First section. Context

a) Description of the case study

In this project, the Udupi fresh fish seller’s association – called the Dupi Has Meenu Marathagarara Sangha, was identified as it brings together fisherwomen selling fresh fish with the objective of protecting their livelihoods. This association was founded in 2010 as a response to newly emerging large fish shops in Udupi and neighbouring district of Kundapura. Women fresh fish sellers, afraid of losing their livelihoods to large shops with access to capital and storage facilities, that they do not have access to, mobilised and formed an association which today comprises of 1631 fresh fish selling women. The Association brings together fisherwomen from 36 fish markets in Udupi district. It was founded by Ms. Baby Salian a fisherwomen from Udupi who has been selling fish for over 30 years now. In 2010 when a fish shop was set up in Kundapura, fearing the loss of women’s employment and in a bid to support an occupation that has traditionally been that of women in the region, Baby Salian founded the Association. The Association made an appeal to the then Home Minister, requesting him to refuse licenses to any new fresh fish outlets in Udupi District as it would affect the livelihoods of over 10,000 fisher women directly selling fish and about 30,000 women indirectly associated with the sales of fresh fish. As fisher women are supported by other women who help them carry fish on the harbor, the sales of fish often involves more women than just those selling fish. Women are also involving in transporting, sorting, cleaning and preparing seafood for consumption. Even though these women are not included in the Association, their numbers are strategically used by the Association to claim a right to livelihoods. In response to their protest, the Minister promised the Association that he would ensure that no new outlets for sale of fresh fish would be permitted.

Market forces are quite strong in the region and with upper class men with access to capital vying to sell fish, which is a profitable occupation specially with the infusion of capital to enable storage of fish and home delivery, women fish sellers are increasingly under pressure from fresh fish shops that provide competition. Recently the Karnataka Fisheries Development Corporation itself set up an air-conditioned retail fish outlet in Chilimbi, close to Mangalore city, inciting another protest by fisherwomen. While this agreement stands till date with the District Commissioner, the Association has had to organise periodic protests when permits or licenses are issued by other departments, in violation of the order of the Deputy Commissioner. Their livelihood is also threatened from time to time not only by fish shops, but also the increasing number of men beginning to sell fish. The battle

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1 The women from fishmarkets that are active members of the Association include fishmarkets in the sub districts of Karkala, Kapu & Brahnavara. It also includes fishmarkets within Udupi city such as: Udupi-Beedinagudde market, Brahnavara, Santhekatte, Moodubelle, Shiva Machakal, Ambagilu, Kadiyali, Hood, Udyavara Bolargudde, Hejemaadi Kodi, Manipal, Kemmann, Padubidri, Barkur, Uchhila, Mooluru, Saligrama, Budde Angadi, Parkala, Pethri, Doddanagudde, Aadyur, Aadi Udupi, Kodavarooru, Kalyanapura, Shankarapur, Ermal Bala, Muderangadi, Honnalla, Perudoor, Thottam, Katpady, Malpe Bandar, Hangar Katte and Kandi Bengre. In all it covers 36 fish markets that take active part in the Association’s activities. Interview with Ashwini, administrative assistant at the Association, dated 12.03.2016.


4 One of the biggest threats fisherwomen in Udupi face is from Muslim men, who are increasingly selling fish through door to door sales, using two wheelers and three wheelers to transport fish boxes to the homes of
to keep fresh fish shops from opening in the region is a continuing one. Following the mushrooming of shops in and around Udupi, in 2014 once again the Association launched a protest before the Deputy Commissioner’s Office in Udupi, protesting the issuance of permissions by Gram Panchayaths to shops that have come up in Udupi, Brahmavar, Sastan, Kota, Saligrama, Saibarakatte, Hebri and Kundapura, despite the acceptance by the District Commissioner’s office to refuse permits to fresh fish shops. Once again as a result of this protest, the then Udupi-Chikmaglur Member of Parliament, Shobha Karandlaje assured them that she would discuss this with the Deputy Commissioner of Udupi to provide instructions to the Gram Panchayaths. With these frequent protests fisher women continue to apply pressure on the local administration to ensure the protection of their occupations.

This association was chosen as it responded to the case of a solidarity economy initiative, with the objective of protecting women’s livelihoods. It responds to all the requirements of a solidarity economy practice as it is focused on community benefit rather than individual financial profit, enables democratic participation through monthly meetings in which decisions are discussed and deliberated in order to arrive at a decision and is autonomous of the state. Apart from resisting fish shops, the Association negotiates with the state to set up markets for women to sell their fish in different parts of Udupi district. It also actively manages the use of these market places, allocating space in the markets to sellers and carrying out yearly rotation of spaces allotted. Women who want to sell fish in the markets that are enlisted are required to become members of the association and are expected to adhere to the rules and regulations set forth for the peaceful management of fish markets. The Association also engages in other issues not related to fishing. For example in a meeting held on February 2016, a fisher women suffering from cancer and undergoing chemotherapy was given a sum of 10,000 INR towards her treatment which was collected from women through a voluntary basis from all the fish markets in Udupi. After this instance and many demands by other fisherwomen for a medical insurance to help protect them during illness, the Association is now negotiating with medical insurance companies to provide a low cost medical insurance for its members- through group insurance. Thus the Association plays the role of a women’s solidarity network in which women support each other not only professionally but also personally.

b) Relevant related public policies in the local context

There are no specific policies that address the needs of fisherwomen, particularly the increasingly difficult terrain of market competition. Women access credit through a range of institutions including the Meenu Maratagarara Vividoddesha Souharda Sahakara Niyamita, Udupi (MMVSSN, meaning Fish Sellers Varied Interests Assistance Society) with which the Association shares a close partnership. The Association is also closely linked to the S.K. & Udupi District Co-operative Fish Marketing Federation, a government federation of fishermen and women, which provides financial and other forms of support to both men and women undertaking fish sales, fishing or related activities. The Federation channels credit through MMVSSN herein referred to as the Society which was formed in 2011, a year after the women’s Association was founded. This Society was meant to ensure credit at low interest rates, as fishermen and women were concerned about the high rates of interest they were paying for access to credit, to carry on their work. Through membership in the Society they have access to consumers. This issue of Muslim mobile fish sellers, consistenly came up in 4 meetings during 2016 when women were furious that customers were beginning to abandon the market to buy fish at their door steps. Also see: ‘ Alleging Harassment, Fisherwomen Stage Protest in Kinnigoli’, December 20 2016, https://www.seenadaye.in/40996/40996, consulted on 20th November 2017.  

