

# On the Nomenclature of Dutch Inland River Craft

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**ABSTRACT** The name Dutch bargemen choose for their vessels are predominantly female names, combinations of surnames and/or christian names of themselves and their wife, or names which reflect human attitudes and attributes. The "surface meaning" of these names can partly be found in the socio-economic developments in inland navigation since the twenties. More important, however, is their "hidden meaning": the perception by bargemen of their ship as a female being and as their own body. It is through this meaning, it is argued, that we can understand their behaviour towards their ships.

## Introduction

Every vessel which travels on the inland waters of the Netherlands has a name. The nomenclature of these craft is remarkable. Generally speaking, there are three categories of names: names which refer to attitudes and qualities (such as Hope, Perseverance, Dependent, Rival); names which consist of elements of the first names and/or surnames of bargemen and their wives (e.g. Jo-Cor, Gerco, Adfra, Lenie D, Joke S); and female first names (e.g. Anna, Maria, Margaretha, Johanna Jacoba). Apart from these three main categories there are a number of less well-represented ones. Bargemen also name their craft after places, rivers or seas, mythological or biblical figures (usually associated with water and wind), the signs of the zodiac, wellknown individuals (John F. Kennedy), animals (rarely birds), or they give them names referring to an ownership situation (The Three Brothers). Sometimes they use names referring to water (e.g. Aquanaut) or simple numbers.<sup>1</sup>

This article concentrates on two of the above categories: the female names and the combined names. I am unable to believe that the preference displayed by bargemen for names of this kind is just chance. Of course, they choose names for their craft to distinguish them from other vessels and thus to make them recognisable, but this in itself is not enough to explain the preference for a particular type of name.

Others have wondered how the choice of female names should be interpreted:

In many cases the boat is named after a woman. It has jokingly been suggested that this is due to a resemblance between women and boats: both items of equipment cost a lot of money. We do not share this view. Instead, we claim that bargemen like to honour their wives by having their name in gold letters borne over the waters (*Schuttevaer* 1936,27:4).

By concentrating on the combined names as well as on the female names, I shall

MAST 1990, 3(1): 106-118

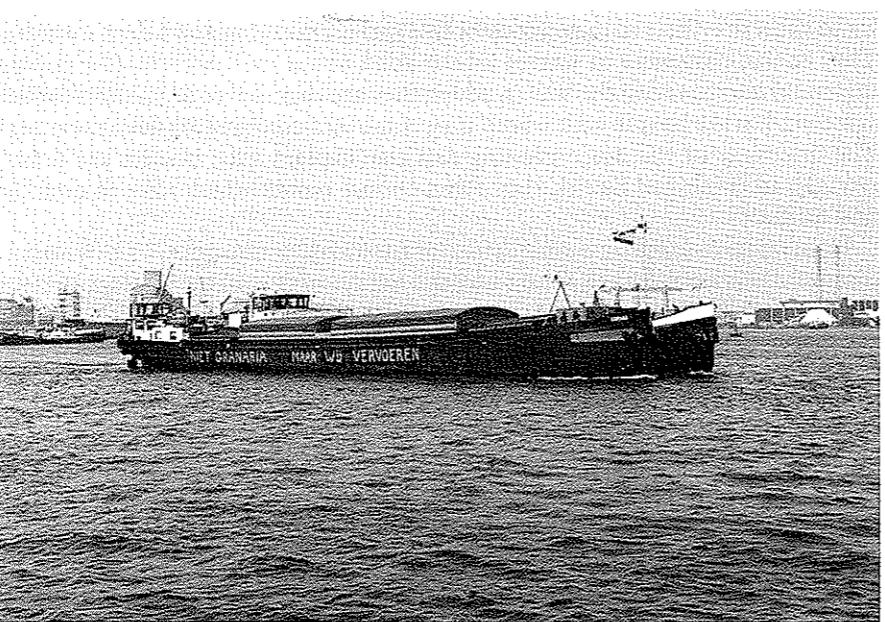
try to show that these names convey both a surface meaning and a deep meaning. They enable bargemen to convey information about their activity (the surface meaning) and to reveal the way in which they see themselves in relation to their vessel and to the people with whom they come into contact (the deep meaning). The discovery of the deep meaning can also explain why, besides the female names and combined names, they often choose names which refer to qualities and attitudes.

