

**SAVING THE OCEAN
THE SACRED ISLAND TRANSCRIPT**

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TEASE

Carl Safina (narration)

On this edition of SAVING THE OCEAN, I'm visiting a tropical island off the African coast.

Fishermen depend on it.

Carl Safina

A lot of work for very little return.

Carl Safina (narration)

And tourists love it.

Tourist

It's like paradise.

Carl Safina (narration)

In one of the world's most unusual conservation success stories, everyone's learned to co-exist -- with some powerful help.

Fazlun Khalid

The Koran is inherently environmental.

FUNDER CREDITS

Announcer

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INTRO

Carl Safina

Hi, I'm Carl Safina. No matter where I travel I always return here, to walk, feel the seasons change... I've been coming here since I was a kid.

Now I'm a marine biologist and I write books about the ocean -- that magic, majestic, two thirds of the planet that starts right there in the surf.

In my travels I see pollution, overfishing, coral reefs in trouble. But I also meet inspiring people, working to solve problems.

In this series, we visit people with solutions, and places getting better. So I hope you'll join me on these journeys. It's all about Saving the Ocean.

THE SACRED ISLAND

Carl Safina

We're in the Zanzibar Archipelago, and we're going from the main island of Unguja to a smaller island called Pemba. In Pemba we're going to look at how very poor fishermen are working with a very new approach, using the Islamic ethic of conservation. It's going to be something really different.

Carl Safina (narration)

We're on our way to Kisanjani, one of dozens of small fishing villages on Pemba's coast.

The guys we're here to meet are waiting on the beach -- Musser Khalfan and Nassor Sleman, local fishermen. It's an enthusiastic welcome.

Carl Safina

Jambo.

Nassor Sleman

Salaam aleikum.

Carl Safina (narration)

They're heading out to check their net. These are poor people, who need every fish they can catch. Yet out here they're going to show remarkable restraint in the way they fish.

A couple of miles offshore, strung between the markers, is a long net that's been out here overnight.

As nets go, this one's quite unusual. It has large mesh, and because it's made of cotton, fish can see it easily. These qualities won't help Musser and Nassor catch a lot of fish, but they're a key part of an innovative solution to a conservation problem -- the kind of solution we look for in this series.

Here's our first catch, which Nassor handles with care.

Carl Safina

This is actually a stingray, so the first thing they did was cut the tail off -- get rid of the stinger.

Carl Safina (narration)

As we continue to haul, we begin to realize it's not much of a catch.

Carl Safina

Second one, looks like a parrot fish.

Carl Safina (narration)

They could catch more: with a transparent nylon net, or by using a smaller mesh. Or they could set their net directly on the nearby coral reefs. But to protect their fishing grounds, the fishermen have agreed to restrictions. How that came about is a remarkable story, as we're going to see.

Carl Safina

Fish number 3 so far. A lot of work for very little return. Is this a normal catch?

Haji Mohammed (subtitle from Swahili)

Apart from this, do you have larger catches?

Nassor Sleman (subtitle from Swahili)

Sometimes, other times nothing.

Haji Mohammed

He says that some days they got more, and the other days they get nothing.

Carl Safina (narration)

The restrictions are all the more remarkable, given how crucial fishing is.

Haji Mohammed (subtitle from Swahili)

The living you make -- is it enough?

Haji Mohammed

They said that this life they were already tired, because that is hard life.

Carl Safina

He's saying this is a very hard life...

Haji Mohammed

Yeah.

Carl Safina

...but it's the only life they have, they have nothing else they can possibly do.

Haji Mohammed

Yeah, yeah.

Carl Safina

So it's the sea or nothing.

Haji Mohammed

Or nothing for life.

Carl Safina (narration)

Musser and Nassor are fishing within sight of one of the most gorgeous islands that exists anywhere, surrounded by pristine waters, thrumming with life.

It's called Misali -- the kind of place for which the term "tropical paradise" was invented.

Since 1998 Misali and its waters have been protected -- with the agreement of local fishermen. It's an unusual and sophisticated scheme.

The best of Misali's spectacular coral reefs are fully protected, with no fishing of any kind allowed.

It's one of East Africa's most important concentrations of ocean life, and a proposed World Heritage Site.

There are at least 40 kinds of coral and around 300 kinds of fish.

