These food systems are structured by social divisions of labor – gender, religion, caste, age, etc. – which differentially structure people’s experiences of development and economic change.
- Even as biological systems, fisheries and aquaculture resources are influenced by sex differences; non-reporting of sex variables hinders reproducibility and can lead to inaccuracies, research inefficiency and difficulty generalizing results (Tannenbaum, et al. 2019; Ellis et al. 2017).

→ Failure to account for sex, gender and other social factors in research results in **weak science, weak technology uptake**, and often, **policy failure** AND it creates/perpetuates **gender inequalities**.

The Challenge:



- Significant gaps in gender-disaggregated data (Harper et al. 2023)
- Exclusion of women and gender perspectives from F&A Governance - Patriarchy within our institutions that produce knowledge and create and implement policy
- Rigorous, theoretically-informed gender analysis within the sector
 - Most research focuses on gender roles and *descriptions* of gender divisions of labor
 - Need more research on *gender dynamics* that can support the transformation of aquatic food systems toward gender equity

Why do gender divisions of labor exist? Why does it matter?

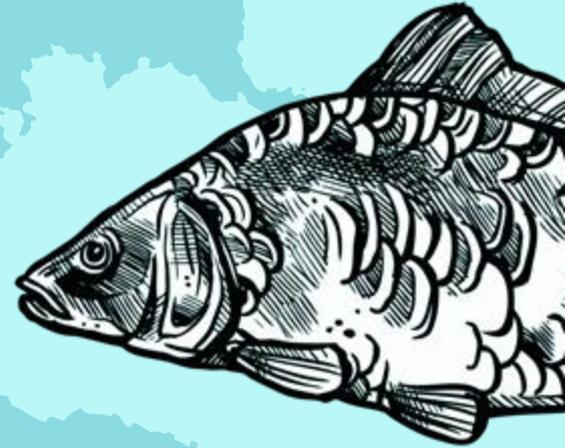
Objective



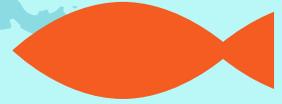
How might we broaden and deepen the scope of theoretically-informed gender analysis to transform fisheries and aquaculture for gender justice?

Argument:

- Deep gender analysis is necessary for robust fisheries science
- And necessary for gender equity in the sector



Insights from Research



- Independent research in southern Kerala (Trivandrum District) 1993-20015 – with Devan Ayyanketil
- Collaborative Research 2016 to present
 - ***Dried Fish Matters*** – with Nikita Gopal (ICAR-CIFT) and Nireka Weeratunge, Kyoko Kusakabe, Tara Nair, Gayathri Lokuge, Derek Johnson, Amalendu Jyotishi, Ramachandran Bhatta
 - ***Indian Ocean Collaboratory on Small-scale Fisheries, Rupture and Gendered Adaptations*** Gayathri Lokuge, Amalendu Jyotishi, Ramachandra Bhatta, Karin Fernando, Derek Johnson, Kyoko Kusakabe, Ajit Menon, Betty Nyonje, Francis Okalo, Sereyvath Prak, Joeri Scholtens, Nadiya Azmy, Nuwanthika Dharmaratne, Channaka Jayasinghe, Nicholas Karani, Prasanna Surathkal, Prabhakar Jayaprakash, Bhagath Singh A.
 - ***IIFET Workshop: Integrating Gender in Fisheries and Aquaculture Economics and Trade Research (2024); GAF 101/201 (2016, 2018, 2025); and Other Research Collaborations*** – Nikita Gopal, Leela Edwin, Kyoko Kusakabe, Cynthia McDougall, Tara Nair, Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez, Marilyn Porter, Meryl Williams

Important (Selected) Influences



Kalpana Ram – *Mukkuvar Women: Gender, Hegemony, and Capitalist Transformation in a South Indian Fishing*

Carolyn Sachs – *Gendered Fields: Rural Women, Agriculture, And Environment*

Doreen Massey – *Spatial Divisions of Labour : Social Structures and the Geography of Production*

Priti Ramamurthy - The cotton commodity chain, women, work and agency in India and Japan: the case for feminist agro-food systems research. *World Development*

Lucy Jarosz – Working in the global food system: a focus for international comparative analysis. *Progress in Human Geography*

Wilma Dunaway (and others) – *Gendered Commodity Chains: Seeing Women's Work and Households in Global Production*

My Intellectual Journey



"Learning to sell fish" – photo by Devan Ayyankeri



First Questions – Impact of Mechanization (i.e., capitalist development and technological change) on Artisanal Fisherfolk Communities

- How do global-level economic processes affect local communities in coastal India?
 - How are specific localities ("places") incorporated into global levels of economic organization?
 - What role do local institutions play in mediating global economic processes and local situations?

