

INTRODUCTION

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In 1988, Jane Nadel-Klein and Dona Lee Davis gave social scientists studying fishing societies an important collection of essays entitled *To Work and to Weep: Women in Fishing Economies*, served up a bounty of ethnographies about women in 11 coastal communities across the globe and situated those ethnographies within the context of existing research on gender in maritime societies. The articles that appear in this issue of *Anthropologica* have been enriched by the contributors of *To Work and to Weep*. We have endeavoured to build upon their insights into the social construction of gender in fishing economies and have continued to explore the nature of the social relations of production and reproduction of culture.

This special issue of *Anthropologica* had its origins in a double symposium entitled “Women in the Fishery,” organized by Marian Binkley for the 1996 meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology held in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. The presenters focussed on women in fishing economies in Nova Scotia, Labrador, New England, Iceland, Newfoundland, Australia and Tanzania. The symposium was well attended and a strong participant interest was expressed that we “do something” about getting these papers published—hence this special issue. An overarching theme reflected explicitly or implicitly in each of the contributions is the profound change that is occurring in fisheries worldwide and the impact of stock depletion locally and globally. Other themes apparent in these articles are: women as a single group in relation to men, women as members of diverse sub-groups, women responding like men, though not necessarily in the same ways as men, to ecological or policy stresses/crises, and the dialogue between women and men as they define themselves in relation to each other and changing fisheries.

Skaptadóttir’s article opens the collection with an important reminder from Nadel-Klein and Davis (1988) that when we study women, whether they are in fishing communities or in other cultural settings, it is critical that we consider what they have in common and what differentiates them from other women. In Icelandic fishing communities, women are coping with situations similar to those of women in other North Atlantic fisheries. Declines in fish stocks,

greater involvement of women in shore-based operations and the transformation of gender boundaries between women and men are placed in sharp focus. What stands out in the Skaptadóttir article is the strong desire by men to maintain the traditional division of labour in village Iceland while at the same time enjoying the many consumer goods that are now commonplace in the lives of Northern Europeans. As a result, there is an expectation that women will continue to re-create the home in its modern embodiment, while maintaining the illusion of the traditional division of labour and the romanticized life-ways of these once isolated fishing villagers.

Like Labradorian women (see the article by Szala-Meneok and McIntosh), Icelandic women produce crafts, thereby preserving traditional domestic skills while contributing to the household budget. The modern home requires many more appointments that range from technologically complex machinery and gadgetry to fashionable furnishings. The introduction of such items necessarily implies new expenditures of household capital and female labour in household maintenance. In addition, Icelandic women are expected to acquire and fine-tune the skills required to carefully manage household finances as the fortunes of the fishery ebb and flow. This re-invention of the home reflects similar role expectations which women in Nova Scotia (Binkley), Labrador (Szala-Meneok and McIntosh) and in a different way in Western Australia (Stella) experience. The role of mate (in both the shipboard and marital senses), quartermaster, accountant and psycho-social animateur surface as recurrent themes throughout Skaptadóttir's work and in articles by other authors in this collection. Skaptadóttir also focusses on the important role of women as small-business managers in the contemporary Icelandic fishery which is now linked to a global network of fishery operations. She points out that the village serves as a lively arena in which the face-to-face interaction of daily life is played out, regardless of the economic realities of world fishery economics. Skaptadóttir's research echoes the work of other authors in this collection concerning the responsibilities of women in fishing economies. Such economies require not only skills on the home front, as families and households interact with each other, but also the ability to communicate with other locales, even with the world at large.

In Stella's article on gender relationships in the Western Australian luxury seafoods industry we are given the opportunity to explore and transcend the kind of discriminatory attitude often manifested toward women who work aboard fishing vessels. In many parts of the world, a woman's presence aboard ship is associated with concerns about luck in the contingent world of fishing. In this article, we are introduced to the culture of Australian trawler fishing vessels where catch phrases such as "No wimps here" and "Go hard or go home" capture the prevailing ethos of *machismo*. Stella's female and male informants expose the harassment and double standard that most women meet

when they try to integrate themselves into the male-dominated world of boat crews. This paper provides a glimpse of the timbers that support the symbolic construction of shipboard community. The life of male crew members is characterized by excessive risk taking, harsh working conditions and competition. Many male crew members seem to bask in unnecessarily adverse circumstances. Their remuneration is manifest in the currency of “rugged” maleness that is routinely tested by adversities they willfully neglect to remedy. Female crew members probably experience even higher levels of harassment, personal risks and severe working conditions because of their gender. However, women’s presence aboard ship is as much a challenge to the carefully constructed world of fishing as it is a theatrical dividend when male crew act out the drama of “fisherman as he-man.” With women aboard, the exaggerated risks men help perpetuate can be further magnified. Still the more traditional division of labour, where women are cooks and outfitters of the crew, remains intact.

