

CAMPO DE VIBORAS

A film by Cristèle Alves Meira

SYNOPSIS

In a small Portuguese village, a tragedy occurred. An old lady is found dead in her garden, surrounded by snakes, while her 40 year-old daughter, Lurdes, fled without telling anyone. The gossips in town about the mysterious destiny of this house are spreading fast...

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Born in France from Portuguese immigrant parents, I go back to my mother's village in Tras-Os-Montes every year. My inspiration comes from there (subject matters, dialogues, settings, actors, stories). Its landscape and inhabitants seem to me to be made for cinema. Literally meaning « beyond the mountains », this area is isolated by its geographical location and its tough climate. In my first short film *Sol Branco*⁽¹⁾ and in the feature film I am currently writing, *Alma viva*, I'm focusing on Summertime, when most of the Portuguese people from France massively come back to their village. On the contrary, in *Campo de Vitoras*, I wanted to pay attention to the ones who stay in the country (and they're less and less), namely the local villagers who live there during Wintertime as well.

Many incredible legends exist in the area. I therefore imagined some kind of bloody news (almost fantasy news) which could have become an urban legend. It is indeed a social drama set nowadays but full of archaic beliefs (al-

most like an anti-fairy tale).

Lurdes is torn between her family duties (taking care of her old mum, feeding the pigs, looking after her sister's villa) and her desire to emancipate (to live a free sexuality without being judged). She suffers from the inferiority complex of the one who did not emigrate, who did not create a family, like her sister Vitoria who made money abroad. The movie opens on her everyday life (she prays, she feeds the pigs, goes shopping downtown) where Glória and her kids belong. The two women live an ambiguous relationship (a kind of friendship-love one), criticized by her sister.

It's New Year's Eve aka the day of the resolutions. While she's downtown in a Chinese bazaar with Gloria and her kids, she meets a French hunter and pretends to be someone else (an ex-local now living in Paris, just like her sister). Under the eye of her omniscient mother, Lurdes is going to transgress morals and express her sexual pulsions. The Non-religious is taking over the Sacred. While she appeared to us as a regular

village woman in the morning, she becomes an attractive and adventurous woman at night. On her way to the bar where villagers are celebrating the new year, a man wearing a wolf mask is following her in the street. Few meters away, young back-in-town immigrants are doing some car skids just for fun. Everyone is partying together, all generations mixed. On the dancefloor, a guy hits on her, but she prefers to dance with Glória, to whom she seems to do her farewell. In the toilets, Lurdes seems to be lost. We don't know what she is thinking about at this particular moment. On her way back home, the « wolf » is following her again, as an ultimate obstacle to her escape (whether he is real or fantasized). Under her mother's pressure (whom we can only hear the unbearable voice), and who is a real burden to Lurdes, she puts some crashed pills into the soup she is preparing for her. It could be some sleeping pills, but the intrusion shot of the mysterious and scary painting in the living room (a witch face with a knife between



⁽¹⁾ Produced in 2014, rewarded by the CNC Quality Award 2015, and selected to the Belfort Entrevues IFF, Angers Premiers Plans IFF, FIFA-Aubagne, FICCI-Colombia, Créteil (Audience Award for Best Short Film/Bought by Ciné+ channel), Pantin Côté Courts IFF, Valencia CinemaJove...



the eyes and circled by a snake) make us doubt and the whole film then takes an unexpected turn. Did Lurdes plan to escape ? Did she really get rid of her mother ? The chorale formed by the villagers at the beginning and at the right end of the film (as a direct reference to antic tragedies), is here to comment and try to understand the macabre destiny of this house...

Deeply moved by this idea of fatality, extremely important in the Portuguese culture (in its literature and music), I wanted to explore the notion of Tragic in *Campo de Viboras*, both in the story and in the direction. Disaster, destiny, chorale, both the non-religious and the sacred, all these are intertwined themes of the film. In this area of the country, though very religious, the beliefs in black magic and occult forces are really common. Witchcraft is still practiced nowadays. Lurdes actually refers to it in her prayer, as well as her sister, convinced that the Devil is running after her. Also, the final gathering of the villagers around what could look like a

stake is directly linked to some pagan ceremonies occurring in the area. Fire is a purifying element chasing evil spirits away. Here, Lurdes symbolizes evil (some villagers suspect her to be a witch), as well as the snakes, coming out of nowhere and invading the whole village, like in the Bible.

Did Lurdes' escape provok the Gods to such a point that they punished the whole village with a curse ? Malicious gossips unleash in the end : if some villagers are sad for the old lady, some believe in an act of sorcery, or even in a matricide.

