

Cinema and Resistance

This year the *Pêcheurs du Monde* film festival, which turns 10, was held between 19 and 25 March 2018, in Lorient, France

46

Each year, the festival gives audiences the opportunity to rediscover exceptional achievements in cinema on fishers, both new and old, giving visibility to the forgotten individuals and communities who strive to protect the ocean

Filmmakers have always been fascinated by the sea, and the lives and work of fishermen. In the course of its 10 editions, the *Pêcheurs du Monde* (Fishers of the World) film festival has screened hundreds of films of all kinds – features, documentaries, reports, etc. Each year, the festival gives audiences the opportunity to rediscover exceptional achievements in cinema on fishers, both new and

the festival, which are rarely screened elsewhere in Europe, stun spectators by documenting the contempt and cynicism of organizations that claim to defend the environment but refuse to recognize the rights of the communities living off these marine resources. The age-old relationship of fishermen with the ocean cannot be perpetuated without a love for nature.

Many films at the festival testify to this relationship. In *Los Ojos del Mar*, directed by Jose Álvarez, the wife of a Mexican fisherman who has been missing at sea for 10 years invents a ritual: She embarks on a fishing boat and on reaching the spot where her husband disappeared, she throws overboard an illustrated box containing objects that reconstitute a link with him. She mixes Indian and Catholic rites before displaying a frenzy of life in a sensual dance.

old, giving visibility to the forgotten individuals and communities who strive to protect the oceans.

Marine conservation has become a major theme in the media and in film, but if we forget the men and women who make a living from the seas, this priority may turn against already fragile communities and their human rights. Indeed, behind some of the memorable campaigns to protect the marine environment, are banks intent on the valuation and extraction of marine wealth. Every year, the festival evokes the risks of such campaigns and this time it is the film, *Angry Inuk* which won two jury awards. The film tells the story of the human disaster created in Inuit communities by campaigns against the misunderstood practice of seal hunting. This and other films at

Unique knowledge

This particular relationship with the marine world endows fishing communities with unique knowledge. Two films – *Enquête sur ma Mer* and *Un Monde Relationnel* – show the richness of the knowledge accumulated through tradition and the daily experience of observing fish behaviour. The directors, Elisabeth Tempier and Philippe Houssin, a photographer-animator pair, document the *Prud'homies* of southern France, which are ancient systems of collective fisheries management. Local fishermen must constantly change the position and colour of their nets because the

This article, by Alain Le Sann (ad.lesann@orange.fr), founder and president of the international Pêcheurs du Monde (Fishers of the World) film festival, was translated by Danièle Le Sann



André Menras receives his price from students for his film, *Les chevaliers des sables jaunes*, about Vietnamese fishermen who employ an amazing fishing technique, using electric poles that stun reef fish, which is very selective but also exhausting and dangerous for the diving fishermen

fish adapt to the gear over time. These observations open up interesting new fields of research. Fishermen also analyze the species diversity and try to control the proliferation of certain fish, for example, small pelagic species, that threaten their traditional resources of rock fish, by consuming their eggs. We see that resource management is not simply 'maximum sustainable yield' (MSY), but a process that requires a thorough understanding of prey-predator relationships. A film shot covertly in Vietnam, *The Knights of the Yellow Sands*, by director André Menras, shows an amazing fishing technique, using electric poles that stun reef fish, which is very selective but exhausting and dangerous for diving fishermen. The young students who were invited to a jury at the festival were manifestly seduced by the skill of the fishermen, who work in very perilous conditions.

Undoubtedly, it is important to preserve and transmit this unique knowledge – that of Inuit seal hunters, Vietnamese pole fishers, artisanal fishermen of the Mediterranean or

women divers in Japan. Everywhere, the passing of each generation of fishermen threatens such transmission. Often, as shown in Claudia Neubern's *Il Canto del Mare*, there remains only one fisherman in ports that once had dozens; when they die, their knowledge will disappear. Some traditions help maintain the link between society and the increasingly marginalized fishermen. In Norway's Lofoten Islands, where the cod fishery is still flourishing, children from seven to 12 years are encouraged by their parents to work for two weeks, cutting cod tongues in a factory. They make good money and look forward to it.

In Solveig Melkeraaen's film, *Tungeskjærerne*, a young girl, raised in the rich, urbanized society of Norway's Oslo, decides to try it. She finally succeeds and passes this rite of passage, which goes to the roots of Norwegian society. It is also an opportunity to discover the autonomy these children acquire through the experience.

