

No Fishy Screen Presence

This year's 'Fishermen of the World' film festival at Lorient, France, portrayed a wide range of fishers, their communities—and their problems

Fishermen have become slaves.” These are the words uttered by a Polish fisherman in the film *Fishermen*, made by Viktoria Marinov, a young Polish filmmaker, which received an award from the jury at this year's Lorient film festival, billed 'Fishermen of the World'. Strangely enough, this reality was a theme echoed in many of the other films screened at the festival, including the ones that received awards.

Every year, the festival screens about 40 films—fictional narratives, documentaries and reports. Many of them describe situations of dramatic crises facing communities humiliated

beautiful landscapes to discover. We don't only gut fishes!”

This year the festival opened with a film on an exemplary Mexican community that displayed solidarity and equality in mastering its resources, markets and its future. It ended with the testimony of a langoustine fisherman, confident of his future, resilient, determined to pass down his passion to new generations and constantly researching innovations to meet fresh challenges.

Aboard an old shrimp trawler, the film captures scenes of the crew, composed of Sicilians and Tunisians who live for weeks in an oppressive, closed-in world, searching for increasingly depleted resources, and surrounded by small fishing boats overloaded with migrants fleeing war and poverty. The film goes beyond fishing to reveal images of a world on the brink of the abyss, a world undermined by inequalities. The boat stopped its fishing operations just after the film was shot.

The jury also paid tribute to the short film of Thomas Szacka-Marier, a young Canadian, titled *Following the Tide*. For seven days, he filmed the work and life aboard a deep-sea pirogue from Dakar, off the coast of Senegal, portraying fishermen who are courageous and serene despite their harsh working conditions and the depleted resource.

Meagre catch

After seven days at sea and after enduring a storm, they have to return with a catch too small to cover their expenses. This unusual film transports us into the everyday lives of fishermen who love their job, but

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and deprived of their rights. Others testify to the fishworkers' capacity to resist. What stands out in all these portrayals is the fishers' passion for the sea and a specific way of life, far from daily routine, where they—both men and women—are called on to work intelligently. Through these fishing activities, the films offer a view of society, human relations and the communities' relationship with nature. That is what struck Marie Cadieux, the Canadian president of the festival's jury, who told a journalist, Pascale Marcaggi: “We are speaking about fishing, but we deal with everything else—the human condition, the role of women, an international look at what is being done elsewhere, but also

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do not wish their children to follow their path.

Another moving film, *Canning Paradise*, a French-Australian production by Olivier Pollet, bore witness to the contempt of the powerful towards the coastal fishing communities of Papua New Guinea, who are being sacrificed to allow the development of free zones for tuna-canning industries. The film depicts the Papuan fishermen's anger and their desperate struggle to retain their lands and their rights. It was given an award by the jury of the young (composed of fishermen and high-school pupils) who were amazed at discovering the implacable violence of a system of which the European Union is an accomplice as it seeks to satisfy its market demands.

The youth jury also awarded *Give a Man a Fish*, a film by a young Palestinian, Alasttal Iyad, who wanted to testify to the fate of thousands of Palestinian fishermen, left to live in poverty as a result of the Israeli prohibition on them going out to

sea. The fate of these fishermen is indirectly evoked in Mahmoud Darwich's poems and through the encounter with a Corsican fisherman who shows solidarity with his eastern Mediterranean brothers.

Sold to the Sea, by the Environmental Justice Foundation, an NGO, described the appalling situation of Burmese migrants forced to embark on industrial Thai fishing boats to work as slave labour.

Balfego: Tuna from Father to Son reported on the rapid development of industrial farming of bluefin tuna, as an answer to the resource depletion crisis, while another film, *Salmon at All Costs*, analyzed the experience of farmed salmon, which has often had catastrophic results.

Today, this industrial model is also applied to shellfish farming. In the Netherlands, dredging for mussels on the seabed is forbidden, and has been replaced by spat hatching, to the great dismay of fishermen who are shown sadly resigned to their fate in the film *L'Amour des Moules*. Another film,

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Italian filmmaker, Rossella Schillaci receives an award for her film *Il Limite* at this year's Lorient film festival, titled 'Fishermen of the World'

Requiem for Oysters, points out the serious crisis oyster farming is going through, and the risks it poses to the environment and to genetic resources.

