



*Billo
Heinzpeter
Studer*

FAIR- FISH

*Because You
Shouldn't Tickle
Fishes*

rüffer & rub visionaries



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About the subtitle | In exceptional cases, fishes in captivity let their keepers stroke, tickle or touch them (for instance, carps, kois, sturgeons, trouts, dolphins or squids). Yet as a general rule, we are unable to make an emotional connection to aquatic animals through touch – and that’s as it should be. Because we could harm the fish’s mucus, protecting their bodies from parasites and bacteria. Even more so than for creatures that exist on land and breathe air like us, forming an emotive bond with aquatic animals requires us to know the facts about their vastly different lifestyle. The fair-fish association campaigns to impart these facts and to raise the profile of fishes.

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*Translated by
Suzanne Kirkbright*

The author and the publisher wish to thank the following foundations and organizations for their generous support:



ERNST GÖHNER STIFTUNG

rüffer & rub Sachbuchverlag is supported by the
Federal Office of Culture, Switzerland, from 2021 to 2024.

Originally published as
fair-fish – Weil man Fische nicht streicheln kann
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First edition spring 2021
All rights reserved
Copyright © 2021 by rüffer & rub Sachbuchverlag GmbH, Zurich
info@ruefferundrub.ch | www.ruefferundrub.ch

Typeface: Filo Pro
Printing and binding: Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt
Paper: Cream white, 90 g/m²

ISBN 978-3-906304-83-0

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Preface

Anne Rüffer, publisher

2 December 2015, Geneva. Standing room only in the city's Auditorium Ivan Pictet. A group of distinguished guests has assembled to honour the four winners of this year's Alternative Nobel Prize. The auditorium's building is named 'Maison de la paix' – 'home of peace'. Rarely has a name so closely accorded with the special meaning of the occasion. The evening begins with two speakers: Barbara Hendriks, who serves as Germany's Minister of the Environment, and Michael Møller, who is Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva. The event's title is 'On the Frontlines and in the Courtrooms: Forging Human Security'.

Dr Gino Strada, one of the 2015 laureates, comments: 'The UN was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War. Its purpose was and is to liberate future generations from being hostages of unceasing conflict. Since that day, the world has experienced more than 170 armed conflicts. And you never broached the subject of how to abolish warfare? Come on, guys, this is incredible!' The audience responds with embarrassed laughter and polite murmurs of disbelief. Gino Strada founded the international aid organization 'Emergency' in 1994, and knows all too well what he is talking about. His organization runs clinics in regions destroyed by conflict and provides medical treatment to victims of warfare – 10% are soldiers themselves, with the remaining 90% being civilians. Strada ends his statement with, 'You can call me a utopian if you like. But remember, everything appears to be a utopia until someone realizes his vision.'

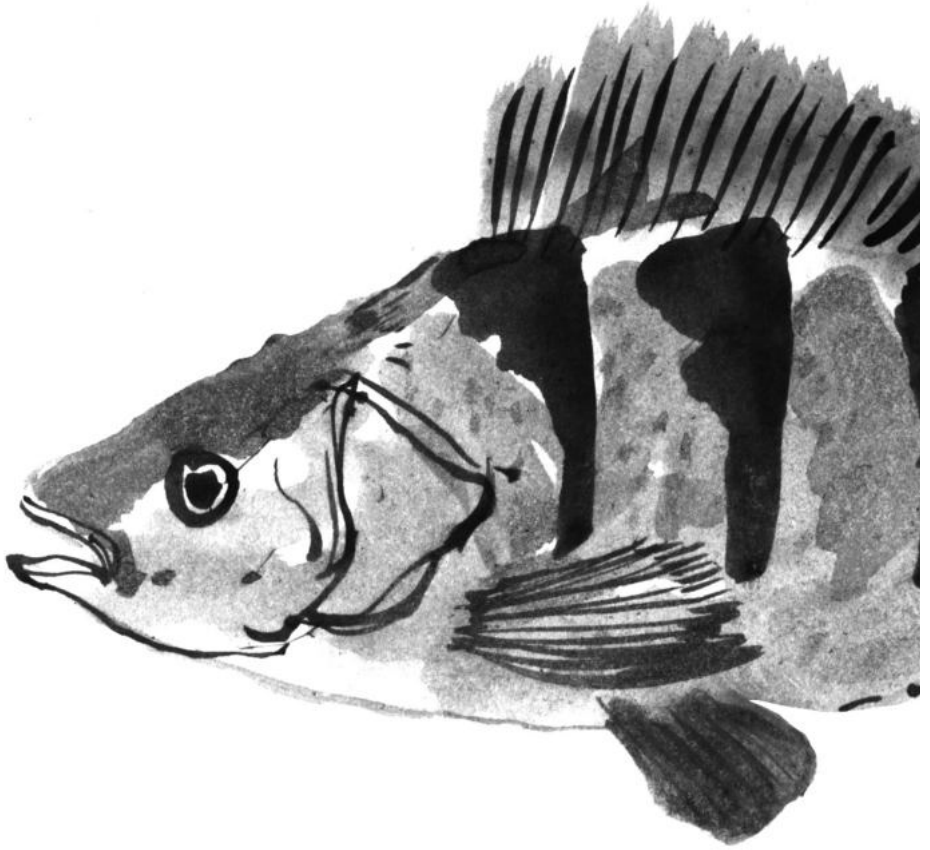
'I have a dream.' Dr Martin Luther King's statement is probably one of the most often quoted over the last few decades. That's because Dr King's dream of a world in which justice prevails is shared by so many people. Some of them – more than we are probably aware of and yet not enough by far – have devoted themselves head, heart and soul to making this dream come true. They were remarkable pioneers in their fields and could certainly be called 'utopians'. And yet, each great advance recorded by humanity originally began as a utopian idea, a hope, a vision.

