

Art Feature: “Our Pirogue—Snapshots of a Senegalese Fishing Community”

Rowan Glass*

(1) Dozens of Senegalese pirogues, traditional fishing boats, cluster at the edge of Guet N'Dar, a neighborhood of Saint-Louis, former colonial capital of French West Africa. In Guet N'Dar, as in most Senegalese coastal communities, fishing is the mainstay of the local economy.

(2) Most fishermen from Guet N'dar, like Babacar, spend much of their lives at sea. Sometimes they also lose them at sea; Guet N'dar is one of the main embarkment points in West Africa for clandestine migration to Europe. The same pirogues that are designed to hold crews of no more than a few dozen are frequently overburdened with over a hundred migrants. Babacar is a survivor of one such voyage.

(3) A small fishing crew heads to sea to try their luck with the catch. Some fishing trips last hours, others days, some even for weeks. Increasingly, the fishermen come back empty-handed; the sea is losing its fish, they say.

(4) When a boat returns with its haul, local merchants—mostly women—flock to the banks to offer a competitive price. The shore is a constant flurry of back-and-forth, rapid-fire negotiations between buyers and sellers, each trying to snag the best deal.

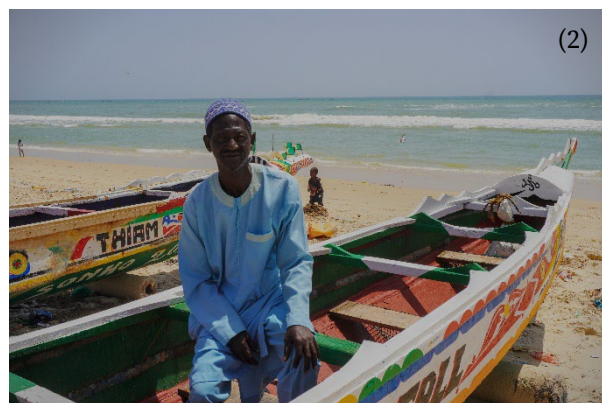
(5) Once the fishermen have made the sale, the merchants head to the shipment depot. Here, men in tall rubber boots haul millet grass baskets full of fresh fish into refrigerated trucks bound for other cities.

(6) Of the fish that stay in Saint-Louis, some are destined for the luxurious colonial-era hotels where tourists stay during visits to the historic center of Saint-Louis. Here, the fish fetch prices far higher than most fishermen could afford. A bridge is all that separates the poverty of Guet N'Dar from the insular wealth of Saint-Louis.

Medium: *Digital photography, Sony a6400, FE 3.5-5.6/28-70. Edited in Darktable.*



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*Rowan Glass (rowan.ff.glass@gmail.com) graduated from the University of Oregon in Spring 2023 with a major in Cultural Anthropology and minors in Latin American Studies and History. A combination of lifelong wanderlust and academic research has taken Rowan far afield across Latin America, the former USSR, West Africa, and Europe. Aside from editing with OURJ, Rowan is engaged in long-term ethnographic fieldwork with the Kamëntšá people of the Sibundoy Valley, a unique crossroads between the Andes and the Amazon of southwest Colombia. Rowan's research in Colombia focuses on the Kamëntšá struggle for cultural survival and ecosovereignty over their ancestral territory. Similar themes animate Rowan's interest in subaltern resistance movements around the world; he interned with several NGOs in Senegal in the spring and will be filming a documentary with the Zapatistas of southern Mexico this winter. Rowan also enjoys photography, creative writing, and indie films.

