

María L. Cruz-Torres. 2023. *Pink gold: Women, shrimp, and work in Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press. ISBN 9781477328026. \$34.95

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When judging an ethnography, I value those that use an interesting set of theoretical lenses to critically analyze their material and examine their utility. Key to both is ethnographic richness. Too many ethnographies are driven by theories in search of supporting facts—this is not science nor is it useful. Rather, the ethnographies I value use their materials to examine the adequacy of theories, providing genuine insight. Because today's theoretical debates rapidly become yesterday's news, I value ethnographies based on direct observation and interviews that are rich in detail. Such material can be examined through other lenses, including those yet to be imagined, giving them lasting value.

Pink gold is a compelling ethnography that places the lives of women shrimp traders, known as *changueras*, at its heart. It is a masterclass in blending detailed fieldwork with rich theoretical analysis, providing a window into the experiences and struggles of these remarkable women, and invaluable insights into the gendered dynamics of the shrimp industry. Unlike many ethnographies that are snapshots of a particular time and place, this book is the product of prolonged fieldwork between 2004 and 2019, informed by a previous dissertation on shrimp mariculture in Mexico (Cruz-Torres, 1991). Cruz-Torres' long-term engagement with the *changueras* provides a panoramic view of how Mexico's economic and political crises have shaped their lives and livelihoods.

This ethnography ticks all my boxes. Using a feminist political ecology lens, Cruz-Torres convincingly argues that access to and control over natural resources, specifically shrimp, is deeply gendered. By tracing the shrimp commodity chain, she illustrates how the *changueras*' work is embedded in broader market dynamics and political contexts, highlighting the global implications of their local struggles. Although these challenges are faced by women working in informal economies across the globe, she does not portray them as powerless victims but as active agents engaging in economic and political struggles to make a living and gain legitimacy.

While the focus of this ethnography is on women shrimp sellers in Mazatlán, it presents three central narratives: the gendered control over fisheries, the intricacies of the shrimp commodity chain, and the personal stories of the *changueras* themselves. Given the gendered nature of state control over fisheries, the book provides a historical perspective on Mexico's shrimping industry and underscores the resilience and adaptability of the *changueras* in the face of systemic challenges. The ethnography's dissection of the shrimp commodity chain emphasizes the roles and interactions of various actors at each stage. It connects local struggles to the global shrimp market, illustrating how gender, power, and economic interests intersect. Third, the text brings the *changueras*' personal stories to life, presenting them as individuals with complex social lives beyond their economic roles. Through their personal narratives, Cruz-Torres offers broader theoretical insights, portraying these women not just as economic agents but as people leading full, complex lives. This saga traces their transformation from marginalized vendors to empowered union members and cultural icons, showcasing their heroic determination to overcome barriers and assert their identities.

Each chapter contributes to the overarching theoretical framework and explores specific dimensions of the *changueras*' lives and livelihoods. The introduction sets the stage for this ethnographic study by outlining the theoretical and methodological approaches and discussing what led the author to focus on the *changueras*. Cruz-Torres provides an overview of the shrimp industry in coastal Sinaloa and the shrimp market in Mazatlán, outlining the history of state control over fisheries and the impact of economic crises and neoliberal privatizations on fishermen and women shrimp traders. Using feminist political ecology, she argues that the women's strategies are transformative struggles reshaping their identities and community relationships. Focusing on the marketing step of the commodity chain and the broader context, including political-economic factors, she describes the *changueras*' transformative journey from marginalized street vendors to empowered union members and cultural icons.

Chapter 1 tells the story of state efforts to control commodity chains by regulating mobilities and public spaces, alongside the parallel tale of women shrimp traders who smuggled shrimp to market and struggled with authorities for public space to sell their goods. She illustrates how the economic crisis of 1982, hyperinflation, and subsequent structural adjustment and neoliberal policies undermined the livelihoods of fishing

communities, pushing men into poaching and forcing women to smuggle shrimp to Mazatlán. Drawing on the accounts of these women, Cruz-Torres presents a vivid picture of the risks they faced, including confiscation, violence, and sexual harassment by police, military, and inspectors on their trips to Mazatlán, and their strategies to elude them. These risks did not end upon their arrival. Using firsthand accounts, Cruz-Torres describes their lived experiences as street vendors who, lacking permits or licenses, struggled to find public places to sell their shrimp and developed strategies to avoid city inspectors and police. This story, however, is also one of resistance. The women organized an informal union to fight for recognition as legally recognized workers in Mazatlán and to secure a permanent public space for their shrimp market.

Chapter 2 tells two stories about becoming *changueras*. The first story, based on the women's own accounts, documents their difficult path in the highly gendered shrimp commodity chain, carving out a niche within the seafood industry and Mazatlán's urban economy. It explores the crisis that fishing communities faced in the 1980s, which undermined their livelihoods and led men to become *changueros* (poachers) and women to become *changueras*, selling their catch. This narrative highlights the dangers they faced, including confiscation, fines, jail, and the risk of being beaten or shot by fishery officers or marines. The second story interrogates their contested identities, and the social labeling associated with the term *changuera*, a derogatory label akin to being called a drug peddler, and examines the process of renegotiating its meaning, which eventually led them to embrace it as a symbol of their resilience and empowerment.

