

WOMEN IN FISHING ACTIVITY: A STUDY IN THE NZETO-ANGOLA FISHING COMMUNITY

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

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ABSTRACT

The fishing activity is considered as a fundamentally male practice. In fishing communities, there is a social division of labor by gender and many women survive from other fishing modalities. This study concerns the fishing community of Nzeto (Zaire province, Angola), where artisanal fishing is traditionally a subsistence activity and aims to discuss the sociopolitical framing of gender in fishing activities, searching the relationship between fisherwomen and the environment. In order to understand the fishing community and the observed co-op, as well as its workers, we asked 18 fisherwomen to answer the survey, 12 of them being from the co-op plus 6 who were not. We intended to divide them categorically aiming to establish a comparative study between fisherwomen who are integrated into an organization that defends their varied interests and those who exercise their profession without any support of institutional recognition. We verify that the integration of women in artisanal fishing is only accomplished thanks to their own initiative and efforts. Women take on the responsibility of transporting, stocking, and drying the fish, and also saling it. Besides, they also demand the construction of a facility where they can take shelter from direct exposure to sunlight and rain. They work under poor sanitary conditions, and handling the catch lacks better hygiene conditions. There are no choices but increasing the family income, even under hard and painful work conditions. From the cultural perspective, women taking control of the fishing process results in stigma' rupture that attempts to exclude them from the productive circuit.

MULHERES NA ATIVIDADE PESQUEIRA: UM ESTUDO NA COMUNIDADE DE NZETO-ANGOLA

A pesca é considerada uma prática fundamentalmente masculina. Nas comunidades pesqueiras, há uma divisão social do trabalho por gênero e muitas mulheres sobrevivem de outras modalidades de pesca, como a marisqueira. Este estudo diz respeito, especificamente, à comunidade piscatória do Nzeto (provincia do Zaire, Angola), onde a pesca artesanal é tradicionalmente uma atividade de subsistência e tem como objetivo discutir o enquadramento sociopolítico de gênero na atividade pesqueira, procurando a relação entre as pescadoras e o meio ambiente.. A fim de compreender efetivamente a comunidade pesqueira e a cooperativa observada, bem como suas trabalhadoras, 18 pescadoras responderam à pesquisa, sendo 12 da cooperativa e 6 não, para estabelecer um estudo comparativo entre pescadoras integradas em uma organização que defende os seus diversos interesses e aquelas que exercem sua profissão, sem qualquer apoio de reconhecimento institucional em nível organizado. Verificamos que a integração das mulheres na pesca artesanal só é alcançada por iniciativa e esforço próprios. Assumem a responsabilidade de transportar, estocar e secar o pescado, além da comercialização. Além disso, exigem também a construção de uma instalação onde possam se abrigar da exposição direta ao sol e à chuva. Elas trabalham em condições sanitárias precárias e mesmo o manejo do pescado carece de melhores condições de higiene. Não há escolha a não ser aumentar a renda familiar, mesmo em condições de trabalho árduas e penosas. Da perspectiva cultural, o fato das mulheres tomarem as rédeas do processo de pesca, expressa rupturas com os estigmas que buscam excluí-las do circuito produtivo.

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INTRODUCTION

Angola, a country located in the west part of Africa, more specifically in the southern area, borders the Atlantic Ocean and has a lengthy 1,6 thousand-kilometer-long shore from North to South. Thus, the fishing activities that provide for several Angolan families are performed on this coast (ANGOLA, 2013).

In a worldwide comparison between large-scale fishing and artisanal fishing, the first employs about 500,000 people in its sector, while the latter directly employs 50 million fishermen who, in turn, provide to at least 450 million family dependents (FRANGOUEDES; GERRARD, 2018). In that sense, artisanal fishing has even more elevated importance in poor countries with a more deficient job and education scenario, which is the case of Angola. Therefore, fishing – just like mining and oil extracting – has a great potential to contribute to the economic development of a country.

According to data from 2012 by the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), 90% of people who work in secondary fishing activities (such as salting, processing, and selling) are women.

Before properly approaching the matter of fishing in Africa, specifically in West Africa, where countries like Senegal, Ivory Coast, Benin, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Conakry, Ghana, and Mauritania have had a great focus in the last two decades with the support from NGOs and donors who are deeply interested in that region, it's important to emphasize that this happened, in a great deal, due to an increase in interregional trade, also with the European Union. However, there was also an increase in discussing and approaching how these women participate in fishing activities regarding the conditions to which they are submitted and the need to improve such conditions, especially the ones involved in processing and selling the product. Yet, in Sub-Saharan Africa, in countries like Angola and Namibia, fishing constitutes the subsistence source of a great part of the coastal population, but attention is rarely paid to the women who participate and dedicate to such activity. Women buy the produce that comes from fishing boats and are responsible for cleaning and processing it, along with selling fresh, salted, dry, and cooked fish (RAEMAEEKERS; SUNDE, 2015).

