

‘The Sea is Our Life’. Woman in the Fishery Sector of the Valencian Community

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Abstract

Traditionally the role of women in fishing has gone largely unnoticed, but now in recent years there has been a growing interest about them. However, the task of identifying and quantifying the role played by women in fisheries has yet to be fully developed. This study tackles the role of women in fishing from a double perspective, both quantitatively and qualitatively, focusing on the case of inshore fishing in the Valencia Community (VC) in Spain. Official statistics now incorporate some important changes in order to reflect a more realistic view of women's involvement in fishing. However, beyond 'official' trades and figures, there is a wealth of work largely done by women that goes unnoticed but it's essential for the fishing sector. Overcoming this, introducing women into fishing studies, statistics and fishing institutions, recognising the work of women in the fishing sector or promoting women who work in tasks traditionally carried out by men is a challenge for such a traditional sector, immersed in profound economic and social change.

Key words

fisheries, fisheries statistics, gender, small-scale fisheries, Spain, traditional fisheries, women in fisheries

Introduction

Studying the role played by women in fishing is critical to understanding the sector and fishing communities as a whole. However, it is not an easy task because much of women's work, despite being decisive for the activity of the sector, is invisible to the rest of society and official registration and control systems.

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In Europe, the capitalisation of the fishing activity from the sixties onwards led to the progressive abandoning of a significant proportion of the activities carried out by women, taking them out of the public space of fishing (Carbonell 2018). The general vision offered today is of men on board and women doing 'minor' tasks on land. Certainly the presence of women on board is marginal: on a global scale, there are 14 women fishers for every 100 men on board while in Europe this proportion drops to 3 per cent (Simmance *et al.* 2018). In spite of this, women continue to participate in the entire production chain, from the extractive sub-sector to the final marketing of the product, in addition to playing a very important role in sub-sectors such as the canning and processing of fish, aquaculture or activities auxiliary to fishing or shellfishing.

Over the last couple of decades, gender studies have focused on highlighting the low visibility of women in the public sphere, for instance in management positions, in decision-making processes and connected to fisheries policy (Alonso-Población and Siar 2018; Gerrard and Kleiber 2019), as well as underlining their dual task, domestic and labour, both always considered as secondary activities (Frangoudes *et al.* 2008; Frangoudes 2011). In fact, the global fisheries crisis has brought about important changes to the family structure. The fishing households have had to create adaptation mechanisms under the new circumstances, with the women bearing the brunt of the changes (Coulthard 2012; Coulthard and Britton 2015).

Other studies have pointed to the key role played by women in the cohesion of fishing communities as the backbone of social relations (Florida del Corral 2004; Calhoun *et al.* 2016) and their importance in understanding human interactions within fisheries and coastal communities (Kleiber *et al.* 2015; Frangoudes and Gerrard 2018). In some cases, studies highlight the importance of women's roles in environmental sustainability and local development (Davis and Gerrard 2000; Korlagama *et al.* 2017; Gisi *et al.* 2018), innovation in small scale fisheries (Locke *et al.* 2017; Delaney *et al.* 2019) or food security (Harper *et al.* 2013; FAO 2015).

In any case, with estimates identifying more than 2.1 million women participating in small scale fishing activities (Harper *et al.* 2020), quantifying the role of women in fisheries is an important aspect, not only from a social but also from an economic, labour and ecological point of view (Weeratunge *et al.* 2010; Kleiber *et al.* 2015). Although advantages have been made, there is still much to be done in quantifying women's work in fishing. But it is no easy task. On the one hand, in fishing as in many other sectors, the boundaries between home and work are diffuse. Often, the work relationship is denied or hidden within the family relationship, harboring the illusion that the worker is just a housewife rather than a woman working without a contract (Boris 2018). Discrimination against women may persist because, in the absence of institutional changes, it is profitable (Elson 1999). The scarcity and frequently biased nature of statistical data, both for the sector in general and for women in particular, add to this discrimination (Frangoudes 2013; Alonso-Población 2018; Smith and Basurto 2019). Typically, figures given in national statistical databases are not disaggregated by gender. On some occasions the records only look at the male population (Kleiber *et al.* 2015; Santos 2015), and, in other cases, such as in Spain, which will be considered later, many women's contributions are hidden.

This increased interest about women in fishing has, however, hardly extended to Spain, despite being the European country with the highest number of people employed in the fishing sector (EU 2018). It is estimated that of the nearly 38,000 people in this sector, 3.3 per cent are women on board (EU 2019). But in related sectors, the percentage of women working rises significantly with aquaculture (27 per cent), shellfish (95 per cent) and the processing industry (80 per cent) (MAPA 2017). The available figures draw a confused and dispersed reality (García Negro and Zotes 2006) in which their work, their way of life and their specific problems have barely been analysed, instead being considered as mere support for spouses engaged in extractive fishing ('collaborating spouses') (O'Doherty and Frangoudes 2004; Fløysand and Sæther 2007; Monfort 2015). In any case, these figures ignore many of the other activities carried out by women who contribute to, and even sustain, the fishing sector. For instance, the cleaning of nets, the administration and management of fishing enterprises, the cleaning of boats and the provisioning of seafarers and the preparation of fish for sale in the fish market are rarely recognised tasks but play an essential role in the sustainability of the sector.

