Women's belongings in UK fisheries

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Abstract

Research on gender in fisheries often argue that women's contributions are important to the functioning of fisheries and are worthy of recognition. However, this has so far failed to consider how women experience and practice belonging to fisheries. This paper structures the analysis of women's narratives around three conceptualisations of belonging: i) how women perform place-belongingness; ii) the politics of belonging; and iii) more-than-human co-constructions of belongings. To develop the conceptual approach, the paper synthesises these three concepts with an understanding of belonging as fluid and adaptable to particular situated relationships. In doing do, the paper explores how women's gendered belongings are co-constructed and performed in the male-oriented UK fisheries contexts. Drawing on in-depth qualitative interviews, the paper finds that women's practices of belonging make and maintain fishing communities and places, and that women's practices of belonging both confirm and challenge longstanding notions of who belongs in the fishery – with women fishers challenging socio-spatial exclusions in fishing. Women's belongings in fishing were further co-constructed in relation to the more-than-human such as fishing materialities, smells, non-human animals and the ocean. The concept of belonging helps to highlight the processes of becoming with fish, fishing and the fishery – even when there are no clear identities and identifications available for the women involved.

Keywords

belonging; women; fishing place; fishing community; more-than-human; gender

1   Introduction

> '[Belonging] is imbued with powerful (but contested) sexist, racist and exclusionary logics at the same time as it is used to generate inclusive ways of being in the world' (Wright, 2015, p. 93).

The number of studies on women's roles and positions within fisheries has been increasing globally. These studies often highlight that although women's contribution to fisheries are significant, they and their work remains undervalued and unseen (e.g. Zhao et al., 2013). Nevertheless, more and more research highlights the very active and important roles women undertake in fishing families and communities (Harper et al., 2020)– often underpinning the industry's existence in multifarious ways (e.g. Lavoie et al., 2019). Whilst studies have recognised that women's contributions to the industry often do not lead to formal roles or recognition in what is often seen as a male-dominated world (Frangoudes and Gerrard, 2018), there has been little scholarly attention as to how women view their own positions in relation to fisheries (see Gustavsson, 2020) and, by extension, as to how women practice belonging to fisheries.

Building on the important work to date around 'women in fisheries', the paper aims to examine how women come to belong (or not) to fisheries and what co-constitutes women's belongings in the industry in varying ways – focusing on the UK fisheries context. In doing so, the current research draws together three conceptualisations of belonging in structuring the paper: i) place-belongingness (e.g. Antonsich, 2010); ii) politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and iii) a weak theory approach to more-than-human emergent belongings (Wright, 2015). These three concepts are synthesised with an understanding of belong as fluid and contextualised in situated relationships (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016).

Of particular importance to this paper is the focus on women's own experiences and practices of belonging to the fishery in different ways – be that as part of a fishing family, a fishing community or working as a fisher onboard a fishing vessel. The paper attends to how women's belongings are co-constructed in relation to more-than-human worlds of fishing – such as in relations to the ocean, non-human animals, fishing places and materialities. In doing so, the paper pushes the field of 'women in fisheries' further in recognising how women's belongings

are co-constructed in relation to both human and more-than-human actors, beings and materialities of fishing. The study draws on a gender perspective in investigating how women's belongings are placed within a particularly gendered context – that being the UK fishing industry which is arguably male-oriented. By male-oriented here I mean that fishing policies centre around fishing activities at sea– which in the UK context remain a male dominated and masculine space (Gustavsson and Riley, 2020) – and are 'gender blind' (Neis, Gerrard and Power, 2013) in their design. The UK fishing industry is a particularly timely case to study because the ongoing reformulations of fishing policies, in response to leaving the European Union, presents challenges and opportunities around re-defining who belongs (or not) to fishing.

By analysing women's biographical narratives through the current conceptual approach, the study illustrates the significance of the concept of belonging – in particular when there are no clear identities unifying a specific group. After conceptualising belonging and outlining the methodological approach, the paper moves on to discuss the findings of the research.

