

FILM

A Mae e o Mar/The Mother and The Sea

(Portuguese with French, Italian and English subtitles; 97mins)

A film by Gonçalo Tocha

This review by **Alain Le Sann** (ad.lesann@orange.fr) has been translated into English by **Danièle Le Sann**

On the Portuguese beaches of Vila Chà, in the fishing village of North of Porto, only nine fishing boats are hauled up onto the sand after a fishing expedition today. Fifty years ago, there used to be a hundred and twenty. The sea is still there; so are the beach and the rocks; the milieu hasn't changed but the fishing activity has been shattered.


It is in this ordinary port that director Gonçalo Tocha decided to focus his camera on the forgotten past—a past that lies buried in the memories of the elderly and evoked only occasionally in local newspaper articles. Indeed, Vila Chà's past is unique not only in Portugal but in all Europe for it was home to fisherwomen who not only went out to sea but often commanded their own boats and crew. Today, only one of them, a sixty five-year old woman, still goes out to sea to fish and gathers seaweed on the beach to sell to a factory. With her help, Tocha brings back to living memory the experiences of these forgotten women who fought for the right to command their own boats and their mostly-male crew.

As the film unfolds, we hear the old women and men rediscover the unique importance of this group of women. We hear of storms and of the dangers that lurked on the storm-slashed coast with its heavy Atlantic swells; we hear of how hard they toiled and how full of uncertainty their lives were. We hear of their love of the sea and of their work—how one of them locked herself in her house when she realised she might have to stop going out to sea. Another,

ninety now, continues to fish with a line from the beach. We also hear the men pay tribute to their wives and daughters who often accompanied them onboard their ships.

At the end of the film, facing the setting sun, one of the fishermen in the evening of his life declaims with lyrical passion his love for the sea “*which gave life to the Earth*” and of which he says “*We are her children*”. His blood is “*salted water*”; the sea is his goddess, but he laments that she has become “*the Earth's garbage can*” and understands her “*anger at what has been done to her*”. The film is moving, yet certain aspects of its construction are also disconcerting, for example, the director himself appearing on screen.

Recipient of the best documentary award at the Doclisboa film festival held in Lisboa, 2013, *A Mae e o Mar* is slow-paced with deliberately long sequences to give us time to absorb a sense of the place, its history and its inhabitants. A particular strength of the film is that it is able to marshal memory without nostalgia. Overall, the film is a superb tribute to a band of strong, independent and feisty fisherwomen, forgotten by history, in a small port that, sadly, is increasingly becoming a seaside resort.

For details, visit: <http://vimeo.com/78641952> 



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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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