

The Many Lives of Fishers

With over 40 films from 16 countries, the Pêcheurs du Monde film festival reminds us that despite the severity of various crises facing fishers, there are still signs of hope

The 11th Festival Pêcheurs du Monde was held at Lorient in France under a renewed team. It kept its promise of quality audience and quality films. The festival, once again, showed that it could address questions about fishing with high-quality films, many of which had never before been screened in France. The theme of the lives of fishers and their communities highlighted remarkable films that often go unnoticed at more general festivals. The Lorient festival thus plays an important role in making

in a corrupt society facing permanent scarcity; he can at least benefit from the friendship of his neighbours and the beauty of the sea. His wife, on the contrary, wants a better future for her children and she wants to attempt once more the passage she had already made to follow her former husband who disappeared at sea. She is surrounded by relatives and friends who keep dreaming of passing through Florida to escape a regime that leaves them no hope. Director Kim Hopkins dives into the intimacy of a warm couple.

These two award-winning films represent the spirit of the festival; they depict social problems as experienced and perceived by fishermen and their communities, their problems and hopes.

Fishermen often migrate with the fish. Now there are other reasons driving their migrations, including environmental degradation, resource depletion, and political and economic crises. The difficulties in renewing fishermen and retaining young people also require the use of migrant fishermen, not only in many countries of the North but also in the South, as shown in the film *La vague à l'ame*.

Fishing remains one of the world's most dangerous occupations. Even if conditions have improved in the North, a crew is never safe from an accident. The spectators at the Lorient festival were able to experience first-hand, from inside a ship, the anguish of a crew stranded in a raging sea, 500 km off the coast of Ireland.

Climate change

Young high school students and the public were touched by Frédéric Brunquell's film *Hommes des tempêtes*. In addition to these conventional dangers, there are now new threats

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French audiences discover heartfelt award-winning foreign films that depict the lives of fishers.

A quarter of the films presented at the festival addressed the issue of migration, including two feature films awarded by the two juries. *Old Marine Boy* by the Korean Moyoung Ji delves into the life of a fisherman who fled North Korea with his family and fishes very spectacularly and dangerously with an antique diving suit. If he earns his living by risking his health every day, he faces difficulties in integrating into a society based on networks that are difficult to penetrate.

Voices of the Sea has a Cuban fishing couple torn apart by the opposing choices of the woman and her partner. The fisherman refuses to take the risk of crossing borders to become a marginalized worker in a concrete city in the United States. He prefers to continue his life of a poor fisherman

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related to climate change, as shown by *In Ockhi's Wake*, which analyzes the origins of the appalling toll of the Ockhi cyclone off the south Indian state of Kerala in November 2017. There were nearly 400 deaths in an area that had never experienced a cyclone before.

One impact of climate change is the coastal flooding in fishing villages. In *Casamance*, Ghanaian migrant fishermen are forced to abandon an island where they have lived for decades. In France, it is the 1,000-year-old salt marshes that are in danger of disappearing; the fishermen have, nevertheless, withstood the pressure of real estate and tourism. But they cannot do much in the face of the rising sea level.

Every year, films alert us to marine pollution, revealing unexpected aspects and new threats. In the North Sea, millions of tonnes of toxic gases and explosives from the two World Wars, abandoned and buried under the sea, threaten to spread under the effect of corrosion. They pose a serious threat to marine life and fishermen are already suffering their harmful effects when they bring them back in their nets. In Tunisia, the Gulf of Gabes is ravaged by pollution from a chemical plant that has been dumping its waste in the sea for decades. Only crabs that swarm and devour each other succeed in surviving; the fishermen call them 'daesh' or terrorist crabs.

The degradation from decades of pollution, as in the Mediterranean, is very difficult and costly to stop



ODILE MALARDÉ

The jury members announcing the awards of the Pêcheurs du Monde film festival, 2019. With more than 40 films, the festival painted a layered picture of the fishworkers situation

because important industrial activities that create jobs must be challenged. Through tenacity, however, fishermen and elected officials have been able to restore certain stretches of the coastal environment, at least partially, as seen in a remarkable documentary on the Etang de Berre, near the largest industrial area in France.

