

A GOLDEN LIFE

a documentary film
by Boubacar Sangaré

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BURKINA FASO, BENIN, FRANCE
2023 — 83 MIN

ORIGINAL TITLE: Or de vie
DIRECTING: Boubacar Sangaré
PHOTOGRAPHY: Issou Emmanuel Bationo
SOUND: Seydou Porgo
EDITING: Gladys Joujou
SHOOTING LOCATION: Burkina Faso
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: Mooré, Gan, French
PRODUCTION: Imedia, Merveilles Productions,
Les Films de la caravane
BROADCAST: TV5Monde



In Burkina Faso, in the gold digging site of Bantara, Rasmané, 16 years old, descends more than 100 metres below ground in artisanal mines to extract gold. Anxious about accidents, Rasmané makes his way through this fierce, adult world in the hope of one day emancipating himself...

Synopsis

Rasmané, alias Bolo, 16, is a teenage gold miner at the Bantara site in Burkina Faso. Like all teenagers of his age, he is playful and dreamy.

His daily routine is organised around cooking, working in the gallery and going down to dig at a depth of more than 100 metres. His hope hangs on a rope that ascends indefinitely from the depths. He hopes to find gold with which to build his future. But the long days of labour are fruitless. As time and his trials go by, his body changes, his features become more pronounced. Inside, he gradually loses his childhood innocence.

When Rasmané finally obtains bags of ore, he transports them to the "yaar", the "city" built from scratch on the edge of the mines. There he meets Missa and Dramane, 12 and 13 years old, two cart-driving friends in charge of transporting the ore from the gold miners. They accompany Rasmané through the various stages of the ore's transformation, until the long-awaited moment when the gold is turned into money.

// When I was 13 years old, I worked in gold digging. 22 years later, I return to a gold digging site to tell the story of Rasmané, Missa and Dramane. //

Director



Boubacar Sangaré is a filmmaker, author and director, from Burkina Faso. He directed 4 short films and co-directed a feature documentary for TV.

A Golden Life is his first feature documentary for cinema. He is currently developing several other projects: including the road movie documentary *Djéliya, Memory of Manding* (selected for La Fabrique des Cinémas du Monde, in Cannes Film Festival 2022) and two feature-length fiction films: *Le nom qu'on te donne* and *Les dieux délinquants*.



// The film paints a portrait of a whole generation of Burkinabe youth, who suddenly go from childhood to adulthood. //



