



THE NEW GOSPEL

A Film by MILO RAU
with YVAN SAGNET



A production of Fruitmarket, Langfilm & IIPM – International Institute of Political Murder in coproduction with SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen / SRG SSR, ZDF in cooperation with ARTE, in collaboration with Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Consorzio Teatri Uniti di Basilicata and Teatro di Roma supported by Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, BAK Bundesamt für Kultur, Zürcher Filmstiftung, DFFF - Deutscher Filmförderfonds, Kanton St.Gallen Kulturförderung / Swisslos, BKM - Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, Volkart Stiftung, Suissimage Kulturfonds

WORLD SALES

CAT&Docs

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PRODUCTION

Fruitmarket,
Langfilm,

IIPM – International Institute
of Political Murder

LOGLINE

An authentically political, theatrical and cinematic New Gospel for the 21st century.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

What would Jesus preach in the 21st century? Who would his disciples be? And how would today's bearers of secular and spiritual power respond to the return and provocations of one of the most influential prophets and social revolutionaries in human history?

Set in the southern Italian town of Matera, where both Pasolini and Gibson shot their legendary films on the life of Jesus, director Milo Rau (Das Kongo Tribunal, Locarno 2017) and his team return to the origins of the gospel and stage it as a passion play of an entire civilization.

Together with Cameroonian political activist Yvan Sagnet, Rau creates a biblical story that couldn't be more topical. With "The Revolt of Dignity" they have created a political campaign that fights for the rights of migrants who came to Europe across the Mediterranean to be enslaved on the tomato fields in southern Italy and to live in ghettos under inhumane conditions. An authentically political as well as theatrical and cinematic New Gospel for the 21st century emerges. A manifesto of solidarity with the poorest, a revolt for a more humane world.

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Country	Germany / Switzerland / Italy
Min	107
Format	DCP
Aspect Ratio	1:2
Sound Format	5.1
FPS	25
Languages	Italian, French, English
Original Title	DAS NEUE EVANGELIUM
International Title	THE NEW GOSPEL



SYNOPSIS

Seven years ago, Pope Francis denounced the “globalization of indifference” in Lampedusa and said that „this system of capitalism kills.“ The moment Italy criminalizes the rescue of people who are drowning, the Catholic Church returns to its socio-revolutionary roots: what does the Bible really ask of us? What was meant by the radical “no” by the Christian prophet when confronted with the system of Roman imperialism and exploitation? Who would Jesus fight for today – and who would be fighting at his side?

In Italy, at the southern edge of the EU, where African refugees are forced into labor as harvesters, where peasants are fighting for survival due to increasing grain imports, Milo Rau creates **THE NEW GOSPEL** – a hybrid film dealing with the life and death of probably the most influential religious founder in world history. Who are the displaced people, the outcasts, the humiliated ones of today’s world order? What is left of Jesus’ message of salvation in times of global exploitation?

In **THE NEW GOSPEL**, Milo Rau and the political activist Yvan Sagnet together create a biblical narrative that couldn’t be more topical, considering the refugee crisis in Europe and the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement.

Political activist and Jesus performer Yvan Sagnet himself worked on a tomato farm when in 2011, he revolted against the system of exploitation and led the first farm workers’ strike in southern Italy. Just like Jesus sought his group of apostles as a “fisher of men”, Yvan returns to the largest of the refugee camps, currently called „ghettos“ in Italy. Among the

refugees and migrants stranded in the barren landscape and those who hire themselves out on the tomato and orange plantations, Yvan finds his “disciples”. Together, they lead the “Revolt of Dignity”: a struggle for the rights of the people disenfranchised by the current Italian government and EU migration policies – over 500,000 people in Italy alone. They are joined by small farmers and activists driven into bankruptcy by major agricultural corporations, as well as actors from the films of Pasolini and Mel Gibson. Enrique Irazoqui, who played the legendary role of Jesus in the Pasolini film, takes on the role of John the Baptist in Rau’s version of the „Gospel“; Maia Morgenstern, Mel Gibson’s Saint Mary, plays the mother of the black savior Sagnet. And critically acclaimed actor Marcello Fonte (Best Actor Award Cannes 2018) plays Pontius Pilate.

Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists, refugees and Europeans fight side by side for the right of all people to live in legality, self-determination and freedom of movement. They call on all citizens of Europe to solidarize with them and to express their resentment and resistance against Europe’s inhumane refugee policy. What is left of the values of Enlightenment and Christianity in the realpolitik of the EU? How can contemporary Europe even be reconciled with „occidental“ values? Even if, or precisely because they are fighting against the Italian government and the large corporations, the followers of the new movement – like Jesus’ disciples at the time – “did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.” For where injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty!

