

SLEEPING SICKNESS

a film by
Ulrich Köhler

Ebbo and Vera Velten have been living in Africa for a long time. Ebbo is managing a sleeping sickness program. His work is fulfilling. In contrast, Vera feels increasingly uncomfortable with her life in the expat community of Yaoundé and the separation from her daughter Helen, 14, who is attending boarding school in Germany.

Ebbo Velten has to give up his life in Africa or he loses the woman he loves. But he has become a stranger to Europe. His fear of returning increases from day to day.

Years later. Alex Nzila, a young French doctor of Congolese origin, travels to Cameroon to evaluate a development project. He hasn't been to Africa for a long time. But instead of finding new prospects, he encounters a destructive, lost man: like a phantom, Ebbo slips away from his evaluator.



MAIN CAST

Ebbo Velten	Pierre Bokma
Alex Nzila	Jean-Christophe Folly
Vera Velten	Jenny Schily
Gaspard Signac	Hippolyte Girardot
Helen Velten	Maria Elise Miller
Elia Todorov	Sava Lolov
Monese	Francis Noukiatchom
Ruhemba	Ali Mvondo Roland
Joseph	Isacar Yinkou

MAIN CREW

Director	Ulrich Köhler
Screenplay	Ulrich Köhler
Cinematographer	Patrick Orth
Editors	Katharina Wartena Eva Könnemann
Production Manager	Anne Lessnick
Production Design	Jochen Dehn
Costume Design	Birgitt Kilian
Casting	Kris Portier de Bellair Ulrike Müller
Gaffer	Stephan Rother
Sound	Julien Sicart
Sound Design	Tobias Peper
Sound Recording	Matthias Schwab
Producers	Janine Jackowski, Maren Ade, Katrin Schlösser
Co-Producer	Frans van Gestel
Commissioning Editors	Christian Cloos, Anne Even, Birgit Kämper

2011 Germany / France / The Netherlands

91 min

Shooting format: RED ONE

Format: 35mm, 1:1.85 - color

Dolby Digital - in French, German, Dutch and Bassa

INTERVIEW

with Ulrich Köhler

You tell the story of a man lost between two worlds. Was Ebbo's character the starting point of the story?

I was interested in the world of the international aid workers in Africa. I asked myself how do people live in an environment in which they will always remain privileged outsiders. My parents were aid workers in Zaire. I grew up in a small village on a tributary of the Congo for a few years. My brother and I spent a lot of time on the water and very little time at school. My mother was our teacher.

Is that where the story about the hippo comes from?

Yes, there were hippos there and my father used to take us out in a small log boat to follow them. The villagers had warned us, but my father didn't take it seriously. After we left the village, an American doctor was killed by one of the animals and the villagers believed that it was the hospital director, who had transformed himself into a hippo to kill her.

That sounds like an exciting childhood.

Which made our return to Germany even more difficult.

We had lost our friends and were forced to give up a free life in nature for a small town in Hessen. It was also a moral shock: Even a nine-year-old could not overlook the unjust distribution of wealth between these two continents. I pushed Africa far away and in a short time I forgot how to speak Kituba, the local dialect that had become my second mother tongue. My parents on the other hand really wanted to return. Later they worked in the hospital where we shot the film. If I hadn't wanted to visit them, I would have probably never returned to Africa.

And now you've made a film there.

Yes and for a long time I couldn't quite imagine it. Even though my first visit to Cameroon had been a powerful experience, it seemed presumptuous of me as a European to make a film about Africa. I didn't want to exploit it thematically. Perhaps it was the novel "Season of Migration to the North" by the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih that finally sparked my courage to examine my relationship to Africa. He tells the story of a Sudanese who returns to his country after having lived in England for many years only to discover that he has lost his homeland. For me, "Sleeping Sickness" is not a film about Africa; it's a film about Europeans in Africa. It's a film about Europe.

You begin the second part of your film with the lecture given by a critic of developmental aid.

Do you share his views?

No. African experts who are advocating the abolition of

international aid are popular in the western press. Their solutions are just as dubious to me as the paternalistic activism of Bono and Bob Geldof. On my travels I met many foreign experts that are in a schizophrenic situation: Although they feel that the actual work they do is very useful, they doubt the sense of developmental aid in general. I don't believe there are any simple answers and perhaps it's not even our job to give answers. We ought to above all be more honest and examine which governments we work with and for what reasons. Rich countries can help improve the situation of the poor but that requires sacrifices we are not prepared to make. For example, most experts agree that agricultural subsidies in developed countries hinder development in Africa.

The second main character, Alex, gets quite upset about the neoliberal lecture. But on his first assignment as an evaluator in Africa he loses all illusions. At the end Alex is rather helpless...

