

PRESS NOTES

THE LAST SHELTER **(LE DERNIER REFUGE)**

A film by Ousmane Samassékou

France / Mali / South Africa, 2021, 85 min

A production of

Point du Jour - Les films du balibari (France)
DS Productions (Mali)
STEPS (South Africa)

A co-production with

Arte GEIE

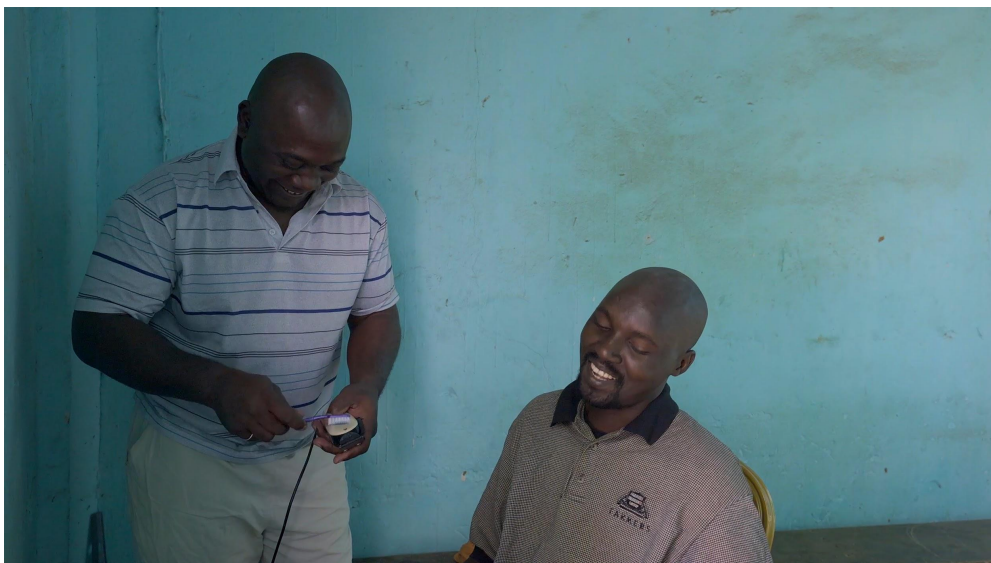
With the support of

Hot Docs Blue Ice Doc Fund
Sundance Documentary Fund
IDFA Bertha coproduction Fund
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Procirep-Angoa

A GENERATION AFRICA PROJECT

Supported by

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FESTIVALS

- **CPH:DOX** (Copenhagen, Denmark - April 2021)
World premiere, Main competition
- **HotDocs** (Ontario, Canada - April/May 2021)
North American premiere, World showcase section
- **DOK.fest München** (Munich, Germany - May 2021)
Horizonte competition
- **Festival de Cinéma Africain de Tarifa** (Tarifa, Spain - June 2021)
- **Biografilm Festival** (Bologna, Italy - June 2021)
Contemporary Lives section (International Competition)
- **Encounters SA International Documentary Film Festival** (Cape Town, South Africa - June 2021)
In competition
- **Durban International Film Festival** (Durban, South Africa - 22nd/07 - 1st/08 2021)
In competition
- **DokuFest** (Prizren, Kosovo - Aug 2021)
International Competition
- **Etats Généraux du documentaire** (Lussas, France - 21st Aug 2021)
SCAM screenings
- **"Der neue Heimatfilm"** (Freistadt, Austria - 25th - 29th Aug 2021)
- **Docs Against Gravity** (Warsaw, Poland - 3rd - 12th Sept 2021) Polish premiere
- **Beldocs** (Belgrade, Serbia - 9th - 16th Sept 2021) Serbian premiere
- **Sydney Film Festival** (Sydney, Australia - dates to be confirmed, Covid-19 related)
International Documentaries strand
- **Lima Alterna IFF** (Lima, Peru - Sept 2021)
International Competition
- **Human Rights Film Festival Berlin** (Berlin, Germany - Sept 2021)
- **Helsinki International Film Festival** (Helsinki, Finland - September 2021) Finnish premiere
- **Mostra de Cinemas Africanos // Brazil African Film Festival** (Brazil - September 2021)
- **International Film festival Innsbruck (IFFI)** (Innsbruck, Austria - Oct 2021)
Documentary competition
- **FESPACO** (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Oct 2021)
"Documentaire long-métrage" competition
- **Off Cinema Festival** (Poznań, Poland - Oct 2021)
International Competition for Golden Castle award
- **Chicago International Film Festival** (Chicago, Illinois, USA - Oct 2021)
US premiere
- **Rendezvous With Madness** film festival (Toronto, Canada - November 2021)
- **African Film Festival of Verona** (Verona, Italy - Nov 2021)
Viaggiatori & Migranti section
- **One World Film Festival** (Bratislava, Slovakia - 5th - 11th Nov 2021)
- **Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal** (RIDM) (Montréal, Canada - Nov 2021)