While the message of the “Rivolta della Dignità”, an emancipatory movement of the lawless spreads, the great performance is organized: the main venue is the small town of Matera in the middle of the southern Basilicata, where the Jesus films by Pier Paolo Pasolini („The Gospel according to St. Matthew“) and Mel Gibson („The Passion of the Christ“) were filmed. Right here in this film historical setting, Jesus enters the city, he gets tortured, crucified and, once again, will be resurrected. This occurred under the eyes of thousands of cultural tourists which Matera attracted from all over the world as the European Capital of Culture 2019. The Christian myth and the touristic reality of Europe clash in a mystery play about poverty, faith and dignity.

„ When man loses his dignity, he becomes an animal, an object. So the “Revolt of Dignity” encompasses all efforts of human beings to remain human. Everyone who stands up for his or her own dignity and well-being fights for the dignity and well-being of all human beings. This is how the sentence in the Gospels can be understood on a religious level. But we can also take it a step further and say: we cannot stop condemning the injustices of the world. Because if we lose this ability, we descend into barbarism. We are living in times in which we can no longer afford to do nothing. We need to unite in order to stand together against the advance of evil – the demon, using another term from the Bible. That is why I call on all organizations, all people, to join the “Revolt of Dignity”.“

— YVAN SAGNET

„ I think it really has become a biblical film adaptation for our time, with the first black Jesus in European film history and with a cast that is diverse in the best sense of the word. Besides international stars and politicians, activists, farm workers and normal citizens play the leading roles. Mary Magdalene is a main figure in our film, some of the apostles are female and - interesting fact - most of the apostles of our „new“ Jesus are of Muslim faith. But what pleases me most is that our film had a real impact. As a consequence of the „Revolt of Dignity“, as you can see at the end of the film, the first „Houses of Dignity“ were founded around Matera: houses where the previously homeless extras of the film can now live in dignity and self-determination. And this with the support of the Catholic Church!“

— MILO RAU



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT – MILO RAU

For nearly 20 years now, I have dealt with the contradictions of the global economy as well as the role Europe plays in it through plays, films and books. In the “Europe Trilogy” (2014-16), the stories of actors from 13 countries, from Belgium to Russia to Kurdistan and Syria, were put together and formed a European story - a “political psychoanalysis of our continent” (Libération) for which we held castings from Erbil to Jerusalem and Athens to Brussels and Paris. For the movie “The Congo Tribunal” (2017), I created a global economy tribunal in the East Congolese civil war zone, where European and Canadian commodity companies are driving away hundreds of thousands of people under the eyes of the UN. Miners and managers, rebels and government politicians answered questions from a jury of national and international lawyers. The project, which was nominated for the Swiss as well as the German Film Academy Award, led to the dismissal of two ministers and even the governor of the Congolese mining province of South Kivu. With THE NEW GOSPEL I now bring together both types of projects: the large-scale criticism of an unjust world order in which Europe plays a central role; and working with a layperson ensemble and their stories and biographies, which emerged from a wide and extensive casting. In addition, there is a long lasting interest in the imagery of the Bible, which I have already dealt with in my Pasolini adaptation “The 120 Days of Sodom” (2017, Schauspielhaus Zurich), my large-scale faith project “The Ghent Altarpiece” (2018, NT Gent), as well as in “Empire” (2016, Schaubühne Berlin), the third part of the “Europe Trilogy” with Maia Morgenstern, who played the role of Maria in Mel Gibson’s bibliographic film “The Passion of the Christ”.

When southern Italian Matera was appointed as the “European Capital of Culture 2019”, I was asked to do a staging in the city. I immediately had a concept in mind: a new Jesus film, mixing the strong cinematographic tradition of the region with its modern reality. My proposal to do „my” version of the New Testament where Pasolini and Mel Gibson did the 2 most-known Jesus films of all time, mixing professional actors with activists, immediately met with open ears from the curators. When I went there the first time, the exceptional antique peace of the city convinced me immediately to shoot a Jesus movie here. The aim was to maintain its original spirit as a Passion story of the socially underprivileged, the poor, the unemployed, the outcasts, the marginalized and the refugees. In Italy alone, more than 500,000 people live underground in unofficial camps.