It's reefs like these that, around the world, will continue to lay the golden egg -- in the form of fish to catch and sights to marvel at -- if only we can look after them.

Since protection began, visitors have been charged a small fee -- \$10 each per day.

Most come for the snorkelling and diving -- and are more than satisfied.

Tourist

It's so wonderful. It's like paradise. I don't know paradise, but it should be like this.

Carl Safina (narration)

A key part of the Misali scheme's success is that some of the visitor fees find their way to places like this.

It's the village of Shidi.

The village is one of 34 that depend heavily on fishing in Misali waters.

It's a typical dusty Pemba village. People are poor, but they get by -- thanks in large part to the bounty provided by Misali's reefs and waters.

But in 1993 disaster loomed for Misali fishermen. The government leased the island to an Italian resort developer, and the fishermen feared being kicked out of the area where they made their living.

It took five years and a powerful consortium of aid agencies, conservation groups, and local leaders, but the government eventually cancelled the lease.

Misali was saved for the fishermen, but now came the hard part -- saving it from the fishermen. That meant the newly created conservation area had to be managed, and the job went to a new local community group called MICA.

I talked to MICA's managers, under a mango tree in Shidi village, and they told me fishermen were already in favour of management. For poor people this kind of vision is impressive.

Massoud Juma

The idea of conserving is coming from the fishermen themselves. They say that if this island, our island, is given to the investor, we are fishers, where can we go for fishing? So we cry to government, better to give us and we can conserve that area to become better area for...

Carl Safina

So instead of being sold to the investor it was given to the community.

Massoud Juma

To the community. Yes.

Carl Safina (narration)

These two brothers, Haji and Juma Shehe, are heading out to check their traps.

The traps are set -- legally -- inside the Misali Conservation Area managed by MICA.

The traps are positioned on the sand, between the coral heads, so they don't smash the coral when they're moved.

It's a perfect demonstration of how well the right kind of fishing, at the right kind of scale, can work.

The catch is not large, but it's not bad either. Today they'll get about 15 pounds of fish -- at \$2 a pound, enough for both men to support their families. And this kind of low impact fishing can continue essentially forever -- as long as they protect the reefs and enough breeding fish

In much of the world fish is the most important protein, and Pemba is no exception. Here it's sold by roadside vendors, who buy a few fish a day from the fishermen.

The island interior looks like rich, lush forest -- but appearances are deceptive.

Pemba is 45 miles from top to bottom, and practically every square inch is cultivated -- for coconut or banana trees, or spice trees like cloves. Cassava grows in the poor tropical soils.

Pemba is a lively and crowded place. As well as the many villages, there are three towns that bustle with activity.

Most people are quite poor, and the population of 400,000 is growing fast. So the drive to get more out of land and sea is strong.

With these pressures, how did MICA make the Misali Conservation Area work? Well first of all, they had some powerful allies.

Almost everyone in Pemba is Moslem. Arab traders have been coming down the East African coast for at least a thousand years, bringing not only their sailboats but their religion too.

We're at Friday prayers in the Central Mosque in Chake Chake, Pemba's principal town.

Every Friday, this scene is repeated all over the Islamic world.

But this part is unique to Pemba. The Imam's sermon is not about saving souls...

Sheik Mohammed Suleiman

...Kyoto Protocol...

Carl Safina (narration)

...it's about saving the environment. Or rather it's about saving souls by saving the environment. And when it comes to current environmental issues like global warming, the Imam is right up to date.

Sheik Mohammed Suleiman

The purpose of this sermon is to teach people about environmental issues in the context of Islamic perspective.

Carl Safina

What are some of the most important things in the Koran about the environment and about nature and our responsibility?

Sheik Mohammed Suleiman

Human being is responsible to preserve the environment, and he will be responsible in the day of the judgement why he has hurt, or make disasters.

Carl Safina (narration)

These kids are from one of the fishing villages that uses the Misali area.

They're here to celebrate how Pemba's mosques first got involved in environmental concerns.

It was actually a coincidence. While the controversy over Misali development was brewing, a British Islamic conservationist came to Pemba, to talk about the Koran and the environment.

Fazlun Khalid had just started to research the subject, and he'd surprised himself.

Fazlun Khalid

We Moslems -- very pious and read the Koran and do our five prayers and go to Haj, and all that kind of thing expected of us -- these sort of deeper ecological principles, that was a surprise to me, you know, and in order to do this work...