First we have to relate a number of phenomena to one another if we are to discover their significance. These are: the nature of inland navigation, the language of the bargemen and their conceptions of their craft.

## Inland Navigation

Inland navigation in the Netherlands is as old as the rivers themselves. From time immemorial people have transported goods by water. Regular routes came into fashion in the middle ages, when bargemen travelled to and fro between specific domestic and foreign locations at set times. Those who wanted to become bargees were subject to strict guild regulations. This kind of inland navigation did not die out in the Netherlands until the nineteenth century. As a result of the increased volume of freight caused by commercialisation and industrialisation, more and more people tried to meet the demand outside the existing regular services. After 1880 it was no longer seen as a contravention; in fact, it was even legalised. Since then the Netherlands has had its irregular services on the inland waters. Bargees no longer followed fixed routes, but went where their freight had to be loaded or unloaded. Before then it was customary for a bargeman to have a house on shore where his family lived, even if he sailed to international destinations, but now the situation changed rapidly. Bargemen came to live on their boats, taking their women and children with them. It is thus not the case that Dutch bargees and their families have always lived a nomadic life. It only took place on a large scale in the second half of the nineteenth century after the abolition of the restrictions on inland navigation.

At that time virtually all inland navigation was by sail; the Rhine was the only river where steamships and steamboats went up and down stream with a long train of barges in tow (vessels without a sail or engine room). In the 1920s and 1930s bargemen began to fit their vessels out with engines or to buy new engine-driven craft. While the accommodation on the sailing craft was extremely cramped, it was more comfortable on the new vessels. Besides being larger, they were better ventilated and lighter, because (small) windows were used instead of portholes, and more comfortable because the bedrooms, living rooms and kitchen areas were separated from one another more clearly than before. Naturally they were not all the same. Thus vessels from the larger tonnage categories had more room for good living quarters than the smaller craft could offer. The big Rhine barges sometimes even had salons furnished with items which would have been hard to find in many middle class homes. All the same, generally speaking the accommodation in Dutch inland craft was (and is) on the small side.<sup>2</sup>



*The "Adriana" and another inland river vessel in the harbour of Amsterdam.*

At the same time that the fitting out of inland craft with engines began to gather momentum, in the early 1930s, the government decided to relieve the distress which had arisen in numerous bargee families as a result of the economic crisis by introducing the system of equitable freight distribution. By this system, bargemen must report to the markets once they have delivered a cargo, and they cannot start on a new assignment before all the bargemen who were registered before them have sailed out. Taxi drivers have a similar system; they patiently wait their turn to take customers. In a situation in which the supply of bargemen outstripped the demand for freight transport, the government hoped that this system would mean the fairest possible distribution of work among the bargees.

Despite this equitable freight distribution, the number of private inland bargemen has dropped drastically in the course of the present century. At the beginning of the century there were tens of thousands of them; now there are about 4,500. The total tonnage of the vessels has increased, however, because the size of the craft which sail the Dutch inland waters has been steadily rising. Nowadays the vessels weigh between 500 and 800 tons on average and they are fitted out with all kinds of technical refinements. It is quite normal for the steering cabin to contain a radar, a mariphone (a wireless system for communication with other boats and with the shore), hydraulic steering, a river bend indicator, a depth gauge, and sometimes even an automatic pilot. These innovations, particularly those in the field of telecommunications, have a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, they make it easier to establish contact, but on the other hand they have reduced the number of face-to-face contacts. A bargeman no longer

has to moor at a lock to arrange a passage with the lock-keeper; while he is still some kilometres away he can contact the lock-keeper and his colleagues through the mariphone and make the arrangements from a distance.

