

THE FEVER

A FILM BY
KATHARINA WEINGARTNER

DOX LEIPZIG
INTERNATIONAL
PROGRAMME
2019



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Presskit

THE FEVER

A FILM BY
KATHARINA WEINGARTNER

A 2019, 99 min, englisch, luganda, luo, mandarin
with engl. Subtitles

World premiere

DOK Leipzig International Programme

dasfieber.com

thefevermovie.com



Production

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Synopsis

Malaria has killed more people than all other diseases and wars on Earth combined. In Sub Sahara Africa one child still dies every sixty seconds. Nobody, including Big Pharma, the Gates Foundation or the WHO, seems to believe that Africans have their own solutions. The Fever portrays the fight against malaria in East Africa as a case study in greed and courage.



Interview

of Bert Rebhandl with Katharina Weingartner

How did you decide on the complex themes which are addressed by *The Fever*?

On a journey to Saigon I found a passage in the guide book about artemisia annua, a plant from the same family as mugwort. It said this was a Chinese herbal malaria remedy that could well have been the reason Vietnam won the war. If that's right, I thought, then this is a good subject for a movie. But I had no idea where this idea would take me.

How did you find out more?

At the start we were most interested in the relationship between tropical medicine and colonial wars of conquest: would the colonisation of Africa – apart from the coastal region – even have been possible without the oldest malaria medication, quinine? The European soldiers, missionaries and farmers died in huge numbers while the local inhabitants were immune from the age of five. It was like the parasite was an important defence against invaders.



You also discovered just how significant malaria is to international politics.

Mao and the Americans were locked in a decades long arms race in malaria research. The Vietnamese president Ho Chi Minh asked Mao for support during the Vietnam War, but he didn't ask for weapons, he asked for malaria medication.

In 1972, Tu Youyou, who later won the Nobel Prize, and her team extracted the active ingredient artemisinin from the herbal compound artemisia annua or sweet wormwood. It is till the most effective malaria medication.

The West was not prepared to allow China to have a lead in this field unopposed. At that time people already knew about resistance to the most common contemporary medicine, chloroquine, and that it was only a matter of time before a huge epidemic broke out. Before 2000, many millions of Sub-Saharan African people died, nobody knows for sure how many.

The film keeps coming back to its core theme of artemisia annua, a herbal alternative. What is so special about it?

Artemisia is a herbal remedy employed all over the world, and is used for lots of



purposes in China. A closely related medicinal herb, artemisia afra, is found across the whole of Africa, and is an ancient malaria medication. It basically grows in any location, no matter how barren.

As the expert on herbs, Rehema Namyalo, so eloquently explains in the film, artemisinin is just one of 240 active ingredients in artemisia annua. The parasites that survive contact with it become resistant because they have only been exposed to one active ingredient. There are two in combination medicines such as Coartem, an ACT. It's child's play for malaria parasites.

Novartis knows this very well, and denies it. The WHO knows it, but says there is still no resistance in Africa. There is going to be a medical catastrophe in the near future because there is still no other medicine.

Another problem seems to come from the underlying pattern of West African politics relating to health: it is too technocratic.

The great downfall of technocratic institutions is that basic health services are decimated. The research contracts go to the West, while African researchers are only allowed to contribute material. "We are nothing but field workers, porters. It's a form



of neocolonialism,” says Richard Mukabana, Professor of Biology at the University of Nairobi.

Why have you had your sights on Bill Gates and the Gates Foundation for so long?

We had planned to interview Bill Gates for years. He and his money are the secret rulers of the malaria world. As the biggest private donator to the WHO, he determines global health policy. In 2008, the Gates Foundation boasted at a press conference that malaria would be wiped out by 2015. There is no longer any trace of this promise on the Internet. The world of malaria research simply laughed at them. Nobody is laughing anymore, because now there is no way of avoiding Gates.

Eventually we realised that we were no longer interested in these big words, even though the media is full of it. We wanted to unambiguously be on the side of people who actually have to live with malaria, battle against it, unseen and unheard by anyone. They should be allowed to shape their own fate. So we felt it right to simply present silent images of the robotic world of glass palaces, in part funded by their suffering and the death of their children. The Novartis Campus in Basel is, like the Gates Foundation in Seattle, almost made for the camera, to show the contradiction.