The few studies carried out in Spain have been promoted by the *Spanish Network of Women in the Fishing Sector*, supported by the *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* (MAPA 2015) with the aim of promoting and valuing the activity of these women. At a regional level, research is concentrated mainly in Galicia (Marugán 2004, 2012; García Negro and Zotes 2006; Frangoudes *et al.* 2008, 2013). There are also few outstanding studies in Catalonia (Alberich 2001; Comes Nolla 2010; Torra and Carbonell 2015), the Basque Country (MAPA 2016), Andalusia (Corbacho and Florido del Corral 2005) and the Canary Islands (Pascual Fernández and de la Cruz 2005). But there is hardly any research in the Valencian Community (VC), the region in which we focus our work. Despite the scarcity of data, it is known that a significantly higher number of female fishers work in this region, when compared to the rest of Spain. More importantly, in the course of this research, women were found to be active in each and every one of the activities related to sea fishing.

Based on the statistical data from the *Social Marine Institute (Instituto Social de la Marina, ISM)*, the difficulties of quantifying female employment in the sector will be shown. The official changes that have been made to the statistics will be reviewed, to see their effectiveness at including the work carried out by women. As will be discussed, the lack of systematic data collection on the participation of women is a persistent issue.

This result is further reinforced by the qualitative analysis, carried out subsequently. This analysis will be applied to reveal the extent of the tasks performed by women in fishing. Giving voice to these women, their perception of the tasks they carry out, from the most formal to the most informal ones, will be thoroughly examined. Through the analysis of their narratives, evidence is acquired that points to the decisive role played by women in the fishing activity (to the extent that fishing would be impossible without their intervention), and to the implicit assumptions -both conceptual and factual- that can go unnoticed in the usual studies by not incorporating the view of women.

Methodology

This study is focused on the Valencian Community, a Spanish region with a strong fishing tradition. In its 22 ports it hosts a fleet of just over 500 boats. The largest percentage are artisanal (54 per cent), the next most important vessels are trawlers (38 per cent) followed by purse seine (7 per cent) (CES 2017). Most of the fleet is made up of small family businesses. The skipper is usually also the boat owner and is accompanied by two or three deckhands who are almost always relatives (Herrera-Racionero *et al.* 2019). But, in addition, there are also other workers who carry out tasks necessary for the operation of the fishing sector: unloading fish, processing, marketing, repair and manufacture of nets, management, etc. The first part of this analysis will identify and quantify the presence of women in these different activities, based on the data provided by the ISM, taking into account the recent changes in the elaboration of these data.

Next, the sample population will be developed using a snowball sample, a method commonly used to find respondents in isolated or hard-to-access groups (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Noy 2008). The researchers start by contacting any female worker in each port, relying on them to provide further contacts.

Data collection took place from February 2018 to November 2018 and was part of a larger study on the sustainability of artisanal fisheries off the Spanish Mediterranean coast. From the total empirical material corresponding to the Valencian Community (Figure 1), this study analysed 21 interviews with women from 12 of the 22 ports that exist in the VC. It was not an aim of the study to obtain statistic samples, but rather to identify the different labour positions of women in the sector. The representativeness of the samples were confirmed when, from a number of discourses, one more did not produce new information relevant to the subject matter (Faulkner and Trotter 2017).

Practically all the women interviewed, in addition to their more or less openly declared tasks, manage everything related to the family business: for instance bureaucratic formalities, cleaning of the boat, provisioning or payment of salaries to the sailors. The following table shows the profiles of our informants (Table 1):

A semi-structured questionnaire was used for interviews, which followed a pre-established scheme, flexible enough to allow for the inclusion of additional fisher's reports. In addition to general questions about personal information (age, studies, personal situation...) questions focused on:

- a personal history in the fishing sector;
- b formal and informal work in the sector;
- c different relationships and perceptions of co-workers and other stakeholders;
- d perspectives and opinions about the fishing sector (current situation, problems, regulations, management system...);
- e links to organizations in the fisheries sector (e.g., Guild or associations); and
- f issues directly linked to personal projects.

Twenty one interviews in twelve Valencian ports (each approximately 45 minutes long) were conducted in-person and recorded and transcribed for the subsequent encoding of the data using Atlas.ti5 tool (Friese 2011) which provided pooled quotations,



Figure 1: Study area. Source: Own elaboration [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

codes and created families and networks. The responses gathered were analysed with specific discourse analysis techniques (Weiss and Wodak 2003; Keller 2005). The extracts of the discourses used here reflect some of the ideas that come up repeatedly in the interviews, as well as those others that, although more exceptional, could point towards certain tendencies that have not yet crystallized in the rest of the reference collective's minds. The extracts selected, transcribed in literal form, contain the ideas and/or words of the interviewees that are considered key for this study.

