

## The enemy is not just 'out there'

**A trip around Senegal brings forth same disturbing perceptions about the common enemy that confronts fisheries**

**I**n the Woluf language, 'yaboye' means the sardinelle and mackerel caught in plenty by the coastal fishers of Senegal. Yaboye is the people's food, bought and sold daily on the beaches of the fishing villages of this West African nation. It ferments in the brine of the vats of the women fishmongers, after being landed at night in Gut Ndyar. It is peddled in the markets of Thies and it is transported to Mali and Burkina Faso.

Yaboye is pervasive and an essential ingredient for the food security of the Senegalese people. It is a resource that supports thousands of fishing pirogues, not to mention a cast of thousands of handlers, brokers, buyers, sellers and processors. It also is what the hardworking families of Senegal eat.

So why would the Government of Senegal place yaboye on the table of negotiations with the Europeans over a new fisheries agreement? Why would they sign an agreement against the wishes of CNPS (Collectif National des Pecheus du Senegal), the organization representing the men and women fishers and fishworkers of Senegal?

Why would the Senegalese authorities allow 22 European industrial seiners to come to Senegalese waters every year to take 25 million kg of this fish for sale and consumption in Europe? Why would the authorities agree to such large allocations, when they know that enforcement is well nigh impossible? (The President of CNPS, Arona Daigle, believes that thrice the authorized amounts will be finally caught.)

I was in Senegal on 25 March, with Frank McLaughlin, President of the Maritime Fishermen's Union (MFU), when the agreement with the Europeans was

signed. This agreement preoccupied not only our hosts, CNPS, but the entire nation. One wry observer from the fishing community of Mbour quipped, "These Europeans send us their 'vaches folles' (mad cows) and then they take away our yaboye in return."

As far as we could see, the Senegalese citizens were not going to take it lying down. It will remain a significant challenge for CNPS to keep the issue in the public eye and to shame the authorities in Dakar and Brussels into revising an agreement that is a travesty of North-South co-operation.

We know the follies of industrial fishery and we know the powerful forces that back these fleets. Our own MFU represents the small-boat inshore fishers of the Maritime provinces of Canada (including Newfoundland). Our fishers joined the MFU in the late 1970s, having experienced the decimation of their herring stocks over the previous decade by industrial herring seiners, not from Europe or the US, but from our own Pacific coast.

In our case, the inshore fishers won a partial victory against the seiners, but only after the resource had been devastated and the seiners made effectively bankrupt. It is to the credit of the MFU that we now have them contained. Yet we have no illusions about the difficulties of getting this type of fleet under control before the resource is completely fished out. The Senegalese can not afford to wait for the industrial seiners to go bankrupt and then move on—the yaboye is too vital to the country's food supply and to the coastal economy.

### Forming alliances

With its extensive network of members and supporters, CM'S should build up a

campaign and form alliances with other progressive forces. The eventual result may be success on the yaboye issue.

**I**n my opinion, however, it will not be a one-dimensional fight. Although the fact of Europeans grabbing food from Africans is scandalous, the issue will be downplayed by the authorities, politicians and experts. The quantities of fish caught will be minimized in the European Parliament, while the trade-offs will be trumpeted.

Foreign fishing in Senegalese waters is a long-term issue for CNPS, one of many that it, as a fishers' organization, has to deal with. The growth and organizational strength of CNPS is much more important than any other issue, including the European fishing agreements that target small pelagics.

For now, though, what is more vital is how CM'S builds up the yaboye issue to also gain support amongst its members and the fishing communities, from St Louis to Cassamance. The Government of Senegal itself is not monolithic. CNPS needs not only to confront it, but work with leaders and technocrats who display goodwill.

It is easy for an outsider to romanticize the struggles of someone else, but fishworkers' supporters can not afford such indulgence. All our organizations are vulnerable in the extreme. Members can be inspired by ideals and solidarity, but the question of the daily bread and butter is always on their minds. We suffer the contradictions of all primary producer organizations. We have staff and volunteers who work in conditions of insecurity, sometimes with little pay and facing conflicting demands on time and emotions. Burnout is widely prevalent, delusion never far-off.

To borrow a saying from the world of sport, "You have to stay within yourself." This is true for the CNPSs and MFUS of this world. Our strength and value come from remaining independent and broadbased, all the while recognizing that any single issue has the potential to sap our strengths and our complexities. As a westerner, I could only dimly sense the strength and complexity of Senegal and

CNPS. History, after all, does not exist in textbooks—it is all around. One moment, the radio blares Celine Dion into the fishermen's huts ten paces from the fish-landing sites on beaches where old donkeys haul the fish in carts.

The next moment, Babou Mal, a West African Bob Dylan, wails an inspirational ode to Africa, to the sounds of the ancient cora, As the herds of sheep grow in number on the crowded streets, wending their way daily into the market to be sold or sacrificed, you can sense the approaching feast of Tabaski.