It is a fairly recent development to carry a car on board. Hardly a boat is to be seen these days without a car on the deck or on the roof of the living quarters. The car has had a profound effect on the frequency of contacts with relatives who sail and those who do not (any more). While the mariphones have reduced direct contact with lock and dock personnel, direct contact with relatives has increased thanks to the car. The bargemen themselves, however, see its major function as strengthening the links with their children in boarding schools on land. The car has given land routes an importance in the eyes of bargees too. A bargeman used only to travel through the country by water, and what he knew was primarily the waterside. His geographical knowledge was based on rivers and their routes, as well as loading and unloading sites. The anecdotes of children who traced the vessel of their parents by walking along canals and asking at the locks are telling in this respect.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up, in less than a century far-reaching changes have taken place with respect both to the living quarters on board the inland vessels and to the forms of communication of bargemen with their colleagues and others. On the one hand, contact with relatives on the water and on land has become more frequent; on the other hand, a dilution has taken place in meetings with people with whom there was frequent contact earlier on.<sup>4</sup>

The improvements in the methods of communication are of no use to the bargemen in getting orders. They still have to attend the market in person and to wait their turn, at least as far as domestic freight is concerned. The procedure there is supervised by local officials. Since 1975 this system also applies to the Belgian and French routes, for in that year a number of bargemen introduced a voluntary system of taking it in turns for the North-South traffic. The only exception to this system is transport over the Rhine. Bargees do not have to wait their turn for this route, and can unconditionally accept any freight they are offered, as long as they have a suitable craft at their disposal, possess certain documents (a Rhine licence), and agree to the terms and price for transporting the cargo.

For all domestic and international trips, whether the freight is a "free" one or of a different kind, the trips (or cargoes) are always tendered by carriers: people whose job it is to mediate between, on the one hand, those who need room on board to carry a cargo, such as manufacturers and merchants, and on the other, bargemen who have room at their disposal. These carriers are also to be found in the markets beside the bargees and market officials, where they carry out their work in small offices. Bargemen have the most contact with them and view them in a very ambivalent way. On the one hand, they depend on the cargoes which the carriers tender on the market, so that it is advisable to stay on friendly terms with them. On the other hand, bargees view carriers as exploiters who always try to keep payments to a minimum.



The "Annie" built in 1926 in the harbour of Amsterdam.

### The Division of Labour on Board

A feature of contemporary Dutch inland navigation is that bargemen and their wives do not just live on the same boat, but they both sail it too. In general a bargee's wife runs the household and does not concern herself with the acquisition of freight or with maintaining contacts with the onshore figures such as loaders, carriers, shipping agents, recipients, loading and unloading personnel. They all form the preserve of her husband, the bargeman. She stays on board when he goes to the market. But there is a whole range of activities during loading, unloading and sailing which she carries out jointly with her husband. For instance, she may help him to open the hatches on to the quay and to cover up the hull again; she warps the boat if necessary and manoeuvres it in and out of locks, while he stands in the prow to tie or untie the ropes. She may count as an official sailor on routes where the presence of a sailor is legally prescribed, such as on the Rhine. In other words, inland navigation is generally not a one-man job, but a man-and-wife concern in which the female partner performs essential functions to ensure the smooth running of the business. This is exactly what names like Jo-Cor and Lenie D express. By giving his craft a name like this, the bargeman indicates that the vessel with which he earns a living for himself and his family belongs to him and to his wife. In both cases the name of the vessel is formed from elements of their first and/or surnames. In the case of Jo-Cor, we are dealing with an abbreviated form of the names Johannes and Corrie or Johanna and Cornelis. In the case of Lenie D, we see the first name of the bargee's wife and the initial of the bargee's surname. In the first case the order of the man's and the woman's name can be reversed, but in the second only one sequence is possible. One might imagine a name like D Lenie, but it never occurs in the world of inland navigation. I see a connection between the fact that the first name of the woman is used in full in combination with only the initial of the man's surname and the common practice of giving craft exclusively female names; I suggest that this case represents a specific variant.

