

A close-up photograph of a young girl with dark skin and curly hair. She is wearing a black, sleeveless dress with a large, dark bow at the waist. A decorative, silver-colored brooch with a floral or star-like design is pinned to the center of the bow. Her right hand is placed over the brooch. The background is a light-colored, textured wall.

The Bush School

a film by Emanuela Zuccalà

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY EMANUELA ZUCCALÀ DIRECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY VALERIA SCRILATTI VIDEO EDITING ALINE HERVÉ
COLOR GRADING AND FINALIZING NICOLA ROMANO MAP STUDIO AUDIO EDITING AND SOUND DESIGN PATRIZIO PARISI MAP STUDIO
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR VALERIA DE BERARDINIS PRODUCED BY GIULIA TORNARI FOR ZONA POWERED BY ACTIONAID ITALIA

SYNOPSIS

In Liberia female genital mutilation is legal *.

It is practiced as an initiation into a secret society of women, known as Sande, which is spread in 11 of the 15 counties of the nation.

Sande is considered the guardian of the tradition and the culture of the ancestors, therefore it is untouchable. In its “bush schools”, whose rite of access is the cut of the clitoris, the girls spend a period from few months up to three years, in order to learn the respect for the elderly, their duties of future wives and mothers, dances and songs. And they remain totally illiterate.

The “bush schools”, inaccessible to those who are not part of the secret society, receive regular licenses from the Ministry of the Internal Affairs. So far, Sande’s enormous political influence has held back Parliament from enacting a law criminalizing female genital mutilation.

While in many African countries decades of female battles have succeeded in reducing genital mutilation and making it punishable by law, in Liberia this journey has just begun.

Giving voice to three Liberian activists for women’s rights, at risk of their lives for their courage to stand against Sande, this film joins their painful and passionate denounce. With the purpose of raising an international outrage that manages to put an end to this cruel traditions.

** According to the UNICEF, 200 million women worldwide have suffered from female genital mutilation. The practice has been condemned by numerous UN resolutions, by the European Union and by the African Union itself. Among the 27 African countries where female genital mutilation is widespread, only five have not yet approved a law that criminalizes it: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Chad and Mali.*



CREDITS

Written and Directed by **Emanuela Zuccalà**

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Editing **Aline Hervé**

Color Grading and Finalizing **Nicola Romano / MAP Studio**

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Production Director **Valeria De Berardinis**

Produced by **Giulia Tornari** for **ZONA**

Powered by **ACTIONAID Italia**

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22'

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

My trip to Liberia to make this film was gloomy, tense, marked by resistances, silences, threats. It was painful to see how much the issue of female genital mutilation, which in almost all of Africa is publicly discussed and opposed after decades of feminist battles, in Liberia is still covered by a veil of reticence.

With this film, I want to give voice to Liberian women who are bravely struggling to build a new future. And they need a strong international support in order to push their government to change course.

BIOGRAPHY

Emanuela Zuccalà

Independent journalist, writer and film-maker. Her work has been published, among others, by *El País*, *D-Repubblica*, *Mail&Guardian*. She's been awarded by several international prizes as "Press Freedom Award" di Reporters Sans Frontières. Her documentary movie *Just to Let You Know That I'm Alive*, (2013, co-directed by Simona Ghizzoni) has been screened and awarded in festivals such as "Margaret Mead" (NYC, Usa) and "Aan Korb" of the Bbc. In 2016 she produced *Uncut*, a multimedia project that denounces the practice of female genital mutilation, winner of 15 international prizes.

Her latest multimedia project is *Crossing the River*, about the connection between maternal mortality and gender inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Among her books, translated in several languages: *Sopravvissuta ad Auschwitz. Liliana Segre, testimone della Shoah* (Paoline, 2005 and 2019), *Donne che vorresti conoscere* (Infinito, 2014), *Kindred Creatures* (with Simone Tosoni, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).



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