2   Conceptualising belonging

Whilst belonging is often used in everyday language to describe everyday experiences, the conceptual significance of belonging has been debated (Mee and Wright, 2009). Several authors have sought to conceptualise belonging – with Yuval-Davis (2004, p. 215) arguing that belonging is more than just about membership, identities or identifications as '[b]elonging is a deep emotional need of people'. Antonsich (2010, pp. 644) suggests that belonging: 'should be analyzed both as a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion∕exclusion (politics of belonging).' Echoing these ideas, Halse (2018) argues there is an infinite number of ways in which an individual can belong to a space, place or social group. Nevertheless, in everyday life, Halse (2018, pp. 6–7) argues, 'belonging tends to be naturalised, unspoken and unrecognised'. She suggests that these belongings become noticed and a matter of politics only when these naturalised belongings are scrutinised or threatened.

These two ways of conceptualising belonging – as 'place-belongingness' and as a 'politics of belonging', however, downplays how belonging is essentially relational (Poe et al., 2014) and a process of becoming rather than something that is. Halse (2018, p. 4) argues that belonging is always relational as it is an 'active social process of everyday life' echoing Wright (2015, p. 393) who suggests that belonging:

> 'is not just made up of things – it also makes things, humans and communities and places. […] these are entities that come together in relational ways, that define and configure what it means to belong (and not belong) as they define and configure themselves. Things (or people and places) do not pre-exist, in static ways – their belongings are made through their coming together'.

As such Wright (2015, p. 393) suggests 'belonging may seem as an act of becoming'. Wright (2015, 399) argues it is possible to pay attention to how emotion and affect 'can work to create both inclusive and exclusive belongings'. To attend to belonging, through this perspective, means focusing on everyday experiences and practices in the way belonging is performed. Viewing belonging as relational and as social process allows us to understand how '[t]hese same processes of belonging can lead to the formation of new social solidarities and social fields of interaction that can open up possibilities for social change' (Halse, 2018, p. 5). Drawing on this perspective in examining how women in fishing practice and perform belonging allows us to understand the process in which women come to belong – beyond simply understanding how these processes can entrench 'differences and inequalities between social groups' (Halse, 2018, p. 5).

By synthesising together these diverse conceptual insights, I bring forward three conceptual foci of belonging in structuring the analysis of women's narratives: i) 'feeling at home' and place-belongingness (e.g. Antonsich, 2010); ii) the politics of belonging and becoming in fishing (Yuval-Davis, 2006); and iii) more-than-human belongings (Wright, 2015). Yet, in examining women's narratives the differences between identity and belonging becomes highlighted. To foreground these aspects I also draw on Lähdesmäki et al.'s (2016, p. 241) distinction between the concept of identity and belonging as 'people may feel they belong to something without necessarily describing this feeling as an identification of identity'. Extending this argument, the same authors suggest the strength of the concept lies in its

flexibility and adaptability and warrants against a static definition of belonging. They argue that belonging:

> 'comprises of situational relationships with other people and social and cultural practices stemming from these relationships, which are fundamentally political and include emotional and/or affective orientations. Belonging is best understood as an entanglement of multiple and intersecting, affective and material, spatially experienced and socio-politically conditioned relations that are context-specific and thus require contextualised definitions' (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, p. 242).

As such, the meaning of belonging is always situated in contextualised relationships. This has implications for the methodological choices with qualitative in-depth methods being well suited to accommodate this flexibility and situatedness. Bringing together Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) notion of the fluidity and situatedness of belonging with the three conceptualisations of belonging highlighted above, the current paper examines situated, relational, more-than-human, emotional, socio-spatial and political practices of belonging in the analysis of women's narratives in UK fisheries. After discussing the methodological focus, the paper moves on to discussing the research findings and conclusions.

