

**The view from the gendered margins: using marine and coastal
research to address some compelling issues of our time***

Barbara Neis

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Thank you very, very much for this tremendous honor; and congratulations on the fortieth anniversary of your university. I think of the University of Tromsø as my second university home. I first visited here in 1986 – 22 years ago. I vividly recall three things about that first visit. First, I recall and am reminded again on this visit of the stunning beauty of this place. Second, I recall wandering home to the hotel at 4:00 a.m., (I was younger then), marveling that people were out mowing their lawns. Third, I remember the strong mentoring relationships I observed between Norwegian male faculty and their male students. At that time, I saw that the female students did not seem to have the same mentoring support.

A great deal has changed since that first visit, both here and at my own university. Since then, my stays in Tromsø have been supported and often funded by Kvinnforsk, your beautiful Centre for Women's Studies. During these visits I have participated in several doctoral workshops, and developed rewarding collaborations with Norwegian scholars working on gender and

fisheries, local ecological knowledge, cyborgs, and, more recently, on comparative analyses of regional and municipal governance. These collaborations have shown me the depth and sophistication of much of the marine and coastal research happening in this region.

Today I want to take a few minutes of your time to talk about the potential contribution that gender-informed, inter/transdisciplinary marine and coastal research can make to addressing some of the most compelling issues of our time. I take these compelling issues to include, at their most extreme, current and future social and environmental threats to life and livelihoods.

The presentation draws on material from multiple projects including a co-edited collection called *Changing Tides*, on gender, globalization and fisheries, and a forthcoming co-edited collection called *Making and Moving Knowledge*, as well as on a talk I gave to the Royal Society in Canada on social complicity in fisheries

collapse. Co-authors John Lutz and Cristina Maneschy helped write pieces of the original text I'm drawing on today.

Looking around us, whether it be to scientific, policy, or popular literature, we find widespread concern that our world may be reaching a tipping point beyond which there is a strong likelihood of catastrophic and irreversible change (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment). This change will be social and environmental. But too often, to quote the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, "... the data and information that are available are related to either the characteristics of the ecological system or the characteristics of the social system, not to the all-important interactions between these systems." (MA 2005: 11).

One of the most profound awakenings and greatest challenges the 20th century left to the 21st is the realization of the complex interconnectedness of humans, human health, and knowledge production within the natural and social worlds we inhabit. This

awakening has brought disillusionment with the utopian claims of modern science and greater awareness of the inevitable presence of uncertainty, complexity, and dynamism within the social and natural worlds. Knowing this, and meeting the knowledge requirements of our time, are two different things.

Coasts are zones of transition between land and sea. Coastal fishery communities are on the margins of the world economy. Often poorer and more vulnerable than men and urban women, coastal women are particularly marginalized within their own and the wider world. From these “frontier” places and frontier experiences the role of power and place in knowledge production is more evident, as are interactions between social and environmental change. As a result, I argue, transdisciplinary, gender-informed research on coastal communities can help us see and understand social-ecological interactivity and its consequences for lives and livelihoods everywhere. While rural fishery

communities are on the environmental and economic margins of our world, their experience is a bellwether for the urban core.

Standing at the fish counter in any of our supermarkets we see row upon row of crab, salmon, lobster, shrimp, monkfish As consumers, it is hard for us to see past this abundance to the reality that most of the world's fish stocks are in serious trouble; that our oceans are emptying. Recently, an article in *Science* documented a dramatic decline in the biodiversity of catches since World War II. Reconstructions of past fish abundance have shown that in many areas, we are chasing tiny remnants of what was once in the sea.

When the oceans and the species that inhabit them become stressed, so do the people and the coastal communities supported by them. In Newfoundland and Labrador, where I come from, most of the cod stocks have barely begun to recover from the collapse of the early 1990s, despite closures and huge and prolonged quota cuts. Fish harvesters are chasing new species, further from shore,

some of which, like snow crab, may also be disappearing. Boats and the cost of fuel are growing as landings get smaller.

