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Introduction to fishy feminisms: feminist analysis of fishery places

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ABSTRACT

Both fisheries and feminism have been the subject of much research spanning academic disciplines and topics for many years. The papers in this themed issue are considered 'fishy' in the sense that they are both about fisheries and fish in diverse places, but also because they use a feminist lens, and feminism is often taken as something suspicious that can be doubted by virtue of the social bias associated with the term. Feminism has long offered an understanding of how patriarchal frameworks are embedded within larger structures of societies that maintain social inequities. In their various papers, the authors bring critical insight to understanding the significance of feminist research and its potential for understanding the connections between place and the future of our relationship with oceans and marine ecosystems. This themed issue contributes to a hopefully growing interest in feminist insights to fisheries and ocean/maritime spaces, and addresses more broadly, the argument that (feminist) geography has remained 'land-locked'.

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Fishy feminism: Feminisms in fisheries research

Both fisheries and feminism have been the subject of much research spanning academic disciplines and topics for many years. This has led to a wide variety of theories, methods, and frameworks on fisheries and feminism. Or, more simply, fisheries and feminisms are multiple and diverse, and are shaped by cultures and societies in specific places and spaces, changing over time.

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At their most basic, fisheries involve human-fish interactions, and feminisms involve highlighting and challenging inequities.

In the 1970s, the research on fisheries and feminism combined as feminist researchers began to explore the significance of women and their specific gendered experience in the context of fisheries, which was more often than not, undervalued or invisible. This work illuminated the gender division of labor in many fisheries contexts around the world – with a part of this work focused on the North Atlantic region (see Knott et al. this issue for an overview). Since the 1970s, research on gender in fisheries have expanded thematically, however, gender and feminist informed research has arguably remained on the fringes of fisheries science as well as the marine social sciences more broadly (Frangoudes and Gerrard 2018). The little research that has focused on gender and feminist issues in fisheries contexts has often engaged with feminist political economy or ecology to highlight women's marginal political and economic power in fisheries communities in relation to men. Alternatively, such work focused on how societal gender norms of masculinity and femininity, have shaped fisheries work, and workers, including the work of feminist geographers (Marshall 2001; Probyn 2014; Waitt and Hartig 2005; Walsh and Gerrard 2018).

This themed issue contributes to a hopefully growing interest in feminist insights to fisheries, ocean and maritime spaces, and addresses more broadly the argument that geography has remained limited to terrestrial spaces (Steinberg and Peters 2015). We draw attention to the ways in which a variety of feminist frameworks, theories, and methodologies, could offer insights and queries to fisheries and ocean research at a time when the ocean is currently being looked to as a solution for climate change via economic development of blue (green) ocean spaces. Feminism has long offered an understanding of how patriarchal frameworks are embedded within larger structures of societies that maintain inequities shaped by both notions of masculinity and whiteness as indicators of human. Understanding how this permeates governance, ecologies, education, technology, finance, industry, among others, in specific places and times, is an important insight for understanding current and future ocean space development within blue economy initiatives, such as offshore aquaculture, marine spatial planning initiatives, and deep-sea mining.

Fishy feminisms

Fishy has a double meaning in common parlance. It refers to both that which is about fish, and that which is suspicious or doubtful. The papers in this themed issue play with this dual meaning and are considered 'fishy' in the sense that they are both about fisheries and fish in diverse places, but also because they use a feminist lens, and feminism is often taken as

something suspicious that can be doubted by virtue of the social bias associated with the term. In their various papers, the authors bring critical insight to understanding the significance of feminist research and its potential for understanding the connections between place and the future of our relationship with oceans and marine ecosystems. These works offer important contributions to mainstream fisheries research engaging with equity principles, with timely significance for national blue economy strategies under development globally that seek to address inequities and injustices in ocean spaces (High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy). Thus, the papers in this issue further our understanding of fisheries and aquaculture workers and communities, in new or renewed ways. They do this by highlighting how specific places have their own ecological and cultural nuances and values that inform and are informed by, but also embodied, via a variety of social inequities, including masculinities, femininities, and disabilities, that manifest in particular (and sometimes risky) ways, with social and ecological consequences.

