

FINAL CUT FOR REAL PRESENTS

Songs of Repression



Songs of Repression is nominated for the main award at CPH:DOX 2020. Directed by Estephan Wagner & Marianne Hougen-Moraga, and produced by Signe Bryge Sørensen & Heidi Elise Christensen. Joshua Oppenheimer is the executive producer.



World Premiere: 18 March 2020

Duration: 90 min.

Languages: German, Spanish

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SYNOPSIS

At the foot of the Andes Mountains in Chile lies an idyllic German colony. However, the beauty of the place contains a grim past. In 1961, the German preacher Paul Schäfer and his congregation moved to Chile with the stated aim of helping the poor. They established Colonia Dignidad (Colony of Dignity), which transformed into a closed sect. This film explores how the remaining residents of the colony deal with 45 years of child abuse, collective beatings and slave-like living conditions. It also reveals how people in the colony assisted Pinochet's dictatorship (1973 – 1990) in torturing and killing political prisoners and burying them in mass graves on their own 16,000 – hectare land.

In 2007, Schäfer was arrested and the colony opened up. During that process, the colony changed its name to Villa Baviera (Bavarian Village). Around 120 people still live there today. This film is about them – now. They work in agriculture and have turned the place into a tourist resort where you can relax, eat German cuisine and listen to yodeling. We meet those who completely deny the horrors and wish to only remember the bright moments, those who still today go through severe emotional struggles – and those caught in between.

DIRECTORS' BIO



Marianne Hougen-Moraga

Director. Graduated with a Master's degree in film studies from Copenhagen University. She also holds a master in screen documentary from Goldsmiths College.

Hougen-Moraga has directed a number of short documentaries, such as 'Returned' (2011), which premiered at CPH:DOX, and 'Sea of Sorrow – Sea of Hope' (2017), which was nominated for a Danish Robert Award for best short documentary. Her feature documentary debut is 'Songs of Repression' (2020), which she has directed with Estephan Wagner.



Estephan Wagner

Director and editor. Graduated from the National Film and Television School in London. Originally trained as an editor in Germany.

Wagner has been working as a documentary director for more than a decade. He directed 'Last Dreams' (2013) that premiered at CPH:DOX. His feature documentary 'Les Sauteurs' (2016) had theatrical distribution in Germany, France, the UK and Italy, has been screened at more than 70 film festivals and has won more than 15 awards including at Berlinale and the Cinema Eye Spotlight award.

DIRECTORS' NOTES

Estephan Wagner and Marianne Hougen-Moraga, March 2020

Estephan grew up in Chile under Pinochet's military rule. Marianne in exile in Denmark. The direct consequences of a totalitarian regime have always been part of our reality.

Since we were small kids we both knew about Colonia Dignidad. But we knew about it from two very different perspectives. On the one hand, Estephan and his family visited the very German roadside restaurant run by the colony each year during their holidays. On the other, Marianne's older family members told her in whispers about how political prisoners under Pinochet's dictatorship were tortured and killed on the colony's land. Estephan's family was involved in fierce pro-colony lobbying against those allegations. Marianne's family was on the opposite side.

As we became young adults, our developing views of the world sprouted more and more questions about Colonia Dignidad. What must it be like for people to continue living in a place where strong collective trauma dominates the psychological reality? How does the individual or the community deal with such suffering? And how does one learn to re-define truth, trust and love when those concepts have lost all meaning?

By the time we met and became a couple in our early 30s, we'd both formed the idea that the world is not as black-and-white as our childhood had suggested. Suddenly it became urgent for us to explore and gain a deeper understanding of how we end up becoming who we are and how societies turn out the way they do. Colonia Dignidad was the obvious first step.

Like in most post-fascist realities around the world, the general discourse surrounding this complex place is still locked in black-and-white terms. There have been attempts to open up a discussion and space for reconciliation in and around the colony. But most mainstream media still show a clear-cut story of victims and victimizers. In reality the relationships between victims and victimizers are deeply entangled. Actually, most residents are both.

Throughout three and a half years we got very close to the colony's inhabitants. We approached the place by encouraging the inhabitants to tell their own stories in their own way. We aimed at understanding their logic. We learned that the predominant

views on their own history are also often black-and-white, although their conclusions may differ. We found that behind the attempt to create a paradise for themselves and for tourists, people living there have very different strategies for dealing with their traumas: from staying silent about the past and choosing only to remember the bright moments, to a desire to open up while being unable to vocalize their pain.

We aim to explore how the individual and the community rewrite their past. Be it to be able to live on after having been abused, as a mechanism to forget and to avoid haunting nightmares, or be it to hide away from the shame and inner demons after having abused or tortured others.

Having worked intensely with the subject of repression for several years, our understanding has grown more nuanced than it was when we met and even more than from our differing childhood worldviews. It was as if the colony slowly revealed all the different ways in which human beings are able to create systems of repression to hold each other in place – to the point where even something supposedly as beautiful and free as music becomes a tool for repression.

Our aim with this film is to open up for a discussion about what happens when traumas are not overcome, so they don't repeat through generations. We believe that it is imperative to expose the roots of such structures in these times where totalitarian regimes are again gaining strength on a global level.



CREDITS

Original title	Songs of Repression
Production country	Denmark
Production company	Final Cut for Real
International sales	Autlook Filmsales +43 670 208 7881 / autlookfilms.com welcome@autlookfilms.com
With support from	Danish Film Institute
Directors	Estephan Wagner and Marianne Hougen-Moraga
Producer	Signe Byrge Sørensen and Heidi Elise Christensen
Executive Producer	Joshua Oppenheimer
Editor	Niels Pagh Andersen