credit at bank lending/preferential rates, as well as assistance in marketing seafood, access to subsidized fuel and ice for storage of fish, access to state welfare schemes including microcredit loans, state-sponsored housing, and supply of safety equipment to fishermen at sea. For example, one such scheme that is presently being channeled through the Society is the Masthyashraya housing scheme, under which several fisherwomen have been able to access free housing provided by the state. Apart from credit facilities, the Directorate of Fisheries also provides them access to certain subsidies to encourage entrepreneurship amongst fisherwomen – for example Bhatta and Rao in their study of women’s livelihoods in coastal Karnataka refer to subsidies for undertaking ornamental fish breeding and marketing and training programs to reinforce and improve their abilities to prepare processed products such as dried fish, fish pickles and wafers. They also refer to government funds provided to encourage fisherwomen in fish processing activities, providing small funds for women to buy fish, salt and ice for their activities. However as this funding is very minimal, it does not substantially aid the fisherwomen in their work.

On the other hand, during the monsoon period between June and August each year, due to the monsoon ban on fishing and the reduced availability of fish to sell, fisherwomen undergo a severe financial crisis. Often saving up during the rest of the year to bide through the ban, they have no access to compensation during this period. While fishermen in the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala as well as in the state of Odisha receive a minimal compensation during the monsoon fishing ban, fisherwomen in these states do not receive similar compensation. In Karnataka, both fishermen and fisherwomen do not receive compensation. For example a 2009 gazette notification issued by the Government of Puducherry, Department of Rural Development, Chief Secretariat Fisheries, provides for the provision of 100 kilos of rice and cash dole of INR 2750 per fisherman’s family during the fishing ban period each year. Such compensation provided to a ‘fishermen family’, conceives of the family unit as headed by a fisherman, and is through its intention meant to provide for the fishermen’s families. However this does not account for widowed fisherwomen or those separated from their husbands. With many fisherwomen being single heads of their households, the benefits of this compensation even if extended to the region of Karnataka may not benefit them. It does not reflect the real situation on the ground of fishermen who do little to provide for their own homes, in which case compensation directed to families should ideally be directed through women, rather than men.

Given this situation, as an offshoot of this research project, the OP Jindal Global University has funded an action research policy project, aimed at bringing presenting a policy brief to the Minister for Fisheries, requesting at the first instance an extension of this policy in Karnataka, and at the second instance, requesting that such compensation include widows and separated women and thirdly the channelling of these benefits through women. This policy project is presently underway and will be concluded in June-July 2017.

Second section. Methodology

a) Description of the fieldwork done

This article relies on 50 interviews, including 5 life histories; observation and participant observation

7 Interview with Prakash Suvarna, Chief Executive Officer of MMVSSN, on 10 March 2016; also http://www.fishmark.in/activities.html, accessed 10 March 2016.
conducted over a period of eleven months – nine months in 2016 - January to October 2016; and 2 months in 2018 – June-July 2018. I will be continuing interviews again between December 2018 and January 2018 (for 5 weeks) and once again in June-July 2018 (for another 6 weeks). Of the 50 interviews conducted at present, 34 have been conducted with fisherwomen who are members of this Association, in addition 16 interviews with staff members of the Association, credit organisations including the MMVSSN and academics working in the vicinity, and staff of the other fishermen’s societies in the area. Apart from observing and often participating in the sales of fish, this research also relies on observation and participant observation of a total of 5 meetings of the Association, one of which was video recorded for the purposes of contributing to the collective documentary film in this project. Everyday observation was carried out to understand time use and the distribution of domestic tasks. I followed fisherwomen from their homes in the early morning as they went to the harbour to purchase fish and transported the fish to the market, observed their market activities, and finally followed them home in the evening. Though access to their homes was limited, I was able to spend time with a few families at the end of the day during dinner, providing me an opportunity to see up close the heavy domestic burden women carry in addition to the long hours they spend selling fish. Apart from the field research, a considerable amount of locally written and published material on the Mogaveera community also informed this research, many of which find mention in this report.

I worked primarily in the central fish market in Udupi which was in a temporarily allotted traditional market in Beedinagudde till December 2016 and shifted in January 2017 to the new two storey modern fish market built and provided by the Government. In the spot where the new market is, an informal market had been established in the 1950s as this was centrally located and close to the civil courts, the central bus station, shops and other bus stands in the vicinity. This market came up informally on land belonging to the government when some women began to sell fish here and were joined later by other fisherwomen. In the early 2000s the Government decided to evict the fisherwomen and sell this piece of land to a private developer for the construction of a building housing shops. The fisherwomen resisted this move and refused to move from the premises and after a series of negotiations the Government accepted their claim to the market, and agreed to construct a modern fish market to enable them to sell fish on this same spot. I was able to conduct my interviews in 2016 in the temporary, traditional squat down fish market in Beedinagudde and later in the modern fish market in 2017.

b) Employed methods

**Deliberation:** The Association primarily uses deliberation as a method of both empowering and responding to the concerns of fisherwomen. Issues that affect fisherwomen are discussed in monthly meetings with fisherwomen in the office of the Association. However while this is the formal setting in which issues are raised and discussed, there is a more informal exchange of information, discussion and deliberation that takes place on a daily basis at the market. Women discuss on a daily basis issues that crop up in their market, including problems between sellers, problems with customers, health issues of women, etc. This sort of informal deliberation is possible due to the kinship ties that many of the women in the Udupi central market have with each other. Often related through marriage and kinship, the informal space of deliberation extends beyond the market to their homes and neighbourhoods. The objectives of the Association, being the protection of women’s livelihoods means that there are certain dos and donts within the market, both for sellers and customers. Sellers and customers who break these rules, are often reminded of these rules and amicable settlements are worked out when possible. For example, customers buying fish at the
harbour at a very low cost are not allowed to get their fish cleaned in the market, as this would affect sellers. The Association includes both sellers and cleaners (considering them all fisherwomen), and both parties are called to respect this rule, meaning that cleaners will clean fish only if the fish has been sold by the sellers in that same market. On one of the days of participant observation, I observed fish sellers follow a customer who entered the market with fish bought from outside, and informed the cleaners that the fish was bought from outside, to which the cleaners refused to clean the fish and the customer had to leave the market. Other examples include instances when fish cleaners who often work with certain sellers, refuse to clean fish for them. In one case the cleaner who had requested maternity leave from the seller she assisted and was refused leave, requested the Association for permission to work with another seller, which was then deliberated and decided by the Association in her favour, given that she needed time to take care of her child. Arrangements were made to replace her with a temporary cleaner during her absence, giving her the option of returning to her work a year after the delivery of her child. Issues of child care are taken seriously by the Association, and often there is deliberation of issues that also affect women and their children in the personal confines of their homes. For example, in one of the meetings, a letter was placed by a woman undergoing domestic violence from her spouse requesting that the Association intervene and find a solution as he was beating not only her but her two children, while intoxicated. There was a long deliberation on this on who would approach the man in question and deal with him, and it was decided that other politically powerful men in the community would approach him and warn him of consequences if he did not put an end to the domestic violence. In these situations, the close involvement of men in the Association helped find solutions, that are otherwise culturally impossible for women alone to tackle. Approaching and speaking out to a man about domestic violence in the community is not a woman’s job, as ‘he will not listen to a woman’ as one of the members of the Association said. Only a man, a powerful man, in a respectable position had to do this.

