

A Fisheye View

The international film festival, titled “Pêcheurs du Monde” (“Fishers of the World”), was held at Lorient, France, during 10-13 March 2010

The second edition of the international film festival titled “Pêcheurs du Monde” (“Fishers of the World”) took place at Lorient, an important fishing harbour in the west of France, in Brittany, during 10 – 13 March 2010.

The annual festival (www.pecheursdumonde.org) was organized for the second time by a committee headed by Alain Le Sann of the non-governmental organization (NGO), Pêche et Développement supported by a large group of local, highly dedicated volunteers and

Indonesia, Africa and other parts of Europe.

These common themes ran as a thread throughout the festival:

- accidents and safety at sea;
- the global crisis in fisheries, and the resistance and resilience of fishing communities;
- relations between countries in the North (Europe/European Union—EU) and the South (mainly Africa); and
- community traditions and resource management.

After every show, time was allotted for debate with special guests, which also saw the active participation of the audience. In this way, the programme contributed to awareness-raising and in-depth reflection.

The festival opened with a controversial film, “The End of the Line” by Rupert Murray and Charles Clover, a pessimistic film about the state of resources of the world’s oceans, which portrayed fisheries as one of the major culprits for stock depletion and resource degradation. I had seen the film earlier in the Netherlands, where it was heavily promoted by environmental NGOs like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). This time I watched the film with a primarily fisheries-related audience. The screening of the film was followed by a debate with its producer.

Propaganda piece

On the whole, the film presents a one-sided, opinionated perspective and looks more like an ideological propaganda film for environmental NGOs like WWF and Greenpeace. Everything in the film revolves around the case of tuna. However, the situation

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many regional sponsors. The festival took place at the graduate school, Lycee Dupuy de Lome, at Lorient. Along with the screening of films, there were also several side events, such as photo exhibitions, debates and lectures, in different parts of the town.

For four days, from morning to well past midnight, films were shown and afterwards discussions held about various global themes concerning fisheries and fishing communities worldwide. The films featured at the festival spanned different genres: fiction, documentary, reportage and educational/awareness-raising films. Most were of French filmmakers, but there were also a few foreign films from India,

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of tuna stocks is not the same as that of other fish stocks. The film does not bother with the opinions of fishers nor does it engage in any sort of dialogue with them. The world's fishers are not a homogenous group. So the question arises: Why is no distinction made between big commercial companies and small-scale or artisanal family fishing enterprises?

The film producer's response to this concern was to project the film as an indictment of globalization and the power of multinationals; both fish stocks and fishers are the victims, he said.

To a query about the financing of the film, the producer clarified that it was funded by BBC Channel 4 and two private funds operated by rich families, one in the United States and the other in Spain.

The film advocates two major strategies for the rehabilitation of marine resources: ecolabelling by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), and the promotion of marine protected areas (MPAs) or marine reserves. Some in the audience pointed out that these are top-down measures that have negative social consequences for fishing communities. Fishers and coastal communities have themselves generated sound solutions and practices for community-based management of natural resources, so why did these not receive any attention in the film?

To this query, the producer replied that MPAs produce employment opportunities for fishers as well—for example, in monitoring, control and surveillance activities, and in ecotourism. It is of crucial importance that we protect the large fish species at the top of the food chain, which are fast disappearing now. “We wanted to make a public awareness film about a theme that is little known in the world. If you can help raise the money, I'm willing to produce a film about the good management practices of fishers,” the film's producer proclaimed.

(Please note that since the discussion was in French, over which I claim no mastery, I may have

missed some important points or misunderstood certain subtleties.)

A selection of the films at the festival was put up for competition, and judged by an official jury and a separate youth jury. I was part of the official jury of eight, as an ICSF representative, together with Lamine Niasse from Senegal, representing *Pêche et Développement*. My limited knowledge of French made it difficult to follow the many interviews and voiceovers in that language. However, the quality of a film is largely proven by powerful visual representation of issues, and, therefore, I was able to get a good idea of the best films at the festival, despite the language constraints

I was very impressed by a short, innovative, awareness-raising film on ‘accidents/safety-at-sea’, titled “Attention Hypothermie” (“Attention Hypothermia”) by the French-Breton filmmaker, Emmanuel Audrain. Four people—a yacht sailor, two fishermen and one recreational boater—recount what happened to them when they fell overboard their vessels in the ice-cold sea after meeting with accidents.