- **Films from the South** (Oslo, Norway - Nov 2021)
Doc:South competition section
- **IFI French Film Festival** (Ireland - Nov 2021)
- International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) (Amsterdam, Netherlands - Nov 2021)
Best of Fest

Awards

- CPH:DOX - DOX:AWARD
- Festival de Cinéma Africain de Tarifa - Special Mention "Meilleur Documentaire" section
- Encounters SA International Documentary Film Festival - Winner of "African / South African feature"

LOGLINE

At the southern edge of the Sahara desert stands The House of Migrants: a safe haven for those on their way to Europe, or those returning home. Here they come to terms with their individual migration stories. How do you feel, what do you need, when your dreams have been buried in the sand, or when they are waiting to be lived?

SYNOPSIS

The House of Migrants in Gao, Mali, is a refuge at the southern edge of the Sahara desert. It welcomes those in transit towards Algeria in the north, or on their way back after a failed attempt to make it to Europe. When Esther and Kady, two teenage girls from Burkina Faso, arrive to regain the strength to continue their journey, they form a friendship with Natacha, a migrant woman in her forties whose memory faded over the years, along with her hopes of regaining her home. The trio finds a semblance of family life, sharing moments of joy, hope and tenderness. But the girls can't shake the dream of a future abroad, even when their journey collides with the ones who came back, burdened by failure and trauma. The house, like a rampart made of fragile walls, can hardly resist the call of the desert, its distant murmur whispering stories of dreams and nightmares.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

It is said that one morning, a few months after I was born, my father's older brother, Uncle Amadou, got up, headed north and set off on a long journey on foot. When I was a child, my grandmother liked to tell me his story. She proudly told me that her son was a brave, dignified child, a man who dared to brave the storm for the honour and well-being of our family. It was her own modest and imaginative way of telling me that my uncle had gone to Europe illegally. She kept interpreting the silence and absence as hope, hope that my uncle would finally give some sign of life as the years passed and we had no news of him.

Since then, my late grandmother may have found an answer in the afterlife to this son's terrible absence. Aunt Aïcha continues to question the marabouts, they tell her that her brother's stars still shine, that he still lives somewhere.

Amadou's two children never knew their father; their mother waited for the return of a husband who was no longer giving signs of life and she never remarried. Are her children, my cousins, orphans ? Those who are now parents of several children themselves? Is his wife a widow? What is the name of this state of interminable waiting? Thirty-two years of absence have not been enough to mourn, because Amadou is a question that has remained unanswered. We built ourselves on the idea of a hypothetical return, believing, in the heritage of our beloved grandmother, that in the depths of absence, there was hope.

As I grew up, I realized that for this trip to Europe, everyone in my family had contributed to the journey by giving money, food, clothing, or by making the sacrifices and blessings necessary for the journey to go smoothly. Over time, Amadou's interminable waiting created many internal quarrels. But outside the family circle, when we were asked about him, we pretended to have received news, because after all, having a migrant in the family was an asset, which attracted the envy and respect of those around us. This is what I call symbolically the African myth.

THE AFRICAN MYTH

As J. Salomé so aptly wrote: *"In some imaginations, the grass is always greener elsewhere... until we discover that it is artificial turf."* For many people in Sub-Saharan Africa, in this case those who have never set foot on Western soil, the West represents that wonderful elsewhere, a paradise on earth – the place of 'real' life. However, the reality of the West can be quite different.