What an irony, that Matera, the European Capital of Culture and „Jerusalem“ of world cinema is surrounded by refugee camps. Where would the contradictions of modern Europe be more visible than here and what would make more sense than shooting a political Jesus movie in this incredibly beautiful and poor region, mixing biblical iconography and real revolt? In conclusion, my „New Gospel“ plays in 2 parallel worlds: it is a real revolt and a bible film, it is staged in the middle of the city of Matera, together with its citizens – and in the wild barracks, populated by thousands of refugees from Africa. A new kind of film emerges, in the middle of fiction and documentary, a gospel for the 21st century, a manifesto of the victims of the so-called “free economy”, of which Pope Francis himself said in his famous epistle Evangelii Gaudium in late 2013: “This economy kills.”



INTERVIEW WITH YVAN SAGNET

Q: Why did you accept to play the role of Jesus Christ in Milo Rau's „New Gospel“? What is the - historical, political, spiritual - meaning of this figure for you?

I immediately shared Milo's vision and concept: a Jesus movie with a strong political soul. In an age in which religion is still used as a tool for discrimination and for bad political agendas, a project like this, that aims to unite people from the lowest ground of society, landless, with activists, actors, normal citizens, is truly necessary. We are faced every day by people that pretend to be christian and at the same time reject refugees seeking help in the Mediterranean sea – a perfect example of how to not follow Christ' teachings. With The New Gospel we go back to the hystorical root of Jesus figure: someone who stands for the people, who acts for their uprisal against injustice. It's our approach to being christian today, to concretize authentically Jesus' words. And this is, for me as a christian, particularly relevant to merge my faith with my strong political belief.

Q: The media called you „the first black Jesus in European film history“? What is the importance for you to enact, as a Cameroon-Italian activist, the Passion of the Christ - in a time that is marked by discussions on racism and police violence?

When we were shooting the movie, back in 2019, an italian right wing newspaper wrote a joke about The New Gospel: “effectively, if migrants could walk over the sea, this would be really a concerning issue”. One year later we are in the middle of a pandemic crisis and a

new movement for black rights rises. I feel that this project is a way to send a clear and strong message to the public opinion continuously fed by such „jokes“ and re-enacting the Passion is simply a way to go through some of the strongest crises of our times; there is a Passion going on everywhere, in every time: in the flooded corpses of the Mediterranean sea as well in the Black Lives Matter uprisings in USA.

Q: In the film, you are not only a spiritual leader, but you connect the figure of Jesus to a clearly political agenda: we see you as leader of the „RIVOLTA DELLA DIGNITA“ which fights for the rights of the landless, the refugees. What is the political message of your „NEW GOSPEL“?

All the politics being developed in these years are wrong: migration and asylum policies, economical development strategies, human rights safeguard – we are stuck in a global crisis that seems to be unchangeable. This is no longer bearable: The DIGNITY of the landless, of all the people, of the Nature have to become the priority to build a fairer world. We cannot stand anymore, for example, that in Italy, in the heart of the EU, thousands of people live in subhuman conditions only to fuel a production system that has only one purpose: exploit human beings to gain the maximum profit possible. With La Rivolta della Dignità we have written a six-point manifesto that pushes for a social, political, economical revolution against the neoliberalism egemony and in which the contradictions of this approach of the world could be made visible and, most important, changed.

Q: To end with: how was it for you, who is an activist and a writer, to play the perhaps most difficult role possible - the Son of God - at the side of mythical actors like Enrique Irazoqui or Maia Morgenstern? How did you manage that?

I would say that it has been an honour to be next to such great actors like the one you mentioned. And I feel that thanks to this I could improve my acting skills every day, little by little. I didn't have the time to think too much about the difficulty of the role: It was much more fascinating for me to grab some advice from an actor like Enrique while he was recalling some of the Pasolini's advices. Like: „speak to the Pharisees like you were a marxist speaking to bourgeois bureaucrats“. But more importantly, acting was just recalling what was happening in the simultaneous ongoing Rivolta della Dignità political campaign. Luckily I didn't have the time to worry. Time was not an option at all!



CV YVAN SAGNET, “JESUS” OF “THE NEW GOSPEL”



Yvan Sagnet, born 1985 in Douala (Cameroon), came to Italy in 2008 to study, where he initially earned his living as a farmhand. In 2013 he graduated in Telecommunications Engineering at Politecnico di Torino. In 2011 he was the spokesman for the agricultural workers strike at the Boncuri farm (Nardò), which led to the introduction of „caporalato“ (mafia-led exploitation of workers) as a crime and to the first trial in Europe for slavery and the conviction of twelve entrepreneurs. He worked as a trade unionist for FLAI-CGIL and is today one of the founders of the international anti-Caporalato association NO-CAP.

