

Film / Africa**Darwin's Nightmare**

Exports of Nile Perch from Lake Victoria do not appear to be benefiting local vulnerable populations in any way

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Strange title for a documentary, but this film does give you nightmares and will haunt some of your nights. Hubert Sauper made a four-year thorough enquiry in Tanzania on the shores of Lake Victoria. As in a police investigation, for two hours, he dissects all the consequences of the development of the Nile perch, and its export to Europe and other developed countries. Without any comment, he lets all those involved in the system speak, from those who make profits out of it (the European Union exporters, African politicians) to the most deprived (fishermen, women, children). He shows how globalization generates huge riches based on the Nile perch, but also how it makes poverty worse and makes more vulnerable the plight of thousands of inhabitants who try to make a living out of the resources of the lake.

The worst situation is that faced by women and children. Fishermen migrate for fishing, spending their income on alcohol and prostitution, often contracting AIDS and then passing it on to their wives before dying at quite an early age. Many villages die: there aren't any young adults left. Neglected women die and only a few teenagers are healthy enough to go fishing.

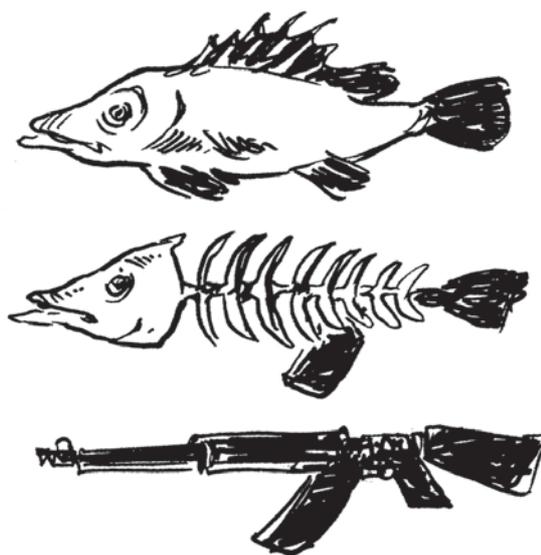
The women who cannot find jobs in the Nile perch processing factories are condemned to work on the scraps left over by the factories—in appalling conditions, and provided they pay for it.

Before, when the European norms weren't strictly applied, these scraps were given away freely outside the factory premises. But now, these scraps are carried away by lorries to be dumped, and women have to pay to try and get something out of the waste.

Before the Nile perch was introduced, there was enough fish to feed the local population. This is no longer true. While starvation spreads among the locals,

many million tonnes of fish end up on the tables of Northern countries to make up for falling stocks of cod or hake.

Abandoned, famished children survive in the streets, sniffing discarded plastic wrappings from the factory. Amidst this dire poverty, sects are fighting; as if a soldier in some African war can make you hope for a better future. It is made obvious in the film that the planes come in full of weapons, and go back loaded with Nile perch.



Such a film troubles and deeply moves those who see it, even as the consumption of Nile perch increases in Europe. Wherever the film has been shown, it has met with success. It provides food for thought on the consequences of globalization. It is an appalling and desperate testimony: no solution, not the faintest glimmer of hope. Some people suggest a boycott. According to us, it would be better to listen to those who try, against all odds, to organize and to find answers so as to improve the fate of those fishermen as well as their families.

That's why, with Daniele Le Sauce, we have decided to organize a series of conferences in France about this film and the Nile perch, and invite Margaret Nakato, who heads a women's organization in Uganda, on the shores of Lake Victoria, to give her own testimony. Some hope of getting out of this nightmare.

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