

Venice International Film Festival - Giornate degli Autori Toronto International Film Festival San Sebastian International Film Festival

Darwin's Nightmare is a tale about humans between the North about globalization, and about

Some time in the 1960's, in the heart of Africa, a new animal was introduced into Lake Victoria as a little scientific experiment.

The Nile Perch, a voracious predator, extinguished almost the entire stock of the native fish species.

However, the new fish multiplied so fast, that its white fillets are today exported all around the world.

Huge hulking ex-Soviet cargo planes come daily to collect the latest catch in exchange for their southbound cargo...

Kalashnikovs and ammunitions for the uncounted wars in the dark center of the continent.

This booming multinational industry of fish and weapons has created an ungodly globalized alliance on the shores of the world's biggest tropical lake: an army of local fishermen, World bank agents, homeless children, African ministers, EU-commissioners, Tanzanian prostitutes and Russian pilots.







The idea of this film was born during my research on another documentary, KISANGANI DIARY that follows Rwandese refugees in the midst of the Congolese rebellion.

In 1997, I witnessed for the first time the bizarre juxtaposition of two gigantic airplanes, both bursting with food. The first cargo jet brought 45 tons of yellow peas from America to feed the refugees in the nearby UN camps. The second plane took off for the European Union, weight with 50 tons of fresh fish.

I met the Russian pilots and we became "kamarads". But soon it turned out that the rescue planes with yellow peas also carried arms to the same destinations, so that the same refugees that were benefiting from the yellow peas could be shot at later during the nights.

In the mornings, my trembling camera saw in this stinking jungle destroyed camps and bodies.

First hand knowledge of the story of such a cynical reality became the trigger for DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE, my longest ever cinematographic commitment.

Said to be the birthplace of mankind, "The Great Lakes Region" is the green, fertile and mineral rich center of Africa.

The region is also known for its unique wild life, snowy volcanoes and famous National Parks. At the same time, it is truly the "Heart of Darkness" of our world.

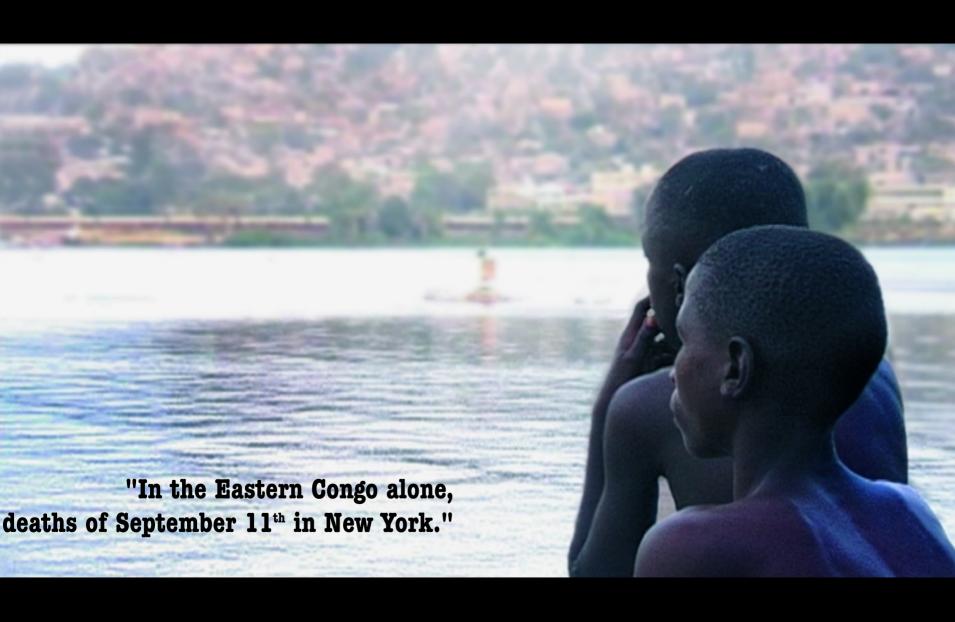
Massive epidemics, food shortages and of course civil wars rage in this area, taking place in a kind of moral oblivion.

These armed conflicts are the deadliest ones in history since the second World War. In the Eastern Congo alone, the casualties of war on each single day equal the number of deaths on September 11th in New York.

If not totally ignored, the uncountable wars are often qualified as "tribal conflicts", like those of Rwanda, Burundi or Sudan.

The hidden causes of such troubles are, in most cases, imperialistic interests in natural resources.

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To shoot DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE we used a minimalist unit: my faithful travel companion Sandor, my small camera and I. We had to be very close to our "characters" and follow their lives over long periods. I feel like they are an important part of my existence now. When you look out for contrasts and contradictions, reality can become "bigger than life". So in a way it was easy to find striking images because I was filming a striking reality. But it was also easy to get into trouble.