Today, I have the chance to travel thanks to my job as a filmmaker. I discover the world almost as a tourist, while discovering the reality of what my African brothers in Europe are living: lack of papers, housing, food, health care, homesickness. Those who leave and settle are victims of exclusion. They are treated as mere labour force. They are condemned, even before building their project, to live on the margins of the European dream.

It is difficult, however, to go back home and contradict the myth of the European paradise, because you would not be believed. After all, there are some who do manage to

make their way in this “paradise”. Many people who have been expelled do not want to return home for fear of being rejected. When the family reunites with the migrant who has not been able to achieve his or her goal, the family members often think first and foremost of the hope generated by the journey... then of the amount invested at a loss in the journey and the return from misery.

It is the project of an entire family that is carried on their shoulders when they leave. And to come back with nothing is to bring back a curse, to attract the evil eye, and to face the silent reproaches of one's own. The expelled person, often without moral or financial support, only thinks of leaving again and again, until he or she never comes back... At least, being absent is to still arouse hope and pride in one's loved ones.

THE HOUSE OF MIGRANTS

The Malian city of Gao, in the middle of the Sahel, is today the scene of profound upheavals. Beyond the apparent calm that reigns there, it is at the heart of the region's greatest geostrategic challenges. Occupied in 2012 by the rebel forces of North Mali and liberated in 2013, the city is currently a base for the French, Malian and UN armies in their fight against the jihadist militias present everywhere in the surrounding area.

For several decades now, the city has been a crossing point to Europe for migrants from far away. Tens of thousands of migrants from all over the continent pass through the city every year. Since the end of 2016, neighbouring Algeria has unofficially tightened its migration policy and the police are making mass arrests of migrants temporarily settled in the country. Without any form of trial, they are escorted back to the border in the south of the country, or sometimes even abandoned in the middle of the desert. Some are victims of violence by the police or smugglers, many arrive thirsty and hungry. In Tinzaouaten, a town on the border between Mali and Algeria, migrants who are turned back are taken in charge by the IOM (International Organization for Migration) and brought back to Gao in convoys chartered by the Malian police.

Faced with these deportations, Gao has become a refuge for many people with a European dream. One place embodies the ‘behind closed-doors’ environment that the city has become: the House of Migrants, which welcomes thousands of people every year who no longer want to set foot in hell, the brazen ones who want to make a costly attempt at a passage to Europe, and those who are making their first journey. They are Cameroonians, Congolese, Ghanaians, Guineans, Nigerians, Ivorians, Liberians, Angolans, Burkinabè, Malians, Senegalese, Africans in short... It is Africa that is there. It is, more precisely, the Africa of the repressed that is housed there, a relentless picture that depicts the lack of future for the country and the cruelty of a migratory system that shatters bodies and ambitions.

THE LAST SHELTER tells the story of this place and its inhabitants, the awareness of the trauma of exile and the difficult issue of the return to one's family. The film gives voice to those we never hear, lost in a dimension that is foreign to us, torn between a past they have drawn a line on and a future they cannot write. Enlightening a slice of life in their present, this film will be an unprecedented plunge into a reality that is usually closed to us.

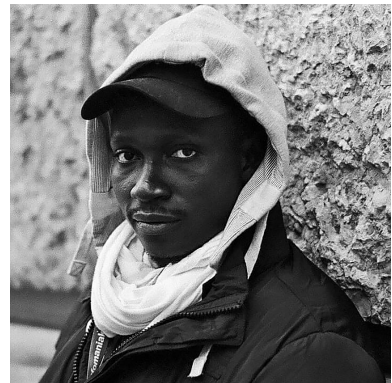
ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

A graduate in business economics, **Ousmane Zoromé Samassékou** continued his studies at the Conservatory of Multimedia Arts and Crafts in Bamako. He then obtained a master's degree in documentary production and creation at the Gaston Berger University in Saint Louis, Senegal. Ousmane is a partner with DS Production in Bamako, where he is a producer, director, DOP and editor.

