

FISHERWOMEN AND GENDER ISSUES, A DECADE LONG ANALYSIS OF SCIENTIFIC WORKS FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE SEA¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a literature review focused on fisherwomen and gender relations existing in subsistence and artisanal fishing practiced in the Classical Amazon⁵, Brazil and Portugal. We analyzed papers published during the last decade on scientific platforms such as Capes and Scielo, in Brazil, and b-on and Recap, in Portugal. In addition, we conducted specific searches in scientific journals from the Federal Universities of the northern states of Brazil and from Portuguese Universities. We deduced that the Brazilian academy has paid more attention to the problems faced by women in fishery than the Portuguese academy, which seems to have not yet realized the depth of the issue, despite the fisherwomen movement of the European Union.

KEYWORDS

woman; fishing; gender; Brazil; Portugal.

Introduction

During the development of the field work for our doctoral research, carried out in fishery areas of the Brazilian Tocantin and Atlantic Amazon and Portugal, we noticed the preponderance of the male gender. However, we identified the presence of women in all the stages of the production chain of the subsistence and artisanal fishing, and that, within this culture, there are uneven power relations, which ultimately reflect in the greater visibility of fishermen.

The asymmetry observed did not fail to surprise us, and we understood that we could investigate further by immersing in the gender issues that existed in fishery, since the oppression suffered by fishermen in their relationship with the dominant is replicated by them, in their relationship with fisherwomen.

Aiming to understand and reflect on the matter without departing from the research objective of the main study we chose to get an overview of the papers produced about this subject. For this, we chose the last decade (2005-2015) and performed a detailed analysis in free access online platforms and scientific journals.

Why choose to dive in research papers? The format of research papers is characterized by being a synthetic and accessible way of relaying information on scientific research both

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⁵ In the understanding of the Society for Preservation of the Natural and Cultural Resources of the Amazon - SOPREN, Classical Amazon corresponds to the north of Brazil and comprises the states of Acre, Amazonas, Amapá, Pará, Rondonia and Roraima, so it is not related to the questionable concept of Legal Amazon.

in progress or already concluded. Its synthetic format also allows a streamlined analysis of one aspect of the research or of a specific problem.

Since childhood we gash rivers, boreholes and streams in the Tocantin Amazon. In this wild environment we could always see fisherwomen in nearby waters, while men were always involved with fishing in distant waters. In both cases they developed means to provide for their families.

The idea to address this issue and highlight the importance of female work in fishery arose with the perception, acquired during the field work and while dealing with academic literature, of the fact that women have a relevant role in fishery, yet when addressed in research they appear as adjuncts. If we look at this reality through Foucault's lens, we can clearly see there is an asymmetry in power relations between genders in the subsistence and artisanal fishing practiced in diverse regions of Brazil, Portugal and other EU countries. We cannot forget that this disharmony is present in the reality of halieutic communities from all continents.

The survey we present is an abbreviated version of the original. We sought to extract the essence from all the publications that we accessed and hope that this study helps to draw attention to the situations faced by fisherwomen every day and to stress the little attention that academics pay them.

The Fisherwoman from Classical Amazon, Brazil.

In the state of Amapá, the study about the participation of women in social organizations, among them, fishery, seeks to "analyze the particular situation of women participating or not in social organizations and movements located in communities of the Bailique Archipelago, state of Amapá, Brazil" (Almeida *et. al.*, 2013).

The authors do not specifically focus on fishery, but on productive livelihood activities practiced by the women of that part of the Amazon. They point out that the main activities carried out in these communities are traditional fishing and shrimp capturing, which stand out in the local context. In this scenario we concluded that all women participate in some social organization, but they still consider it is a small participation.

According to Almeida (*et. al.*, 2013), a greater participation of women in social movements would be possible if they did not reproduce what was taught to them as a "women attributes", namely that it is up to women to "get married and take care of the home". However, the authors emphasize that, although women have already conquered spaces in the contemporary world, rural societies still show traces of male dominant behavior towards women, such as *machismo* and sexism.