3   Methodological approach

This study is part of a research project looking at women's lives in fishing enterprises and families in the UK. The paper is based on in-depth qualitative narrative interviews with 24 women in fisheries in England, Wales and Scotland conducted throughout 2019. Participants included women who work with fish – either by capturing (2), processing, selling or marketing fish (13), working in fisheries organisations (2) – or women who are part of fishing families but did not necessarily work with fish (7). Some, but not all, of the women who worked with fish were also part of fishing families or partnered with a male fisher. The women that I spoke to had varying and intersection positions in relation to the fishery and their families and reporting on the unique specificities of individual women could reveal their identity. To preserve women's anonymity pseudonyms are also used throughout this paper. Participants were identified through advertising on social media, through engaging in different fisheries networks, and through 'cold calling' potential participants that had been flagged as relevant in conversations with other researchers and fisheries contacts. I sought to interview all women

that expressed an interest in participating in the study and were part of the UK fishing industry. I also deployed chain referral sampling to identify further participants. The age of participants ranges from early 20s to retirement age and most women are associated with the small-scale fishery (that is boats under 10m in size) and most of them had someone in their family who fished for whitefish and/or shellfish (most often male partners but in some cases also fathers). My interviews with women in the UK fishing industry were most often individual interviews although occasionally they were joint interviews with mothers and daughters or mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. On one occasion a son of a participant intercepted the interview, and I chose to embrace such interruptions rather than to challenge them. The interviews involved visiting participants in a place of their choosing – often in their homes or their place of work. Interviews lasted from 40 min – 2 hours. The face-to-face narrative interviews centred around understanding the lived experiences of women in fisheries and focused on women's biographical narratives around what it meant to them to be part of a fishing family, or to be working in the fishery, and how this had evolved over time. I began the interview by asking participant to tell me about their experiences of being part of a fishing family or working in the fishery and, subsequently, I followed up on any emerging themes in their narratives. Following transcribing the recorded interviews, an inductive thematic analysis was undertaken through which the themes around belonging to fisheries discussed below emerged.

4   Practices of belonging in women's narratives

4.1   *Place belongingness*

A useful place to begin an examination of women's belongings in fisheries is through examining their attachment to particular social groups and places – that being fishing communities and fishing places. Women's narratives revealed many aspects of what Antonsich (2010) called 'feeling at home' or 'place-belongingness' in fishing. The perhaps most overt expression of this revolved around being part of an intergenerational fishing family. Women from familial fishing contexts drew on their generational lineage in highlighting how they belonged to the fishery:

> From a family perspective as well, just because it's been generations, and generations, and generations, and it's been in the same place, you just have a tie to it […] It's not about losing your job and your livelihood necessarily. It's about a legacy, because your

family has been doing it for generations, and you want it there for the next generation (interview *Rachel* –business owner and family member).

Women's narratives revealed a deep emotional connection to the industry and its sustenance over time – an intergenerational process which shaped who they were, the kind of place they were from, and how they belonged to place. Here we also see that fishing places are what Bennett (2014) refers to as an 'inalienable gift' – that is, a place where community members have a 'moral duty to nurture' the place and pass it on to succeeding generations. Not doing so, as revealed by interviews, was narrated as a loss of 'legacy' associated with grief and sadness. Whilst scholars have raised concerns around whether it is still possible to 'pass on' such places, as parents have been seen to discourage children from becoming fishers due to for example its hard lifestyle (White, 2015), *Rachel's* extract highlights how these intergenerational continuities and belongings are ongoing emotional processes. My findings reveal that women in fishing families still, to date, draw on both past lived experiences and predecessors and an imagined future to practice a 'naturalised' sense of belonging which shape how they care for place in the present. Fishing places, as such, have meaning to these women beyond the economy and the professional identities that it sustains.

The patrilineal transfer (Neis, Gerrard and Power, 2013) of fishing knowledge and ownership, however, means that many women in fishing do not necessarily come from a fishing family – many are also partnered or married into a fishing family – be that being born into the local community or not (Gustavsson and Riley, 2018). In my research, women who were partnered into fishing often expressed a sense of feeling at home in fishing places and communities, and a desire to be part of it all:

> I wouldn't want any other life. I have worked a lot of different jobs, but it always comes back here. I can't help it. I will go and help [my daughter] out in the [fish] shop. I don't want no money for doing it, I just have to be there and be part of it (interview *Patricia* – seller and family member).

