

The Effects of Internationalization on the Lives of Fishermen's Families

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First of all, allow me to thank you for your invitation to come and make a testimony to the experience shared in the maritime world through three commitments: as a secretary in a maritime vocational school, as a member of the Mission of the Sea, and as the secretary for many years of an association of seafarers' wives and later of one of the two French federations of seafarers' wives and families, the "3.F.M."

This, however, does not make me an "expert" in internationalization that affects the political, economic, cultural and technological sectors. In the area of fishing, it is expressed in terms of the market, fishing places, technology, and very little as a social model. We note that the human values are weakened by the economic upsets, the choice of productivism that calls for extractive and destructive technologies, and financial support for industrial firms to the detriment of traditional fishing. Since the sea can not be made larger, the decrease in resources leads to working more and giving priority to the return on the boat to the detriment of the humans who become an object.

For us Christians, "A man's life is worth more than all the gold in the world". Since as a committed missionary of the sea, I am affected in this faith, I feel supported by the Gospel and the place made for women in it; participation in the masses of the maritime world restores inspiration just as our regional and national meetings do. These moments of sharing in the faith are very strong and rich in spiritual nourishment because they give witness to "actions lived in truth" and invite us to always keep a vigilant but objective watch, and, above all, to build in this maritime world.

After the short talk presented to the European Conference of the Apostleship of the Sea in Southampton (England), in particular through Louis Guérin and our brother, Michel Maes of the MdM France, here we are in Rio to bring women's voices to another dimension and give witness to actions and reflections to local problems while taking the realities of globalization into consideration. This possibility to meet and communicate is one very positive aspect of internationalization.

1. Identification of the associations of seafarers' wives

The first vocation of these associations of wives is to get them out of isolation, to form and inform them and, for the younger women, to let them discover the maritime environment from which in many cases they do not come. They take part in the events of their ports both of a festive (Christian and lay) and a protest nature. They meet the wives of seafarers with different trades -- traditional fishing, industrial fishing and trade -- who want to keep the trades from becoming compartmentalized.

They agree in recognizing that at sea a seafarer works twice as many hours a day as a worker on land in unsafe and dangerous conditions and with little sleep, which are the same conditions for the owners and the sailors, and that on land the wives are the voice of the family at home and in society with regard to the defence of rights.

For the market, the men are means for maximizing profit. Yes, as an association or federation of seafarers' wives, we have no authority or competence to stop these negative

aspects; we are recognized because we have taken up respect for fishermen's dignity, safety at sea and formation. These wives meet locally, but also on the departmental, national and international level.

2. The history of the themes dealt with at the international meetings

While today the "3.F.M." federation is free from any religious, political or labor union label, most of the associations emerged from groups of seafarers' wives and widows attached to the Mission of the Sea. Our chaplains, in particular Mikel Epalza of the Netherlands, are at the origin of the international meetings of seafarers' wives with our sisters from Spain, Galicia, the Netherlands, Andalucia and at times also from Italy or Portugal.

In 1986, the entrance of Spain and Portugal into the common market was also a call to unite. The Mission of the Sea played an effective role in this sense by sowing a spirit of union, exchange and reconciliation between the different communities.

- 1988: La Rochelle – the first event and creation of the network that is still in place and enriched by new groups (Arcachon– Mediterranean).
- 1989: La Guardia (Galicia): forms of solidarity.
- 1991: Pasajes (South Basque Country): safety at sea.
- 1993: Lourdes: Women, the Hope of the Maritime World.
- 1995: Vigo (Galicia): associations and aid for formation.
- 1997: Noirmoutier: the fisherman's family, from the boat to the home – Concrete example of the spirit of reconciliation, "the tuna war"; while French and Spanish Basque fisherman struggled at sea, their wives, concerned by and victims of the same struggle, met in Noirmoutier to strengthen the "tuna peace".
- 1999: Saint Jean de Luz: The year 2000, what is the future for fishermen and their families?
- 2001: Malaga (Andalucia): the applicability of the new social laws.

Since the start of this great adventure, twice a year each French and Spanish association takes turns publishing a review called "Boga" that reports on news, activities or events from the different ports. This publication provides a link for communication and friendship beyond frontiers.

3. Positive repercussions of these international meetings

□ Following the Pasajes meeting in 1991, a delegation of Spanish and French seafarers' wives presented a common request before the European Parliament in Luxembourg and obtained one important advance in particular when helicopters and life rafts were made available (Spanish coast).

□ Following the very important meeting in Noirmoutier in 1997, a French-Spanish common petition was written and formulated before the European Parliament in Strasbourg in March 1998, to the Family-Children-Solidarity Commission. It can be synthesized as follows:

"The equilibrium of a seafarer's family depends on an improvement in the living conditions at sea and on land. This equilibrium is increasingly threatened... The shipwrecks are there to remind us about the difficulty and the risks of a fisherman's work.