In *Ama-San*, directed by Cláudia Varejão, we see the pleasure that

Japanese women divers derive from their vocation. Through their fishing co-operative, older women pass on their traditional skills to the few young women who agree to continue this exhausting activity. This film won the Chandrika Sharma Award for highlighting the role of women in fisheries.

This year, many films reflected the importance of women in fisheries. In Senegal, they control processing activities, as they do in Mexico's freshwater fishery (*Les femmes de Petatan* by Carmen Pedroza Gutiérrez). A fisherwoman from Le Guilvinec, Scarlett Le Corre, took part in a lively discussion on the film dedicated to her (*Scarlette, une Femme sur le Pont* by Leslie Benzaquen, Henri Desauay and Nicolas Berthelot). The audiences also got an opportunity to rediscover a film made 30 years ago by Yolande Josèphe, president of the jury in 2018. Her film, *La Mer à L'Envers*, portrays the life and

work of a fisherman in the 1980s, the heyday of industrial fishing, from the point of view of his wife and children – a modern look on a world perceived as very masculine.

As it does every year, this time too the festival showcased films on the various facets of Big Business's grab of oceans, lakes and coasts. Ristead Ó Domhnaill's *Atlantic* explores a heretofore unknown impact of offshore oil exploration: the shock to cetacean and fish populations caused by explosions on the seabed. The threat of extractive industries is also depicted in films such as Veronica Quense Mendez's *La Ultima Barricada*, on mining in Chile, and in *Angry Inuk*, which is set in Arctic Canada. The ravages caused by illegal fishing in Asia and Africa are denounced in the investigative documentary, *Mafia des Océans*. In Lebanon (*Wled Bayroun*, directed by Sarah Srage), fishing villages are displaced to make way



Young fish processing and selling apprentices associated with the festival, which gave visibility to the forgotten individuals and communities who strive to protect the oceans

for private real estate interests, and fishing areas devastated by pollution – a threat faced by many Mediterranean countries.

No matter how grave the threat, coastal communities continue to resist, especially when their cultural roots are strong, as in the case of indigenous people. *Angry Inuk*, the award-winning film about the struggle to carry on the traditional Arctic seal hunt, is also a tale about the resilience of an indigenous culture as new oil and mining interests threaten their lives and autonomy.

Yet, resistance is not easy when the adversary is powerful and the struggle deepens divisions within the community. In *Poisson d'or, Poisson Africain*, Thomas Grand and Moussa Diop subtly analyze the internal tensions within a fishing community in Casamance, Senegal. In Chile, salmon farm workers, shellfish gatherers and artisanal fishers do not always have the same interests, even if they all fight a common enemy – large salmon farms (*La Ultima Barricada*). When there is unity, as amongst the fishermen of the Indian Ocean islands (*Unis pour Durer* by Mathilde Junot), it is easier to be heard.

The films presented at this year's festival show that fishermen are at the heart of the big forces sweeping over the planet: the environmental crisis, of course, but also China's growing footprint in the world (*The Knights of the Yellow Sands* and *Golden Fish, African Fish*).

Each year, the theme of migration comes back with greater force. Fishermen are often migrants themselves, as in Charlie Petersmann's *Deltas, Back to Shores* or *Lebous, Labous: Une Histoire de la Mer*, by James Labous.

This year, the festival screened an exceptional film by José Leitao de Barros, *Maria do Mar*, shot in Nazaré, Portugal, in 1930. This silent film was presented in a cine concert, with Roberto Tricarri's quintet playing alongside. All the spectators were dazzled by the exceptional images, music, and the discovery of the fishermen's world of that time in Nazaré.

Thanks to these films, universal problems are perceived in their singularity and humanity.



Thomas Grand receiving an award for his film *Poisson d'or, Poisson Africain*, which subtly analyzes the internal tensions within a fishing community in Casamance, Senegal

But if these films evoke the problems experienced by fishermen and fisherwomen, they also show images of happiness in work, nature and community life: whether it is in Norway, Canada, Japan, Vietnam, Senegal or France. It is these images that viewers will remember – a tribute to the lives of the men, women and children at the heart of the films. ♣

For more

<http://webdoc.france24.com/odyssey-senegal-fishermen-france/index.html>

The Fishermen and the Sea: The Odyssey of Senegalese fishermen from Lorient to Joal-Fadiouth

<http://www.pecheursdumonde.org/>
Pêcheurs du Monde (Fishers of the World) Festival International de Films, Lorient