> Because the boat costs a lot to run and sometimes they don't earn that amount to run it, so I subsidise that really. It's really nice, born and bred down here, the atmosphere is second to none really (interview *Sandra* – seller and family member).

The extracts above are just two of many that reveal how women developed a sense of belonging through working in the fishing community. As highlighted in the interview with *Sandra*, even when women do have an income it sometimes goes to 'subsidise the boat' which work towards maintaining – in an economic as well as a social sense – the family business and the community and the 'naturalised' sense of belonging and 'feeling of home' in fishing places which this implies. *Patricia's* narrative highlights that working with fish – in the community – was preferred to other jobs which she had done in the past (e.g. working in a supermarket), as it allowed her to be close to her family and to be 'part of' the community on an everyday basis. Therefore, working with fish had meaning beyond the economic value it generated. Important here is that 'feeling at home' and to practice a belonging to place was a strong motivation for some women to organise their work lives around fishing. Therefore it could be argued that, within the gendered socio-spatial context of fisheries, women's (and men's) emotional attachment to the community as a place to 'feel at home' and to belong shaped their everyday practices and contributed to *making* fishing places (cf Wright, 2015) and to maintaining the community over time.

Important to this discussion is that the women in fishing families I spoke to often engaged in work which did not challenge localised gender norms. Authors (e.g. Zhao et al 2013) has suggested that such 'supportive work' has been 'invisible' and 'unrecognised' within fishing policy. Yet, drawing on Gustavsson (2020), I would argue that even if women's agency was constrained within this gendered fisheries context, women still exerted (constrained) agency in their everyday lives through their practices of belonging. That is, by practicing belonging within the boundaries of what is locally considered gender 'appropriate' they were included and had access to a 'naturalised' sense of belonging to place and to community. In the next section I will discuss situations women traditionally have been excluded from and how they challenge notions of socio-spatial gendered exclusions through their practices of belonging.

4.2 Politics of belonging and becoming in fishing

As part of the research I spoke at length to two women who fish commercially at sea. The number of women fishers in the UK is generally considered to be low, although no formal survey is currently undertaken, and the low number of participants in the current research is arguably reflective of this wider demography. Nevertheless, paying attention to women fishers'

specific experiences of belonging highlights particular notions of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion in fishing. Here I draw on the insights that belonging goes beyond a naturalised notion of 'feeling at home', as it is equally about feeling recognised and understood (Ignatieff, 1994).

The first theme stressed in interviews with women fishers was how they particularly enjoyed the practice of fishing:

> All I know is that I'm so happy now, I don't want that to ever change. I know it sounds silly, I am so stuck in this little fishing bubble that I am in. I have a job where I am genuinely excited to get up and go to work (interview *Gemma* – fisher).

As highlighted in *Gemma's* interview extract, women who worked as fishers put more emphasis on enjoying the nature of the job than women who were part of fishing families and communities more widely. Doing fishing practices, as such, were arguably a practice of belonging – to the 'fishing bubble' – for these women. Yet, the narratives of women who fish differed to those of other women in fishing families – and belonging and 'longing' (see Probyn, 1996) to belong was a central theme to their experience of fishing:

> [When I moved here] I really didn't feel like I fitted in at all. I am in such a better place now after doing that job [fishing] because of the confidence that I have gained in that community. Because it is so revered, the fishing community here, that has made a big difference to how I feel on a daily basis. I feel much more a part of it. It can upset you if every day you are feeling not worthy of the community you are living in on a daily basis. I don't feel like that now (interview *Fiona* – fisher).

As the extract above reveals, working as a fisher contributed to developing a sense of belonging in the community – that is, fishing was a way to practice belonging. In particular so because the practice of fishing was symbolically valued beyond the group of fishers in this particular place. The same participant, however, had a very different experience to her largely positive account in the extract above, which was taken from the first interview with her, after applying to join the local fisheries organisation. After not having her application processed and after receiving discriminatory comments from a few male members on the organisation's board, as revealed in a follow-up interview, she eventually got her application approved. This approval did not, however, happen before actively getting the local press to cover the story that she was

the first 'female fisherman' in the organisation, essentially drawing in wider society to support her cause. These stories reveal how women mobilise their agency in engaging an active politics of belonging by resisting longstanding gendered socio-spatial exclusions and discourses around who belong and who does not belong in fishing. This further reveal that whilst women can work as fishers – and practice an everyday belonging in this space – achieving recognition (cf Ignatieff, 1994) on equal terms as male fishers by becoming members of the local fishery organisation was more difficult.