*Action to change this seems to be essential for the survival of the families. This is why we recommend **no European aid to firms and State members without social security**. We conclude by saying that 'to establish social justice in the fishing sector, it is necessary to see to it that the work contracts are applied and respected, to strive for a social harmonization among all the European fishermen, and, above all, to set up **vigilance and arbitration***

mechanisms on the part of the European authorities, given that a fisherman who demands his rights runs the risk of getting sacked on land. Even though social matters fall under the State members' competency, it seems to us that the European institutions should also weigh their responsibilities with regard to human rights by requiring maritime social security before granting any subsidy".

- Strong points accepted by the European MP's in Strasbourg on March 10, 1998:
 - The problems of the seafarer's family: the single parent family.
 - The real maritime fishing situation does not change: **technologies evolve, the social aspect stagnates or regresses.**
 - The importance of radio and telephone communication: obtain lower rates.
 - Fishermen must be treated on an equal footing with other workers. Given the complexity of the profession, there are no directives, while elsewhere (industry, etc.) laws have been made regarding the social aspects.
 - The wives' groups are right to remind Parliament of its function: the directives and their application, which highlights a form of protection in the international jungle.
 - Contacts with the seafarers' labor unions are essential in order to made social projects succeed.

□ After that meeting in Strasbourg, we worked in different meetings (Bilbao, Vigo, Barcelona) on drawing up a European project called F.E.M. (Familles Européennes de Marins – European Seafarers' Families) carried out principally by our Spanish friends represented by Cristina de Castro from Vigo. We brought together the associations of seafarers' wives from Germany, Denmark, Norway and Holland around this project.

At the international meetings in St. Jean de Luz, we signed a petition common to these countries which was brought to Brussels in April 2000. It states the following:

- *A fair distribution of working time and rest.*
- *The remuneration of crews during rest time on land would compensate the extra hours and unpaid weekends. This measure requires restructuring the firms and involving the administrations of the countries concerned by the European Social Funds.*
- *Respect for biological rest periods could correspond to the periods of paid leave.*
- *Creation of European funds for women.*
- *Formation of seafarers' wives so that they will have full knowledge about everything which concerns the maritime sector.*
- *Creation of a European Network of seafarers' wives to foster the exchange of experience, the analysis and expression in one voice before the European Union of the participant countries' common needs for the defense of the rights of seafarers' families.*

□ At the Malaga meeting, great concern was expressed regarding the future of fishing in Spain.

Whereas in France we are expecting some social progress from the fishing law of July 2000 (work time calculated on an annual basis – minimum salary from the start – work contracts – spouse's status as head of fishing or marine cultures), the Spanish women are less optimistic. In fact, when measures are taken in the private and public sectors, things progress through labor-union action on land which is lacking in the maritime world.

The other point mentioned is certainly safety on ships, but also the fact that it is necessary to go out at all times in order to earn more. The young couples we met in Malaga spoke to us about respect for life, nature and the environment as a heritage to be transmitted to our children. Reassured by our experience in France, we have tried to breathe life into the federation spirit, its strength, credibility and power. Today we know that this is becoming

concrete especially in the ports of Andalusia. Next objective: a **French-Spanish co-federation of seafarers' wives?**

4. Evolution

Although the role of women in the maritime sector is vital, it has always been hidden both on the economic and the social levels. The statistics used as economic indicators have to do with the activity of fishing firms: the number of ships, jobs, the number of maritime registrations, production in worth and volume, etc.

Nonetheless, a part of the activity of these firms is done on land, and a considerable number of spouses take part in the work without being fishermen or salaried workers: for example, selling fish, bookkeeping, management, relations with the suppliers, etc. This lack of real recognition of women's place in the maritime world constitutes an important curb on the dynamism of the sector. Moreover, the curbs are also of a cultural, economic and social nature.

Locally, women's place in the professional maritime organizations "of men" has not been won. Whether this has to do with local committees, cooperatives or management centers, there are two attitudes: rejection in principle or paternalism, which is another way of making us keep silent. Since the persons in charge have been the same ones for years and from one organism to another, we find ourselves talking to the same persons. And yet, since the fishing sector is in difficulty, all energies and intelligence should be called on, and women's energies and intelligence should be mobilized more and more.

There are various obstacles to playing a role that is recognized, or fulfilling a function in the administration, in marketing, financial control, quality control or management: mentalities, insufficient skills, a lack of training; for this reason, we give priority to action in this area.

