

## **SELLING POWER: A FEMINIST GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF SPATIAL ACCESS AND SOCIAL POSITIONING IN FISH MARKETS IN NEGOMBO AND PHNOM PENH**

Gayathri Lokuge\* and Nadiya Azmi  
Centre for Poverty Analysis, Colombo, Sri Lanka  
\*gayathri@cepa.lk

This paper examines the role of social positioning and social networks in shaping access to, and participation within, fish markets in Negombo, Sri Lanka and fish processing markets in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Drawing on feminist geography—particularly Doreen Massey’s conceptualization of space as relational, socially constructed, and imbued with power—the paper explores how gendered, location-based, and ethnically-shaped social relations mediate market actors’ ability to navigate and claim space in these urban economic environments. In both locations, fish markets operate as crucial economic and social hubs that are simultaneously shaped by broader socio-political histories and micro-scale everyday negotiations of power. Applying Massey’s feminist geographical lens allows us to understand these market spaces not as neutral economic arenas but as arenas of ongoing spatial negotiation, where power is continuously (re)produced, negotiated and contested. This study argues that access to market space is not solely determined by economic capital but is deeply intertwined with social capital—constructed through networks of kin, ethnicity, religion, and gendered labour histories and roles. Moreover, the articulation of these networks is deeply spatial: power relations manifest through who can occupy central stalls; the permanent buildings, who must remain mobile and occupy the corridors, and who can engage with particular market actors including suppliers from outside the district.

Through comparative immersive fieldwork, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with sellers, conducted between 2019-2020 in Cambodia and 2022-2023 in Sri Lanka, this paper highlights how spatial access in fish markets is both a product and a producer of social inequalities. By foregrounding the experiences of women and marginalized actors, it reveals the gendered geographies of informality and the everyday spatial politics of survival and resistance. In doing so, the paper contributes to broader discussions within feminist geography about how spatial justice, access, and mobility are negotiated within uneven urban landscapes shaped by both local histories and global economic pressures.