

# Not Rigorous Enough

*Cry Sea*, a 55-minute documentary by Luca Cusani and Cafi Muhamud, produced in 2007 in Italy, deals with the crisis facing artisanal fishermen in Senegal

The documentary, *Cry Sea*, by Luca Cusani and Cafi Muhamud, examines the fishing crisis from the point of view of artisanal fishermen from Kayar, Senegal, northwest Africa. These men have to face despair and poverty because of the cost of fuel as well as diminishing resources. Quite often, the only solution they can think of is emigration to Europe. Indeed, hundreds of fishermen from Kayar have tried this adventure, heading for the Canary Islands aboard their *pirogues*. Scores of them have drowned, and more than 500 have been sent back to their villages, ruined and even more desperate than before.

first State in the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) region to sign this type of agreement, but it is also one of the first to question them, refusing to renew them in 2006, following the depletion of the resource, and the fishermen's protests.

Then, through gripping images and testimonies in the port of Lowestoft, *Cry Sea* documents the collapse of catches, as well as the crash of European fleets. Despite this grim situation, salesmen at a professional fair in Iceland continue selling electronic devices and more and more sophisticated tools to catch the last fishes in the oceans with boats that are increasingly expensive. Meanwhile, they admit that the efficiency of their tools endangers the ocean's resources.

The film demonstrates the dilemma of Senegalese fishermen clearly and movingly. The film is sober and well built, yet the well-informed spectator feels there is something missing. He is surprised to hear that 500 to 600 European boats are present in the Senegalese waters—a figure that is certainly an overestimate, even if illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing exists. Such IUU fishing is also done by Asian and Senegalese boats, which are mostly owned by European shipowners.

## Fishing agreements

The European Union (EU) has not signed any fishing agreement since 2006, and more than half of the Senegalese industrial fishing boats are European boats that operate with Senegalese licences as well as Senegalese flags. The absence of fishing agreements with the EU has not put an end to the presence of European boats. For some categories, such as trawlers,

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The Senegalese fishermen are particularly affected by the disappearance of numerous high-quality species of fish, in high demand from the interior domestic and export markets. They blame the invasion of European boats, especially Spanish trawlers, as leading to stock overexploitation in their waters. For their part, the Spanish crews acknowledge the fact that the fish resources have been depleted, and accuse the Senegalese government of distributing too many fishing licences. In the film, a European Commission representative defends the fishing agreements, while admitting that they are, first and foremost, commercial agreements. In 1979, Senegal was the

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it would appear that the absence of an agreement has not diminished the EU presence; on the contrary, their number has risen from around 30 at the time of the last agreement to more than 60 today. For other vessel categories, the decreased EU presence since the last agreement was due to the lack of interest of some EU operators following resource overexploitation. That explains why the EU did not 'fight' to renew the agreement. Their fleets had either lost interest or found easier ways to get access to Senegalese waters, particularly through reflagging.

Some sequences in *Cry Sea* offer another reason for the fishing crisis in Senegal: the explosion in the number of fishermen. Between 1960 and 2009, the population of Kayar has multiplied tenfold, with the number of inhabitants rising from 2,000 to 20,000, not taking into account the thousands of seasonal migrant workers. The number of fishermen must have risen in more or less the same proportion, with the overall demographic increase, and the arrival of people from the hinterland, driven away by the drought.

Currently, in 2009, there are about 1,300 *pirogues* in Kayar. Some data tends to show that landings have remained stable for pelagic species, but as the number of fishermen and *pirogues* has doubled in a few years, it is nowadays impossible to find sufficient catches for each boat. Quite often, as the film shows, fishermen are no longer able to earn enough from their landings to cover the expenses for their fishing trips. This reality is a feature of the evolution of artisanal fishing, though there is no denying that foreign fleets are also responsible for the crisis in Senegal's fisheries.

*Cry Sea* depicts an appalling situation, largely verified. It provides a platform and lends voice to those who suffer and are usually never heard of, namely, fishermen from the South. At the same time, the film is really one more pessimistic documentary that fails to bring out the complexity of the situation in Senegal and the responsibilities involved. It offers few solutions, and it doesn't give the slightest hope, although there do exist initiatives—both in Senegal as

well as in Europe—that offer possibilities to secure the future of artisanal fishermen, even if the task may not be easy.

The film shows fishermen who are desperate, but says nothing about their organizations, their struggles, their demands and initiatives. Senegalese fishermen have been among the first to

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organize themselves around issues of livelihood and to rebel against fishing agreements.

The film's only interview with a representative from *Fenagie Pêche*, Senegal's fisheries federation, saying how disappointed he was with the conditions in which negotiations were being held, is not enough to present vividly the dynamics that exist in the fisheries of Senegal and elsewhere in western Africa. Such a deficiency may only reinforce in the European viewer of *Cry Sea*, the traditional, paternalistic view of 'poor' fishermen who are forever crushed.

The sequence in the film on the role of marabouts, interesting in a way, depicts a society unable to cope with modern challenges. European

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Drying fish at Kkafountine village, Senegal. As the population of fishermen has doubled in the past few years, catches have dwindled

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A Senegalese fisherman building a *pirogue*.  
There are about 1,300 *pirogues* in Kayar and their numbers are growing

fishermen face similar conditions too. They have to cope with acute resource availability crises, but to reduce their plight to sheer melancholy or a furious race towards technology-driven solutions is to forget that there are also plenty of initiatives being taken in fisheries management. These fishermen haven't waited for the alarm cries of environmental organizations or green documentaries to find solutions to restore some of their resources, and to manage them. Of course, these initiatives do not always cover all the fishermen in a community, but if they have proved effective, sometimes for decades, why should they be ignored?

It is urgent to show that artisanal fishermen have the capacity to be actors of their own future. Bereft of such an approach, *Cry Sea* offers more of sensationalism than an attempt to be a rigorous, committed documentary. 3

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