

Mongrel Media Presents

THE WHITE MASAI

A Film by Hermine Huntgeburth

Starring

Nina Hoss & Jacky Ido

(2005, 131 mins, Germany)

Distribution

mongrel
MEDIA

1028 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M6J 1H6
Tel: 416-516-9775 Fax: 416-516-0651
E-mail: info@mongrelmedia.com
www.mongrelmedia.com

Publicity

Bonne Smith
Star PR
Tel: 416-488-4436
Fax: 416-488-8438
E-mail: starpr@sympatico.ca

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THE WHITE MASAI

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THE WHITE MASAI

CAST

Carola	Nina Hoss
Lemalian	Jacky Ido
Elisabeth	Katja Flint
Father Bernardo	Nino Prester
Stefan	Janek Rieke

CREW

Director	Hermine Huntgeburth
Producer	Günter Rohrbach
Screenplay	Johannes W. Betz based on the autobiographical book by Corinne Hofmann
Script arrangement	Hermine Huntgeburth Günter Rohrbach
Photography	Martin Langer
Editing	Eva Schnare
Set design	Susann Bieling Uwe Szielasko
Costumes	Maria Dimler
Make-up	Sabine Hehnen-Wild Gregor Eckstein
Music	Niki Reiser
Sound	Eckhard Kuchenbecker
Sound Engineer	Martin Steyr
Casting	An Dorthe Braker
Line producers	Jürgen Tröster Bernhard Thür

With backing from FilmFernsehFonds Bayern (FFF), Bayerischen Bankenfonds (BBF), FFA and Hamburger Filmförderung

THE WHITE MASAI

SHORT SYNOPSIS

At the end of her holidays in Kenya, Carola (Nina Hoss) meets the Samburu warrior Lemalian (Jacky Ido), who cuts a handsome figure with his weapons and traditional dress. Fascinated, Carola falls head over heels in love with him. The results are fateful: she impulsively cancels her return flight and sends her boyfriend (Janek Rieke) back home alone. She stays in Kenya and sets out in search of Lemalian. After a grueling journey through the African wilderness, Carola meets the German woman Elisabeth (Katja Flint) in Maralal, and the two become friends. There she also runs into Lemalian again and follows him to his village, Barsaloi. Carola decides to turn her back on her old life in Switzerland. With incredible energy, she braves all obstacles and builds a new life for herself in Africa. But what she felt was the biggest love of her life turns into an ordeal, an adventure between heaven and hell, a journey that takes her to her limits...

PRODUCTION NOTES

Hermine Huntgeburth ("The Trio") shot Corinne Hofmann's best-seller of the same name on original locations in Kenya. „The White Masai“ relates the true story of a young woman who defies countless obstacles in a strange and foreign culture to be with the love of her life.

The adventure that took „The White Masai“ through heaven and hell lasted four years. A courageous and resolute woman, a proud warrior and a great love story set against the breathtaking backdrop of Africa – these are the ingredients of this international success. The book has been translated into 16 languages, and more than 4 million copies have been sold worldwide to date.

The screen adaptation of this life between two worlds will also fascinate viewers everywhere. The dazzling Nina Hoss ("Naked") gives a vibrant performance as the young Swiss woman Carola, who risks everything to make her dream of love and happiness come true. Providing a tension-filled counterpoint to this dream is charismatic young Jacky Ido as the imposing Saburu warrior, his feature-film debut in a leading role. Joining them in the role of Elisabeth, a German woman stranded in a remote African village, is film star Katja Flint ("Marlene").

A major project of Constantin Film Produktion, „The White Masai“ was shot in Kenya in fall 2004. The producer is Günter Rohrbach ("Das Boot").

THE WHITE MASAI

SYNOPSIS

Carola (Nina Hoss) and her boyfriend Stefan (Janek Rieke) have just spent their holidays in Kenya. Towards the end of their stay, they meet the Samburu warrior Lemalian (Jacky Ido). The Samburu are a tribe related to the Masai, with similar customs and the same language. Carola is immediately fascinated by his imposing appearance. After Lemalian helps the guileless tourists out of a nasty situation in Mombasa, Carola wants to show her gratitude by inviting him to a drink, but Stefan reacts jealously when she pays Lemalian too much attention. Stefan wants Carola alone to himself on their last evening, but feels that she is slipping away from him. Carola dances with Lemalian, but leaves before Stefan makes a scene in the club.

The couple is scheduled to fly back to Switzerland the next morning. However, Carola cannot hide her agitation and spontaneously decides to stay in Kenya and look for Lemalian. Deeply hurt, Stefan accuses her of being only interested in sex.