Research Objective:

- Analyze the nature of trade and market arrangements in the fish economy of Kerala as it had undergone mechanization & commercialization
- Assess the impact of mechanization on small-scale fish traders from a **gendered** perspective



- What are the social relationships of fish trade in this region?
 - What are the relative positions of power and control between various groups in the economy (i.e., producers, wholesalers, retailers)? What social-cultural factors (including *gender*) shape these relations?
- In what way have the institutions for local distribution of fish changed?
- **What are the implications of these changes for small-scale traders, especially women traders, and their ability to participate in the economy?**
 - ➔ a geographical political economy of fish market development
- Later – How are household economies organized in fishing communities in terms of gender relations? How has economic change impacted fishing households and organization of the household economy?



Subsequent Questions – Gender, Globalization, Livelihoods, and the Intersection of Culture and Economy

- How do gender ideologies in different communities construct economic roles, labor practices, and concepts of work at the household level?
- How do these then inform household livelihood strategies?
- How does economic transformation rework gender norms, ideologies and relations within households and communities?
- What are the implications of such transformations for women's autonomy and status within the household?



Recent Work – similar questions related to:



- Social Economy of Dried Fish (*Dried Fish Matters* project)
- Technological Change and Labour Relations (Ring Seines in Kerala – w/ Nikita Gopal and Leela Edwin)
- Blue Economy Impacts (Ruptures) and Gendered Adaptations (*SSRC Indian Ocean Collaboratory* project)
- Valuing Women's Work (w/ Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez)

Lessons



- Fish economies are constituted by social relationships that “govern” economic relations and transactions.
- Fish markets are GENDERED – **Complex gendered norms influence the way men and women traders access markets and move through market spaces.**
- Fisheries development has restructured fish economies toward greater hierarchy and geographical extent that impacts different groups of fishers differently.
- Economic and technological change has both positive and negative impacts on women fish traders and processors – creates new opportunities as well as new pressures.
- Different women experience economic and technological transformation differently depending on a range of factors – age, economic status, experience and stage in work-life course, familial obligations, household pressures, entrepreneurial inclination.

→ Women are not a homogenous entity!

Lessons cont.

- Patterns of men and women's work in fisheries is geographically and historically dynamic
 - Gender ideologies variously inform type of work men and women may undertake across different communities and households.
 - Women's and men's work in fisheries changes over time – change is not necessarily linear.
- Livelihoods are GENDERED. A range of factors inform the different livelihood options that are available to men and women over time.
- Men and women's technological needs differ; technological change impacts men's and women's work differently.
- Adaptations to economic and environmental ruptures varies in gendered ways.

➔ ***Development interventions need to consider gender.***



Gender Analysis for Gender Justice & Transformation



A Theoretical Approach that:

- Goes beyond a focus on gender *roles* to examine gender *relations*.
 - Gender roles research describes women's and men's roles but doesn't generate deep analyses of gender systems and structures of inequality
 - Tend to address symptoms of gender inequality rather than interrogate underlying causes (McDougall et al. 2023)
 - Gender relations/gender transformative approaches focus on power relations to understand inequality and strategies to improve it
- Key Concepts:
 - **Patriarchy** – How do gender ideologies and patriarchal structures shape economies, institutions, commodity circuits, and food systems?
 - **Labour** – Paid and unpaid; productive, reproductive, community (Parpart et al. 2000); not a cost but a social relationship (Dunaway 2014)
 - **Value** – also a social relationship – How does women's unpaid labor generate value?

A Methodology that

- Roots analyses of gender relations in broader economic, political, institutional, technological, social, and cultural relations and processes
 - Multi-scalar and historical in perspective
- Draws on material *and* cultural understandings of economy and gender
- Considers Intersectional identities and interconnections
- Reveals complex configurations of culture, economy, society and polity
- Utilizes *Gender Division of Labor* not as just a descriptor but as a conceptual axis to reveal local gender power relations and understand transformations in labour processes (Jarosz 1996)

Materialist Feminist Framework

Economic/Environmental:

Resource base; organization of economy; livelihoods; access to resources & education; divisions of labor (productive, reproductive, community); wages; employment; mobility; markets; trade networks & value chains

Political-Legal:

Rights of property, inheritance, voting, participation in governance, household decision-making; Power relations that structure access to rights and resources



Social: Kinship, descent, systems; marriage/sexuality; household composition; family structure; social groups; social norms; social privilege

Cultural: identities; moral authority; norms, ideologies & beliefs; constructions of power and authority; notions of space (public/ private); mobility; social status

How do gender relations cross-cut each sphere and geographic scale?