In that place, as in too many others, social, health and longer-term environmental impacts of over-fishing have been amplified by the effects of neoliberal globalization and related policy change. After the collapse, trade liberalization and the transfer of quotas out of the province exacerbated the loss of employment in processing plants triggered by the cod collapse. The elimination of the Fisheries Loan Board encouraged credit-starved small boat fishermen in need of new boats to fish safely further offshore, to sign away their new-found fish and crab quotas to processing companies. Our government reduced core funding for the long-term, publicly funded science that has played a key role in helping us understand the cod collapse and wider ecosystem change. The social safety net available to the seasonally unemployed was eroded and provincial government support for municipal governments was slashed, leaving coastal communities to struggle with the

combined fiscal impacts of plant closures, lower incomes and lower financial transfers.

Funding cuts to postsecondary education drove up its cost just as both parents and children suddenly needed more schooling. Parents pushed their children into universities and colleges and out of their boats and communities. Today, many of them are following their children to jobs elsewhere, leaving the elderly and the disabled left to manage what is left of their communities sometimes with the help of transfers from those working away.

Throughout our coastal communities, resource degradation and other threats to our marine and coastal ecosystems have driven down the margin for error while driving up uncertainty and the need for timely, fine-, meso- and macro-scale knowledge, fine-tuned multi-level management and greater community engagement. On the social and economic side, rapid globalization of our fisheries and tourism sectors mean development in our

coastal areas is becoming increasingly complex and dynamic, their fates subject to the influence of lengthening chains of interaction (Kooiman and Bavinck...).

What are the lessons here for the knowledge requirements of our time? Knowledge requires a 'knower'. It only exists in a social context, and often, since it has an experiential component, it exists in a place. Because it is embodied in people and in particular places and institutions, knowledge, unlike information, is surprisingly difficult to move across groups and institutions (Brown and Duguid 2000). An index of the democracy and resilience of a society is the extent to which there is a diversity of pathways to knowledge and knowledge is seen as communal property.

Knowledge may be cumulative over certain time scales but there is no guarantee that it will accumulate in the long run. Civilizations have been wiped out along with their wisdom, research gets

forgotten, legions of researchers charge off on what in the long run proves to be a dead end. Knowledge and wisdom do not accumulate and grow of their own accord. They need to be fostered and archived through the creation, maintenance, and continual recreation of institutional frameworks, pathways, and social conventions.

It is now widely accepted that there is no such thing as the “view from nowhere.” As argued by Longino, all knowledge is social in that it is “constructed through interactions among individuals” (1990: 231). All knowledge is also environmental in that it is constructed and shaped through interactions with particular environments (institutional, built and technological, bio-chemical, physical).

Historically, much energy has been invested in promoting certain knowledge forms over others: whether disciplinary rivals, paradigmatic rivals, applied versus basic research, or scientific

versus folk and indigenous peoples' knowledge. This has been wasted energy which, given our scarce resources and time, must be re-directed to learning from each other. Discipline-based knowledge production tends to mask or misinterpret processes and outcomes associated with interactive effects. Placing our focus on such effects highlights the need to move beyond the status quo within which, as argued by Visser, “[e]nvironmental change and social transformation are mostly analysed in isolation from each other, according to different epistemologies, and approached from different bodies of knowledge” (2004: 25).

Now, when so much is at stake, when problems are so large, we must “learn how to learn ” across cultural and disciplinary boundaries and imposed hierarchies that have ranked disciplines and scholarly and folk knowledge. Real abstract and practical knowledge lives in communities of scientists and elders, workers and employers, mothers and fathers, hunters and teachers,

bureaucrats and youth, as well as in schools, universities, corporations, and government.

Our coastal communities are appropriate places to take on the challenges associated with producing and exchanging transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and integrated knowledge.

If the creation of new knowledge is a kind of discovery - the space between disciplines and cultures is a rich space for exploration because, by definition, these are neglected spaces. These intellectual “wild spaces” beyond the cultivated seaweed gardens of disciplinary knowledge, where the fisher meets the benthic environment, the scholar meets the storyteller, the fishplant worker meets the doctor, the paleo-geologist meets the philosopher - are in today’s world some of the most productive places for the discovery of knowledge and cultivation of wisdom.