Carl Safina

Was it a surprise to you that these deeper ecological principles are actually in the Koran, is that the part that was surprising?

Fazlun Khalid

No, I knew that they were. The surprise was that they weren't articulated. It hasn't seeped into the consciousness of the Moslems generally that the Koran is inherently environmental.

Can I formally present the...

Carl Safina (narration)

Today Fazlun is back to hand over a new Swahili version of the Koran-based environment guide that he developed for his original workshop.

Fazlun Khalid

...to the Moslems of Zanzibar and in particular Pemba. And I hand this over to the Mufti who will in turn give it to the schools.

Carl Safina (narration)

The Koran has plenty to say about the environment, but there's one basic message.

Fazlun Khalid

The message was that you are Allah's caliph -- you are God's steward. So your job is to protect. God says in Koran that he has sent everything for you for your benefit, but he also says (Arabic) -- "Allah does not love the wasters." It's very strong.

Carl Safina

He doesn't love the wasters.

Fazlun Khalid

Yes. Allah does not love the wasters, or the destroyers.

Carl Safina (narration)

Misali is a sacred place. The island points to Mecca, and its name is like the Swahili word for prayer mat -- a visiting prophet said the whole place, lying like it does like a mat upon the sea, could be used to pray.

Religion is key to the Misali success story, but there's a second essential part -- right here.

It's a watchtower from which rangers can survey Misali waters. God doesn't love the wasters, and neither do the cops. So MICA developed a patrol system, paid for with visitor fees.

About 1600 fishermen use the conservation area, so there are people out here every day.

This man makes his living by diving for octopus and these animals that look like vegetables, called sea cucumbers.

Accepting enforcement, and the need to leave enough in the water to spawn the next generation, is a big deal. In many countries, rich or poor, people don't get this.

Ranger (subtitle from Swahili)

Hey, we're asking you. Do you have your license, the public fishing license?

Carl Safina (narration)

First the rangers want to know if he has a license.

Fisherman (subtitle from Swahili)

It's over at the camp.

Carl Safina (narration)

He eventually admits he needs to take care of that.

And the boat license ought to be displayed, they point out.

Ranger (subtitle from Swahili)

Alright, what are you catching?

Carl Safina (narration)

Now they want to see exactly what he's got in the boat -- he's not allowed to take coral, or have a spear gun.

Fisherman (subtitle from Swahili)

There's not much to catch. Enough of all these questions.

Carl Safina (narration)

The catch is pretty good -- about 15 pounds of octopus, worth a dollar a pound, 10 pounds of sea cucumbers, worth two dollars a pound, and some decorative shells.

Now here's the important part. The fisherman doesn't get a ticket, just a talking-to, with the firm suggestion that he not only gets a license from the government fisheries department, but also goes to see his local village leader, Massoud.

Ranger (subtitle from Swahili)

Ah yes, he knows Massoud.

Carl Safina (narration)

It's part of a village-level enforcement system that MICA developed. It tries to be fair to people who don't have a lot.

Massoud Juma

Every area we were what we call Fisheries Conservation Committee. That committee have a, what you call? -- cell phone.

Carl Safina

Cell phone, yes.

Massoud Juma

So just if you can see anything they can inform to the...

Carl Safina

And have they caught people? Have they gone and arrested people?

Massoud Juma

They didn't go to prison, because we deal with the community. So just the leader in the community, they say that, OK, take them out, we can talk with them, and we can punish or we can, whatever -- but they can't go again there.

Carl Safina (narration)

The system can be tough when necessary, and not everyone is happy about it, as we discovered when we tried to film at a fish market used by many Misali fishermen.

Carl Safina

We just got kicked out of the market there. These guys that were bringing in fish got very angry when they saw the cameras, and it looked like there was going to be a fight. And they made it very clear, no uncertain terms, get back, get the cameras out.

Haji Mohammed

Department of Fisheries, they take this, the unlegally...

Carl Safina

They took their net.

Haji Mohammed

Yeah. Not fish with them. So that they angry because they said that this is, they were going to stop their life.

Carl Safina (narration)

We're in the town of Wete, visiting the government fisheries department.

I'm here to see Ali Said, the manager who's worked with MICA since it started.

Carl Safina

Ali.

Ali Said

Hi.

Carl Safina

Jambo.

Ali Said

Jambo

Carl Safina

So this is all spearguns that you have confiscated?