In the meetings of the Association, two politically well-connected men participate, one of whom is present in all meetings while the other is present occasionally depending on the issue to be discussed. While these meetings do not take place without the presence of this one man, the deliberations that take place are not dominated by him. While he participates actively, often interjecting, the women feel free enough to voice out their concerns even if they go against what he says. Due to the position and status of these women who are not the first ones to work in their families, with a long trajectory of mothers and grandmothers working as fish sellers and often heading their households, the dominant group of Mogaveera, freely express themselves. The Association meetings are thus a hub of deliberation, with fisherwomen chatting with each other, forming opinions for themselves and then later voicing them out quite loudly in the meetings. Each of the 5 meetings I attended was a cacophony of voices with women vying with each other to communicate their point of view, and loudly disagreeing with the man when he suggested something that was not acceptable to them. Even before the meeting begins (during the first week of each month), women congregate in groups outside the meeting room, discussing in advance many of the issues they know will be placed before the association, and also garnering support for some of the issues they plan to place before the Association.

Within the market, not all women agree with everything that the Association does. For example in the run up to the elections which were held in the month of October 2016, many of the women were quite critical of the head of the Association, who is one of the biggest sellers in the market and is also politically very well connected. One of the women told me that there was no point in these elections, ‘clearly she has the time and connections to do this work, we don’t, otherwise we would have stood for elections’. Others told me that only a big seller could be a representative, as these people hired
third section. Results / scientific contributions

a) Work, (re)productive activities, “value”, “fulfilment”, sense of meaning

Work

The majority of the fisherwomen in the Association are belong to the fisherman’s caste in the region – the Mogaveeras and are the lowest of the four castes – shudras, in the caste hierarchy. These women consistently speak of their work as – Jati Kasubu, meaning caste occupation. Prior to the establishment of markets in Udupi, a few of the older fisherwomen I interviewed (5 fisherwomen), and the mothers / grandmothers of the others I interviewed bartered fish for rice under what was known as the ‘kyeka’ system. Under this system each fisherman’s household was linked to a group of upper caste households, and fisherwomen in these households exchanged fish for rice with the assigned households. The exchange was organised based on prior kyeka relations and fisherwomen could barter only with the households with which they were in kyeka relations earlier. They did not have the freedom to barter with other households, and had no power to determine the terms of exchange – how much fish for rice was determined unilaterally by agricultural households. The relations between these families went back to several generations and women often speak of the kyeka households in kinship terms due to their longstanding relationships. Often the barter of fish for rice, also included other services such as agricultural work and domestic support provided by Mogaveera women during the non fishing season and during other times of need. Reciprocity was built into these relations with fisherwomen and men employed by kyeka households during the monsoons. Fisherwomen developed and continued to maintain relationships with their kyeka families even after moving to the market. 3 of the 35 women for example spoke of helping their keka families in need – during pregnancies and childbirth, marriages, ill health, etc. In exchange for their services, women spoke of receiving loans and other material support during periods of crisis or need. This system was quite complex and when asked why the 5 older women switched form Kyeka to the market, they explained that they were impoverished under the Kyeka, while in the market they earned more money and could provide better for their families. Even if the Kyeka households offered a safety net during times of crisis, this was often done through debt, locking them in relations of dependence from which they now find freedom in the market. One of the community men, spoke of how Kyeka relations also cloaked sexual abuse of fisherwomen, who were often at the mercy of rich agricultural landlords, and that over a period of time, many fisherwomen were ‘kept’ as second wives or for a period of time for sexual services by landowners. While these cases were few, they are still important to note as a sign of the power relations encoded in the Kyeka system. The inability to determine the terms of exchange and the inability to freely choose whom to exchange with, put them in a position of ‘unfreedom’. It is in this context that the Market is viewed as liberating them from these exploitative relationships.
In the 1980s with increased transportation and autorickshaws and the possibility of selling fish outside Udupi, the price of fish began to rise. This coincided with nutritional discourses on fish as healthy and fish oil as beneficial. With improved roads and increased modes of transportation Udupi began to receive more tourists, apart from the increasing number of students enrolling into the a nearby private university. Fish that was earlier thrown away on roadsides now suddenly was in demand. With the increasing demand for fish, women began to sell fish in the market and over a period of time gave up their kyeka households. With a bounded and static place of selling, the market came to replace barter with money, and caste relations with new market relations. The nature of the activity also changed, women who walked or travelled several miles to barter their fish for rice, now began to use autorickshaws to transport their fish to the market.

In one of the interviews with an older woman she explained, that she had to struggle hard to feed her children when she practiced the kyeka, and that with the market she did not have to worry about that. With markets coming up for other necessities as well, including rice and other consumables, the fish market was a better option. This also accompanied government programs enabling access to subsidised food, and now they no longer had difficulty feeding their children who were now increasingly sent to school. In the market, they could now determine the price and negotiate with customers. She agreed that though now too there were days when she had to sell fish at a loss, this was rare. Though it is much better in the market, she continues to be stressed about selling at a decent price specially as prices fluctuate sometimes even during the course of the day. She pointed to the fish in another basket just brought in by a woman in the afternoon, saying that though this fish was the same as hers, this basket cost this woman lesser than what the fish she bought in the wee hours of the morning cost her. Now customers would logically choose to buy less expensive fish and she would probably have to sell her fish at a loss today.

