



ADIEU À L'AFRIQUE

UN FILM DE PIERRE-ALAIN MEIER

Réalisation PIERRE-ALAIN MEIER avec la collaboration de OUMAR NDIAYE Ecriture et enquête JAMAL BELMAHI, PIERRE-ALAIN MEIER Image SÉVERINE BARDE Son ERIC GHERSINU Montage MYRIAM RACHMUTH Musique ISMAËL LO, WASIS DIOP Montage-son ELEONORA POLATO Mixage DENIS SÉCHAUD Etalonnage CHRISTOPH WALTHER Titres ILARIA ALBISETTI Sous-titres NINA KAEIN, ARON NICK Une Production PRINCE FILM (SUISSE), ALLIANCE MÉDIAS INTERNATIONAL (SÉNÉGAL) Avec la participation de CINÉFORUM et le soutien de LA LOTERIE ROMANDE, RTS RADIO TÉLÉVISION SUISSE - UNITÉ DES FILMS DOCUMENTAIRES, IRÈNE CHALLAND, FONDS SUCCÈS CINÉMA ET SUCCÈS PASSAGE ANTENNE Distribution OUTSIDE THE BOX, THIERRY SPICHER

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CINÉFORUM

LOTTERIE ROMANDE

princefilm

OUTSIDE THE BOX

***FAREWELL
TO AFRICA***

**EVER SINCE THE EUROPEAN PEOPLES
MADE PRACTICAL ATTEMPTS TO INCLUDE ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH
IN THEIR CONCEPTION OF HUMANITY,
THEY HAVE BEEN IRRITATED BY THE GREAT PHYSICAL DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE PEOPLE THEY FOUND ON OTHER CONTINENTS.**

HANNAH ARENDT

SYNOPSIS

In 2009 the body of Alice B is found washed up on an African beach. Next to the corpse of the white, 30-year old European woman lie those of a dozen black migrants. Eight years after this tragedy, Pierre-Alain Meier travels to Senegal in the hope of understanding the story behind this tragic shipwreck.

When he was Alice's age, he wandered the streets of Dakar planning the production of the film *Hyenas*. Like her, he was a white person in Africa. Perhaps like her, he hoped he could blend in more easily with his African friends and co-workers and not be so unmistakably foreign.

Following in Alice's footsteps, the filmmaker today puts his own story into perspective, with humility and affection, allowing us access to a very intimate terrain. *Farewell to Africa* tells the story of a final journey and sets out to explore the complex ties – both rich and asymmetrical – that have never ceased to exist between Europe and French-speaking Africa.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

What was your initial motivation behind *Farewell to Africa*?

The first seed was planted during the filming of Markus Imhoof's *Eldorado* - a very complex film I am currently producing, about the Western attitude towards the countless migrants that arrive in Europe across the Mediterranean sea and those who currently live in refugee camps in Libya, close to the Syrian border...I was also motivated by my memories of Oumou Sy, the exceptional costume designer on the film *Hyenas*, the very tumultuous film I produced in Senegal in 1990, and then again in a second and successful attempt in 1991; the death of Matthias Kälin, my friend and cameraman on most of my films, most notably on *Yaaba* and *Hyenas*; the tragic accident my son Dawit suffered, as well as a strong desire to return to Africa, which had been gnawing at me for several months...And eventually - last but not least - the fact that if I didn't make a film before June 2016, I would have lost the funding I received as a consequence of the success of the film *More Than Honey*. I was also driven by the desire to direct a small, personal film, with few constraints - an independent and free cinema, which I evoke at the end of the film.

What about Alice Bianchi? Wasn't she part of what motivated you to do this film?

She was the underlying story, the directional thread of the film. Nevertheless, without *Eldorado*, I might never have heard of Alice Bianchi. But even without Alice Bianchi, I still would have filmed *Farewell to Africa* - although the end result would have turned out to be a different film. Over the past 40 years - every ten years more or less - in the middle of all my productions, I always had this recurring desire to make a film of my own, I was presented with the perfect moment to do just that.

The film poster depicts the African continent distancing itself from the European continent...What does Africa mean to you?

