

# SYNOPSIS AND FILM MAKERS' STATEMENTS

A film by ROB LEMKIN  
Featuring FEMI NYLANDER

# AFRICAN APOCALYPSE

BFI LONDON  
FILM FESTIVAL  
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2020

THE BFI DOC SOCIETY IN ASSOCIATION WITH BBC ARENA AN INSIDE OUT FILMS / LEMKINO PICTURES PRODUCTION FEATURING FEMI NYLANDER "AFRICAN APOCALYPSE" WITH AMINA WEIRA ASSAN AG MIDAL BOUBACAR WRITTEN BY ROB LEMKIN FEMI NYLANDER MATT MCCONAGHY CINEMATOGRAPHY CLAUDE GARNIER AFC EDITOR DAVID CHARAP COMPOSERS TUNDE JEGEDE & SUNARA BEGUM PRODUCERS GEOFF ARBOURNE DAVID UPSHAL DIRECTED & PRODUCED BY ROB LEMKIN

BBC

BERTHA

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE

DOC SOCIETY

inside  
ino

LEMKINO

## SYNOPSIS

**'The conquest of the earth is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much'**  
**Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, 1899**

African Apocalypse tells the story of a young man's epic journey across Africa in search of a colonial killer. It is an urgent and timely non-fiction retelling of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

Armed with a copy of Conrad's classic novel, British-Nigerian Oxford University student Femi Nylander goes in search of the meaning and legacy of colonial horror in West Africa. He discovers the unknown story of a French army captain, Paul Voulet, who descended into unspeakable barbarity in the conquest of Niger at the very moment Conrad wrote his book.

Femi finds communities still traumatised by the century-old violence of Voulet. For many Nigeriens, their unenviable status as what the United Nations describes as the world's least developed country dates from the moment of Voulet's arrival in their land. But amidst a tragic history, Femi also encounters a beautiful spirit of hope: young people learning to find a way out of colonialism's darkness, and a country determined to harness the power of its most precious resource, the light of the sun.

He returns to Britain just as a new global confrontation of the legacy of empire and racism emerges in the Black Lives Matter protests. Empowered by his journey, Femi joins up determined to play his full part in this growing movement against oppression.

## FILMMAKERS' STATEMENTS

**'We wanted to show how the violence of colonialism is not limited to history, it continues to shape the modern world. By the time we returned from Niger, the question of colonialism had moved to the centre of world events.'**

ROB LEMKIN

This is a film about ghosts. Ghosts of the past that even while they slumbered have continued to influence our present. Ghosts that appear on the verge of re-awakening. We must face these ghosts now if we don't want them to determine our future.

For over 20 years I have made films about empire and colonialism (specifically British). In the past, it was important to reveal the workings of imperialism to understand how we reached the present. But although these films had impact, I never really felt I put my finger on the problem.

Now a younger generation is maturing which sees colonialism anew – as an insidious and pervasive presence in our world, both within European societies and globally. History is important, but the future is even more important...

While preparing my film on the Killing Fields of Cambodia (Enemies of the People, 2010), I realised I wanted to make a big film statement about the hidden force of empire. When I met Femi Nylander, a young Oxford poet, performing a song about the Belgian Congo in a bar on my street I realised I had perhaps stumbled across the possibility of being able to make this statement relevant to the new generation, the generation of my own children, who are the same age as Femi.

I also realised that the technique I evolved in making 'Enemies of the People' – made as a joint collaboration with a Cambodian participant in the events being investigated – could be taken further in the form of a film dialogue between myself as director and an on-screen protagonist who is living the personal process of discovering and absorbing history as a key to the future.

The spine of this film is a road movie investigation. But it is a road movie in time. And through the devices of cinema, I seek to collapse time and space in the way that colonialism has and does collapse our time and space.

The global emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 has given unprecedented urgency and force to this need to unpack the persistence of racist colonialism in our modern world.

FEMI NYLANDER

**At the end of the journey, I have learnt how real this history is even to the current generation of Nigeriens, and how little it has been repaired for. I have learnt how France still has far too much influence in Niger even today, and how Nigerien people feel as though they are not in total control of their own destiny.**

I have realized and come to terms with how, as a black Brit, I am hugely privileged compared to Africans who are forced to live with the reality of the Colonial Legacy rather than simply being a minority in the Colonial Metropole. I have come to the conclusion that there needs to be some sort of reparation. That this story which has been hidden for so many years needs to be uncovered and told and that through the metaphor of solar energy but in reality through many varied avenues, a brighter future is possible not only for Niger but for postcolonial Africa as an entity. For this to be achievable, both Africa and Europe need to confront this and come to terms with the Ghosts of their shared past.

# COMPOSERS' STATEMENT

TUNDE JEGEDE

African Apocalypse is a timely intervention into the general perception of colonial history as a benign initiative with minor indiscretions along the way. It is a reminder of the innate violence that accompanied the endeavour, which is, unfortunately, often forgotten in the current discourse. It is rare to hear the story and first hand testimony of African people within this narrative but vital if we are to understand it in its full context.

I believe this film brings a new insight to one of many untold stories of colonial genocide and atrocities. There are so many parallel narratives to the story of Niger to still be told. Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness was a text I first met during my studies at school but is one that implicitly impacted my long-term desire to examine the relationship between colonialism, social iniquity and revisionist histories. Creating the soundtrack for this film allowed me to revisit this text within a new cultural framework that was highly refreshing for me.



**Producer**

GEOFF ARBOURNE

Inside Out Films

Devon, UK

[www.insideoutfilms.uk](http://www.insideoutfilms.uk)

**PR**

AMBER MUOTTO

[amber@ambermuotto.com](mailto:amber@ambermuotto.com)

**Director**

ROB LEMKIN

Old Street Films