Lemalian has since left Mombasa. From his friend Tom, Carola learns that he has returned to Barsaloi, his native village, a remote spot in the middle of the Kenyan bush. This is where Lemalian lives with his tribe and shares the life of a shepherd people. It is no place for a white woman.

Nevertheless, Tom tells Carola how she can get there.

After a long bus trip over bumpy roads, Carola reaches Maralal. Following Tom's advice, she looks for Elisabeth (Katja Flint), a German who lives there with her Kenyan husband. The two women become friends and Elisabeth, already visibly marked by her life in the African bush, gives the young Swiss woman some important insights into the hard life of a woman in Kenya. Carola's search for Lemalian ends in Maralal. She must now simply wait; if he wants her, he will come and get her.

It takes ten days before Lemalian appears in Maralal. Their first encounter is not at all what Carola had hoped for: there is no tenderness, no romance, just quick sex geared solely to please the man. In spite of her disappointment, she follows Lemalian into the wilderness.

The difficult foot march to Barsaloi takes one full day. Carola is utterly exhausted when she arrives in the primitive little village. She and Lemalian must share a hut with Lemalian's mother, who welcomes Carola warmly, and his eight-year-old niece Saguna. Life is very hard in the bush, and Carola can expect no support from Father Bernardo (Nino Prester), an Italian who runs the local mission. The mini-chief, a corrupt bureaucrat who harasses the villagers with his financial demands, expects to be bribed. He will only give Carola a residency permit for Barsaloi if she and Lemalian marry. And in order to obtain the necessary papers, Carola and Lemalian have to travel to Nairobi.

Here, far from the community, they finally have time for one another. Since it is not common for the Samburu to kiss and caress during sex, Carola teaches Lemalian her understanding of love and tenderness and carefully introduces him to a completely new world of sensuality.

Their happiness is of short duration, however, since Carola falls ill with malaria. Lemalian lovingly takes care of her and, as soon as she is healthy again, they obtain the papers and Carola has money sent to her from Europe. She buys a beat-up four-wheel-drive in order to reach the village more easily. On their way back, they pick up some local women who make fun of Lemalian for letting his wife drive.

He asks Carola to let him drive even though he has never learned how. No sooner does he take the wheel than he crashes into a tree. Carola explodes and screams at him, deeply hurting his pride.

In order to clear up her personal affairs at home, Carola returns to Switzerland. Her mother and brother are appalled when she sells her boutique and leaves for Africa. In Barsaloi, everyone is getting ready for the wedding, which is scheduled for the next full moon.

The feast is to unfold according to native customs. Carola, who has brought a white wedding dress from her shop, looks very pretty, but also very foreign and lonely. Among the wedding guests is Father Bernardo, who slowly begins to shed his reticence towards the white woman and to respect her.

Before Carola even suspects it, Lemalian's mother has noticed that her daughter-in-law is pregnant. Everyday life is extremely demanding, and the Samburu's diet consists only of goat meat and tea drunk with sugar. In order to improve the living conditions – also for the child she is bearing – Carola decides to open a shop.

The shop is a success, and is thronged from morning till night. Her life with Lemalian, however, is becoming increasingly difficult. He feels humiliated by his successful wife and is jealous when she speaks to male customers. He also gives credit to everyone who wants it, especially to the mini-chief, who forces Carola to hire his good-for-nothing nephew.

Carola is planning to give birth to her child in a circle of local women, but complications arise.

When the midwives give her some medicine, she thinks that they want to poison her child. At the last minute, the Flying Doctors take her to a hospital in Wamba, where she gives birth to a healthy girl, Sarai.

Back in Barsaloi, Lemalian's jealousy is turning her life into sheer hell. The situation escalates when Lemalian accuses her of having an affair with the priest and claims that Sarai is not his child. He begins to drink more and more, and hits Carola during an argument. When she hits him back, only the villagers can prevent the worst from happening. Lemalian cuts off his hip-long hair and temporarily puts away his traditional dress. Carola knows that she is no longer able to master the situation and sees no future for herself and her now two-year-old daughter. She announces that she wants to show her child to her mother in Switzerland and promises to come back. But to be able to leave the country with Sarai, the child's father has to give his written consent. A final, nerve-wracking ordeal awaits Carola...

THE WHITE MASAI

INTERVIEW HERMINE HUNTGEBURTH (director)

What did you know about Africa and the Samburu before *The White Masai*?

