



The three faces of agency and the gendered social relations in the artisanal *capiz* (*Placuna placenta*) fishery of Oton, Iloilo, Panay Philippines

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

1. Introduction

- Research Problem and Objectives

2. Method

- Research Area
- Ethnographic fieldwork

3. Research findings

- The gender division of labour in artisanal *lampirong* fishery: (male) compressor diving , “lineman”(female) post- diving work, shucking, food processing, and vending
- The labour performed by men is paid while the labour performed by women is unpaid
- Shucking the shells produces two commodities: the unworked/unmanufactured capiz shells (*panit*) and the seafood (fresh kernels or *unod*) or fermented *guinamos* (kernels processed in brine)
- The female “lineman”

4. Analysis and Discussion



Introduction

Research Problem and Objectives

- My paper explored individual and collective agency in women's and men's work in the artisanal *lampirong* (Sp. *Placuna placenta*) fishery in Oton, Iloilo, Panay, Philippines. Popularly known as *capiz*, *lampirong* is the local name in Visayan.
- I examined the work of women and men fishers, representing the gender division of labour, in the value chain of the artisanal *lampirong* fishery. Men's work and women's work are valued differently in artisanal *lampirong* fishery.
- The paper that I am presenting at this Conference, is a Chapter from my dissertation titled *Unod (Kernel) kag Panit (Shells): The narratives of the development of the lampirong (Sp. Placuna placenta) fishery of Oton, Iloilo. Chapter 4 The Social Relations of Women and Men in the artisanal lampirong fishery of Oton, Iloilo* sought to analyze the gender division of labour and the gender differential issues in women's work and men's work in artisanal *lampirong* fishery. I posited the intergenerational cultural resilience of fishing households sustains the artisanal *lampirong* fishery of Oton, Iloilo. Livelihood diversification is a strategy of fishing households adapted to seasonal fishing that embodies the three faces of agency theorized by Naila Kabeer (2020).



PLACUNA PLACENTA

Placuna placenta is the scientific name of *capiz* or *kapis*, in Oton it is popularly called *lampirong*. Windowpane oyster is a “bivalve marine mollusk with thin mica-like translucent shells. *Placuna placenta* is distributed across the Philippines archipelago and has been utilized as material for the *capiz* window since the 19th century.



RESEARCH AREA

Oton is a coastal municipality situated in the southern part of the province of Iloilo (Figure 1). It is a town located in Panay Island in Western Visayas, Philippines. It has a total of 37-villages/barangay spread within an area of 86.44 km² (33.37 sq mi). There are six fishing village communities and my fieldwork took place in Barangay Botong and Trapiche where compressor fishers divers and their families reside. Oton belongs to the sandy or rocky beach ecosystem, according to a survey of the coastal areas of Panay Island (Yano, 1994, p.4) The ecosystem is suitable for lampirong to thrive and for artisanal lampirong fishery to flourish as an important source of livelihood and subsistence for fishing households. The artisanal fishing of Oton is multi-gear, and the municipal waters defined its fishing-diving ground. The seasonal lampirong fishery is just one of the livelihood strategies of the artisanal fishers of Oton.



ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

- I have employed ethnographic fieldwork methods such as key informant interviews, focus group discussion, and direct observation conducting fieldwork for a total of 16 months from April 2019 to October 2020. I joined a compressor diving trip to observe directly the work of the diver and his line-man. I also conducted focus group interviews and key informant interviews with compressor fisher- divers and their lineman and line woman. My fieldwork entailed joining a compressor diving trip for direct observation. I have collected qualitative datasets from interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, and video clips. And applied inductive qualitative analysis deriving the themes from the narratives of male compressor diver-fishers, the line woman and lineman, and female *lampirong* vendors. Collectively, they comprised the fishing households engaged in artisanal *lampirong* fishery.
- I appropriated Naila Kabeer's (2020) critical standpoint of the three faces of agency in feminist economics, "capabilities", "empowerment", and "citizenship" as a framework for my analysis. I surveyed 103 fishers: 83 male and 20 female (approximately 20% of the registered fishers in Oton) from Alegre, Botong, Cabanbanan, *Poblacion* East, *Poblacion* West, and Trapiche to describe the artisanal, small-scale fishing in the six (6) coastal barangays of Oton. I generated descriptors of the development of artisanal *lampirong* fishery detailing the socio-demographic profile that includes years of fishing experience, fishing effort- types of fishing gears and fishing schedule, fishing assets ownership status, commonly caught fish species, and the local fish markets of the small-scale artisanal fishers of Oton, Iloilo. These cultural forms represent the current development descriptors of the artisanal *lampirong* fishery in Oton.
- Oton total fishers 427: 352 male and 95 female; of the 352 are 13 compressor fisher- divers. A total of 193 fishing boats were registered by the Municipal Agriculture Office of Oton (R. Melgar- Jaspe, Personal communication, June 11, 2018)

RESEARCH FINDINGS

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- The gender division of labour in artisanal *lampirong* fishery is demonstrated in the delineation of work performed by women and men fishers. Traditionally, male fishers performed capture fisheries. Compressor diving is man's work, which was perceived to require physical prowess and considered risky. (Castillo, 2008; Fabinyi, Foale, and MacIntyre, 2013; Bacalso, Wolff, Rosales, Armada, 2016; Bañez, 2019)
- The male fisher-divers use compressors in diving for *lampirong*. In Oton, female fisher-divers practice the traditional breath-hold diving to gather seashells nearshore.
- The labour of the compressor divers and the "lineman" is paid. The price per kilogram of *lampirong* shells is equivalent to the compressor diver's labour value.

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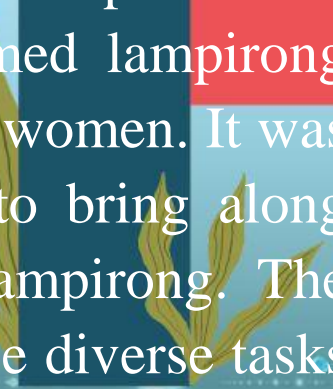
RESEARCH FINDINGS

- The value of the labour of the “lineman” is equivalent to one-fourth percent of the total price per kilogram of the *lampirong*.
- The lineman stays on the boat while the diver scours the sea floor gathering the *lampirong* shells.
- The task of the lineman is to safeguard the life of the diver ensuring the safety of the compressor engine and the hose pipe. Practically, he holds the lifeline of the compressor diver.
- Overall, the lineman performs the work of an assistant to the compressor diver during diving and upon landing on the shore.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Female unpaid work: Laborious post-diving tasks, panala, vending steamed lampirong
- The laborious tasks, post-diving (or post-harvest) such as washing and brushing the shells to remove the sand, steaming, packing the steamed lampirong in small bags, selling the seafood commodity (either stationary or ambulant), and shucking shells are tasks performed by women, girls, and boys. The steamed lampirong were sold by retail in roadside sheds by women. It was a common sight for women vendors to bring along their children while selling steamed lampirong. The long hours expended in performing these diverse tasks were unpaid work.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

- *Panala* (shucking shells)
- It takes the fishing households from the village community to shuck tons of *lampirong* shells. The shells belonged to the wholesale buyer while they collected the *lampirong* kernel in pails. They took home the kernel for household food consumption or had them sold fresh or as processed fermented *guinamos*. Essentially, shucking *lampirong* shells is unpaid labour. Fishing households performed shucking *lampirong* shells in exchange for the kernels. The buyer owns the shells and they reasoned the kernels were given to them free.

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

- “Helen”- female “lineman”
- “Helen” is the wife of a compressor diver and performs the delicate tasks of a lineman. She challenges the traditional role assignments of the lineman, a predominantly male domain in artisanal *lampirong* fishery. The primary reason for assuming the lineman role is practical. They agreed in order to defray the cost of paying for the labour of a lineman. Thus, Helen the female lineman challenges the traditional role assignment in artisanal *lampirong* fishery, however, she also submits to allowing her labour to remain unpaid. Her justification, she must provide for the needs of her children.