Nevertheless, the authors conclude that the fieldwork revealed evidence of changes in women's daily lives, since female participation in social organizations, although it still is small, is a strong indication of change.

In the study conducted with fishermen and fisherwomen surrounding the Hydroelectric Plant of Coaracy Nunes, in the state of Amapá, Oliveira *et. al.* (2013) concluded that women, despite their significant participation in local fishing, were invisibilized in the collection of field data, as a result of the characteristics of the local community, "of patriarchal type, where the head of the household and the one responsible for the support of the family and for answering the surveys is the man" (Oliveira *et. al.*, 2013, p. 91).

Oliveira's (*et. al.*, 2013) study leads us to conclude that the local cultural pattern diminishes women, reinforces, reproduces and naturalizes, in the present time, oppressing postures that silence and do not recognize the importance of fisherwomen's labor, although they also provide food and income for the family.

From the Amazonian state, we highlight the work of Alencar (2013), which addresses gender issues in fishery management projects that run on the sustainable development reserve of Mamirauá, where fishery is an important mean of family support and supply for the local market.

Alencar (2013) regrets that his project does not include information on neither gender relations, nor women's role in the activity, nor the amount of fish captured by men and women. There is also no quantification of production for family consumption, which is usually performed by women.

The author concludes that the factors mentioned, together with the sexual division of the roles within the local community, which assigns the care of the house and the children to women, end up alienating them and contributing to their invisibility in the society, institutions and even within the fishers' category.

The author understands that the fact that there is no statistical data on fish production by women contributes to the lack of formulation of public policies focused on them and, with that, their invisibility as fisherwomen is strengthened. On the other hand, she highlights with some hope that "as the work of women in fishery management is known, it can contribute to their recognition as fisherwomen and their rights as complete citizens" (Alencar, 2013, p. 6).

The author concludes that even with the non-identification of gender representations on the participation of men and women in the fish management project in Mamirauá, women can point out ways and give visibility to their needs by organizing themselves politically, participating in Colonies, Associations or Unions of fishermen, since "visibility is a condition for women, especially from rural areas, to have greater participation in the economic, social and political lives of their communities, and it is also a way to enhance their role as a historical subject, thus reconciling the interests of human populations and the conservation of biodiversity" (Alencar, 2013, p. 14).

The work of Miranda and Barroso (2013), conducted in the states of Amazonas and Tocantins, focuses on women from rural areas, where fishery, agriculture and extraction make the livelihood of families.

Through a comparative study of public policies for women in the two states, named Policy Organizations for Women - OPMs, the authors sought to understand whether they have incorporated the perspective of gender, and how women's organized action had contributed to regional development.

The authors assure that OPMs, both in the Amazon and in Tocantins, go against the women's movement, given its lack of representativeness before the social movements and of structure to function; in addition, there is the fact that the effects of gender inequality impact women differently, depending on their identity and ethical position, sexual orientation and social class.

Miranda and Barroso (2013) understand that for the OPMs to become effective they must take differences into account. To this end, it is necessary for States to assess and find ways to interconnect gender issues to development, in order to be able meet the peculiarities of the women from the forest.

The study conducted by Machado with women from the mangroves areas of Guarajubal village, municipality of Marapanim, in Para state enabled the "analysis of environmental is-

sues and gender relations from an anthropological approach to a portion of the traditional Amazonian population” (2007, p. 485).

Based on Shiva (1993), the author considers that the gender, work and education issues are arising from the complexity of the problems of societies at global and local levels, which cross environmental issues such as pollution, degradation and poverty.

Machado (2007) states that women’s labor is considered of minor importance and made invisible by their societies. And if a woman is a *cabocla*⁶ this is intensified and it reaches the extreme when the woman is both a *cabocla* and a fisherwoman, because besides the depreciation at the local level, there is also the belittlement of women by the government.