I knew about the region and the Samburu people only from books and research. But I was fascinated by them as soon as I got there. They are a people with a great deal of humor and warmth. They are also gifted actors, and they greeted us warmly. I think that Corinne Hofmann also captured the fascination exerted by these people and by Africa. That helped her put up with the enormous privations. Just look at the diet: the Samburu subsist on milk mixed with blood, goat meat, and tea with sugar. Such a diet is unimaginable to us Europeans. The cultural differences are also enormous; for example, sexuality is understood so differently there that conflicts are bound to occur. Though there are relations between the sexes before marriage, concepts such as "love in marriage" do not exist.

How did you get ready for the shooting?

I was in Kenya several times. Just before the shooting, I tried to share as much as possible in the everyday life of the Samburu. Of course I felt it was very necessary for me to understand their traditions and lifestyles, their myths and social relations as much as possible. I was particularly interested in the warriors. I wanted to be able to understand why someone like Lemalian can only act the way he can. In the book, Lemalian often remains enigmatic and distant.

It seems you had difficulty finding an actor for the male lead...

We spent a long time looking. Jacky was the last in a long series of castings. We also thought of having a Samburu play the role. But that would have been too difficult since we had to have the same level of understanding, the same arc of perception. As a European with African roots, Jacky was ideal. He was already in Kenya long before the shooting began, and penetrated very deeply into this culture. He's a very positive and sympathetic hero, big, handsome – and not American, which was important. The difference between Africans and Europeans is not as big as that between Africans and Americans.

THE WHITE MASAI

INTERVIEW NINA HOSS (Carola)

Can you empathize with Corinne Hofmann's story? How did you approach this role?

I can imagine her situation very well, when you fall in love so suddenly that you're willing to change your whole life. Maybe I wouldn't be as extreme as Carola, but basically I can understand this. I have tried to find my own access to this character. The difference with other projects is that here I am portraying the true story of a real person. My aim wasn't to copy or imitate Corinne Hofmann, but to understand her character and motivation.

How would you characterize your role?

The person I play has a certain innocence, a great deal of curiosity, and a lot of strength. Something happens to her which she cannot influence: she falls in love, feels incredibly attracted to this man. She must yield to him, or she won't be able to carry on with her life. She acts quite naively at times, but also with incredible willpower and a directness that sometimes almost borders on ignorance. It is impressive how she copes with everyday life in the torrid heat and strange surroundings.

How was the shooting?

It was extremely demanding to stand in the heat, dust and wind every day from five in the morning to seven in the evening. But the entire team did this too! Whenever we had a second to look around, we marveled at the grandiose landscape. We slept in tents, showered under the stars – it was all so adventurous and fantastic, in spite of all the difficulties. I still had to fulfill my theater obligations in Germany, so I would climb into a Cessna and fly out of the bush to Berlin where I would play Lessing on stage – it's so absurd, but it had to be done.

INTERVIEW JACKY IDO (Lemalian)

What does the role of "Lemalian" mean for you?

It is very, very important to me. It was also important to me to come to Africa. It took a while, but ultimately the people there accepted me, and that's what counts. I live in Paris, I'm a French citizen, and it's there that I began doing research on the Samburu and Masai, about whom I knew nothing before.

Did you understand your role right away when you read the script?

To be truthful, my first impression was: this is crazy! Yet I found the role very powerful, and I was highly motivated. It is rare to get an African role that is so differentiated, with so many levels and shadings. This suits me very well, since my own roots are in Africa.

How did you prepare yourself?

I spent quite a long time with the Samburu. I had a language teacher and learned about their customs and way of life. They take great care of themselves, the men need about two to three hours every day just to spruce up. They are very proud of their appearance.

THE WHITE MASAI

ABOUT Hermine Huntgeburth (director)

Born in Paderborn, Hermine Huntgeburth majored in film while studying at Hamburg's Hochschule für bildende Künste (beginning in 1977). Six years later she was able to pursue her film studies in Sydney, Australia, with a scholarship from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. During her studies there she developed scripts, assisted in theater direction and worked in film productions as camerawoman and technician.

After directing three short films, she made her feature film debut with "Im Kreise der Lieben" in 1991. Starring Barbara Auer, the film won many awards, including a German Film Award in Gold for Huntgeburth as Best Young Director. She then made some highly noted television productions, such as "Ein falscher Schritt" (1994) and "Gefährliche Freundin" (1996) with Corinna Harfouch, as well as "Und alles wegen Mama" (1998), the Ingrid Noll adaptation "Der Hahn ist tot" (1999) and "Die Stunde des Wolfes" (1999). In 2000 she directed the Bavaria Film production "Romeo," which won the Grimme Award, and followed this up with "Das verflixte 17. Jahr" (2001).

