

From Latin America/ Chile

Book Talk

A personal account of a visit to Peru, which the author, Professor Maria Terease López Boegeholz, a sociologist based in Chile, would like to share with artisanal fishermen/women and with professionals working with coastal communities.

I visited fishing communities of Paracas in Pisco, Peru on the invitation of Amelia García, a Peruvian sociologist. She was making the trip to present her book titled: *Los culpables desconocidos: Artisanal Fishworkers and the Environment in the National Reserve of Paracas, Pisco*, to the inhabitants of the *caletas* (fishing communities) who had provided her with the information and inspiration for this book, and who, besides this, had offered her “a lot of warmth”. This was to express her gratitude towards the people who offered her the hospitality of their homes, as well as the support and the motivation she needed to write this book.

In the port of Callao we visited the union of fishworkers. The 1800 members of this union are mainly shellfish collectors, boat-owners and longliners. Their boats and nets are small. The union is linked to the Committee of *Jaladeros*—those who wash the boats.

In Chorillos, Lima, our contact was Ms. Paquita Ramos, the first President of the *Comité de Damas* (Women’s Committee) of FIUPAP (The Federation for the Integration and Unification of Artisanal Fishworkers in Peru), founded in 1992. However, as there were never enough funds, they had to knock at many doors. She now works in the Ministry of Health, and manages health services for fishworkers. She has one of the restaurants under her in the scheme *Pesquero del Muelle* (Dock Fishworkers, literally translated). Her experience would be of great value in an exchange with successful women working in artisanal fisheries in Chile.

In the port of San Andres we met the Port Administrator. The wives of the fishermen here sell the fish catch. The fish are washed well with plenty of water and are laid out on the ground for sale.

The major species are *cabrilla* (*Paralabrax humeralis*) which amounts to approximately 180 tonnes per month, *cabinza* (*Isacia conceptionis*), *ayanque* (*Cynoscion analis*) and *chita* (*Anisotremus scapularis*). The fish is sold in boxes or by the dozen. The larger fish are sold in kilograms. Large vessels fishing in shallow waters, targeting mainly anchovies to supply fishmeal factories, catch a large number of small fish, and cause great damage.

In Laguna Grande, a village with temporary shacks, we were guided by Ms. Tita from the *Centro de Madres* (Mothers Club), and the daughter of one of the founders of the *Rancherías* (collection of shacks of fishworkers). The police personnel from the Paracas Police Headquarters and the Paracas National Park Security had tried to catch those using explosives—outsiders without permits—who had eventually escaped. The outsiders had stored their gear in a small inn, in the care of an old man they had paid, and this man had been imprisoned. The women had come together to protest in Paracas against this imprisonment and to testify in favour of the old man, seeking his release.

We observed the entry of vessels fishing at a depth of six fathoms in the bay area, which is prohibited. We conversed with old fishermen who had come here from Comatraca-Ica, their place of residence. Here, their workplaces are the little temporary shacks constructed on the shores of the beach. Their living conditions are very difficult, without water, electricity, proper drainage or sewage systems. As one of the young mothers, a niece of Ms. Tita explained, “they live like the fish, moving constantly— the fisherman goes where the fish is”

We then visited El Chaco accompanied by Ms. Gregoria. This was a visit to study family life in these parts. Ms. Gregoria is married to the grandson of the founder of El Chaco and is the first woman *chalanera* of the place. *Chalana* is the name of a boat used to ferry the fishermen from their boats to the beach and *vice versa*.

We also visited the Association of the Inhabitants of El Chaco and the *Atracadero Flotante Artesanal* (The Floating Artisanal Pier in El Chaco), a tourist attraction.

In La Gunillas we met Tia Fela, a 93-year old lady, who owns a family-run restaurant. This place has a

dock to offload fish and shellfish. Nevertheless there is pressure to privatize the place and get rid of the fishermen. Amelia's book influenced Tia Fela's family deeply as they are fighting to continue living in the place.

The problems faced by artisanal fishworkers in Peru are similar to those observed in Chile. However there is, in comparison, a lack of political awareness among the Peruvian fishworkers. During our conversations with them we found them to be poorly informed in political terms. The fishermen had little or no knowledge of the relations between CONAPACH (The National Confederation of Artisanal Fishworkers of Chile) and FIUPAP or of the Accord of 1998 signed by these two institutions.

The women, who are heads of extended families, have an important role to play in the family economy and many of them take an active part in fisheries activities. They have conserved and maintained the customs of the Andean culture, an issue being studied by Amelia, who is discovering roots of this culture among the coastal communities. Her book also describes this connection.

In the *caletas* of La Gunillas, El Chaco and Laguna Grande (the beach and residential areas), fishing communities are under pressure to leave the place and to make way for modernization and the development of tourism. Amelias book is her contribution to defending the cause of the inhabitants of these *caletas*. (Maria Terease López Boegeholz can be contacted at mtlopezb@hotmail.com)