On location in Tanzania we could never really show up as a regular film team. In order to fly with cargo planes we had to disguise ourselves as pilots and loadmasters and carry fake identities. In villages we were mistaken as missionaries, and in fish factories managers feared we might be EU hygiene inspectors. We had to become Australian businessmen in the fancy hotel bars, or just harmless backpackers in the African bush, "taking pictures". Many many days were lost in front of sweating, confused and questioning police officers, on checkpoints and in local prisons. A good part of the filming budget was wasted just paying for our freedom in bribes and fines. The national newspaper headlines and even the BBC in London declared, "French and American journalists kidnapped by bandits on Lake Victoria". Since the writer Nick Flynn from NY was travelling with us, the US embassy in Dar es Salaam started franticly ringing the alarm for their lost citizens. There was no kidnapping, however, but once again we had been held back on a remote fishing island - this time accused of shooting "blue movies" with naked girls.

Forced idleness became a dull routine. We would sit in the merciless equatorial sun surrounded by a million Nile Perch skeletons, the local's food, trying not to go mad.



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Survival of the Fittest?

The old question, which social and political structure is the best for the world seems to have been answered. Capitalism has won. The ultimate forms for future societies are "consumer democracies", which are seen as "civilized" and "good". In a Darwinian sense the "good system" won. It won by either convincing its enemies or eliminating them.

In DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE I tried to transform the bizarre success story of a fish and the ephemeral boom around this "fittest" animal into an ironic, frightening allegory for what is called the New World Order. I could make the same kind of movie in Sierra Leone, only the fish would be diamonds, in Honduras, bananas, and in Libya, Nigeria or Angola, crude oil.

Most of us I guess, know about the destructive mechanisms of our time, but we cannot fully picture them. We are unable to "get it", unable to actually believe what we know.

It is, for example, incredible that wherever prime raw material is discovered, the locals die in misery, their sons become soldiers, and their daughters are turned into servants and whores. Hearing and seeing the same stories over and over makes me feel sick.

After hundreds of years of slavery and colonisation of Africa, globalisation of african markets is the third and deadliest humiliation for the people of this continent. The arrogance of rich countries towards the third world (that's three quarters of humanity) is creating immeasurable future dangers for all peoples.

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It seems that the individual participants within a deadly system have no ugly faces, and for the most part, no bad intentions. These people include you and me. Some of us are "only doing their job" (like flying a jumbo from A to B carrying napalm), some don't want to know, others simply fight for survival. I tried to film the personalities in this documentary as intimately as possible. Sergey, Dimond, Raphael, Eliza: real people who wonderfully represent the complexity of this system, and for me, the real enigma.

Hubert was born in a village of Tyrol, Austrian Alps. He lived in Great Britain, Italy, the USA, and since ten years in France. He studied film directing in Vienna (Univ. of Performing Arts) and in Paris (Univ. de Paris VIII.) and graduated B.A.(Mag. art) Hubert teaches film classes in Europe and USA. The last two documentaries he wrote and directed were awarded twelve International Film Prizes.

As an actor he played in several shorts and two feature length films:

"IN THE CIRCLE OF THE IRIS" (Dir. Peter Patzak, with Philippe Léotard) and "BLUE DISTANCE" (Dir. Peter Schreiner).

Hubert Sauper

Filmography (as writer and director)



Best Short Film Int. Festival Würzburg 1994. Prix Max Ophüls. Best Documentary Nexon, France 1995.

SO I SLEEPWALK IN BROAD DAYLIGHT (1994, fiction, Austria, 55min, 16mm)

Premio da casa da Figueira da Foz, Portugal 1995 Best First Film, Best Film School Production

LOMOGRAPHER'S MOSCOW (1995, Documentary, Russia, 30 min, for TV)

KISANGANI DIARY (1998, Documentary, France/Austria, 45min, 35mm)

PARIS — Cinéma du Réel Grand Prix du meilleur Film 1998

ST. PETERSBURG — "Centaur 98" for Best Documentary Film

NEW YORK — Gold prize for Best Documentary, NY Film Expo 1999

KRAKOW — "Don Quihote Prize" 1998

LONDON — One World Media Award 2nd prize 1998

NÜRNBERG — 1st Human Rights Award for Best Film 1999

BERLIN — "Forum of young cinema" 48th international film festival

MONTEVIDEO — Special Jury Mention

KARLOVY VARY — Special Jury Prize for Documentary 1998

GENEVA/NY/L.A. — International Humanitarian Award

ALONE WITH OUR STORIES (2000, Documentary, France, 60min, DigiBeta, for TV)

DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE. (2004, Documentary, France/Austria/Belgium, 107min, 35mm)



DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE

Written and directed by Hubert Sauper Artistic Collaboration: Sandor Rieder, Nick Flynn Cinematographer: Hubert Sauper Sound engineer: Cosmas Antoniadis Film Editor: Denise Vindevogel Sound design: Veronika Hlavatsch Press book layout: Kurt Hennrich

Producers: Edouard Mauriat Antonin Svoboda Martin Gschlacht Barbara Albert Hubert Toint Hubert Sauper

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