The author realizes that, in countries whose economy depends on biological resources, women’s traditional knowledge of the local natural environment is essential for the preservation of species.

The author concludes that, both in the Amazon and in other areas, the recognition and participation of women is shown as an open field that requires research and specific public policies, since “the issue involving gender and environment is revealed as the most important [...]” in contemporaneity (Machado, 2007, p. 490).

Leitão’s (2013) work, accomplished in the context of the research project “Actions to Consolidate Gender Mainstreaming in Public Policies for Fishery and Aquaculture”, that the author coordinated from 2010 to 2011 in the Ministry of Fishery and Aquaculture was developed in five Brazilian states: Pará, Santa Catarina, Pernambuco, Ceara and Paraíba. It aimed to give visibility to the speech produced by artisanal fisherwomen in their daily work, their struggles and transformational operations in the economic, cultural, social and political spheres. In the state of Pará, the collection of data was carried out with fisherwomen from the village of Baía do Sol in Mosqueiro and the municipality of Curuçá.

According to Leitão (2013), women and men manage their time differently, although both guide themselves by the cycle of water. In the case of women, the adaptation to the “water system”⁷, mentioned by Sarraf-Pacheco (2009), may lead to an advance in the execution of a chore, because when the tide is favorable for fishing in the morning shift, they perform and finish their “domestic duties” on the previous night.

The author understands that, despite the fact that a fisherwoman carries out diverse works every day, she is still perceived as an adjunct and thus professionally invisible when it comes to fishery. And this invisibility helps to increase their marginalization and decrease their participation in social movements of the category, providing, on the other hand, opportunities for men to be a majority

Regarding the fundamental difficulties faced in their everyday, the author highlights some similarities that run through the accounts of fisherwomen of the five states surveyed:

(...) the discrimination or invisibility of women in the production chain of fishing, their lack of knowledge about the access to social artisanal fishery rights, the difficulty to reach positions of power within the Colonial and fishermen/women Associations; the risks and diffi-

⁶ Cabocla is a term used to identify women from the inside of the Amazon rainforest. According to Rodrigues this is “[...] a category assigned by others and not self-assigned, an accusatory category and not one of recognition of rights and privileges [...]” (2006, p. 121).

⁷ The water system consists of an imposition of nature through the tidal cycle that influences the way of life of Amazonian men and women. For further information see Sarraf-Pacheco, A. (2009). *En el Corazón de la Amazonía: identidades, saberes e religiosidades no regime das águas marajoaras*. Thesis (PhD). Post-Graduate Program in History, PUC-SP.

culties of access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); the presence of middlemen and the need for fair trade (Leitão, 2013, p. 103).

Besides the difficulties of being a fisherwoman in today's society, the author informs that these women are also economically disadvantaged, since the income from the fish is routinely small and the situation worsens during the winter, because of the lack of fish and buyers.

518 | To conclude, Leitão (2013) states that the report of the fisherwomen indicates that domestic and care activities are understood by men as exclusively female. Working in fishing does not spare them the care of the children or the house; on the contrary, it adds working hours and it is their "natural role" to deal with the demand.

The Fisherwoman from Portugal.

Amorim's (2005) work, carried out in several documentary sources during the turn of the nineteenth-century aimed to "assess and discuss women's space in the organization of work of fishing communities in Portugal in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th" (2005, p. 658). Gender issues are not the focus of the author: this survey focuses on the description of women's work in the fishery sector, which virtually involves every step of the fishing chores, from the preparation of the fishing gear to fishing itself (in different ways), from the processing to the marketing of fish. But, before what the research shows, it is possible to have an overview of the role of women in the *métier* and understand the relationship between female fishery and gender issues in Portugal during that time.

Amorim (2005) understands that the visibility of fisherwomen's work has been overshadowed for a long time in scientific literature, which has understood the sea as an exclusively male territory. The author concludes that the transformations occurred in the fishery sector, which changed the production methods, from family based to commercial fishing (in a major scale), turned the masculine figure in the dominant element and, with some variations, it turned the woman into a participant.