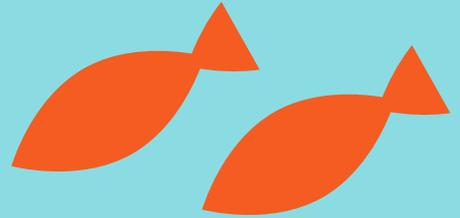
How do transformations in one sphere inform change in other spheres across, space, time, and geographic scale?



- Individual
- Household/Family
- Community
- Market (local, national, global)
- The State



Example Key Questions



Political Economy/Environment:

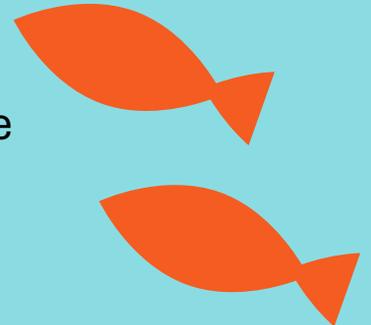
- What is the resource base? How might it be changing?
- What are the divisions of labor in households and local economy?
- What livelihoods, for whom? In what spaces do economic activities occur, who has access to those spaces, and why? How does (in)access create inequality?
- How are property rights structured? Who has access to resources and property? Who controls resources and capital?
- How is economic value generated by paid and unpaid labor?
- Who makes economic and political decisions and participates in resource governance?
- What kinds of technologies are needed or developed, for whom and for what tasks, and who benefits? How is technological innovation and adoption impacted by gender?

Example Key Questions

Social-Cultural:

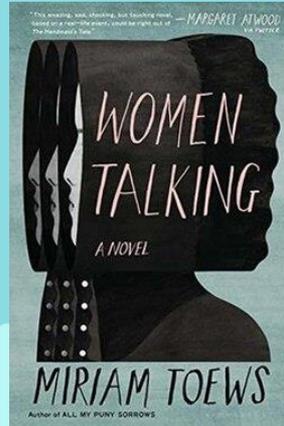
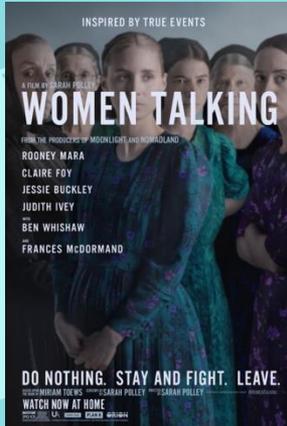
- What norms/ideologies define masculinity, femininity, and gender relations?
- What cultural factors shape women's mobility, access to economic resources, and ability to engage in economic activities? E.g., How is space defined in terms of gender
- How are households organized? How do gender relations structure kin systems and local communities? How do household structures shape access to resources and livelihood opportunities for men and women?

Intersections: How do social-cultural factors legitimize and reinforce political and economic structures and divisions? How does this change over time?



A word about Governance and Gender

- Women and the voices advocating for gender justice have been left out of governance institutions and policy discussions



THE NETWORK OF
WOMEN IN FISHERIES
AND AQUACULTURE.



SEWA

SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

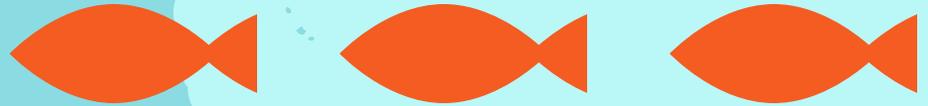


- Support fisherwomen's organizational capacity and collective action



Conclusions

- Theoretically-informed research on gender in fisheries and aquaculture enhances the robustness of fisheries science, which in turn may support stronger policy. ~ This is important for advancing social equity in food system transformation.
- But to realize the full potential of robust gender analysis, we need to deploy theoretical concepts and methods that allow us to interrogate the social relationships that underpin aquatic food systems.





- Gender relations approaches offer viable approaches for fisheries research and development to reveal underlying structures of inequality and potentially support transformations toward gender justice.
- Much work remains to be done – at all levels and in all dimensions of fisheries and aquaculture work.
- More gender relations research is necessary, but we need to get our insights into governance and policy.

How can we use gender-informed fisheries science to challenge the underlying drivers of gender inequality and transform fisheries and aquaculture toward greater gender justice?



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Thank You!

Questions?

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