The analysis of the interviews aims to understand and reconstruct the realities of these women which, in most cases, go unnoticed. With this, in addition to obtaining direct information, access is given to otherwise hidden elements of the discourse,

Table 1: Interviewee

Interviewee	Details
l1	52 years old. Shipowner and fisher. Bureaucratic management
l2	53 years old. Shipowner and fisher. Bureaucratic management
l3	52 years old. Shipowner and fisher. Bureaucratic management
l4	52 years old. Net mender and fisher. Bureaucratic management
l5	57 years old. Shipowner and posera. ⁶ Bureaucratic management
l6	52 years old. Posera
l7	54 years old. Posera. Managing the family boat
l8	45 years old. Auction seller. Hired by the guild
l9 ⁷	52 years old. Admin. assistant hired by the Guild
l10	49 years old. Admin. assistant hired by the Guild
l11	54 years old. Posera and net mender. Occasional fisher
l12	27 years old. Admin. assistant Treasurer in the morning and auction seller in the afternoon. Hired by the Guild
l13	55 years old. Net mender and fish courier
l14	58 years old. Shipowner. Bureaucratic management and occasionally sells fish
l15	53 years old. Managing the family business
l16	39 years old. Admin. assistant in the mornings, posera in the afternoons
l17	25 years old. Fisher
l18	49 years old. Admin. Assistant, hired by the Guild
l19	52 years old. Shipowner. Posera. Managing the family business
l20	51 years old. Occasional fisher. Managing the family business
l21	56 years old. Net mender. Managing the family business

revealing the latent assumptions of the informants and their capacity to create new meanings.

Women in fishery in the Valencian Community: the data

The first time that the *Special National Insurance Regime for Seafarers* was established was in *Law 193/1963*, of 28 December, that is to say in the middle of the Franco regime. This law makes a distinction between a general regime and special regimes aimed at workers in sectors with some ‘specificity’. The meaning of this specificity is established in *Decree 2864/1974* where, in its *Statement of Reasons*, the special circumstances that occur in maritime and fishing work such as difficulty and danger, prolonged isolation and variations in catch size are indicated. Its objectives are: ‘a) to achieve a degree of social protection for seafarers, in line with that of workers in industry and services. b) to stimulate sea-fishing work... facilitating training and specialization in the tasks of the sea, with a view to greater performance and a better remuneration. And finally, c) to achieve a maritime-fishing population with a rational structure ... avoiding the aging of the fishing population’ (*BOE*, 245, 10 October 1975).

This regulation (in force until 2016, although previously repealed for the most part), always speaks in masculine terms, therefore concealing a series of tasks, that are carried out largely by women: activities linked to extractive work, such as shellfish and aquaculture activities, or to functions that are essential for the functioning of the fleet such as unloading of fish, processing and marketing or repair and manufacture of nets.

In the mid-1990s, many of the women engaged in these tasks grouped themselves into independent organisations with the aim of claiming, in addition to the defence and survival of the fishing sector, a legal status recognising their contribution within fishing industries. This was the case of the Galician shellfish workers, who obtained a professional status and became part of the fishermen's organisations. They were joined by different groups along the Cantabrian coast, leading to constituting various associations of shellfish, net menders and *neskatillas*¹ (the latter only in the Basque Country). Finally, most of these local associations joined forces creating bigger entities, like for example AGAMAR, *Galician Association of Shellfishers*, or the *Association of Net menders and Neskattillas of Euskadi*. In 2010, the *General Secretary for Fisheries* created the *Spanish Network of Women in the Fishing Sector*, with the idea of serving as a platform for communication and exchange of experiences among women in the fishing industry, organizing several congresses at a national level. Within the net menders there are associations of Galician, Asturian, Basque, Andalusian and Valencian women. Recently, in May 2016, ANMUPESCA, the *National Association of Fishing Women*, was set up, with the participation of shipowners, networkers and shellfish handlers mainly from Galicia, but open to any woman or group of women from the fishing sector. This project is coordinated by CEPESCA, the *Spanish Confederation of Fishing*.