I can highly identify with his character. I have often felt this way on my trips to Africa. The wish to do things right and have a natural relationship with the people there clashes with our fear of being cheated and exploited. The evaluator Alex Nzila is forced to realize that he cannot assess things from his European perspective.

Alex is in some way Ebbo's counterpart. A man caught between two worlds. The conversation in the institute's canteen shows that Europe is a difficult home for him.

Alex feels like an outsider, even when he counters his

colleagues' provocations with humor. Despite Sarkozy, French society is far more cosmopolitan than in Germany. In France you find people with African roots in all social classes and professions. But during the casting, I discovered that even there dark-skinned actors are often left to serve stereotypes of illegal immigrants or drug dealers. A character like Alex is rare.

Did you find your African actors in Cameroon?

The casting was quite complicated. Ulrike Müller and Kris de Bellair did a great job. The casting makes up 80% of the work of directing actors and that's often underestimated. Little can go wrong for a director with a good script and the right cast. It's what saved me on some days. All the African actors came from Cameroon where Kris de Bellair had searched for them. We had wanted to work with amateurs. Professional actors in Cameroon love illustrative acting and exaggerated gestures. Finally we also worked with a few professionals. We realized that they were able to adapt very well when we asked them to concentrate on the situation and go with it.

You have worked with Patrick Orth for quite a long time. Did you have a storyboard or did you decide from situation to situation?

The shooting conditions were tough and the preparation time too short. We made a lot of decisions on the day of shooting. I was busy working with the actors and so Patrick had to prepare a lot of things without me. There is tremendous trust between us. We had established a few basics. The night scenes had

to be realistic. We wanted to work a lot with flashlights. It was also clear that some scenes would be filmed in several classical angles and not in sequence shots. The dinner at the Chinese restaurant was the first time I ever used a shot-reverse shot. I am surprised how well the film works with these stylistic breaks.

The film begins with the transport of tropical wood on trucks. Nothing is in place. No one has a home. Even the traditional African clothes come from China. Only at the very end do you get the feeling that Ebbo is where he belongs. Who is the hippo? Unfortunately I didn't get a chance to ask him. I don't think he even noticed that he was being filmed.



ULRICH KÖHLER

Director

Ulrich Köhler was born 1969 in Marburg, Germany and lived for several years in Zaire (now DRC) with his family. He studied Fine Arts in Quimper, France, Philosophy in Hamburg and later on Visual Communication at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg, where he made his first short films ("Epoxy", "Maria Tokyo", "Starsky", "Rakete"). His feature films "Bungalow" (Panorama 2002) and "Windows on Monday" (Forum 2006) were successful at numerous festivals and won national and international awards.



PIERRE BOKMA

as Ebbo Velten

Pierre Bokma, born in Paris in 1955, was educated at Toneelschool Maastricht and has been acting on stage and screen in his own country (The Netherlands) as well as abroad. He performed leading roles in plays such as "King Lear", "Othello" ("Golden Hart" for his role of Iago), "Richard III" ("Louis D'Or"), "Ivanov", "Macbeth", and "Uncle Vanya". He received the prestigious theater awards "Albert van Dalsum-ring" and "Paul Steenbergenpenning" and won three "Gouden Kalveren" (Dutch Academy Awards). Bokma starred in TV series like "Tatort" (Germany), "Dalziel & Pascoe" (UK) and movies such as "The Assault" (1986) by Fons Rademakers which won a Golden Globe and an Oscar, Peter Greenaway's "Prospero's Books" (1991), Theo van Gogh's "Interview" (2003) and "The Chosen One" (2006) by Theu Boermans for which Pierre Bokma received an International Emmy Award. Currently he plays at the Münchner Kammerspiele in Germany.



JEAN-CHRISTOPHE FOLLY

as Alex Nzila

Jean-Christophe Folly, born in 1981, graduated from the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique in Paris in 2007. He has worked on various theater productions such as "Le Retour", "Yerma" as well as "L'Opérette Imaginaire" at the Théâtre de la Cité Internationale. Jean-Christophe Folly made his feature film debut in Léon Desclozeaux's "Cargo" (2007), followed by Claire Denis's "35 Shots of Rum", Benoît Jacquot's "Villa Amalia" in 2008, and "Eden Is West" by Costa Gavras in 2009. At present he is part of Alain Resnais's new feature project "Vous N'avez Encore Rien Vu".



