

StoryScope and EyeSteelFilm
Present

INFLUENCE



A film by Richard Poplak and Diana Neille
2020 / South Africa & Canada / 105 Minutes / English & Spanish

Festival Screenings:

Monday, January 27th, 11:30am, World Premiere (Prospector Square Theatre)
Tuesday, January 28th, 9:00am, Press & Industry Screening (Holiday Village Cinema 2)
Tuesday, January 28th, 9:00pm, Public Screening #2 (Broadway Centre Cinema 6, Salt Lake City)
Wednesday, January 29th, 9:00am, Public Screening #3 (Temple Theatre)
Friday, January 31st, 9:15pm, Public Screening #4 (Holiday Village Cinema 2)
Saturday, February 1st, 11:30am, Public Screening #5 (Holiday Village Cinema 1)

For images and other materials, please visit our materials folder:

<http://bit.ly/influencefilm2020>

Sales – Cinetic Media
Shane Riley
shane@cineticmedia.com

Publicity – Obscured Pictures
Amanda Valley
amanda@obscuredpictures.com

Sales – EyeSteelFilm
Bob Moore
bob@eyesteelfilm.com

SYNOPSIS

INFLUENCE is a profile of the morally slippery British reputation manager, Lord Timothy Bell. Born into a modest working class family, Bell climbed his way to the heights of global power, first spinning Margaret Thatcher into the “Iron Lady”, then working for the successors of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet; later branching out into France, Africa, Russia, the Middle East and elsewhere. In 1998, Bell co-founded the legendary PR firm Bell Pottinger, which quickly earned a reputation for representing even the most unsavory characters, regardless of the circumstances. In tracking the particulars of Bell’s extraordinary life, the film examines the politicization of modern communication over the last 40 years—the winding journey from advertising to algorithms; television to Twitter. INFLUENCE examines how Bell and his associates shaped and co-opted the very institutions on which our governance systems are premised, quietly entrenching one of the most sophisticated—and successful—business ventures of recent times: the weaponization of democracy.

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

Like many democracies, South Africa finds itself on the brink. Of what, no one can be certain. But the country tiptoes along the edge of economic and social disaster, riven by racial faultlines that have persisted since the end of apartheid. As journalists, we have covered this malaise in technicolour, and have watched as the crisis has deepened. During Jacob Zuma’s presidency, which lasted from 2009 to 2017, every single state-run institution was gutted by corruption. At the heart of this mess were the Gupta brothers: three Indian nationals who served as Zuma’s mafia benefactors, eventually picking his ministers and running a kitchen cabinet committed to robbing the state into penury.

In 2016, the company running PR for the Guptas was the infamous London outfit, Bell Pottinger. Everyone on the politics beat knew it—we had the cease and desist letters from Bell Pottinger’s attack dog lawyers jamming up our inboxes. But none of us could establish a solid link between the London-based firm and Zuma’s faction.

That changed in May 2016, when a cache of leaked emails came into the possession of Daily Maverick, the muck-racking news site at which we ply our trade. The leaks were an astonishing window into a gangster state that operated at the highest levels. Perhaps most shocking of all, the leaks proved that blue chip multinationals like KPMG, McKinsey, SAP, Bombardier and Liebherr were colluding with elements of the Zuma regime in order to milk state contracts. Front and center in the leaks was Bell Pottinger, earning \$120 000 a month to stoke a racially divisive campaign designed to distort and distract from the larceny. Their misinformation was having the intended effect—race relations took a turn for the worse, while opposition politicians, businessmen and journalists were harassed viciously on social media. Sometimes that harassment spilled over into physical attacks.

When the GuptaLeaks stories broke, our determination to go after the multinationals that helped rob South Africa of billions became something of an obsession. Despite Bell Pottinger’s protestations to the contrary, the company was inserting toxic, dangerous messaging into the

South African discourse. Ours is such a fragile country: one that is constantly trying to reconcile a brutal past with an uncertain present. As far as we were concerned, this wasn't just another money contract: a British PR firm was on the brink of driving South Africa into a race war.

We began digging into the company's history. Pairing up what Bell Pottinger had done before with what they were doing in South Africa, we realized that we were researching a globetrotting thriller that helped explain the entire arc of the so-called Fake News era. It was also the ultimate follow-the-money story.

