

THE CEMETERY OF ELEPHANTS

A documentary film by
Éléonore YAMEOGO

Produced By
VRAIVRAI FILMS, ONEZIK



Film summary

In a locked retirement home in France, we follow the daily life of some former missionaries commonly called "pères blancs" or "white fathers" who stayed on the African continent long before independence, in order to evangelize the African people and to work toward transmitting a western vision of the world to them. Their current resting place (the retirement home), ironically called "the cemetery of elephants" by local residents, hosts about thirty residents among whom, Father François de Gaulle, the nephew of General de Gaulle. In the twilight of their life, the desire to open up the doors and reveal an essential memory, essential to the understanding of a common history, comes out. They walk us into the memories of their turbulent African lives, and with nostalgia and an analytical look, they then talk about their mission and their place in the history of colonization.

Director's note of Intent

As an African Catholic, it was quite natural that I would go back to church soon after I arrived in France. I was unexpectedly surprised to find out that the priest in the church I went to, not only was black but also spoke with an African accent. I started wondering whether or not France, "eldest daughter of the Church", is lacking in vocation and appointed an African as priest? In order to have a better understanding of that, I decided to go back in time and to have a better understanding of history.



What did Catholicism represent in France at the end of the 19th century in order to go as far as to push hundreds of men for decades to come this far from their motherland and pass on their religion ?

I discovered in the suburbs of Paris a particular retirement home. This resting place, ironically called "the cemetery of elephants" by the local residents. This home hosts about thirty retired White Fathers who worked on the African continent in the past. I visited them quite often and each meeting was an opportunity for us to talk about memories of Africa.



They would nostalgically share stories about their mission in these distant lands (african countries) and I would immerse myself in their daily life within this singular place that later turned into a movie set in which exciting characters with astonishing stories would evolve. I then decided to make a film in which I will address an unknown human reality that is often regarded as taboo in some situations. My intention was to collect a rare narrative, a narrative of people who experienced unique life adventures.





The White Fathers will share with me their experiences staying in Africa. It is an opportunity for them to also talk about the nature of the relations that may have existed between them and the settlers.

Taking a distance from that context and period, I hope to have them give their personal opinion on the influence of their mission on the process of decolonization in Africa and on the often complex relationship between them and the native Africans.



I also like to address the issue of loneliness that evolves within this place, the disarray they experienced when their hierarchies forced them to suddenly end their mission and to come back and live as retired in their home land, France.



I also found it very interesting to address the painful problem of old people in general, who at some point of their age become more and more inactive and can't do anything about it. Those are among others the diverse topics, that I hope to explore in this documentary. I believe that such stories told by wise memories at their latest age would have a valuable heritage that would be essential for the understanding of our common stories.

Director's Short Biography

As a native from Burkina Faso, Éléonore YAMEOGO is from a generation of the youngest African female directors who are eager to make films addressing compelling social issues. She has always been passionate about bringing up and promoting, a new African look with a feminine sensibility through her films. Her career starts with some experiences on some film sets in Ouagadougou before she attended cinema schools in Burkina Faso, Belgium and France where she currently lives.



Technical Summary Of The Film

Length: 70 min

Genre: Documentary Film

Author/ Director: Éléonore YAMEOGO

Cinematographer/ Sound Recordist (France):

Jean-Baptiste BEIS & François PERLIER

Cinematographers: Moussa OUEDRAOGO,

Tibiri KOURA, Sam REMY TRAORE

Sound Recordist (Burkina Faso): Halassane

SANFO, Mohammed ZERBO

Editing/ Color Grading:

Philippe RADOUX-BAZZINI

Sound Editor: Yves MESNIL

Original Music: Alif NAABA, Flatié DEMBELE,

Patinda David ZOUNGRANA

Field Producer (France): Florent COULON

Field Producer (Burkina Faso):

Honoré YAMEOGO

Production Assistant: Faissol GNONLONFIN

Production Secretary: Felix SALGADO LOPEZ

Production Intern: Aissata OUARMA

With the Supports of:



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