As far as the dating of the combined names is concerned, it is striking that the Jo-Cor type came into fashion in the 1930s (cf. *Schuttevaeralmanak* 1936:339), while names of the Lenie D type only came in from the mid 1970s onwards and were mainly used by young bargemen. The use of combined names is not a chance occurrence, but it coincides with changes in inland navigation itself. In the 1930s the wages of deck hands rose so high that they disappeared from sight. Moreover, it became increasingly common in this period for bargemen's children to go to school on land, although education was only made compulsory for them in the 1960s. Activities on board which used to be performed by deck hands or children were increasingly taken over by bargemen's wives in this period. The choice of a name like Jo-Cor was a statement by the bargee and his wife that inland navigation had become a business for two. It is not so easy to connect the "modern" combined name with changes in inland navigation. When I asked bargemen why they had chosen a name of this kind, they just emphasised that they saw their craft as "something feminine" and had therefore



An inland river craft with a "mustache."

given it a woman's name. If we combine this with the fact that many vessels only bear a female first name, it leads us on to the deep meaning of shipping nomenclature. I should emphasise in advance that bargemen have never pointed this out to me themselves. All the same, I would like to suggest that one may deduce the existence of a meaning of this kind from a number of aspects which I shall now proceed to review.

#### **"And then I Sank Her"; Deep Meanings**

It is striking that bargemen apply the terms used for limbs of the human body to refer to parts of a boat. For instance, a boat has a head ("a friendly face" or "an ugly one"), ribs, a belly, flanks, eyes (hawseholes) and a rump. There are a lot of jokes which refer to the latter association, which are especially popular to floor people who are unfamiliar with the world of navigation: "now I'm going to take off my best trousers to tar my arse". A boat also has a skin: the plating on the flanks and surface.

These terms suggest that it is not far-fetched to assume that bargemen see their craft as a body. But what is the gender of this body: male or female? I put this question to a number of bargemen and received the following reply from most of them: "a boat feels like a woman" and "a boat is like a woman." One bargee explained at great length and in full seriousness that a boat takes as much paint as a good-looking woman. According to him, a bargee cherished it as a lovely lady. This is pregnantly expressed in the words of a bargee who refused to

let his vessel fall into the hands of the occupying force during World War II:

And then I sank her. It was a painful experience. I can hardly describe what it feels like for a bargeman to sink his own boat. [...] She was my past and my future and I loved her (Berman 1985:104).

The vision of a boat as a woman also emerged from a conversation I had with a bargeman about a colleague who had called his vessel Only Son. "It's not right, a name like that, because a boat is a woman." This immediate association is also expressed in a bargee's ditty with the following chorus:

Oh Neeltje Jacoba with your beautiful stern,  
Your sturdy flanks and your charming bottom.  
Your heart is iron and your hair rope,  
But in my eyes you are the most beautiful woman of all.

The common practice of giving boats female names seems to me to be directly related to the feelings which bargemen have for their craft.

Although the vessel may bear the name of the bargeman's wife, this is not always the case. This indicates that the expression of the experience of the boat as "something feminine" is more important than the identification of the boat with the bargeman's own wife. This identification is made on occasion and can be explained against the background of the customary practice of not sailing for oneself until one is married. In view of the feminine associations of the craft, the association of the first boat with the first wife is natural enough.

The claim that boats are viewed as females is not novel. In a lively article on the symbolism of the launching of seagoing vessels Sylvia Rodgers states:

From being a numbered thing at her launch, the ship receives her name and all that comes with the name. This included everything that gives her an individual and social identity, her luck, her life essence and her *femininity* [my emphasis, JV]. [...] Most of us know that sailors refer to a ship by the feminine pronoun. But the extent of the metaphor of the ship as a living, feminine and anthropomorphic being is not, I think, appreciated. (1984:2)<sup>5</sup>

However, inland navigators do not just see their craft as women, but they also strongly identify with the boats they sail. Once again their language is revealing. If a lock-keeper asks how big the boat is in order to determine the sequence of boats in the lock, the bargeman will rarely or never reply with: "my boat is thirty-eight metres long and five metres wide." Instead he will say: "*I'm* thirty-eight metres long and five metres wide." Nor do they say that their boat is loaded or unloaded, but that *they* are loaded or unloaded; and it is *they*, not their boat, who are empty. A typical expression is: "*I'm* carrying 480 tons of tapioca" to indicate that their boat is loaded with that fodder. Nor do they say that their boat is moored next to their neighbour's, but that *they* are moored. The number of expressions in which bargemen identify themselves with their boat is as large

as that of the expressions identifying it with a woman. It is therefore difficult to believe that we are here confronted with an insignificant coincidence.<sup>6</sup>

If we now combine the two equations 1) boat = woman and 2) boat = bargeman, it might be supposed that a bargeman identifies with a female body, or even that he often expresses the fact that he feels like a woman. I realise that this is a provocative statement which is likely to arouse bitter opposition from the bargemen themselves, but I consider that it holds water in view of additional data which support it.