(Re)production: In all the interviews with both men and women from the community, productive and reproductive work is central to sustaining families, while male labour and wages are less relied on amongst this fishing community. This could be due to the long history of women’s work in the fishing communities in the region, as well as the matrilineal forms of family organisation in the area, which were dismantled through laws and policies introduced during the colonial rule in India. That women should work and sustain their families, - ‘put food on the table’ as most fisherwomen spoke of it, is normalised, often letting male members escape from their family responsibilities. The role of the provider is often primarily that of women in this community. Of the 50 women I interviewed about 45 are primary providers for their families, and about 15 provide not only for their families but also provide for their aging parents, ill or out of work siblings, widowed sisters, etc.

Despite this primarily role as provider, women also have to ensure the efficient organisation of domestic work and other reproductive roles within the family. One of the fisherwomen explained to me that it takes a lot of work to make the small amounts of money she makes at the end of her day. She has to wake up very early each morning at 4 and bathe, cook and clean her home before she leaves to the harbour at 7 to buy her fish. Tiffin boxes have to be packed for her children and herself, and everything has to be ready for the evening meal when she returns after work. After the auctions she arrives at the market early each morning and leaves everyday in the evening before 5 if she is lucky and has managed to sell all her fish. If not, she sits till late at night until it her basket is empty. Very rarely she will pack fish with ice, to sell next morning. It’s a lot of hard, physical work.

‘Our lives, Mogaveera lives are very difficult, it is so difficult that if we recount it even God will feel sad. We have to work and make a life like the others, bring up our children... what to do’

When asked how women managed with young children, they often spoke of other women – neighbours, sisters, mothers, daughters, family relations, helping them care for their children while they sold fish. In one case, a woman spoke of how she entrusted her children to her neighbour who salted fish and thus stayed at home. Her older child a daughter, also learned to dry fish from this
neighbour and went on to become a dry fish seller. To compensate her neighbour for caring for her children, she often purchased her dried fish, helping her make a living too in the process. Without exception all the children in this community were taken care of by women and it is unheard of for fathers to take care of their children, even if they are out of work and stay home. In about 9 interviews with women, their spouses were injured and could no longer go fishing on boats and despite being able to handle some of the domestic work at home, did little or nothing at home, sometimes helping children with their school work and often spending most of the day in front of television sets. In about 3 cases, the men who could travel would contribute by picking up children from school or colleges, and buying vegetables for the home – two acceptable domestic chores that men can safely participate in, without transgressing cultural norms in Udupi. Given this situation women have to handle both productive and reproductive activities and often suffer from sleep deprivation and lack of any time for leisure. I followed 3 women on their daily routine, from early in the morning (between 4 am and 5.30 am) when they woke, bathed, prayed, cooked, packed tiffin boxes for themselves and their children and left to the harbour to purchase fresh fish, to the market and then back again in the evening, sometimes early at around 6 pm and in two cases at 8 pm when they returned to heat up the food for dinner, prepared the vegetables and soaked lentils for the next day, washed clothes and dried them, before finally going to bed – at the earliest at 10 pm. In all these 3 cases, children were school going and in two cases the men were stay at home dads. In all three cases, none of the men contributed to cooking, though all the 3 fisherwomen spoke of their husbands helping out in the kitchen- this was often limited to heating up food and getting the children to eat, if she came home too late in the night.

Selling as reproduction: Selling fish is spoken of as work essential for the reproduction of their families. Here reproductive work does not only include domestic work but also productive work undertaken in the market. These roles of mother and provider are seamlessly interwoven in the discourses on fisherwomen by fishermen as well as customers buying from them. In an interview with a Mogaveera fisherman, he consistently spoke of the fisherwomen as feeding her children and feeding the community, by providing fresh fish in the market. If supermarkets come into business this would mean that people don’t get fresh fish anymore. With refrigeration there is no saying how fresh the fish is. With fisherwomen selling fresh catch bought each morning from the harbour, they were assuring the freshness of the fish. In this sense, fisherwomen are providing a service to the community, he argued. In this sense the there is an overlap between productive and reproductive activities, in which the reproduction of the community hinges on fisherwomen selling ‘fresh’ fish, fish that is not refrigerated and thus healthier for the larger community.

These narratives that gender the work of selling fish, making what is an economic activity seem almost like a domestic one, result in gendered policies that view this work as requiring limited protection or support from the state. As discussed earlier, this trend persists in other states as well, where fishermen are entitled to compensation during the monsoons given in the name of ‘fishermen families’, while fisherwomen do not have access to such compensation, except through the men in their families, and conditional on them working on boats. This points to the recognition of fishing as work, and the lack of recognition of women’s work, which is more a service than work in itself - a service due to their families and the community, by virtue of being women. It is here distinguished from a service that is paid for and constitutes a service that is more in the nature of an obligation, something women render for a low price, by virtue of being women and not as economic agents. The local fish market is thus not a space of big business, unlike the fishing boats that are crucial for exports and assures state revenues. It is more a space in which livelihoods are eked out. Fishermen who have transitioned into owning boats and factories, have access to a range of state benefits including diesel & electricity subsidies, while the new modern fish markets built by the state for fisherwomen have no such benefits. To the contrary, investment in these constructions is recovered through monthly rents from the fisherwomen.
The perception of women’s productive and reproductive work as a service – as community service, and an essentially gendered one at that, means that women are left to their own vices to juggle productive and reproductive work. Women bear the consequences of this over work, exhaustion, lack of sleep and fatigue, developing health problems early on. By the time women turn 40, they complain of back aches sitting in the market in a hunched position all day. While it is culturally acceptable for older women to take rest in the afternoons, taking a nap during the afternoon lull, younger women cannot do so and this means sleep deprivation through the year. While women often are forced to take days off due to illness, they do so in a forced manner, preferring to sell and make money, to the unproductive time they spend getting well again. Leisure is in rare supply, as women cannot afford to spend a lot of time in marriages and other ceremonies, that are culturally acceptable times of leisure for women. When invited to a wedding, they arrive at the market with a set of ‘good clothes’ and use the afternoon lull period to attend these events, while their basket is taken care of by a friend, relation, or sibling. As one women told me, even this does not mean that my fish will be sold, of course everyone will focus on their own baskets, only if a regular customer turns up and insists on buying from the basket of the absent women, would their fish be sold by those taking care of their baskets. The market is thus a place that offers many solutions for them, a place that they don’t want to be absent from, for the simple reason that they could make money on a day instead of spending it on leisure:

‘It is the desire to make more money that pulls me back…. the 1st of each month is a holiday because the boats don’t work on this day, that’s why the association meetings are held on this day, its because of this that we take a holiday … left to ourselves we would store the previous day’s fish in ice and sell on the 1st too…. now as we are members of the association and we have the meetings, we don’t sell on the 1st…… apart form this one day, we work on other days, unless we are sick or we have any other social event that we cant avoid… otherwise everyone wants to be here… to work…. to make more money……’