How do we work in these spaces when other ways of knowing seem so foreign, so incommensurable, with our own ways of

knowing? For working across disciplines, Visser advocates “a concerted interaction between the social sciences and the natural sciences [and we could add the health sciences], in which epistemological differences and conceptual incongruences become transparent in order to be overcome.” (2004: 27). Visser calls for *transdisciplinarity* rather than *multidisciplinarity* or *interdisciplinarity*. Transdisciplinarity invites us to critically examine our own disciplinary assumptions and to reveal, versus conceal, discontinuities; it aims at “boundary areas” and at discovering “cutting edge issues” and new research questions that go beyond partner disciplines.

The space between universities and communities (coastal or otherwise) is another of these boundary areas. Communities are where life is lived, where we feel comfortable and understood. We all want healthy communities in the broadest sense of that term: safe, clean, prosperous, caring communities where we feel understood and valued. Community and university are not

opposed, just different types of “communities,” and research does not start with the one and operate on the other. The two should be interwoven like an Escher painting so it is hard to tell where one starts and the other ends.

Furthermore, while we need our bounded communities, paradoxically we must also learn to operate beyond them. All the big problems transcend the boundaries of particular communities (academic or otherwise). We are inevitably part of a larger community that includes plants, animals, and the aquatic, terrestrial, or celestial environments in which we and they live. To thrive we must understand how our community is linked to all the others, including their past and their future.

Feminist researchers have been doing collaborative, interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary research for a long time. In their work from the gendered margins they have a lot to tell us about how the world works, about knowledge production, and

particularly about the role of power and diversity in influencing what happens and what we think is possible. Let's look, for example, at feminist work on globalization and fisheries.

Fisheries are one of the most globalized sectors of the world economy. The effects of globalization can be seen in the growing proportion of total fish production traded on the international market, the growing control exercised by a small number of transnational corporations over global fish stocks, and the increasing internationalization of fish processing labour forces.

Fisheries are increasingly dominated by production for sale versus subsistence turning rural, coastal areas, particularly in the South, into "food deserts" as fish migrate from the South to the North in the global fish trade.

In most parts of the world, responsibility for finding, preparing and serving food falls to women. In this, and in many other ways,

globalization is gendered and mediates gender relations. Like coastal men, coastal women contribute directly to fisheries as workers, organizers and managers, in fishing-based households, markets, credit systems, industries and communities. They have fishery knowledge and skills, and they depend on fish resources and industries for their livelihoods and, to some extent, for food self-sufficiency.

However, coastal women's access to fisheries resources and the wealth they generate continues to be largely mediated through their relationships with men—fishermen, husbands and sons, male-dominated governments and male-dominated science, universities and industry. Increasingly, major state-initiated management programs and corporate control are further limiting women's direct access to fisheries and fisheries wealth adding to their vulnerability and poverty.

Approaching the globalization of fisheries with a gender focus can, Broadhead tells us, help us tear away the “flimsy veil” of simplistic and circular reasoning that mystifies globalization, implying that it is inevitable and beyond our control (2002: 179). A gender focus also directs our attention to those people and creatures that frequently bear the brunt of its effects, challenging claims that globalization is producing higher standards for environmental protection, improved incomes or better protection of human rights (Broadhead 2002).

Perkins (2002) uses insights from feminist research to explore two key vulnerabilities associated with globalization. These vulnerabilities include a “cooperation deficit” and a “resilience deficit.” She argues that increasing integration brings with it increasing complexity. As the operations of global capitalism become more complex, the need for interpersonal cooperation and the risks associated with non-cooperative behaviour escalate because cooperation can “reduce wasted time, effort, energy, [and]

materials” and allow us to take advantage of the personal fulfillment that comes from working together. However, people need to be socialized from a young age in cooperation and conflict resolution. Much of this socialization work is the responsibility of women through social institutions like family meals, daycares, schools and communities. Too often this socialization capacity is being eroded by globalization in its current form.

Resilience, she tells us, is “the system’s ability ‘to land on its feet’ in the event of an unpredicted crisis or catastrophe” (2002: 185).

Resilience is undermined through the erosion of diversity and through increasing specialization, which make us more dependent on others who are often very far away. As a result, as economic and ecological collapses occur (local, regional and global), we not only lack access to key services, but have also lost many of the skills, networks and means we need to generate substitutes.