Frightening stories

The camera diligently captures their emotions as they tell their frightening stories, supremely supported by a refined soundtrack and dramatic

ROBERT LE GALL AND MARIA THAMIN



The jury of the “Pêcheurs du Monde” international film festival, 2010. Along with the screening of films, there were also several side events at the festival

animation derived from original drawings. Without being didactic, the film also puts forth clear explanations, proposals and possible solutions to save lives at sea. The work reflects the commitment of the filmmaker, whose message is strikingly uncomplicated: no death at sea is inevitable; the mere application of simple measures can save lives.

Another film that impressed me was the documentary titled “La Veuve et la Mer” (“The Widow and the Sea”) by Sebastian Legay, Matthieu Birden and Mathieu Dreujou. It depicts the struggle of a French widow whose husband died at sea after his fishing boat was run down by a cargo ship. She demands a fair trial, and refuses the compensation offered by the owner of the ship, which carries a flag-of-convenience from the Kiribati Islands. Forced to dock in Brest, France, after the accident, the ship has been costing its owner huge amounts of money, and so he would rather pay for the silence of the widow. But she resists and goes on to help other women who face a similar tragedy. The film is a poignant testimony to the hard struggle of women to break the silence surrounding the disappearance of husbands, sons and partners after

environment in northwest Quebec. This community is totally dependent on the cod fishery. The abundance of cod was the reason why these people had settled down in that isolated environment. In 2003, the Canadian federal government decided to impose a moratorium on cod, fearing the collapse of stocks. Through vivid portraits of community members, the film tells us that the fishers in the community are determined to reclaim their right to live where they are now and where they feel most at home. However, the lack of alternative livelihood resources and the dependence on government aid make the community even more vulnerable. Government attempts to develop tourism in the area do not seem to have been very feasible. The young people in the community see no future, and most are opting to leave the place. A tragedy is developing and the community is unlikely to survive.

In contrast, the film titled “Vezos, un voyage à Madagascar” by Pascal Sutra Fourcade shows how the Vezos, a nomadic fishing community of Madagascar, successfully coped with the devastation caused by a hurricane. The film highlights the strong survival mechanisms rooted in the community’s rich cultural tradition, and the abundance of resources it can count on. The community appears to be able to live a very autonomous life, relatively untouched by globalization and government intervention. One wonders, though, how realistic the picture is.

Rely on your own capacities and social organization skills to solve your problems—that was the message of two interesting films, one from Aceh in Indonesia, “Peujrôh Laöt” (“Help the Sea”) by Ayad Doe, and the other, a French-Senegalese documentary titled “Kayar, l’enfance prise au filet” (“Childhood Caught in the Net”) by Thomas Grand and Moussa Diop.

Positive message

From a cinematic point of view, both the films are not of the best quality,

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such accidents at sea. These are becoming more common, as cargo ships increasingly pass through the traditional fishing grounds of small-scale, artisanal fishing communities. I was more impressed by the powerful content of the film than its cinematic quality.

The Canadian film, “Cod Help Us” (the title itself deserves an award!), by Ezra Soiferman, is also worthy of mention. The film recounts the plight of the fishing community of St. Paul’s River, an English-speaking community in the pocket of a French-speaking

but, personally, I liked them because they stood out from the rest of the films screened due to their positive message. Both films also present a more integrated picture of fisheries (which is more than the mere catching of fish) and stress the importance of educating children and women for a healthy future for the community.

I was shocked to see the plight of the community of Kayar as depicted in the French-Senegalese documentary. During my last visit to Kayar, in 1995, there existed a strong community organization. Kayar's population has since doubled, and the community appears to be plagued by internal divisions, negligence by the authorities and fatalistic attitudes. The depletion of the sardinella stocks has led to misery and exploitation, especially of children. The plight of women and children seems to have worsened most. Men often opt to migrate to Europe. The film does, however, portray some community members who successfully try to turn the tide by sending their children to school, and by lobbying for better healthcare facilities and alternative livelihood activities to feed the community and make it less dependent on fishing.

