

Time to connect GAF research to the  
political economy of the fish value  
chain revolution that is shaping  
women's inequality

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The title is the summary of my position. Going to walk you through my journey of thinking behind this conclusion, based on

# Where should we focus our GAF research?

## Drawing from experiences of 9 WIF/GAF and 4 IIFET conferences

- Looking at fisheries through a gender lens and seeing the fisheries problems
  - the gender lens – with deliberate focus on gender and age differentiation of roles, responsibilities, access and opportunities (Williams 2008 *Why look at fisheries through a gender lens?*)
  - Place/fishery based, broad and descriptive; diagnosis of gaps in current fisheries priorities
  - May not address why the existing priorities emerged
  - And the mainstream of fisheries does not respond or pick up a gender lens
- Looking at GAF through a gender lens and seeing the gender inequality
  - Mainly interests gender actors who see patriarchal social norms and focus primarily on a Gender Transformative Approach (militant particularism?)
- Looking at gender through a fisheries (political economy) lens and seeing the world that is
  - *Political economy is the study of production and trade and their relations with law, custom and government; and with the distribution of national income and wealth (Wikipedia).. an approach that stresses the importance of historical processes, structural forces and institutions in shaping economic outcomes (Henderson 2015), i.e., where the state meets the market, how economics and the state interact in structuring each other*
  - Offers an approach to contextualising GAF and the constraints and opportunities to achieving equality and change by helping identify where specific change needs to be negotiated – as a continuous process

Long history going back to 17<sup>th</sup> century France but made much more prominent on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century UK and Europe through Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus and Karl Marx, among others.

## Looking at gender thru a fisheries political economy lens

- Biswas 2011 *Turning the Tide: Women's Lives in Fisheries and the Assault of Capital*.

“Over the years, research on women in the fisheries moved from a framework of political economy to a framework of political ecology. This meant that analyses shifted away from labour, production relations and surplus value extraction typically grounded in Marxian modes of analysis, in favour of those focused on environmental sustainability, livelihood sustainability and a discourse on poverty.”

- Campling & Havice 2012 *The Political Economy and Ecology of Capture Fisheries: Market Dynamics, Resource Access and Relations of Exploitation and Resistance*

- Recognized the gender dimension but did not especially address it.

Urging us to look at “political economy” is not new.

## What is political economy?

- ...where the state meets the market, how economics and the state interact in structuring each other..
  - government role vs class and power relationships in resource allocation
  - economic models of political or exploitative class processes – in different economies (e.g., market, command, traditional)
  - international political economy – especially trade, labour, security (including biosecurity), conservation, climate, IPR (including of genetic resources) rights...globalisation
- Industry/industrial policy is a key element of political economy
  - And pertinent to aquaculture and fisheries; and highly relevant to GAF

## Why is industrial policy relevant to fisheries?

- Fisheries/aquaculture largely operate through capitalist production (Campling et al 2012) - market economy
- Fisheries conceived in recent decades as “developing” - state industrial policy plays a role in this “development”
  - E.g., incentives for exports for forex
  - Trade, labour, tax, investment and ownership policies
  - Education, infrastructure, regulatory support
- “markets fail when government interfere too much or engage too little..” (Page and Tarp 2017)
- Stiglitz (2017) – if no industrial policy, self interest prevails; industrial policy needs social objective too, e.g., income equality
  - Despite this, political economy and industrial policy are mainly concerned with **production**

# Why is Political Economy and Industrial Policy relevant to GAF?

V Spike Peterson 2003 “A Critical Rewriting of Global Political Economy: Integrating **reproductive, productive and virtual economies**”

- Feminist analysis of oppression most inclusive, incisive -> apply advances in feminist theory to the analysis of power and .. hierarchies and... *to elevate the visibility of gender as a...(key) feature of social relations ..*
- [Note: fisheries agencies do not even take account of the full productive economy of fisheries]
- A continuum of feminist projects (that resonate with GAF experience)
  - Noticing androcentrism – [Women do fish! \[WIF Asia 1998\]](#)
  - Investigating omissions and "adding women" - [Where are the women in fisheries? \[WIF Global 2001\]](#)
  - Adding women and adding gender – [From women in fisheries to gender and fisheries \[WIF Global 2001\]](#);...[the first global look at the gender dimensions of fisheries \[GAF1 2004\]](#)
  - Adding gender, politicizing hierarchies – intersectionality, post-colonial critique – [gender & development \[GAF2 2007\]](#); [moving the agenda forward \[GAF3 2011\]](#); [navigating change \[GAF4 2013\]](#); [the long journey to equality \[GAS5 2014\]](#); [engendering security \[GAF6 2014\]](#); [expanding the horizons \[GAF7 2018\]](#)
  - **Feminist fisheries futures through a political economy approach addressing reproductive, productive and virtual economies?**

Spike Peterson: “**virtual economy** where the production and circulation of symbols, finance, knowledge-based goods and services are outstripping the "traditional" realms of productive and/or reproductive economies.”

**Reproductive economy:** caring labour

## The fisheries political economy and GAF

- Using industry policy as it affects fisheries as an example
  - *Changing Tides* (Neis et al 2005) ... “*the way women’s lives and gender relations within the world’s fisheries are being shaped by globalization*”
  - Campling et al (2012) “*Studies of gender and race in fisheries are well advanced..*”
    - Then why are they not having more impact?
    - Are they being adequately connected to macro structures? How can the local/specific/difference studies be linked with the macro?
- Raises questions on what we study and why we need to connect to the political economy.

## Posing some sample questions..

- How are women's work conditions in fish processing plants linked with industry policy and fisheries?
  - Labour policy – work security, pay, conditions, factory location, resistance/suppression
- Why are sex-disaggregated statistics only (incompletely) collected for part of the fisheries production system?
  - The massive fish processing industry – traditional and modern – is not well connected to fishing industry production
  - Fisheries reproductive and increasingly virtual economies are totally ignored
- Why do studies on women in seaweed focus only on what happens in the water and on the shore and ignore the vastly aggregated global industry that controls collagens?
- While seeking to sustain the environment for production, why do certification and auditing systems not recognise broad social justice criteria, including gender equality, in view of the market pressures to find the lowest cost labour?



## Where to next for GAF?

- It's time to connect GAF research to the political economy of the fish value chain revolution that is shaping women's inequality
- Activism needs good analytical underpinning
- Research is essential but not sufficient
- Taking a leaf from the rapid rise of the neoliberal agenda (Harvey 2005 *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*), education, research, activism, GTA, institutional learning - yes but ....do we need

**feminist fisheries political economy think tanks?**