Sagnet has written two books, published by Fandango: the first ***Ama il tuo sogno*** tells his experience as a tomato harvester in the fields and the first strike ever in Italy held by migrant field workers. The second ***Ghetto Italia*** written together with the sociologist Leonardo Palmisano, describes the harsh reality of the ghettos in which foreign laborers are forced to live and highlights the responsibilities of small and large enterprises in the system of agriculture exploitation. He was awarded as ***Cavaliere dell'Ordine al merito della Repubblica*** by the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella, Thursday, February 02, 2017. In the “New Gospel”, Yvan acts as himself and as Jesus Christ.

CV MILO RAU – DIRECTOR



Milo Rau, born 1977 in Bern (CH), is director, writer and since the 2018/19 season artistic director of NTGent (Belgium). Critics call him the „most influential“ (Die Zeit), „most awarded“ (Le Soir), „most interesting“ (De Standaard), „most controversial“ (La Repubblica), „most scandalous“ (New York Times) or „most ambitious“ (The Guardian) artist of our time. Since 2002 he has published over 50 plays, films, books and actions. His theatre productions have been shown at all major international festivals, including the Berlin Theatertreffen, the Festival d'Avignon, the Venice Biennale, the Vienna Festival Weeks and the Brussels Kunstenfestivaldesarts, and have been touring in over 30 countries worldwide.

Rau has received the 3sat Prize 2017, the Saarbrücken Poetics Lectureship for Drama 2017 and, as the youngest artist after Frank Castorf and Pina Bausch, the renowned ITI Prize of the World Theatre Day in 2016. In

2017, Milo Rau was voted „Acting Director of the Year“ in a survey conducted by Deutsche Bühne, in 2018 he received the European Theatre Prize for his life's work and in 2019 he was the first artist ever to be „Associated Artist“ of the „European Association of Theatre and Performance - EASTAP“. In 2019 he received an honorary doctorate from Lund University (Malmö), in 2020 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Ghent University. In 2020 he received the renowned Münster Poetry Lectureship for his complete artistic oeuvre, his plays were voted „Best of the Year“ in critics' surveys in over 10 countries.

Rau's previous films (Die letzten Tage der Ceausescus, Hate Radio, Die Moskauer Prozesse, Das Kongo Tribunal) have been awarded with a Special Award at the Festival des Deutschen Films, the Zürcher Filmpreis and the Amnesty International Prize), his last film Das Kongo Tribunal was nominated for the German and Swiss Film Awards. In addition to his work as a director, Rau is also a television critic, lecturer and writer with 15 publications to date, which have been translated into English, French, Italian, Dutch, Chinese and Norwegian, among others. Rau's literary work has been awarded some of the most prestigious German literary prizes, including the „Radio Drama Prize of the War Blind“ (2014) and the two most prestigious German literary prizes for committed literature: the „Peter Weiss Prize“ (2017) and the „Gerty Spies Literature Prize“ (2020)

FILMOGRAPHY MILO RAU (SELECTION)

The Congo Tribunal

Cinema Documentary, Germany Switzerland,
2017, 100 min.

Zurich Film Prize 2017, Nomination for Swiss
Film Award 2018 for Best Documentary Film
and Best Film Score, Nomination for German
Film Academy Award for Best Documentary
Film 2018, World Premiere at the „Semaine
de la Critique“ Locarno 2017, International
Film Premiere & Honourable Mention DOK
Leipzig 2017 - International Competition, IFFR
- 47th International Film Festival Rotterdam,
Festival d'Avignon 2018, Sheffield Doc/Fest
2018, CPH: DOX 2018, LOLA at Berlinale 2018,
DocsBarcelona - International Documentary
Film Festival 2018, 41e Festival de Cinéma de
Douarnenez 2018, Solothurner Filmtage 2018

The Moscow Trials

Cinema Documentary, Germany 2014, 86 min.
Festival of German Films 2014 - Special Price,
Dok Leipzig 2014

Hate Radio

TV Film, 2014

The Zurich Trials

TV Film, 2013

The Last Days of the Ceausescus

Cinema film, 2009/10, 72 min.