In its current form, globalization is fundamentally about power shifts and the consolidation of control. It includes technological and other processes that are increasing the capacity of corporations to move investments and work quickly around the world, avoiding taxes and regulations (Armstrong and Armstrong 2002) and shaping our understanding of what is happening.

When fish and fisheries move rapidly from place to place as is encouraged by globalization, science tends to follow them around, recording rather than preventing their demise. Similarly, too often fisheries take with them occupational illnesses and injuries that we are only starting to understand before they depart. Ironically, because the value of fish in the market place is affected by freshness, standardization of size, supply and quality, but rarely by the impact of its production on the health of the workers or of the environment, global regulations for food quality and packaging are stronger than those to protect occupational and environmental

health. The Chilean salmon aquaculture industry takes better care of the fish than of the health of its workers.

Globalization is commodifying more and more of the things and relationships in our lives. Commodification invites us to treat fish as an object. Paraphrasing McMahon, in reality:

A fish isn't just a fish, it carries in it, and into us when we eat it, a host of social relationships such as those with the people who grow, harvest, or trade the fish and also with Nature, not in the abstract but with particular nonhuman others, things, and individual places. When we partake in food, we consume relationships. (2002: 204).

Thus, when we consume food that leaves others (current and future) hungry, we are socially if not individually complicit. Kutz tells us that *social complicity* refers to situations where “regrettable things [are] brought about by our association with other people or

with the social, economic and political institutions in which we live our lives and make our living” -- (Kutz 2000: 1).

Lest we forget, food is a necessity of life that, Madeley notes,

... meets many kinds of human needs—cultural, psychological and social among them. It is *the* social good ... Lack of food is the ultimate exclusion. When people don't have food they are excluded from what the rest of society is doing regularly—eating. It is a human right, totally different from any other commodity.... (Madeley 2000: 25)

But we must take care not to become preoccupied with social complicity. One of the features of this globalizing world is that its emphasis on protecting individual rights leads to a fear of liability breeding distrust and paralysis when we need to take responsibility and act collectively. Commodification and corporatization of more

and more aspects of our lives are encouraging this trend. If the commodification of fish threatens the fundamental fabric of the lives of many and of our oceans, the increasingly pervasive commodification of knowledge is even more threatening. It turns us from lifelong mentors and students with a responsibility for future generations into salesmen and consumers whose contract with the future ends when we pay our tuition or pick up our pay cheques. This is not the road to planetary recovery.

If we can create institutions that threaten our environment, erode our willingness to work together, hamper social justice and equality and that block or impoverish the production and exchange of knowledge, surely we can build others that foster these things. We can build institutions that promote dialogue and awareness of uncertainty and complexity without promoting paralysis.

As for the planet as a whole, the only reasonable option for our oceans and for our coastal communities is to collectively embrace our responsibility to rebuild and protect.

The other night I attended a panel discussion on the past, present and future of the University of Tromsø. I learned that when it was founded, the University had a responsibility to do work that was regionally relevant and that researchers worked with women and men in local communities to build and not simply capture local culture. I learned that, in the beginning, research was often interdisciplinary and it was only later that disciplinary boundaries became firm and entrenched. I learned more about something I had noticed before - that for students and scholars at this university, international work is part of their mandate for regional relevance because there is or was (?) a fundamental commitment to solidarity and equity in the local culture.

The people of North Norway know better than most what it takes to endure and then to rebuild in the wake of destruction; this knowledge is a resource of global relevance as we collectively struggle to see and understand the destructive forces in our world (Sauper, Darwin's Nightmare) and move it back from the precipice of social-ecological collapse.

Coastal people want to do more than sustain the current misery, they want and need to conserve and enhance, but they also have to live. They are some of the obvious stewards for our recovering oceans but they cannot be those stewards if they and their families are migrant workers living in camps and oil "boom towns" 4,000 miles away. If they must sacrifice and invest, they need to know, as much as anyone can, that theirs and our children and children's children will benefit. If we can find a way to restore our oceans and our coastal communities where these are threatened, we'll have a model for the planet. If we do nothing, we will all pay the price.