Feminist analysis of gendered fish workers lives

One of the key insights that emerges from the papers in this themed issue is how nuanced and often fluid the gendered notions of the binaries of masculinity and femininity are for those who work in fisheries, whether it is on or in relation to fishing boats (Alonso; Gustavsson), diving for fish in the water (Pauwelussen), or within processing plants (Pedroza and Hapke), or in the communities themselves (Kopelent-Rehak). This nuanced gendered identity, whether masculine or feminine, can be embodied in ways that relate to increased risk (Pauwelussen; Alonso) but also is often framed and normalized within western/colonial ontological understandings and knowledges that ignore that other ways of knowing exist (Knott et al.; Pauwelussen).

Thus, fluidity in gender performances is a theme highlighted by several authors. Paulwelussen in her gender, disability, more-than-human, and intersectional analysis of the practice of cyanide fishing in Indonesia, engages with masculinities. She takes up the idea of feminist theory duality that posits femininity against rigid and solidified masculine modality – to show how masculinity is more than hegemonic masculinity. Thus, masculinity is - similar to that of femininity - also fluid and leaky. Another example is Alonso who, by starting from the assumption that fishing is more than that which takes place at sea, looks at labor relations on Vietnamese offshore fishing boats. She explores the relations among labor, masculinity and ecological change that engage with notions of how masculinities are varied, spatial and connected to risky work. In focusing on masculinities both Paulwelussen and Alonso are able to tease out the nuanced relationships that exist for men working on the sea, and how more commonly discussed

notions of hegemonic masculinity that are associated with risk taking, gambling, drinking, and so forth, exist within a plurality of emotions and experiences that fall within the domain of masculine. They further highlight the place specificities, and fluidity between spaces, in masculine performances.

In studying Smith Island in Maryland US, Kopelent-Rehak also contributes to our understanding of gender fluidity as a coping mechanism to deal with environmental, economic, and demographic changes to their fishing livelihoods and community, and discusses how women navigate their ways around traditional gender norms with agency and humor. Kopelent-Rehak particularly highlights how the gendered spatial division of labor with men fishing at sea and women staying ashore is associated with forms of cohesion across binary gender categories. Kopelent-Rehak's analysis sheds light on women's multiple gender performances as many women in the town balance both feminized and masculinized labor tasks as they move across spatial and relational contexts in the everyday lives of themselves and their families. They do so despite the narrow confines of gender roles enshrined in the community historically.

In further highlighting gender fluidity in fishery places, Gustavsson, in her study of women's practices of belonging in UK fisheries, identifies women's agency in (re)making and (re)producing fishing places. She highlights that even if much of women's work is conforming to existing gender relations, some women - in particular women who fish - do not have an organic sense of belonging to place as they break with traditional gender norms, relations, and identities in entering traditional masculine spaces. These fisher women engage in a 'politics of belonging' to gain recognition and respect - and to feel they belong - within their community and within the group of fishers. As such, while women's positions vary, they all practice a form of belonging to fishing communities and places. Yet the ways in which they are included or excluded in particular socio-spatial fisheries contexts (e.g. the home, community, fishing boats, harbors, fishing businesses) and how they confirm or challenge gender norms vary across positions. The wider implications of Gustavsson's findings are that gender and fishing places are both fluid and 'fixed' as gender is negotiated and renegotiated over time.

Another area that this body of work brought to the fore was Pedroza and Hapke who explore the gendered aspects of economic value, pushing gendered norms beyond normal gendered narratives of labor to explore how women produce value through their paid and unpaid work within the small-scale fisheries value chain. Drawing on two case studies - one in Mexico and one in India - they combine the Knowledge-Based-View (KBV) and Feminist Commodity Chain Analysis (FCCA) to focus on how situated knowledge and activities performed by women produce value that is not counted and often invisible due to long standing gendered inequities that

undervalue women in comparison to men. They move beyond the theoretical discussion of how and why women are undervalued in society and engage with feminist work to provide novel ways to account for economic contributions beyond the limitations of finance and exchange that have long been organized within masculine and patriarchal structures and spaces. The contribution of this article is how it challenges the normative (i.e. patriarchal) economic/knowledge making frameworks that create and recreate gender binaries that place higher economic value on men's work versus women's. In taking up a feminist value chain analysis, the authors are able to not only challenge, but create new ways to account for and thus acknowledge the value of the work women do within, this gender binary framework.

