

Synopsis :

TOGETHER

Photographic documentary by

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for Cimade Ile de France

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Victims of the recent restrictions on the right to live as a family group, rejected asylum seekers or those who do not or cannot go back to their home countries, people who have been living for years in France but who are confronted by administrative or judicial problems, students, sick people who have come for treatment to France, many and varied are those who come to the Cimade association for help in obtaining or maintaining the right to living in France.

This association, with branches countrywide, was founded on October 18th, 1939, as an offshoot of the Protestant Youth Movement. It has kept its name from its original mission which was to help the "evacuated" residents of the Alsace-Lorraine region fleeing the Nazi invasion (*Comité Inter-Mouvements Auprès Des Évacués*, or the Inter-Movement Committee for the support of the evacuated). Since then, the Cimade has adapted its activities to the requirements of the times: helping Jews during the War, working for German-French reconciliation, supporting the end of colonialism, and today working to help the migrants.

In March 2015, I decided to start this photographic documentary in one of their branches....

25, rue Fessart, just behind the Jourdain church in Paris, is a place where Nigerians, Cambodians, Moroccans, Malians, Filipinos, Tunisians, Algerians and others meet... If they are all here, it is because they have fled wars, political persecution or poverty in their home countries. That is what exile means. A brutal uprooting driven by necessity.

There is a map of the world on one of the light green walls of the waiting room. It is calm, sometimes even joyous, but despite the shy smiles, you can sense the ambient worry in the air. Everyone there shares the same hope of obtaining the right to live in France.

Soon the volunteers come in: Céline, Marie Ange, George, Sabine. Their job is to illuminate the tortuous path through the administrative jungle of immigration that gets more and more complex as time goes by. Their legal advice is to the point, precise, and always dispensed with compassion. Everyone's story is different. Sometimes it takes hours of listening in order to figure out individual situations and bring the appropriate solution. The migrants live under the shadow of the threat of "OQTF", (*Obligation de Quitter le Territoire Français*, or Injunction to leave France), sometimes for years. Some of them have no contact any more with their home countries, like Mr Traoré, who arrived in France in 2001 and who is still considered "irregular" fourteen years later. During that time, his family in the Ivory Coast has disappeared. As he told me, "that's the way my life is, no more parents, no-one at all, I keep telling myself that I'll go back to the Ivory Coast but it would be like as if you took someone and put him in the desert".

They don't necessarily find a solution every time, but the attention that they get here at the Cimade is a precious dose of humanity, because everyone finds someone to listen to them, defend them and give them back their dignity.

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