In line with many of these initiatives, in 2016 there was a legislative change which entered into force with *Law 47/2015* of 21 October. The current legislation incorporates new professional groups to the *Special Regime of the Sea* (REM), both employed and self-employed, engaged in fishing, aquaculture, merchant navy, inland port traffic, sports or pleasure craft, or professional diving. This implies a restructuring of the professional framework of the sector. In addition, this new law gives more visibility to women by including the feminine Spanish name ('rederas') as well as the masculine one ('rederos'), in the specific case of net menders.²

This new REM recognises two specific groups of women, the *neskatillas* and the packers in the Basque Country. The *neskatillas* are in charge of unloading and cleaning the fish from the catches of the inshore fleet, as well as supplying provisions for the fishers. The packers, in turn, classify the catches of the trawler fleet, prior to their commercialization. The women of both groups are usually relatives of the sailors (e.g., wives, daughters, sisters).³

Another aspect to highlight is the inclusion in this law of the figure of 'collaborating family members', classified as self-employed workers who are the spouse or relatives up to the 2nd degree who work with them on a regular basis, live with the head of the family and depend economically on them, unless they can prove that they are employees. In groups 2 and 3 (boats up to 150 Gross Registered Tonnage -GRT- and up to 10 GRT, respectively) it is an essential requirement that the same activity is

Table 2: *Workers affiliated to REM-December 2018*

Social Security contributions by group		Detail 2	Affiliates fishing and aquaculture women	Affiliates fishing and aquaculture men	
Group	Subgroup	Detail			
First group (vessels of more than 150 GRT)	Fishing employees	Aquaculture	345	1729	
		Fishing	439	4246	
		Divers	6	192	
	First group. Self-employed	Others	Net menders	1	16
			Mussels and fish farmers	12	36
		Aquaculture	Shellfish collectors	6	22
			Fishing boat owners on board	5	79
			Self-employed on board	5	6
			Family member collaborator	23	-
			Net menders	1	3
Total: First Group			6329	2825	
Second group (vessels between 10 and 150 GRT)	2A Group	Group 2A Fishing employees	843		
		Group 2A Self-Employed	17		
	2B Group	Group 2A Fishing boat owners on board	6	438	
		Group 2B Fishing employees	18	3410	
		Group 2B Self-Employed	24	943	
		Group 2B Fishing boat owners on board	65	7616	
Total: Second Group					
(Continues)					

Table 2: (Continued)

Social Security contributions by group		Detail 2	Affiliates fishing and aquaculture women	Affiliates fishing and aquaculture men
Group	Subgroup	Detail		
Third group (vessels of less than 10 GRT)	Third group. Employees	Group 3C. Employees	289	4414
	Third group. Self-Employment	Aquaculture	2784	1565
			Mussels and fish farmers	504
		Divers	-	54
		Fishing	408	5009
		Fish. boat owners on board	35	-
		Nestatillas/ Packers	-	60
		Divers on board	564	71
		Net menders	4584	12251
	Total. Third group		5492	26196
Total: December 2018 (NATIONAL TOTAL)				

Source: ISM 2018.

carried out by the owner of the business. As we shall see below, this requirement had a direct impact on seafarers in the Valencian Community.

These changes affect the treatment of data on the registration of affiliations to the social regime prepared by the ISM. On the other hand, the data are also disaggregated according to sex (this split does not appear in the statistics until 2005), which allows for a first approximation of the female employment in the sector.

The presence of women in the sector is a minority but no longer anecdotal (Table 2). Specifically, 5,492 women were affiliated to REM in December 2018. This figure indicates that women make up about 21 per cent of the total number of REM members. A very irregular presence in the different groups that make up the REM is observed. In three activities, women are in the predominant position: shellfishers on foot, net menders and *neskatillas*/packers. Of these groups, the *neskatillas*/packers group is made up exclusively of women, but being a very small group, there are barely 35 affiliated women. On the other hand, 65.2 per cent of the shellfish workers on foot are women, and these 2,784 women make up the bulk of female workers affiliated to the REM, representing more than half of the total women affiliated. Another sector displaying an important female presence of around 88 per cent, is that of net menders, with 565 women affiliated. In the rest of REM activities there is a large majority of men, more marked in fishing than in aquaculture. It should be noted that in those groups that do not involve work at sea, the presence of women is in majority (net menders, *neskatillas*, shellfishers) or has a significant percentage (mussel farmers and aquaculture).

As expected, the picture changes when the activities that involve shipping are taken into consideration. When adding together the different groups that work on board, 734 women are registered, a figure that never reaches 10 per cent of the total. The number and percentage of women on board varies according to the size of the boat. Thus, in the first group, which includes workers who carry out their fishing activity on board vessels of more than 150 GRT, there are barely 5 shipowners and 5 self-employed women on board. However, in group 2, which includes vessels between 10 and 150 GRT, a total of 65 women are found among the groups of employees and shipowners. Finally, in the third group, which includes vessels of less than 10 GRT, there are 289 employees (6 per cent of the total) and 408 shipowners (8 per cent). But, curiously, it is in this third group that the presence of women has declined in the last 5 years by about 7 per cent, whereas the first group has increased by this number in the same period.⁴ In any case, when analysing this data, it is necessary to take into account the recession the Spanish fishing sector is currently suffering, which has led to the total employment in the fishing sector decreasing by 11 per cent in the last five years (Figure 2).