The journalism, combined with an onslaught of public outrage and some deft opposition politics, forced the PR company to run a PR campaign for its life—and within a few short months Bell Pottinger bled out its client list and imploded. The congratulations and backslapping didn't last long, because the South African campaign was now running on its own steam, as if guided by an unseen, malevolent force. That same sense of orchestrated chaos we experienced in South Africa in 2017 is now the norm around the world, innocuously termed 'strategic communications'.

And so, this film is deeply personal. It's a means of telling the story of a truly dangerous company that faced off against our colleagues and our country. But—and this part is crucial—the film is also a work of journalism. Our profession, mired in one of its darkest periods, was nonetheless instrumental in helping to fell the Zuma regime. Along with opposition politicians and civil society, the pillars of democracy held up, however tentatively. In this, South Africa is both a symbol of hope and a warning, one we hope will not be ignored.

- Richard Poplak, Diana Neille

KEY CHARACTERS



Lord Tim Bell
Former founder, Bell Pottinger

The consummate ad man, Bell was considered the ampersand in the legendary UK firm, Saatchi & Saatchi. After the company secured the Conservative Party account in 1979, Bell helped Margaret Thatcher win her three successive election campaigns, eventually becoming her unofficial adviser. He founded Bell Pottinger in 1998, pioneering geopolitical public relations and earning a reputation for working with and for some of the most unsavory public figures in the world. "Go anywhere, do anything" was his unofficial motto.



Phumzile van Damme
Opposition politician in South African parliament

Phumzile van Damme represents the Democratic Alliance, South Africa's official opposition party in parliament. A controversial figure on both the right and the left, she was instrumental in having Bell Pottinger ejected from the UK's Public Relations and Communication Association, after which the company was forced into administration.



Nigel Oakes
Founder of SCL Group & the Behavioural Dynamics Institute

Nigel Oakes founded the Behavioural Dynamics Institute in 1989, and later Strategic Communications Laboratories. SCL became notorious when its subsidiary, Cambridge Analytica, was forced to shutter following the 2016 Trump election campaign scandals. Oakes is a self-declared amateur historian of the influence industry.



Marianne Thamm
Assistant Editor, Daily Maverick

One of South Africa's most respected journalists, Marianne Thamm began reporting in the early 1980s during the apartheid era. She is Assistant Editor at Daily Maverick, South Africa's premier news website, and began writing about Bell Pottinger's presence in South Africa in 2016.



FW de Klerk
Former President of South Africa

FW de Klerk was president of South Africa from 1989 to 1994, and served as deputy president under President Nelson Mandela from 1994 to 1996. Despite the taint of being apartheid's last president, he is credited with ending the regime and freeing Mandela from prison. He founded the secretive advisory outfit Global Leadership Foundation in 2004.



Paul Bell
Former Director, Bell Pottinger Iraq

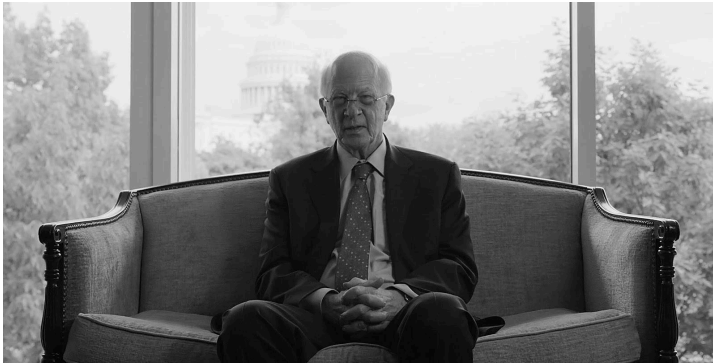
A former South African journalist, Paul Bell was tasked with leading Bell Pottinger's special projects unit in Iraq between 2004 and 2009, before taking over Bell Pottinger Sans Frontieres, the former company's geopolitical unit. He left Bell Pottinger in 2012.

With appearances by:



Stanley Greenberg
Senior pollster

Stanley Greenberg is a leading Democratic pollster and has served as a polling adviser to Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Tony Blair & Nelson Mandela, among dozens of leaders around the world.



Chester Crocker
Former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

A diplomat and scholar, Crocker architected the U.S. policy of "constructive engagement" towards Southern Africa, including apartheid-era South Africa, and is credited with setting the terms of Namibia's independence.