This book appears in our series of 'ruffer&rub visionaries'. These books are intended to fan the sparks emanating from the ideas and hopes nurtured by these visionaries into the ardent flames of perseverance and endeavour. The heart of each book is the author's very personal look at her or his scientific, cultural or societal area of focus.

Each author will convey – in plain, inspiring words – how the fascination with the topic began. Each story reveals a personal quest to look for comprehensive answers and sustainable solutions. These books will tell you what it means to commit yourself to a cause, to live your commitment every day, to develop and implement a vision for its realization. These visions are highly variegated – political, scientific or spiritual – in nature, but the individual authors are united by a yearning for a better world – and a willingness to put their hearts and souls into achieving them.

All of these visions and the activities undertaken to make them come true possess something else in common: the deep-rooted belief that we can positively shape our future, that we can restore the health of the planet on which we all live. We too are convinced that each and every one of us is capable of pursuing the steps required to make each of us part of the solution, and not of the problem.

***So Fishes Suffer Less
and Fewer Fishermen
Have to Emigrate***



European perch [*Perca fluviatilis*]
Short profile: fishethobase.net/db/35

Kayar, one of Senegal's major fishing ports, at 5 am in mid-January 2005. An old fisherman, the leader of the *handliners* [ʔ], meets me in the pitch dark in Medina. Untypically for Africans, he arrives half an hour earlier than yesterday's arranged time. Hastily, he flip-flops across the sand between the tightly parked *pirogues* [ʔ], glancing back at me repeatedly and urging me to hurry along. On arrival at the beach, he tells one of the assembled figures waiting by a boat to bring out his oilskins. I am supposed to take his place and slip into the clammy gear, grab hold of the side of the boat, then heave-ho, until the pirogue is pushed down the beach and afloat, and quickly jump aboard and off we go. Captain Banda Diouf, who is right behind me, switches on the engine for a top-speed chase in the pirogue, which is as narrow as a dugout canoe, out onto the open sea. It is blackest night as the bright lights of Kayar's large fishing port disappear. So, who am I crouching next to, here in the same boat?

Clinging onto both sides with my hands, I wedge my feet against the rib; I concentrate entirely on the constant shifting of my weight to counter-balance the fierce crashing of the waves, which rock the boat up and down and back and forth, threatening to capsize the craft, or so I fear. Hold tight, no sliding around! What is the lunatic doing ahead of me? Standing upright ... he takes a pee, in all honesty, calmly and without falling overboard. I count my blessings that I had no time for breakfast; I don't even know if my stomach is seaworthy.

It's daybreak; behind me the captain slows down the engine, looking for the perfect spot above a reef, then one of his crew at the bow drops anchor. We sit here in the heavy swell; the boat is still rocking. I stay wedged in, looking at the three youths as they cast their handlines, guiding and adjusting

them through their fingers taped with plasters, and constantly pulling them in to replace the bait on the hooks, pieces of yesterday's fish. A fish rarely bites. 'Marée haute', says Banda, who is sitting opposite me, shrugging his shoulders, as though he would like to apologize from the outset: fishing is no good at high tide.

It's true, the other two fishermen don't see much activity either. Only Banda is lucky today; now and again, a fish wriggles on his line with eight hooks. 'Tu veux essayer?', you wanna try?, he asks me, holding out his line towards me. I wave it aside. 'Just tell me exactly how you do it.' He lets the line glide over his finger, waiting, waiting, and pulls sharply. 'You see?' he says, articulating with his fingers more than with his voice. 'With some fish, you have to let the line go when they bite, whereas with others you have to pull instantly, so they get caught.' 'And how do you know what kind of fish you've hooked?' He shrugs his shoulders dismissively, as if to say: 'It's obvious, man, I've been doing nothing else since I was a child!' They have been returning daily to the same places for generations; they know every inch of their reefs, even if they use GPS nowadays to check that they have arrived at the right location.

