

The dark side of fishing in Africa: the backlight denunciation of Ibrahima Mbengue

Fishing, essential for the culture and economy of many African communities, is today faced with a serious crisis that threatens its very essence. It is the Senegalese photographer Ibrahima Mbengue who highlights this reality, through a series of powerful and symbolic images against the light, revealing the dark side of a sector that is both traditional and overexploited.

Originally from Dakar, Mbengue has developed a visual approach that combines artistic research and social commitment. Growing up in Dakar-Plateau, in an environment rich in cultural stimuli, he nourished from an early age a passion for visual art, influenced by his older brothers already active in the world of photography. Trained at the Forut Media Center of Dakar, where he acquires technical skills in shooting, sound, assembly and realization, Mbengue begins a professional career which combines aesthetics and social denunciation.

Over the years, he has collaborated with prestigious organizations such as FAO, for which he has carried out a documentary project on the management of pelagic areas in West Africa, and has worked as an official photographer for the Intelcia group. His career has led him to occupy leading roles, especially as artistic director of Dak'art Milan, and to travel to several African and European countries, thus expanding his artistic gaze. His works, which range from photography to the cinema, are committed to telling the urban and social transformations, as evidenced by the Rufisque photographic exhibition, a city in degradation and the documentary made for the Tèrranga association.

A story against the light

The images of Mbengue are distinguished by their masterful use of the backlight, an aesthetic choice which exceeds the simple visual effect. In these photographs, light is often relegated to the margins, enveloping human figures in dense darkness and stratified. This play of shadows and lights is not fortuitous: Mbengue uses this contrast to underline the tension between the dignity of traditional work and the inhuman conditions which accompany it too often.

These photographs are not content to capture daily fishing scenes, they turn into a visual story that explores the lives of those who work tirelessly to ensure the survival of a vital sector for their communities. From fishermen to carriers, women involved in the smoking of fish to those who recover the sockets, each image seizes the essence of a silent and invisible struggle.

African fishery under attack

Through his images, Mbengue denounces the progressive degradation of traditional fishing, caused by international agreements which promote the exploitation of African fishery resources by foreign powers. These agreements, often concluded without taking into account the rights of local communities, led to overfishing and the destruction of marine ecosystems, compromising not only the sustainability of the sector but also the life of millions of people who depend on it.

The workers in the fishery sector, protagonists of photographs, face extremely precarious working conditions: derisory wages, overwhelming workloads and daily risks for their health and safety. Fishing, formerly a symbol of pride and stability, has turned into a battlefield where human rights and dignity are often ignored.

Art as a tool for social denunciation

Mbengue's images are not content to document a reality, they become a tool for social denunciation. The use of counterattack serves to highlight the invisibility of these communities in the eyes of the world, a visual metaphor for their marginalization. At the same time, these photographs highlight the resilience and the strength of the workers, whose determination constitutes a daily act of resistance to the injustices that surround them.

Culture as a form of resistance

Fishing, beyond its economic value, is a central element of African culture. Ibrahima Mbengue invites us to think about what is disappearing: not only a profession, but a tradition, a lifestyle and a deep link with the sea and the community.

This cultural erosion is one of the main causes of forced migration that concerns thousands of people each year. Deprived of their resources and opportunities, many residents of coastal communities are forced to abandon their land, undertaking often perilous trips to Europe in search of a better life.

A call for change

With his project, Mbengue reminds us that the future of fishing in West Africa cannot be left in the hands of those who favor profit to the detriment of human life. His photographs become an urgent call to rethink international policies and put the rights of local communities at the center of priorities.

In the darkness and light of these shots emerges a powerful message: it is necessary to act now to protect a secular tradition, guarantee worthy working conditions and preserve the cultural identity of African communities. Mbengue's photographs challenge us to look beyond shadows to imagine a future where fishing becomes a source of pride and not of exploitation.