TIMELINE FACT SHEET

1970 Saatchi & Saatchi is established. Tim Bell is brought on and becomes managing director and chairman in 1975.

1979 Saatchi & Saatchi wins the Conservative Party account. As the firm's best salesman and as the professed "only Tory in the firm", Bell becomes the project lead, working directly with Margaret Thatcher. She wins the 1979 election and Bell slips into the roll of unofficial advisor.

1983 Margaret Thatcher wins a second term as Britain's Prime Minister.

1985 The UK seals the £43 billion "Al-Yamamah" arms deal with Saudi Arabia in exchange for up to 600,000 barrels of crude oil a day. The primary contractor is BAE Systems, and the deal is fraught with accusations of corruption. Thatcher's son, Mark, acts as a middleman in the deal, receiving a massive commission. Bell is tasked with managing this potential scandal, shielding the Thatchers from media scrutiny. In a further bit of intrigue, the Chief Operating Officer of BAE Systems during the latter years of the Al-Yamamah deal is Chris Geoghegan, the father of Bell Pottinger partner Victoria Geoghegan, who ran the Gupta account in South Africa in 2016.

1989 Bell and his associate Bertie Way travel to Santiago as emissaries of Margaret Thatcher to meet Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet. Pinochet became the military dictator of Chile on September 11, 1973 after ousting president Salvador Allende in a violent coup. He subsequently presided over human rights abuses perpetrated against at least 30,000 Chileans between 1973 and 1990.

1989 Following the 1988 referendum in which Pinochet is ousted as de facto leader, Bell is brought in to advise the campaign of his replacement at the helm of the right-wing UDI party, Hernán Büchi. Considered a poor choice from the outset, Büchi does not win the election, but by his own admission Bell makes a fortune of money. More substantially, the campaign modernizes Chile's far right.

1989 After leaving Saatchi & Saatchi, Nigel Oakes founds the Behavioural Dynamics Institute, which “develops and aggregates breakthrough social science in the behavioural and social sciences”—a significant milestone in the West’s influence industry.

1993 - 1994 Bell takes on the South African National Party campaign, working directly with outgoing president FW de Klerk to help the apartheid state navigate the country’s first democratic election. Their goal is to secure the second highest percentage of votes so that de Klerk can become deputy president of a government of national unity, and maintain vetting power over the constitution-writing process. They are successful in this endeavor, with major implications for South Africa’s future.

1998 The firm Bell co-founded in 1987, Lowe Bell, becomes Bell Pottinger. His co-founder, Piers Pottinger, is put in charge of the Singapore office. (Pottinger has no appreciable influence over Bell Pottinger’s geopolitical operations.)

2000 Vladimir Putin becomes president of Russia and begins a campaign against the country’s infamous oligarchs, many of whom transfer the majority of their vast wealth and assets to London.

2000s Bell starts working for Russia’s most notorious oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, on an anti-Putin campaign. He does this along with exiled Russian activist Alexander Goldfarb, and later the former KGB operative-turned-whistleblower, Alexander Litvinenko. The latter is poisoned with nuclear-grade polonium in 2006. Despite having worked previously for Boris Yeltsin, over the course of the 2000s Bell also works for controversial Berezovsky allies, former Ukrainian president, Victor Lukashenko, and his father, Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko.

2003 Bell Pottinger wins the tender put out by the Pentagon to create propaganda advertisements in Iraq. The initially small production turns into a secret \$540 million campaign spanning six years, in which Bell Pottinger produces more than 600 unbranded television commercials and dabbles in more sinister propaganda tactics.

2009 Jacob Zuma becomes president of South Africa, dodging hundreds of charges of corruption against him.

2009 Bell wins a massive contract from the Development Board of Bahrain. Following Mohamed Boazizi’s self-immolation in Tunisia at the end of 2010, a wave of protest known as the Arab Spring takes off across the region, bubbling over in Yemen and Egypt before moving to the rest of the Middle East. When it takes off in Bahrain, Bell admits to also doing work for the government and being “paid privately to prop the regime up”. Bell Pottinger also worked in Libya, Egypt and Yemen during this time.

2010 Bell sets up a first lady’s office for Syria’s Asma al-Assad.

2013 Boris Berezovsky is found dead inside a locked bathroom in his UK home. The circumstances of his death are met with suspicion by anti-Putin activists—he is one of at least 15 prominent anti-Putin politicians, businessmen or their associates to die mysteriously between 2005 and 2016.