Her feature "The Trio" with Götz George and Jeanette Hain was released in 1997. Five years later she landed a great commercial hit with the children's film "Bibi Blocksberg". More recently, she has directed productions for the small screen such as "Eva Blond – Confession of Innocents" (2003) and "Der Boxer und die Friseurin" (2004). She is currently preparing the feature film "Hilde".

THE WHITE MASAI

ABOUT Nina Hoss (Carola)

Born in Stuttgart, Nina Hoss was already performing in radio plays at the Süddeutscher Rundfunk at the age of seven. At 14 she made her stage debut in the two-person play "Ich lieb dich, ich lieb dich nicht" at Stuttgart's Theater im Westen. The daughter of an actress and a Green Party politician, she perfected her acting skills by studying at Berlin's Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch from 1995 to 1998. She made her breakthrough in 1995, in the title role of Bernd Eichinger's remake of "A Girl Called Rosemarie."

For her TV debut, she won the Golden Camera, the German Video Prize and the Golden Lion. Hoss had just made her theatrical film debut in Joseph Vilsmaier's "And Nobody Weeps for Me" (1995). She also starred in films such as Detlev Buck's "Love Your Neighbor!", Nina Gross's "Fire Rider" (1997) and Ottokar Runze's "Der Vulkan" (1998) – a role for which she obtained the Best Actress Award at the Montreal Film Festival. In 2002 Doris Dörrie cast her in the romantic comedy "Naked" along with Benno Fürmann, Heike Makatsch, Jürgen Vogel, Alexandra Maria Lara and others. She gave an impressive account of the mysterious Leyla in Christian Petzold's TV drama "Something to Remind Me," which won the Adolf Grimme Award. She also starred in Petzold's TV movie "Wolfsburg" and won the Adolf Grimme Award in gold for her portrayal.

In addition to her work for film and television, Nina Hoss remains attached to her origins in the theater and has been performing regularly on two Berlin stages since 1998. At the Deutsches Theater Berlin she starred in "Don Carlos" (2000), Michael Thalheimer's celebrated production of "Emilia Galotti" (2001), Barbara Frey's production of "Einsame Menschen" (2003) and in "Minna von Barnhelm" (2005). At the Berliner Ensemble, she appeared in "Zigarren," an evening of songs (2001), Luc Bondy's "Unerwartete Rückkehr" and Robert Wilson's "Leonce und Lena." Hoss is currently starring in Oskar Roehler's new feature film "Elementary Particles", which will be released by Constantin Film in 2006. In the summer of 2005 she is also embodying the role of "Buhlschaft" at the "Jedermann" production in Salzburg. Rehearsals for Michael Thalheimer's production of "Faust II" at the Deutsches Theater begin in August.

Filmography – Nina Hoss (Selection)

	Film title	Director
1995	And Nobody Weeps for Me A Girl Called Rosemarie (TV)	Joseph Vilsmaier Bernd Eichinger
1997	Love Your Neighbor!	Detlev Buck
1997	Fire Rider	Nina Grosse
1998	Der Vulkan	Ottokar Runze
2002	Naked Something to Remind Me (TV)	Doris Dörrie Christian Petzold
2003	Wolfsburg (TV)	Christian Petzold
2004	The White Masai	Hermine Huntgeburth

THE WHITE MASAI

ABOUT Jacky Ido (Lemalian)

Born in Burkina Faso, Jacky Ido lives and works in Paris. After his training at the Déclic Théâtre and on the stages of Xavier Marcheschi, he was able to prove his talent in several films over the past few years. He was seen in the TV pilot "Le courrier de Dembélé" (2000), Rosine Young's "Futilités" (2001), Frédéric Khan's "J'ai vu le diable pleurer" (2002), Mathieu Vinel's "Whenzhou" and Alexandre Lemoine's "Joyeux Noel de merde" (both 2003).

In 2004 he starred in Jean-Teddy Filipppe's pilot film "Intrigues au Palais" and the series "Laverie de famille." The role of Lemalian in „The White Masai“ is Jacky Ido's first feature-film role. Ido is a member of a theater group as well, and is also admired as a rapper and hip-hopper. He has also made several short films. His short “Descente” was shown in competition at the 19th Fespaco 2005 (Festival panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision) in Burkina Faso.

Filmography – Jacky Ido (Selection)

	Film title	Director
2001	Futilités (TV)	Rosine Young
2002	J'ai vu le Diable pleurer (TV)	Frédéric Khan
2003	Whenzhou (TV)	Mathieu Vinel
	Joyeux Noel de merde (TV)	Alexandre Lemoine
2004	Intrigues au Palais (TV)	Jean-Teddy Filippes