From the studies of Poinard (1912) and Descamps (1935), which approach aspects of the work developed in fishing and the canning industry by families from Setubal and Lagos, Amorim (2005, p. 661) understands that "[...] the passage to sectors upstream or downstream of fishing, when it comes to industrialization, created hierarchies of value, praising or degrading female roles". Those antipode positions can be identified in the production chain of codfish and sardines.

Regarding the alienation of fisherwomen from the work market, Amorim (2005) highlights the distant-water fishing of codfish in Terra Nova and Greenland, during the dictatorship (named *Estado Novo*). This type of fishing was completely territorialized by men. Women, in this case, were confined to domestic chores and given brochures with advice about subjects related to child nutrition and child care (these women, when their husbands were fishing codfish, were identified by others as "the women of the codfish fishermen").

When it comes to the convenience of women's labor in the fishery sector, Amorim (2005) highlights the productive chain of coastal sardine. This activity represented an important income for Portugal during the fisheries crisis of the time, which was worsened by the low wages. To elucidate this context, the author analyses the speech given by Salazar (1932)

to women working in the canning industry, in which the dictator encouraged them to work at the “fishing and canning centers”, instead of doing domestic work.

The author expresses that verifying the weight of female participation in Portuguese fishery of that time is an “inglorious task”, because none of the documents produced by the State or by fishing entities did a clear registry of those data. Nonetheless, the author states that those documental sources both make invisible the weight of female work in fishery and reveal that women acted in the diverse modalities of fresh, salty and salt water fishery from the north to the south of the country, and, therefore, “women symbolized the reserve necessary to continue both in the sea and the land [...]” (Amorim, 2005, p. 674).

Finally, the author considers that the data of this survey do not subside quantitative conclusions about female participation in Portuguese fishery at the end of the 19th century, because “the information is misled by the weight of the information produced by the government authorities and by the absence of information produced by fishery communities” (Amorim, 2005, p. 664). But, in the diverse fishery centers of Portugal, “[...] the woman not only represents a clearly observed labor force in the sector, above all she is a determining agent in the family survival [...]” (Amorim, 2005, p. 671).

In order to research this issue in the present time, in Portugal, given the lack of scientific studies and qualitative surveys about this subject, we appealed to field research, aiming to get to know effective actions turned to the valorization and recognition of women’s work in fishery and aquaculture. In this sense, we can verify and highlight the work of AKTEA – European Network of Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture and of the ICSF – International Collective in Support of Fishworkers, which join forces and act together with the groups of fisherwomen from countries within the European Union, aiming to “reinforce the voice of women of fishery communities in Europe” (Quist, Frangoude & O’Riordan, 2010, p. 1).

The report of the actions of this partnership, carried out in 2010, by Quist, Frangoude and O’Riordan (2010) with the title *Reformulation of the Network: The Definition of a Gender Agenda to Sustain Life and Means for Livelihood in Fishery and Aquaculture*, shows an overview of the activities developed with the fisherwomen of Europe, and, particularly, with the groups of fisherwomen of Portugal.

According to Quist, Frangoude and O’Riordan (2010), the ICSF – AKTEA made a survey and taught workshops related to the sexual division of work in fishery, the decision-making of women in fishery, its economic impact, aquaculture and climate changes, with the objective to prepare fisherwomen for the workshop that aimed to discuss and elaborate a gender international agenda to influence the Fishery Global Program managed by the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and to strengthen the networks of fisherwomen.

Regarding the data collected in Portugal and the Azores, the authors link the existence of sexist postures before women’s labor and understand that these positions need to be overcome. In the Azores, the most shocking issues are related to the activity of fish processing where difficulties are the seasonality of the job, which ends up affecting women’s salary; and to the prejudice of the population regarding women who, after a working day, walk down the streets exuding fishy smell and are considered nasty, because they share their work space with men.