JENNY SCHILY

as Vera Velten

Jenny Schily was born in 1967 in Berlin. After her studies at the Ernst Busch School of Dramatic Arts Berlin, she was engaged at the Staatstheater Dresden as well as the Schauspielhaus and TAT in Frankfurt. From 2002 to 2006 she was a permanent member of the ensemble at the Schaubühne Berlin. She is currently a guest performer at the Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin. Her first major film role was "The Legend of Rita" (1999) by Volker Schlöndorff. Various films followed including "Der Letzte macht das Licht aus" (2006) by Clemens Schönborn, "At Any Second" (2007) by Jan Fehse and "Das System" (2010) by Marc Bauder. She has performed in several TV productions including "You Can Never Be Sure" (2008) by Nicole Weegmann, which was awarded the Adolf Grimme Prize in 2009.



HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT

as Gaspard Signac

Born in 1955 in Boulogne-Billancourt, he studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs. As an actor he played his first role in "La Femme de Jean" (1974) by Yannick Bellon. In 1985 he won his first nomination as Best Supporting Role in "Le Bon Plaisir" by Francis Girod. He became known to a wider audience for his role of Hippo in Eric Rochant's "Un Monde Sans Pitié" (1988). In the following years he played in films such as "Hors la Vie" (1990) by Maroun Bagdadi, "Le Parfum d'Yvonne" (1993) by Patrice Leconte and "Les Patriotes" (1993) by Eric Rochant. He worked with some of the most respected French directors such as Arnaud Desplechin in "Kings & Queen" (2003) and "A Christmas Tale" (2007) and Pascale Ferran in "Lady Chatterley" (2006). Girardot has directed two feature films, the latest being "Yuki & Nina" (2007), co-directed by Nobuhiro Suwa, which was shown on numerous international film festivals. In 2011 he will be playing in "La Conquête" by Xavier Durringer, which tells the story of Nicolas Sarkozy's victory at the elections.



PATRICK ORTH
Cinematographer

Patrick Orth, born 1968, studied film at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg. During his studies he made a variety of short films both as cinematographer and director. His final film "Love" (1999) won the German Film Award in Gold. He has been working as a freelance cinematographer for film and TV since 2000. In addition to Ulrich Köhler's films ("Bungalow", "Windows on Monday"), he has worked with several directors including Stefan Krohmer ("Summer of '04", "Mitte 30", "Dutschke"), Ayse Polat ("En Garde", "Luks Glück"), Yüksel Yavuz ("A Little Bit of Freedom") and Elke Hauck ("Karger").

WORLD SALES

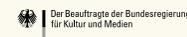
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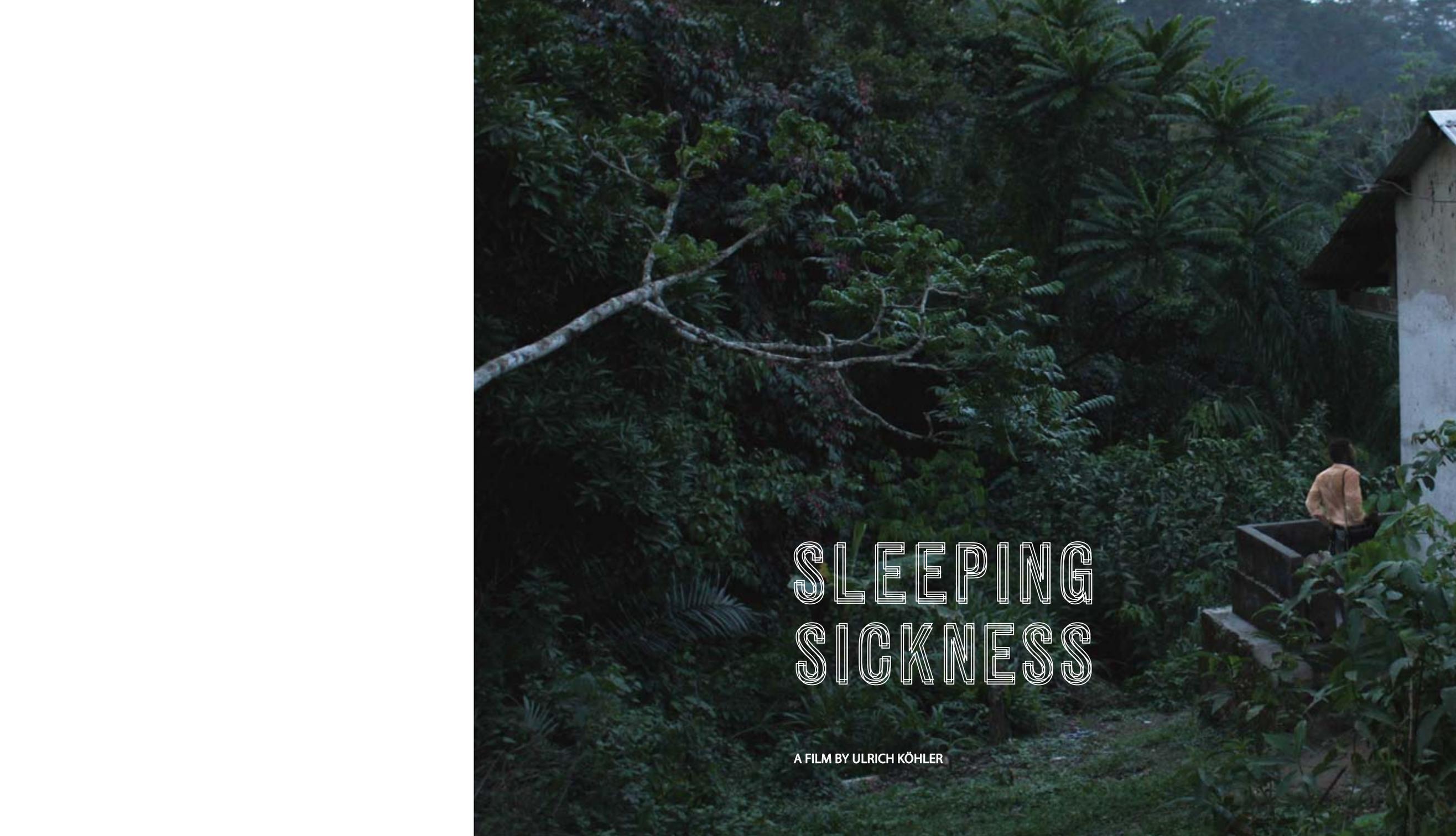
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A dark, atmospheric photograph of a tropical forest. The scene is filled with dense green foliage, including various types of trees and large ferns. In the lower right foreground, a person wearing a light-colored jacket is sitting on a stone structure, possibly a well or a small shrine. The lighting is dim, suggesting dusk or dawn, creating a somber and mysterious mood. The overall composition is vertical, with the forest filling most of the frame.