It is common for bargemen to refer to carriers (*bevrachters*) as "inseminators" (*bevruchters*) or, less commonly, "rapists" (*verkrachters*). These go-betweens make them "pregnant" (*bevruchten*) with their cargoes (*vachten*). These terms have an unmistakably sexual character. They suggest that bargemen see themselves as "women" in relation to the carriers and that they are approached in order to become "pregnant." It is also striking in this connection that *double entendre* jokes are made about waiting one's "turn," after the "release" of what they had "inside" them. All the ambiguities which hinge on the presentation of the bargeman as a woman who can be made pregnant can only be understood if one realises both that a bargee sees his boat as a woman and that he identifies with it. *Vis-à-vis* the carriers and other bargemen he is both boat and bargeman. Not only does he run a man-and-wife concern together with his wife, but he also has a perception of self in which clearly feminine elements can be distinguished beside the masculine ones. This is expressed in the name of his boat and in his language.<sup>7</sup>

The result of this survey of a particular kind of shipping nomenclature may also help us to understand the ways in which bargemen behave toward their own craft and those of others, as well as their verbal and non-verbal behaviour toward colleagues on water and in the market, carriers and others with whom they come into contact. Of course, other "factors" play a part too, such as the nature of their physical environment, but I will leave that out of the present discussion.

If we assume that bargemen view their boats as women and at the same time identify with them, it is understandable that they are so enraged when their craft are discussed, boarded or touched by others in an insulting fashion. Just as there are parts of a bargeman which must not be touched (such as the belly), there are parts of a boat which must be avoided to keep out of harm's way. Certain rules of respect for the bargeman and his boat are observed when stepping from boats which are moored next to one another alongside the quay in order to reach a boat further away. Even though it means going out of one's way, one has to keep as far away from the stern as possible, i.e. from the private part of the vessel, and to walk over the prow, i.e. the public area. This rule is also familiar to non-bargees, as can be seen from the instructions given to the riot police in 1981 when they were to break up a blockade: they must only take up positions on the prows of the boats.

For a bargeman, walking over the hatches of his boat is as much an insult as a slap on the belly: it is an affront to or assault on his physical integrity. In general, he will treat every irregular contact with his boat as a personal attack,

and is prepared to respond with physical violence. Whoever touches his boat touches his (woman's) body and - paradoxically - can count on an exaggeratedly masculine reaction.

To sum up, the identification of the boat with the body of the bargeman accounts for a whole range of reactions to words and actions of others which concern the craft. The bargemen care for and protect their boats like women or as they do for themselves in a fashion which recalls the way in which Mediterranean males watch over their wives and daughters and, in the last instance, their physical integrity.

The identification also explains why, besides the female or combined names, vessels are often given the names of human qualities or attitudes. By calling his boat Perseverance, a bargeman indicates that he is persevering; by calling it Dependent, he indicates how dependent he feels himself to be on the favours of the carriers who have it in their power to "inseminate" him.

I hope to have demonstrated that the choice of shipping nomenclature among inland navigators is no random choice. They use it to express the fact that their craft mean more to them than just material objects. Boats are experienced as (female) bodies, with which the bargemen identify themselves to such an extent that in their everyday language they no longer distinguish between themselves and their boats. They treat their vessels as bodies which are as precious as their own and expect others to follow suit. The proxemic rules of inland navigation, the movements of bargemen *vis-à-vis* one another and their boats, are to a large extent understandable in terms of this perception, which is specific to this professional group.

These considerations could lead one to formulate a broader thesis: it is very probable that professional groups which tend to give names to the means of production from which they earn a living (many fishing vessels and lorries also have female names) view their means of production as bodies. This finds expression in their behaviour toward them and in their expectations of the behaviour of others.

#### *Acknowledgements*

With thanks to Kitty Verrips and the participants in the conference on "Perception and the use of space and non-verbal communication in European and Mediterranean societies," held in Maastricht in January 1985.