Refusing to succumb to the tyranny of time; a different type of bond of an individual to a collective; a resistance to the accumulation of riches; a peaceful integration into an environment...These values allow a glimpse of a different way the world could evolve, more balanced, more modest, less predatory, more prospective.

Africa stands for "different" values and mentalities, which our world could benefit from greatly. The battle for cultural diversity - of which the black continent is one of the most powerful symbols - in reality represents a battle for survival of humanity as a whole.

Besides that, life in Africa to me seemed more intoxicating, more unsettling, more exalting than life in Europe.

Your encounter with Oumou Sy marks the end of the film and the end of your *Farewell to Africa*. Who is this woman? What does she represent in your life?

Oumou Sy was the astounding costume designer on *Hyenas*. She then went on to have a hugely successful career as a fashion designer. She has an incredible creative force. Her secret, she says, can be summed up in one sentence: "All things considered, life is incredibly simple and I don't like being a prisoner". Throughout the difficult filming of *Hyenas*, she supported me in such a unique way. I don't think I would have made it without her. We also lived a short, but intense love story. Back then I considered settling down in Africa. 25 years later - throughout which, from afar, I followed her brilliant career - I wanted to revisit that distant and precious past with her.



Pierre-Alain Meier, Oumou Sy, Wasis Diop, Ami Diakhate, the old woman in *Hyenas* (1991)

Who is Oumar Ndiaye, whom you collaborated with closely on this film?

Oumar Ndiaye is a filmmaker and producer. He set up the Festival du Film de Quartier de Dakar (Dakar Neighbourhoods Film Festival) in 2003. We met at a large symposium which brought together filmmakers and producers from ten different countries within Black, French-speaking Africa and of which we then went on to organise another edition in Burkina Faso in February 2012 with Thierry Spicher, Pierre Agthe and the local DDC. The symposium's objective was to implement a project for automated funding for low-budget films, with the intention of fomenting films Africa is capable of funding on its own without depending on European funding.

Oumar had also filmed migrants on their way to the Canary Islands in 2008, a beautiful film called *As long as there are boats*. It came naturally to us that he accompanied me in my inquiry into Alice's story, from a logistic point of view, but also as an accomplice and interviewer, as I decided on interviewing the different protagonists in Wolof, their mother tongue.

Oumar started his investigations with the police in St. Louis at the beginning of 2016, three months before we started filming. He was the one who found out that Alice's real name was Renata Bianchi, that she was Italian and had lived in Senegal for 6 years. I decided to keep her name Alice in the film, to maintain a certain distance.

What does the film *Hyenas* represent in your career as a producer?

Hyenas, an adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit*, pushed me to my limits like no other film or experience ever did in my entire professional and personal life. *Hyenas* is the only film - among all the films that I have produced, accompanied and directed - which really tested me.

To this day, I'm trying to understand what made me come to Senegal to produce that film, a project, which the writer and director himself, Djibril Diop Mambéty, wasn't really eager to film. With that film I hit rock bottom. It was a physical struggle. Three times, I was taken to the Dakar police station. I had to



Djibril Diop Mambéty, director and Mansour Diouf, main actor (photo Felix von Muralt)

bring filming to a brutal halt – and go against the majority of the crew involved. Eventually I fled to the airport with a few of my compatriots in tow. We ran out of petrol 2km before reaching the airport and started running to the airport, so we wouldn't miss the flight. To add to that I was escorted off the plane, because I had been sold a fake plane ticket. I then returned a year later, to start the whole production from scratch again.

Throughout the years that followed that shoot, I returned to Dakar incognito, to revisit the different locations we filmed in. I was struggling to overcome that powerful and traumatic experience. Back then Africa fascinated me. With *Yaaba*, *Hyenas*, and then *Laafi Tout va bien* and a few other films - which had all been selected at Cannes - I had become “the” African producer. At one point, I almost felt more African than Swiss.

Several of my co-workers on *Hyenas* have passed away, all before their time. I also returned to Senegal to try to finally grieve my dear colleagues. Among them: Mansour Diouf, the main actor, Djibril Diop Mambéty, Samba Felix Ndiaye, the production director and a talented filmmaker, Matthias Kälin, Maguette Salla, the sound engineer as well as most of the actors of the film.