The lack of any social protection to cover sickness, dips in business or other crisis, means that small sellers often depend on informal sources of credit carrying higher interest rates, during times of crisis. One way in which they protect themselves from crisis periods is through micro credit that is informally organised by the fisherwomen themselves, with the support of local credit cooperative societies, that offer higher rates of interest as compared to nationalised or private banks. Setting aside 100 rupees a day, each day, irrespective of profits or loss, means that a period of crisis is taken care of. They rotate loans amongst themselves, based on need and are able to ensure repayment due to the personal ties they posses with their members. As one woman explained, ‘we are each other’s guarantors, we know each other so well, we know if someone can repay the loan or not, as we know everything about the other women in our group including their spending habits, their personal financial situations, the sales they make each day in the market, .. everything.’ Here also they see the market as a solution to precarity, and use micro credit to smoothen rough times. However this is also insufficient during times of serious illness, for example recently the Association spoke of 5 cases of women suffering from cancer, in which case, the lack of medical insurance often means the inability to seek treatment. While the state provides for ‘free medical treatment’ for a range of health issues, this is a restrictive list and is often administered through public hospitals that dispense very poor health care. The Association has thus resorted to private solutions for this too - negotiating a group medical insurance to cover such illness, but this is yet to materialise.

In conclusion to this part, it is important to point out that there is no political initiative whatsoever on the part of the Government to help fisherwomen in their work. It is noteworthy that modern fish markets are constructed for sellers, with no extra rooms or facilities for the care of children. The Association is trying hard to enable a series of welfare schemes for fisherwomen including
government pensions which are provided to fruit and vegetable vendors. However their demands have fallen on deaf ears, and instead the provision of a ‘modern fish market’ is often spoken of as a favour rendered to women – when in reality it enables a different type of relationship based on rent, changing the nature of the relationship between a citizen and a state – to that of a lessee and lessor. In a neoliberal context in which even state departments are expected to raise funding for civil works, the modern fish market is constructed by private bidders at a cost that is recovered by the Government through rents from the fisherwomen.

**Sense of meaning:** Despite the many hardships of their work, fisherwomen speak of selling as something they look forward to. The market is a space that comes to mean many things for them. It is a space that is precarious, a space in which one can loose money, make losses, but also a space in which a decent livelihood can be made. As one fisherwomen explained, when she takes a holiday, she keeps thinking of the others who have gone to work, that they made some money, that she could have made some money too. Their sense of achievement is closely tied to being able to sell fish. Often there is high competition between fisherwomen to finish selling fish earlier than the others, to go home early and thus enjoy an evening of contentment after having sold the entire basket. For example in many of the interviews, when I asked them what gives them pleasure, they spoke of being able to go home earlier, with enough money, even if it was not a very high amount, having emptied their basket. They spoke fondly of these exceptional evenings when they returned earlier home, often with snacks from a bakery nearby, saying it felt good to spend time with the children and relax at home, go back home early. Women envy others who are able to go home early, often looking on with irritation as a woman cleaned her spot, packed her baskets and prepared to leave early. As I sat with them in conversation, or idle chat, they would often get distracted when a woman got up and began packing to leave – looking at their own baskets and wondering when they would leave today.

While the capitalist market provides no protection from risk or losses, the market still provides women with support from other women. Linked to each other through kinship and communal ties, women selling in Udupi’s market make close friendships and relationships that seem to provide respite from the ravages of capital. Even if they compete with each other to sell fish, often trying to empty their baskets before their friends, there is a sense of security in the relationships they make here. Women support each other in times of need, helping others in the market sell their fish. Shopping expeditions are made to get the best deal to help other women buy scales or weights. When a woman goes out to run errands in the afternoon, her friend often sells the fish in her basket if a regular customer passes by. Women buy fruit and share it amongst each other. When a woman is striking a bad deal, her neighbour reminds her that she should not. News of harassing customers is passed around so women are careful while dealing with them. A solidarity that functions informally through friendships functions to keep women together and unified during times of need. This inherent solidarity makes it possible for the formal association to mobilise against the state. During the monthly meetings, women come together and set aside their other differences to unite to protect their livelihoods. Even if the interests of big sellers are different from those of small sellers, they still stand united to protect the market from corporates. It is this inherent, almost organic solidarity that enables them to work together and to adopt a single representational form irrespective of other differences.

**Value – autonomy**

The market offers freedom from these relations, but also autonomy. Selling fish is difficult, as all the women I interviewed told me. It is hard to say at the beginning of the day whether the entire basket will go or will have to be kept aside laden with ice for the next day. If that too did not happen, it would all go into a large blue plastic bin set aside for fish oil – it is as good as throwing it away. But
serving fish is still the most lucrative occupation for all these women, all of whom choose to sell rather than do any other sort of work. In all of the interviews, women spoke of being ‘free’ as sellers, ‘free’ to come to the market at the time they wished to come, ‘free’ to leave at the time they wanted to, ‘free’ to take a day off, without asking anyone for their approval. Even if they finally exercise with great restraint their right to take a day off for leisure, the fact that they have this option is valued enormously. Even if there are anxieties around making profits and the fear of losses, women consider this work as ‘free’ labour, in which one is accountable only to oneself. As one of the women asked me about my own job, if I had to apply for leave to take a day off, and when I said yes, she responded.

‘In this work, I am my own master, I am happy that this is my own business, I don’t have to work under anyone else’

This freedom is not only from the hierarchies or caste, but from other forms of power, control and dependency. While wage work often provides similar or sometimes higher earnings, women prefer selling fish to other types of work. On the one hand one can view this work as autonomous in terms of the absence of vertical relations of power, while on the other hand their work is embedded in other relations of dependence. Women sellers in the fish market depend on each other for the work they carry out. Many of the older fisherwomen often serve to train younger women in the market. For example, one of the women I interviewed began selling fish at the age of 11 and spoke fondly of how she would walk to the market each day after school with a basket of mussels to sell and would sit beside an older woman in the market who was also a neighbour, and would return late in the evening with her after selling her basket. She spoke of how this older woman trained her in the art of selling, and these sort of relationships continue to this day. For example during the many months of participant observation in the market, I frequently saw women exchange information on good and bad customers, on maintaining prices at the same level, forming groups to buy fish together at the harbour auctions to keep prices low, making shopping expeditions with others in need of things such as baskets or weights and measures, striking deals with vendors of various kinds to get the best price for themselves and often for others, etc. Due to the kinship and family ties that many of them possess, there is a sense of solidarity in the market that is more organic in nature, and is based on mutual trust and friendship. Afternoons are often spent in idle chat and gossip and there is a lot of light hearted fun that is poked at each other. Fruits are often purchased and distributed amongst each other, and women enjoy the company they get from the others in the market. Thus despite the market freeing them from exploitative forms of relationships, the space of the market serves to bind them in relationships that are often beneficial to them. They are thus entangled in friendships that they speak about fondly and miss when they stay away from work. As most of the women told me, they felt isolated and very ‘bored’ when they decided to stay home. Here in the market, something is always happening and it is entertaining to be here.

