

Papang Films (Reunion) & Endemika Films (Madagascar) present

# WHERE ZÉBUS SPEAK FRENCH

a documentary film by  
**NANTENAINA LOVA**

with the voice of  
**CLAUDIA TAGBO**

with  
**GEGE RASAMOELY & TEMANDROTA**

By the director of **ADY GASY**

DOX Leipzig  
Film Prize  
Leipziger Ring  
2023



Distribution partners:

REGION REUNION



ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE DE la francophonie

TV5 MONDE

written by NANTENAINA LOVA and EVA LOVA-BELY - produced by EVA LOVA-BELY, NANTENAINA LOVA, NICOLE GERHARDS and MICHEL ZONGO  
production crew CANDY RADIFERA, JONATHAN NARLYSH RAFIDIARISON, NINA FERNANDEZ - images NANTENAINA LOVA, NANTENAINA FIFALIANA  
sound NANTENAINA FIFALIANA, JONATHAN NARLYSH RAFIDIARISON - editing NANTENAINA LOVA, EMMANUEL ROY, JEAN-MICHEL PEREZ animation  
HERIZO BASHY RAMILJAONINA - sound editing and mixing JULIEN VERSTRAETE - color-grading SYLVAIN LANGE - puppets' voices CHRISTIANE  
RAMANANTSOA, FELA RAZAFIARISON, GAD BENSALAM - credits music MAMISO TRIO - illustration DWA - poster CANDY RADIFERA - typography TIA



**PAPANG FILMS, ENDEMIKA FILMS, NIKO FILM and DIAM PRODUCTION**  
present

## **SITABAOMBA**

# **WHERE ZEBUS SPEAK FRENCH**

A feature-length documentary directed by Nantenaina LOVA  
Written by Nantenaina Lova and Eva Lova-Bély

2023 / Madagascar / 103' / Color / Sound 5.1

Languages: Malagasy, French  
Subtitles: French, English, Spanish, Chinese

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## SYNOPSIS

*Ly is one of the last farmer orators in Madagascar's capital. His life was turned upside down in 2016 when long-armed speculators began coveting the land he farms. Like an egg arguing with a pebble, Ly and his farmer friends battle it out, while their children and teasingly humorous puppets tell the story of the grown-ups!*

## INTENTIONS

*"My challenge is to allow the viewer to escape from the Western gaze and transcribe, in the very form of the film, the mindset of my compatriots and ancestors. My film is constructed in reference to the "kabary", their poetic and comical art of oratory, their baroque and metaphorical reading of reality, the fruit of observation of Nature and Humans... which makes sense in the end."*

**Lova Nantenaina**



# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

## **What inspired you to become a documentary filmmaker?**

I think I felt the need to offer my perspective, that of a Malagasy who has travelled across the seas and seen that young rice shoots are not necessarily greener elsewhere. About ten years ago, in France, I read a sign on the back of an activist saying: "There's nothing to be proud of about being well integrated into a sick world". I thought that my films should tell the story of how the Malagasy are exhausted trying to adapt to this unhealthy modernity.

## **How did you come to film this family and their village, "Sitabaomba" (bomb bay)?**

It all started in May 2016, when it was suggested to me that I make a film about the dysfunctions surrounding the setting up of the Francophonie Summit. I was drawn to a newspaper article that described how farmers were demonstrating against their rice fields being taken over to build a road for the Francophonie Summit. I went to meet the leaders of the protesting association, and was surprised to recognize Ly among the victims! I had filmed Ly and her youngest child in 2007 for my first short documentary.

## **Why this interest in the 2016 Francophonie Summit?**

The Summit's slogan, "*Shared Growth and Responsible Development*", made me smile because it was so out of touch with reality, especially when you think of Hery Rajaonarimampianina's presidential project, which is destroying many peasant jobs in favor of speculators... and also in favor of the invited heads of state, to spare them the endemic traffic jams in our beloved capital.

## **With this film, can we say that you're siding with the peasantry and against urban development?**

Not really, because I didn't want a film that denied the complexity of reality. I didn't set out to make a Manichean film that would systematically pit traditional wisdom against modernity, or the happiness of country life against the aggression of the city.

The debate I'm trying to provoke lies elsewhere. I don't think it's acceptable for decisions to be taken in high places and imposed on the rest of the population without the slightest consultation, as if we were nothing more than puppets. I think that in Madagascar, generally speaking, many intellectuals, leaders and foreigners, with good or bad intentions, impose their interests with condescension. I say this because they imply that criticising their choices would be tantamount to criticising the will to develop the country. For them, the choice of development is a profession of faith. All the people have to do is say "thank you" for finding them investors, even if it means dispossessing some poor peasants of their land. For some right-thinking people, farmers should give up their independent profession and become agricultural workers for agribusiness companies, or move to the city.