Ali Said

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Carl Safina

They are allowed to use spears, but not a spear gun, is that right?

Ali Said

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Intensive spear gun fishing creates the decline of certain species of fish, because...

Carl Safina

It's too easy to shoot too many fish?

Ali Said

Yeah, too many fish, yeah, yeah, yeah and bigger ones, and fish not like human beings. The older the fish, the more the strong, even the birth rate is higher.

Carl Safina

And the big fish are exactly the ones that they shoot with these guns.

Ali Said

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Carl Safina (narration)

Fishermen can turn in illegal gear and get legal replacements free, but if they catch you first, you'll lose your gear.

Ali Said

OK welcome. These are some of the gears.

Carl Safina

Uhuh.

Carl Safina (narration)

Here's a net with an illegally small mesh.

Here's a heavily weighted net, used to drag across coral reefs, smashing vital fish habitat to bits -- probably the kind the angry guys at the fish market used.

And here's a nylon monofilament.

Ali Said

The problem of this net is that it does not rot.

Carl Safina

Yes.

Ali Said

So when it's lost by mistake, then it stays for ever catching everything.

Carl Safina

These nets are a lot more like what they use where I come from, and I would like it if they stopped using them there too. But I have also seen this kind of net lost in the ocean and floating with live sea turtles stuck in it, and dead sea turtles stuck in it also.

Carl Safina (narration)

Even government regulators like Ali Said welcome different approaches to conservation -- including religion.

Ali Said

If you use a single approach, maybe people would not understand it, and then they will continue to destroy. But this second approach is associated with their belief.

Carl Safina (narration)

We're back in the village of Shidi, to attend a sort of conservation edutainment session.

MICA has been doing these in Misali fishing villages from the start.

First there's a skit by school kids, about fishermen who want to take all the fish from a new area. Two kids playing imams read verses from the Koran, saying they can't take all the fish, they have to leave some.

Then the actual Imam of the village describes how God created both natural resources and people, and people must make sure the two stay in balance.

Finally there are films -- about reef conservation from the Islamic perspective, and also about general ecological ideas.

Carl Safina

Very unusual scene really, you know, this village -- everybody turning out to watch this scratchy television, and see this skit, and listen to the Imam, and all with the same message. The resources are here to use, if you use them you have to take care of them, if you cut a tree you have to plant a tree, and if you're out in the ocean you have to take care of the reef, if

you're taking from the reef. And that's the order that God has given to people, and that's what God wants.

Carl Safina (narration)

This is the beach just below Shidi village. MICA understood that if you ask poor fishermen to catch less, you have to help in other ways. So they started development projects -- like mangrove restoration.

Mangroves fringe the beach, providing fish nursery areas and protecting the shore from erosion. They're also heavily used -- for construction, or boat-building, or to make charcoal.

Massoud Juma

Another step, just one piece. OK.

Carl Safina (narration)

If you cut a tree, you have to plant a tree. Mangrove restoration, improved banana cultivation, beekeeping, seaweed culture -- MICA has introduced them all, subsidised with Misali Island visitor fees.

Local involvement, education, enforcement where needed, and an extraordinary rediscovery of Islamic conservation ethics -- all these elements working together have made Misali Island conservation a success.

Here's why I find the Misali story so exciting, and so full of promise. We're at a meeting called by Sheik Mohammed, the Imam of the Central Mosque in Chake Chake.

Attending are about thirty imams from villages throughout the island of Pemba.

Sheik Mohammed Suleiman (subtitle from Swahili)

God made the earth a good place, but then human beings have come with technology, ecology and science. The science has highlighted how we are using the resources of the earth, and that is in a bad way.

Carl Safina (narration)

Sheik Mohammed is now busy spreading the word about God, Islam and our obligation to conserve the earth.

Just think where this could go. From Africa across the Middle East and most of south Asia, throughout the 17,000 islands of Indonesia and into the western Pacific, most of the sea fishers are Muslim.

Could the seeds that bore such fruit in Misali grow and spread? I can see it, I can feel it -- but the world is full of terrible distractions.

Something has started here that is very special. It's a new view of the world, a view so full of ancient reverence and modern realization that, if it spreads, just might save the ocean and the people whose survival depends upon it.

May it spread in peace.

For SAVING THE OCEAN, I'm Carl Safina.

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