Value – financial independence

The majority of the women – about 43 out of 50 spoke of being able to take decisions on how to spend their money. The remaining 7 spoke of taking financial decisions with their spouses. The ability to both earn and spend the money they earn the way they wish to, allows these women a sense of control over their own lives. It is true that in all of the 43 interviews, when asked what women spend money on, they spoke of spending it on children, or buying things that would make their lives more comfortable – for instance investing in a car, or a two wheeler to help them become more mobile. This indicates that women are primarily heading their homes, with almost all of what they earn spent on families. In a sense this does not seem to provide them autonomy, and yet the manner in which women spoke of their control over finances indicated a perception of autonomy - of being able to allocate money towards children’s and family needs, without being dependent on their spouses.
While most of these women spend the larger part of their money on family needs, they are also able to allocate some money towards their own personal needs such as clothing. Women value the ability to spend money on themselves, without having to depend on male incomes. Their status as earning members is reinforced through conspicuous acts of consumption, which they enjoy and recognize as a privilege that homemakers do not enjoy.

However, this sense of personal autonomy they experience in controlling their expenditure also comes with a price, as male income forms a small part of household budgets and is often not taken into account for financial responsibilities. Due to their ability to earn, women are also often financially exploited by their spouses. For example, many of these women raised loans on behalf of their husbands to enable the purchase of small mechanized boats to contribute to the family income. However, for various reasons when the men were unable to make a decent income from these boats, the responsibility of paying back these loans fell on women. In about 5 cases, women who had to pay off these loans, often spoke about it as a collective family responsibility to pay back the bank, while in fact they were individually liable to pay them, as their spouses were all out of work. It is in these cases that the Association is unable to raise consciousness or awareness amongst women, often letting women relegate such issues to the private realm of the family. Unless things are serious and involve ‘domestic violence’ of any sort, there is little interest amongst the Association members to tackle this issue. To the contrary, often men who are out of work, are often protected by women themselves, who refer to these men as ‘businessmen’, without accepting their status of unemployment. In this sense there are clear limitations to the work that the Association does with the women, and there is often an attempt to segregate the personal and the professional. In interviews with one of the administrators in this association, she explained that unless women brought this to the forefront and framed it as an issue, they would view the Association’s work as interference with their personal lives. This does not explain much. In fact, the dominant culture of patriarchy, and patrilineal organisation which is now imposed on these communities since long, has the effect of enabling restrictive notions of empowerment that serve to maintain male domination over women. Even if women earn and are empowered, it is within certain limitations, as their autonomy should not trouble male power and privilege and in these instances actually serves to reinforce male power.

b) Solidarity, the commons, territory, tensions, process, power

**Solidarity:** One of the most important findings of this research, is the manner in which solidarity in the context of Udupi’s fisherwomen is largely built on the intersection of identities of gender, caste and class. In an initial article in 2016, I looked at how the Association built on the plural identities of women to frame their issue more broadly as that affecting the livelihoods of women, while at the same time relying on caste and class solidarities. In this sense the view of solidarity economy...
practices as something that should inherently be secular, does not play out in practice, particularly in a political context where diverse political allegiances can enable the work of the Association. In this sense, the practices of this Association, that involves powerful men from within the fishing community, can be understood as strategic and essential to the furtherance of the interests of fisherwomen. The rhetoric of community is often used by both fishermen and women who belong to the Mogaveera community, which is the second most dominant community in terms of population in the district. This numerically dominant community in the Indian context translates to a politically powerful community, as representatives within the community are more often likely to be voted as political representatives for the district. With representatives of the fishing community being politically dominant, the Association largely relies on the Mogaveera caste networks to gain political support in the area. Thus in India where both caste and democracy have resulted in complex situations of local power, with lower caste numerically dominant populations gaining power in a democracy, caste networks also translate into political networks essential enable state support to the Association.

However it is not simple to write away this Association as a caste association as they also mobilise their identity as women, building ties across caste and class barriers, by recruiting politically strong women from other castes to support their Association. Through these alliances, they mobilise support for ‘women’, appealing to all fisherwomen irrespective of caste to join the Association. In their lobbying with the state, they also appeal to women’s poverty and thus appealing to policies that pay attention to both their gender and their class. In interviews with members of the Association and the Society, the sales of fish comes forth as an occupation of necessity – something to ‘help put food on the table’.

In the statements made before the government, fisherwomen claim their right to selling fish out of necessity and point to the inability of the government to provide alternatives to the thousands of fisherwomen engaged in this activity. Thus the argument is that of necessity and poverty is frequently used to make this argument. The fact that fisherwomen have no other viable alternatives and that they would fall into poverty if their work is not provided state support, comes forth in the interviews conducted and the press reports of the demands made by the Association to the state. The sales of fish is not preferred by younger Mogaveera women with higher education. Both the Association and the Society members speak of Mogaveera women transitioning out of fish sales and other women – scheduled caste women and Karvy women (another fishing caste from the neighbouring state of Goa) moving into the sales of fish in their place. And yet the sales of fish by these women is what enables them to ensure that their daughters transition out of the vocation and out of conditions of poverty. Poverty is thus crucial in the appeals they make and intersects with gender in the effects it has on women and their families. That the loss of women’s earnings would directly impact families dependent on women’s earnings is a key message that comes from the interviews conducted. The work and livelihoods of fisher women are thus key to lifting families out of poverty and it is this fact that is consistently put forth before the state.

10 In the last 13 elections to the Udupi Assembly Constituency, 7 terms were under Mogaveera MLAs. Of these 7 terms, 5 terms were held by a Mogaveera woman, Manorama Madhavaraj, a prominent politician in the area.

