

WHOSE LAKE? WHOSE CREATIVE ENERGY? RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ATTRIBUTION OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN FISHERY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF VALUE IN RURAL MALAWI

NAKAYAMA Setsuko

Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan

E-mail: nakayama@jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp

This paper examines daily catch sharing practices among fishermen on Lake Malawi and their role in the construction of value. According to previous studies, small-scale fisheries on Lake Malawi had been commercialized by the 1960s, with the introduction of fishing units based on wage labor, between gear owners as employers and fishermen as laborers. This new system of organization is said to have replaced previous regimes of value, in which fishing was a communal activity based on kinship, and the catch was shared extensively among kin before being directed to sale. However, in the research area of Nkhata Bay, catch sharing is still widely practiced, as fishermen set aside a significant portion of their catch to share outside their unit, apart from that which is set aside for household consumption or sale.

Among the lakeside Tonga, fishing involves not only actually targeting and catching fish with the deployment of gear, but also the extensive usage of herbs and charms, or magic, as production technology. This is believed to allow various agents, in addition to fishermen and the owners of gear and craft, to intervene in the process. Such agents may range from the fisherman's kin, peers, and neighbors, to the herbalists, spirits of the deceased, and even those unknown. The attribution of success or failure in fishing to certain agents affects the allocation of wealth extracted from the lake. In this paper, I analyze catch sharing events as a series of public evaluations of the creative energy exerted in the fishing process by each agent.

Through the distribution of the catch, agents are recognized for their involvement in the process. For participants and observers, these transactions reflect the recipients' potential influence over the fishery, and could also affect future distributions to the agent, regardless of whether ascribed actions actually took place. The attribution of the outcome in fishing thus becomes a reflexive process, raising the importance of certain actions and agents at the expense of others. Collectively, recipients represent the range of agents with the power to affect the fishery. However, this collectivity is constantly challenged from within and without, resulting in continuous fluctuation of the range of catch sharing. This means that value, as the importance attributed to various agents' actions or influence in the fishery, is constantly reconstructed through the allocation of each catch.

Keywords: Fishermen, Food sharing, Imaginary totality, Lake Malawi, *Usipa (Engraulicypris sardella)*