2015 Bell Pottinger takes on the Gupta's company Oakbay on as a client, working to create a racially divisive smokescreen campaign to distract from their state capture project.

May 2017 A cache of emails pulled from a hard drive belonging to a Gupta consigliere comes into the possession of Branko Brkic, editor of the South African news site Daily Maverick. The so-called GuptaLeaks includes revelations of corruption that implicate multinationals such as McKinsey, KPMG, SAP and, of course, Bell Pottinger.

August 2017 South African opposition politician Phumzile van Damme takes Bell Pottinger to the UK's Public Relations and Communications Association and wins. After the remainder of its clients leave, the firm is placed under administration.

September 4, 2017 Bell appears on Newsnight. The interview makes headlines because of his odd behaviour, confused answers and ringing phone.

2018 Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group close in the wake of a Channel 4 expose and an interview with a so-called whistleblower from the company, Christopher Wylie, who explains how they used Facebook data to manipulate the 2016 US polls that saw Trump elected as president. It is believed that the companies declared bankruptcy to avoid reporting their activities, and began operating out of their same offices, with their same staff, under the name Emerdata.

February 14, 2018 Jacob Zuma resigns as South African president following pressure by the media, civil society and ordinary citizens in the wake of revelations about the Gupta scandal. He previously survived four motions of no confidence brought against him in South African parliament during his two terms as president.

August 25, 2019 Lord Bell dies at home, surrounded by his family.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Richard Poplak (Writer/Director) is an award-winning author, journalist, and filmmaker. He has become one of the most widely read and controversial political journalists in South Africa, editing at large for Daily Maverick. Poplak has reported from over 30 developing countries for news outlets across the world, and he was part of a team that won the prestigious Global Shining Light Award for investigative journalism.

Diana Neille (Writer/Director) is an award-winning journalist and filmmaker from Johannesburg, South Africa. A 2011 alumna of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, Neille has subsequently co-founded two media startups with the intention of fostering long-form investigative storytelling and documentary filmmaking at a time when journalism is facing unprecedented challenges globally.

Bob Moore (Producer) is Co-President and Creative Producer at [EyeSteelFilm](#) in Montreal where he has produced over 30 feature documentaries since 2008. At Sundance 2020 he is presenting *Influence* (Richard Poplack & Diana Neille) and *Softie* (Sam Soko) in World Cinema Documentary and *Chomsky vs Chomsky: First Encounter* (Sandra Rodriguez) in New Frontiers. Together with his talented partners and collaborators, he has been the recipient of over 100 international awards, including Emmys, Cinema Eyes, Golden Horses, Owls, Phoenixes, and a variety of other celebratory animal-themed prizes. Bob also oversees EyeSteelFilm's dedicated theatrical distribution company, and works with artists exploring meaningful interactive storytelling (which, again, has led to prizes, though in this case less animal-related and more pixel and digital-themed). He's been the subject of a Producer's Spotlight at the Cannes Marché du Film, an advisor at the Sundance Creative Producing Lab, is currently an international advisor to DMZ Docs in South Korea, and generally enjoys working with and mentoring emerging filmmakers.

Neil Brandt (Producer) is a multi-award winning filmmaker and producer, comfortable working across content genres, cultures and time zones, drawn to films exploring personal and political revolutions. A founding member of [StoryScope](#) in Johannesburg, Neil is passionate about nurturing authentic African voices that challenge stereotypes. An undergraduate in Economics and a postgraduate in International Law from the University of Cape Town, Neil has worked in volatile spaces across Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. His non-fiction films have been broadcast on Al Jazeera, ARTE, VPRO, Sundance Channel, BBC, PBS, ZDF, NHK, CGTN and others. His most recent documentary, "*Influence*" (Richard Poplack and Diana Neille), a global-trotting political thriller in a time where democracy is up for sale, is in official competition at Sundance 2020.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Written and Directed by
Richard Poplak
Diana Neille

Produced by
Bob Moore
Neil Brandt

Executive Producers
Mila Aung-Thwin
Daniel Cross
Thandi Davids

Editor
Ryan Mullins

Cinematography
Glauco Bermudez
Mark Ó Fearghail

Music Provided by
Floencia Di Concilio

Sound Design
Benoît Dame
Catherine Van Der Donckt

Graphics
Brandt Botes
Christiaan Venter

Featuring (in order of appearance):