Important in this context is the emotional distress which sexist comments, treatment and bullying resulted in for women fishers:

> [Fishing] is so hard, physically, that if you are then emotionally feeling bullied or just not accepted or there are people talking about you behind your back – because they do that all the time too – the average person just wouldn't want to go through all that hassle. I don't know any other woman who would put up with that (interview *Fiona* - fisher).

As the interview extract above reveals, the struggle for belonging by resisting socio-spatial gendered exclusions can be an emotional process. The distinction between the private and the public is important here as whilst engaging a politics of belonging led to structural (and public) change, through her becoming a member of the local fisheries organisation, it did also lead to an increased private sense of being out of place with *Fiona* stressing was not accepted in the community of fishers. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016, p.239) suggest that any conceptualisation of belonging has to 'overcome the traditional distinction between belonging as either a psychological or political process' and women fishers narratives illustrate the importance of this as their practices of belongings were, at the same time, emotional and political experiences. This suggests that one cannot attend to the politics of belonging without considering the emotional and affective motivations for engaging this politics as well as the emotional impacts resulting from this process as these – together – inform individuals overall sense of belonging in a particular context.

Interrelated to the discussion above, my interviews revealed that women fishers struggle to know what to call themselves. With 'fisherman' being the everyday job title for those who fish, this gendered word may not sit so well with women fishers:

I had no idea what to call myself. I was in touch with a very old fisherman and he said to me, 'It is difficult because if you call yourself a fisherwoman you are taking away the fantastic job that the fisherwomen used to do historically. The fisherwomen would do all sorts of jobs. They just didn't go to sea. That is what I find a bit disrespectful to fisherwoman, but I think I would be inclined to call you a fisherman.' I said, 'Why is that? I'm not a man.' He said, 'Because if you are at the back working the rails alongside me, you deserve to be called a fisherman.' I was like, fair enough. I actually don't care. I am not bothered about the labels behind it so much. I fish. I really don't care (interview *Fiona* – fisher).

Carving out a name for herself – a job title, 'label' or an identity – is historically layered with 'fisherwomen' already used to identify those women who worked with fish in Scotland in the past (see Nadel-Klein, 2000). This is illustrative of Bell's (2019) discussion around how belongings are situated in histories of place. Yet, the extract above is also revealing of Lähdesmäki et al.'s (2016) suggestion that belonging is important beyond the idea of identity. The extract highlights that it is not important to *Fiona* what she calls herself – instead, as revealed in other parts of her interview belonging to place, to community and (as will be discussed below) the more-than-human world of fishing was significant and a deeply emotional process which took precedence over what she called herself. As such, it is suggested that belonging is a more significant – and situated – concept in making sense of the lives of women who fish than identity as it is, first, revealing of the multiple politics at play and, second, it pays attention to the (emotional) process by which women come to belong – allowing us to go beyond highlighting women's exclusions to understand processes of becoming.

4.3   *More-than-human belongings*

The narratives I gathered through my interviews with women in fishing revealed that women's belongings were also constructed relationally to the more-than-human worlds of fishing and fishing places. Interviews particularly revealed that the materialities of fishing were important in co-constructing women's sense of belonging – with boats taking on a deeply felt emotional connection – described in the extract below as part of a 'family':

We had a wooden boat which I loved. It burnt down. It was really tragic. I was heartbroken. I was over there sobbing as it was burning. And so was my dad. Because that boat was part of my family [laughter]. I know it's a bonkers thing to say, but my

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nan, she's always had an involvement in the business, she funded them buying boats and stuff like that, and she was upset, and she said it was because that boat was what made them the money to start their business. She said that boat was what kept them safe every day. And that boat was what provided them with food, and a house. And it was more symbolic, I guess. When it was burning, it was like someone in our family dying (interview *Rachel* –business owner and family member).