Why in the end did you decide against telling the story from a western perspective, as your German and Swiss coproducers wanted you to do?

You still see the same old postcolonial patterns in a huge number of documentary films, where Africa is used only as a backdrop. With a complex subject like malaria, the temptation was to concentrate on all the scandalous global interrelationships. This is what the Global North is used to seeing, but the people impacted by malaria would once again have been seen as victims and statistics. It is absurd that 90% of research money stays in North America and Europe when 90% of actual cases of the disease are in Sub-Saharan Africa. Those effected are rendered voiceless and refused the medicine they need. It was important to us that our protagonists, who have to live their whole lives with the malaria parasites, were presented as self-reliant actors who want to and are very able to battle the illness for themselves.



Protagonists

The single mother of three kids runs a little clinic in her hometown. She works relentlessly to spread the knowledge about how everyone can grow the herb *Artemisia annua* at home and prevent their families from getting malaria.

“When the majority of the local community uses Artemisia to treat themselves, the government will not get taxes, like they do with imported drugs. Because there are non charged on herbal medicine.”



Rehema Namyalo
herbal practitioner in Masaka,
Uganda

After studying mosquitos in the Netherlands and the US, Richard returned to Kenya in order to find ecological and local remedies against malaria. However, he soon realized that research grant donors like the Gates Foundation have no interest in supporting community based low-tech solutions and African scientists.

“We are nothing but field workers, porters. It’s a form of neo-colonialism.”



Richard Mukabana
professor of biology at
the University of Nairobi, Kenya

Patrick conducted a clinical study on a flower farm next to Lake Victoria with over a thousand workers about the efficacy of the herb Artemisia taken as tea. The result: malaria cases were reduced by 85%. He has proven that Artemisia could save millions of Africans - if Big Pharma would finally stop pressuring the WHO in banning its use.

“When I started this study about malaria prevention I was warned by many people. That I might get killed by those who profit from the drug.”



Patrick Ogwang
pharmacologist at Mbarara University
of Science and Technology, Uganda

Almost all the kids in his class have lost a family member to malaria. He educates them in prevention methods but financial struggles in many families make it impossible for lots of students to take care of health problems.

“We don’t have enough food. Most of them suffer, but their parents would rather look for something for them to eat than to take them to hospital.”



Paul Mwamu
teacher in Nyabondo, Kenya

The Fever

A 2019, 99 min

with: **Rehema Namyalo, Richard Mukabana, Patrick Ogwang, Paul Mwamu**

Written and directed by: **Katharina Weingartner**

Producer: **Markus Wailand**

Assistant Director: **Weina Zhao**

Director of Photography: **Siri Klug**

Sound: **Patrick Becker, Richard Fleming**

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Research, Production Assistants: **Anna Hirschmann, Sophia Laggner**

Location Manager: **Evelyne Faye-Horak**

Story Consultant: **Monika Bernold**

Text: **Noviolet Bulawayo, Pat Blashill**

Title Design: **Toby Cornish**

Color Grading: **Gregor Pfüller**

Sound Design: **Peter Braeker**

Sound Mixing: **Florian Beck**

Poster Design: **Karl Ulbl**

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Production Assistant: **Natascha Gertlbauer**

Production: **pooldoks**

World Sales: **filmdelights**

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financed and supported by:







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Katharina Weingartner is a filmmaker and radioproducer, currently living in Vienna after many years in New York. She creates films and radio programs, books and exhibitions about urban culture and politics, feminism, pop- and consumer culture.

- 1989 *Lips. Tits. Hits. Power? Popkultur und Feminismus*
Folio (book edited with Anette Baldauf)
- 2001 **too soon for sorry**
feature length doc about the US-prisonindustrial complex
and the War on Drugs
- 2001 *shopping*
exhibition at Generali Foundation, Vienna (with Anette Baldauf, Dorit Margreiter)
- 2003 **Knock Off. Revenge On the Logo**
45-minute doc about life in the glow of global superbrands
(with Anette Baldauf)
- 2008 **Sneaker Stories**
feature length doc about streetball and sneaker culture
- 2010 **The Gruen Effect**
60-minute doc about the architect who invented the shopping mall
(with Anette Baldauf)
- 2019 **The Fever**
feature length doc about the fight against malaria in East Africa



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