

FISHING WITH “OUTSIDERS”: VILLAGER–MIGRANT RELATIONS ON NORTHERN LAKE MALAWI

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Small-scale fishers on Lake Malawi operate in units called “*kampani*.” Named after the English word “company,” this type of unit has become popular in the area within the last 50 years. A *kampani* consists of the fishing gear owner and several fishers who take part in the actual fishing. After operating for a fixed period of time, the catch is distributed at prearranged rates, regardless of the unit members’ kinship relations to the gear owner. The gear owner takes the bulk of the share and provides all the necessary fishing materials.

Scholars have associated these *kampani* features with the individualization of gear ownership and decision making, treating them as evidence of the commercialization and modernization of small-scale fisheries. In such studies, the introduction of a *kampani* has been presented as a one-sided process in which migrants, intruding with new and efficient techniques and market-oriented organizations, have competitively excluded villagers fishing with indigenous methods and kinship-based organization.

This paper describes the technical and organizational transformation that occurred in a village north of Nkhata Bay during the period from the late 1970s to the present, a period straddling the introduction of *kampani*. Contrary to the findings of previous studies, this transformation process developed by means of negotiations relating to the incorporation of migrants into the village fishery. The villagers, who have been treated in previous reports as passive receptors of new technology and forms of organization, were, in fact, active agents in the transformation. Furthermore, technical innovations included the recombination of pre-existing methods known to the villagers. The organization retained its kinship-based structure and former patterns related to the usage of fishing grounds. In short, the concept of *kampani* was introduced to enable villagers to collaborate with migrants and to share the catch while retaining their methods and fishing organization.

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