As stressed in the quote above, the boat – being a symbol of past fishing lineage and success– provided safety for the male fishers at sea which meant that family members too had to trust the boat's reliability. Indeed *Rachel* explained how her grandmother used to fund the purchase of boats, highlighting how women have, for generations, actively helped to ensure the safety of men at sea through investing in safer fishing equipment and practices. The boat, according to *Rachel,* is symbolic of this act of care exercised by women onshore and the presence of this cultural heritage had the potential to arose powerful emotions which co-construct a sense of intergenerational belonging to fishing and fishing places.

Interviews revealed that boats were not only symbolic to women in fishing– boats, too, provided a material context through which families and children could play and have fun. In the following extract the participants discuss a photograph which one of them showed in the context of the interview:

> *Son*: That's all my mates that went out. We took all my mates out.
>
> Mother *Amanda*: And we had a barbecue on the boat.
>
> Interviewer: That must have been a fun day.
>
> Mother in-law *Margaret*: Yes. They just jumped off the boat. It does have the plus signs.
>
> Mother *Amanda*: So we get some really good family time, not a lot of it but when it is it's precious (interview with *Amanda*, *Margaret* and *Son* – family members).

As the interview extract above highlights, boats enabled families to spend 'precious' family time together. Whilst male fishers often are portrayed as absent fathers – 'the boat will always come first' (*Sarah*) – the boat provided a space for deep connection and family time (*Amanda*). Bringing all your 'mates' out to sea for a day of swimming, barbecuing and playing was highly valued by the son of the fishing family I spoke to. What is important here however is the memories that are created through these practices – which encourage children (boys and girls)

to develop a sense of belonging to fishing through using and interacting with the materialities of fishing. Supporting this analysis, participants often spoke fondly of childhood memories associated with growing up in a fishing family:

> Mother *Deborah:* Yes. They were in bed. He came in with a load of sprats so we cooked them up.
>
> Daughter *Amy*: It was midnight, wasn't it?
>
> Mother *Deborah*: Yes, it was late.
>
> Daughter *Amy*: We had sprats in bed (interview *Deborah* and *Amy* – sellers and family members).

The extract above is taken from an interview with a mother and daughter in a fishing family. In the interview they were fondly sharing memories of positive experiences from the daughter's childhood. The extract is discussing a moment in time when the children were woken up to eat fish (sprats) in bed – which the daughter, who is now in her mid 20s, remembers as very exciting. This story, and others like it, highlights the importance of memories (see Fenster, 2007) in constructing women's (and men's) belongings in fishing. Fishing memories developed over the lifecourse of family members and their predecessors– often associated with the material context of fishing, such as going to sea – co-constructed a sense of belonging to fishing. This, again, echoes Bennett (2014, p. 669) who found that '[l]ooking back does not have to be seen as nostalgia but can confirm identities and belonging in the present'.

Further stressed by the extract above, and frequently discussed in interviews, was the specific culinary way of life which fishing enabled, with fish being easily accessible to fishing households:

> Then also there's great joy in a fish supper or something like that. And sharing fish and bringing fish home and having that as a family. You cook it, you clean it, you eat it (interview *Sarah* – family member).

Eating, cooking and enjoying fish was, as revealed above, an emotional experience. Having the skill to prepare your own meal was often discussed as something which had been handed down through generations – which developed an intergenerational sense of belonging in relation to predecessors (cf Bennett, 2014). Preparing seafood was a way in which the women spoken to were practicing belonging. Eating fish, however, went beyond the emotional, to also

provide essential healthy food during the times of financial hardship frequently experienced by many fishing families:

> We do have a good life. As [my husband] says, [laughs] we live like kings, we're as poor as mice [laughter], meaning we have fish, we have good fish to eat and everything, we've always got nice things to eat, quite often things that you would pay fortunes for, we'll have lobster or crabs and things like that, which obviously are very expensive to other people. So we have a good life (interview *Julie* - family member).