On the outskirts of Dakar is the fisheries centre, CRODT, which charts fish habitats with digital satellite tracking, while the fishers of Guet Ndar plot their moves as surely as the Three Wise Men in search of Baby Jesus.

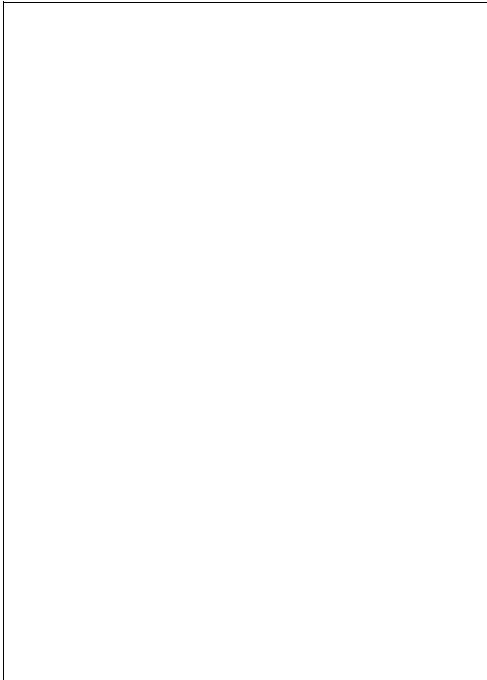
Lamine, a CNPS supporter, evokes the colonial past as he describes the days he used to wait at the gate of the peanut oil plant to be called in for a day's work. Nearby, the French maintain a military base. My colleague spends the afternoon on lie Goree, at the mouth of Dakar's harbour, where the old quarters for millions of African slaves en route to America has been preserved as a museum.

The history, dignity and civility of the Senegalese people grows on you at every encounter, where the greeting "Salamalikum" is followed by a string of exchanges about each other's health, and that of the family, a prayer to Allah and a parting "Inshallah."

The civility is evident in the one-year old child who can not yet walk, but greets the stranger with a handshake and a smile. The act of sharing from a common bowl of rice and fish, yams, manioc and cabbage is spiced with a gentleness in the pace of eating. The fish is carefully separated from the bones and the food is discretely directed to your corner of the bowl, when your supply is diminishing.

**Eke out a living**

Though I had been to Senegal twice earlier, never before had I been struck by how hard every one works to eke out a living, to make life civil and bearable. The government seems so distant from daily



suddenly overwhelmed by an unexpectedly large wave.

The enemy can even be found in the academies of Dakar, France or Canada which make the young ignorant of their society and impotent in the face of social reality. It lies in the legacy of polygamy and the empty grandeur that builds a massive Marriot President Hotel replete with golf courses but no guests.

The enemy sits in the World Bank, which declares the vital rail link between St. Louis and Dakar obsolete—let them walk, so the Bank seems, to say. The enemy drives the pirogue owner to burn out fishers by 35 years of age, and the Korean super trawler that takes the pirogues on board and pilots, them to fishing grounds far from the coast and then discharges them at sea, with no compasses or radios.

The Senegalese fishery is one of the world's most productive, landing a quarter of a billion tonnes of fish a year, but it strains under impossible burdens. It has to support a population driven from the land by desertification, and excluded from the workforce by the international division of labour. It has to support 60,000 fishermen and women and another 240,000 shore workers. To ask it to support a bloated, overcapitalized European fleet is to invite the wrath of God.

Of course, we Canadians would never demand as much from our fishery. Of course not, that is why our coastal communities recently vented their wrath on the governing Liberals, while the cities in the centre of the country overwhelmingly voted them back to office. No, I would say there is much that coastal communities everywhere have to say to one another. Yaboye is the people's food—for the people it must remain. 🍷

life, be it in matters of basic maintenance of sewage pipes or in disbursing old-age pensions.

The state seems to be widely viewed as a burden to be endured, feeding off an already overburdened population. Then there is the problem caused by the Sahel, the creeping desert that is driving more of the population to the overcrowded fishing areas.

In Senegal, we were received in common cause, as fellow warriors of inshore fishers, acknowledged friends, speaking in the same tongue about the problems of the fishery. All of us know that the common foe is not just 'out there'. It exists in the cost of fuel doubled by the devaluation of the Senegal franc, and in the incessant need to pay off the mortgage on the pirogue.

It also exists in the glut of fish that can not be handled by the local infrastructure. The enemy exists in the credit union that plays favourites and blacklists the family with the wrong name, a union that is controlled by the local politician for political gain and economic reward.

The enemy is also the foreign trawler that rams into the pirogue in the dark of night, within the exclusive six-mile limit. It is in the sea itself, as the pirogue loaded with fish and a dozen crew members approaches the beach landing site and is

This piece is written by Michael Belliveau, executive secretary, Maritime Fishermen's Union, New Brunswick, Canada