Mystery is part of the story itself, hidden in the holes of the tale, which does not answer to all the questions, as I wanted it to be. Lurdes' path is in no way psychological. She carries a secret with her : her escape, hidden to everyone (viewer included) through the whole film. She carries on naturally, as if pushed by a strong and invisible force, above and beyond her. Is it her who free herself from the weight of her life or the other way around ? We can feel this

invisible force in the shots on nature, which appears impressive and powerful, also in its elements (Fire, Water-river/rain, Air-sky), but also in the mysterious portayal of the character of Lurdes. I indeed chose to introduce her as someone evasive, ungettable, in all ways. As one of the villager says « she was not the woman we thought she was ».

Cristèle Alves Meira



INTERVIEW

Cristèle Alves Meira



What made you want to become a filmmaker?

If I go back to the initial desire, I would say from the moment I discovered Gena Rowlands in *A Woman under the influence* by John Cassavetes. Her powerful performance really made me want to become an actress. To me, acting leads to cinema. My desire to film came later on, along with the need I felt to understand where I come from, my link to Portugal (I'm French-Portuguese) and what pushes me to make films.

Where does the idea of the film come from?

I'm fascinated by the French author Jean Genet (I adapted two plays of his) and by *The Maids* in particular. It gave me the idea of writing a social film about two sisters of different social levels: a rich one, who immigrated in France, and the other one, isolated in her village in Portugal, working for the success of the other. It actually made me think of one of my aunt. She lived with her mother in the village where she was born and raised until she hit 45 years old, whereas her siblings were making money abroad. I remember her running away at that age, like a late teenage crisis.

Then, I thought about a former reading of mine *The Morning of the Magicians* by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, starring a character who classifies every extraordinary and unexplicable event which occurred on earth. That's when I decided to develop a news-in-brief type of story, written like an extraordinary event which happened in a village in Portugal (which name really is Campo de Vitoras, literally meaning « snake fields »). One thing leading to another, the story turned out to be at the same time a tale about a run away, an involuntary matricide, a lethal destiny, a chorale of villagers unleashing gossips, and an unexplained drama soon becoming an urban legend.

Was it a tough shooting?

The shooting last nine days and during

nine days, it rained non-stop. Plus, the area where we shot being in the middle of the mountains, it got really cold and the roads became dangerously slippery. This terrible weather could have killed the film but the whole contrary occurred. Humidity indeed enabled us to set the main character (Lurdes) in a more dense rural reality. This rain immediately brought a stronger atmosphere and genuineness to the film. The whole crew felt it too and accepted to shoot anyway. It really was heartwarming! The downside was that it forced me to make choices in an emergency context. For instance, there was a two months ellipsis in the script, from New Year's Eve to carnival. After two days of shoot, I decided to rewrite the story in its continuity so that the scenes connect. It took me all night. The morning after, when I arrived on set with a brand new script, it, of course, spiced things up in the organization. We worked on a new shooting schedule, it was exciting. At this moment, I realized that it's the unexpected which makes a film alive. Also, in the final scene, we were supposed to shoot a big fire scene (of the villagers burning the snakes) with a drone. But since it was raining harder than ever and was very windy, we had to think about another way to shoot it. We eventually agreed on a backward tracking shot, more sober but definitely finer and stronger.

How would you define your aesthetic choices and how do you justify them?

From the writing stage until the shooting stage, I am entirely driven by the physical reality of my actors in my choices. I need to feel the architecture of the place we shoot in, the bodies of the actors in this same area, and to have actions justified by a situation, in order to decide and create. I noticed that every time I went away from this physical reality, by applying ideas first for instance, I was losing the essential thing to me: the incarnation. It's actually one of

the first thing we talked about with Rui Poças, our Director of Photography: camera must move according to the actors' rhythm, not the other way around. Especially since the major part of the cast is composed by non-professional actors, they are people from the village and members of my family who accepted to be part of the experience. There is a lot of improvisation in the way I prepare my scenes. But to have this freedom on set, I had to prepare the shooting in its every single details beforehand.

How did you feel when you got confirmed at the critic's Week?

A huge happiness mixed with satisfaction. Cinema is still very new to me as I have been directing plays for ten years. *Campo de Vitoras* is my second short film. This selection is therefore very encouraging signal for the what's coming up next.

You are also selected to the Next Step Lab program, how do you feel about that?

It sounds like the perfect opportunity for me to talk about my first feature film project, *Alma viva*, which I have been developing for one year at the Femis school in Paris (script program 2015). I started to write this story three years ago but have felt the urge to shoot fiction first. I had indeed so far only directed two documentaries. I then shot *Sol branco* (in 2013 with my own money), then *Campo de Vitoras*, in the same area of Trás-os-Montes, where the full action of my feature film is also taking place. These shorts enabled me to deeply prepare the feature film as I shot real inhabitants of the area, made them used to cinema, got closer to local actors and professionals (like the beautiful and famous Portuguese actress Ana Padrão), and created my own cinema family.



