

DEMOCRATS

Directed by Camilla Nielsson

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Running time: 100 Minutes

SYNOPSIS

For more than three years, director Camilla Nielsson had unique access to the center of power in Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe. She closely followed how the governing party and the opposition struggled over the contents of a new democratic constitution to shape the country's future – while Mugabe's anti-democratic forces were still at play.

The film focusses on two charismatic politicians – Paul Mangwana and Douglas Mwonozora – who are responsible for guiding the process of creating the new constitution. They are political opponents, each from rival parties, appointed with the expectation of securing their party maximum influence on the provisions of the constitution. At the same time, they are forced to collaborate to complete the constitution successfully. Do they have any chance of succeeding in a political culture that has for decades been marked by a lack of democracy and a lack of respect for fundamental human rights?

Through the tug of war that was the process of drafting a new constitution, the film provides unique insight into the political mechanics of a modern African country in a time of violent upheaval.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

We in the West sometimes have a hard time understanding why it is so difficult to create a viable democracy in other parts of the world. The democratic values we ourselves accept in a democracy as a matter of course – that there are three branches of government, that we have freedom of expression and assembly, our civil rights in general – can not be taken for granted everywhere on the globe. DEMOCRATS is a sort of a primer, a form of basic research, into how difficult it is to create a true democracy – if that exists?

Democracy is not something you can bomb your way into or something that can be implemented from an office at the UN or in Brussels. It has to start from within and from below. But even in countries such as Zimbabwe, with one of the bravest, most persistent and hard-working pro-democratic movements in the world, ordinary civil rights continue to be a daily struggle.

DEMOCRATS is about two men who, after 30 years with one of the world's most autocratic dictators, President Robert Mugabe in power, try to establish a democracy from the ground up – all while anti-democratic forces still have control of the country. It is the story of a relationship, of two men who have been sent on an impossible mission.

At the same time, it is a portrait of two very different political cultures: through one of the protagonists, Paul Mangwana, we gain insight into an otherwise very closed political culture of Mugabe's ZANU-PF – an old resistance movement party - that still acts with impunity thanks to its role in the struggle for liberation from former colonial powers. Through the other protagonist, Douglas Mwonzora, we gain insight into one of the world's most tenacious and resilient democratic movements, the opposition party MDC-T.

Even though the mission of introducing democracy failed, there is still hope in the offing. Through the process of writing the new constitution for their country, the former political enemies find each other through a newly forged political dialogue. An autocratic party such as ZANU-PF, which has been in power since the country gained independence from the UK in 1980, is not used to being in constructive dialogue with the opposition. But through the process of creating a constitution, they were forced to talk together and make compromises, and the new political culture that was created is a small step forward. So even though Robert Mugabe is still in power and the new democratic constitution has not been implemented, the process has not been entirely wasted, as a democratic seed has now been planted in Zimbabwe's beautiful red soil.

- Camilla Nielsson

CREDITS

Director: Camilla Nielsson

Producer: Henrik Veileborg

Idea & research: Peter Tygesen

Cinematographer: Henrik Ipsen

Editor: Jeppe Bødskov

Composer: Kristian Eidnes Andersen

Sound design & mix: Thomas Jæger

FILMMAKER'S BIO

CAMILLA NIELSSON – Director

Based in Copenhagen, Camilla Nielsson studied documentary filmmaking at the Tisch School of the Arts and holds an M.A. in visual anthropology from New York University (NYU).

She has directed the trilogy GOOD MORNING AFGHANISTAN (2003), DURGA (2004), and THE CHILDREN OF DARFUR (2005), and MUMBAI DISCONNECTED (2009), part of the CITIES ON SPEED series. Since 2007 she has collaborated with the Israeli video artist Yael Bartana on the trilogy AND EUROPE WILL BE STUNNED (Venice Biennale 2011), and RE: CONSTRUCTED LANDSCAPES (National Gallery of Denmark/CPH:DOX 2011).

FILMOGRAPHY

GOOD MORNING AFGHANISTAN (2003)

DURGA (2004)

THE CHILDREN OF DARFUR (2005)

MUMBAI DISCONNECTED (2009)

DEMONSTRATORS (2012)

DEMOCRATS (2014)