In keeping with much feminist geography and other feminist scholarship/frameworks these papers provide place-based nuanced analysis to their understandings of fisheries, such as how fishy places are shaped by the cultures, people, and industries, which are always in flux and, often with fishing, are also by their very nature mobile (i.e. boats in the water). For example, Alonso moves beyond gender in exploring how class relations intersect with gender in maintaining and reproducing labor relations as well as a localized hierarchy of masculinity in the Vietnamese offshore fishery. In addition, Knott et al. explore an ecofeminist more-than-human theoretical approach as a potential analytical framework for fisheries and aquaculture that includes attention to how fish could be conceptualized, and thus governed and managed (or not), in ways that go beyond fish as commodity. This is important because of the ways that fish as commodity is tied into larger social and ecological inequities within specific places. This includes settler colonial practices and capitalism, that have negative implications not just for fish health, but also humans, recreating unjust inequities along class, gender, race, religion, etc. This article argues that a feminist framework accounts for inequities within fisheries, workers, and fish, but also, research, with attention to who is cited, and who is not.

Ecological embeddedness

Another interesting insight that emerged in many of the papers is the ecological connections with human bodies that are gendered, classed, and otherwise categorized unequally, which plays out in diverse, place specific ways, and often engages with the more-than-human literatures. The papers engage with embodied ecologies using feminist analysis to dig deeper into overlapping and interconnected inequities, across species, and in situated ways. The papers highlight how significant our human interactions are with watery and fishy places. Knott et al., focusing on North Atlantic feminist fisheries research, interrogate human-fish relations in fisheries and aquaculture research, highlighting how key relationships within fishing communities,

and commodity chains, shape relationships among humans, fisheries and fish that are rendered invisible in mainstream and some gender and fisheries work. Gustavsson's analysis of women's narratives and practices of belonging in the UK fishery highlights the processes of becoming 'with fish', fishing and the fishery – even when there are no clear identities and identifications available for the women involved. She uses the concept of smell-scape to delve into one aspect of women's sense of connection and belonging to a place in fishery places. Sensory connection to fishery places, specifically 'the taste of things', also feature predominately in Kopelent-Rehak's paper on the performant and fluid aspects of gendered embodiment within coastal community inhabitants on Smith Island, USA, in response to social-ecological changes over time. Kopelent-Rehak understands, 'ecological systems are based on holistic principles and that human lives are part of those systems (and not outside of them)... as embodied within the larger ecological system'. Pauwelussen highlights the connection between environmental degradation of corals, the resulting loss of fish species who live in them, and the damaged bodies of male divers who fish them. She states, 'in this interlinking between environmental and human health, cyanide fishing not only poisons reefs but also affects and injures diving bodies as they move through differently pressured environments' (3).

Concluding remarks

The papers in this themed issue contribute to a growing, increasingly vibrant and diverse body of mainly qualitative, feminist, place-based fisheries research globally. Collectively, they seek to spark future fisheries research that engages with 'fishy' feminist frameworks that aim to disrupt and overturn normalized inequities in fishing places and cultures. The current fishy feminist scholarship, similar to early feminist researchers, engages with the feminist theories of the day to improve inequities in fishing communities in varying geographical contexts. Current ocean economies and blue growth initiatives are ramping up world-wide as governance responses to the current climate crisis and to ensure national prosperity. As shown in the papers of this themed issue contextual, place-based ecological attuned studies could potentially benefit from (fishy) feminist analysis. Thus, while much is covered in these papers there is room for so much more. Future compilations of (fishy) feminist analysis could aim to incorporate more perspectives, approaches and themes such as indigenous and black feminist theory, gender beyond masculine and feminine binaries, sexuality, citizenship, or to use feminist methods as well as theory to take up more equitable fisheries research. There are many more perspectives that would add much to providing a fuller picture of the diverse array of challenges around inequities, ocean space and fisheries. Feminist geography is particularly well positioned as it attends to

geographical aspects such as those across land and sea, the contextualized social and ecological inequities, and material relations in place.

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