Fishermen also have to face threats from the land. In Alaska, the last flourishing salmon fishery has been threatened by the opening of a gigantic copper mine. The resultant pollution may put an end to the annual rush of hundreds of boats searching for salmon, as depicted in the film *Jackpot in Alaska*.

In Brittany, the wreckage of the tanker *Erika* (also the title of the film by Christopher Hoyet) has destroyed the coastline and part of the seabed, and interrupted the sale of fish and shellfish. The film shows how volunteers and elected representatives joined forces to combat the power of the oil companies.

Orphans of Development, a film by the Sri Lankan NGO, National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), denounces the eviction of fishing communities to create a huge tourist complex on the Kalpitiya lagoon in the north of Colombo.

The collective capacity of fishermen to innovate is shown in *Punta Abreojos: An Exemplary Community*, a film by Stéphanie Brabant on a fishermen's village in Mexico. There the fishermen manage

Breton, Quiterie Sourget, shows how the region's fishermen are able to find complex solutions for better management and distribution of their fishing territory between trawlers and gillnetters.

In Québécois Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault's *Pour la suite du monde*, we are shown how it is possible to pass down values and experiences to future generations. There can be no future in fishing without a passion for the sea, a passion that is often passed down at an early age. Even when crises in fisheries loom and jobs in cities seem more attractive, the sons of fishermen often express regret for not living off the sea. Sometimes they find that in their new jobs, working conditions are far worse, as shown by the young Cambodian ex-fisherman in the feature-length film, *A River Changes Course*. His parents, who had no fixed income, forced him to stop studying and look for a job in a Chinese cassava plantation. The film depicts the disruption of Cambodian society, and the destruction of the environment that goes with it.

Elsewhere, too, there seems to be a future for the young in fishing. In Poland, some young men have returned to fishing despite uncertainties. In Alaska, young people are rediscovering the thrill of the rush for 'red gold' during the summer. In Lorient, some young men and women, who are training to become fishermen, have used their cameras to record and pass on their passion to other young people through several short-length films.

Some coastal activities that used to be considered as extinct, such as the traditional gathering of salt in salt pans, have reappeared and prospered in the 1970s, thanks to a generation of enthusiasts, as shown in the film, *Grain de Sel*.

Women amply represented

Women were also amply represented at the festival, both in the juries, in the films and among filmmakers. In *Mélancolie des beaux jours*, an old Korean woman goes on fishing despite being fatigued and worn-out, so as to make a living,

their resources by controlling their fishing zones as well as access to the fishery. A co-operative is in charge of marketing, as well as social-welfare measures, including pensions. The main resource, lobster, is sold live and transported by air to China. This may be an example of successful integration with globalization, even if the sustainability of such a form of marketing is moot.

In *Fishing Together: Quite an Art*, a young amateur filmmaker from

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because her drunkard husband is unable to work.

In *A Mae et o Mar*, Gonzalo Tocha, a young Portuguese filmmaker, revives the memory of a small fishing community, evoking the times when women used to be skipper-owners of their boats. In one scene, an old fisherman declaims his passion for the sea with great lyricism.

In her film, Rossella Schilacci evokes, in a restrained manner, the isolation of the Tunisian fishermen's wives in Sicily.

One of the most striking films about women in fisheries came from India. In *Chronicles of Oblivion*, Priyanjana Dutta narrates the plight of women living in coastal villages. They are forbidden access to coastal resources by bureaucratic conservation policies that refuse to take into account their unreliable means of subsistence. The screening of this film also gave the festival participants the opportunity to pay tribute to Chandrika Sharma, ICSF's Executive Secretary, who went missing in the ill-fated Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 a few days before the festival. In the film, Chandrika talks about the involvement of ICSF in defending the rights of women in fisheries.

The Lorient film festival ended with the screening of a documentary by the Comité Départemental des Pêches du Finistère, on fishermen fishing langoustines in the Bay of Biscay. Four fishermen, including two young men, from different ports, talked of their passion for their jobs, inherited over generations.

Elizabeth Tempier, a regular at the Lorient festival since it started in 2008, sums up the spirit of the festival: "Each film is a song...some are sad, haunting, insistent, instructive, revolting, some are a real treat! The art of the filmmaker is at its best when he is self-effacing, so as to let his subjects' vivacity express itself freely". As the films screened at Lorient testify, the one thing fishworkers do not lack is vivacity, and they need it to survive. 3



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For more

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmXd8uGtBKM>

Orphans of Development

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=setlylcpxA>

Punta Abrejos: An Exemplary Community