11 For example since the establishment of the Association in 2010, they have enlisted the support of Shobha Karandlaje, a woman politician of another caste – the Gowda caste who is the present elected representative (MLA) for the Udupi-Chikmagalur constituency. Drawing on a shared gender identity and claiming her support as a woman, the Association frequently invites her to their programs and enlists her support. The appeal to the gender identity comes forth in an address to the Association in which she states – ‘women today play a significant role in religious, political and social arena. She surpasses men in all spheres’. See: http://www.deccanherald.com/content/50235/unity-among-women-yield-tremendous.html consulted on 10.03.2016
However in the long term vision of the Association, even if Mogaveera fisherwomen are able to transition out of poverty, by protecting their livelihood, the work of the Association would be required by women from other castes requiring a similar voice and representation. In this sense they frame their Association as secular, open to membership from all women wanting to sell fish, despite the predominant presence of Mogaveera women at present.

To conclude this section, an intersectional approach was essential to understand the manner in which solidarities played out in practice on the field. Apart from sharing similar strategic interests, the importance for identities that enabled solidarities across caste, class and gender, are largely responsible for the success of this Association – and their ability to keep large fish shops away from the district.

**Tensions:** There are inherent tensions that women face, between the collective objectives of redistribution and personal attempts to accumulate. On the one hand women mobilise to protect their livelihoods, and on the other are often in competition with one another to outsell each other and make more profits. There are clear anxieties over not making enough ‘profits’ or worse – making ‘losses’, as prices fluctuate and customers strike tough bargains, wanting fish at lower costs. While the Association ostensibly struggles to protect the livelihoods of women – specially the small sellers, the market also includes a few powerful big sellers. As big sellers stand to gain immensely from the work of the Association, and as the head of the Association is herself a big seller, there are clearly tensions within the Association. The rhetoric of the protection of livelihoods provides meaning to the lives of the small sellers, who have little in terms of personal wealth, however the lives of big sellers has little in common with the lives of small sellers. Big sellers often hire several women to buy, clean and load fish that is sold to restaurants in the district. The clientele of big sellers is often generated through their political connections and their ability to invest in their business is largely due to accumulation over long periods of time. Both these resources, political and financial are not available to small sellers, whose desires to sell more and make more money like the big sellers are frustrated. Big sellers often spend large amounts of money each day – between 25,000 – 50,000 to buy fish, and sell to regular customers – most often restaurants in the vicinity and some irregular customers – such as individuals from upper class families. Both the quality and quantity of fish sold by small sellers is inferior to the big sellers. Because big sellers are also big buyers at the auction and can command better prices, they also frequently supply fish to the small sellers. Their ability to hire many other women to help them run their business, enables them more leisure time. They often come in late in the morning and leave early in the afternoon, spending no more than a few hours a day in the market. This marked difference in the quality of their lives, leaves small sellers anxious to improve their own lives, to make more money.

Signs of accumulation include the possession of large mechanised boats. In the Udupi main market about 10 women possess boats and these women can be visually marked apart as they wear better clothes and more gold than the others. Perceptions of accumulation are however complex and oscillate between desire and disdain. Big sellers are powerful and are to be pandered to, and yet big sellers are almost immoral. One day as I waited for a fisherwomen to complete her sales to take a video interview we had scheduled that afternoon, the woman sitting next to her said to me, oh you have to wait she is a big seller. To this the woman I was waiting for became very enraged and began yelling asking her what she meant when she said big seller? What did it mean? Did she see the basket before her? Was that big sales? Was she making so much money? Was she so rich? Was she rolling in wealth? Why then did she have to come here and sell? The term big seller was suddenly an accusation, of wealth improperly gained, of greed, of bad money. There is an underlying resentment of the large gap between small and big sellers, while the small sellers struggle to accumulate, the big sellers they share the market with, are able to make a lot more money in much less time. It is not just
money that they have accumulated to become big sellers, but also a set of relationships with customers, politicians and local land owners, that bring together financial capital and social and political capital that enables them to continue accumulating. In this context, a big seller is viewed as immoral – a state brought about by an excess of money and other types of capital that the small sellers can never access. The market as a place thus exacerbates these hierarchies, as they are more visible and witnessed and experienced publicly. That money should come so easily despite lesser labour is often spoken about in interviews. The money that small sellers make is thus qualitatively different from the money that big sellers make. It is hard earned money, while the money that big sellers make is easy money, the money of the wealthy, the rich, the lazy.

c) Deliberation, constituting oneself as political subject

Through all the interviews with women in the Udupi central fish market, the position that women take vis à vis their work is clear – they all inherently believe this work to be theirs as fisherwomen, not only because their mothers and grandmothers did this work, but because they themselves value this work and see it as a way out of poverty. All the sellers, big and small, agree that men should not take over this vocation and actively resist what they see as male interference against their work. They take the position of a right to this work, not just due to the caste they belong to, but because of their poverty and their inability to eke out any other work they consider ‘decent’. They unite on one common ground, despite the deep divergences of class between big and small sellers, that small sellers stand to loose the only livelihood they can depend on, if men enter this area of work. Even if this political stance is limited to the work they do, and does not extend to the personal realm, they construct themselves as political subjects, deserving of state protection and benevolence, as mothers and reproducers of community and culture. This self construction as carrying on an acceptable caste occupation, enables them to position themselves politically as lower caste women, and at the same time, as poor and thus entitled to a special status, unlike other workers. Their allusion of work- as reproductive work, essential to the health of the community is stressed, as women argue their right to sell ‘fresh fish’ and not refrigerated fish, that men would sell in large shops. In this political stance they adopt an anti capitalist approach, rejecting capital intensive establishments as harmful for the health of the local community, that deserves to eat ‘fresh fish’, something only they can supply. Within the cultural, social and economic constraints in the district, this self construction has enabled the preservation of livelihoods. This enables a rethinking of the notions of altruism that inhere in Social and Solidarity Economy initiatives (Hillenkamp & Wanderley, 2015), as something that is essential to garner political support for these initiatives. In the context of Udupi, altruism serves as a strategic devise, to mobilise political support.

However, as many of the women themselves narrated, this would surely change with more and more mobile Muslim men beginning to sell fish from door to door. On the other hand, the state itself is investing large amounts of capital to set up retail outlets such as that set up close to Mangalore city, and they see a bleak future when this work will be taken over by the quickly privatising state, intent on capitalising on the sales of fish. Given these transformations, the work of selling fish which is for the time being in the hands of women, may soon move over to the hands of men. Or worse as many women voiced their fears, they would probably have seek employment in such establishments, taking away the limited autonomy they enjoy. As some women asked me during the shooting of the documentary film, this would probably be a record of their lives, something their own children may never live and thus may not be able to identify with later on.
d) Articulation SSE and state, interaction with political processes, capital, articulation social reproduction, transformative potential?