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MEN'S WORK IN THE ARTISANAL *CAPIZ* FISHERY



WOMEN'S WORK IN THE ARTISANAL *CAPIZ* FISHERY



Discussion and Analysis

An entire fishing household performs various tasks in the economic production of two *lampirong* commodities: the unworked or unmanufactured shells and the seafood *lampirong* kernel. The compressor fisher-diver and lineman, the male fishing household members, received for their labour an equivalent monetary value. In contrast, the female household members who perform diverse post-harvest (post-diving) tasks for their labour do not receive monetary value. Helping out in the livelihood of the household was perceived as the duty of women, girls, and boys, thus, their labour was unpaid.

Discussion and analysis

- In summary, compressor diving by male compressor-fisher divers and the linemen are paid work while the laborious post-harvest (post- diving) tasks by female lampirong vendors, and the women, girls, and boys shucking shells were unpaid work. The division of labour and the disproportionate valuation of the work by men and women exposes the gender differential issues in artisanal *lampirong* fishery. The fishing household, a unit of production, reproduced the social relations in a coastal fishing community (Acheson, 1988; Iwakiri and Ram, 1988; Palsson, 1989; Britwum, 2009; Castillo, 2009; Sumagaysay- Bañez, 2014; Castro, Lazarte, and Bilecki, 2020). The gender division of labour, reproduces the social relations of fishing households, as a unit of economic production of the artisanal *lampirong* fishery.

Discussion and analysis

Compressor-diving is a fishing strategy employed by marginal, subsistence fishers. Compressor fishing is regulated, even considered unlawful, and a destructive fishing strategy. The Philippine Fisheries Code 10654 and local legislations in Oton regulate the use of compressors in fishing. Naila Kabeer (2020) states, “a critical take on human agency looks into the “structures of constraint” which binds their full expression”. (p.1) The social provisioning of marginal subsistence fishers limits their livelihood strategies; thus, they engage in artisanal multi-gear fishing and lampirong fishery, which are adaptive to seasonal fishing. Notwithstanding, the multiple hazards posed by compressor diving-fishing, marginal fishers persist in engaging in artisanal *lampirong* fishery. It is a double-edged adaptive livelihood strategy with positive and negative dimensions.

Discussion and Analysis

- The fishing households demonstrated human capabilities, empowerment, and active citizenship. The persistence of the compressor diving fishing practice *treads* on the regulations set by the national and local legislation. According to Kabeer (2020), “Citizenship can be defined in more active terms as the social practices through which members of a society interpret, enact and seek to expand legal definitions.” (p.1) The fisher-divers rationalized compressor diving was the only practical fishing strategy available to harvest the Oton lampirong growing in the deep waters. In Trapiche and Botong, entire fishing households engaged in artisanal *lampirong* fishery displayed human capabilities and empowerment. The fishing households engaged in artisanal *lampirong* fishery exercise collective agency as an economic unit of production in the coastal communities of Oton. Their human capabilities and empowerment are established in the social relations of the gender division of labour (and in local ecological knowledge) in the artisanal *lampirong* fishery.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

- Historically, the Oton lampirong has supported the local development of the shells and shell craft industry since the 1970s. The fishing households engaged in artisanal *lampirong* fishery have surmounted the periods of the decline in *lampirong* stock in the 1990s. The current lampirong resurgence even was attributed to the synergistic efforts of local government legislative initiatives, the scientific research interventions of the academic community, and the participation of coastal communities in resource governance in Oton. The empowerment (fishing human rights) of fishing households remains precarious with the insecurity brought by relocation from their fishing village communities giving way to the expansion in local tourism development. However, the lampirong is a viable economic commodity in the ongoing revitalization of the Philippine shells and shell craft industry. The socio-cultural practices, and local ecological knowledge of intergenerational fishing households, are adaptive forms of cultural resilience (McGoodwin, 2006; Broch, 2020).

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