

NETWORK, EXPLOITATION AND RESISTANCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF CAMBODIAN WOMEN MIGRANTS IN FISHERIES IN THAILAND

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MIGRANT IN FISHERIES

- **Fisheries in Thailand**
 - The 3rd largest exporter of fishery and seafood products.
 - Rely on migrant workers from Myanmar and Cambodia
 - Hazardous, low-paid
 - Employment immobility, violence, intimidation,



MIGRANTS IN FISHERIES

- Thai government reformed fisheries sector
 - Security/ health for off-shore fishers
 - Migrants were registered and legally working
 - The reform focuses on men working on fishing boats
- Little is known how Cambodian women migrants in fisheries understand and resist their working conditions.



STUDIES ON RESISTANCE

- Migrant resisting strategies
 - Formal resistance: filing complaint
 - Informal resistance: leaving exploitative employment, stealing, faking hours, slow working pace, or other disguise activities.

Although, resisting strategies of Cambodian women migrants in fisheries is not well explored.



PURPOSE

- Explore how Cambodian women migrants in fisheries experience and understand their working conditions.
- How they resist exploitation, and how migrant networks may facilitate resistance.



METHOD

- Ethnography
 - Participant observation
 - Informal conversation
 - Semi-structured, in-depth interviews
- Site: Rayong province, Thailand.
- 6 months living in Cambodian migrant community Rayong



CONTEXT OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN FISHERIES IN RAYONG

Men migrant workers

- Live with wife or relatives
- Work on fishing boats (primary fishing)
 - Heavy, long hours
 - Come back to shore every 5 to 10 days
- Payment (monthly & closing account)
- Work permit tied to employers (boat owners).
- Police harassment (suspect of using drug)



CONTEXT OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN FISHERIES IN RAYONG

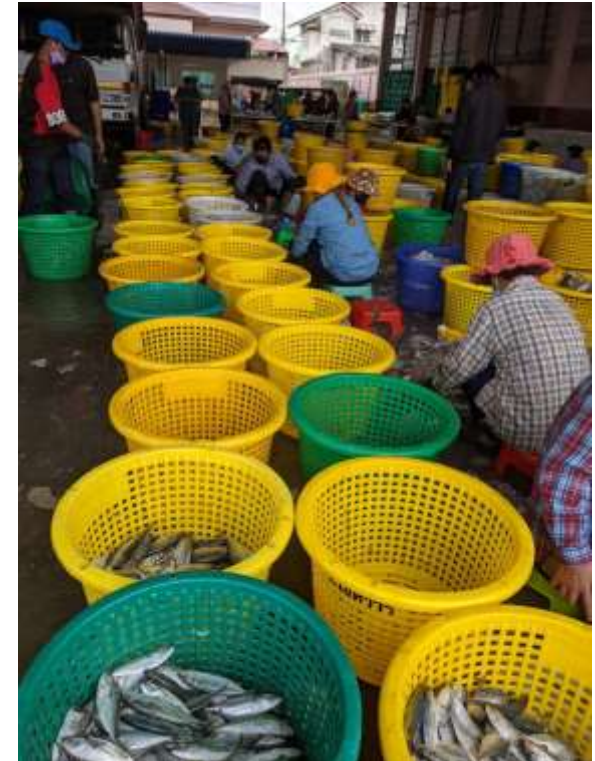


Women migrants

- Fish processing: picking/sorting, gutting
- Irregular work and inconsistency payment
- Piece rate payment, informal
- Some have work permits tied to their husbands' employers
- Cannot take up any work outside fisheries –illegal



WOMEN IN FISH PROCESSING: PICKING FISH



WOMEN MIGRANTS IN FISH PROCESSING: PICKING FISH

Work arrangement:

- Boat owners → middle person → a lead woman migrant → fellow migrants

Working hours & payment:

- Irregular work (4 -10 days/ months)
- Working hours: 4 hours- 14 hours (12am -2 pm)
- Payment for their work:
 - Lumpsum: 50 Baht (\$1.40) to 200 Baht (\$5.60) to pick 10,000kg-40,000 kg fish.
 - **Provide fish (in-kind):** 2-10 kilogram (70 Baht-350 Baht) (Gallon fish)



WOMEN INTERNALIZE THEIR CONDITIONS

- Long hours, heavy and dirty work.
- Payment is low, local Thais do not want to do it.
- Payment was deducted or held by middle persons
- Irregular work and payment (depends on boat owner)

“sometimes, the boat owners asked the supervisor (middle person) to take away our gallon fish [fishes in container] and leave little amount of fish for us. We rely on gallon fish for our living” (a migrant).



INFORMAL RESISTANCE/SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

- Take good quality and marketable fishes (in-kind payment)
- Stealing/hiding fishes
 - “ we could earn a little more from it [stealing fish]... It is like we claim from our labor. We could not survive by just relying on picking fee”. (a woman migrant)
- Negotiate with middle person
 - “ tell the lady (boat owner), if she still takes away gallon fishes like that, we won't go to work for her again” (a woman migrant)
- Stop working with exploitative middleman
- Take up another fish processing-breaking dried fishes, poorly paid.



NETWORK AND RESISTANCE

- Collaborate in hiding fish (work together to make sure boat owners didn't know)
- Experienced women migrants helped new migrants
- Sharing information/gossiping about works/ boat owners and middleperson
- Reporting to the chief (supervisor on fishing a boat)



CONCLUSION

- Inconsistent payment (dependent on the boat owner) encourages women to use different strategies, e.g., Stealing, to survive.
- Women migrants have to take up another poorly paid work(breaking dried fish) to support themselves.
- Migrant status criminalizes women, who take up work outside fisheries when there is not enough work.
- Women migrants rely on informal network for their survival.

