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Theatrical Notes . . .

AQABAT JABER: PASSING THROUGH

S.F. International Film Festival by Annette Lust

Aqabat Jaber: Passing Through (France, 1987), directed by Eyal Sivan, depicts Palestinian inhabitants who fled from their villages in the early fifties and in the sixties to this refugee camp on the occupied West Bank, which was one of the largest camps in the Middle East. The documentary, in Arabic with English subtitles, which won the Grand Prix for documentaries at the Festival du Reel in Paris last spring, is a poignant testimony of the lives of 3000 refugees living there today. After the inhabitants are informed that a film is about to be made of the camp, we see shy toddlers sleeping on their mats, toothless and crippled inhabitants, dancing and singing school children and the young sons and daughters of families who have grown up in mud and brick houses over the last thirty years. We listen to a Mukhtar (local authority) shopowner tell of how refugees from over one hundred villages have poured in to live in the camp, which originally had 65,000 people, and how he has settled disputes between the villages. We interview a Bedouin who describes the difference between "Bedouins" who live in tents and are nomads tending their livestock and "fallahs" who live in houses and grow farm products. We hear the testimonies of grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, mothers, and children born in the camp, whose sole dream is to return to his or her original village. Life in the camp is painful for these people who no longer live on their own land or may be buried among their ancestors. They want to feel as though they are only "Passing through" this refugee camp and will someday return home. This documentary about one of the sixty Palestinian refugee camps built by the U.N.R.W.A. (the United Nations Relief and Work Agency), which, along with the Red Cross, brings in rations of food every two months, offers an authentic portrayal of people waiting and praying that they may return to their roots to which they claim a right. The photography (camera by Nurith Aviv and Raymond Grosjean) of daytime and sundown scenes is remarkably well done, captivating minute details in the preparation of bread-making or glimpses of interiors through tiny open windows where women fold away blankets and go about their chores.

Aqabat Jaber - Vie de Passage

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