My backside aches from sitting for so long on the same spot. Yet, I'm more focused on Banda, who speaks a little French and likes using it, while the others remain silent. I find out that the three cousins have been fishing together for years. Do they love their work? 'Travail? Ce n'est même pas un travail de merde!' It's not even a shit job; it's lousy pay, and the fish stocks are virtually nil at the moment, because the Spanish, Japanese and Koreans are exploiting the sea on a grand scale. Or else, I reflect, they get others to do the overfishing for them. I picture myself on my first visit here, half a year ago, on the short ferry crossing from Gorée Island back to Dakar. Thousands of

dead fishes were adrift on the water, floating into the distance, their appearance unscathed and fresh. The puzzle was solved soon afterwards at the sight of a Korean factory ship at anchor. That's where the pirogues were selling their catch, and from here countless fish were being discarded because they didn't fulfil certain criteria. 'But thousands of people could be fed with these fish,' I had said to our guide. And after he politely nodded, I probed further: 'So why does your government allow that?' 'We're just a poor country,' he remarked quietly, 'and we absolutely need foreign currency ...'

But things get much worse than that. Six months later during my third stay in Senegal, I discover that better-off countries even have a way of satisfying their lust for fish without compensation in hard currency. To cut costs, factory ships from South Korea (and who knows from where else) bring local fishermen and their pirogues on board; they sail along the West African coast, from Mauritania to Angola, dropping anchor just off reefs teeming with fish and dispatch the pirogues, which have free fishing rights in Senegal and other West African countries, with no regard for their country of origin and irrespective of where they sell their catch. At least, this was still the case until 2005, because traditional fishing rights were not applicable to vessels from Europe or Asia. The pirogue fishermen from North Senegal hadn't anticipated that the very Korean factory ship that they had supplied with such an abundant catch off the Angolan coast would send them out again to the reef, only to abscond suddenly and leave them stranded in remote waters and without compensation. However, I discover too that local experts blame the overexploitation of Senegal's once rich fish stocks not merely on the sell-off of fishing rights to foreign industrial fleets, but also on the local pirogues. The

fishermen are multiplying in number due to the local exodus from ever more arid crop fields and pastureland. They hope at least to earn some income from fishing, although they lack the expertise or the proper fishing gear.

Besides, says Banda, nudging me back from my thoughts, their job is extremely dangerous. A pirogue capsizes every so often, and the fishermen drown. 'Are there no life jackets?' I ask, while at the same time I realize that I'm perched out here without protection, fully clothed and in tight oilskins, which I wouldn't be able to pull off in the water ... 'Non, pas de gilets de sauvetage.' Nobody here has life jackets, there's just not enough money. In fact, wearing a life jacket is compulsory in Senegal for every sailing trip. I find this out half a year later, while boarding the old ferry to Foundiougne, when I'm astonished to be reminded to put on a life jacket. What's missing are the life jackets themselves. Our colleagues with a Senegalese NGO had taken the trouble to manage the local production of life jackets. After three batches, however, they had to give up again because of a countrywide shortage of materials for the buoyancy aids. Instead, China took pity (which applies to Taiwan and mainland China, as both generously set up projects in Senegal, while leerily eyeing its natural resources) and donated thousands of life jackets to Senegal. The life jackets are now sold for about 5,000 local francs – the equivalent of five simple midday meals at a local restaurant. Yet none of the fishermen wears any of these *gilets chinois*. Perhaps, they don't much like the inscription on the back: 'Amitié de la République de Chine (Taiwan)'. In any case, the donation has certainly had one effect: local production of the life-savers remains postponed indefinitely.

To cut a long story short, for Banda it may have been less humiliating and at least simpler to explain the absence of the

life jackets with the customary shortage of funds. Hadn't he received EUR 100 last year? 'Who from?' 'Well, Senegal receives the most relief aid in all of Africa, USD 100 per head and per annum!' He pauses, then laughs. 'Non, jamais vu ça; nobody ever gave me anything, and no one that I know would've got a share. But if I do have any money, I'm clearing off. I'm emigrating, you see?'

'Where to then?'

'Italy, Spain ...'

'Right now, you'll get as far as Morocco at the most; Europe has erected a high fence there!'

'Well, I'll muddle through ...'

'And when you do: our climate back home is not only too cold for you, but nobody will be waiting for you!'

'But I know someone who made it and now he has a fantastic job in Amsterdam!'

'Well, someone got lucky, one of tens of thousands. But where do you feel at home?'

'Well, here, that's obvious!'