In July 2000 at a federal meeting in Arcachon, we invited the representatives of another federation of seafarers' wives. Many times we have knocked on the same national and European doors for the same reasons, but our disparity was a weakness.

Very soon we realized the complementarity of our vocations and decided to bring many cases together, including the one on **formation for seafarers' wives**. Our efforts to unite around this project have born fruit because at present we are working with the Ministry of Transportation for the validation of a kind of national diploma for Bookkeeping and Management of a fishing firm. Several associations from our network have obtained subsidies, especially regional subsidies, to set up this formation. As a concrete example, in St. Jean de Luz we have set up a paid training period for bookkeeping management for 15 seafarers' wives. In addition to these subjects, they have also been sensitized to the problems and regulations with regard to managing the resource and safety. As a direct result, they have transmitted their new knowledge to their husbands who are much more vigilant about respect for rules, survival equipment, the dispensary, etc.

The other case on the agenda is the dreadful damage done by drugs to seafarers. The situation is alarming in some ports, and our efforts are united with those of all our maritime or "land" partners who are concerned about this scourge.

However, the women's associations are recognized by other spokespersons: for example, the association of the Netherlands has just been given an award by the Prefect for its actions in the public interest. The president of the other federation (FIFEL) has received the National Maritime Merit medal.

In general, we are listened to attentively in the Regional Directions of Maritime Affairs, the Ministry for Transportation, the maritime formation centers, the regional Councils, Women's Rights, etc.

In 1998, we were invited by the C.E.A.S.M. to take part in a study trip to Galicia among the associations of seafarers' wives and, in particular, the women who collect shells and try to create their own firms. In 1999, in the framework of the PESCA program, we attended a symposium in Finland on the theme "Women and Fishing". In September 2000, we were invited by the fishing D.G. of the European Parliament to participate in a hearing in Brussels on "Reducing the overcapacity of the fishing fleets and the fishing efforts in the E.U."

At the PESCA Symposium in Finland, we exchanged our testimonies with the seafarers' wives from the Scandinavian countries, Ireland, Belgium and Spain. Despite the different situations in the countries represented, some common points emerged:

- *Problems raised by the lack of recognition for women's activities and a legal and social status.*
- *Isolated and small-scale character of fishing communities.*
- *The need in order to progress to organize groups and make contacts with other associations on the regional, national and even international levels.*
- *Difficulty of reconciling a family role and a professional role.*
- *Importance of diversification in the areas dependent on fishing, which will enable women to undertake new activities.*
- *Need to improve the level of safety and formation in maritime activities.*
- *Financial aid is essential to develop better organizational structures and women's role in fishing.*

Some significant steps forward:

- *Effort regarding formation for women by the Irish Council of fisheries.*
- *Complete social protection system in Finland.*
- *Work on formation for safety in Sweden and Belgium.*
- *Recognition of shell collecting as a profession in Galicia.*
- *In Ireland an association has been created especially to help families get over the loss of a seafarer at sea.*
- *Again in Ireland, the organization of seafarers' wives has obtained the right to vote by correspondence for fishermen at sea.*

Some common objectives:

- In general, the need to develop awareness about the existence of rights.
- The need to finance the women's organizations.
- The need to obtain recognition for formation and to raise its status.
- The need to arrive at a common approach in all of Europe for dealing with cases of seafarers who die at sea and to reduce the delay in receiving compensation.
- The need for women to be involved in protecting the resource.
- The need to develop awareness about women's interests among the different actors and organisms concerned with fishing.

6. Conclusion

As I have tried to explain, our local concerns and actions are well situated in these issues and sphere of influence which is common to our colleagues in the E.U. There is no doubt that the association or unions of seafarers' wives active around the world are working in the same direction.

One of the effects, albeit modest, of internationalization, is the possibility to exchange our experience, knowledge and know-how and to give one another strength and confidence.

Like worker ants, let us continue to unite, to open our windows on to the rest of the world, to build together for greater opportunities for women's equality in the fishing sector and related fields, and to improve working conditions at sea for greater equilibrium in family life.

Although I have not specifically mentioned the young seafarers in training schools, they are quite obviously at the heart of our concerns. Through their vocation as mothers, "life bearers", women are aware that respect for nature and the environment is our contribution to the heritage of the future generations, just like everything that will develop with regard to the safety and quality of working conditions.

For women, it is not a question of "taking men's place", but of making this complementarity recognized which exists by nature and in the facts. Women do not presume to make a revolution in the maritime world, but the maritime world will not be able to evolve without this active and recognized participation of women.

Despite these long struggles, nothing is won: "Always put all your work into the loom!". We have to keep watch over what has been achieved and continue to be cooperative with all our partners, including the Apostleship of the Sea that has given us the floor today for which we are grateful.