This irregular distribution by sector of women in fisheries and aquaculture is reflected geographically. Almost 88 per cent of female employment in fishing is concentrated in Galicia, which is explained not only by a significant percentage of the Spanish fishing fleet (and industry) located in this region, but also because more than 51 per cent of women sea workers are in the sub-sector of 'shellfish on foot', emblematic of this region (ISM 2018).

Focusing on the Valencian Community, the percentage of women in the fishing sector decreases considerably. According to ISM data, only 63 women were affiliated

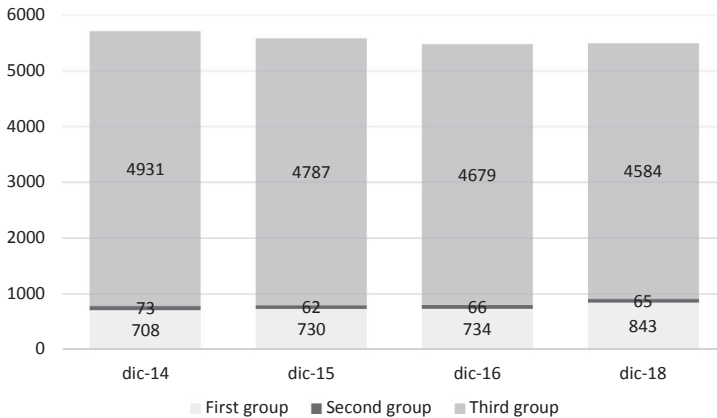


Figure 2: Evolution of the number of female workers in the fishing sector by social security contribution group. Source: ISM 2018

in 2017, representing 3.47 per cent of the total. This data is due to the absence of shellfishers, net menders and, obviously, *neskatillas*. However, the presence of women in aquaculture is relatively significant (30 women work in the sector, which is one in five jobs). As far as women working at sea are concerned, there are practically no women found working aboard the larger boats (groups 1 and 2), the 5 women in group 2, do not represent even 0.5 per cent of the total. However, it is interesting to note that in smaller boats (group 3) there are nine women on board as employees and nine women as shipowners (Table 3).

In conclusion, it should be noted that the statistical changes implemented by the ISM have made some of women's work at sea more visible, due to the incorporation of sectors with a large female presence. However, as mentioned previously, these sectors are geographically concentrated in certain areas of the north (Galicia and the Basque Country). Women in Mediterranean fishing continue to be practically invisible, an obvious example of this is that 'poseras' -the Valencian equivalent of 'neskatillas'- are not officially recognised and, therefore, do not appear in the statistics. The same happens with net menders: an official certification is necessary for registration, the problem is that this professional certification does not exist in the Valencian Community.

The fieldwork has highlighted the difficulties of including women linked to the sector in the statistics. As commented previously, this study forms part of a larger project, carrying out a survey of the Mediterranean fisher guilds, in which to establish, amongst other things, the presence of women in the different activities. In spite of walking past women in the port repairing nets on the way to interviews, the answer to the question 'how many women net menders workers are there?' was on many occasions 'none'. Indeed, there is an important quantity of hidden work, carried out mainly by women that should be addressed.

Table 3: Women affiliated to REM in Valencian community

Social Security contributions groups		Detail 1	Detail 2	Affiliates REM women	Affiliates REM men	Average (%) women about total	
Group	Subgroup	Detail	Detail 2	Affiliates REM women	Affiliates REM men	Average (%) women about total	
First group (vessels of more than 150 GRT)	Fishing employees	Fishing	Fishing	9	30	30%	
		Aquaculture	Aquaculture	30	156	19,20%	
			Divers onboard	1	67	1,49%	
	First group. Self-employed	Aquaculture	Mussels and fish farmers	0	0		
Total. First group Second group (vessels between 10 and 150 GRT)		Fishing	Self-employed onboard	0	1	0%	
			Family member collaborator	0	0		
			Net menders	0	0		
	Group 2A	Group 2A Employees	Group 2A Fishing employees	40	254	15,75%	
	Group 2A	Group 2A Self-Employed	Group 2A Fishing boat owners on board	2	372	0,54%	
	Group 2B	Group 2B Employees	Group 2B Fishing employees	1	56	1,79%	
	Group 2B	Group 2B Self-Employed	Group 2B Fishing boat owners on board	1	499	0,20%	
	Total. Second group		Group 2B	Group 2B Fishing boat owners on board	1	117	0,85%
					5	1044	0,48%

(Continues)

Table 3: (Continued)

Social Security contributions groups						
Group	Subgroup	Detail	Detail 2	Affiliates REM women	Affiliates REM men	Average (%) women about total
Third group (vessels of less than 10 GRT)	Third group. Employees	Group 3C. Fishing employees	Group 3C. Fishing employees	9	242	3,72%
	Third group. Self-employed	Aquaculture	Shellfish collectors	0	2	0%
			Mussel and fish farmers	0	4	0%
		Fishing	Fishing boat owners onboard	9	245	3,67%
		Net menders	Divers onboard	0	0	0%
			Net menders	18	22	3,50%
Total. Third group				63	1813	3,47%
Total November 2017. Valencia Community						

Source: ISM 2018.

