

Variety 23 sept. 1987

Aqabat Jaber: Vie de Passage (Aquabat Jaber: Passing Through)
(FRENCH.DOCU-COLOR)

A Dune Vision production. Produced by Thibault de Corday. Written and directed by Eyal Sivan. Camera (color), Nurith Aviv; editor, Ruth Schell; sound, Remy Attal. Reviewed at Toronto Festival of Festivals, Sept. 18, 1987. Running time: 80 MINS.

Toronto - As parched and spare as the landscape it chronicles, "Aqabat Jaber: Passing Through" is a coarsely realistic and depressing look at one of the largest Palestinian refugee camps. Strictly for specials houses, pic would fare better as a public broadcasting spec than a theatrical feature.

Aqabat Jaber was set up on the occupied West Bank in 1948 for 65,000 Palestinians who were uprooted from 116 villages. Today there are only 3,000 refugees left. First-time director Eyal Sivan takes his camera on-site to the remaining inhabitants, most of whom are convinced that they will one day, through political or divine intervention, return to their homeland.

They all express similar sentiment - their land is the very source, they are homesick for their villages and orchards, and feel that Aqabat Jaber is a "temporary situation," although they've been there for 38 years (pic was shot in 1986).

Some refugees welcome the chance to introduce themselves, air their grievances and bemoan their fates; others scorn the filmmakers. Sivan, ever sympathetic to their conditions, extracts detailed life stories from these displaced persons as he pans the daily life at the camps _women baking bread, men sitting around smoking from a hookah, children playing in abandoned baked earth houses.

The United Nations Relief and Works Act, which set up the camp now provides it with a minimal of sustenance every two months. In the summer there's no water.

It's all hopeless and full of despair. Being and nothingness are the watchwords at the camp as well as this docu. Sivan should have established the details of the camp's politics and history at the outset to make the individual stories more accessible to the viewer, instead of saving a paragraph of description for the end. There's no narration or music either.

These people's plights are poignant, but there are too many unanswered questions as to why they're still here, why neighbouring Arab countries didn't take them in, and why their embitterment paralyzes.

Devo.