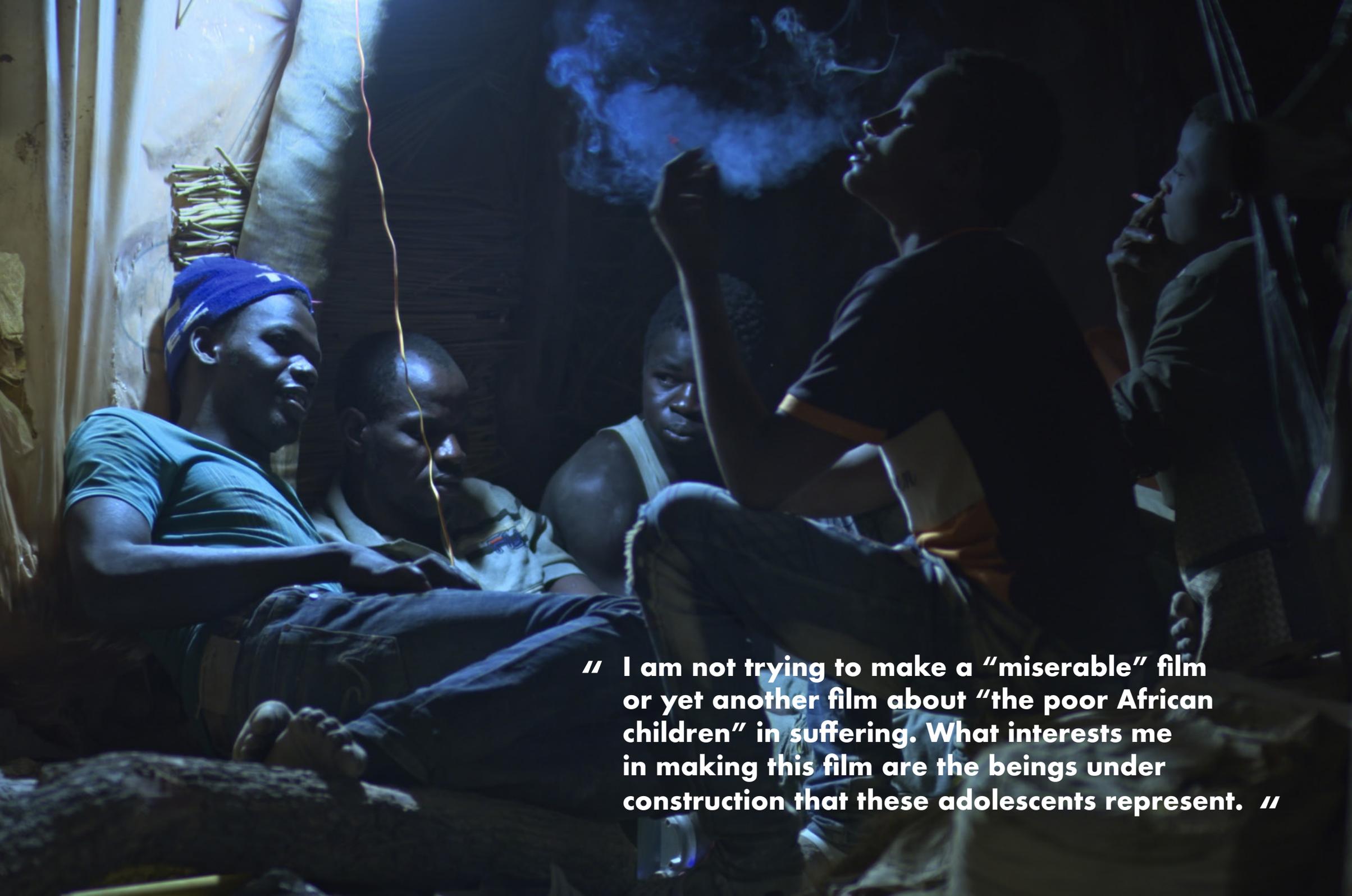
Director's statement

In 1996, after my CEP exam (primary school certificate), my brother and I went to work on a gold mining site. More than 22 years later, I returned to tell the story of Rasmané, Missa and Dra. Through the story of these three characters, *A Golden Life* paints a portrait of a whole generation of Burkinabe youth, who suddenly go from childhood to adulthood, from carefree living to violence, leaving in their wake golden dreams covered in dust.

I filmed Rasmané, alias Bolo, from the age of 16 to 19, as he changes in the environment of the galleries, as well as in the "yaar" where he meets Missa and Dramane, aged 12 and 13. In this universe, destinies are similar and futures seem to follow the same paths.

Around the galleries, still shots capture the daily life of this playful and dreamy character. Little by little, the wide opening on the site reveals the similarities that characterise the gold miners in their dreams and work. Just like the nature that surrounds them, innocence and dreams crumble before the unfolding ordeals. The duality between the yaar and the gallery is matched by that of the depths of the gallery and the outside of the site, to translate the effects of capitalism that confront the exploited and the exploiter, as in the sequence where Bolo's team worries about being chased out by the prospecting "white man's machine".

The transformation is at work, its effect upon the bodies is felt, Rasmané does not understand why he is already suffering from back pain at his age. Are dreams but a cloud of smoke like the one that rises from the site's central fire?



// I am not trying to make a "miserable" film or yet another film about "the poor African children" in suffering. What interests me in making this film are the beings under construction that these adolescents represent. //



Rasmané, nicknamed “Bolo”, gold digger

Rasmané is 16 years old and comes from Gourcy, in the north of the country; far, far away from the Kalgouli site where he works today. Of Peulh origins, he arrived on the site at the age of 16. He is the eldest son of a family of five children. His grandfather has always taken care of him, his parents having gone to work in the capital of Burkina, his father as a driver, his mother as a housemaid. He decided to leave school and follow his cousin Sambo into gold-digging, against his parents' advice. To a fellow gold miner who pulls his ears, Rasmané likes to retort: “It’s because of pulling ears that I left school”.

His mother and father would like him to go back to school, but their opinions have little influence on Rasmané’s choices. They don’t have the money to support him. So Rasmané decided to take matters into his own hands, to forge his own destiny, like the thousands of children who have come to try their luck on the artisanal mining sites. The promise of a better life outweighs all the difficulties.



Missa & Dramane, friends and cart drivers

Missa and Dramane are 12 and 13 years old. They come from the same village, Loropéni, not far from the year of Kalgouli, near Bantara’s mines. The two friends are inseparable. They alternate between harvesting cashew nuts for their parents and spending long months at the year. They prefer the year, even if the work is hard, because the money comes to them, not their parents. The job of cart driver is another of these many small livelihoods that survive off the gold-digging manna. Here it is less the hope of fortune than the quest for independence and survival that motivates the teenagers to start working at an early age. School was quickly forgotten in the face of imperatives. Missa dropped out last year. Dramane had never been to school. Missa would like to go back to school, but not in his old class, with children who would now be much younger than him.

At 12 and 13 years old, Missa and Dramane are very conscious of the fact that they have to work to satisfy their needs. They are not unhappy with their situation; they have chosen to come here regularly to improve their lives.

// In Burkina Faso, 1 in 18 people make a living from artisanal gold digging. In 2017, the country's National Assembly listed 1,000 gold digging sites and estimated that 300,000 children worked there. //





Gold digging in Burkina Faso

Today, several West African countries such as Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso are experiencing a proliferation of artisanal gold-mining sites, encouraged by the surge in market prices of gold following the global economic crisis. Gold remains a safe value for the global capitalist system. Gold-digging has been a historical activity in Burkina Faso for several centuries, but it has taken on a phenomenal dimension in recent years. In Burkina Faso, 1 in 18 people make a living from artisanal gold-digging. In 2017, the country's National Assembly listed 1,000 gold-digging sites and estimated that 300,000 children worked there. Entire families live on site, others are lone "adventurers" of all ages, gold seekers in a 21st century where money still matters more than anything. Compared to industrial mining, artisanal gold-digging is subject to much criticism with regard to the difficult working conditions, the anarchic occupation of space, and the impact of the activity on the environment... But there is no doubt that the populations benefit, in part, more from artisanal gold digging since, in a context of high unemployment, their earnings belong to them, unlike in industrial mining.

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