Fishermen not only suffer from various crises but they are also actors in the defence of the oceans, their resources and their environment. While they may have acted recklessly at times, they are also among the first to react. In her highly anticipated film *Oceans 2: The Voice of the Invisible*, Mathilde Jounot gives a voice to fishermen involved in the defence of their resources and environment in France, Senegal or the

Swiss film bags Chandrika Sharma Prize at film festival in Lorient, France

The Swiss film *Ligne Noire*, a 10-minute production that has garnered many awards at film festivals, has won the Chandrika Sharma Prize at the Festival Pêcheurs du Monde, held in Lorient, France.

(Chandrika Sharma, then Executive Secretary, ICSF, was on board the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 that disappeared on 8 March 2014 en route to Beijing, China, from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Chandrika was on her way to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, to attend the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, representing ICSF. The location of the aircraft is, to date, not known.)

In the award-winning film, shot in the Sundarbans, Bangladesh, the director first immerses his camera in the lush vegetation of the mangrove swamps. Then a woman appears who walks into the water, pulling a large net and fishing for shrimp larvae. The film is built around a long silent journey that follows the woman in muddy waters along a mudflat. The silence is broken by an announcement to the inhabitants of the village asking them not to use the water from the ponds. Then the woman meets men covered in oil who are collecting all sorts of debris dripping with fuel oil. Nevertheless, she continues her walk in the water and mud, in vain. We understand that she will not be able to fish anything. All mangroves, mudflats, trunks and tree roots are steeped in oil, up to a black line showing the upper limit reached by the oil-polluted sea during high tide.

The film ends with a wide shot of the mangrove swamp, apparently still lush, but marked at its base by this black line. Without any comment from the director, these simple images show us how the basic resources of the people of this region, especially those of the women who make a living collecting shrimp larvae, are being threatened.

DANIÈLE



Participants at the Pêcheurs du Monde film festival, Lorient, France, 25 to 31 March 2019. It plays an important role in making audiences discover foreign films that depict the lives of fishers

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Indian Ocean. After having shaken up some ideas about large environmental NGOs, the film presents a plea for the recognition of fishermen's knowledge, shaking up preconceptions and clichés about destructive fishermen, unable to react to the various crises that threaten them. It also shows, as do the other films, that fishermen know how to combine local management with regional networks and at global forums such as the World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers (WFF) and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP).

As in each year, the Pêcheurs du Monde festival showcased how women are doing their bit to defend the future of fishing. Short films have described how women are getting involved in fishing—in Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico and France—out of concern for the abandonment of this activity by young people in regions with a long tradition of fishing. Of course, it is in post-harvest activities that their commitment is most recognized. The organization 'Women in Seafood Industry' presented the winning films from its international video competition.

Finally, the Chandrika Sharma Prize was awarded this year to a short Swiss film *Ligne Noire*, directed by Mark Olexa and Francesca Salisi. It strongly shows the consequences of pollution for women in Bangladesh who fish for shrimp larvae in the Sundarbans. The directors immerse their camera in the lush vegetation of the mangrove

swamp. A woman appears on foot, enters the water and pulls a large net, fishing for shrimp larvae. The film is built around a long silence that follows the woman in muddy waters along a mudflat. The silence is broken by an announcement to the inhabitants of the village asking them not to use the water from the ponds. The woman meets men covered in oil from a spill, collecting all sorts of debris dripping with fuel oil. She continues her walk in the water and mud, in vain. We realize that she will not be able to fish anything. All mangroves, mudflats, trunks and tree roots are covered in oil, up to a black line showing the upper limit reached by the oil-polluted sea during high tide. The film ends with a wide-angle shot of the mangrove swamp, apparently still lush, but marked at its base by this black line. Bereft of any comment, these simple images show us how the basic resources of the people of this region, especially those of the women who make a living collecting shrimp larvae, are being threatened.

Layered picture

With more than 40 films from 16 countries, the Pêcheurs du Monde festival painted a layered picture of the situation of fishworkers around the world. Despite the severity of pollution and overfishing, there are still signs of hope, the films remind all. 

For more

www.pecheursdumonde.org/
11th edition of the Pêcheurs du Monde Film Festival from 24 to 31 March 2019

www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/79-4361-Cinema-and-Resi.html
2018 edition of the Pêcheurs du Monde Film Festival

www.icsf.net/en/samudra/detail/EN/4315.html
2017 edition of the Pêcheurs du Monde Film Festival

www.icsf.net/fr/samudra/article/EN/56-3486-A-Fisheye-View.html
2010 edition of the Pêcheurs du Monde Film Festival