



Special Award in „Education“ of the Conference of Regional Film Services

Category “Informational films and documentaries”

Slave Route of Ouidah

bce film / Bayerischer Rundfunk, Kompass-Auslandsreportage

(28 minutes, German, 2008)

The "Slave Route of Ouidah" by Bettina Ehrhardt – who already won the Toura D'Or 2004 for her entry "Strom für die Sherpas" ("Electricity for the Sherpas") – is an unusual documentary. The history of the slave trade from Africa to America and recent current efforts to come to terms with this history are dealt with in a respectful manner. The subtitle "Voodoo and Reconciliation in West Africa" emphasises both the film's thematic and regional focus.

Ouidah is a place in the West African state of Benin. Important trade routes from all over the region used to lead to this place. At that time, slaves were deported to the coast under inhumane conditions in order to be shipped across the Atlantic by smart traders.

Rather unknown aspects of slavery are being addressed. For example, it is hardly known that local chiefs and middlemen supported the slave trade, that some of those who were deported or their descendants managed to return to their home continent, and that European slave traders – in this case mainly from Portugal – mingled with the local population and produced a kind of Euro-African upper class.

Today, local people as well as foreign tourists – among them many descendants of African slaves – visit the "Gate of no Return" and other memorial sites, learn about the history of the slave trade and commemorate the suffering of the people who were shipped from this place until the 19th century.

Descendants of both victims and culprits, of the traders and of those who were traded, now meet once in a year on 10th January in Ouidah. The tradition of voodoo is a medium, the demonstrative means of choice, so to speak, that people use for their meeting and exchange.

In a very lively, credible and authentic manner, this documentary benefits from the many statements by both local people and tourists.

The African Renaissance mentioned in the film becomes tangible when one visitor says: "It is history that belittled us – now it makes us great." The guests from America are received as visitors from the Diaspora. It is an emotionally moving film that graphically portrays a "place of Remembrance and Reconciliation".

There are very few educational and school materials on this complex contemporary issue. Therefore, the Konferenz der Landesfilmdienste (Conference of Regional Film Services) has awarded this film with a *Special Award* 2008 in education.