

FILM REVIEW

Michaël Andrianaly, dir. *Nofinofy (Dream)*. 2019. 73 minutes. Malagasy, with French subtitles. Madagascar and France, Les Films de la Pluie and Imasoa Films. 15€.

Nofinofy (Dream) is the third documentary by Michaël Andrianaly, who also works as a film editor, cinematographer, photographer, and producer. His first film, *Todisoa et les Pierres noires* (2013) tells the story of Todisoa, a man whose land was taken by a mining company and who is reduced to walking between towns selling charcoal to feed his family. Andrianaly's second film is *Njaka Kely* (2015), another documentary. This film looks at a boarding house run by the owner of a bicycle taxi company, Saholy, who treats her employees like her children. The film follows the tensions surrounding one of her employees, Njaka, who needs to grow up, but finds it difficult to behave like an adult because he enjoys flirting and smoking weed. These first two films establish the main tone and themes of Andrianaly's filmmaking: he uses his documentaries to narrate an individual's struggles, which become emblematic of larger social ills in Madagascar. *Nofinofy* fits squarely into this pattern, adding to Andrianaly's corpus of engaged, but very personal films.

Nofinofy is a tender look into the life of Roméo, a hairstylist in Tamatave (Toamasina), Madagascar. The documentary opens with closeups of Roméo as he gives haircuts to men, including the director, Michaël Andrianaly, who plays an important role in his own film. Roméo informs Andrianaly that the government is kicking his business out of the building to tear it down. Then, after showing some of the demolition, which Roméo watches with obvious emotion, the documentary follows him for nearly two years as he searches for another location for his salon. Moving from shack to shack in poor neighborhoods, Roméo seeks a locale where he can attract an economically stable clientele, but properties move fast, and he misses out time and again on good spots where he can showcase his artistry.

The film's emphasis on Roméo's talent and ideas about hairstyling elevate him and his profession to the level of art. One lovely scene shows Roméo talking with Andrianaly about his quest. Shot at night, the low lighting and tight shots create a warm, private space where the spectator is invited into their friendship to hear Roméo share his philosophies about the importance of his work. His ideas are thought-provoking, such as when he affirms that,


“Hairdresser is one of the most beautiful jobs. You touch another human’s head. To touch someone’s head is delicate. It’s an honor.” Roméo again displays his nuanced thinking when he says that posting prices is not “fine,” because it takes away his flexibility to adjust to what people can pay and what special techniques they request. This scene’s beauty is echoed in other scenes that are shot in window frames, beneath streetlights, and through doorways, allowing Andriana to play with high contrast, and to use lighting to create intimacy and introspection.

Roméo’s search is the focus of *Nofinofy*, but the titular dream extends to other aspects of Madagascar, too. As Roméo visits potential sites, he walks past busy markets, people at work, and children playing, giving the spectator a glimpse of Madagascan life. Roméo’s roving salon is also a space where friends and family gather, and their conversations reveal their dreams, struggles, and strengths. For example, while cutting his son’s hair, Roméo teaches him about honor, money, and the importance of education. With the help of some clients, he also counsels his son to stay away from crime, despite the alluring photos on Facebook of riches to be gained from selling drugs. Poverty, crime, alcoholism, and government exploitation all build as themes through debates in Roméo’s salons, in conversations at evening parties, and on radio broadcasts. Despite these difficult themes, *Nofinofy* does not wallow in sadness. Thus, the men in the shop often criticize politicians for their hypocrisy, but one man also places the responsibility for change squarely on their own shoulders, insisting that it is up to them to act if they want things to be different. Also, although unemployment is a theme of their discussions and of the images (men often sit in Roméo’s salon with no apparent job to go to), there is simultaneously a focus on community strength: when a storm decimates their neighborhood, the men previously shown with little to do rise up and repair, haul, and build. They devote themselves to recreating their community’s infrastructure, presumably for no pay, because this is work that simply must be done, for everyone’s sake. This type of resilience and creativity is also demonstrated by Roméo, who, in addition to cutting hair, is shown repairing shoes, soldering electrical wires with a match, repairing a friend’s clippers, and trimming the bristles of a paint brush with his clippers.

Nofinofy is a beautiful piece of engaged filmmaking. As one man looks for a site for his business, the film showcases the struggles and strengths of all Madagascans through the microcosm of his community. It examines relationships between fathers and sons. It shows people working together toward common causes. It warns against the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption. And it brings art and light to hairstyling. All of these themes develop against the background story of Madagascan elections and political hypocrisy.

In a touching gesture of friendship, Andriana ultimately has a building constructed to house Roméo’s business. As Roméo is setting up his salon in this brand new space, the radio broadcasts a live report from Analakely (the largest market in Antananarivo) about an anti-government march. The reporter explains that demonstrators want to get to the town hall, but police have set up a roadblock. Roméo moves to a window and looks out at his new

neighborhood just as the reporter's voice is drowned out by demonstrators rushing the barricade and the sound of a gunshot. The film does not explain the gunshot, but simply ends with it. An informed viewer understands, however, that the gun's report echoes with the violence that has marked Madagascan politics, and is likely connected to the riots that surrounded the 2018 elections. Once more, hope for a bright future is undermined by struggle and political turmoil, leaving Roméo's dreams in uncertain territory.

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