In 2015, he completed his first feature-length documentary film on the evils that hinder training and education in Mali: **Les héritiers de la colline**, produced by Label Vidéo (France) and DS Production (Mali), which won the Grand Prix du Jury at the Agadir Festival and special mention of the Jury at the AMAA Awards .

His latest feature-length documentary **The Last Shelter** was presented at the IDFA Forum in 2019 (round tables) and 2020 (rough cut) under the working title *Witnesses from the Shadow* (*Les témoins de l'ombre*). With this project, Ousmane participated in the IDFA Summer School and the IDFA Academy in 2019.

As co-producer of Aïcha Macky's **ZINDER**, produced by Tabous productions (Niger), Les films du balibari and Corso films, he participated in the Atlas workshops in 2020, la Fabrique des Cinémas du Monde at the Cannes Film Festival, the Ouaga Film Lab and the Produire au Sud workshops of the 3 Continents film festival in Nantes. In October 2018, he won the producer networks grant at the Ouaga Producer Lab with the project **Tonso**.



Filmography / Filmographie

2015 Les héritiers de la colline // 84 minutes



ABOUT THE PRODUCERS

Estelle Robin You

Point du Jour - Les films du balibari (France)

Estelle Robin You is a producer at French company *Point du Jour - Les films du balibari*, nominated for the French Documentary Producer Award in 2010, 2017 and 2018, and finally winner in 2019.

She has produced documentaries that have travelled and gained acclaim in festivals and on TV stations around the world, with broadcasters such as ARTE, ZDF, France Télévisions, YLE, SVT. *VILLAGE WITHOUT WOMEN* by Srdjan Sarenac (ZDF), *SEA IS MY COUNTRY* by Marc Picavez (ARTE France), *SISTERHOOD* by Maxime Faure (France 2), *THE FRUITLESS TREE* by Aïcha Macky are amongst the films she and her partner Clara Vuillermoz produced with international careers, selected in festivals such as IDFA, Visions du Réel, Hot Docs and Göteborg IFF.



Estelle has successfully moved the company into theatrical film production in 2016, releasing films in French cinemas such as *COMME DES LIONS* by Françoise Davisse, *OUAGA GIRLS* by Theresa Traore Dahlberg (co-produced with Memento Film in Sweden), and the Greek-French-Canadian *DOLPHIN MAN* by Lefteris Charitos (co-producers Anemon Productions GR, Storyline Entertainment CAN) for ARTE Documania. She is currently producing a Grand Format for ARTE entitled *CHARITY* by Floriane Devigne and a feature-length theatrical documentary by Berlinale-awarded Saeed Taji Farouky, *A THOUSAND FIRES*. Estelle is a EAVE producers workshop and Ex Oriente Alumni. She is co-President of the Plateforme, the audiovisual and cinema professional organisation in her region, and has been a member of committees such as CNC, regional funds, Procirep.

Andrey S. Diarra

DS Productions (Mali)

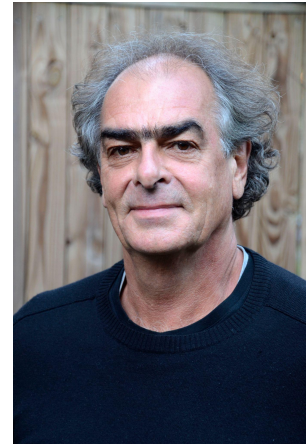
After graduating in 2012 with a Master's degree in creative documentary production, Andrey S. Diarra directed and produced his first feature-length documentary *HAMOU-BÉYA (SAND FISHERS)*, which received international acclaim. He also produces institutional films for NGOs in Mali. His production company, DS Production, has been based in Bamako since it was founded in 2009. It specialises in producing creative documentaries and institutional films. It has recently expanded its production activities to fiction films, and has produced around 10 cinematographic works.