CREDITS

With Yvan Sagnet, Papa Latyr Faye, Samuel Jacobs, Yussif Bamba, Jeremiah Akhere Ogbeide, Mbaye Ndiaye, Kadir Alhaji Nasir, Ali Soumaila, Vito Castoro, Marie Antoinette Eyango, Anthony Nwachukwu, Mohammed Souleiman, Alexander Kwaku Marfo, Blessing Ayomonsuru and many others

And Marcello Fonte, Enrique Irazoqui, Maia Morgenstern

With the voice and the songs of
Vinicio Capossela

Conceived, Written and Directed by Milo Rau
Producers Arne Birkenstock, Olivier Zobrist, Sebastian Lemke **Director of Photography** Thomas Eirich-Schneider
Dramaturgy & Editing Katja Dringenberg
Dramaturgy & Concept Eva-Maria Bertschy **Dramaturgy & Assistant Director** Giacomo Bisordi **Set Design & Costumes** Anton Lukas, Ottavia Castellotti **Original Sound** Marco Teufen, Julian Joseph **Sound Editing** Guido Keller, Dieter Lengacher **Production Management** Elisa Calosi, Laryssa Stone

FILM

A production of Fruitmarket, Langfilm & IIPM – International Institute of Political Murder **in coproduction with** SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen / SRG SSR, ZDF **in cooperation with** ARTE **in collaboration with** Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Consorzio Teatri Uniti di Basilicata and Teatro di Roma **supported by** Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Bundesamt für Kultur

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LIVE EVENTS

A coproduction of IIPM – International Institute of Political Murder with Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Teatro di Roma and NTGent **in collaboration with** Consorzio Teatri Uniti di Basilicata, Fruitmarket and Langfilm **in association with** ProLoco Ginosa, University of Applied Arts Vienna **funded by** German Federal Cultural Foundation, European Cultural Foundation, GEA – Waldviertler

CROWDFUNDING PROJECT UNDER THE „HOUSE OF DIGNITY“ ROOF

www.gofundme.com/f/2gjex-houses-of-dignity

This crowdfunding campaign tries to raise awareness for the four projects that were part of the film project THE NEW EVANGELIUM and to support the activists in their work. As artists, we want to ensure that our projects are sustainable and we are very happy to continue working with the activists after the project is over. We would be delighted if you too would support these great initiatives for the working and living situation of migrants in Southern Italy.

Below you will find a short presentation of the four projects:

No-cap means of transport

Yvan Sagnet's International Anti-Caporalato No Cap Network needs financial support to purchase buses that can be loaned to farms for free use, following the guidelines of the new „Ethical No Cap Stamp“ certification. The fields of agricultural production are often isolated and far away from the inhabited centres. For this reason the workers have to travel long distances to reach the collection points. There is no system to facilitate the transport of agricultural workers in the countryside by the public sector or the agricultural companies involved. This situation has led to a kind of Mafia transport monopoly in the agricultural areas. In this way, the most fragile workers (who do not have autonomous means of transport) rely on improvised transport companies with vulnerable means of transport or on Caporalato,

which can extort part of the (already miserable) wages paid to the agricultural workers.

Further information is available
www.nocap.it

AgricoLa Leggera

AgricoLa Leggera demands social and ecological justice. And promotes permaculture, which can be implemented by migrants. The aim is to improve the living conditions of migrants as well as the social and professional integration of migrants and farmers. In Miglionico near Matera, a new housing project is being built that aims to support migrants in becoming independent in a humane, sustainable and realistic way. Through the construction of straw houses and the cultivation of agricultural products without chemical fertilisers or herbicides, free from the exploitation of the land, an awareness is being created: the „food of the insurgency“, in order to make them independent of the exploitation and the large organised distribution of these.

Further information is available
[Facebook AgricoLa Leggera](#)

Casa Sankara

In Casa Sankara, which today is home to some 500 people, all of whom were snatched from the hands of the Mafia, many very concrete projects

for the social and professional integration of this community must be realised. Once a wood-burning oven has been built for the production of bread and other products, an attempt will be made to create a covered space in front of the oven for the consumption of products and the socialisation of the various visitors. This space would provide an opportunity for work like the other projects to come.

[Further information is available](#)

[Facebook Casa Sankara](#)

Casa Betania

Casa Betania provides specialised agricultural training with field laboratories. The project offers an interactive training that starts from zero - the preparation of the soil - and continues until the finished product - the fruit. In this way, an agricultural path is taught that protects nature and ethics in equal measure. The proposed crops are a mixture of those of African origin, such as ochre, and those of regional origin, such as figs. The aim is to achieve economic autonomy in the sale of products. At the same time, the project promotes integration when workers and migrants together acquire professional and specialised knowledge that they can pass on.