In the film, at times with the smugglers, it seems like you're trying to clear their names...

The smugglers are only the very last link in a long chain of people. Not too long ago, the migrants themselves were treated like “terrorists”. And because it is considered politically incorrect to put forward such a strong argument against so many desperate human beings from so many different places, the focus and blame is instead placed on the smugglers.

More than the migrants and their backgrounds, their status or the situation of their countries of origin and transit, for me it's a question of the nature of Europe and the power it holds over Africa, imposing its own model of development on them. Europe barricades itself off and within its borders creates centres of administrative detention, clearly violating international asylum rights.

Our governments proclaim they are unable to “receive all the world's misery” and we hide our in-

volvement with the oppressing regimes that create that misery in the first place. But is it still feasible to expect that a cry – or numerous cries for help – can change anything? All these deaths haven't changed a thing.

**Is there still hope that one day we will wake up and realise what's going on?
What is the migrant situation in Senegal today?**

Today the number of migrants leaving Saint Louis for the Canary Islands has drastically dropped, on account of the intervention of agencies such as Frontex (the European border and coast guard agency) and the Senegalese and Mauritanian police, who carefully control the coastlines. Some migrants still cross through the Western Sahara, but most of them – much less today though – cross through the desert, through Libya or Egypt.

At the same time I also realised that a large number of migrants have returned to Saint Louis. Some because they were forced to leave Europe, others because they wanted to return. The European dream didn't turn out to be what they had hoped for – far from it.

Is this your first documentary?

No, not exactly. I directed a few documentaries in the early nineties, in the last century so to speak: *Ikaria BP 1447*, *Douleur d'amour*, *La danse du singe et du poisson*. More recently, in the 21st Century, I produced several feature-length documentaries that have really marked me and which I collaborated on closely: two very political films with Fernando Solanas, *Memoria del Saqueo* (Social Genocide) and *La dignidad de los nadies* (The Dignity of the Nobodies); three more experimental films with Olivier Zuchuat, *Far from the Villages*, *Like Stone Lions at the Gateway into Night* and *Le périmètre de Kamcé* (currently in pre-production in Burkina Faso); as well as Markus Imhoof's two most recent and astounding films, *More than Honey* and *Eldorado* (currently in the final editing stages).

Perhaps it was Fernando Solana's approach which I've felt closest to when making *Farewell to Africa*. In fact, I pay him a spontaneous and sincere tribute at the beginning of the film, when I show the beginning



In 2004, at the Berlinale: Joskha Fischer, Fernando Solanas and Dieter Kosslick, the director, when Solanas was awarded an honorary Golden Bear for *Memoria del Saqueo* and his work as a whole. It was over the course of this exceptional evening that Monika and I decided to adopt our children.

of the credits of *Memoria del Saqueo*. A sequence which begins with the juxtaposition of the city's towering skyscrapers and families rummaging for food in the streets below. Images that are accompanied by Solana's voice-over: "What happened in Argentina? How was it possible for there to be so much hunger, in a country that was so rich?"

With Markus Imhoof, I was influenced by his desire and decision to not use journalistic methods when investigating the extinction of bees or the mass arrival of migrants in Europe. In both cases, it was more about giving the viewer an authentic insight into a very real drama that is unfolding in the world today, thanks to his very sensorial images and to him presenting the subject – much like Fernando Solanas – in a much vaster context: the pressure created by a global economic pyramid, which is constantly growing and becoming increasingly inhumane.

I hope I have lived up to these exemplary colleagues of mine and to have learnt all I can from them and those valuable experiences.

And your children?

They are now aged 18, 14 and 13. The proverb: "Small children, small worries, big children, big worries" couldn't be more true in our current situation. But I love them more than anything...like all parents do. It was also for them, as I explain at the end of the film – which is something I only discovered at the very end of the editing stage of *Farewell to Africa* – that I have decided to stop producing and directing films, in order to have more time for them and their futures.