In rural communities, women are the family and domestic life providers, being responsible for educating the children, providing for the family members, and, in general, managing the domestic work. Nonetheless, their existence is marked by great social invisibility, especially when they are not invited to participate or intervene in decisive matters of community life (COSTA, 2017).

[...] Gender, by exposing the anatomical and biological difference between sexes, aggregates other differences – in the economic, political, social, cultural, or ethical ambit –, which engender different ways of thinking and acting, choices, interests, positional and occupational spaces, trajectories and experiences for men and women, in each society or time. In other words, gender is a social product, which is built in temporality. Its relational character conceives sexed identities and subjectivities, gender relations mold gender roles, attributes, and hierarchies that are reproduced in daily life practices. (DELGADO; TAVARES, 2012, p. 82, our translation).

In the Angolan rural area, it's possible to observe a great hegemony of cultural tradition, which is the reason why local habits and customs have been preserved, such as initiation rites, which not only contribute to the differentiation of gender roles but also the social derogation of women. Therefore, such precepts are reinforced by male domination logic, aiming to naturalize women's submission (COSTA, 2017).

According to Nascimento (2014), despite the growing participation of Angolan women in the family income and resources, there is a feeling that it is not accompanied by the participation in the public sphere of community decision-making and management. It's evident that the official authorities or local leaders don't recognize the essential role of women, i.e., regardless of the reasons that have led them to migrate

(focused or spontaneous migration; due to wars and housing destruction, or family factors, economic factors, and lack of social infrastructure), they do not prioritize the creation of specific protection structures for women.

It is known that the fishing activity is considered a fundamentally male practice; in reality, there is a social division of labor by gender in fishing communities, and many women survive from other modalities of fishing, such as clamming, for example, even if such modality is considered less prestigious in the piscatorial process (MANESCHY; SIQUEIRA; ÁLVARES, 2012). Furthermore, women dispose only of coastal mangroves as a working space and source of nourishment or even income, due to, partly, for being excluded from high-seas fishing (FIGUEIREDO; PROST, 2014).

There is a guiding question to be asked to understand the debate about the female presence in fishing, about which Costa (2017) ponders: do women help or work? Evidently, such discussion evokes several other related ones, but, after studying a fishing community, the author has stated that women, however aware they are of the importance of their fishing work, sometimes classify said work as ‘help,’ or, better yet, not always see their own work as a protagonist. In another instance, the same activities performed by men who fish together are not assimilated in the same category. The sea is, by excellence, a male work environment, and female activity in boat fishing is not allowed. Throughout the time, women have been pickers or clam diggers, and, alongside their sons and daughters, they have occupied the margins of estuarine regions, from rivers to mangroves, with oyster, crab, charru mussel, and mollusk digging in general. (RAMALHO, 2006, p. 29).

[...] many of the jobs taken over by women in fishing communities present as characteristics the variability in time and space, the irregularity of demand, its compatibility to domestic work, and, therefore, the difficulty of measuring work time. These factors reinforce the current view of women being more like housewives, their partners’ ‘helpers,’ and not as proactive subjects. (MANESCHY, 2002, p. 88, our translation)

Figueiredo and Prost (2014) state that clamming tends to be a predominantly female activity; nonetheless, this may be considered an artisanal fishing-related activity, because it’s characterized for its low environmental impact and for being performed with rudimentary tools, manually fabricated by the clam diggers themselves. However, it’s important to elucidate the differences pointed between fishermen and clam diggers, especially in space usage, which is different in the various types of fishing arts. Women participate equally in the fishing productive chain performed by men, since they are the ones who deal with the catch from the sea and who normally sell it at fairs, besides also being responsible for manufacturing part of the tools used and preparing the food they take to the sea.

Beck (1991) confirms the affirmation above: in regards to the social division of labor in fishing communities, it’s noticeable that women and men are subject to representations that place them as opposites and, at the same time, as complementary; thus, the world of men is the world of production, the world of labor. Soares (2011) specifically portrays the difficulties and barriers in recognizing the presence of female workers — directly or indirectly related to fishing activities — and, consequently, denying their participation in the activity. Fortunately, there have been suggestions about actions to take in order to overcome these problems, such as the participation of representative organs that can guarantee the interests and rights of women involved in artisanal fishing. On the other hand, it’s worth mentioning that boat fishing, both estuary and sea fishing, is a male job by excellence, in which female participation is not allowed due to misconceptions that women are not equally as strong physically; that they must stay home raising their children; that their presence on a vessel full of men ‘just wouldn’t work out,’ amongst

other things (FRANGOUEDES; GERRARD, 2018).