The tasks of the fishing women

Of the multitude and variety of tasks carried out by sea women nothing can give a better idea than the details provided by their own testimonies⁵:

'I am a fisherwoman, that's my work. And then, well, I am in charge of everything: the bureaucracy of the ship, I mean, every Friday I collect the liquidation of the guild, do the accounts for the workers, then all the bureaucracy of the ship to pass inspections, go to the banks, pay transfers to the suppliers, pay the quarterly VAT, go to the accountant. I am in charge of all that'. (I1)

'I take care of the documentation for the boat. I go to the guild, they arrange my papers, I go to the captain's office, I pick up the mail from the boat, I take care of paying the bills that arrive, I file the invoices, then I also keep the boat's accounts, on Fridays I am in charge of calculating each person's share and preparing the envelopes for the afternoon, when they return, I pay the men. The financial part. And documentation and all that I usually do. And then in the afternoon, when the boat comes, I'm waiting with the pallet mover, I pick up the fish -which I don't load or anything-, we go in and I wait to weigh it, I pick up the papers and go home'. (I14)

'My work is all the work that is done on land. As a ship worker, then, to know everything that the boat needs, the purchases of nets, of meshes, of all the stuff they need. And then to keep the accounts and to do the paperwork. And then, in the afternoons, to do the *posera*, which is to prepare the ice, the boxes, the cart, arrange the fish when the boat arrives and take it to the auction place, auction it, bring the summary (...) On Mondays I buy the food for the boat for the whole week for the men'. (I3)

'My work starts when they get back from the sea, I unload all the fish, collect the rubbish or whatever, and leave the nets clean and ready for the next night'. (I19)

The positive attitude of the majority of women fishers towards all tasks, could be surprising in other sectors, but is typical throughout the fisheries sector, where job satisfaction is high, particularly in small-scale fisheries (Féral 2004; Pollnac *et al.* 2012; Holland *et al.* 2020). The numerous comments in this respect can be summed up by:

'What do I like best? everything. And what do I like least? Nothing'. (I7)

'Going fishing is my life. (...) To work for yourself, to work outdoors, to depend on yourself, on your decision, for me it is the most important thing'. (I1)

'For me the sea is our life. (...) There's nothing special I don't like'. (I16)

Only a couple of our interviewees disassociate themselves from these appreciations: 'I don't like the net, I make it out of obligation (I21). The sea? I don't ... It's hard. If I had known that a few years earlier, I would probably be a school teacher instead of having a fishing boat'. (I4)

As for the less pleasant side of their work, except for some shared appreciations, the opinions are varied. They agree, in general, in complaining about what I3 described as 'my enemy, the paperwork'. And they also coincide in pointing out the difficulties of days when the weather is adverse, not only if they are the ones that go out to sea ('a day with a gale or heavy swell, because it exhausts you physically' (I2), 'when you catch a storm' (I5)), but also when it is their people that go out to fish ('maybe they go out to sea in bad weather and you are here at home and you are thinking: Lord what will happen! and waiting by the phone' (I7)).

But then they disperse into a variety of individual complaints. For I5 'apart from the paperwork, it's going to do the shopping [laughs] ... going to do the shopping, look, it kills me'. Some people especially dislike 'preparing the boat, nets and all that' (I1). Or when work has piled up, 'when you catch a lot of fish and you are stressed, overwhelmed, because the auction is due to start and you still haven't taken [the fish]' (I4).

The immersion of women in such a traditional way of life as fishing, distances them in many aspects from the values and advantages of modernity. During the research this has been demonstrated in the sphere of national insurance, which covers aspects that are not provided by the guild, this is also the case with holidays and bank holidays. The perception that these women have of their work is reflected in what, in modern terms, are called 'labour rights', such as the right to holidays, to a fair wage, pension on retirement, national insurance, etc. As far as holidays are concerned, some of them barely remember the last time they had a holiday:

'On my 25th wedding anniversary, I went with my son to Florence for the weekend'. (I13)

'It's been many years since I've had a vacation. My daughter gave me a present, yes (...) to Thailand, 15 days'. (I2)

Others, like I1, have set out to institutionalize holidays in the future: 'I love to travel very much; my husband and I have realized that holidays are important. And if we have to stop the boat, we stop it; a week or 10 days a year at least'. Most usual however, is to take time off when sea conditions demand it or depending on the characteristics of the fishing that each one does. In other words, leisure time is adapted to fit around the natural cycles of the target species, or the unpredictable weather that hinders or impedes fishing:

'For the month of biological recovery period. But not the whole month (...), maybe 15 days'. (I3)

'Yes, if it's bad weather we don't go out to sea (...) normally I take it to be at home and do more housework or personal stuff of mine'. (I1)

'On vacation? The stormy weeks'. (I2)

'Here when there's bad weather you stop. Monday was the patron day of fishers, we celebrated, the bosses go to lunch, to dinner, and no one goes out to sea'. (I7)

The women of the sea do not take holidays according to the calendar, but according to the sea ('bad weather', 'storms') or the fish ('biological recovery periods'). The only exception is the one mentioned by I7: all fishers celebrate the Virgin of Carmen, patron saint of the sea, when fishers do not work.

