

'THEY SHOOT KANGAROOS, DON'T THEY?'

"Do they really shoot kangaroos"??? Each time I hear the same incredulous question, I notice the same reaction of disbelief. Yes, each time I tell to French or Europeans that, in Australia, kangaroos are killed and consumed, I can feel, through their repelled and thoughtful attitudes that there are some limits humans unconsciously don't like to overstep.

Kangaroos have filled with wonder every child, everyone of us. Kangaroos have a special emotional status in our affective histories. Some animals are very particular, and kangaroos are part of them. Because of their unique appearance, like whales or elephants, they are the magnificent and obvious symbols of this nature we deeply need, biologically and spiritually speaking. They are like the beams of a lighthouse; living, delightful and bouncing beacons for roaming ships trying to keep the helm in this furious economically-founded world. But one after the other, in Africa, in Europe, in America, everywhere in the world, little lights of this kind are going out, and people feel vaguely unsafe. That's why, outside Australia, so many persons instinctively think killing kangaroos is shocking. For us, harvesting them for human consumption is worse, it is almost like transgressing a taboo: kangaroos have always been part of our child dreams, and who likes to eat a dream, who likes to bite into one's childhood, to swallow a part of one's innocence? Our European supermarkets are more and more numerous in withdrawing kangaroo meat from their shelves: no customers!

But Australians allow this slaughter, even vigorously support it sometimes. Why? **As a journalist, I was interested in understanding the ins and outs of this issue and came to Australia to film a documentary about Skippy's misfortune.**

The answer to my question appeared immediately to be quite simple and just one word long: **BRAINWASHING.** *"Kangaroos are in plague proportions", "kangaroos are pests for farmers", "kangaroos are more numerous than before"*... Continuously and very cleverly, almost without foundation, all these statements have been hammered out as obvious facts. To such an extent that they have smothered this first instinctive and natural reaction which leads almost everyone to feel that wild animals like kangaroos shouldn't be killed for profit. The French have not the right to criticise this: haven't we lost our wolves and our bears forever, defeated by the same kind of brainwashing? However, fortified by our failure, aware of our foolishness and our responsibility towards the loss of our own natural treasures, could we dare to beg Australians to be more aware of their extraordinary heritage?

Could we convince them by telling them how much the unpleasant atmosphere in which we have worked for this report deeply reveals that this issue has many questions in the dark? Because we have tried to find evidence for all those groundless statements, we have faced suspicion, numerous withdrawals, pitfalls, prohibitions, intimidations and stereotyped formal language... Why? We had to put pressure for months to film one night of kangaroo harvesting. **Why?**

Or, I could tell to this shooter we eventually filmed how much I felt sorry for him? How could his spirit be happy with all this blood shed each time he goes out, his mind always in harmony with chaos? I will never forget this silent night in the bush, the stars were so bright. Twelve kangaroos were killed in front of us. Only males. Shooting females would have had, as a consequence, the killing of the baby joey in the pouch, which is not a footage the kangaroo industry wants to show. Once, the shooter missed his target. Has a kangaroo been injured? We will never know. We went away without checking. And yet, I suppose the industry has cautiously chosen for us one of their best shooters. So we can imagine, that it is not so rare for harvesters to miss their targets. Then, how many kangaroos each year are left dying in the bush? We had to interrupt our filming in the middle of the night, because the shooter got nervous: he noticed we were filming "dead" kangaroos still kicking. So we went back to the chiller. What had once been magnificent animals were now pieces of flesh dangled down lamentably from their hook, the head sweeping over the bottom of the truck to the beat of the bumps, drawing strange letters in their own blood. **Every Australian should have seen this, before accepting what politicians decide for them.**

Could I reply to this kangaroo meat processing plant manager we met in Melbourne that, no, it is not stupid or a child mawkishness that leads many people to think there is a difference between killing domestic animals and wild ones? Domestic animals have been bred for centuries to feed us, don't they offer us enough meats to satisfy our blasé palates? Wild animals have been evolving for millions of years to survive, doesn't their own complex social organisation call for all our respect? As there are rules of respect between different human beings in a same family, and in a same town, and in a same country, more widely, there are rules of respect between different species, different living beings in the same planet. We should not forget these rules; breaking them means leaving the way open to all sorts of abuses which will turn against us. Do we really need to eat wild animal meat? Would we be stupid enough to eat eucalyptus leaves to make a change from lettuce? And for pity's sake, don't tell us that aboriginal people have always killed kangaroos. They had no 4 wheel drive cars, sophisticated rifles equipped with sights, and their artisanal harvesting could not have an industrial dimension

But of course, it is said that the kangaroo harvesting doesn't aim at getting rid of **all** the kangaroos. However, could I express to this representative of the National Parks & Wildlife Service who we interviewed, my doubts towards the sustainability of this harvesting? Could I express my astonishment at the **hypocrisy of such a system**? In France, National Parks Rangers are viewed almost as heroes. How surprised one of them has been when I told him that in Australia, **each State National Parks were responsible for managing the harvesting of kangaroos.** Unfortunately, maybe it is not clearly understood how much this difficult issue, tarnishes the good Australian reputation abroad and favours prejudice.

I remembered this man we interviewed in front of a supermarket. "Isn't it a problem for you to eat your national symbol?", I asked him. "It is not. France's symbol is the cock, and you eat chicken don't you?" he answered. I would like to reply to this man that no tourist comes to France in order to see Roosters. They are our national symbol but not our national pride.

Kangaroos are the flagship of Australia, but they are not only Australian, they are International. The Australian continent needs kangaroos, it needs their carcasses to keep on feeding its fragile soils. The Australian souls need this unique animal which gives them a beautiful identity and whose leaps seem to offer a magnificent boost to dreams of liberty. And moreover, we, Europeans, who have almost destroyed our nature, who are so astonished by the powerful beauty of your amazing country, we really need Australians, we really need you to show us that living in harmony is not yet a lost dream.