Beck (1991), creating a frame between genders in these activities, highlights that the world of work is male, public, i.e., it's the open space of the field and the beach; on the other hand, the female world is the domestic one, or, better yet, the enclosed one of the home/backyard and upbringing. In this ambit, when a woman searches for a job outside her home, it usually occurs inside other houses that are not hers, where work is normally the reproduction of the routine in her own home. Contrarily, when men work outside of the community, they do so in the open spaces of the sea and the street. Women in housework don't sell their service in exchange for a salary, which means, even if their job is not characterized as so by the classic Marxist reading of value production, it constitutes a fundamental base of production force development, being home the place where it's reproduced. (ALMEIDA, 2016, p. 25).

In order to provide more support to Education, we must use traditional community education to guide it, which hasn't been yielding significant results, or, better yet, it hasn't been approached through the national identity construction and democratic citizenship perspective, i.e., simply attributing a cultural rooting role to it, in general. That means this education is deeply rooted in traditional African education (TAE), whose basic principle is gender differentiation. Furthermore, this procedure has been criticized concerning the principle of equal rights, but we can't ignore TAE's potential regarding the rescue of the Angolan people's identity as Bantu (COSTA, 2017).

According to PNUD (2015), these asymmetries put women at a disadvantage in the work world, whether it's a paid one or not. In both work worlds — the paid work and the unpaid work of nurturing — there are still a lot of imbalances in the gender domain, which is a reflection of local values, social traditions, and the historic roles associated to genders and, equally, the work of nurturing includes domestic work, such as taking care of the household in general, from the most basic to the more complex activities: preparing meals for the family, gathering water and fuel, cleaning the house, which are circumstantially correlated to nurturing for the elderly, children, and members of the family who are ill, whether it's short or long term.

It's important to notice that, in most countries, in all regions, women work more than men. It's estimated that the female force corresponds to 52% of the global work, whereas the male force corresponds to 48%. However, even if women do more than half of the work, the reality is that they are at a vast disadvantage in the two work spheres: the paid and the unpaid, due to standards that are mutually reinforced.

In conclusion, this is the basis of the female presence in the Angolan work market, in which the active workforce of the population is between 15-54 years old, therefore reaching 9.4 million people.

METHODOLOGY

The area of this study contemplates the Nzeto town, which is located South of the Zaire province, whose Western limit is the Atlantic Ocean, surrounded North by the city of Tomboco, East by the Uíge province, and South by the Bengo province. Based on the last census results from 2014, the town has approximately 48,011 people, of which 23,952 are men and 24,060 are women (INE, 2016b). In this context, it's the town with the biggest territorial extension in the province, with 10,120 square kilometers, which represents a little bit more of a quarter of the total province area.

The study was performed from the analysis of legal documents and ministerial plans of the Angolan Government, from the most diverse areas that compose the fishing community, as well as the pertinent bibliography of the sector.

For more objective results, we asked the co-op and non-co-op fisherwomen to complete a survey that was held through the intermediation of a municipal administrative. This intermediation was necessary due to the lack of formal education and/or illiteracy that is predominant amongst the fisherwomen inserted in the study's sampling.

The initial contact with the interviewees was made consensually in their workplaces, especially the non-co-op ones. Those who work in co-ops were identified through a request made to the artisanal fishing co-op association of Nzeto.

In order to effectively understand the fishing community and the observed co-op, as well as its workers, we asked 18 fisherwomen to answer the survey, 12 of them being from the co-op plus 6 who weren't. We intended to divide them categorically aiming to establish a comparative study between fisherwomen who are integrated into an organization that defends their varied interests and those who exercise their profession without any support of institutional recognition at an organized level (GONÇALVES; QUEDA; RIBEIRO, 2018).

With the help of the surveys, we have gathered information based on the following categories: a) identification, where we asked questions about age, education, number of children; b) their situation in the co-op regarding fishing activities, their goals when joining the organization or, on the other hand, not joining the organization; c) women in fishing, an exclusively female approach in the exercise of artisanal fishing, as well as their domestic role.

RESULTS

PARTICIPATION OF FEMALE CO-OP WORKERS IN FISHING ACTIVITIES

The Dialunga co-op has employed twelve women. Albeit, the number does not translate into the management point of view, if we consider there is only one woman amongst the founding members. From the management jobs, as established by the council board, only one woman is working at the General Secretariat. Analyzing the collected data, the obtained results were deeply expressive according to the reports collected from this group of female workers.