Having access to fish, as highlighted by *Julie*, had practical importance in terms of nutrition and health. It was further symbolic in much broader ways – having access to fish was a symbol of food security, self-sufficiency and resilience as well as 'the good life' of fishing families. Access to fish as food was central in co-constructing a sense of belonging to fishing for many women I spoke to.

Women's narratives revealed how multi-sensorial experiences such as smell was a central theme in constructing women's belonging to fishing:

> Daughter *Amy*: I would drive with my windows down just for the smell of the sea air.
>
> Mother *Deborah*: When she goes out there [at sea] she used to say 'I love the smell of these pots'. She says, 'There's something wrong with me, isn't there mum? I love the smell of them!'
>
> Daughter *Amy*: But my sister is the same. My sister likes the smell of them as well. It is something that takes you back to being a child, like going out on the boat and that smell of the pots as they are being hauled or if they have been stored and you are going onto the quay. You think, I can smell them. It is a flashback (interview *Deborah* and *Amy* – sellers and family member).

As previous research has argued, the smell of fishing – together with the dirty and hard work, often served to construct fishing as a masculine space (e.g. Gustavsson and Riley 2020). Yet the interviews here revealed another nuance to this through women's experiences of smell in fishing. The smell-scape of fishing – being specific to the smell of fish, fishing equipment and the sea co-constructed a sense of belonging to fishing which was associated with fathers, fishing and childhood memories. The smells become symbolic of the times spent with their

father at sea – or, as highlighted in the extract below, fathers' fishing successes and homecoming:

> I came back with a thumping head, feeling really ill and the smell of diesel and fish and everything. Although now I find it a very comforting smell it just made me really appreciate everything that my dad had worked for (interview *Sarah* – family member)

> When dad has been at sea we always know. You can smell his clothes when he comes in! It stank, but you always enjoy that (interview Daughter *Amy* and Mother *Deborah* – seller and family member).

In the first extract, *Sarah* describes how she did not enjoy going to sea but that the smell of fishing, particular the smell of diesel and fish, still this day provided a sense of comfort. She went on to discuss how her current partner, also a male fisher, smelt of diesel as he came back from sea and how this smell contributed to her wellbeing. In the second extract, *Amy* accounts for how the smell of fish was symbolic of her father's return from sea. Britton (2012), in her work on women's wellbeing in the Northern Irish fishing families, found that 'homecoming' was a moment when women experienced a strong sense of wellbeing. Britton's (2012) findings are significant here, as the current research revealed that the smells of fishing (fish, fishing equipment and diesel) become symbolic of these moments. As such, smells take on symbolic value of belonging to fishing, and the emotional hardships that come with waiting onshore for, in particular, fathers to return safe from sea and is active in co-constructing women's belongings in fishing.

Women's narratives further highlighted how their belonging to fishing was co-constructed in relation to the presence of living non-human animals and the ocean:

> Once he [the skipper] is in [harbour], he wants everything to be done really quick and get out of there, but I have got my own little routine. I like to feed the seals my whitefish. I will whip out some razor clams for my favourite duck that I have called Little Wing (interview *Fiona* - fisher).

> I'm happiest down the quay so, for me, I love being involved with the fishing industry. I love beach cleans; I want to clean up the oceans. I love swimming in the oceans, I love going out and all the rest of it. So it's natural for me to be part of it (interview *Sarah* - family member).

As revealed in the interview extracts above, women's belongings were also constructed in relation to non-human animals – such as seals, ducks and seagulls – as well as to the ocean. Whilst these more-than-human relations may not be specific to women, interviews reveal that these relations and overt performances of these emotional attachments may sit easier with women's gender identities than those of men. Here we observe how gender performances and 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) becomes central to how practices of belonging are public practices, as opposed to private practices, and how this sometimes differ between men and women. Nevertheless, just like women's performances of belonging may be locally socially accepted in relation to animals, the spaces in which they can perform a 'naturalised' sense of belonging – without engaging a politics of belonging through challenging socio-spatial notions of inclusion and exclusion (Antonsich, 2010)– are also limited. As previous research has revealed, there is a lack of 'symbols for femininity' onboard fishing vessels (Munk-Madsen, 2000) and echoing this thinking I observe there are particular fishing spaces which are considered more appropriate for women – such as beach clean ups, mental health projects and sustainability initiatives, where women in UK fisheries can practice their belonging to fishing in more undisputed ways.

