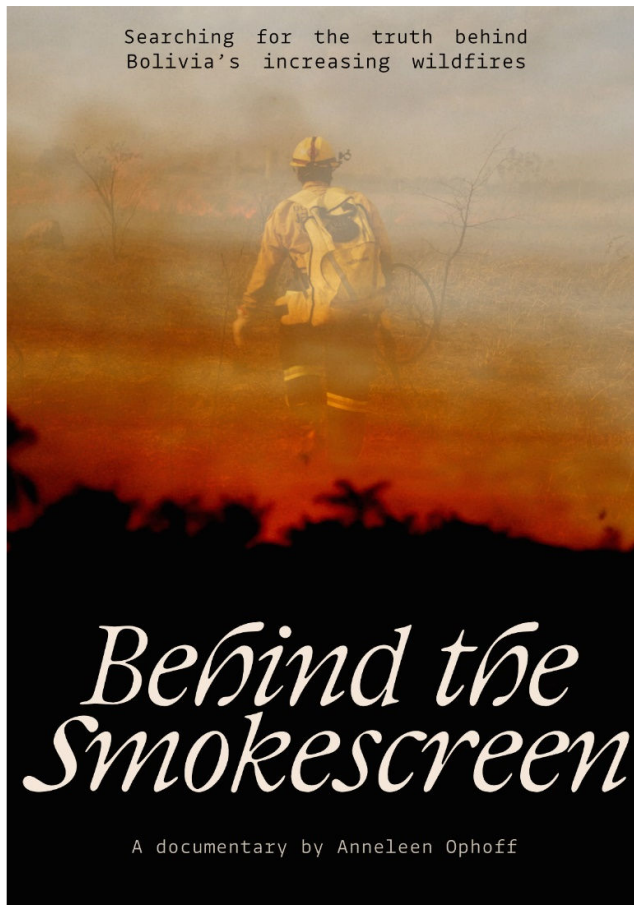


BEHIND THE SMOKSCREEN



A FILM BY
ANNELEEN OPHOFF

29 mins / 2024 / English, Spanish, English Subtitles / Belgium



EPF MEDIA GROUP, LLC
324 S. Beverly Drive, PMB 437
Beverly Hills, CA 90212
(323) 301-3663

Website: www.epfmedia.com

Email: larry@epfmedia.com

SYNOPSIS

In the summer of 2019, images of the Amazon forest colored our television screens fiery red. Millions of hectares of rainforest burned completely. Despite international outcry, little has changed since. Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest is continuing at an increasing pace, causing droughts and heat waves. In the summer of 2024, Bolivia is battling record wildfires again, with worse likely ahead.

Beyond climate change, many wildfires in Bolivia can be attributed to slash-and-burn agriculture and land grabbing. Farmers set fire to pieces of the forest every summer to create agricultural fields. Some lack the necessary knowledge and inadvertently cause large-scale fires. Others burn areas far beyond their lands, engaging in land trafficking or setting up mining activities with impunity.

Last year (2023), a staggering 3.3 million hectares burned across the country. Behind these numbers, economic and social inequality only adds fuel to the fire. This documentary visits indigenous communities surrounded by the annual fires, follows volunteer firefighters in their efforts to extinguish the flames, talks to farmers who practice slash-and-burn agriculture, and investigates a web of illegal land deals and political maneuvering.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I was 17 and graduated from high school, I moved to Bolivia for a year. I ended up spending much more time there than expected, returning multiple times, gaining my first post-graduation work experience in the country, and making it a goal to visit all its different corners. During my time there, I witnessed both the re-election of Bolivian president Evo Morales, South America's first Indigenous president, and the crackdown on Indigenous protests. The contrast between these two events led me to explore the lived realities of Bolivia's many Indigenous communities.

During the 2019 Amazon fires, I reported on their consequences: the loss of biodiversity, the health risks for Indigenous people in the region, and the limits of firefighting capacity. With the forests still burning, it was difficult to see what lay behind the falling ashes. Despite the extensive media coverage, Bolivia's tropical regions continue to experience increasing deforestation, and the fires return every year. Some of them are part of a natural balance in the ecosystem, but the enormous extent of the fires cannot be explained so easily.

Wanting to understand what virtually no one even reported on, I flew back to Bolivia. I spent three months traveling the country to uncover some of the dirty secrets behind the wildfires and to speak to those affected. While the story certainly illustrates the growing socioeconomic divide in the country, it also serves as a reminder that nothing is as black and white as it seems. I am forever grateful to both those who inspired me to go beyond the facts and those who cautioned me against falling into a narrative trap. This story would never have been told without the expertise of those on the ground and the willingness of people to candidly share their experiences.

Anneleen Ophoff

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Anneleen Ophoff (°1990, Belgium) is a freelance crossmedia journalist with a passion for human rights. While she currently focuses on indigenous rights, land rights, and LGBTQ+ rights, she has previously produced award-winning stories on domestic terrorism and foreign fighters. She has worked for the Flemish-Belgian public broadcaster [VRT](#), VICE News, as well as the European media consortium [ENTR](#), and was the editor-in-chief of the independent magazine [Are We Europe](#). She received the VRT Diversity Award in 2015 and the Belfius Press Prize in 2016. She was also awarded a Fulbright Award in Journalism, which gave her the opportunity to spend six months at the School of Journalism of the University of Missouri. One of the stories she produced there looked at inequality during and after natural disasters, and was awarded the Mark of Excellence by the US-based Society of Professional Journalists. She currently splits her time between Brussels, Belgium, and Cambodia.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director of Photography: Anneleen Ophoff

Reporter: Anneleen Ophoff

Producer: Anneleen Ophoff

Editing: Anneleen Ophoff

Camera: Eva Maria Coimbra & Anneleen Ophoff

Additional camera: Daniel Coimbra, David Goldsmith

Color grading: Raf Claes

Sound mix: David Baeck

Voice-over: Juli Simond