



*A History of Conflicts: Filming Liberian Warriors for "Fragment 53"*  
*How two filmmakers set out to explore primeval warfare in their new documentary.*

In partnership with New York's Film Society of Lincoln Center, MUBI [will be hosting four films](#) recently shown at Art of the Real, the Film Society's annual showcase for boundary-pushing nonfiction films. *Fragment 53*, directed by Federico Lodoli and Carlo Gabriele Tribbioli, will be showing April 23 - May 22 on MUBI in most countries around the world, and April 24 - May 23, 2016 in the United States.

*"Comprising interviews with seven different men of varying rank about atrocities they committed (or ordered) during the First Liberian Civil War, this frank and frequently disturbing documentary examines the nature of modern violence and an essentialist concept of warfare. Their testimony, interspersed with snapshots of Liberia's streets and mangrove trees as they currently exist, along with some terrifying video footage from the era, illustrate the ravages—and the inevitability—of humanity's basest desire for conflict. Without falling into the sensationalist or simplistic, Lodoli and Tribbioli's film is crucial viewing for our current age of extremism."—Art of the Real*

The two directors were kind enough to answer our questions about their dark, enthralling and entirely imperative documentary via email.

**NOTEBOOK:** What was your collaboration like?

**FEDERICO LODOLI & CARLO GABRIELE TRIBBIOLI:** We've known each other for a long time. We had different parallel paths and lately met on this particular project, sharing a common interest and a similar mind-set. Then we worked 50/50 on everything: the film is written, filmed and edited by us two together.

**NOTEBOOK:** What drew you two to Liberia and its recent war history?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** We were looking for a case study that could embody the essential and primeval warfare our project aimed to evoke and confront. Most of the African continent is still living an era of post-colonial re-foundation and, in such a context, the Liberian case stands as unique and paradigmatic at the same time. Its entire history is a history of conflicts, whose causes and needs, still unsolved today, have led to decades of civil wars, giving birth to a whole generation of warriors. A confrontation with such warriors was the main intent of the operation. The response from our survey experience in 2011 was encouraging.

**NOTEBOOK:** Your film's core is a series of interviews. However, the film begins with an essayistic prologue, and the interview section is bookended by landscape photography. Why did you want to expand the visual scope of your documentary beyond its records of these fighters talking of their violent history?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** We did not have a naturalistic approach. We thought the film had to begin with a declaration asserting our point of view and working as a lens, through which the rest of the material had to be interpreted. Also, the two parts that open and close the interview section are conceived similarly, as two abstract landscapes of signs. The idea was to present through Liberia an imaginary field. These parts are built as specular chapters, yet the first one is still structured on a set of symbolic dichotomies whereas in the latter the structure collapses completely into a sort of abandon to the night of thought, a dimension where everything melts together.

**NOTEBOOK:** Your prologue connects the real fighters alive today to gods through history. How do you see today's men as archetypal?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** Archetypes are the structures of our thought and our imagination. War is one of them and the God of War is one of its embodiments. Thus, we could say that it is at the same time arbitrary and legitimate to conceive real warriors and war as expression of such mythological and archetypal forces.

**NOTEBOOK:** How did you find your subjects and what was the process like getting them to speak?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** Generally speaking, our approach, which avoided any moral judgement or condemnation, favored our encounters with the warriors. It made them comfortable to abandon their initial suspect. From a practical point of view, each case is different and it could depend both on our organization and on pure chance. Once, for instance, we were in a bar in Monrovia and someone told us that the man drinking a beer next to us was a notorious Charles Taylor's general. Thus, we just introduced ourselves to the man and we started to talk.

**NOTEBOOK:** Would you say the men you've recorded are unusual among Liberian fighters?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** We interviewed almost 30 fighters ranking from leading warlords to simple fighters and actual field commanders—the "Generals." The seven men who appear in the film surely distinguished themselves from the others because of their performances: by staying true to what they are and what they did, they were able to give natural, bold and unique witnesses.

**NOTEBOOK:** How did the experience with these fighters of this generation differ from your interactions, during production but not on camera, with the same generation who were not fighters?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** This is difficult to say, as the Civil War in Liberia was an overwhelming experience that lasted more or less 20 years and that caught up not only one generation. Therefore it is not easy to find a man, or even a woman, between 20 and 50 years old, who was not involved in the war in a way or another.

**NOTEBOOK:** Were direct interviews with these veterans always the original visual conception of your documentary?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** In our vision, the interviews had to constitute both the contents and the visual essence of the film, as the driving force behind the project was our need to confront war through those who fought it, namely the warriors. We wanted to

meet them, to question them and to listen to them. This way of relating to them had to be central in the film.

**NOTEBOOK:** Your mise en scène separates the interviewees from one another, which makes them each seem isolated from the other rather than part of a connected community of veterans. Is this a reflection of the dispersed nature of these men and how they've separately integrated into society?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** The idea of building separate portraits was also present since the beginning. We always wanted them to appear like some kind of monads. To put them in connection would have built a sort of dialectical process among them we were not interested in.

**NOTEBOOK:** Did recording so much unabashed pride and glorification of pain and death ever make you question the motives behind the film or, indeed, the very act of recording such testimony?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** No, it didn't.

**NOTEBOOK:** Why did you want to keep your questions, your direct voices, out of the film?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** We believe this approach could enhance the transfiguration of reality we were looking for. Yet, our dialectical presence is strongly expressed through the filming technique.

**NOTEBOOK:** Would you say Liberians are the first audience for this project, or is it primarily intended for overseas viewers?

**LODOLI & TRIBBIOLI:** The film has always been conceived as a critical instrument of ethical confrontation with war and the values it implies and expresses. It was born from our need as Europeans to confront ourselves with that phenomenon and to extend, through the lenses of the camera, this relation to the spectators. At the same time, we wanted to build a film that could win the respect of Liberians, avoiding any feeling of pity and reflecting the fierceness of its people.