I have experienced incredibly beautiful adventures in cinema with Fernando Solanas, Rithy Panh, Djibril Diop Mambéty, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Pierre Yameogo, Merzak Allouache, also in Switzerland with Jeanne Waltz, Markus Imhoof, Olivier Zuchuat, Claudio Tonetti, the Blind Date directors (M. Gisler, Samir, Ch. Schaub, Anka Schmid, etc), among so many others. I can't really ask for more. And today, filmmaking doesn't make me dream the way it used to.

Fernando Solanas still wants to direct an ambitious ecological saga based on a text written by Pope Francis, which he has presented to me and which I am still unsure whether to collaborate on. Olivier Zuchuat and Markus Imhoof still have to finish their films...Then it'll be time for me to lock the door, throw away the key, to retire.



With Noah, Dawit and Chaya in the Franches-Montagnes

REFERENCES

Succès cinéma Burkina Faso: <http://succescinema-bf.com/contexte.html>

Prince Film: <http://princefilm.ch/en/>

Oumar Ndiaye: <http://africultures.com/personnes/?no=11262>

Oumou Sy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oumou_Sy



I dedicate Farewell to Africa to Monika, Chaya, Dawit and Noah

BIO-FILMOGRAPHY

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Pierre-Alain Meier was born in Delemont, Switzerland. He went on to study Science and Literature at the University of Neuchatel, then filmmaking at the INSAS in Brussels. He founded the production company Thelma Film AG in Zurich in 1988 and Prince Film in Geneva in 2005. Since 2010, both companies are headquartered in the Jura, in Delemont.

He has produced over 30 films, among them *Yaaba* by Idrissa Ouedraogo, *Hyenas* by Djibril Diop Mambéty, *Rice people* by Rithy Panh, *Bab el Oued City* by Merzak Allouache, *Salt of this Sea* by Annemarie Jacir, *Les hommes du port* by Alain Tanner, *Bye Bye* by Karim Dridi, *Memoria del Saqueo* and *La dignidad de los nadies* by Fernando E. Solanas and more recently in Switzerland *A Parting Shot* by Jeanne Waltz, *Far from the villages* and *Like stone lions at the gateway into night* by Olivier Zuchuat, *More than Honey* by Markus Imhoof.

Currently in post-production: *Eldorado* by Markus Imhoof; in production: *Le périmètre de Kamcé* by Olivier Zuchuat (in Burkina Faso).

He has also directed several documentary films, as well as a fiction short and feature film, *Thelma* in 2001.

DIRECTOR'S SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

Author, director and producer/ co-producer of:

1986 IKARIA

Doc. - Medium, Grand Prize at the Strasbourg Festival, 1987

1988 DOULEUR D'AMOUR with Matthias Kälin

Doc. - Medium - Grand Prize at the Bludenz Festival, 1988

1990 LA FEMME ET LA SANDALE

Fiction - Short

1994 LA DANSE DU SINGE ET DU POISSON

Doc. - Medium

2001 THELMA

Fiction - Feature length, Mannheim-Heidelberg Festival 2001, Quality Prize OFC, Prize of the city of Zurich

2017 ADIEU A L'AFRIQUE

Doc. - Feature length

EQUIPE

Direction and production**In collaboration with****Writing and investigation in collaboration with****Image****Sound****Editing****Sound Editing****Sound Mixing****Music****Assistant director****2nd Camera****On-site Production****Image post-production****Translations****Titles and promotional material**

Pierre-Alain Meier

Oumar Ndiaye

Jamal Belmahi

Séverine Barde

Eric Ghersinu

Myriam Rachmuth

Eleonora Polato

Denis Séchaud, Studio Masé

Wasis Diop

Ismaël Lo

Chimi Flaubert

Jean Diouf

Mariame Ndaw

Christoph Walther

Nina Kälin, Massamba Dia

Ilaria Albisetti

MAIN PROTAGONISTS

Aïcha Sarr, Leila Sall, Makane Diagne, Kadia Sall, Moreau Marshall Sidibe, Oumar Thioye, Mohamed Sow, Ahmadou M'Baye, Arona Seck, Oumou Sy.

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