

# The Hearts of Fishers

***Men on the Edge*, a 90-minute film made in 2005 by Avner Faingulernt and Macabit Abramzon of Israel, tells of how, against all odds, Israeli and Palestinian fishermen co-existed**

The title of the film, *Men on the Edge: Fishermen's Diary*, may be interpreted as dealing with fishermen aboard a vessel—or it could be seen to refer to men about to see the end—or the edge—of a world. In this documentary lasting 90 minutes and four years in the making, the two film-makers, Avner Faingulernt and Macabit Abramzon, bring us face-to-face with fishermen who seem to come out of the Bible. It is a trip to the heart of small-scale fishing in the part of the Mediterranean on the border between Gaza and Israel. It is equally a trip into men's hearts.

Following the Oslo Agreements of 1993, Palestinian fishermen have the right to fish in the 20-mile zone off their coast. In reality, though, the Israeli army bans fishing beyond seven miles. In 2008, the Israeli navy targetted fishing boats with foreign militants aboard. In 2009, the zone was reduced to three miles, making it impossible to fish.

In 1999, the year when the documentary began, another state of mind prevailed on small Palestinian boats. A friendly atmosphere reigned on the beach, which seems unrealistic today to spectators used to seeing stark opposition between Palestinians and Israelis. Then, the fishermen met together, sitting at a table, close to a fire, surrounded by dilapidated shacks. They are seen joking while waiting to go out to sea, and then embracing each other goodbye. This world, which is far removed from the stereotypical representations of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, is set against a background of checkpoints, Israeli warboats, and a television that

keeps broadcasting images of a country where violence seems to be the rule.

Our fishermen, seated on barrels and plastic chairs, are not really part of this world. Here, the Palestinians are the bosses. Under their orders, the Jewish Israelis are learning the job... provided that their Palestinians friends are allowed to pass the border. At first, these men, who share the same way of life, respect one another and accept mockery. They live inside tumbledown shacks, and spend their time on the shore. Very few women appear in the film, only on the television screen, or when an Israeli fisherman evokes his

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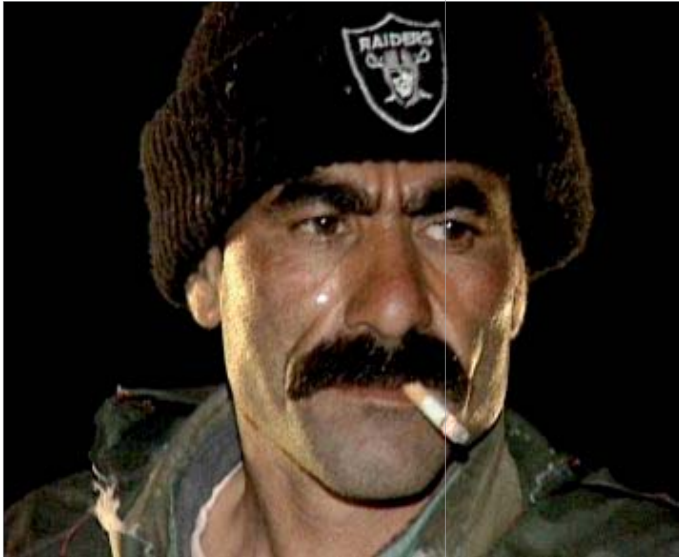
ex-wife. Apart from smoking the *narghileh* or drinking tea, these fishermen seem to spend most of the time chatting away about the job, about the war, about God.

## Real complementarity

They mainly fish sardines on their small boats. With much skill and passion, the Palestinians also fish amidst the waves by throwing out cast nets. Whenever the Palestinian boatowners are absent, blocked at the border when troubles get more serious, the Israelis are much less efficient in their fishing. At sea, there is real complementarity between them, and on land, real complicity.

*This review, by Pierre Rio (pierre.rio@gmail.com), is translated by Danielle Le Sann*

AVNER FAINGULERNT



A scene from the film *Men on the Edge: Fishermen's Diary*. Jews and Palestinians have succeeded in creating a fragile brotherhood

The Sa'adalla family commands the boats on Sikma beach. At sea, they sing their own sailor songs for hauling in the nets by hand. On the beach, an Israeli fisherman breaks into a song, that of soldiers who fought in Lebanon.

Exchange is possible. Difficulties appear when the Israeli government bans fishing at night. More and more incidents take place with the Israeli navy; that affects everybody's morale. Whenever an ultramodern warship comes upon a small Palestinian fishing boat, the discrepancy is obvious. We cannot see the members of the crew of the warship, for it is too high from the point of view of the small fishing boat. Nevertheless, a voice can be heard, coming as it were from the hull, reminding the Palestinians that they are under control; this makes the difference between the boats even more striking. The spectator wonders whether it is because of the presence of the camera that the military leaves after a quick check. It is as though man faced up to the machine.

Another interesting thing about the film is that we discover many-sided aspects of fishing. Hauling in the nets, cutting up *calamar* (squid) and other fishes ...all the ancestral gestures that mark the working day. Sometimes, children can be seen. One of them, who apparently refused going to school, according to his father, happens to be at sea.

During the four years that it took to make the film, we witness the degradation of the relationship between Jews and Palestinians: *Intifada* and suicide bombings worsen it. The political change is felt in the relationships among the members

of the crew, which take a tragic turn when the wife of a Jewish fisherman is killed in a suicide bombing. Despite the political events, Jews and Palestinians have succeeded in creating a fragile brotherhood while fishing along the coast. Palestinian captains and Israeli fishermen share a lot, while fishing or living on board the same boats.

Four years later, in the summer of 2003, when the film-makers returned, all the Palestinian fishermen had gone away, or rather were denied the right to come to the beach. There was no fishing activity anymore, because the Israeli fishermen couldn't manage to do it alone. At the beginning of the film, the men were talking and having tea together; near the end, a tank is driving along the beach. The fishing boats are stranded, and the small boats are collapsing. This world is coming to an end. The Israelis are left alone, regretting the demise of the good old days.

This film, which is in Arabic and Hebrew with English subtitles, is like a theatrical drama played out before the camera, on a beach. In it, we discover an environment that is new to us, difficult to imagine; yet, it is full of hope, showing that brotherhood can develop among people of the two communities along the Mediterranean coast. 3

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**Film Description from Peabody Essex Museum**

[fishingunderfire.blogspot.com](http://fishingunderfire.blogspot.com)

**Fishing Under Fire: A Blog on Palestinian Fishermen**

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo\\_Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords)  
**Oslo Accord 1993**

[israel-palestinenews.org](http://israel-palestinenews.org)

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