#### *Notes*

1. These findings are based on a scrutiny of the names of vessels contained in the Central Register of Inland Craft of the Ministry of Transport and Public Works for 15 January 1981. This contains all vessels belonging to companies and private individuals which sail with a licence. There were about 6,000 at that time. For the present article I have categorised all the names of vessels belonging to bargemen or shipowners whose surnames began with A, B, C, D, S, T, U or V. These totalled 3,182 vessels, i.e. roughly 50 per cent of the full list. Of these, almost 50 per cent fell into one of the three main categories, while the rest belonged to the less well-represented categories. It is very likely that

the percentage would be higher if the vessels belonging to shipowners were to be discounted. Shipowners tend to give their vessels names with a geographical colouring or prosaic combinations of letters and numbers. A number of names cropped up in my sample which defied categorisation. In some cases a highly complex combination of first names and surnames had probably taken place.

2. The dimensions can be gauged from the following passage, taken from a government report on the inland navigation problem from the beginning of the present century: "In this connection the Commission points out that there is very good accommodation for the bargeman and his family in the barges of the last twentyfive years and in the clippers; even the barges constructed recently satisfy the highest demands of comfort and hygiene [...] they have a salon and other conveniences. These fresh and comfortable living quarters form a sharp contrast to the afterhold of *tjalken*, flat-boats and other wooden vessels and of the smaller iron ships; a whole family lives, sleeps, cooks, spends the whole day if the weather is poor, and carries out all the household chores in a space which on land would be deemed unsuitable for a person living alone. The surface of the afterhold in old-fashioned vessels of around 40 tons is approximately 1.50 × 2.00 metres, and the height of such a space is between 1.40 and 1.50 metres. The more recent vessels generally have afterholds in the deckhouse. These are higher and broader, but they take up more of the cargo area. The larger the ship, the larger the afterhold. Nevertheless, only a big *tjalk* will have an afterhold that is 2 metres long, 3 metres wide and 1.80 metres high" (Verslag 1911:168).

3. The cognitive map of a bargeman is determined not only by the waterways but also by the location of docks and factories: the loading and unloading sites. He is familiar with parts of the country where landlubbers seldom come, and as a result his experience of the built-up areas is very different. His life runs in a space which is literally organised in a different way, often bound by fences and railings, filled with technical installations, warehouse stores and factory floors, usually far from the "inhabited world." The manoeuvres which bargemen, their women and children have to make in order to reach the inhabited world are often perilous and demand a lot of skill. The way in which they have to keep on leaving their homes or moving into new ones is fundamentally different from that of the sedentary landlubber.

4. At the risk of exaggeration, it could be claimed that the improved transport and communication facilities have contributed to the internal integration of the world of the inland navigators and to its external isolation. This isolation is also due to the fact that industrial estates and docklands tend more and more to be situated in remote spots. This development is aptly summed up in the following bargeman's song:

Beneath the eternal flame in the Europort  
 Beneath the eternal flame, under the smoke of Rotterdam,  
 Tanks full of oil around me  
 We arrived on Friday the 13th  
 After a tiring trip.  
 We wanted to stop off in the city of Rotterdam  
 But there was no place for the boat.  
 We were sent further and further away from the city  
 And now we're here in this stinking neighbourhood.  
 Beneath the eternal flame in the Europort  
 Beneath the eternal flame, under the smoke of Rotterdam.

My car's parked useless on the roof  
 For how can I ever get out of here?  
 We're imprisoned in our own boat  
 In this miserable and desolate place.  
 No fisherman, neighbour or human being to be seen.  
 I wonder why I deserved this.

So this weekend drags to a close.  
 Sometimes my wife looks at me without saying anything.  
 She doesn't say much, but I know what she's thinking.  
 Is this a bargeman's life?  
 After TV we go to the bunk bed.  
 My wife's so beautiful by the light of the flame.