## **Is the Sitabaomba land grab a special case?**

Yes and no. Yes, because the land belongs to the State and it was on the initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture that families were encouraged some 40 years ago to transform the marshes into rice fields. It was a major rural development project that turned into a major urban development project. In that sense, it's a special case. The general case is land that has been farmed for generations by the same clan or family, but without land titles, and unfortunately it is very common for farmers to find themselves in an unequal battle with powerful people who claim to have bought titles from the State in order to settle there and displace those who have always lived there. Whether these powerful people are Malagasy or foreign, it's reminiscent of all the invasions and colonisations that history has seen and that we still see all too often throughout the world today.

## **In France, this spoliation process is not authorized by law?**

But it was once. Europeans went through what we are going through today. Anthropologist Philippe Descola explains that the mechanism of the capitalist system has been fed by land grabbing since the Middle Ages. It began with the privatisation of fields and the creation of enclosures to prevent sheep from grazing freely in Great Britain.



## **Do you see a link between the problem of land grabbing in Madagascar and France as a former colony?**

I'm afraid that what we're seeing in Madagascar will spread everywhere, because Africa is very often the laboratory of the worst, the place where we test what can be applied universally or not. And it's not hard to imagine that landless farmers with no ties to their country will try to flee and swell the illegal immigration statistics in France, particularly in Mayotte and Reunion.

As for the French, there is also a feeling of guilt as they watch on their television screens the children who are dying of hunger as a result of a lack of food self-sufficiency. With the many land grabbing situations across the country, we are taking the risk of losing our land, our farmers and their souls in order to benefit from development that is not on the cards.

## **Why do we sometimes smile when we watch a film about such a subject?**

Eva, my co-writer and I could indeed have written a leaden film, if I can put it that way, which simply documents the misadventures of a peasant family suffering the perverse effects of urbanization and the decisions of the corruptly powerful. But we started out with the idea of an ironic, slightly gritty film, and we tried to stick to it, while remaining faithful to a certain Malagasy humor that is a hallmark of a great Malagasy speaker.

In fact, in our language, to express despair in the face of the aberrant and sad situations we encounter on a daily basis, we're used to saying "mampihomehy", which literally translates as "it makes you laugh". Laughing at injustice rather than crying is a form of modesty, and resisting rather than feeling sorry for oneself is a form of courage. Modest, courageous and sometimes funny too, that's how I see the members of Ly's family, the leaders of the association, the village children and the artists I filmed.



### It's a film about children putting on a puppet show...

Yes, and that's what makes it a softer story that appeals to almost all ages, with different reading levels. When the first screenings came out, Malagasy people from the diaspora came with their families. Children can see this film if they are comfortable reading subtitles or if they speak Malagasy well.

### Talking of the artists, did you choose them and bring them to Sitabaomba?

Yes, I'm proud to say that the artists I've chosen to set up the puppet workshops in this village are great artists, a very fine cast. **Gégé Rasamoely** is undoubtedly the most famous of Malagasy actors, having succeeded in taking his career from radio theater to the cinema. He has been directed by directors in short films, but he is also a celebrity throughout the island, having starred in a number of very popular Nollywood films.



As for **Temandrota**, he is internationally recognized as one of Madagascar's leading visual artists, and he surprised me by proposing an installation on the day of the show for Malagasy journalists, parents and members of the farmers' association.



I also asked **Bekoto** de Mahaleo to share his expertise as a sociologist with a long-standing commitment to the peasant cause.

Finally, although they don't appear on screen, actors from the **Compagnie Miangaly** played the voices of the various puppets. This theater company was founded by Christiane Ramanantsoa, who played the role of the queen who goes in search of a new soul.

### **There's also the voice of the Franco-Ivorian actress Claudia Tagbo. Why was she chosen for a Malagasy documentary?**

We wanted to add to the film the voice of a storyteller who addresses the audience and sometimes even the protagonists in a style inspired by the Malagasy art of oratory, *kabary*. This intention to make a film inspired, in its very form, by this art of peasant oratory was present from the start of the project.

*Kabary* is an argumentative and metaphorical discourse that seeks to make the audience smile or think in order to convince them. *Kabary* uses images and sound like cinema.

We chose Claudia Tagbo's voice to add a touch of humour and a pan-African dimension. *Kabary* is not a fixed traditional art form, proverbs are still used today and evolve with people's lives. For me, orality is synonymous with freedom of tone, which Claudia embodies perfectly.



### **Why choose to integrate other arts, such as music, object theater, animation and even fiction, into real-life cinema?**

Music is always important in my films, because it's important in the lives of most Madagascans, both for the poetry and messages of the lyrics and for the wide range of emotions it can arouse. With *Eva*, we liked the idea of surprising people by showing that Malagasy music can range from rap and metal to party music and a cappella.

For the puppets, we wanted first and foremost to show the richness of children's imaginations as they play "*tantara*", the traditional game in which pebbles represent people and start talking.