Concerning labor in fishery companies, the problems are even greater: even acting in all stages of the production chain, their work is seen as a help to their spouse or an extension of their domestic activities and, for that reason, it is not paid. The authors realized that there are still cases of some fishery companies that restrict the boarding of women, because it is considered that they bring bad luck to the crew. In this case, we see the application of the

Amazonian myth of panama approached by Torres (2007) and Soares and Scherer (2013) in the reaffirmation of fishery as an exclusively masculine territory.

Regarding the sexual division of work, Quist, Frangoude and O’Riordan (2010) assure that some asymmetries still persist. Men predominate in the labor carried out in the sea, while women are more present in assistance activities than in fishing itself. Even in the milling fishing industry, where women predominate, the top positions are occupied by men. In some situations, women have to do special efforts to prove that they are as capable as men to progress in their careers, but they are in clear disadvantage because they have to alternate their professional and domestic activities.

Quist, Frangoude and O’Riordan (2010) conclude that with the creation of AKTEA and the local networks of women in fishery, such as the Portuguese network *Estrela do Mar*, women of all Europe have been able to exchange experiences, organize themselves and become more visible, as a regional and a national social group, and, thus, to participate more actively in the decision-making that affects the fishery sector and the labor of fisherwomen. They also highlight that there has been an evolution regarding women’s independence, especially in the new generations. The image of the fishermen wives is changing and nowadays it is more common for them to get support for their domestic chores, more autonomy in social life and professional qualification as fisherwomen.

Final Considerations

Considering the criteria that we chose to promote this revision of literature, the evaluation of the texts made it possible for us to work with the production of 3 (three) of the 6 (six) states that form the Classical Amazon (in Brazil). We noted that most of the production of scientific research was from Pará state, followed by Amazon and Amapá (we did not identify any works on this subject in the other states). In Portugal, we found 1 (one) paper that fulfilled the criteria of this research and 1 (one) activity report related to this subject. In this abbreviated version we chose to only approach two works of each locus of study.

What do the quantitative data reveal us? Firstly, the academy of the north of Brazil has paid more attention to the role played by women in fishery, when compared to the Portuguese academy. In Portugal, despite the growing mobilization about the issue of the movement of women in local fishery and its articulations with movements of fisherwomen in the European Union, the local academy seems to have not yet understood the importance and study required by this subject.

The cycle of discussions *Quintas da Ria*, promoted by the University of Aveiro and the City Hall of Murtosa, where the subject on *Women in the Economic Activities of the Ria*, was attended by Anabela Valente, member of the Portuguese Network of Women in Fishery, who talked about the work that is being promoted by her group in Portugal by telling the difficulties and delights of being a fisherwoman.

The reaction of the audience revealed the thoughts of the community on fisherwomen’s labor. Positive opinions praised their initiative and courage for persisting in a male territory. On the contrary, more critical opinions revealed that there is still a part of the male community that does not accept the presence of women in fishery. This difficulty to accept and give recognition to their work leads to believe that the educational system needs to strengthen

the treatment that has been given to gender issues at all levels of education, given that the current positioning silence and obscure fisherwomen and is not compatible with reality.

During the development of this research it was possible for us to understand that the invisibility, the silenced presence and the status of “help-labor”, in spite of the efforts carried out in Brazil and Portugal, still are “qualities” that characterize fisherwomen. It is important to highlight that the practical results of gender inequality reach women differently and it is subjected to their identity and ethnic, sexual orientation and social class, as pointed out by Miranda and Barroso (2013).

Thus, it is desirable for the academy of northern Brazil to continue questioning and showing off the situation; as long as fisherwomen are alienated from their rights and their voices are silenced. Regarding the situation in Portugal, it is mandatory for the academy to take over this issue, because identifying, reflecting, spreading and encouraging the creation of public policies to reduce gender inequality in fishery are still ways of playing an important role in society and working for better days for fisherwomen.

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