The two articles by Pratt and by Médard and Wilson also focus on women who are making their way into the previously male preserve of fishing on Lake Victoria in Tanzania. In addition, these two East African studies also represent the expansion of research to include not only seaboard fishing economies but also those in riverine and lake locales. Pratt reports on the impact of the introduction of a new fish species—Nile perch—to Lake Victoria. The decrease in biodiversity and the threat to other merchantable fish species are among the outcomes of the introduction of these perch. Pratt argues, however, that environmental perturbations such as these can be “useful disasters,” because they serve as dynamic forces that can institute change. Pratt’s article records how the women and men in this region have had to rely on a broad range of skills developed in both fishing and agricultural settings to devise ways of responding to the multiple perturbations that have arisen in ecological, social economic and social contexts. As is the case with the Australian women in Stella’s article, new economic and political realities in the broader society and changes in the fishery have created a precarious state for women who have only recently begun to take a more prominent role in both the fishing and selling of Nile perch.

Médard and Wilson’s examination of the impact of the introduction of Nile perch to Lake Victoria suggests that as the environment of the region undergoes rapid changes, new institutions emerge. These changes also influence the roles that gender plays. Médard and Wilson have observed how female entrepreneurs have attained access to venture capital and how women and men negotiate the use of household wealth and the allocation of women’s labour. The Lake Victoria fishery continues to expand in response to world demand for perch. In this process, traditional institutions are faced with new kinds of risks.

However, equally new strategies for addressing these risks are making their way into community life as well.

The Nova Scotian fishing households, discussed by Binkley, are living through a difficult transition period as they face the crises currently affecting the off-shore fishery. The challenges which fishermen's spouses face require them to develop new strategies both to overcome hardships and to cope with even greater levels of risk and psychological stress in their work and family lives. Strategies that were once effective for women and men are no longer viable. Binkley reports that in many instances women are adjusting to the crises more rapidly and creatively than men. This is a condition reported for Labrador by Szala-Meneok and McIntosh, and for Lake Victoria by Pratt and by Médard and Wilson.

Hall-Arber's article explores the roles of women associated with the commercial off-shore fisheries of New Bedford and Gloucester, Massachusetts. For the largely Portuguese fishing community of New Bedford and the largely Italian community of Gloucester women's work on shore in both fishing and community settings is essential. In both communities, women work in a variety of fishery-related jobs. These range from processing-plant positions to running family businesses or working as office staff for fishing companies. Women are also stakeholders in the fishery because of their familial ties to it. In both communities, women's most frequent forum for expressing their interests and those of their families is through wives' associations. Gloucester and New Bedford women, however, use their wives' associations in ways that reflect not only the distinct histories of these two fisheries, but the gender models ensconced within the ethos of Italian and Portuguese cultures. Hall-Arber explores how two communities gain and retain their "voice" amid serious changes influencing their respective fishing industries.

Szala-Meneok and McIntosh probe craft production as one of a constellation of adaptive strategies that women in coastal Labrador employ to mitigate the contingent nature of fishing, hunting and trapping. Their research reveals that an important factor in making craft production more lucrative, as the fishery declines, is to approach craft development schemes proactively and to accept that risk taking is part of entrepreneurship. Szala-Meneok and McIntosh show that risk taking has always been a successful strategy in coastal Labrador. Despite this tradition, the type of risk taking typical of successful entrepreneurs in more urban contexts continues to be viewed with scepticism even as the future of fishing remains bleak. Their article provides a view of a fishing society currently facing the prospective loss not only of its sustenance but also of its way of life. In Labrador, where fewer alternative species are available, the scenario which threatens so many other fishing economies is already becoming a reality.

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