Lord Timothy John Lee Bell
Ron Leagas
Sir John Hegarty
Phumzile van Damme
Nigel Oakes
Mark Hollingsworth
David Wynne-Morgan
Marianne Thamm
Sergio Bitar
Ascanio Cavallo
Pablo Zalaquett
José Antonio Kast Rist
Dr Ralph Mathekga
FW de Klerk
Stanley Greenberg
Chester Crocker
Ketso Gordhan
Justice Johann Kriegler
Andile Mngxitama

Dr Alex Goldfarb
Paul Bell
Meirion Jones
Haider Jraidan
Joel Harding
Kirsten Fontenrose
Francis Ingham

Line Producer
Lauren Clifford-Holmes
Valerie Shamash

Associate Producer
Katie McKay

Location Sound
Daniel Hewett
Pablo Villegas

Additional Camera
Adam Vinokur

Archive Producer
Edmund Duff

Production Coordinator
Zoe Ramushu

Junior Business Affairs
Vanessa Di Gregorio

Location Fixers
Ammar Karimina
James Gatica Matheson
Paris Palmer
Sahar Sarshar
Harry Stanley
Ethel Williams-Abrahamse

Production Assistants
Cristóbal Bahamondes
Vusi Fenyane
Garry Washington

Online Editor
Hamed (Ed) Aleali
Samantha Neboschizkij

Post Production Sound Facilities
Exsono Inc, Digilog and Technicolor

Sound Design
Benoît Dame
Catherine Van Der Donckt

Sound Editor
Jérémy Jones
Gaëlle Komàr

Foley Artist
Stéphane « Caboom » Cadotte

Foley Recording
Isabelle Larin

Re-recording Mixer
Stéphane Bergeron
Benoît Dame

Post Production Image Facilities
CineGround (CAN)

Colorist
Mathieu Marano

Post Production Technician
Simon Turcotte

Post Production Coordinator
Aurelie Crapez

Graphics
Old Friends Young Talent

Creative Director
Brandt Botes

Animation Director
Christiaan Venter

Design
Samantha Jones
Catherine Fok-Seang

Animation
Victor Hugo

Post Production Assistant
Kayla Fragman (CAN)
Gilda Pourjabar (CAN)

Research
Sasha Wales-Smith (SA)
Kristen van Schie (SA)

Transcription
Pamela Grimaud
Tariq Jamal

Tess Liem
Cherie Pyne
Greg Smith

Translation
Mary-Ellen Fierro
Marco Luna

Distribution and Festivals
Camille Jacques

Additional SA Crew

1st AC
Brendan Wassermann

Key Grip
Muzwakhe Mathenjwa

Grip Assist
Jan Matlala

Gaffer
Simeon Foroma

Lighting Best Boy
Nkanyiso Makhoba

Set Builder
Sets Non Stop / Stef Pioreschi

Set Standby Assistant
Zwelithini Mthembu

Construction Coordinator
Raphael Sibanda

Set Dressing, Wardrobe and Props
Lisa Perry

Head Scenic Painter
Sascha Stylianou

Head Potter
Nic Sithole

Assistant Potters
Fire
Freeborn

Cast Manager
Afrodizzyacts

Extras Manager
Michelle Lowry

Extras
Tommy Bezuidenhout
Phillip Bezuidenhout
Lodie Gourley
Nicolás Platovsky

Production Accountants
Robert Hingley
Melinda Stokes

Security
Hlungu Security Services / Cornwell Zulu
Jacob Ndlovu
Ernest Maepa
Zimi Protection Service / Xabiso Tyingwa
Chrishnet Siginiseko Mbelembushe
Moqdad Athab

Drivers
Mohammed Mehdi
Mayser Gitan

Auditor
Thomas Pietrzykowski, HHL

Legal
REMY KHOUZAM, LUSSIER & KHOUZAM
Miller Thompson
Laura Colucci
Willem de Klerk Attorneys

Insurance Provided by
Globalex/Front Row Insurance

Financial Services Provided by
Banque Nationale
First National Bank

Music

"Overture"
"Jean"
"Space"
"Minutes"
"Planete"
"Jack in the middle"
"Years later"
"Kids and I"
"Again"

"My friends who are still working"
"Fun in the gym"
"Had to go"
"Really hope you're having a good day"
"Full time"
"Until you're gone"
"For sure"
"What I would do"
"Hey hey"

