

FILM

FISHERWOMEN, FISHERMEN'S WIVES

(Femmes pêcheurs, Femmes de pêcheurs)

A documentary by Georges Vilasalo - 26mn, 2004

This review is
by **Alain Le Sann**,
Member, ICSF

In the Mediterranean, along the coasts of Provence and Corsica, eight women involved in fishing activities took part in the making of a book that told readers about their lives, their worries, their hopes. The book, titled *We, Fishermen's Wives, on the Mediterranean Shores*, was quite a success. It was the outcome of a writing workshop that provided them the encouragement to write. It also made them more determined to assert the importance of their role in fishing, and, as it turned out, they were invited to take part in the NGO Forum, during the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. "Being a fisherman's wife is not considered as work but as helping one's husband!" They rebelled against this stereotyped image prevalent in society, which displays a total ignorance of their role and their work.

The book was later made into a film in which five of the women talk about their lives and their jobs. One of them is a fisherwoman who works alone on her boat, having started to fish after her husband's death. She works hard, fishing from 4 a.m. onwards, then going to the fish market, a long drive from her port. Another woman works as a crew member with her husband, and shares all the tasks with him, the only difference being that she is not allowed to be in charge, for lack of an official diploma. A third one sells her husband's catch on the landing quay in a small port crowded with tourists. Two others help their husbands

and have responsibilities in the fishermen's organizations. "A fisherman's wife works from morning till night, without stopping, with no fixed working hours, no salary, and no holidays. Without her, a fisherman wouldn't survive", says Anne Torunczyck, one of the women in the film.

All of them testify to the difficulty of engaging in work dominated by men, especially for one not born into this milieu. Yet, fishermen must accept that women play a major role, a role that is generally unknown and devalued. In the sector in which they dominate, that is, in fish processing, their work is thought to be unskilled, though this is not the case. Women are involved in the management of the boat, in charge of relations with the authorities, selling of the fish, and sometimes, they even go fishing. While being responsible for the children and the family, they also contribute to providing security and moral support to the fisherman. Moreover, the couples try to diversify their source of income. If the wife has a job with a fixed salary, it reassures the fisherman, as his own income is quite uncertain, and the supplementary income can also allow him to invest more in fishing-related activities.

All the women featured in the film say that fishing is a difficult job, but that it is, nevertheless, "a fascinating way of life" in a "fascinating environment". The work gives them much "happiness" and "they share a feeling of solidarity with the other women".

This documentary offers simple testimonies. The tender view provided by the filmmaker makes it possible to see fishing activities in a different light. These testimonies also help us understand how coastal fishermen have managed to resist the pressure of tourism and to stick to their spaces in ports amidst numerous sailing boats. Without these fisherpeople, the famous Côte d'Azur wouldn't be as attractive as it is! **✚**



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable

fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

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