We can verify, firstly, that the integration of women in artisanal fishing is only accomplished thanks to their own initiative and efforts, without any incentive or support from community leaders or public institutions, which makes the latter's weak commitment very clear.

Another aspect to consider is that 100% of women join the mentioned organization to achieve economic goals; 77% of women associated with the co-op work in the salting and drying process and 23% work on the transportation and storage of the catch. Besides, 77% of the women believe that the participation of their gender in fishing is complete; 70% of women associated with the co-op do other business (such as agriculture or informal sales of diverse products) to complement their income.

It's important to highlight that the fisherwomen of the community are restricted to performing post-fishing activities, i.e., they work when men disembark on the coast bringing the catch — which is completely different from other fishing communities, where women directly participate on catching the fish in mangroves, rivers, lakes, etc.

Women take on the responsibility of transporting, stocking, and drying the fish, plus the selling, and we can't undermine this important role, since it involves being entirely in contact with the fishing culture and obviously exposed them to all the risks of artisanal fishing, which are countless, and complements the embarking/disembarking chain and processing.

Women in the Nzeto fishing community, regardless of any family makeup, tend to be in charge of all domestic work, performing countless activities, such as taking care of feeding the family, of the children, of the sanitary conditions of the house. For financial reasons, some women tend to dive into other sources of income, such as tending at bars or stores. Thanks to the small economies saved by their spouses, many of them could launch themselves into new commercial activities to spend their free time. Before, not all of them could benefit from such extra income; this reconversion is inhibited by factors like lack of capital, low levels of education, raw material, skills needed, and access to the market.

These women dedicate themselves exclusively to the salting, drying, and selling the catch activities, in environments that may be considered too precarious for handling edible products. In this process, they're completely exposed to health risks, rain, solar radiation, and climatic variability (alternating temperatures). Besides, there are also ergonomic risks that these women are exposed to when fulfilling their activities, like the lack of workbenches and fish processing tanks, plus decent work structures to avoid back problems, as well as problems related to carrying weight, poor posture, and excessive repetitive motion efforts.

FEMALE NON-CO-OP WORKERS

If, on one hand, we approached the situation of co-op fisherwomen, on the other we have the situation of the non-co-op ones. In this category, 83.4% affirm there is no difference at all in not being associated with the co-op because they obtain more profit, and 16.6% admit they do think it's different working without being associated with the co-op versus working while not being a member of it.

Non-co-op women complain about the lack of refrigerator chambers to preserve the product since their only solution has been selling it immediately to the consumers who visit the place where they work, and also retaining some amount for family consumption.

Their greatest wish is to build proper structures for salting and cleaning the fish. However, even though it's their greatest wish, it's also one of their biggest problems, since they work under poor sanitary conditions, and even handling the catch also lacks better hygiene conditions.

It's important to highlight that, in Angola, 60% of families use a proper place for their necessities. In rural areas, however, that number gets even lower, corresponding to 26%, against 84% in urban areas. In that sense, we must add that the supply and distribution of clean water are extremely deficient in the country, where only 44% of families have access to clean water for human consumption; that percentage is even lower in rural areas, with 22.4%, against 57.2% in urban areas (INE, 2016a). Unfortunately, the Nzeto community is not free from the lack of this precious good on a large scale. The water abstraction in the town dates back from the colonial times, it was projected to cater between 500 and a thousand people, and, later on, was extended to cater around 6 thousand people. Even so, for its 48 thousand people, such a structure is not enough to attend to the basic needs of the population (ANGOP, 2016).

The lack of clients leads to scarcity and a lack of monetary means to open their own business, which is another problem reported by the fisherwomen. Furthermore, other improvements they demand are the construction of a technical school of artisanal fishing and higher investment in fishing supplies, or, better yet, facilitated access to such materials. Finally, the women also demand the construction of a facility where they can take shelter from direct exposure to sunlight and rain.

CONCLUSION

Even though they have a financial goal regarding fishing activities, women also do other businesses to complement their income. The female presence in artisanal fishing is significant, their participation in the co-op is relevant, especially in the catch salting, drying, and stocking process, being those their main sources of income for their families.

There are many problems that they demand are solved, such as governmental support, acquisition of new fishing techniques, and the construction of a learning center for fishermen. Despite their aspirations, the fishing process is extremely rudimentary, since no modern techniques are adopted and there is a lack of product processing tanks, proper cleaning and drying stations, restrooms, and the need to build structures that can avoid their excessive exposure to the sun.

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