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Black Africa White Marble: Tale of writer Idanna Pucci's battle with dictator Sassou Nguesso

Clemente Biccocchi's documentary on view at New York Africa Film Festival

BY [JOANNA MOLLOY](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS



TERENCE WARD

Gramercy Park writer and Italian aristocrat Idanna Pucci (r.) meets with King Makoko, the revered spiritual leader of majority tribe during trip to Republic of Congo.

[Idanna Pucci](#) stood up to an African dictator — and her battle is not over.

When the Gramercy Park author found out that Republic of Congo [President Sassou Nguesso](#) wanted to take her explorer ancestor's remains and put them in a \$9 million mausoleum to boost his own image, she was livid.

Sassou Nguesso built the colossal crypt for [Pietro Savorgnan](#) di Brazza in the Congolese capital named for him — Brazzaville.

“Building a multimillion-dollar monument with his people living in poverty was unconscionable,” said Pucci, whose story is told in [Clemente Biccocchi](#)'s brilliant documentary produced by [Terence Ward](#) “*Black Africa White Marble*,” showing Saturday and Monday at the New York Africa Film Festival. “I didn't want Brazza, who was a man of peace and who gave his entire fortune to the people of Congo, to be used to marginalize the current King Makoko, who is the revered spiritual leader of the majority tribe.”

Pucci, who is the niece of the late legendary designer Emilio, flew to Congo to meet with the king, whose ancestor Brazza had protected from the ravages of brutal colonialist [Henry Stanley](#).

She met face to face with Sassou Nguesso to present the family's demands in a bizarre meeting during which the dictator was watching “The Sopranos,” she said.

“ ‘We will give you Brazza,’ I told him, ‘only if you sign a protocol of provisions that benefit the population. You restore the Lycee Savorgnan Brazza school. You build a road to Mbe, where Makoko lives. You build a clinic there. And you put a statue of the original King Makoko right next to the statue of Brazza at the mausoleum.’ ”

Three days before world leaders were due to show up for the unveiling ceremony in the oil-rich nation, Sassou Nguesso signed.

He has yet to fulfill all his promises and Pucci is still fighting, suing in a French court, and threatening to remove Brazza's remains.

“Brazza will not be betrayed again,” Pucci said.

YOU SHOULD KNOW

“Black Africa White Marble” is playing at the New York African Film Festival Saturday at 5 p.m. and Monday at 4 p.m., Walter Reade Theater, Lincoln Center. More information at africanfilmny.org and filmlinc.com.



Pietro Savorgnan di Brazza, the explorer ancestor of writer Idanna Pucci, had the Congolese capital of Brazzaville named for him.