BIOGRAPHY

Cristèle Alves Meira is a Stage Director since she's 20 years old. She directed Jean Genet's *Les Nègres* and *Splendid's*, then Suzan-Lori Parks' *Vénus*, at the prestigious Théâtre de l'Athénée-Louis Jouvet in Paris. She directed a documentary in Cape Verde, *Som & Morabeza* (52'), in which she reflected on the issues of immigration in the African Portuguese-speaking countries through the theme of music; and later through Angolan youth and its social realities, in *Born in Luanda* (26'). Since 2008, Cristèle Alves Meira also runs stage workshops for primary, middle

school class pupils and students under the leadership of the National Scene of Saint-Quentin en Yvelines.

After *Sol Branco* (which won the Quality Award of the CNC 2015), Cristèle shot her second short film, *Campo de Viboras*, again in the Tras-os-Montes area (located in the North-East part of Portugal) last January 2016, which got selected to the Cannes Critic's Week 2016. She is currently writing her first feature film, *Alma viva*, developed at the famous FEMIS school in Paris (Script workshop section 2015).

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 **Alma Viva** feature film - fiction (in writing)
- 2016 **Campo de Viboras** short film - fiction (completed)
- 2014 **Sol Branco** short film - fiction
- 2013 **Born in Luanda** documentary, co-directed with Julien Michel
- 2010 **Som & Morabeza** documentary, co-directed with Julien Michel

CAST

Lurdes	Ana Padrão
Glória	Sónia Martins
Basílio	Simão Cayatte
French hunter	Ludovic Berthillot
Vitoria's voice	Jacqueline Corado
Villagers	Ana Brito e Cunha, Viriato Trancoso, Sao Penascaisn, Marta Quina, Isabel Afonso, Élia de Jesus Brinço, Maria de Lurdes Brinço Ramos, Fernando António Ramos, Durvalino Fernandes
Mother	Ester Catalão
Son of Glória	Ruben Correia
Daughter of Glória	Cristiana Correia
Daughter of Glória	Leonor Correia
Friend of Basílio 1	Lino Henriques
Friend of Basílio 2	Bruno Adrião
French kid 1	Enzo Caldas
French kid 2	Alicia Vieira
French teenager	Eliane Caldas
Wolf	Álvaro Preto
Waitress	Maria Gorete
Car driver	Lino Henriques
Moto driver	Durvalino Fernandes
Minivan driver	Fernando António Ramos

Extras

Adão Cunha - Albertina Lopes - Alda Cordeiro - Amador Jornal - Diogo Jornal - André Pires - António Bóia - António Padrão - Marta Pires Lopes - Antonio Brinço Ramos - Carla Fernandes - Carla Miranda - Carminda Meira - Domingos Penascais - Élia Brinço - Emídio Alves - Fatima Gonçalves - Filipa Diz - Henriqueta Lopes - Helena Lopes - Isabel Pires - Joana Gonçalves Ramos - Joana Oliveira - João Cardoso José Galego - José Gonçalves - José Pires - Julieta Carneiro Laura Martins - Laura Marques - Leonel Reis Leonor Jornal - Luísa Preto - Manuel Cunha - Manuel Ramos - Manuel Sousa Meira - Maria de Fátima Gonçalves - Maria da Natividade Lopes - Maria de Lurdes Ramos - Maria Gonçalves - Maria Henriques - Maria Luísa Pires - Maria Marabilha - Marta Machado - Milton Cordeiro Henriques - Rúben Rosário - Sofia Diz - Tiago Magalhães - Verónica Lopes - Vítor Gonçalves - Vítor Penascais - Vítor Reis

CREW

Written and directed by	Cristèle Aves Meira
Script doctoring	Nuno Camarneiro
Production	Gaëlle Mareschi
Coproduction	Pablo Iraola, Pandora da Cunha Telles
Direction of photography	Rui Poças
Artistic Direction	Julien Michel
Editing	Raphaël Lefèvre
1 st Assistant Director	Dino Estrelinha
Script supervisor	Louise Arhex
Costumes	Raquel Santos
Sound engineering	Amaury Arboun
Sound editing	Vincent Pateau
Sound mixing	Cédric Lionnet
Casting director	Patricia Vasconcelos
Hair and make-up	Abigail Almeida
Color grading	Reda Berbar
Wolf mask creation	Yvan Robin

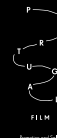


SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2016

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