5   Conclusion

The paper has highlighted how women maintain, make and re-make fishing communities and places through practices of belonging to fisheries. Women's place-belongings are essentially tied to the past and predecessors living in these places as much as they are associated with a 'moral duty to care' (Bennett, 2014) for future generations in these places. Using the concept of belonging has allowed for an examination of process – that is, how women come to belong (or not), and the structures of power which shape this process in various ways. Drawing on this perspective, the paper identified how women fishers engaged a gendered politics of belonging in fishing by resisting socio-spatial exclusions. These processes of resistance, however, were both emotional and political processes that took place at the individual and structural level – highlighting the longstanding feminist argument that the personal is political – but also that the political is personal and emotional. The paper goes beyond women's relations to humans to consider the more-than-human world which informs women's situated relationships of belonging. The paper found that boats, the smell-scape of fishing, non-human animals and the ocean were important more-than-human relationships which co-constructed women's

belongings – even in times of social struggle and feelings of being 'out of place' in the social group of fishers. As such, the findings of this study echo Lähdesmäki et al.'s (2016, p. 240) argument that: 'it seems impossible to separate emotional attachments, psychological belonging, and politics of belonging' as these simultaneously shaped women's emotional experiences and how they performed belonging. Belonging therefore is spatial, plural and relational – one can, for example, belong with animals or with the ocean but feel out of place within the community of fishers. Belonging is further temporally changeable – cumulative and varying experiences over the lifecourse shape how women feel and how they practice belonging in the present and in the longer temporal perspective as well. As such, specific relationships and micro-processes of doing belonging inform individuals overall sense of belonging in particular contexts.

The current paper particularly illustrates how belonging is an appropriate concept to understand the lives of those who may not have access to a clear identity – such as women in fishing. The concept of belonging has the advantage of allowing us to attend to processes and becoming as well as to situational human and more-than human relationships – such as those present in fishing communities and fishing places. Belonging is also a flexible and fluid concept and this adaptability has allowed it to capture women's lived experiences of being part of the fishery in different ways. Even if recent conceptualisations of identity also highlight fluid dimensions, belonging, in this research, was a process which the narratives of women directly related to whilst identity was more abstract to their lives as women did not tend to embody or share a specific collective identity. Belonging thus helped to shed light on how those that do not necessarily identify with any fishing-specific subject positions may embody a sense of belonging, which, in this research context, was essentially a gendered process.

The wider policy implications of this work, in particular in a post-Brexit restructuring of UK fisheries, is that whilst women are often ignored in policy design, women actively shape and make fishing places through their practices of belonging – both through confirming and challenging gendered notions of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion. Such findings suggest that any policy that omits the roles women play in fishing communities and places will – even when there are no collective identities that women go by – fail to fully understand how such places and communities change or remain unchanged over time. The findings of this paper

highlights how women belong to UK fisheries in different, but important, ways and as such I argue women should be treated as relevant to fishing policy design and formulation 'in their own right' (see Gustavsson, 2020).

As a concluding conceptual point, whilst belonging may continue to be under-conceptualised and unspecific, in this research I observed how the concepts flexibility and adaptability allows to make visible certain relations which have not been discussed in this way before. Drawing on these insights, I suggest that any conceptualisation of belonging should embrace fluidity and that research need to attend to the plurality of belonging – that is, situated, relational, more-than-human, emotional and political belongings – in examining practices of belonging in specific socio-spatial contexts. Doing so, as demonstrated in findings of the paper, is particularly helpful in understanding practices of diverse socio-spatial belongings to human and more-than-human worlds where a particular social group share certain experiences but cannot be said to occupy a specific and unifying identity.

6 Acknowledgements

7 References

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