



Looking at fisheries and aquaculture through a gender lens

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Thru a gender lens – why are women in aquaculture and fisheries becoming *technologically excluded, economically ostracized, and politically powerless?*

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Upfront

Why Look at Fisheries through a Gender Lens?

MERYL J. WILLIAMS

Fisheries have long been weak on a gender perspective, focusing mainly on the fish stocks and fish production conducted predominately by men. In terms of gender focus, aquaculture has fared only slightly better. Fortunately the tide of attention to women and more generally gender in fisheries and aquaculture is turning due partly to the

- Post 1945 history
 - Global fish sector trends
 - Changes in women's status in society
- Gender & political economy (PE) basics

The global fish value chain

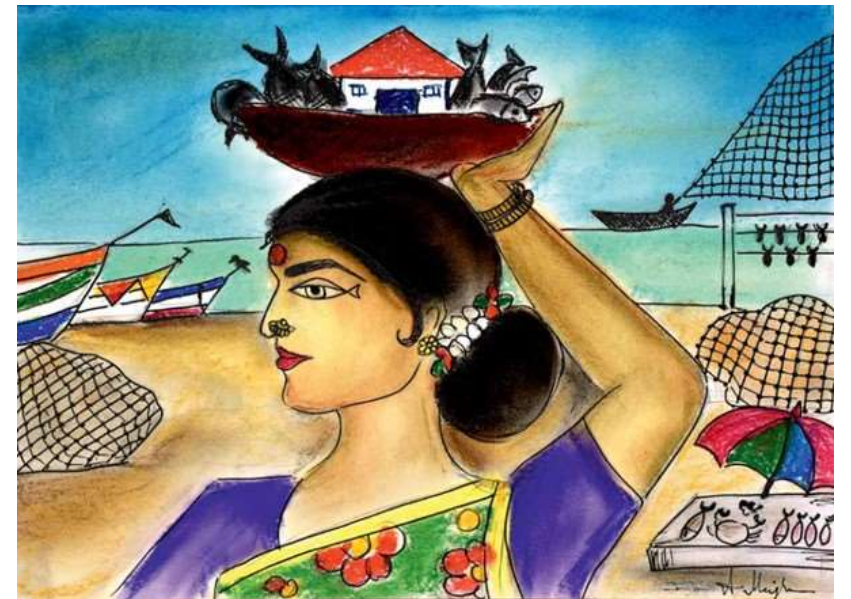
- *Growth, market orientation & governance transformations*
- 1945-1969 - **The Big Awakening**
- 1970-1982 - **Pushing the Limits**
- 1982-1992 - **The Great Transition**
- 1992-2005 - **Focus on Environment**
- 2006-2019 - **Commoditising fish**
- 2020 - > **COVID-19 and Beyond**



Different size boats anchored, Samut Prakan, Gulf of Thailand, 2007. The two small (walat) boats are overnight squid fishing boats while the bigger boats fish further afield, maybe South Thailand for over a week. The bigger (wadan) trawlers may even transfer their catch to a big feeder boat (Reefer) that can freeze the fish. Here, the boats are being watched during the day by one crew member on the middle boat (who comes from either South Thailand or Burma). Photo, description by Gerry Popplestone on Flickr.

Women's changing status in society

- Indicators
 - **Improved** female education and health
 - **Mixed** outcomes in the workforce
 - **Slow progress** in political power
- **Women's development needs** were slow to be recognized, but knowledge grew
- **1979 CEDAW** - a milestone for women's rights
- After 1995 Beijing Conference on Women came **resistance & counter political economy forces**
- **MDGs, SDGs and women's activism** helped momentum



Manjula Anand, 2022. In "Women in Fisheries – through the eyes of artists." Waves of Art Bay of Bengal Intergovernmental Organization & Arnawas Vasudev Charities

Improvements in the status of women in society did not directly translate into gains for women in the booming fish sectors

... to understand why, we need to go beyond our common narratives ...

Women are invisible

Women don't fish

Technology is for men

Division of labour reflects gender norms

Women have no decision-making power

Why have women in the fish sectors become more **technologically excluded**, **economically ostracized**, and **politically powerless**?

... a new narrative requiring a political economy analysis? ...



Fish factory women's lunchtime dash, 9 December 1977, Hull, UK. Photograph: Alec Gill

What is the political economy (PE)?

“a systematic theory of state-market relations” (adapted from Alford & Friedland, 1985:24)

PE entails

- theory of the economy and society
- diversity of interests
- conflicts between interested parties
- power and authority (political means) for resolving conflicts
- each party looks at the PE from its preferred perspective



Soltuna processing factory, Noro, Solomon Islands. Photo: Tri Marine Group, <https://trimarinegroup.com/processing-2/>