Don Edkins

STEPS (South Africa)

Don Edkins is a South African documentary filmmaker and producer based in Cape Town. He has produced documentary film projects that have been broadcast around the world, such as *Steps for the Future*, *Why Democracy?* and *Why Poverty?* earning multiple international awards, including an Oscar for *Taxi to the Dark Side*, and the Special Teddy Award at the 63rd Berlinale for *Steps for the Future*. The Peabody awarded *Why Poverty?* project, with documentary films from 21 countries, was screened globally by 70 broadcasters. He is Executive Producer of AfriDocs, a free-to-view VOD platform and broadcast strand across Africa that screens the best African and international documentary films. He is currently producing a new documentary film project with African filmmakers across the continent, *Generation Africa*, around the theme of migration. He is a mentor for the Berlinale Talents, Durban FilmMart, and Docs by the Sea in Indonesia, and a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



Tiny Mungwe

STEPS (South Africa)

Tiny Mungwe is a documentary film and arts producer. She currently works at STEPS (Social Transformation and Empowerment Projects) where she produces *Generation Africa*, a pan-African anthology of 25 documentary films from 16 countries in Africa, on the topic of migration. Mungwe's films include *Akekho uGogo*, a 48 minute documentary about urban youth culture, which screened at several festivals including the Durban International Film Festival, Apollo Film Festival and DOKANEMA Festival. Her short film script *Evelyn* was selected for the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) Women Filmmaker Project and she directed another short film in the program, *Daddy's Boy*. She has written for some of the highest rating South African television dramas such as *Muvhango* and *Matatiele*, and was one of the directors on the series *Uzalo*. For several years she worked as a festival organizer and programmer for four international festivals, namely *Time of the Writer*, the Durban International Film Festival, *Jomba! Contemporary Dance Festival* and *Poetry Africa*. During that time she also worked on the program for Durban FilmMart (the co-production market of the festival) and *Talents Durban* (a career development program for emerging African filmmakers in partnership with Berlinale Talents). She continues to work as a program curation associate for the Durban FilmMart. She also programmed and curated the city of Durban's inaugural book and art fair, *ARTiculate Africa*.



ABOUT GENERATION AFRICA

Generation Africa is a collection of 25 short, medium and feature length documentary films from 16 countries in Africa, which aim to shine a light on the future of youth in Africa through the topic of migration. Produced by STEPS in South Africa in collaboration with production companies in each country, this project aims to give voice to African storytellers in an initiative that has built a strong documentary community across Anglophone and Francophone Africa.

For the first time, filmmakers from French and English-speaking countries were able to create collaboration across the continent as well as with the North. The project centred on the professional development of filmmakers participating in the project, with support from African and international experts in story development, dramaturgy and production, as well as post-production.

Generation Africa was conceived from the beginning with a clear idea for reaching audiences, as these films will be distributed in Africa through the STEPS pan-African platform AfriDocs.net, as well as the network of broadcasters in a global broadcasting event led in partnership with Arte (France, ZDF and Strasbourg).

This ground-breaking collection introduces exciting young documentary voices to a world stage in order to shift the narrative on migration.

For more information, please contact STEPS:

Don Edkins: Executive Producer – don@steps.co.za

Tiny Mungwe: Producer – tiny@steps.co.za

Bérénice Hahn: Assistant Producer – berry@steps.co.za



CREDITS

The Last Shelter

France, Mali, South Africa | 2021 | 85'

A GENERATION AFRICA PROJECT

Original title	Le dernier refuge
Written and directed by	Ousmane Samassekou
Cinematography	Ousmane Samassekou
Sound	Adama Diarra Jean-Marc Schick
Editing	Céline Ducreux
Original music	Pierre Daven Keller
Producers	Estelle Robin You (Point du Jour - Les films du balibari) Andrey S. Diarra (DS Productions) Don Edkins, Tiny Mungwe (STEPS)
Produced by	Point du Jour - Les films du balibari DS Productions (Mali) STEPS (South Africa)
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With the support of	Hot Docs Blue Ice Doc Fund Sundance Documentary Fund IDFA Bertha coproduction Fund Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie – OIF Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée (CNC) International Media Support – IMS Région des Pays de la Loire SCAM Brouillon d'un Rêve Fondation Alter-Ciné Procirep-Angoa
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