'So why do you want to leave?'

'I want to do something else other than fishing; none of us youths wants to carry on fishing.'

'What would be an alternative?'

'None, there's nothing else here.'

'No tourists at this beautiful beach?'

'No, nothing. Well, yes, there are plans, everyone always has plans here, the French, the Italians, the Spanish, the Canadians, the Americans, but nothing has materialized yet.'

'Well, be glad about it; when they make a start here, you'll be overrun with white people, but you still won't get any work because they'll bring their own workers with them.'

'Certainly not; our president will make sure that we get the work, if it's there! But nothing is happening ...'

‘Don’t you share experiences with young fishermen in other countries? They might have some ideas ...’

‘No; how does that work?’

‘Well, on the Internet!’

‘I’ve heard about it; the guy living now in Amsterdam showed it to me once. But we don’t even have a computer ...’

‘And what if we brought one with us for you next time, and somebody would teach you?’

‘Mais ça serait super!’

I’ve watched enough. I unwrap the club made from stainless steel that we developed for our project here. This can be used quickly and efficiently to stun and kill the fishes the instant that they are removed from the water. Local fish-eaters probably don’t care about this; however, in Europe a growing number of consumers would prefer to buy fish not landed on board in vast nets and forced to endure a painful death. The people who catch fish every day for others, who watch them perish as they quietly reflect and go about their business, can already appreciate some sympathy for the animal. Yet here is the problem: the fisherman is meant to humanely dispatch every fish, a whole net full; but how? Besides, even if he could, the extra effort doesn’t pay off anyway ... Senegal’s fishermen obviously see this differently than their peers in the northern hemisphere; they earn so little that slightly more would already be substantial. I demonstrate the stunning blow to the fish’s head and, rotating the club 180 degrees in my hand, cutting the gill through the artery for bleeding. Then I point out the mark that the screw-thread at the end of the club made on the fish’s head, making it easy to check later whether the fish has been stunned. Banda watches everything carefully; he asks for an explanation of its purpose and attempts it himself. ‘It works okay,’ he remarks, ‘and so there is a higher price for fish like these?’

‘Yes!’

‘C’est intéressant, ça; then maybe we’d think twice about getting away from here ...’

Banda wants to know whether I’ve had enough yet. I’m not here to have enough, I respond, but to experience their work one-to-one. How long do they stay at sea on each trip?

‘About six hours, it depends.’

‘Well, we’ve only been out here for two hours.’

‘Mais ce n’est pas la pêche aujourd’hui. We didn’t go out today to fish but because you paid for it.’

‘I didn’t pay to be taken out on the boat. I paid because you said that you’d catch less, if I came aboard and you need time for what I’m showing you.’

‘Alors, on rentre? Do you want to go back now that you’ve shown us?’

‘No, we’ll go back when you’ve finished fishing.’

Banda’s fishermen friends are curious and begin circling around us in their pirogues. It feels as though a *toubab*, a white man, is a novelty here on board a fishing boat. Words fly about in Wolof, the regional language, which I don’t understand; jokes, obviously, and crude ones at that. ‘What are they saying then?’ Banda explains that his friends were poking fun at him and his cousins for casting their lines at all today, because I had funded a full day, and one of them was just shouting that I should pay them all as well, then they could go home. Damn, word has got around quickly! I swear never again to pay for a training excursion with potential project participants; I already had a strange feeling yesterday when I gave in to the captain’s scrounging.

My feet are back on terra firma again six hours later, but the beach is swaying alarmingly beneath me. Banda thinks this is a good sign. ‘That means that you cannot get seasick.’

I would prefer not to push my luck; I shower and change into something different before I join the young fishermen for the guided tour to their home, through Medina's narrow backstreets, and into vast, sandy inner courtyards. Wide-eyed children laugh at me curiously; women smile and stare at the ground; fathers and uncles, who are proud that their sons are carrying on the profession, welcome me like an old friend, although I don't speak any Wolof and I'm only married to one woman (the local men and women find this just as puzzling as we do polygamy). Besides, I don't bow to Mecca (which most local people do every day), let alone towards Rome (which they would deem an acceptable substitute). The young men who invited me to their home discreetly withdraw after the initial greeting. It's inappropriate to express a different opinion from the family elders, so they prefer to be absent. But the fathers welcome me not just into the inner sanctum of their homes, but into their innermost hopes. How should I explain to them that there is no longer any income for all the crew on the boat?

Back in Kayar six months later, I ask after Banda but he is no longer here. He has gone to Spain, I am told. The business with 'fair fishes' came too late for him. But his friends still count on the day when at last there will be fair trade for fish.

**Does it help only to buy fish
from developing countries?**

[↗ Chapter 'Which Fish Can I Still
Eat?', p. 142]