A framework of the economy and society + 3 political perspectives

- Market Economy
- Managerial
- Intersectional and Feminist

Understanding requires all perspectives

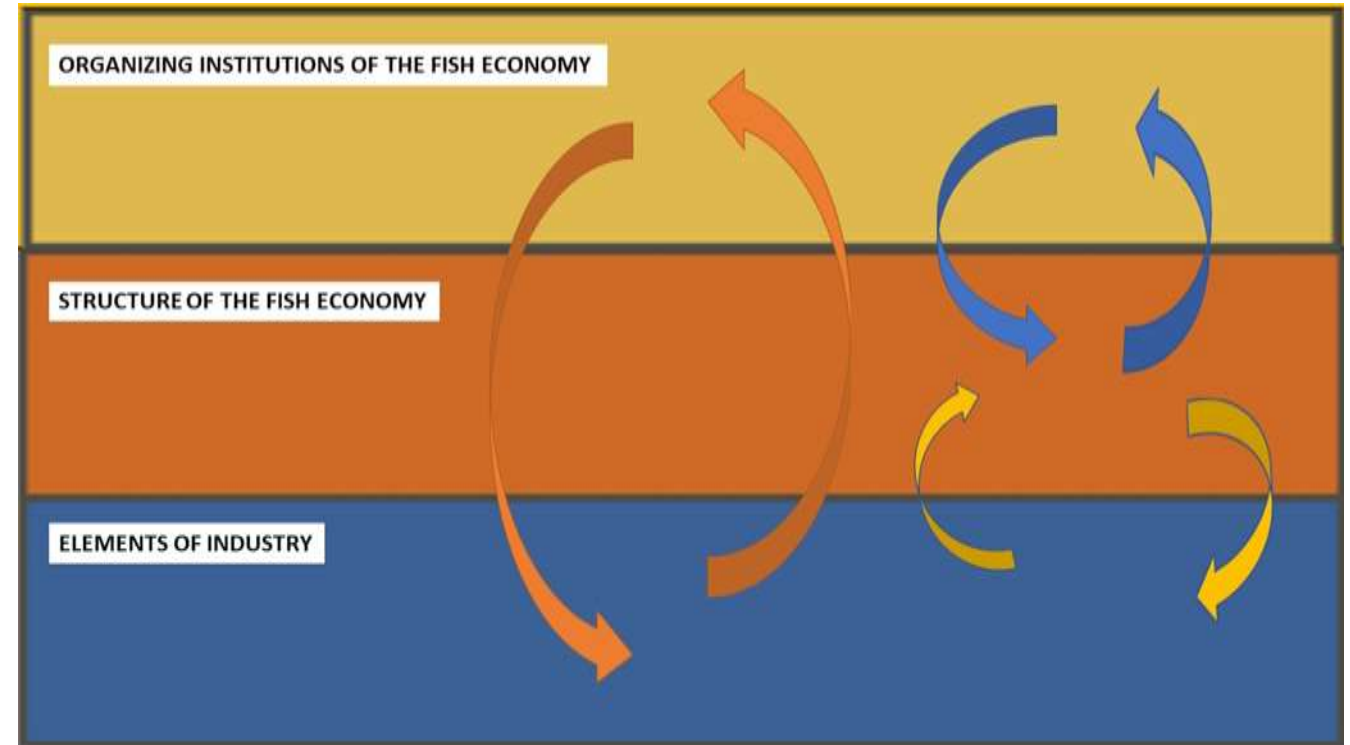


Water fountain "Blindenbrunnen" at the Garden for the Blind, Rheinaue, Bonn, Germany. Photo: Michael Sondermann/ Bundesstadt Bonn, sourced from <https://www.judithbogner.com/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant-truth-fake-news-and-why-journalism-matters/>

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A framework of the economy and society

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

ELEMENTS OF INDUSTRY

Productive forces:

- Means of production
 - instruments of production (technology, processes in the material and virtual economies)
 - raw materials; and
- Labour power

STRUCTURE OF THE ECONOMY

Production relations

The power over production

- Effective power over people and productive forces
- Rights to use
- Material rights (how something is made) & social rights (for what purpose)
- General ideology of the organization of the economy, e.g., market economy, socialist

ORGANIZING INSTITUTIONS

Superstructure

- The non-economic institutions through which the economy is organized (Polanyi, 1960:329-30)
- Molded by the organization of the economy; includes laws.

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EXAMPLES FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES – WOMEN'S LABOUR POWER

Market Economy

- Women's labour power as lower cost commodity
- Only reproductive labour is valued; reproductive labour is a private matter

Managerial

- Concerned with defining the inputs and outputs of the means of production

Intersectional and Feminist

- Values differences among people, groups
- Reproductive labour power integral to productive labour (Power 2004; Peterson 2004)
- Women labour is undervalued, and their access to the means of production is fragile

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Market Economy

- Women's inferior labour position is not a concern; may be economically efficient

Managerial

- Productive relations best centralized, strongly hierarchical and masculine in style
- Senior women expected to adapt to masculine business culture

Intersectional and Feminist

- Efficiency drive deepens social divisions, affects labour relations & women's work
- Education brings more women into professional positions, but few yet have power over production

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Market Economy

- Policies and laws on gender equality must be supported by a business case, but a business interest offers opportunities for women's advancement
- Reproductive labour may be of interest, e.g., child-care, if it clearly supports productive labour or is socialized

Managerial

- Focus on needs of the market economy, especially the industrial economic actors
- Superficial interest only in closing the fisheries gender gap (Mangubhai et al. 2022)
- Social needs are relegated to central government agencies

Intersectional and Feminist

- Asserts organizing institutions exacerbate social inequality by prioritising profits over gender equality, and other needs, e.g., food, environment
- All crises (covid, climate change, resource depletion, war, financial crises) amplify inequality

Conclusion

- Political economy must be analysed from several perspectives
 - Powerful parties favour capital accumulation, using Market Economy and Managerial perspectives
 - Current women's projects ignore unbalanced reproductive/informal labour loads and large power differences
 - How do we use PE insights to educate, campaign against, encourage or challenge dominant institutions to achieve transformation?
 - A work-in-progress we welcome your feedback
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Pregnant wife of fisher selling tuna, Gizo Markets, Solomon Islands. Photo: V. Syddall