5. Why ships are perceived as (female) bodies is an intriguing question. According to Rodgers, the fact that seamen generally see their ships as omnipotent mothers, protecting their helpless young, and/or as enchanting women you can never be sure of, is directly related to the dangerous circumstances in which they live. "This environmental context is crucial when we look for reasons for the feminine nature of the ship. [...] It is easy to understand that the oceanic environment exacerbates the need for mystical protection that emanates from women. In addition, in circumstances where uncertainty and the likelihood of sudden death is increased, the symbol of rebirth in the form of the mother would be particularly welcome" (1984:3). Generally speaking I can follow Rodgers in her heavily psychological approach, but she overemphasises the importance of the environment – which is much less dangerous for inland bargemen than for seamen – and underplays the association of a ship with a woman as far as reproduction is concerned. At the risk of exaggerating, I would claim that a ship is a means of reproduction for an inland navigator. As a woman reproduces labour power or life by bearing children, so the loading and unloading of a ship reproduces the situation and life of the bargeman. Incidentally, it should be noted that the christening of a ship ("an artifact" in Rodgers' terminology) with wine instead of water should probably be seen as an attempt to inspire life into an inanimate object by means of a spiritual fluid.

6. The Dutch language also contains a large number of expressions in which it is not ships which are compared with people, but people with ships. For example, *een zwak schip* (= an ailing woman); *een mal schip* or *een lastig zeeschip* (= a strange or difficult woman); *iemand dwars voor de boeg komen* (= to cross someone's path); *de lading in hebben* (= drunk); *de kont tegen de krib gooien* (= dig one's heels in); *op de helling moeten* (= to review), etc. The comparison of a human being with a ship can also be seen in proverbs like the following: "Man is like a ship, the world like a sea/The bible my compass, heaven the road." It is remarkable that bargemen's wives do not talk about vessels as their husbands do. They say, for example, "we're loaded with tapioca" and "we're forty metres long and six metres wide" or "we're moored in the Houthaven." Conversations with bargemen's wives did not yield any associations between craft and female bodies, although they followed their husbands in referring to the skin, belly, flanks, face and rump of their boat.

7. To put it more abstractly, it might be claimed that bargemen have an androgynous cognitive structure or mentality, which is directly connected with the nature of their work. The fact that they call some of the decorations to the prow of the boat (a series of horizontal lines) *snorren* [whiskers] is indicative. A moustache is not a feminine attribute, but a particularly masculine one. In doing so, they turn their craft into "a woman with a moustache": a bargeman.

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## The Difficult Transition from Subsistence to Commercial Fishing

The Case of the Bijagòs of Guinea-Bissau

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**ABSTRACT** This article seeks to explain factors behind the continued subsistence orientation of Bijagò fishermen in Guinea-Bissau. The lack of a transition to a commercial adaptation cannot, it is argued, be explained by factors inherent in the artisanal fishery sector itself. Foreign fishermen pursue a highly productive fishery, and access to necessary factors of production as well as demand for fish exist. The explanation is to be found in processes of change in the socio-cultural environment of the Bijagòs, set in motion by the increased options for individual economic strategies and capital accumulation.

### Introduction

Transition from subsistence to commercial fishing among traditional fisherfolks is difficult for a number of well known reasons. The investment required is considerable, with capital being necessary for the purchase and maintenance of both boat or canoe, gear and motor. Fishing societies are typically marginally located in relation to larger markets of exchange, which inhibits sales and capital accumulation. The insecurity involved in fishing makes access to credit limited and conditions often hard. In addition, fisherfolks are typically poor, making involvement in several systems of production, and hence only part-time or seasonal involvement in fisheries, the optimal risk-reducing strategy (Pollnac 1978; Smith 1979; Acheson 1981; Tvedten 1986).

In West-Africa we find some of the major exceptions to the general picture of a deprived fisheries sector. In countries like Senegal and Ghana there are examples of communities where fishing is highly profitable and specialized, based on advanced means of production, market integration and extensive migration (FAO 1988; Everett 1986).

The Nhominkas of Senegal is one group which has gone through the type of transition in question. External preconditions for this transition seem to have been the introduction of the purse-seine and outboard motors in the 1950s and 1960s, while the internal market and commercial tradition in Senegal largely explain why the new technologies had such a profound impact on production. (Chaveau and Samba 1989; Fernandés 1987).

Around 150 Nhominkas have been operating from the Bijagò Islands in Guinea-Bissau from the late 1950s. There they live semi-permanently and produce considerable surpluses through a fishery involving advanced means of production, a variety of high-yielding technologies, and with considerable in-