Chapter 3 examines the *changuera* street market and their seafood workers' union, highlighting the significance of power and gender dynamics. She argues that the market is not just a space where commercial transactions are conducted, but a space embedded in wider social relations, where social ties are formed, trust is built, and mutual support is fostered. Cruz-Torres describes these as imaginaries and moral economies to explore the role that power, gender, class, and race play in the shrimp market. This chapter also tells the story of how the *changueras* in Mazatlán organized their own informal seafood trader's union, providing them the political legitimacy to negotiate a collective permit with the city, and secure public space for their market.

Chapter 4 details the daily routines of the *changueras*, highlighting their interactions with wholesalers, customers, vendors, and family. Among the more interesting observations she makes is that shrimp gain value through the *changueras'* knowledge, work, and social interactions. Using the literatures on the anthropology of work, social networks, social capital, and moral economies to continue the analysis of the market as a social space, Cruz-Torres examines the dynamic relationships among women shrimp traders, stressing that despite competing with one another, these women often need to collaborate, relying on family ties and mutual support. Familial relations in the marketplace are complex, involving conflict, cooperation, and varying emotions. Because their stands operate as family micro-businesses, with children, husbands, and hired workers contributing to the labor, the women constantly negotiate their relationships, balancing competition with mutual support. The seafood workers' union, she observes is crucial in sustaining these familial-like relations amid market competition.

Chapter 5 explores the cultural significance of shrimp in everyday interactions, showing how their actions and behaviors facilitate mutual trust and social cohesion, essential for withstanding economic pressures. Cruz-Torres presents a vivid picture of the *changueras'* trading practices and strategies they use to attract and retain customers, such as promotions and advertising, as well as the dangers they face, including aggression and theft. She provides a comprehensive look at the cultural and economic dynamics of shrimp trading, showcasing the resilience, ingenuity, and adaptability of women shrimp traders in the face of ongoing challenges.

Chapter 6 presents a fine-grained analysis of how *changueras'* manage their finances. One of the central arguments Cruz-Torres advances is that unlike formal businesses, the *changueras'* finances are intermingled with those of their households, making access to credit is essential for both. Cruz-Torres examines their use of informal credit, negotiation tactics with suppliers for access to shrimp and other seafood, interactions with moneylenders, participation in rotating credit and savings groups, and strategies for debt management. She illustrates how these informal credit arrangements rely on trust and reputation, deeply rooted in complex social ties and exchange relations among family and friends. These relationships are crucial for their livelihoods, often requiring significant effort just to meet their financial obligations.

Chapter 7 traces the transformation of *changueras* from a denigrated group to celebrated cultural icons. Cruz-Torres documents this transformation by focusing on their sponsorship of an annual Christmas *posada*, an event that turns the market into a festive space, reinforcing their ties to the community and legitimizes them

as working women. She examines their portrayal in popular Mexican *telenovelas* and ballads, such as "El Corrido de la Pantera" that recounts the exploits of a daring *changuera* and the risks she faced. Using such examples, Cruz-Torres advances her argument that the *changueras* heroic determination to overcome barriers and assert their identities have made them symbols of regional and national identity.

The book's conclusion emphasizes the value of feminist political ecology for understanding gender's role in shaping access to natural resources and livelihoods. Cruz-Torres reflects on the importance of longitudinal study in documenting the lives of the *changueras* and the emergence of new identities, reiterating the importance of the feminist political ecology framework for a more nuanced understanding of human-environmental relations. She underlines the value and relevance of ethnographic research as a venue to present the voices of these women, and that by acknowledging history provide valuable insights into much the impacts of larger processes, but because ethnography uniquely considers concrete things to think abstract thoughts, the details of their lives and livelihoods these women have broad implications for theory.

In sum, *Pink gold* provides a rich and detailed account of how gender, culture, and economics intersect in the world of shrimp trading. It makes significant contributions to feminist political ecology, the study of commodity chains, the anthropology of marketplaces, the anthropology of work, and household livelihoods. The book's primary strength lies in its rich, detailed ethnographic data gathered from prolonged fieldwork. Cruz-Torres extensive engagement allows her to capture the evolving socio-economic conditions and the enduring struggles faced by *changueras* and enables her to present a nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of their lives, making the ethnography both compelling and credible. Her integration of theoretical analysis with ethnographic detail is particularly effective. Her use of feminist political ecology provides a robust framework for understanding the gendered nature of access to and control over natural resources. She convincingly argues that the *changueras'* local struggles are intricately linked to broader global market dynamics and political contexts, offering valuable insights into the complexities of informal economies. The detailed ethnographic richness of this book ensures that it will be a valuable resource for examining the adequacy of various theoretical lenses, providing lasting value for future research.

References

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