"How's your morning"
"Dear god"
"Please let us know"
"What do I do for you"
"Is there any other way"
"Just to be sure"
"Thanks for your message"

"Feel free"
"Field of work"
"A little too late"
"Go for a drink"
"Giselle"
"Je suis vraiment désolée"

(All Above Music)
Composed and Performed by
Floencia Di Concilio

Published by
Gloria Vision

Courtesy of
Floencia Di Concilio

"Jeans On / Brutus Jeans"
Composed by David Dundas & Roger Greenaway
Performed by David Dundas
Published by Air Edel
Courtesy of Brutus Jeans

"Ou Ryperd (Ole Faithful)"
Composed by Michael Carr and Hamilton Kennedy
Performed by Charles Jakobie
Published by Shapiro Bernstein % Music Sales Group and Peer Music Canada
Unika Records

"No Necesitamos Banderas"
Composed by Jorge Gonzalez
Performed by Los Prisioneros
Courtesy of Warner Music

"Wakanda Forever"
Composed by Oludemilade Martin Alejo, Kabelo Hector Masia, Maya Christinah Xichavo Wegerif
Performed by Sho Madjozi
Published by Songtrust
Courtesy of Flourish and Multiply

"Heist"
Composed by Diana Neille & Hannah Foster
Performed by Hannah Forster
Produced by Proto_Sapian & Hannah Foster
Mixed by Proto_Sapian & Jacob van der Westhuizen

Visual Archives

Archivo Fortín Mapocho
Associated Press
BBC
The British Film Institute
Campaign Magazine

Channel 4 News
Chronicle
Clips & Footage
Conservative Party UK
eNCA

Footage Farm
Getty Images
Historic Films
History of Advertising Trust
José Antonio Kast
Nigel Oakes

PA Images
Producers Library
Reuters / Screenocean
Sarah Lee Photography
Shutterstock

Thanks

News24 & Nasdak
Shine Studios
Bernard Kotze
Stephen Abbott
Jonathan Kovel
Shaun Swinger
Mushra Hartley
Ayanda Charlie
Katherine Warren
Shanel Dawson
Robert Exley
Jozua Loots
Redi Tlhabi
Jerusha Sukhdeo-Raath
Gideon Raath
Chris Vick
Francis Antonie

Anton van Dalsen
Gaye Neille
Martin Wells
Genaro Arriagada
Khaya Sithole
Philip van Niekerk
Piers Pigou
Greg Mills
Alan Hilburg
Martyn Day
Teresa-Anne Dunleavy
Alexander Melck
Jean le Roux
Jason Norwood-Young
Melonie & Sifiso Mazibuko
Marianne Merten
Philippe Baylaucq

Special Thanks

Styli Charalambous & Branko Brkic, Daily
Maverick
Joel & Beverly Wynne, Gatehouse Commercials
Medeine Tribinevicius
Jeffrey Brenner
amaBhungane
News24
The Bureau for Investigative Journalism

Peter Goring
Pemberley Investments
Chris Donald & John Donald
Richard Gotlib
Raymond Stone
Heidi Fleischer
Andreas Medritzki

DISTRIBUTION ADVISORY SERVICES
CINETIC MEDIA



This film was presented at Hot Docs Forum 2018

hotdocsforum

Developed in association with



Produced with the financial participation of



Produced with the participation of



Produced with the assistance of



Peter Goring
Pemberley Investments
Chris Donald & John Donald
Richard Gotlib
Raymond Stone

Produced with the participation of



Co-Executive Producers
Neil Tabatznik and Robin Smith



with support from



Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program with support from Luminate



Yolanda Ncokotwana – Production & Development Manager
Katlego Moseamedi – Nonfiction Coordinator
Makhosazana Khanyile – Chief Executive Officer

In co-production with
ARTE France



(FR)

Society and Culture Department
Fabrice Puchault

Commissioning Editor
Mark Edwards

Business & Legal Affairs
Françoise Tsitsichvili

Post-production
Rachel Anquetil

Produced in association with



Sandra Kleinfeld - Senior Director, *documentary* Channel
Jordana Ross - Production Executive, *documentary* Channel



An Official South Africa-Canada Co-production

INFLUENCE

EyeSteel (LTH) Productions Inc.
Agents of Influence (Pty) Ltd
© Copyright 2020