In the minds of child spectators, a whole dream world unfolds. To get closer to this childlike universe, I wanted to animate the custom-made pebbles from the Temandrota workshops. It was a wonderful experience because, for once, the village children became actors in their own story. Herizo Ramilijaonina, a Malagasy animator with whom I'd already worked on a short film, animated the Temandrota works to give realism to a sequence



in which Eva and I had fun imagining a meeting of the country's most powerful people!

As for the fiction, it's a short film entitled "Wrong connection" by Ando Raminoson and Colin Dupré, excerpts from which were chosen to introduce actor Gégé Rasamoely, a little nod to Malagasy fiction cinema to show that the Malagasy know how to do a lot with a little.





# NANTENAINA LOVA

His name, Nantenaina Lova, means "hoped-for inheritance". He was born into a modest family in Madagascar in 1977. He studied Social Sciences in Antananarivo, then Development and Humanitarian Management in France. After working as a journalist in Madagascar, he was introduced to the audiovisual field at the University of La Réunion, and later entered the Toulouse film school (ENSAV - France). He set up his own production company, Endemika Films, in 2008. It is one of the few Malagasy companies that has always been dedicated to the cinema. The company is managed by Candy Radifera and Eva Lova-Bély, who completed a master's degree in production at Lussas.

## **2023 « Sitabaomba » (Where Zebras Speak French),**

documentary, 103 min, with the voice of Claudia Tagbo.

*Leipziger Ring Award and world premiere at Dok Leipzig Festival (Germany), Luminous selection at IDFA Festival (Amsterdam, Netherlands), Prix du Film Vert at Festival du film francophone "Les oeillades" d'Albi (France), Festival du film citoyen (La Réunion), Festival Afrique en Vision (France).*

## **2020 « Aza Kivy » (Morning Star)**

documentary, 77 min, produced by Endemika Films and Papang Films.

*2 special mentions at Vues d'Afrique (Canada). Selections: feature film competition at IDFA (Netherlands), IMPACT competition at FIPADOC (France), Dok.Fest (Germany), Cinémas d'Afrique (Angers, France), out of competition at Durban Film Festival (South Africa).*

## **2019 « Zanaka, Thus Spoke Félix »**

documentary, 29 min, produced by Endemika Films.

*Poulain d'Argent at FESPACO 2019 (Burkina Faso), Zébu d'or at Rencontres du film court d'Antananarivo 2019 (Madagascar).*

*Selections: Vues d'Afrique (Canada), Cinémas d'Afrique d'Angers (France), Festival du film citoyen (La Réunion), Afrika Film Festival Köln (Cologne, Germany), Koudougou Doc (Burkina Faso), Festival Ciné Africano Tarifa (Spain) ...*

## **2014 « Ady Gasy » (The Malagasy Way)**

documentary, 84 min, produced by Endemika Films, Laterit Production, Autantik Films. Theater release in France: April 2015.

*Prize Fénèt Océan Indien at the FIFAI (Réunion), Grand Prix Eden Documentaire at the Festival Lumières d'Afrique (France), Special Mention of the Documentary Jury at the Festival Quintessence de Ouidah (Benin), Special Mention at the Festival international du cinéma d'Alger, Special Mention of the Youth Jury at the Festival des Cinémas d'Afrique in Angers.*

## **2007 « Little Men »,**

documentary, 35 min, produced by Endemika Films.

*Selection « Regards d'Afrique 2008 » at Clermont-Ferrand film festival.*

**Complete filmography here: <https://www.papangfilms.com/catalogue>**





# MAIN CREDITS

## **Writers**

Nantenaina LOVA et Eva LOVA-BÉLY

## **Director**

Nantenaina LOVA

## **Visual artist, puppet designer**

Randriahasandratra RAZAFIMANDIMBY (TEMANDROTA)

## **Voice narrator / speaker**

Claudia Tagbo

## **Puppet voices**

Gégé RASAMOELY, Christiane RAMANANTSOA, GAD  
Bensalem, TEMANDROTA, Fela RAZAFIARISON,  
Nathalie Marie Jeanne RASON

## **Associate producers**

Eva LOVA-BÉLY, Nantenaina LOVA

## **Coproduction**

Nicole GERHARDS (Niko Film),  
Michel K. ZONGO (Diam Production)

## **Production managers**

Candy RADIFERA, Nina FERNANDEZ

## **Animation**

Herizo RAMILIJAONA (BASHY)





### **Illustrator**

Eric ANDRIANTSIALONINA (DWA)

### **Images**

Nantenaina LOVA, Nantenaina FIFALIANA

### **Sound operators**

Nantenaina FIFALIANA,  
Jonathan Narlysh RAFIDIARISON

### **Image editor**

Nantenaina LOVA, Emmanuel ROY

### **Writing and editing expertise**

Jean-Michel PEREZ ALBANO,  
Guillaume BEGUE

### **Color-grading**

Sylvain LANGE - Charbon Studio  
(Atelier Takmil - JCC)

### **Sound editor**

Julien VERSTRAETE

### **Mixing**

Christopher MAC DONALD - MDC PROD  
Julien VERSTRAETE