SLEEPING SICKNESS

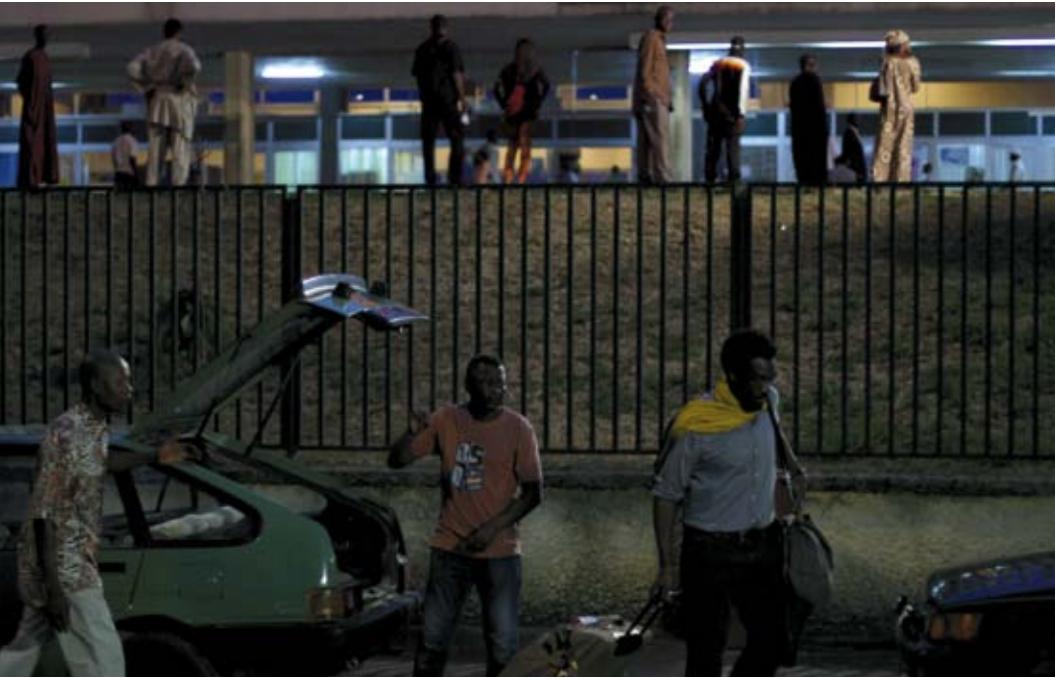
A FILM BY ULRICH KÖHLER































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PATRICK ORTH PRODUCTION DESIGN JOCHEN DEHN COSTUME DESIGN BIRGITT
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