In my opinion, the organizers of the film festival were wise to show the Italian documentary "Cry Sea", by Cafì Muhammed and Luca Cusani, and the abovementioned French-Senegalese film in succession on the same evening. Both films deal with the impact of the fisheries crisis on the community of Kayar in Senegal, and complement each other. While "Kayar, l'enfance prise aux filets" reveals the internal factors that contribute to the present plight of the community of Kayar, "Cry Sea" clearly shows the external factors that contributed to the fishery crisis in Senegal and how they caused the fishing community of Kayar to become the victim. "Cry Sea" is a very pessimistic film about the failure of the European Common Fisheries Policy, which is the main culprit for the present fisheries crisis in both Europe and Senegal. The film is

similar to "The End of the Line". There is juggling with facts—a few facts were even false—which I personally dislike.

However, the film should be seen as an awareness-raising film for European audiences and not as a film that analyzes the intricacies of the problem. The combined screening of both films clearly reveals the complexity of the fisheries crisis in Kayar. Unlike "The End of the Line", "Cry Sea" does not advocate what action should be taken to turn the situation around. The film ends powerfully with people shutting their eyes. From a cinematic point of view, "Cry Sea" is a better film than "The End of the Line" (see the review by Alain Le Sann in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 54, November 2009).

And, finally, to come to my favourite film at the festival, the Moroccan docudrama "Les Damnés de la Mer" ("The Damned of the Sea") by Jawad Rhalib. Like "Cry Sea", this film too deals with North-South relations (private fishery agreements between Morocco and EU countries) and the crisis in fisheries. The film is a docudrama—a combination of fiction and documentary. Its script is of high quality and deals with three different perspectives. The first is that of poor Moroccan migrant small-scale fishers near the border of Mauritania who are unable to feed their families because of the depletion of the fish stocks they depend on. This perspective is depicted primarily through the eyes of a poor fisherwoman, who is desperately looking for some income and is humiliated in various ways and is denied the right to fish because she is a woman.

Young skipper

The second perspective is of a young Swedish pelagic trawler skipper who escaped the strict regulations on fisheries in his own country and is now continuously fishing with his



The annual international film festival was organized for the second time at Lorient, France

large trawler close to the coast of Morocco under a private fishery agreement. And the third perspective is that of the Moroccan crew on this Swedish-Moroccan trawler, who, compared to the poor small-scale fishers, lead a better life, but also work under exploitative conditions.

The film is similar to “Darwin’s Nightmare”, the famous 2004 French-Belgian-Austrian documentary film

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written and directed by Hubert Sauper, which deals with the environmental and social effects of the fishing industry around Lake Victoria in Tanzania. The Moroccan film does not pretend to condemn, but aims to show the problems caused by an unfair and unsustainable social system. It is not a mere rational exercise but gives space to the viewer to garner insights. I was immediately struck by the strong characters in the film. The determination of the poor fisherwoman to fight for her right to fish because she wanted to feed her family touched a deep chord in my heart. I even felt some sympathy for the Swedish trawler skipper, despite the fact that his motives for fishing were disgusting, compared to the motives of the poor Moroccan fishers. “Les Damnés de la Mer” is a film about human relations and human values that can be changed.

On the last night of the festival, after four days of watching films, the jury had to choose a film for the Best Film award. This was not an easy task because of the great differences in themes, nature and quality of the films screened at the festival. Five of the official jury were French, coming primarily from backgrounds in cinema and the media. The three others were of different nationalities and had a

background in fisheries. They were Robert Le Floch, a French fisher from the region; Lamine Niasse, an ICSF Member from Senegal; and myself, an ICSF Member from the Netherlands. The youth jury comprised mostly students of the Lycee Dupuy de Lome and the Lycée Saint Louis, and a few young fishers (two girls and a boy) of the Lycée Maritime from Etel, near Lorient. The youth jury met separately from the official jury.

Both the official and the youth juries awarded the festival’s Best Film award to “Cry Sea” by Cafi Muhammed and Luca Cusani. The official jury’s choice was not based on a unanimous vote and since only one first prize could be awarded, the jury decided that a special award would be given to “Les Damnés de la Mer” and “Attention Hyperthermie”.

Looking back, the films at the Lorient festival and the animated debates that covered most important themes on fisheries and fishing communities worldwide, was extremely valuable and interesting. I hope the festival will be followed by many more in the years to come. 3

For more

www.pecheursdumonde.org

International Film Festival: Fishers of the World

www.videosoftheworld.com/vow/view.asp?country=madagascar&vid=G-9194026531869329025

Vezos, un voyage à Madagascar

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndnXQpatqOU

Peujrôh Laöt

www.peche-dev.org

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