

# Central Tanzania's Birds of Prey:

An Analysis of Economic Development surrounding Lake Victoria

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Everyday in Central Tanzania, a bird of prey comes down and swoops in on the residents of Mwanza. This is not a conventional bird, like a hawk or vulture; it is a plane that comes in and deprives the local people of their resources. In the 1960s, the Nile Perch was introduced to Lake Victoria; ever since, Central Tanzania has experienced adverse impacts to its society and economics. In the documentary *Darwin's Nightmare*, Hubert Sauper examines the local effects that the extraction of the Nile Perch has had on the region surrounding Mwanza. In the film, the audience witnesses prostitution, starvation, and physical deterioration to those who reside near Lake Victoria. Meanwhile, Russian men excessively export the Nile Perch and leave little behind for the local civilians. At first, one may think that the film's title refers to the death of other fish due to the introduction of the Nile Perch. While this is true, the film also discusses the collapse of the human ecosystem due to the introduction of Global North humans. The film's title, *Darwin's Nightmare*, encapsulates the deeper message of the film whereby the strong prey on the weak, both institutionally and individually.

In the film, three forms of economics were apparent: institutional, local, and shadow. Institutional economics was the primary form of economics exhibited. Institutions such as Europe and Russia invested in fishing factories to satisfy their desire for the delicacy of Nile Perch. Another institution, the United Nations, gave money to support the ecology of Lake Victoria in another effort to satisfy the wants of the Global North. Additionally, they gave food to aid the Tanzanians in the face of famine. Local economics experienced the greatest impacts as their previous self-sufficient way of life was disrupted through international forces. Local economics was exhibited primarily through the prostitution business and the "business" to salvage unwanted parts of the Nile Perch. Lastly, shadow economics was portrayed through the

arms dealers who fed civil strife throughout Africa. Russia would also funnel arms through the airport in Mwanza to other regions of the world. The airport was used as a vehicle to transport an underground supply of ammunition and other instruments of war. The catalyst of institutional economic development may have been harm hiding under a misleading disguise, as their programs had destructive consequences at the cost of civilians (Ferguson 2006, 71).

There were many economic interdependencies that played out as a massive series of cause and effect, with both intended and unintended consequences. The greatest unintended consequence that occurred due to institutional economics was the extinction of the local indigenous species of Lake Victoria, leading to the elimination of the local food source. As a result, there was a need to import food from other countries, which further stretched the resources of Tanzanians. The Tanzanians were unable to afford the imported goods which led to widespread famine. This further perpetuated the need for institutions, “The ‘development’ apparatus... is not a machine for eliminating poverty... Rather, it is a machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power, which incidentally takes ‘poverty’ as its point of entry and justification” (Ferguson and Lohmann 1994, 180). Another consequence was that locals developed diseases as a result of the Nile Perch fishing industry. Ammoniac gases released from the fish remains damaged eyes and created harmful drugs. Institutions provided no form of aid to resolve or prevent the diseases. It was necessary for locals to harvest the scraps from the Nile Perch carcasses as one of their only food sources. Furthermore, prostitution was an interaction between local and institutional economics. Women were forced to become prostitutes in order to provide for themselves. Foreign men treated them horribly, going as far as murdering the women. It is easy to believe that life may have been worse under subsistence living, when in

fact, quality of individual life may have deteriorated significantly as a result of these external factors.

The predators from the North would argue that Central Tanzania has experienced a surge in “development” as a result of the fishing industry and the resulting foreign trade. In actuality, “development” has resulted in a lower quality of life for the local people (Hickel 2012, para. 5) While there are world-class fishing factories and an abundance of exports, the introduction of the Nile Perch has led to the decimation of their local food supply. “Development” has not led to an influx of educational or monetary resources, creation of improved infrastructure, or the fulfillment of fundamental human needs. Instead, “development” has led to increased starvation because there are no longer fish that civilians can eat, prostitution so that women can find a way to make money, disease because the Nile Perch introduced new illnesses, and increased war and civil strife through the proliferation of arms.

*Darwin's Nightmare* exemplifies the fittest depriving the weak of their livelihood and future potential. Throughout the film, countries in the Global North prey on the species of Lake Victoria and the civilians in Central Tanzania. The Nile Perch industry in Central Tanzania has created a new form of colonization because of the dynamics of dependency, servitude, and resource confiscation. True development should result in value creation and the improvement of the human condition. This situation is quite the opposite: once Lake Victoria is lifeless, the Perch supply is depleted, and the planes no longer come, the people will be left with nothing, not even the rotting fish carcasses.

### *Works Cited*

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