An interesting paradox is the perception that most of them have of themselves as people who have to 'do everything' (I20), but also, simultaneously, they neither recognize nor value their work:

'No, I don't work in fishing, I just take care of the boat and crew, the bureaucratic paperwork, the auction'. (I14)

'Women do [the work], but we don't expect anything in return ... it's normal, it's our boat, our mothers did it, our grandmothers did it ... and now it's our turn'. (I3)

As seen above, women take on a variety of jobs without which fishing would be impossible. For them, however, it is not work *per se*, but an activity so rooted in tradition that it is almost part of their nature. The invisibility of female work at sea in the statistics, therefore, mirrors their own perception of invisibility. The woman's role is assumed as the natural caregiver of the family. The responsibility for the wide range of household tasks, which also includes the care of the family business, therefore falls firmly on the women's shoulders. (Angeles *et al.* 2019; Blossfeld and Kiernan 2019; Frangoudes *et al.* 2019).

Indeed, these women rarely receive a salary, do not pay national insurance and are therefore not entitled to a pension. Their work is regarded as family assistance and normally complements the work of their husbands at sea, thus avoiding additional expenses for the family economy:

'It is enslaving, a lot of hours, a lot of dedication. And, being women, we have to combine family life, all the work at home, prepare meals, everything. Run everything, I run everything. The management, the paperwork, I am at sea, at home, with the family ... It's crazy'. (I2)

Many of these women, in addition to working on land, own the boat, usually jointly with their husbands. But what could apparently be an advantage ('ownership') becomes a great obstacle since it prevents them from being recognized as land personnel due to incompatibilities within the Special Regime of the Sea.

'I'm a shipowner, the owner of a boat with my son 50-50. My job is all the work that is done on land. As a shipowner, because I am aware of all that the boat needs, the net purchases, the rigging, then to keep the accounts and to do the paperwork, to prepare the boxes. (...) I have no legal remuneration for my work, I can't invoice my work, and the boat income has to pay for the work I do'. (I4)

As outlined earlier, Law 47/2015 of 21 October, regulating the social protection of workers in the maritime-fishing sector, includes the figure of the 'family collaborator' in article 4, as a form of self-employed worker. However they are required 'to perform the same activity as the owner of the business'. In this case, as the co-owner is her son, whose activity is to go out to sea, the land activity of I4 (and of all women in the same situation, who are the majority) is automatically excluded from this legal

classification. Consequently, I₄'s share of the sale of the fish cannot be declared, which prevents her from enjoying the same labour rights as her son.

A similar situation is generated with the figure of the net menders, which although appears as a category within the Social Institute of the Sea, there is no recognized qualification of this profession in the Valencian Community. Not being able to formally demonstrate that they exercise this work, Valencian net menders do not exist in the system. Here, as in many other traditional societies, women are perceived as 'wives' (Weeratunge *et al.* 2010). Thus, I₁₁, who works as a net mender, in order to have access to National Insurance, plans to abandon her specialty and relocate as a sailor, but:

'No, here at sea I've never been hired. I lack a title that I have to get if you want to be enlisted, but of course, I lack that title. And it's worth 260€ or something like that. As only my husband is earning I cannot afford that luxury. All I earn is under the counter, but I don't earn anything else. That's what we live on'. (I₁₁)

For that reason, I₁ brings up what women of the sea in the VC are asking for:

'Women who do not have national insurance and are doing more or less the same work as those who have national insurance, except for going to sea, well, we ask that they be able to pay national insurance just like the others. They had it in the past, but I don't know why, it was taken away'. (I₁)

All these problems suffered by women in the sector who work on land disappear, at least apparently, for women who go out to sea. Indeed, women fishers, like fishermen, are included in the Special Regime for Seafarers, with the same rights and obligations. However, this formal equality does not translate into effective equality. On the one hand, as came up in several interviews, the conditions of the boats do not cover the basic needs of women – a lack of private spaces, and in particular, the lack of toilets on board. On the other hand, the time away from home while on board and the working hours are incompatible with the upbringing of children. As in all employment sectors, fisherwomen have maternity rights, but:

'What nursery could take care of my child from 4:00 in the morning?'. (I₂)

'I prefer to work elsewhere, on a different schedule so that I can take care of my son. In October I had to go out [to the sea] because I didn't have a sailor and the boat had to go out (...); I had to go live at my mother's house to be able to see my son at least when he was sleeping'. (I₆)

This leads to *de facto* discrimination; if there is no mother or mother-in-law, the fisherwomen's only option is to stop working and, therefore, stop contributing.