The Udupi fisherwomen have been able to reach a temporary solution to the influx of capital in the sales of fish. What has been and largely continues to be a traditional caste vocation of Mogaveera women, responds to the Government’s development agenda of ‘women’s empowerment’ and ‘poverty alleviation’, both of which consistently appear in the five year plans. Within this context, the work of fisherwomen is protection and even this agreement to not issue licenses to fish shops is not a policy decision, but a more locally enforced bureaucratic order, that can be easily overruled by a new order. The protection of fish selling as a livelihood is thus a tenuous territory, marked with tensions, as the Government is increasingly relying on private capital to carry out its activities. As local governments are increasingly under pressure to raise funds from private players for the provision of infrastructure and services to its citizens, it is not long before the domain of fish retail sales which is already a lucrative activity, will be considered as an avenue to build state coffers. With fish markets increasingly being built and leased by the state to private sellers, some modern fish markets are seeing more men as fish sellers. For example the Padubidri market within Udupi has a male fish seller, who has obtained government permission to sell in the modern market built recently. As these modern markets come under the Government which accords permission to sell equally to both men and women, there are bound to be more and more cases of men taking over the sales of fish. My interviews in this market for example revealed that this male seller had built a sizeable business and had employed many other people under him, transitioning from a small seller to a big seller very quickly over a period of 3 years. As male patriarchy is strong in this region, male sellers would have a considerable advantage over female sellers, in being able to strike better bargains with male auctioneers, and the dominant male customers who visit these retail markets. In this particular case, what was interesting was that this male seller had invested considerably both in labour and some tools to enable quicker processing of fish, making him the most important seller in the market, while the women sellers continued to use old methods of processing and attracted far fewer customers. The infusion of capital into fish sales would also accompany the influx of men into this work, as men by virtue of patrilineal organisation would possess better access to credit, apart from the social and economic capital due to their gender.

Fourth section: Conclusions

In the Indian context, there is little work on Social and Solidarity Economy practices, let alone policies to enable such initiatives. The state recognises the distinction between formal and informal work, grouping all non-market transactions: that fall below the threshold for direct taxation or licensing; and/or that involve mobile exchange and production (Harriss-White, 2003). While all informal economic activities may not be carried out for collective good, some may possess a collective logic and may be located in social norms or values that oppose the rationale of modern capitalist markets. For example certain cooperatives that function on the basis of collective good and collective ownership in India. Informal economic activities, not only lack the status of work, but also lack any state support or protection similar to SSE initiatives that claim autonomy from the state. The informal sector often accounts for the bulk of employment in several countries. Barbara Harriss-White notes that the ‘India of the 88%’ is often termed as the ‘local economy’, the ‘real economy’ distinguishing productive activity from financial capital implying authenticity and distinguishing it from the inauthentic top of the economy (Harriss-White, 2003). As Kabeer points out, activities such as care and non-market production that enable subsidies or savings in expenditure, come under this
large umbrella of informal work (Kabeer, 2008). The specific overlapping of informal economy and SSE (however small this may be) and the location of poor women often from marginalized groups in this work, calls attention to the ways in which intersecting identities locate women from certain groups in certain forms of precarious work.

The biggest challenge in organizing women in the informal economy is constructing a shared identity (Kabeer, Milward, & Sudarshan, 2013). Many of these women are in direct competition with each other and are located at different intersections of inequality in terms of class, race, caste and legal status. Within SSE debates, little attention has been paid to an analysis of gender (Guérin & Nobre, 2015) and this is moreso the case when it comes to other social identities such as caste and race. The example of the Udupi fisherwomen’s case enables an intersectional analysis of SSE in India (Thara, 2016). As Thorat & Newman point out in their work, the Indian economy is still largely organized around caste lines (Thorat & Newman 2007; 2012). As Harriss-White points out, low caste groups face greater obstacles as compared to other groups in terms of market entry, credit, social & information networks (Harriss-White et al., 2014). This case reveals the manner in which gender, caste and class are entangled in India, providing rich material for debate and action, particularly in the realm of public policy. While SSE is promoted as providing solutions towards greater sustainability (Sahakian & Dunand, 2014) and an inclusive economy that provides an alternative model of development and thus an alternative globalization (Neamtan, 2002), analysis of these initiatives must interrogate if they enable women or in practice reinforce their marginalities. On the other hand the role of the state with reference to these initiatives must be critically analysed. How does the state respond to these initiatives, what are the policy implications of these initiatives, how does state policy affect them? What is the relationship between these initiatives and the state, does it enable them, frustrate them or is it irrelevant? On the other hand another question that is central is how these initiatives respond to state projects, laws or public policies that affect them. This work has attempted a critical feminist analysis, while staying close to the ground and lending primacy to the voices of the women that populate this report.

Based on this research, which is till ongoing, I propose a critical analysis of solidarity economy practices, that are often celebrated in literature as emancipatory, suggesting that a more nuanced detailing of the internal workings of such solidarity economy initiatives, reveal entrenched hierarchies and the frustrations women face in aligning their personal objectives of accumulation alongwith collective objectives of redistribution. Through detailed ethnographic material, I focus on how women think about their work, the meanings they give to choosing to sell fish, their choice of autonomy over dependence, the anxieties of selling and of competition with others and their efforts to live good lives. I look specifically at entrenched hierarchies, with big sellers who are often more politically powerful, representing them and leading the association. I examine the frustrations of small sellers, who both envy and despise the big sellers, lending more value to their own hard earned money, not easy money that big sellers make. Through close interactions with small sellers and many months of participant observation, I argue that the objective of redistribution that solidarity economy practices such as these formally claim, are troubled by the contradicting desires of women, torn between collective objectives of solidarity and individual desires to accumulate through higher profits. Within the dominant framework of the market, in which selling more enables higher accumulation, the solidarity of such associations is fragile and fraught with tensions between ideologies of redistribution and accumulation on the one hand, and practices of solidarity and individual profits on the other. Coming back to the emancipatory potential of such initiatives, I argue that solidarity economy practices that are often largely populated by women often serve to enforce
forms of voluntarism and collective benefit on women, thus resulting in the paradox of associations that on the one hand are meant to free women, but through redistribution entrench them in poor paying low income work.

References:


