

Suñu ekool

A film by Aron Marty & Maria Bänziger



Short documentary (23 min)

Directors	Aron Marty Maria Bänziger
Camera	Aron Marty Audy Valera
Sound	Aron Marty
Music	Philip Bartels
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Synopsis

Short

After staying in Switzerland for fifteen years, earning a living in construction, 'Bouba' returns to Senegal to help shape the future of his motherland.

Medium

After staying in Switzerland for fifteen years, earning a living in construction, Babacar 'Bouba' Camara, 51, returns to his motherland Senegal. In Béne Barack, a socially and economically marginalised neighbourhood of Senegal's capital Dakar, Bouba has founded a private elementary school. Stepping in the footsteps of his socially minded parents, he aims to give the children a better education in comparison to the overcrowded public schools.



Long

After staying in Switzerland for fifteen years, earning a living in construction, Babacar 'Bouba' Camara, 51, returns to his motherland Senegal. In Béne Barack, a socially and economical marginalised neighbourhood of Senegal's capital Dakar, Bouba has founded a private elementary school. As Bouba was not able to finish his own school career and fulfil his vision of becoming a lawyer or a doctor, he wants to give the kids in this poor neighbourhood the opportunity to attend a decent school that is not hopelessly overcrowded like the public schools. His aim is to give every kid in the neighbourhood a chance "like all the other kids in Senegal and in the world". While the parents get the opportunity to send their kids to an affordable school, Bouba is permanently struggling with the school's budget: Since many parents can't even pay the low fee and Bouba does not want to expel any pupils because of lacking payments he is forced to return to Switzerland from time to time to earn some money to keep his school going.

The School

The elementary school *Adja Nene Soukho* is located in the quarter of *Béne Barack*, meaning 'Single Hut'. Since its naming things obviously changed: *Béne Barack* is a crowded neighbourhood, afflicted by socio-economic problems and threatened by seasonal inundations. In contrast to the quite shiny quarters of central Dakar, it is called 'banlieue' or 'bidonville' by the inhabitants (meaning something between 'suburbs' and 'slum'), especially pointing to the lack of monetary resources and adequate access to basic services like schools and hospitals.

Compared to the busyness and dereliction of the quarter itself, the school represents an area of peace and ease. Using his skills as a craftsman Bouba fixed a run-down building and transformed it into a decent place. Even though financing the project was, is and will remain a struggle, Bouba turned down the offer to install an 'école franco-arabe' (religious school) with the funding of Muslim organisations. This was just not an option for Bouba: To him, it is too important to shape the school project at his own discretion, in line with his own values.



Bouba started the school in 2015 with his former neighbour Madame Fall as his first teacher. Since then, he added three classes with a class size between four and twenty pupils; very small numbers compared to the public schools. While this is an absolute novelty in this 'bidonville', Bouba is struggling with the finances: A lot of parents cannot pay the monthly fee of 5\$. Regardless, Bouba does not expel their kids from school, even if he must return to Switzerland to earn some extra money for the school. As Madame Fall puts it: "Il ne gagne absolument rien. Il fait dans le social." (He does not earn anything at all. He is socially minded.)

The People

Babacar 'Bouba' Camara, 51, School Founder and Director

"My mother always told me: 'Do not look only after yourself and your own family. But all children are your family, too.'"



"And it talked to my family. They said: 'You are sick!'"

"I cannot change the whole world. But I try to fulfil my duties."

Bouba was raised in Dakar by his quite wealthy and socially minded parents in a 'good' neighbourhood. But his biography suffered a crack when his parents got divorced. Bouba had to move to the quarter Béne Barack and had to stop going to school. Therefore, he never acquired a formal school education; his vision of becoming a doctor or a lawyer got shattered.

After getting vocational training as a sanitarian, he moved to Switzerland and worked there for 15 years. At first in a restaurant, until he managed to get into his desired field: construction. Bouba was working on construction sites for many years, mainly as a roofer. But Bouba always had in mind to return to his motherland to help the people in his neighbourhood. Or as Bouba puts it: "My country needs me, as the other country [Switzerland] needs me, too".

Madame Fall, 47, Teacher and Deputy Director

"I think he is socially minded. [...] We have never sent away a child because of lacking payments."



"Sometimes, the pupils cannot understand. As soon as there are obstacles, you are obliged to use the mother tongue, Wolof."

Madame Fall, 47, teacher since the very beginning of the school and Bouba's former neighbour, is *the* authority at the school. Not only is she the oldest, best trained teacher and the deputy director in Bouba's absence. Her standing is also expressed by her appearance: Always dressed in a colourful traditional dress her posture and her strict and sceptical glance exude the kind of self-confidence that makes an impression on pupils as well as external visitors.

Her obvious rigour is countered by an affectionate approach towards the kids (for instance while distributing self-made water ice during recess). Her deadpan humour flashing from times to times is also a remarkable quality that softens her otherwise strict appearance.

Les enfants

Of course, the children attending the school are a main subject of the film: Witnessing their everyday school life is a central part of the documentary, especially in the un-commented observational sequences.



The kids like to go to school there, they obviously feel at ease in this setting. Contrary to the 'external' world, the school is a quiet and peaceful island where they enjoy the special attention they usually don't get: In social life in Senegal, kids generally have a low status: In the presence of adults they mostly have to keep quiet and usually they are the last to get anything, for instance when meals are served.

In comparison, they get a lot more attention at their school: The kids get recognized and they want to be recognized. As a result, they almost scramble for the opportunity to answer questions in class or to come to the blackboard.

(Grand) Parents



Madame Khardiata Déme's daughters both attend *L'école Adja Nene Soukho*. As her kids got kicked out from another school for lacking payment she is very thankful for the opportunity, especially because the teachers are kind to their kids and take good care of them. As a compensation for not being able to pay the fee, Madame Déme prepares a meal for the school's teachers on a daily basis.



Monsieur Elhadj Malick Kassé is a proud grandfather to his namesake, little Malick. Monsieur Kassé is very enthusiastic about the school. For him, it is a reference for the whole quarter, so he is emphasising the advantages of the school: He is impressed by the discipline of the kids, the energetic teachers and the (Swiss) orderliness of the school. And he is praising Bouba's motives: "C'est une action de bienfaisance" (It's a beneficial act).

Production Notes

The impetus for this project was an external one: Co-director Maria Bänziger, herself a teacher in elementary schools, had to complete an internship in a French-speaking school to get her teaching licence for French classes.

Instead of choosing the easy way (teaching in the French speaking part of Switzerland) Maria aimed higher (or further away): With the help of a teacher colleague and former girlfriend of Bouba she set up the internship in Dakar.

Travelling with her partner and co-director Aron Marty as well as their little girl, one and a half years old, was quite an overwhelming experience at first. The surroundings of such a marginal neighbourhood that the 'spoiled' Swiss is not accustomed to and where the inhabitants – contrary to the central districts of Dakar – are not accustomed to some 'whiteys' walking around (resulting in a lot of interested gazes) was kind of irritating at first – for both 'sides'.



In order to overcome these cultural barriers, the internship was crucial: It gave Maria a natural field access and a good opportunity to get to know the protagonists and the setting via her teaching assignment. Especially the role of Bouba as an information source and as a mediator cannot be overstated. Without him and his team it would not have been possible to portray the everyday life of the school in an authentic way that does not solely reflect the alien perspective of the visiting foreign Swiss family.

Directors' Statement

Our central aim was to give the European audience an insight into the everyday life of the school without solely reproducing the usual stereotypes that emanate from the 'white gaze'. We want to show what happens on an everyday basis, how the classes are working, and how the people interact with each other. We want to get across what the school means for the people and the quarter and what rationale and motivation is driving Bouba to invest his money in this unprofitable project. As we got more and more familiar with the school setting and the people there, but did only know little about the whole context in Senegal, we decided to focus on the microcosm of *this* school, only broaching issues of context if they were stressed by the protagonists themselves.



Of course, it remains a film that Swiss aliens produced about a place they did not know much about. To counter this bias, we put a lot of emphasis on observational sequences quite open to different interpretations by the audience. For the same reason the film does not use any voice-over. Commenting quotes by the protagonists are only used in the second half of the film. And these quotes were chosen respecting the relevancies the protagonists attached to them.

For example: A lot of the protagonists were talking about the lacking resources and the struggle to upkeep the school. This is an aspect that is striking from the Swiss perspective, too. But we would not have included this issue if it weren't stressed so insistently and repeatedly by the interviewees.

Crew



Aron Marty, 39, lives in Zurich. He is a late bloomer in the industry: After starting his career as an offset printer he switched to the audio-visual arts: His graduation at the Zurich University of the Arts in 2014 was the starting point for his career as an independent camera operator and editor for TV, music videos and advertising. For his work in these fields he received a number of awards (music video *Stahlberger Schwizer Film*: Official Selection Filmdays Solothurn; Gold EDI for *Deportation flight KM 491*; Gold bcm for *SIX: Your social media profile*)

In 2019, he started the production company *docyard* (together with producer Andi Bänziger) to focus on the production of documentary movies. His first short documentary *Transition – Xbuk Alo?* (11 min), portraying an Eritrean barber in downtown Zurich, made it into the Official Selection of the Filmdays Solothurn, the biggest festival for Swiss Films.



Maria Bänziger, 38, lives in Zurich. She made kind of a career-changing move, too: After obtaining a Master's Degree in Science of Religion, she discovered her passion for teaching. She completed another three-year-training as a secondary and elementary teacher and has been working as a class and subject teacher for ten years now. Her experience as a teacher and her French skills, combined with her open and communicative personality, were a major asset in exploring the unknown setting and in building a trustful relationship with the protagonists.



Philip Bartels, 41, lives in Zurich. After his graduation as a composer he worked as a director for (music) plays. His proclivity for special arrangements and instruments were a blessing for this film. Philip could bring in his expertise to produce a special and unique music score for the film:

By using the instruments the kids are singing about in the national anthem, Philip focusses his composition on the conflicting reality of the school, the country's colonial past coming together with the hopeful future of the schools' graduates to-be.

His music score explicitly gets across a kind of imperfect and improvised touch, representing the aforementioned conflicting reality and the imperfections of not yet graduated pupils, metaphorically still learning how to play the instruments. The contrasts between chaos/order and adults/children are best represented in the last sequence of the film: For the first time European harmonies can be heard which – as soon as they are established – dissolve again into child-like instrumental play.

Florian Albrecht, 38, lives in Bern. He has been working as an illustrator and typographer for about fifteen years, nowadays running his own company. His focus is on creative illustrations and typographical work. Since his graduation he was able to show his works to a broad public at different occasions and sites like the *Neurotitan* Berlin, *Schwarm* Bern, *Millionaires Club* Leipzig, *Friche la Belle de Mai* Marseille, *Casa Planas* Palma de Mallorca, *Akademiegalerie Weissbachsches Haus* Plauen as well as at the *Grafik 17* in Zurich.

Audy Valera, 38, lives in Dakar. His family left Senegal when Audy was a little kid and settled in France. After 27 “good and happy” years in France, Audy returned to Senegal to rediscover his roots, his homeland, its culture and traditions. He is working in Dakar as a camera operator, running a company for audio-visual productions.

Andi Bänziger, 40, lives in Zurich. Like his sister, he realigned his career: After graduating in sociology, obtaining a PhD in media sciences and working as a researcher and lecturer in various fields, he decided to found a production company with his sister’s boyfriend (and father of his niece), Aron Marty. As a sociologist, he brings in his experience in social sciences methods. As a producer, he is responsible for any issues concerning financing and distribution. Moreover, he is the factotum for any administrative work nobody else is eager to take over (so basically for all the administrative work).

Technical Information

Completion Date:	September 2020
Duration:	22 min 43 sec
Shooting Location:	Béne Barack, Sengal
Country of Production:	Switzerland
Production Budget:	€14,000
Format:	DCP, Pro Res
Aspect Ratio:	1,90:1
Resolution:	2048x1080
Sound:	Stereo
Original Languages:	French, German, Wolof
Subtitle Versions:	English, French, German