Once again, it shows how the woman of the sea occupy preferentially the private space and, in general, show a considerable lack of interest in participating in the public space:

'I have no say there [in the guild meetings]'. (I₁₇)

However, it remains to be seen to what extent this disinterest is real or the result of all those other time-consuming obligations. All the women interviewed consider that the role of the guild is fundamental for the fishing community, but, in general, they neither participate in the dynamics of this institution nor are they well informed about the current situation in the fishing sector, their knowledge coming from 'word of mouth' through family and friends. Some of them, however, have been or are part of the governing bodies of the guild and do demonstrate a more critical opinion and greater involvement in the public sector.

Conclusions

Although always present, women are often hidden in the fishing sector, with the exception of the processing and marketing sub-sector. Considered as an aid to the extractive work carried out by men, historically they have been limited to a series of roles supposedly associated with their sex, which still survive today. This has resulted in a labour segregation that is manifested in the high rate of employment held by women in activities of the sector considered more compatible with the domestic sphere (land tasks), while their presence is very scarce or almost non-existent in other areas such as extractive fishing or decision-making.

This analysis has shown the rich variety of tasks carried out by women both on land and at sea, both in the field of care and management, and in the extraction of fish, with and without legal recognition. Women are present in almost all the activities undertaken in the sector: they are in charge of weaving and repairing the nets, preparing the fishing gear or the daily meals of the crew. They clean the boat and manage its upkeep. They take the necessary steps to ensure that everything complies with the law and make visits to the public administrations, port offices, guild offices, etc. They deal with labour documentation such as crew contracts, salaries, insurance, unemployment, etc. They make sure health and safety requirements are met (inspections, revisions, rescue equipment, etc.), and also look after the financial side of running a business. In the afternoons, they go to the port to wait for the arrival of the day's catch. Once there, they unload the fish and transport it to the fish market, where it is boxed in ice. Then they attend the auction and stay until all the fish is sold. The last task of the day is to prepare and deliver the sales documents to the guild offices. The number of tasks described above may vary from one case to another. However, women are usually solely responsible for all of these tasks.

This wide variety of activities is barely reflected in fishery statistics. The recent statistical changes applied in Spain by ISM have allowed some of these tasks to emerge, as more feminine activities have been incorporated (for instance shellfish or *neska-tillas*). However, although it is a step forward, this recognition is still restricted to very specific geographical areas. These changes are barely reflected in the Mediterranean, although mark a path to follow: the official recognition of trades and tasks which, in the case of *poseras* or net menders for example, have traditionally gone unnoticed.

The difficulty of including the wide range of work carried out by women in the statistics is very noticeable. Beyond 'official' trades and figures, there is a wealth of work largely done by women that goes unnoticed. Tasks that, on many occasions, are

linked to 'care' (of the boat, of the documentation, of the crew, of the family) and that are essential for the functioning of the sector. Interestingly, it is often the women themselves who do not recognize their work as a real job but continue to consider it an extension of their domestic obligations. Overcoming this, introducing women into fishing studies, statistics and fishing institutions, recognising the work of women in the fishing sector or promoting women who work in tasks traditionally carried out by men is a challenge for such a traditional sector, immersed in profound economic and social change.

To recognise, quantify and value the role of women in fishing requires a change in the way fishing management is understood. It implies regarding the sector and the fishing communities as a whole, avoiding the simplistic image of a primary sector with men onboard. The fishing sector is much more complex. Fishing neither ends nor begins with the extraction of fish. Fishing involves a great deal of work before and after removing the fish from the sea, both onboard and ashore, by both men and women. Fishing implies a way of life and comes from a very characteristic and particular social reality, where the borders between work, family and community are often blurred.

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Notes

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Neskatillas is the name of a typically female laborer found in the ports of the province of Vizcaya (Basque Country). The neskatillas are usually relatives of the sailors, who are in charge of receiving the ships when they arrive in port.

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³For further development see 'Diagnosis of the professional situation of the *neskatillas* and packers', MAPA (2016), available in https://www.mapama.gob.es/es/pesca/temas/red-mujeres/primerborradordiagnosticoneskatillas17022016_tcm30-77155.pdf

⁴ It would be interesting to analyze the reasons and consequences of the increased employment in this group, but our work is focused on the Valencian Community which does not have an industrial fleet.

- ⁵We are aware of the difficulties involved in translating into English forms of expression typical of fisherwomen's language; we have tried to keep as closely as possible to their literal expressions.
- ⁶'Posera' refers to the woman who is in charge of the land work linked to the boat, usually trawlers. This involves unloading and cleaning the fish from the catches of the inshore fleet.
- ⁷ Interviewees' names were kept confidential. We named each with I1, I2 ...

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